

City University of New York (CUNY)

CUNY Academic Works

Dissertations, Theses, and Capstone Projects

CUNY Graduate Center

9-2019

Love and Revolution: Queer Freedom, Tragedy, Belonging, and Decolonization, 1944 to 1970

Velina Manolova

The Graduate Center, City University of New York

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

More information about this work at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/gc_etds/3506

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

LOVE AND REVOLUTION: QUEER FREEDOM, TRAGEDY, BELONGING, AND
DECOLONIZATION, 1944 TO 1970

by

VELINA MANOLOVA

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

2019

© 2019

VELINA MANOLOVA

All Rights Reserved

Love and Revolution: Queer Freedom, Tragedy, Belonging, and Decolonization, 1944 to 1970

by

Velina Manolova

This manuscript has been read accepted by the Graduate Faculty in English
in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy.

Date

Robert Reid-Pharr

Chair of Examining Committee

Date

Kandice Chuh

Executive Officer

Supervisory Committee:

Kandice Chuh

Sarah Schulman

Barbara Webb

THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

ABSTRACT

Love and Revolution: Queer Freedom, Tragedy, Belonging, and Decolonization, 1944 to 1970

by

Velina Manolova

Advisor: Robert Reid-Pharr

This dissertation examines literary works by U.S. writers Lillian Smith, Carson McCullers, James Baldwin, and Lorraine Hansberry written in the early part of the postwar period referred to as the “Protest Era” (1944-1970). Analyzing a major work by each author—*Strange Fruit* (1944), *The Member of the Wedding* (1946), *Giovanni’s Room* (1956), and *Les Blancs* (1970)—this project proposes that Smith, McCullers, Baldwin, and Hansberry were not only early theorists of intersectionality but also witnesses to the deeply problematic entanglements of subjectivities formed by differential privilege, which the author calls intersubjectivity or love. Through frameworks of queerness, racialization, performance/performativity, tragedy, and (de)coloniality, this work explores the liberatory and revolutionary possibilities unearthed by such a conceptualization of love.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful for everyone and everything that has made this project and its completion possible. In the process of completing a dissertation, it is easy to lose track of what day, month, or year it is, of what country or city one lives in—of one’s embodied existence in time and space. Fortunately or not so fortunately, our material conditions and the living and dying beings in our lives remind us what and where we are, interrupting the process, jolting us into, as it were, reality, before we dive back in until the next intrusion of life’s happenings. I thank all the people, animals, and related sources of energy that have helped to keep me relatively sane throughout this process.

First off, I thank the friends/comrades/rabble-rousers/fellow travelers from and adjacent to the CUNY Graduate Center: Anahí, Maryam, Maryam, Debarati, Maggie, Ian, Tim, Alan, Demond, Tsedale, Arthur, Akissi, Christine, Jasmina, Colin, Conor, Khaled, and Mikey. Thank you all for the vent sessions, the meetings of minds, collisions of hearts, the inspiration, the explosive laughter in the library stacks, the endless conversations while almost en route to the subway station. I am enormously fortunate to have made a number of lifelong friends during the fascinating, bizarre, and at times seemingly interminable journey of Ph.D. school.

This dissertation is in large part about strange people, and I would be nowhere without a community of queer and otherwise remarkable individuals I am lucky to call friends, which can perhaps only exist in a city like New York. Mariam, Piro, Jasmina, Maria, Elise, Zhivka, Ricky, Joey, Brittney, Katarina, Sary, T, and Nadia: thank you for helping me find a home. Relatedly, friends in my original home, Bulgaria, some of them also migratory like myself, have been and continue to be a much needed source of perspective and, oftentimes, levity during the many

moments when I feel as if I am, in so many ways, neither here nor there. Thank you, Bili, Jana, Zhivka, Joro, Raia, Madlen, and Stani. Thanks also to Puja and Brian, longtime friends who have remained present despite a lack of geographical proximity. Endless gratitude to Stephanie, with whom, as chance would have it, I crossed paths during my time in Montreal, Florida, and New York, and has remained a steady source of encouragement, advice, and insight.

I am grateful to everyone who has supported my research, materially, intellectually, or through a combination of these. My advisor, Robert, committee members Kandice, Sarah, and Barbara, department administrators and faculty in administrative roles—Nancy, Carrie, and Mario—as well as Duncan, Eric, and Ammiel for various forms of advice and support. Many thanks to Matt B., Kevin F., and Soyica C. for their helpful feedback on my first scholarly article, derived from the third chapter of this dissertation. Steven F., who both supervised my fellowship and offered invaluable guidance for my own research at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, has been a great mentor and friend. Thanks to my friends Jess and Melissa, who hosted me during my archival research stays in Durham and Gainesville, respectively. I am grateful to the John F. Kennedy Center for North American Studies at Freie Universität Berlin for its generous research fellowship and for providing me with a beautiful workspace during my time in Berlin. I am also very thankful to the Institute for Research on the African Diaspora in the Americas and the Caribbean (IRADAC) at my home institution, and for Zee's tireless work at IRADAC in supporting my work and that of my peers. The Center for LGBTQ Studies (CLAGS), also housed at the CUNY Graduate Center, has been a vital resource and important venue for presenting my work and dialoguing with colleagues in queer studies. I thank also my colleagues at the Pratt Institute—Michele, Jeffrey, Sacha, Maria, Philip, Arlene, Suzanne, Karin, and Emily B.—for their continued support and encouragement.

At a crucial moment in my doctoral studies, I, along with many at the Graduate Center, lost a dear mentor and friend: Jerry Watts. Much more than an advisor, Jerry left an impact on me and my colleagues that will reverberate for many years. A mentor in many aspects of our lives, Jerry was also an ambassador across disciplinary and institutional boundaries and an advocate for all marginalized students. The community he thus helped create remains a lasting testament to Jerry's deeply empathetic, institutionally irreverent, and rigorously intellectual spirit.

Within the same ten-day period in November of 2015, I lost Jerry, met my partner Shirly and our feline companion Mali and became an aunt to my niece Diana Sakura. A reminder of the cyclical nature of all things, the events of those weeks, in retrospect, likely inspired the dissertation's eventual title, "Love and Revolution." I thank Mali for her constant presence, embodied affection, and diligent marking of time through demands for food and attention. I don't know how I could have ever completed this project without Shirly's unrelenting love and encouragement through times good, bad, and strange. A million thank yous—and never enough. Somehow, this seems like an appropriate place to also acknowledge the invaluable labor of therapists. Much gratitude goes to Nidhi, my therapist during the period referenced a few lines above, and also to Michelle and Donna, who helped me through the crucial final months of this process. This has been a marathon I am beyond thrilled to have completed, and so, I am also thankful to my boxing instructor Carrie for the continued inspiration and extremely helpful training in pacing and form.

Finally, I thank my parents, Diana and Nikolay, for their enduring love and support, along with my brother Emanouil and too many extended family members to name—but I will name my aunt Bistra. You are anchors I am lucky to have.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Chapter ONE: Love and Sympathy: Lillian Smith's <i>Strange Fruit</i> and the Critique of Liberal White Supremacy	21
Chapter TWO: Love and Belonging: The Elusive "We of Me" in Carson McCullers' <i>The Member of the Wedding</i>	58
Chapter THREE: Love and Tragedy: The "Complexity of Manhood" in James Baldwin's <i>Giovanni's Room</i>	96
Chapter FOUR: Love and Revolution: <i>Les Blancs</i> and Lorraine Hansberry's Decolonial Queer Feminist Thought	124
Notes	166
Works Cited	172

Introduction

It is true that all human questions overlap. Men continue to misinterpret the second-rate status of women as implying a privileged status for themselves; heterosexuals think the same way about homosexuals; gentiles about Jews; whites about blacks; haves about have-nots. And then, always, comes the reckoning.

—Lorraine Hansberry (quoted in Steven Carter’s *Hansberry’s Drama*)

The construction of the world on the basis of difference is quite distinct from the experience of difference.

—Alain Badiou, *In Praise of Love*

This dissertation is about possibility. I initially envisioned the project as a theorization of “intersectionality before it was a thing”—before Kimberlé Crenshaw’s coining of the term in 1989 and before the Black Liberation, Gay Liberation, and Women’s Liberation movements of the 1970s. Lorraine Hansberry, Carson McCullers, James Baldwin, and Lillian Smith—the literary subjects of this dissertation—were visionaries. They theorized intersectionality, and they “did” intersectionality in their works. After World War Two, but before the 1970s, they foresaw a world in which various divergent marginalized groups would gain consciousness of the interrelatedness of the powers that oppress them and begin to strategize collective and coalitional forms of resistance. At some point in the dissertating process, however, I was confronted with the problem of the before and the related problem of the before of the before. What if intersectionality began not in 1944 but 1917? Or 1890? How far back “before it was a thing” would I need to return, and at which point would I forget what questions I was asking in the first place? I dispensed with this particular line of historical argumentation and decided to ask the

texts instead. The texts told me that they understood intersectionality because they were written by strange people interested in other strange people, and that all of these strange people thrived in interstitial moments of liberatory possibility. Such moments are central to the resilience and resistance of people of color living under white supremacy, of colonized people working toward decolonization, of precarious immigrant workers, and of queers and women in search of livable futures.

The project does engage in a “backward turn” of sorts, to borrow from Heather Love. Love, in her book *Feeling Backward* uses “figures that turn backward,” such as Lot’s wife, Orpheus, Odysseus, and Walter Benjamin’s angel of history as “allegories of queer historical experience” (5) that allow her to meaningfully engage with the affects of queer modernist texts often dismissed as “internally homophobic” or “retrograde” (4). *Feeling Backward* thus explores “queer modernist melancholia” (5) and also constitutes a melancholic project in its own right in its relationship to an abject and disavowed queer past, asserting a preference for melancholia over mourning, since “mourning can be another name for forgetting” (42). It is too early to really know how this dissertation feels, but I do not believe it feels backward. In its attention to a queer past, it feels in fact very much contemporary and present. That is to say, the thought of Lillian Smith, Carson McCullers, James Baldwin, and Lorraine Hansberry feels contemporary. These writers were prophetic, and so, the questions they raise are of the present moment. Thus, while my project does not feel backward, it does look backward and reach backward in order to inform our understanding of the present and inspire our imagining of the future.

And yet, things were quite different from 1944 to 1970. Categories of queer identity during this period, when at all visible, were much less fixed and immediately identifiable than the distinct, acronymizable groupings available today. Desire wove itself through and around

queer bodies less recognizable as distinctly lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. In other words, before LGBT, there were other possibilities. This is not to suggest that today's acronyms of identity foreclose queer possibility. Rather, I am interested in exploring what possibilities were/are available only a few decades ago. Given how relatively recent this history is, I at times even hesitate to use the past tense. A visionary writer like Carson McCullers could envision something like today's queer identities and paradoxes in the emerging queer subjectivities of her time. At a time when the state inaugurated institutionalized forms of homophobia through its military, welfare, and immigration bureaucracies,¹ McCullers foresaw homonormative and even homonationalist queer subjects not so different from the ones we know today. Accordingly, this project reaches backward for figures, tropes, and moments of the queer imagination that allow us to untangle webs of desire and identification that inform our relationship to the oft maligned "identity politics" that continue to shape every aspect of our social existence.

Relatedly, this project is also about "strange affinities,"² strange bedfellows, "strange fruit," strange people, and strangers. This is a strange dissertation, or at least such is its aspiration. On a personal note, my own pursuit of identity and community has always relied on identification with others across many vectors of difference. Born in Bulgaria, a small and somewhat obscure country that few in the U.S. know anything about (the more knowledgeable remember an association with the Soviet Union they cannot quite define), I was dispatched onto a surreal suburban American landscape in Virginia at age eleven—an age already sufficiently fraught and transitional without the violence of such jarring cultural displacement. I sought to make sense of the absence of sidewalks, and, where sidewalks were present, the absence of people on them, through television programs such as *Beverly Hills, 90210*, *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, *Saved by the Bell*, and *Family Matters*. While these shows offered hopeful dreams of

community that included strange people, where I could find such community was much less clear. Via detours through Montreal, Florida, and even France, I eventually landed in New York City, a haven of constant contact—voluntary or otherwise—among all possible varieties of strange people. I made my first Bulgarian friend in the U.S. twenty-one years after immigrating and seven years after moving to New York. Thus, the majority of my most intimate relationships have been formed and nurtured not through commonality but through difference—in background, experience, and dimensions of identity such as nationality, sexuality, race, and class. In short, I relate to and through difference. I make connections through strangeness.

So, too, my intellectual work addresses strange subjects. This dissertation is about queer writers and black queer writers who imagine relationships and communities formed across difference as a challenge to white supremacy, heteronormativity, homophobia, patriarchy, American imperialism, and European colonialism. They are also writers known for having strange personalities that cannot be separated from their experiences of oppression as women, queer people, and queer people of color in a period that marks the beginnings of contemporary U.S. hegemony and its attendant aggressive propaganda promoting patriarchal, heteronormative, white, suburban families as an ideal of American citizenship and belonging.

Historicizing Intersectionality

The intersectional literary analysis this dissertation offers is informed and inspired by an understanding that non-intersectional movements for liberation necessarily fail. Movements that exclude women and queer or gender-nonconforming persons necessarily reinforce patriarchy and nationalism, which in turn reinforce old and usher in new ethno-exclusionary divisions easily exploited by militaristic political interests. So-called “white feminism” similarly benefits no one

in the end, isolating potential allies, and ultimately upholding the violences of racial capitalism and the prison-industrial complex run by agents of a police state hostile to feminism of any stripe.³ Conversely, the most successful social movements have always been intersectional, even if they were not always acknowledged as such. The African American Civil Rights Movement is a case in point. We now know Martin Luther King, Jr. could have never had as comprehensive an understanding as he did of anti-capitalism, internationalism and the strategy of non-violent direct action without the input of Coretta Scott King and Bayard Rustin.⁴ New biographies of Rosa Parks, Florynce Kennedy, and Pauli Murray have moreover brought to light the centrality of women and queer, gender-nonconforming, and transgender persons to the Civil Rights Movement.⁵ Even when CRM leadership silenced or undermined these activists' gender analysis, they brought an intersectional understanding without which the movement could not have thrived.

My argument is not invested in locating the exact historical moment when intersectionality was birthed. I focus on 1944 to 1970 because the collision of the beginning of contemporary U.S. hegemony, homophile movements, the Civil Rights Movement, and anti-colonial movements resulted in a unique historical moment that allows us to think, through analogy and temporal displacement, about contemporary struggles for black lives, women's bodily autonomy, queer rights, workers' rights, immigrant rights, and decolonization. Intersectionality could very well date further back in time. Siobhan Somerville, for instance, locates the invention of modern homosexuality in the United States in the 1890s, during the dawn of U.S. imperialism, and argues this intervention is closely connected to contemporaneous discourses of scientific racism. In 1892, the highly publicized trial of Alice Mitchell, who killed her lover Freda Ward in Memphis, Tennessee, codified into law the category of "the female

invert” (2). In 1896, the U.S. Supreme Court’s *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision codified racial segregation as both lawful and constitutional. During this period, “the heightened surveillance of bodies in a racially segregated culture demanded a specific kind of logic, which,” Somerville argues, “gave coherence to the new concepts of homo- and heterosexuality” (4). Moreover, “[b]ecause existing cultural stereotypes of African Americans were largely sexualized, the new discourse of sexual pathology was intertwined with... racialized images” (11). Discourses of scientific racism and sexual inversion informed one another, often through identical tropes of perversion and unnaturalness. Thus, racism and homophobia in the United States were in a sense always intersecting oppressions, provoking intersectional forms of resistance.

Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality in 1989 to call attention to legal discourse's inability to attend to the interaction or intersection between racism and sexism in addressing discriminatory practices against women of color. Crenshaw offers the image of a woman of color simultaneously injured by racism and sexism, “lying in the intersection” and refused help by both “the race ambulance and the gender ambulance” because anti-discrimination law can only address each form of oppression separately (Thomas 2004). Attention to intersectionality, then, calls for a move away from single-issue identity politics in which supposedly discrete marginalized groups (gays, women, people of color) are politicized around supposedly discrete rubrics (sexuality, gender, race) and toward a politics and understanding of the social world in which these rubrics and struggles are seen as necessarily overlapping.

Building on the work of Crenshaw and her predecessors, Roderick Ferguson and Grace Hong point to a historical urgency to complicate intersectional frameworks and develop “new comparative models” for understanding “how particular populations are rendered vulnerable to

processes of death and devaluation *over and against other populations*” (1-2; emphasis added). As the state and capitalism continually refine their strategies for identifying new types of subjects and populations to neglect, exploit, and devalue, while appearing to champion social equality by rewarding certain historically exploited populations for their participation in marginalizing newly created and devalued groups, social theorists and cultural critics must rigorously attend to the differences *within* historically oppressed groups in order to more precisely map and anticipate the neoliberal state's strategies for perpetuating social and economic exclusion.

While Hong and Ferguson insist that new comparative models must emerge to respond to contemporary historical exigencies, they locate the “blueprint” for such models in the 1970s and 1980s women of color feminism pioneered by lesbian-identified women of color such as Audre Lorde and Cherrie Moraga. This theoretical and political movement made possible – and in fact already performed – what is referred to today as queer of color critique. Hong and Ferguson’s conceptualization and application of queer of color critique is one that inspires and informs my own mode of analysis because it offers an intersectional approach that appreciates the integrally entangled and multi-dimensional nature of social being, belonging, and exclusion. This approach does not see identity as a puzzle to be solved through the proper arrangement of its various components, nor does it gesture toward the democratization of theory through token inclusions of historically marginalized perspectives. Queer of color critique is not a critical recipe that adds a pinch of race consciousness to a stew of queer theory methodologies. It is not “deriv[ed] from a white Euro-American gay, lesbian, and queer theory tradition” (2); rather, it is an incarnation of women of color feminism—a critical tradition for which the integral interplay among sexuality, gender, race, and class are a given.

From Intersectionality to Intersubjectivity

To this end, Audre Lorde begins her essay “Scratching the Surface: Some Notes on Barriers to Women and Loving” with four succinct definitions—of racism, sexism, heterosexism, and homophobia—and the assertion that “[t]he above forms of human blindness stem from the same root—an inability to recognize the notion of difference as a dynamic human force, one which is enriching, rather than threatening to the defined self, when there are shared goals” (45). Lorde calls for a celebration of difference that would sound neoliberal were it not a simultaneous call for collaboration across lines of gender and sexuality toward the political emancipation of black communities in a white supremacist United States. In addition to making an eloquent argument for intersectional collaboration, Lorde’s essay inspires thoughts about the relationship between intersectionality and intersubjectivity. Racism, sexism, and heterosexism are defined in the essay through an identical formula: each constitutes, respectively, “[t]he belief in the inherent superiority of [one race/one sex/one pattern of loving] and thereby its right to dominance” (45). Homophobia, on the other hand, is “[t]he fear of feelings of love for members of one’s own sex and therefore the hatred of those feelings in others” (45). These respective definitions beg the question of why Lorde seemingly understands homophobia as a much more psychologically complex phenomenon than, say, racism. Rather than simply constituting a feeling of superiority, homophobia, according to Lorde, is produced by a complicated entanglement of love and fear.

Frantz Fanon’s term “negrophobia” suggests that anti-black racism is psychologically similar to homophobia. Relatedly, Lorraine Hansberry, the subject of this dissertation’s final chapter, argues that it is “the *sameness* of kind which oppressors most despise in the oppressed.... It is the reflection of oneself that most enrages when we are engaged in crimes

against a fellow human creature” (“Thoughts on Genet, Mailer, and the New Paternalism” 14; emphasis in the original). What are we to make of this? If a homophobe fears he may be gay, does a negrophobe fear she may be black? In a manner of speaking, yes. Both phenomena, when defined as phobias, have a basis in a confusion between self and other that results from an artificial production of otherness. As Hansberry asserts, we do not fear otherness. We fear sameness. Lorde, I think, would agree. Homophobes “fear... feelings of love” not only for “members of one’s own sex” but also for gay people. We love otherness. We fear sameness. We fear, most of all, our inseparability from the other. I understand intersubjectivity as the transformation of our deeply problematic love for otherness, which most often manifests itself as violence, into a complex understanding of relationality. This dissertation is about relationships. Intersubjectivity, too, is love. And intersubjectivity is not unproblematic.

I read Robert Reid-Pharr’s essay “Living as a Lesbian” as, among other things, a love letter to intersubjectivity. The essay opens with a call for collaboration that parallels Lorde’s, reflecting on a Barbara-Smith-inspired idea of queer chosen family called “home” during his college years at Chapel Hill in the mid-1980s: “At home we would recreate ourselves and our world, fashion a new mode of being, map a way for living in which the vision of the black freedom struggle would be realized in the daily interaction of black lesbians and gays” (153). From black-lesbian-inspired intersectional collaboration toward a liberatory politics, the essay then turns its attention to intersubjectivity and friendship. Through this latter development, a black gay man lives as a lesbian.

Let us turn, again, to Audre Lorde for a clarification of terms. Lorde defines a lesbian as a “strongly woman-identified [woman] where love between women is open an possible,” adding that

the true feminist deals out of a lesbian consciousness whether or not she ever sleeps with women. I can't really define it in sexual terms alone although our sexuality is so energizing why not enjoy it too? But that comes back to the whole issue of what the erotic is. There are so many ways of describing "lesbian." Part of the lesbian consciousness is an absolute recognition of the erotic within our lives and, taking that a step further, dealing with the erotic not only in sexual terms. (Hammond 21)

Lorde has defined the erotic as "a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling" ("Uses of the Erotic" 53). What does it mean for the erotic to be female? Lorde understands the patriarchal suppression of the erotic as central to the oppression of women: "For women, this has meant a suppression of the erotic as a considered source of power and information in our lives (53). The erotic is a source of power. Lorde associates it with "nonrational knowledge" (53), creativity, joy, poetry, sexuality, and love. And while an "anti-erotic" patriarchal and capitalist regime has, according to Lorde, compartmentalized the erotic into an exclusively sexual, and, moreover, specifically male-centered *heterosexual* field of desire that objectifies women, the erotic in its proper sense, as a creative resource, is not solely the province of women. The erotic belongs equally to all bodies, indeed, all entities, that have embraced its creative powers. The erotic can be found in poetry and margarine alike:

During World War II, we bought sealed plastic packets of white, uncolored margarine, with a tiny, intense pellet of yellow coloring perched like a topaz just inside the clear skin of the bag. We would leave the margarine out for a while to soften, and then we would pinch the little pellet to break it inside the bag, releasing the rich yellowness into the soft pale mass of margarine. Then taking it carefully between our fingers, we would knead it

gently back and forth, over and over, until the color had spread throughout the whole pound bag of margarine, thoroughly coloring it.

I find the erotic such a kernel within myself. When released from its intense and constrained pellet, it flows through and colors my life with a kind of energy that heightens and sensitizes and strengthens all my experience. (57)

I find myself absolutely stunned each time I read this passage. I was introduced to fictional western “food” products such as margarine and condensed milk (I remember the latter as humanitarian aid from Belgium) at the same time that my native Bulgaria was, just as forcibly, introduced to the fictional western promise of “democracy.” There was no alternative to neoliberal capitalism, Margaret Thatcher had announced, just as there was nothing else to eat in the grocery store. And yet, Audre Lorde remembers her experience with margarine, resulting from analogous conditions of manufactured scarcity, in strikingly sensuous and erotic terms. Leave it to a great poet to make something out of nothing; to transform something as plastic and tasteless as margarine into an erotic experience that culminates in orgasm.

A lesbian, then, according to Lorde, is a woman with a feminist consciousness who embodies the full range of sensual and creative possibilities of the erotic. For Reid-Pharr, lesbianism is a similar form of consciousness. Lesbianism is friendship and solidarity; it is a kind of intellectual, political, creative, and emotional compatibility with women who love women. Of his relationship with black lesbian filmmaker Cheryl [Dunye?], Reid-Pharr writes:

The two of us maintain a type of charming delicacy with each other. I respect her boyishness as she cherishes my effeminacy. We are a couple, mentioned in one breath as dinner parties are planned, given to public quarrels over the minutiae of every day life, constantly aware of each other’s steps and jealous of the intrusion of others. Our

lesbianism runs deep. We are drawn together because of our profound love of women, our unquenchable thirst for companionship, our hot blooded sexual passion, and our constant struggle to find and create home. (160-161)

Lesbianism is intersubjective. It is intersubjective, first of all, because it is relational. One cannot be a lesbian in isolation from other lesbians. And in Reid-Pharr's essay, lesbianism performs an attempt to inhabit the subjectivity of the other. A black gay man can be a lesbian if he forms part of a lesbian couple. He can be a lesbian if he loves women. And, finally, he can become a lesbian if he is interpellated as such, presumably, again, by other lesbians: "To become myself I have become a lesbian, or at least that's what I have been told" (158). Poets, writers, and artists with intersectional and intersubjective imaginations create astounding possibilities. If margarine can be erotic, then there is no reason why Robert Reid-Pharr cannot be a lesbian.

Love as Possibility

The political and creative project of intersubjectivity is closely related, if not identical, to the labor of love. Alain Badiou maintains that through the experience of love "you learn that you can experience the world on the basis of difference and not only in terms of identity" (16-17). Love demands a new perspective of the world, which Badiou calls "the perspective of Two" or a "Two scene" (29). Thus, for Badiou, love is a "truth procedure" (38) that concerns difference: "This truth is quite simply the truth about Two: the truth that derives from difference as such" (38). The Two scene is the scene of intersubjectivity. Love necessitates an encounter with difference and, beyond this, a scene of conflict that creates the possibility for transformation. To pursue love is to embrace possibility.

The pursuit of love takes on explicitly political dimensions for Badiou. Deeply suspicious of the algorithm of the dating site, Badiou compares its “safety-first concept of ‘love’” (6) to “the propaganda of the American army promoting the idea of ‘smart’ bombs and ‘zero dead’ wars” (7). Let us first acknowledge the immediate problems with this position. Badiou does not in fact consider the perspective of difference here in the point of view of women or queer people for whom meeting a strange man who has not been previously screened carries potentially deadly consequences. Nor does he consider the point of view of sex workers who screen their clients via Internet sites. (The criminalization of these websites in the United States in 2018, supposedly in the service of sex trafficking prevention, lead to an immediate rise in the murders of sex workers by their clients). It is important to acknowledge these blind spots, which are in this case casualties of unacknowledged male and heterosexual privilege, as much of this dissertation addresses the contradictions in intellectual production taken on in the service of liberatory projects, and toward this end, focuses on the perspectives of subjectivities overlooked by such seemingly “clueless” white male analyses.

At the same time, Badiou importantly points out the *false* promises of safety made by algorithmic dispensaries of love. Beyond addressing risks of physical danger, platforms that screen potential lovers also minimize the risk of encountering difference. Questions that determine “match” percentages on dating sites not only seek to map how much one may have “in common” with another—lest we be exposed to new information or cultural consumption practices previously unfamiliar to us—but are often designed to curtail possibilities for what Samuel Delany calls “interclass contact.”⁶ And while encounters across racial or ethnic identification are possible, they are often mitigated by some other mode of sameness such as belonging to some form of the same “community”—professional, political, and so on. As Badiou

explains, “[t]he aim is to avoid any immediate challenge, any deep and genuine experience of the otherness from which love is woven” (8). Otherness, in Badiou’s discussion, also takes on racial and orientalist dimensions:

If you have been well trained for love, following the canons of modern safety, you won’t find it difficult to dispatch the other person if they do not suit. If he suffers, that’s his problem, right? He’s not part of modernity. In the same way that “zero deaths” apply only to the Western military. [...] The casualties are Afghans, Palestinians... They don’t belong to modernity either. (9)

Under the brutal regimes of contemporary capitalist and imperialist modernity, a lover who loves recklessly is expendable, not unlike the lives of orientalized populations whose existence poses an inconvenience to empire’s conquest of land and expropriation of resources. Lovers are useless to modernity. The titular character of James Baldwin’s *Giovanni Room*, the subject of my third chapter, is described as anti-modern. He is racialized, Southern European, working-class, undocumented, and believes in love. Thus, David, the novel’s white American protagonist, feels justified in abandoning him with no explanation. What does Giovanni want from me?, David wonders, assured in his belief that he owes him nothing. Giovanni is the lover in Roland Barthes’ *A Lover’s Discourse*. As Wayne Koestenbaum explains in his foreword, for Barthes, those who say “I love you” are: “Lyric poets, liars, wanderers. Carnival freaks. Cassandras” (xv). These are figures both outside modernity and integral to the creation of communities and cultural productions that facilitate the survival of the majority of people subjected to modernity’s violences: people of color, workers, women, queers, and lovers.

The central contention of this dissertation is that love, defined as a radical project of intersubjectivity, creates possibilities for new world orders. Love works against white

supremacy, sexism, heteronormativity, classism, American exceptionalism, and various imperialisms and colonialisms, and toward queer, decolonial, and internationalist futures. My readings of the texts that make this argument equally illustrate the disavowals of these possibilities, disavowals which occur in the majority of cases. Barthes creates a framework for love as episodes or moments he calls figures. Like possibility, love is interstitial. I am interested in moments of possibility. Before the disavowal, before the retreat into conformity, there is possibility. I call these moments love.

Modernity brands the lover as Other. Barthes understands the love story, the narrative of love, as a domestication and ultimately a rejection of love that allows the lover to be reintroduced to society after she falls victim to love's detours from normativity:

Every amorous episode can be, of course, endowed with a meaning: it is generated, develops, and dies; it follows a path which it is always possible to interpret according to a causality or a finality—even, if need be, which can be moralized (*"I was out of my mind, I'm over it now"* *"Love is a trap which must be avoided from now on"* etc.); this is the *love story*, subjugated to the great narrative Other, to that general opinion which disparages any excessive force and wants the subject himself to reduce the great imaginary current, the orderless, endless stream which is passing through him, to a painful, morbid crisis of which he must be cured, which he must "get over" ("It develops, grows, causes suffering, and passes away" in the fashion of some Hippocratic disease): the love story (the "episode," the "adventure") is the tribute the lover must pay to the world in order to be reconciled with it. (7; emphases in the original)

The love story is subjugated—like the Other and to the Other. The love story, according to Barthes, is a disavowal of possibility. The four writers around which this dissertation is focused

all explore possibilities for intersubjectivity that are inseparable from possibilities for and moments or episodes of love. It is tempting to postulate, based on the readings that follow, that the failure of intersubjectivity and love is a foregone conclusion. However, it would be a mistake to read the stories Smith, McCullers, Baldwin, and Hansberry generate as rejections of love and possibility. Failure and the acceptance of failure are inherent to every progressive and radical political project. In fact, the only political project that cannot accept failure is fascism. Projects with progressive and radical visions benefit and learn from failure. Failures help us become mindful of our endless capacity for stupidity and destruction. Failure is embedded in possibility.

The first chapter examines the critique of what I call liberal white supremacy in Lillian Smith's novel *Strange Fruit* (1944), the possibilities of love as a challenge to white supremacy, the failure of love in the face of a white supremacist political imagination, the resilience of black community, and the hope found in black futurity and resistance. My reading of *Strange Fruit* is in conversation with Jodi Melamed's important theorization of U.S. postwar racial liberalism—an ideological formation she defines as an “official antiracism” of the state, which treats racism as a cultural and psychological problem without addressing its material conditions and entanglement with U.S. and global capitalism. Melamed cites *Strange Fruit* multiple times as an example of a “racial-liberal novel,” arguing that racial-liberal literary production helped to unify a mainstream racial-liberal discourse and that it did so through the trope of sympathy. While Melamed's argument usefully identifies a prevalent U.S. discourse on race during the period I examine, her contention regarding racial-liberal novels does not offer any textual evidence from these works. Through a close reading of *Strange Fruit*, I demonstrate how the novel actually critiques the notion of white sympathy as a solution to racism and is, moreover, in agreement with Melamed's argument about the dangers in which a reliance on sympathy can place black

lives. Furthermore, my reading illustrates how what Melamed calls racial liberalism may be more accurately called liberal white supremacy and how, under liberal white supremacy, love, with its promise to inaugurate radical change, necessarily fails. Finally, I emphasize Smith's solidarity with black resistance and the ways in which this solidarity emerges through a white lesbian character's attempt at intersubjective identification with the perspective of black resistance. Thus, Smith's queer imagination slips in tangentially but nonetheless meaningfully, as analogous to and in conversation with black hope.

Conversely, queer imagination is central to my second chapter, which focuses on Carson McCullers' 1946 novel *The Member of the Wedding*. In the novel, Frankie, the queer white adolescent tomboy protagonist, plans to disrupt the matrimony of a "nice white couple"—as her family's black maid, Berenice, calls Frankie brother, Jarvis, and his fiancée, Janice—by inserting herself in the couple's matrimonial union at their upcoming wedding. While McCullers celebrates Frankie's existing queer familial arrangement, as the protagonist spends most of her time with her cousin John Henry, who is explicitly characterized as queer and effeminate, and Berenice, Frankie's desire to marry the wedding further subverts the reproduction of the heteronormative, intra-racial, hegemonic, post-War nuclear family. My reading of *The Member of the Wedding* situates Frankie as an uncanny figure who queers a normative structure of desire through her own overenthusiastic desire for normative belonging. Seeking to become normative through queer desire, Frankie indulges in a fantasy that uncannily mirrors the heteronormative wedding, exposing not only the failure of the normative but also the hyperbolic normativity of the assimilationist aspirations of the marginal. Thus, I also argue that McCullers envisions the contemporary developments of homonormativity and homonationalism. In the novel's conclusion, Frankie redirects her desire toward a lesbian love object from a wealthy and well-

traveled family, deciding that her new friend, Mary, will join her on world exploration she previously imagined undertaking with Janice and Jarvis, who is a member of the U.S. military. While McCullers' novel thus appears to offer a homonormative and even homonationalist narrative closure—a sufficiently extraordinary feat for a text published in 1946—I argue that such apparent closure should not be read as a foreclosure of alternative queer possibilities. Like Frankie's previous fantasies of queer love, her attachment to Mary suggests a future filled with perverse disruptions of normative arrangements of love and desire.

Dreams of queer freedom underwritten by postwar U.S. hegemony and imperialism propel the narrative of James Baldwin's novel *Giovanni's Room* (1956), which I read in my third chapter. Set in Paris and narrated retrospectively by David, a closeted white gay American expatriate, the novel's tragic narrative unfolds as a result of David's ultimate refusal of love and connection across difference with Giovanni, an undocumented working-class Italian immigrant, racialized through descriptions of his "dark" body and features. David's first-person narration constitutes an especially brutal iteration of the "love story" as defined by Barthes. The narrator not only disavows his love affair with Giovanni as a transient and trivial episode in a young man's quest to "find himself"; he also refuses, from the start, to claim ownership of his romantic and sexual love for Giovanni. Furthermore, I argue that Baldwin, through the character of David, negotiates his own ambivalence regarding the value of theorizing masculinity formations as ethical models of gendered subjectivity. David's ambivalence toward queer love stands for Baldwin's ambivalent glorification of male gender. I examine the novel's juxtaposition of and negotiation between the contemporary Butlerian notion of performative masculinity and a nineteenth-century model of interiority called "manhood" theorized by Michael Kimmel and elaborated upon by Kevin Floyd, and argue that Baldwin flirts with but hesitates to embrace a

third register, which I alternatively call theatrical genderqueerness or genderqueer theatricality. Genderqueer theatricality thus emerges as another moment of liberatory possibility generated by intersubjectivity and love.

My final chapter explores, among other things, the theatrical queering of the colonial humanist ideal of “manhood” in Lorraine Hansberry’s play *Les Blancs* (1970). Hansberry’s posthumously produced play intervenes in both liberal and anti-colonial versions of masculinist humanist thought and cultural production. I argue that *Les Blancs*, a direct response to what Hansberry’s calls the “romantic racism” of Jean Genet’s play *The Blacks* (1961), is also in conversation with Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). While indebted to Fanon’s humanist critique of the racist reification of blackness, Hansberry also offers a feminist rebuttal to Fanon’s reinscription of the masculinist equation of “man” and “human,” pointing to the colonialist legacies that this equation perpetuates. Thus Hansberry critiques both Genet’s failed anti-colonial satire and Fanon’s misreading of the conditions of colonized women and queer subjects. Moreover, beyond mere critique, *Les Blancs* offers an internationalist, feminist, and queer vision of decolonization. Eric, the character in *Les Blancs* who most clearly understands the colonial situation and is most capable of sustained revolutionary action, is both racially amalgamated and homosexual, in direct defiance of the nationalist and homophobic currents of anti-colonial thought in which Fanon participates. Hansberry thus directly confronts the sexual anxieties—against miscegenation and homosexuality—of her anti-colonial contemporaries, as well as the messy complicatedness of love under colonization. Provocatively, in *Les Blancs*, the queer revolutionary’s sexual affair with a colonizer (a European philanthropist) sparks the former’s insurrectionary fervor and facilitates the latter’s acceptance of the prospect of his own death as well as that of his fellow philanthropists as a necessity for the anti-colonial struggle.

Love in *Les Blancs* thus constitutes the most radically intersubjective relationship examined in this dissertation—that between colonizer and colonized.

Chapter I

Love and Sympathy: Lillian Smith's *Strange Fruit* and the Critique of Liberal White Supremacy

This chapter explores the missed opportunities of love as a potentially liberatory anti-racist force through a close reading of Lillian Smith's 1944 novel *Strange Fruit*. It also engages with Jodi Melamed's important theorization of postwar U.S. racial liberalism as an ideological project that consolidates U.S. hegemony by divorcing an understanding of white supremacy from its material conditions, as well as Melamed's identification of Smith's novel as one of the key literary participants in this project. While Melamed mentions *Strange Fruit* several times in lists of novels she argues perform the ideological work of postwar racial liberalism, she does not perform a reading (even so much as a plot summary) of *Strange Fruit* or any of the other novels from this period that allegedly do similar work. I propose that if we in fact read Smith's novel, we can discover its critique, rather than reinscription, of racial liberalism and its related affect of sympathy through an exploration of the missed opportunities of love. Smith painstakingly documents the formation of the liberal white supremacist subject and the attendant process through which, under liberal white supremacy, sympathy eclipses love.

Melamed's theorization of postwar U.S. racial liberalism and racial-liberal novels informs my analysis of *Strange Fruit* in crucial ways. Melamed defines racial liberalism, an ideological phenomenon prevalent between the mid-1940s and late 1960s, as the first in a historical series of "official antiracisms" deployed by the State to promote egalitarian racial attitudes without addressing the material conditions that produce and perpetuate the structures of racism and white supremacy in the U.S. In contrast to 1930s "race radicalism," which, according

to Melamed, analyzed global capitalism and racism as symbiotic political and economic structures, racial liberalism both “universalized U.S.-style capitalism as an antiracist good” (25). Thus racial liberalism is also necessarily an anti-internationalist Cold War project, directed at producing a global pro-capitalist consensus while also seeking to shield the U.S. from critiques of its structural racism by the USSR and other governments worldwide participating in communist and socialist projects. Racial liberalism, as Melamed explains, abstracts racism from economic inequality by framing it as an intellectual, cultural, psychological, and moral problem.

Furthermore, Melamed identifies sympathy as the affect most closely associated with the racial liberal ideology, drawing from Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal’s call that “people’s great propensities for sympathy” be mobilized to address the American “Negro problem” (qtd. in Melamed 56). So-called race novels, novels addressing U.S. racial relations, including *Strange Fruit*, were, according to Melamed “conceived as purveyors of white sympathy” and able to “ideologically unify racial liberalism and disseminate it as a commonsense position within diverse fields of governance, academia, and U.S. national culture” (56). While I am fascinated by (and more than a little skeptical of) Melamed’s claim that novels can have such a wide-ranging influence in shaping a uniform mainstream discourse across virtually every field of social, political, and civic life, I am primarily interested in investigating the extent to which a novel, specifically Smith’s *Strange Fruit*, can actually challenge the logic of racial liberalism even while seemingly exemplifying a number of its tropes. I argue that in writing *Strange Fruit*, Smith in fact refuses to participate in the kind of ideological project Melamed identifies as racial liberalism, and, moreover, exposes the reliance on white sympathy as a solution to racism to be not only ill-advised but in fact potentially fatal, echoing Melamed’s contention that sympathy

kills.¹ In *Strange Fruit*, sympathy is appealed to as a last resort to ebb the violence of white supremacy, after the failure of love and attendant loss of its revolutionary potential.

1. Love

Set in 1920 in the fictional rural town of Maxwell, Georgia, *Strange Fruit* is focalized around the romantic and sexual affair between Tracy Deen, a member of a prominent white family in the town, and Nonnie Anderson, a soft-spoken woman from a respected black family. Tracy believes he loves Nonnie but struggles with his white supremacist attitudes, which significantly challenge his ability to love her. Upon discovering that Nonnie is pregnant with his child, Tracy undergoes a crisis and vacillates between envisioning a new world liberated from the confines of racial segregation by the possibilities of love and retreating into complacency within a white supremacist order that makes his relationship with Nonnie unviable. Tracy's mother requests that the town's white preacher Brother Dunwoodie offer Tracy his guidance, and Dunwoodie successfully convinces Tracy that he must join the church, marry his white neighbor Dorothy "Dottie" Pusey (assumed to be Tracy's girlfriend despite an absence of any form of intimacy between her and Tracy), and pay off a black man to marry Nonnie and help her raise her baby. One Saturday evening, Tracy gives his servant Henry one hundred dollars to marry Nonnie and offers Nonnie two hundred dollars as assistance for raising the child and compensation for having to marry Henry, suggesting he intends to continue the affair with her even though he will marry Dorothy Pusey. Nonnie is devastated and refuses to, perhaps physically cannot, respond, and Tracy leaves the two hundred dollars on the fence of her family's property and leaves. Meanwhile, Nonnie's brother Ed, who is visiting from Washington, DC and wishes to take Nonnie back to Washington with him, where she can presumably live a better life, overhears at

the drugstore a drunken Henry brag about the financially profitable arrangement he has made with Tracy. An incensed Ed returns to the house, grabs his pistol, finds Tracy not too far from the Andersons' home, just after he has left Nonnie, and fires two shots that instantly kill Tracy. When Ed informs the family of what has happened, his sister Bessie organizes his escape, instructing family friend Dr. Sam Perry to immediately drive Ed to Macon, where he can catch a night train that will eventually take him to New York. Inexplicably, the townspeople never suspect Ed or question his disappearance on the night of the murder. Many of them suspect Nonnie but have no interest in prosecuting her. Soon thereafter, a lynch mob decides Henry must pay for the murder. Tracy's sister Laura, telephone switchboard operator Miss Sadie, and Sam Perry warn Tom Harris, a prominent white man who owns a sawmill, that Henry will be lynched if he and other powerful white people do not act to stop the mob. Harris believes they are exaggerating but works with the town sheriff and Tracy's family to devise and carry out a plan to protect Henry. Henry is "disguised" as a white woman and hidden in Maxwell's jail. Harris subsequently refuses to heed Sam Perry's warnings that Henry will be caught regardless if the mob is not stopped. The mob breaks into the jail and lynches Henry, leaving the "good white people" to wonder what went wrong in their town and leaving Bessie to wonder what kind of future Nonnie's baby can have. The novel ends with a description of the body of Dessie, Henry's girlfriend, which implies she, too, is pregnant.

1.1 Where There Is Smoke There Is White Supremacy

The novel is composed, in part, of many flashbacks that probe the psychology of its major and minor characters. Central to Tracy's ability to imagine a different world are memories of his time away from the United States, when he is stationed in France during World War One.

Tracy's flashbacks to his time in France and the immediate aftermath of his return from the war outline formative moments in the development of his short-lived consciousness of resistance to the white supremacist and racially segregated social order of his community and nation. While in France, Tracy vacillates between thinking about Nonnie as a human lover and an object or thing available for his use. His thoughts as conveyed through the narrator demonstrate a remarkable capacity for cognitive dissonance. "She had been something you tried not to think about—something you needed, took when you needed, hushed your mind from remembering," Tracy recalls (50). Pondering the possibility that if they lived in France he and Nonnie would be able to dance in public transforms Nonnie in Tracy's mind from an object to a person worthy of love. All of a sudden, "[s]he wasn't a negro girl whom he had in a strange crazy way mixed his whole life up with. She was the woman he loved" (50). While Tracy understands his attitude toward his relationship with Nonnie through a formula of progression—that was then, this is now—the proximity and contiguity of the sentences in which she is described as a usable "negro girl" and "the woman he loved," coupled with the immediacy of his supposed transformation, suggests he in fact holds these contradictory thoughts and feelings simultaneously. Thoughts of the possibility of freedom do not in and of themselves manifest freedom. Certainly not in the case of a white man who has heretofore regarded his black female lover as someone akin to property, to be taken when needed. Tracy's consciousness is the schizophrenic consciousness of white supremacy, which insists on regarding a person as a thing until the cognitive dissonance of doing so in spite of the other's undeniable humanity becomes too unbearable; even when the other is recognized as human, her humanity is granted only provisionally and conditionally. Like Tracy, white supremacy humanizes black people fantasmatically without affording them the social and political status of the human subject.

For Tracy, this irresolvable contradiction—irresolvable because white supremacy refuses to resolve it—partially manifests itself in sexual terms, which he understands through a false mind-body dualism: “[H]is mind ached for the completion of a reality that until now only his body had accepted” (51). I won’t rehearse here the philosophical, psychological, and neurological debates and consensuses on the fallacy of mind-body dualism in the early twentieth century. Smith, a psychologist by training, refutes it with the simple phrase “his mind ached.” There is no question that the mind-body division is a false one and that, moreover, every insistence on this duality is instructive. The analogous dichotomy of thoughts and feelings proves especially so during the brief phase of Tracy’s awakening to questions of social equality, accompanied by his ability to see his relationship with Nonnie as a potentially viable one.

As he returns from the war, on the train ride from New York to Maxwell, Tracy observes that the South has “no feeling” (53). He finds himself feeling alien to a white supremacist society that complains that black people who served in the war no longer accept their place in the Southern social hierarchy. In all likelihood, such grievances are expressed with great feeling, but feeling Tracy no longer recognizes as legitimate—or worth feeling. “He listened. They were words as familiar to him as his own name, but words with which he now refused identification. It was as if he were the only thing real. The rest was made up” (53). The South remains unreal, a distant memory to Tracy as he journeys back. He refuses identification with it only to learn shortly thereafter that feeling on its own cannot usher in a new reality.

Indeed, Smith depicts Tracy’s reunion with Nonnie as dreamlike, in stark contrast to the sociopolitical reality of an interracial relationship in the 1920s U.S., and in the U.S. South in particular. Tracy spends part of his first night back in Maxwell with Nonnie. The two share a romantic evening that resembles a cinematic dream sequence. In a remote abandoned cabin

owned by Nonnie's family, Tracy shyly admits he has dreamed of dancing with her and reveals that he has brought a phonograph and waltz record to the rendezvous. As the record exhausts itself before the dancers do, "Tracy leaned across her and clicked it off..." (56, ellipses in the original). Smith's ellipses give us a literary analogue to the cinematic cut that signals sex and substitutes its representation and are followed by a paragraph portraying an impossibly gregarious Tracy and a silent Nonnie, in one of many scenes in the novel that render Nonnie passive, readily acquiescing to Tracy's wishes. Tracy's reflections in this monologue on his time in France lead to his offhand suggestion of France as a place he and Nonnie could live, which causes "something [to happen] to Nonnie's face and he [is] startled—as if he had lighted ten thousand candles with one small half-thought-out word" (57). France is never mentioned again, nor does Smith ever verbalize what Nonnie thinks or feels in response to the idea of it. Tracy's comment and Nonnie's facial expression remain the only signals of a liberatory potential lost in Tracy's ultimate unwillingness to work to transform, or ever properly address, a paralyzing and violent social reality.

Something happens in Tracy's body that same evening that he does not understand and whose implications he refuses to question or further explore. A chance meeting, when he steps out of his house in search of cigarettes in the drugstore owned by his father, with the town's black Reverend Livingston and his wife Roseanna inexplicably (to him) precipitates an irreversible shift in his disposition away from "the new world" of possibility he sought to explore with Nonnie moments before. This encounter with the Reverend and Roseanna does not appear in any way remarkable. Roseanna does initially greet Tracy somewhat mockingly, having forgotten "her white-folks manner" (58), but she quickly recovers from this lapse in proper performance for white people. There is no suggestion of anything unusual about this kind of

lapse; it is surely something Tracy has encountered before. One is hard-pressed to imagine his living for more than twenty years as a markedly mediocre (as he is consistently described in the novel) white man in a segregated Southern town without encountering the occasional forgetting of politeness or deference from a black person. The Reverend and Roseanna welcome him home, they and Tracy exchange a few words of small talk, and both he and they head to their respective destinations. And yet this seemingly mundane encounter affects Tracy profoundly:

In the old world that would have been all. They would have gone on to Negro Quarters, to be forgotten, and he would have stayed in White Town, forgetting.

But that was not all. As they stood there, between the speaking and the turning away, Tracy felt as if the blood were draining from his veins.

He went into the drugstore, lighted a counter lamp, took a package of cigarettes, sat down at one of the tables.

All the feeling he had was a physical sensation. He was tired as hell, that was all, and nothing was worth doing. There was not a word in his mind that explained his feeling. All he knew was that thirty minutes ago he had been with the woman he loved. Now there was a colored girl named Nonnie. That was all there was to it.

He did not sit there, piling facts here and facts there, weighing one pile against another. The anthropologists had proved there was no superior race. Sure, he knew that. Guys in the army had said the South wasted half its money and energy and time keeping the Negro in his place; if they'd stopped doing it, things might not be so bad down here. He knew that too. Books were written showing this, telling it, proving it even. He didn't read books all the time, as [his sister] Laura did, but he knew what the world was thinking. He knew what the facts were. They had no more to do with his feelings than knowing the

facts about bone structure or the reproductive process has to do with your feeling about the mother who bore you.

There was a colored girl named Nonnie. That was all there was to it.

Why it was so, why the accidental meeting with the Reverend and Roseanna could have done this, he did not know.

All he knew, as he stood there looking at them, a door slammed in his mind, shutting out the new world, shutting out Nonnie with it. He was just there on the sidewalk, where he had always been, feeling the feelings he had always felt. He had been somewhere... in a dream maybe; maybe crazy[...]. Maybe he'd lost, not his memory, but his white feelings” (59-60).

This passage is quite remarkable in its ability to convey the mundane nature of the way in which a white person, upon realizing they are given a choice, chooses to continue his complicity in white supremacy. Tracy is tired. This is understandable as he has had an extremely long day: he has completed a boat ride from France and a train ride from New York and made love with the lover whom he has just begun to recognize as someone with whom he could have a viable relationship. He does not feel like doing anything at the moment besides smoking a cigarette. And yet, as he ruminates about the difference between fact and feeling, he declares to himself that the subjective feeling of a white man constitutes objective fact. It is not that he simply does not feel like doing anything in this very moment; rather, nothing is *worth* doing. There is no worth in his working toward the “new world” he knows is possible. He knows racist ideology has no scientific basis or logical coherence. He knows segregation is both socially and economically disadvantageous to a society that practices it. But he cannot reconcile fact with feeling. Perhaps this is so because there is no feeling in the facts he cites to himself, similar to his

earlier observation about a South and Southerners without feeling. There is no attempt at empathy toward black Americans made in the complaints by fellow passengers in his white-only train car that the South is losing the cheap labor of black people who seek social equality, just as studies of the South by Northern economists take little account of the human subjectivity of the laborers and profiteers factored into their equations. Nothing is worth doing because Tracy cannot feel the value of working toward transforming himself and his society. Economic and sociological studies alone are not enough to convince him, and neither is love. Tracy's alienation from his own body does not allow him to connect the two. Rather, it allows him to simultaneously love Nonnie and continue to identify with the system that disenfranchises and dehumanizes her.

This passage is in many ways remarkably similar to one in Frantz Fanon's 1952 text *Black Skin, White Masks* (translated into English in 1967). Fanon, while also looking for a cigarette, reflects on the difference between an "intellectual understanding" of racism and colorism and a somatic experience that concretizes for him the alienation of a person of color produced by racism and colonialism:

The black man among his own in the twentieth century does not know at what moment his inferiority comes into being through the other. Of course I have talked about the black problem with friends, or, more rarely, with American Negroes. Together we protested, we asserted the equality of all men in the world. In the Antilles there was also that little gulf that exists among the almost-white, the mulatto, and the nigger. But I was satisfied with an intellectual understanding of these differences. It was not really dramatic. And then.[. . .]

And then the occasion arose when I had to meet the white man's eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me. The real world challenged my claims. In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is solely a negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty. I know that if I want to smoke, I shall have to reach out my right arm and take the pack of cigarettes lying at the other end of the table. The matches, however, are in the drawer on the left, and I shall have to lean back slightly. And all these movements are made not out of habit but out of implicit knowledge. A slow composition of my *self* as a body in the middle of a spatial and temporal world—such seems to be the schema. It does not impose itself on me; it is, rather, a definitive structuring of the self and of the world—definitive because it creates a real dialectic between my body and the world. (110-111, emphasis in the original)

An intellectual understanding of racism, especially from a space geographically removed from the metropole and predominantly populated by black people such as the Antilles, is not “dramatic.” Fanon does not *feel* personally invested in the stakes of such discussions, even as he participates in political demonstrations against racism, just as Tracy isn't moved by reading academic literature that challenges segregation. It is only when Fanon finds himself in the white space of the metropole, in an *embodied* encounter with white supremacy when he “meet[s] the white man's eyes” that he gains a fuller understanding of the violence of European and white hegemony. In the “white man's” world, even the simple gesture of reaching for a cigarette and searching for matches feels disorienting for Fanon. As Sara Ahmed observes when she analyzes this passage in her groundbreaking *Queer Phenomenology* (2006), racism “disorients’ black bodies such that they cease to know where to find things—reduced as they are to things among

things” (111). The black body in white space must slowly and painstakingly compose itself as a subject in the face of the objectification that separates it from a world that distributes subjectivity unevenly.

Searching and reaching for a cigarette, for very different yet very closely related reasons, dramatizes Tracy’s alienation from his body as well. There are no cigarettes at home, so he opts to walk through public space in order to acquire them from the drugstore. (Unlike Fanon, he does not need to purchase them because his family owns the drugstore.) He is thus unexpectedly (for it is late at night) confronted with the public presence of black bodies who are also public figures: the Reverend and Roseanna. The encounter disorients Tracy not because he is alien to the white world. On the contrary, it reminds him he is integral to it. What is unusual about the encounter is not how Tracy or the Reverend or Roseanna behave; nothing they say or do is particularly out of the ordinary. What is unusual and what emerges as a tragically missed opportunity is the very brief moment in which Tracy is able to step out of his body and observe what happens, as Fanon does, in the third person.

In the space of perhaps a few seconds, Tracy *simultaneously* exists in both the “new world” and the old. This is a simultaneity different from the cognitive simultaneity of white supremacist double consciousness. In this moment Tracy is simultaneously a third-party observer—someone outside the “old world” that dictates segregated paths, toward the Negro Quarters and White Town, for himself and the Livingstons, respectively—and a white man whose presence demands a performance of respect from black people in place of a conversation with them. Tracy feels “as if the blood was draining from his veins” because he, like Fanon, is having an out-of-body experience. It is the confluence of his own racism, structural racism, and a

desire for a new world order, and the weight of this convergence, that produces a vertiginous effect in Tracy's body.

Let us look more closely at what could have been potentially disruptive to Tracy about the behavior of Roseanna and the Reverend in the forgetting of their "white-folks manner" as Tracy approaches:

They were laughing heartily, having the street to themselves at this late hour, and the Reverend's black face was crinkled with laughter as he walked along spryly whirling the cane that usually he leaned on before white people. Roseanna was floating beside him, being one of those fat women so light on their feet that their weight seems to act as a sail filled with a stiff breeze. Her light-yellow face was merry now with her joking.

"If it isn't Mr. Tracy!" Roseanna's voice curved to the ground as she spoke his name, though he heard, too, the razor edge of mockery that cut a swath through her humility. He had caught Roseanna without her white-folks manner and it was as if she were hastily buttoning it on as she spoke to him. (58)

What is notable about this encounter is that it is uncanny.² Tracy *has* seen something like this before, but not in the way he sees it this time. The timing of the incident is crucial. At the very moment at which Tracy decides "his" world will change, he is confronted with the subjectivity of the other—specifically, the racial other whose subjectivity challenges his claim to ownership over this new world. Tracy realizes it is not he who will usher in a new world; it is Roseanna, whose body defies gravity; it is the Reverend, who twirls his cane like a magician. These are not magical black people who will lead Tracy on his journey to growth and self-discovery; they are not black people who will hand Tracy "his" new world on a platter and congratulate him for his ability to recognize them as human. Roseanna and the Reverend are black people who perform

the same extraordinary feat as millions of their fellow black Americans on a daily basis. They are black Americans who live, build community, raise their children, and look toward a brighter future in spite of an entire national apparatus designed to deny them their human worth and extinguish all hope for a better tomorrow. In the moment in which the Tracy who dreams of a new world observes himself in the role of a white man who has “caught” the Reverend and Roseanna living, laughing, and occupying space freely without needing to defer to white people, the two Tracys return to the same body, and this body gains a visceral understanding that it cannot oversee the emergence of a new world. It is not for Tracy to grant freedoms to Roseanna and the Reverend; their freedoms aren’t his to grant. If Tracy were to participate in the creation of a new world, he would have to give up his jurisdiction over other people’s freedoms. He would have to, in short, give up his whiteness.

Both Fanon and Tracy experience profound moments of somatic awareness about their respective places in the white world while “reaching” for a cigarette—an object that signals their respective places within the historical schema of plantation economies and the Atlantic slave trade; their shared claim to a male public sphere; and their differential relationships to a sense of belonging within that public sphere.

However, while Fanon uses such moments to develop a rich analysis of the dialectic between that world and his own body, Tracy accepts his bodily sensations as indicative of an immutable world order. Tracy does not understand what he is feeling, while Fanon understands it all too well. Fanon devotes his life work to such understanding, whereas Tracy gives up at the first sign that his body may encounter resistance if he dares to challenge white supremacy. Perhaps he understands to some extent “the facts,” as he puts it, of what such resistance may mean. Perhaps he understands how relatively little bodily harm he will be exposed to in contrast to a black

person who participates in similar transgression. Yet, ultimately, his complacency is stronger than his will to usher in the new world he knows is possible. Tracy inhabits his white body much too comfortably. To step out of that body to not only observe but actively challenge its participation in white supremacy would be too disorienting and require too much to be of worth for Tracy. It would make the Reverend and Roseanna real. It would make their freedom real. And, most frighteningly, it would place him in the most vulnerable of positions: that of the lover who must take responsibility for his love.³

Love in this novel is the liberatory force that must be suppressed to ensure the functioning of white supremacist heteropatriarchy. Tracy's family, and the white residents of Maxwell more generally, are aware of this fact, as they are also aware of Tracy's sexual relationship with Nonnie. Therefore, at the request of Tracy's mother, and with the blessing of a white supremacist social order which he understands as a mandate granted by a higher power, the town's white preacher Brother Dunwoodie gives Tracy a private sermon on his responsibilities as a white man within this social order.

Dunwoodie's lecture for Tracy features a bizarre combination of vague sexual innuendo, hideous racism, absurd sexism, and barely sublimated homoeroticism. References to Dunwoodie's own past unspecified sin of which "God convicted [him]" (84) at first suggest he may be a closeted homosexual man, as Dunwoodie explains to Tracy that neither joining the army nor playing sports "helped" the situation (84). As the preacher's monologue devolves from oddly vague allusions to his own supposed history of moral corruption to explicit tirades against sexual affairs with black women, it becomes reasonable to presume that his past "sin" is closer in nature to Tracy's sexual transgressions. This possibility becomes increasingly probable as it becomes apparent that Dunwoodie cannot conceal his personal investment in the subject.

Dunwoodie warns Tracy that “[o]f course no decent fine white woman can satisfy [him]” sexually when he allows himself to be sexually interested in black women, his voice “ris[ing] shrilly” (87), and advises Tracy to “leave colored women alone and stick to your own kind” (88), so that they, too, can find and marry “a man their color” and “[l]ive a fairly decent, respectable life—that is, if a nigger woman can live a decent, respectable life” (88). As he offers this last piece of advice, Dunwoodie’s voice turns from shrill to “suddenly bitter” (88) in an unencumbered display of emotion that would read as comical were it not a testament to the ease with which a white patriarch can frame his own sexual ignorance, racism, and sexism as wisdom issued by a voice of experience, reason, and morality. Within such a framework, Dunwoodie’s undisguised resentment, his resentful displacement of personal sexual insecurity onto the figure of the morally pathologized black woman, is presented as the pathos of a wise, benevolent, and generous patriarch.

It is unclear whether the bizarre ideas about relationships between men and women that follow this racist tirade come from Dunwoodie’s intense hatred for women, repressed homosexuality, or a combination of the two. Regardless, he continues to perform with pathos, and Tracy, lacking the will to seek a different way to address his own predicament, seriously considers the preacher’s words. Dunwoodie frames his theories on gender relations with a well-rehearsed reiteration of the division of the gendered division between public and private spheres, where men are credited with “do[ing] the work,” “mak[ing] a living” for their families, “do[ing] the farming,” and “creat[ing] the cities,” whereas women’s essential domestic labor is not recognized as labor (89). Yet Dunwoodie also appears to find the public/private separation between men and women insufficient in creating what he deems a necessary emotional distance between the two genders for the proper functioning of a patriarchal society. It is not enough for

Dunwoodie that women's labor as well as much of their social life is confined to the home, as he fears that women, even thus confined, can lay claim to a man's soul if he does not take special care to protect himself from forming a relationship with them beyond the minimum interactions required for the basic day-to-day functions of a nuclear family. Dunwoodie explains:

[W]hen a man gets over into a woman's world, he gets into bad trouble. He don't belong there. He belongs in a man's world. God wants your soul where it belongs, for then He'll be surer of getting it than if it was on the other side—where some woman'll get it all[...]. I don't preach it in the pulpit. But it's good preaching, just the same. Too much love makes you soft. No-count! Tying you to a woman's apron strings! Women wouldn't understand that—and, as I say, I don't preach it in the pulpit.

Now some men have a deep feeling for God. It comes to em easy. Others get it slow. The hard way. But a man makes a living and feeds those younguns his wife *says* are his, even if he ain't sure he loves them yet, don't he? And a man gets on the Lord's side and joins the church, supports it and his town's affairs, even when his heart's not in it much, at first.

But this is what happens after a time. After a time God begins to seem like a real Man to you. Not something your mother loved and told you to love. But your own Kind. I mean that in a holy and sacred way. And what men are doing, their work, their interests, seems more important to you and satisfying than anything in a woman's world. So when I say, get on the Lord's side, I mean one thing when I talk to the ladies and another when I talk to men. (89-90; emphasis in the original)

Dunwoodie believes loving women is catastrophic for men. He further believes only men know how to love God because God is a man—"a real Man," capitalized by Smith to emphasize the

homoerotic deification of a man's love for other men as well as the homoerotic personification of the Christian deity as a man who fits criteria for masculinity performance that warrant being called a "real man."⁴ "Too much" love for women is not good for men; it makes men "soft," which presumably translates to "not sufficiently manly." Softness, for Dunwoodie, is clearly a transgression of gendered belonging, and softness also connotes excessive kindness or empathy, presumably for women, and, in the context of this conversation, also for black people. Tracy's problem is that he loves Nonnie, and love causes a double transgression of segregated belonging—into "a woman's world" as well as a black world.

Men, then, are not meant to love women because God is a man, and because God is a man, only men know how to love God. Men are to love God like they would love "a real Man"—"[n]ot something your mother loved and told you to love. But your own Kind." Women do not know how to love men, and men should not love women. Of love between women there is no mention. The preacher's world is an exclusively homosexual male one. The directive that Tracy should love "his own Kind" here (capitalized again to suggest the deification of men and masculinity) is inseparable from his earlier instruction that Tracy "stick to [his] own kind" (88) and marry a white woman. While his marriage to a white woman is instrumental to the continuation of patriarchy, white supremacy, and racial segregation, loving a white woman or loving any human being is, according to the preacher, detrimental to such systems of hierarchy and dominance. Dunwoodie denies the eroticism of his statement that a man knows how to love his "own Kind"—other men—immediately after he makes it: "I mean that in a holy and sacred way." Men know how to love men and must sublimate that desire for worship for a deity personified in the masculine. With enough effort, that deity will "begin to seem like a real Man."

Despite having gained both an intellectual knowledge (through his travels) and a visceral knowledge, though falling in love with Nonnie, that a world radically different from the one espoused by the preacher is both possible and necessary, Tracy chooses to listen to Dunwoodie and accept as a role model a man who has chosen to repress his own erotic desire (desire for sex and love) in the service of a white supremacist belief in a concept of a “white race” created by a higher power with a mandate to subjugate another allegedly inferior “race” of people.⁵ Perhaps Tracy is flattered to be called a man. Perhaps no one has suggested he is a “real man” before, and the invitation from the preacher into a secret society of real-Man-worshipping men (secret because Dunwoodie does not talk about worship and God in these terms in mixed company) is difficult to resist given Tracy’s questionable reputation among the town’s respectable and not-so-respectable white people. Or perhaps his decision comes down, once again, to that fateful meeting with the Reverend and Roseanna Livingston, which ostensibly cements in Tracy a “bodily sensation” of stuckness within a white supremacist order and its perpetuation.

Tracy attempts to escape this stuckness and the preacher’s invitation to join a society of repressed homosexual white supremacists by making an effort to remember another night with Nonnie. The evening takes place at a secluded spot by a river, in fact the very spot where Tracy has taken the preacher just after his invitation of “trying it on the Lord’s side—and man’s, for while” (90) as part of his attempt to reject the preacher’s world for a world in which transgressions in sex, love, and “softness” generate possibilities for more egalitarian interactions between humans of differential gendered and racial privilege. I’d like to explore the problems with the premise of a liberatory potential in a relationship between a white man and a black woman in the U.S., and specifically in the post-bellum South, before returning to an analysis of this scene.

1.2 Is There an Interracial Sexual Relationship?

Jared Sexton titles the third chapter of his book *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiculturalism* with the provocative assertion that “There Is No (Interracial) Sexual Relationship,” adding the parenthetical modifier of the “interracial” to Jacques Lacan’s (in)famous dictum that “there is no sexual relationship” (“*il n’y a pas de rapport sexuel*”). Because Lacan’s statement, also known as his formula for “sexuation,” hints at the power differential implicit in all sexual relationships, a variation of that formula that foregrounds the specificity of race could offer useful insights into the power imbalances of interracial relationships and how such imbalances are symptomatic of the larger structures of racial violence in our society. However, I ultimately find Sexton’s use of Lacan unconvincing because he sticks a little too closely to Lacan’s formula, which I argue fails to take into account the foundational violences that produce the traumatic kernel of the Real found at the heart of the social antagonisms he articulates. Further, I believe it is important to unpack the Lacanian formula of “there is no sexual relationship” as well as any and all variants that add race, class, or any other index of social, political, and historical oppression to this conceptualization. I find the tendency of scholars to ascribe a queer or otherwise liberatory potential to Lacan’s statement extremely worrisome, as it unwittingly reifies political and historical categories such as race and gender as ontological.

The principal problem of the “sexuation” formula used by Lacan and Lacanians is the persistent lack of clarity in what is meant by the words “sex” and “sexual.” At no point does either Lacan, Bruce Fink (the preeminent English-language translator of and source for interpreting Lacan), Slavoj Žižek, or any other of a number of Lacanian thinkers clarify whether

the “sex” and “sexual” in “there is no sexual relationship” refer to gender, sexual acts, sexual proclivities, or sexual orientations. In fact, Lacanians systematically conflate these various meanings and thus conveniently evade engaging with discussions about the relationship between “sex,” gender, and sexuality that feminist and queer studies scholars have taken on for the last four decades. Sexton quotes and expands upon an explanation by Joan Copjec that attempts to get at the heart of the antagonism expressed in the formula. Unfortunately, Sexton’s own analysis, too, remains unclear in the very basic, dictionary definition, of its usage of the words “sex” and “sexual”:

Joan Copjec (1994) puts a finer point on it when she writes that there is a “*radical antagonism between sex and sense.... Sex is the stumbling block of sense.... Sex is produced by the internal limit, the failure of signification*” (204). In this sense, sex is an effect of the Real (“produced by... the failure of signification”) and sexual difference is, as a result, understood as *real* difference. Racial difference, on the other hand, would seem to present itself as a *symbolic* difference, what Foucault might call the functional effects of a discursive regime. (183-184, emphases in the originals)

On its own, Copjec’s excerpted statement reads as a fairly “common-sense” observation about the irrationality of sexual drives and desires. Who and what we desire evades our rational understanding and ability to conceptualize through language; our bodies, as we observe in Smith’s protagonist Tracy, can follow a path at odds with the social structure within which they exist. Yet Sexton’s interpretation resorts to the ambiguous phrase “sexual difference” (alluding to the equally problematic Lacanian concept of “the Real of sexual difference”), which reproduces the nonsensical and reactionary conflation between “sex” in the sense of “sexual

encounter” and “sex” as the antiquated, biologically and anatomically determined term for “gender.”

Furthermore, Sexton’s reference to Fink’s translation of Lacan’s “*il n’y a pas de rapport sexuel*” as “there is no such thing as a relation between the sexes” does not help the case for the use of Lacan’s formula in the service of a politics of liberation (Fink 1995: 98 in Sexton 181). While Lacanians such as Fink insist that “the sexes” in Lacan’s formulation of “sexual difference” and “sexual relationship” (or the lack thereof) do not correspond to gendered, male and female bodies, neither they nor Lacan offer any examples of an attempt at a “relation between the sexes” that imply anything other than an attempt at a *heterosexual* relationship, that is, a sexual relationship between a cisgender woman and a cisgender man.⁶ “The sexes,” then, remain exactly what they sound like: a binary set of anatomically constituted participants in what Judith Butler has termed the “heterosexual matrix” that aligns sex, gender, and sexuality. Thus, while Lacan’s suggestion that there is no such thing as a *heterosexual* relationship may at first sound intriguing to scholars in search of queer possibility, such possibility is foreclosed from the start. If an attempted heterosexual relationship proves impossible beyond the mere fantasy or illusion of a relationship, a queer sexual relationship does not even appear on the horizon of possibility.

My point here is not to invalidate Sexton’s thesis or dismiss his use of Lacan. Rather, I interpret his choice of a Lacanian formulation as symptomatic of a certain impasse produced by language in its inseparability from power and violence. Sexton’s *Amalgamation Schemes* assails an ideologically conservative underpinning of multiracial discourse that reifies racial categories and heteronormative definitions of sex, love, and family. Multiracialism’s “sexual politics,” Sexton maintains, “imply a production of race in the field of heterosexuality, nominating, more

specifically, the reproductive sex act as the principal site of mediation for racial difference itself” (7). In other words, biologically essentialist understandings of race are also heteronormative—“races” are reproduced or “continued” through reproductive heterosexual coupling, and so, the field of interracial sexuality within multiracial discourse is reduced to reproductive heterosexuality. “[T]o the extent that one thinks of race as biological (e.g., genotype, phenotype), one thinks of race mixture in heteronormative and reproductive terms” (7-8). Sexton therefore proposes “[d]islodging biological notions of race” as a “condition of possibility for the queering of interracial sexuality, including its disarticulation from the specter of miscegenation” (8).

To the extent that Sexton’s intervention necessitates a critique of a discourse that reifies heterosexuality and racial categorization within a formula for love in which the multiracial or postracial subject is produced biologically and discursively by, for example, one white and one black parent of “opposite” “sexes,” the application of a Lacanian theory of sexual relationship and sexual difference functions as a kind of double-edged sword. On the one hand, a Lacanian critique offers a powerful rejoinder to uncritical and untheorized multiculturalist notions of “love” as a magical solution to structural inequalities by highlighting the uneven distribution of power embedded in all sexual relationships. Yet, at the same time, even if we are to entertain a generous reading of Lacan and accept the claim that the two sides in his formula of “sexuation” do not necessarily correspond, respectively, to one cisgender male and one cisgender female person, his argument that any (attempted) sexual relationship is comprised of a meeting of two incompatible forms of desire (termed phallic jouissance and Other or female jouissance) nevertheless produces an impasse that reifies socially constructed and determined categories as essentialized effects of the Real.⁷

The impasse of “sexual difference” produced by patriarchy is analogous to the impasse of racial difference produced by white supremacy. Thus, Sexton’s claim that “sexual difference” is to be “understood as *real* difference,” and “racial difference... present[s] itself as *symbolic* difference” rehearses a deeply problematic (and long discredited) formula that considers gender, in contradistinction to race, to be rooted in an originary biological reality (that of anatomical “sex”) of which gender is considered to be a discursive effect.⁸ Through this juxtaposition, Sexton also misses an opportunity to effectively queer interracial sexuality by theorizing race and gender as analogous and similarly (discursively) produced indices of power and violence.

A more fruitful avenue of exploration of the problematics of interracial sexual relationships between people of European and African descent would be their historical foundation, in the U.S. context, in the system of chattel slavery and its legacies. Although Sexton develops his point that “there is no interracial sexual relationship” through the Lacanian framework implied by the sentence, he does gloss the historical reasons for which this may be the case. To this end, Sexton objects to “the assertion within multiracial discourse that consensual sexual relations between white male slaveholders and enslaved black females allowed genuine interracial intimacy to flourish under the regime of chattel slavery in the antebellum United States” (153). He notes that this assertion is facilitated by “an ethical evasion of the foreclosure of black female consent under the conditions of enslavement,” and, moreover, argues that the problem of “black female *sexual* consent in relations with white male slaveholders” is related to “a broader problem of *political* consent from the captive community and its descendents for the project of multiracial democracy up to the present moment” (153, emphasizes in the original).

Saidiya Hartman offers an illuminating analysis of the historical conditions of (im)possibility surrounding an enslaved woman's ability to give sexual consent. Under slave law, an enslaved woman could neither legally give nor refuse consent, rendering her rape legally impossible. This "disavowal of rape," Hartman explains, "most obviously involves issues of consent, agency, and will that are ensnared in a larger dilemma concerning the construction of person and the calculation of black humanity in slave law since this repression of violence constitutes female gender as the locus of both unredressed and negligible injury" (80). Hartman's definition of "female gender" as an entity constituted by violence and its denial bears comparison with Sexton's definition of race as "the relation one suffers and/or enjoys with respect to the state-sponsored organization of violence and sexuality" (9). If race is constituted by violence and its relationship to sexuality, it is not clear how gender, a formation clearly entangled with the sexual violences that produce racial difference, should have any relationship to an ahistorical antagonism of the Real. Hartman's analysis of the production of female gender under slave law crucially underscores the *intersectional* relationship between race and gender as *symbolic* (that is, operating with the realm of language) indices of the related forms of violence—patriarchal and white supremacist—that construct the enslaved person as the paradox of an undeniably human person who holds the political status of dehumanized property.

Such an understanding of the intersectional operations of race and gender under a regime of white supremacy allows us to better utilize Sexton's point about the relationship between sexual and political consent. Sexton's work ultimately critiques a certain tendency within what he calls multiracial discourse in the United States to pathologize "black identity... as an antiquated state of confinement from which the 'multiracial imagined community' (Stephens 1999) must be delivered," a tendency he interprets as "a refraction of the pronounced fear of

‘black domination’ that underwrites the history of white supremacist discourse: whether postbellum alibis for institutionalized lynching, segregation, or disenfranchisement or the propaganda of ‘reverse discrimination’ fashionable today” (7). Sexton’s arguments raise important questions about the stakes of black participation as well as black refusal to participate in a postracial project that may or may not reckon with a white supremacist history, present, and their consequences. In the context of Smith’s *Strange Fruit*, it is equally important to ask whether Nonnie’s presumed sexual consent equates to political consent to the “new world” Tracy imagines; whether Tracy seeks her consent in the first place; and, finally, to what extent Tracy and Nonnie’s respective positionalities as a white man and black woman in a segregated 1920s Georgia town make Nonnie’s sexual and political consent possible.

Nonnie and Tracy’s relationship has its roots in Nonnie’s childhood and Tracy’s adolescence, during an incident that prompts Nonnie to position herself as an object of exchange within a white supremacist patriarchal system. When Tracy protects a seven-year-old Nonnie from sexual assault by another white boy—proclaiming, “Beat it. She’s not that kind” (4), thus distinguishing her from other seven-year-old black girls who presumably are the “kind” that desires to be raped—Nonnie rebuts her attacker’s statement, “I didn’t know she was yourn,” by announcing to Tracy, “I *am* yourn” (4, original emphasis). Nonnie, thus, from a very young age, understands her situation as that of a black female person who belongs to a white man, in this case a white savior who emerges as an option preferable to that of a white rapist within a rather limited spectrum of black female choice.

Like Sexton, Tracy suspects there may not be such a thing as an interracial sexual relationship, even while his attempt to be part of such a relationship allows him to envision and maintain hope for the possibility of a different world. During the night with Nonnie which Tracy

recollects in an attempt to counter Dunwoodie's white supremacist indoctrination, Tracy feels "shamed and confused" (92) by his role in the relationship and the position of power he inhabits. "[H]e knew that she had never seen a river in the moonlight before... that somehow he had conferred a great favor" (92). To think of sharing something one loves, in this case an aesthetic experience of nature, with one's lover as conferring that lover a favor is at best quite odd. Perhaps Tracy cannot divorce his position as lover from his role as savior; the original "favor" he granted Nonnie in protecting her from a rapist continues to structure his subjectivity in the relationship. But love is not a favor. To love one must relinquish power, of which the power to grant favors is just one kind.

All sexual relationships occur within and perform power dynamics. A differential in power does not make a sexual relationship impossible. And while the dynamics of subject-object and self-other within sexual relationships are quite complicated and difficult to disentangle, I propose a sexual relationship requires a level of recognition of the subjectivity, and, in the case of human beings, humanity, of the Other. Tracy demonstrably struggles with such recognition. As Tracy and Nonnie are about to have sex in the moonlight, "everything seemed right and good" (93). And, as is often the case with sexual relationships, afterwards, things get weird:

But later, as they lay there, relaxed, looking up at the sky, she had pulled his hand to her breast. He felt her heart beating under it and suddenly, lying there, she seemed not the Nonnie whom he had a way of taking for granted *as you'd take a piece of cornbread*, but a girl off somewhere by herself and sad about something. He drew her to him and ran his hand across her hair, not knowing what to say. Not knowing in this damned upside-down, devilish world what to say to a girl like this. (93)

The emphasis is mine. Within the white supremacist thought patterns performed in this novel, the comparison between a black woman and cornbread slips in casually—a dependent clause latched onto a previous dependent clause. In this “upside-down... world” of white supremacist perception, Tracy cannot tell the difference between his lover and cornbread. To take one’s lover for granted is one thing; to take one’s lover for granted “as you’d take a piece of cornbread” is quite another. Must Tracy feel Nonnie’s heartbeat to remind himself that she is not a spongy supplement to Sunday brunch? Perhaps. There is, most certainly, no sexual relationship with cornbread.

It is no wonder then that Tracy is ultimately swayed by Dunwoodie’s rhetoric. In addition to illustrating Tracy’s inability to distinguish between Nonnie and cornbread, this flashback also demonstrates his intolerance toward any mention to the structural racism which their relationship would need to navigate if it were made public. Even a brief reference by Nonnie to her experience as a black woman sends Tracy into a panic. When Nonnie suggests that her desire to be protected by someone is related to growing up as a black girl, Tracy’s inner monologue sounds an alarm: “*Negro*. She’d said it. Now everything would be spoiled. Ruined as it always was!” (94, original emphasis). Tracy has not only given up on imagining a new world; he cannot even acknowledge the reality of the world in which he lives, where it is not possible to attempt any kind of relationship between a white and black person without addressing their racial difference. When Nonnie reassures Tracy that she is not interested in discussing race—“Race is something—made up, to me. Not real” (95)—Tracy feels momentary relief. Yet, it is not clear how he decides, based on Nonnie’s comment, that their relationship may be viable after all. “She’s my girl,” Tracy tells himself. “She’s lovely and beautiful, and she’s mine. [...] Holding her there, he knew he loved her—as a man loves the woman who fits all his needs” (95). A man

who loves a woman for no other reason than his belief that “she fits all his needs” mistakes possession for love. Distinctions between love, need, use, and ownership, as well as distinctions between a person and cornbread remain murky for Tracy.

As the affair with Nonnie threatens to throw Tracy’s world into chaos, Dunwoodie’s invitation into a white supremacist homoerotic patriarchal society offers the seduction of stability and order. Nonnie cannot be “Tracy’s girl,” he comes to realize, because the social order that allowed his forefathers to own black girls and women no longer exists, and a new order that facilitates a consensual relationship between a white man and a black woman has not yet been established. This in-between space of normative orders is a space of possibility that Tracy lacks the vision to transform into a future. After the moonlit evening with Nonnie, Tracy heads back to “White Town,” once again, full of hope. And yet, “the moment he opened the screen door of his house and entered that hall, things changed as if he had found his sense of direction out in the swamp—and lost it again” (96-97). Tracy’s home is with white supremacy.

Thus, faced with a choice between the pursuit of love and white supremacist complacency, explicitly framed by the preacher as a rejection of love, Tracy chooses the latter:

Sitting there under the big oak tree by the preacher, who breathed deep and steadily now, sweat rolling down his neck and forehead—Tracy tried to feel again what he had felt that night two months ago under the same oak tree, on the same old riverbank. But it wouldn’t come. He remembered every word they had said, every moment they had been here—as if it had happened to someone else a hundred years ago. Nonnie was only a name today.

A name and an obstacle. *A colored girl blocking a white path.* (97, emphasis added)

The sight of the preacher sleeping the “effortless sleep”⁹ of those who embody supremacy inspires neither love nor hope. Tracy once again observes himself in the third person, failing to

reconcile his analysis of his body with his experience of that same body. Aligning oneself with white supremacy is a form of dissociation. It nullifies personal experience. Tracy is not Tracy. He does not know if he exists in the past or the future. On the one hand, temporal disorientation is integral to the experience of love. As Alain Badiou observes, “everyone’s existence, when tested by love, confronts a new way of experiencing time” (33). Yet, Tracy opts to resolve this disorientation by disavowing his identity as lover. He cannot accept love’s challenge to his existence. He does not wish to build a new world. Love is what landscape architects call a “desire line”—an unofficial path delineated by “marks left on the ground... where people deviate from the paths they are supposed to follow” (Ahmed 19-20). In *Strange Fruit*, love is a desire line paved over by a master plan. The lover is always an obstacle, and the “colored girl blocking a white path” is an intolerable obstacle to whiteness.

2. Sympathy

Under white supremacy, love necessarily fails. When love fails, we are left with sympathy. Love involves a confrontation with the subjectivity of the other. From love, “you learn that you can experience the world on the basis of difference and not only in terms of identity” (Badiou 16). Sympathy’s engagement with difference is at best superficial. Sympathy maintains white supremacy. And as Melamed argues, and Smith’s novel confirms, sympathy kills.

Sam Perry, a physician and friend of the Andersons, believes “decent white people” live in the town (177). He can count them on one hand. They are Tut Deen, Tracy’s father, a physician, and soda fountain owner; Pug Pusey, father of Tracy’s fiancée Dorothy “Dottie” Pusey; and Tom Harris, owner of a sawmill, who is kind to black people and kind to his

employees, yet refuses to hear the latter's appeals that he provide a living wage (177-179). In an internal monologue, Tom Harris, who uses chain-gang labor, reasons that the best way to keep these unpaid incarcerated black male workers well-behaved would be to "bring a drove of black women" once a week to have nonconsensual sex with them (302). Harris does not plan to act on this idea; he has some inkling it may be unethical, imagining his wife "would quit him tomorrow if she knew he thought such a thing" (302). Like other white men in this novel, Harris defers questions of right and wrong to (white) women and the Church.

Some of these white women, specifically, telephone switchboard operator Miss Sadie and Tracy's lesbian sister Laura,¹⁰ warn Tom Harris that Henry will be lynched if he does not use his power to stop the lynching, as does Sam Perry. A delusional liberal who cannot stand to have his own supremacy ideologies challenged, Tom Harris compares Sam to his wife, who "is always imagining things" (339). While Tom Harris believes women and black people imagine things and exaggerate white supremacist violence, he does take measures to protect Henry. Tom Harris, who has witnessed a number of lynchings of black men in his lifetime, understands measures against a lynching to consist, in this case, in dressing a large black man such as Henry in improvised drag meant to disguise him as a white woman and hiding him in the town's jail (324). A self-professed rational white man, who, unlike his wife, Laura, Miss Sadie, and Sam, does not "imagine things" such as the proven dangers of white supremacist violence, Tom Harris does imagine Henry's absurd disguise will protect him. He also imagines Henry will be protected by the law, symbolized by the jail, in a town where lynchings are never tried.

Liberal sympathy quite literally kills Henry. Sympathy also kills and buries love. Tom Harris postulates that "[m]any a man in Maxwell knew why Tracy was killed on the Old Town road" and, in his bottomless ignorance and self-delusion, believes that "of course the women

didn't" (300-301). Tracy's body is found in "Colored Town" just after he has proposed marriage to Dorothy Pusey. All signs point to a crime of passion. And at the same time, to prosecute Nonnie is out of the question. "Best thing folks can do now is hush it up," Harris decides. "Get the boy buried, hush the talk. Bring that mulatto girl to trial, pretty as she is, and you'd spread a scandal from end to end of the United States" (301).¹¹ The men in this town know very well that women are capable of murdering them—whether in self-defense or in response to accumulated indignities. "Get a woman mad enough, she'd do you in, in a minute," observes plantation owner Captain Ruston, who also believes Nonnie killed Tracy (361). And yet, the thought of any public acknowledgment of this fact is so intolerable to Tom Harris that he must assure himself that the town's white women would never suspect (or identify with) Nonnie. Moreover, public acknowledgement of a black woman's murder of a white male lover would constitute an irrevocable attack on a U.S. body politic whose coherence is maintained by a suppression of its history of chattel slavery and denial of ongoing racial violence. There is no interracial sexual relationship—consensual or otherwise—in Maxwell, Georgia, or in U.S. history. For the Tom Harrises of the nation—its liberal white supremacist ruling class—this fiction must be defended to ensure the endurance of polite racial oppression, which works in tandem with the spectacular extra-judicial executions of black people to sustain white supremacy.

3. Hope: A Black and Queer Perspective

That no one suspects Ed Anderson, Nonnie's brother, or questions his sudden disappearance the night of the murder is among the less believable elements of Smith's plot. One could argue Smith constructs such a plot in order to appeal to liberal white readers who may be outraged by reading about the lynching of an innocent black man in a novel thought to operate within the

genre of social realism. Yet, there are other, more realistic ways, to achieve such an effect. We know from the novel's title that an innocent black man will be lynched, and yet, the lynching is not the main focus of the novel; the focus of the novel is the psychology of white supremacy. At the same time, the novel also allows us to contemplate black survival and its relationship to hope.

Ed Anderson is protected by an organized black community that performs an instinctual knowledge of fugitivity under white supremacy. As she helps plan her brother's escape, Bessie stops to think, "as if all her race's knowledge of how to escape the hands of white men would offer itself to her, only for the thinking" (229). While Ed's murder of Tracy is clearly carried out in anger, it would be a mistake to read Ed's character as indexical of an appeal to liberal white sympathy. Ed is not an illustration of a damaged black psyche; he is not a Bigger Thomas character. Ed is consistently characterized as a person who seeks a life of dignity for himself and his family; a life he does not believe is possible under the racial apartheid of Maxwell, Georgia. (While Washington, DC, where Ed lives, is also a segregated city, it nonetheless affords black communities with a relative social and economic autonomy that does not exist in Maxwell.) Arguably, Ed's murder of Tracy is a perfectly rational response to Tracy's sale of Nonnie. While the sale of human beings is no longer legal in Maxwell, the town's legal system has no provisions for the trading of women under (white supremacist) patriarchy. Moreover, the town's law enforcement authorities enforce laws against murder only selectively, as demonstrated by their refusal to prosecute Nonnie or the members of Henry's lynch mob. In Maxwell, conflicts are solved through murder and mob violence. Ed knows he has no other recourse. Consequently, Smith does not seek her readers' sympathy with the predicament of Ed and his family; she invites their solidarity.

While she performs solidarity with black self-determination and fugitivity, however, Smith misses an opportunity in the character development of Nonnie. The novel offers detailed biographical information and transcribes extensive inner monologues for its many characters, including minor ones not mentioned in this chapter, and yet, we are left with a rather limited understanding of Nonnie's perspective. We largely understand Nonnie from the point of view of her siblings and other characters in the novel. Nonnie's family, the Andersons, have a reputation for being educated and proud of their blackness, although the latter is more so the case for Nonnie's sister Bessie than it is for Nonnie. While both sisters have graduated from Spelman College, only Bessie is described as having gained pride in her blackness as a result of the curriculum's lessons in black heritage and politics. Nonnie, on the other hand, tells Tracy that "[r]ace is something—made up, to [her]" (95), and her assertion is not a commentary on the concept of race as a racist, eugenicist fiction, but, rather, a statement of colorblindness that deflects from a discussion of the violence produced by racialization.

Nonnie's views on race sound odd to her siblings Bessie and Ed, who embrace their black identity and are conscious of their racial oppression under American white supremacy. She is also the only character referred to as "mulatto" in the novel, even though all evidence suggests she and her siblings come from the same two biological parents. The novel's narrative, along with this figurative use of the term "mulatto," then, implies a revision of the tragic mulatto trope, where it is not so much Nonnie's identity that is in crisis, but rather, the identities of all other characters in the novel, none of whom are described as racially "mixed." Additionally, it is not Nonnie's character who suffers a tragic fate, but, rather, her white lover and the black man he hires as his replacement. Nonnie's strangeness lies in her ability to simultaneously deny the material violences of race and racism and somehow emerge miraculously unscathed by them.

Aside from her family members, the only person curious about Nonnie's point of view is Tracy's lesbian sister Laura—one of the novel's two queer characters. Laura's lesbianism is not a subject of discussion in the town and is known only to Laura, her lover Jane, and Laura's mother, who communicates this knowledge by stealing one of Jane's letters to Laura and destroying a small clay nude sculpture made by Laura and inspired by Jane. An avid reader, Laura is not only intellectually curious, but, like Smith, also curious about people's motivations. This curiosity leads to "queer" thoughts about Nonnie: "It's queer to think of a colored girl knowing your brother better than you do. Why had she killed him? Not the kind to flare up in anger. [...] He must have done something very dreadful to have made her do it. [...] No one has said it. No one ever would... and yet... they must know" (321). It is only fitting that the lesbian character would contemplate the town's open secrets, even if, in this case, the secret concerns a shared (and incorrect) assumption rather than a known fact.

Laura plans and comes very close to executing her plan to ask Nonnie how she found "the courage" to kill Tracy. As her family and that of Tracy's fiancée prepare for his funeral, Laura sends for Nonnie, and attempts to speak to her. However,

Laura could find nothing to say. She pressed back the question, struggling to keep it from forming words that might slip through her lips. What did he do that gave you the courage? Nobody loved him much, except you, but you must have loved him. You have to love a thing—you have to love someone a great deal to kill her, don't you? You have to love and hate what you kill, a great deal, don't you—

“—before you can find the courage—”

She spoke the words aloud and was utterly confused at the sound of her voice. Then, perceiving that the girl had not heard [...] she forced herself back into the conventional attitude of white mistress and colored maid. (322-323)

Tellingly, this queer character's irrepressible utterance concerns courage—the courage to do or say the forbidden—while her imagined conversation with Nonnie contains a queer slip of the tongue that transforms her brother into a hypothetical female lover. Laura is incapable of composing a sentence in her mind that includes the phrase “to love a man”—the man becomes a thing that takes the form of a woman when de-objectified. Her fantasy of a queer transgression of boundaries demarcated by race, open secrets, and symbolic limits to language surrounding funeral rites (such as the ones on which Antigone insists) is both utopian and informed by an entitlement produced by whiteness. Laura momentarily feels she can say anything to Nonnie, including things she would never dream of saying to a white person. As Laura imagines the dissipation of boundaries between herself and Nonnie, boundaries erected by centuries of white supremacist domination, the line between queer and white fantasy is blurred, suggesting a moment of self-reflection on the part of the queer white author writing a novel about the radical (and unfulfilled) potential of interracial love.

Smith leaves us, in the end, with queer and black hope. Early in the novel, Nonnie tells an uncomprehending Tracy that she wants her baby: “I’ll have something they—can’t take away from me” (6). This is the only instance in the text where Nonnie alludes to racial oppression. For all of her insistence that she is not interested in questions of race, she seems well aware of how her body, as a black female body, is situated within U.S. history. Nonnie understands her pregnancy as an opportunity to claim ownership over a body whose sovereignty is threatened under American white supremacist patriarchy. Relatedly, Nonnie also rejects her sister Bessie’s

insistence on respectability politics when the latter argues that Nonnie should have her pregnancy terminated lest she and her family be disgraced by the “concubine” status the birth of a white-fathered baby would imply for Nonnie (123, 127). Her simple statement, “I’ve got to have my baby, Bess,” ends all further discussion and succinctly performs a politics of black hope and resilience that gestures to the novel’s vision of futurity and world-making.

Chapter II:

Love and Belonging: The Elusive “We of Me” in Carson McCullers’ *The Member of the Wedding*

Carson McCullers’ *The Member of the Wedding* envisions new community and family formations by directly interrogating the institution of marriage through a queer protagonist whose imagination subverts the ritual of the exogamous, intra-racial, heterosexual wedding. In McCullers’ 1946 novel, Frankie Addams, a twelve-year-old tomboy living in a Georgia town, seeks membership in a new community after she is socially rejected by other adolescents. Because Frankie is not invited to return to the “club” of older adolescent girls who were previously her friends and because she is not aware of any other existing “club” that wants her as a member, Frankie must create a new community that will include her. Rather than bond with others who have been similarly excluded, Frankie invents a new kind of club: she decides she will insert herself into the matrimony of her brother Jarvis and his fiancée Janice, become a member of their wedding, and join them on their honeymoon and subsequent travels. Paradoxically, Janice and Jarvis are desirable for Frankie in part because they exemplify normativity, as a conventionally attractive young, white heterosexual couple, but also because Jarvis’s employment in the U.S. military facilitates world travel that for Frankie, symbolizes queer freedom.¹ Frankie falls in love—not with Jarvis or with Janice but with the couple and their wedding, naming her desire with the simple sentence, “They are the we of me” (42). My reading of *The Member of the Wedding* examines how this “impossible desire”² queers heteronormative arrangements of sex, love, and community that have perpetuated racial segregation and white dominance in the mid-twentieth century. Further, I trace the novel’s

exploration of the uncanny and its relationship to desire to demonstrate how both attraction to a violent normativity and utopian and non-normative queer desire are uncanny processes that collide within the wedding as object of desire. Concurrently, I examine the process of queer subject formation and its relationship to the formation of a cross-racial, inter-class, and queer collectivity that emerges in tandem with the vexed and ideologically ambiguous collectivity facilitated by the wedding.

Frankie's primary familial arrangement throughout much of the novel is in fact interracial, multi-generational, interclass, and composed of both straight and queer people—herself, her six-year-old cousin John Henry West, who is explicitly characterized as a genderqueer sissy boy, and the family's servant Berenice Sadie Brown, a black heterosexual woman. Frankie's mother died on the day she was born and her father, though not unloving, is somewhat distant toward Frankie and rarely present in the novel. Berenice and John Henry, then, effectively constitute Frankie's family. While Frankie is driven to devalue this primary family, as she comes of age in a culture that privileges the heteronormative and racial exclusivity signaled by white (people's) weddings, her communion with John Henry and Berenice facilitates her subsequent imaginings of queer and cross-racial community formations.

Frankie does not just imagine new social formations; she also actively participates in their creation. Thus, she is doubly creative. She envisions the new social possibility of getting married to a wedding couple and tells her story to Berenice as well as to strangers in town. Through this act of storytelling, she connects with strangers and creates an imaginary community of listeners who are informed about her intended transformation of the genre of the wedding. This storytelling also allows her to refine her vision of the wedding, as she revises the story each

time she tells it to a new person, artfully shaping and re-shaping her narrative: “the telling of the wedding had an end and a beginning, a shape like a song” (62).

Love and the Uncanny

Rhythmic, musical storytelling is intrinsic to Frankie’s mode of belonging among and relating to people. In the novel’s opening paragraph, we are introduced to Berenice, Frankie and John Henry in the middle of a hot summer, as they sit “at the kitchen table, saying the same things over and over, so that by August the words began to rhyme with each other and sound strange” (3). One example of their repetitive conversation is Berenice and Frankie’s mulling over the disappearance of the family cat Charles. Continually rehearsing the same theories about his whereabouts without arriving at any conclusion, “each gloomy afternoon their voices sawed against each other, saying the same words, which finally reminded Frankie of a raggedy rhyme said by two crazies” (31). Similar to Frankie’s creative storytelling while walking through town, the trio of Berenice, John Henry and Frankie also tells tales to create community. While they do not consciously revise their stories, constant repetition allows them to hear these stories in new ways, producing new and unexpected rhymes. Thus the three create their own music, their own language, and their own family.

When she falls in love with Janice-Jarvis,³ however, Frankie distances herself from her trio and decides to join a new one by creating a new rhyme. Changing her name to F. Jasmine for the purposes of marrying the wedding, she links herself to Janice-Jarvis through the imagined formation of “the JA three of them.” Her falling in love and wanting to associate with this couple is undoubtedly linked to a desire to belong to an entity that is socially recognized as desirable. In a sense, F. Jasmine seeks to identify with a dominant model—a wedding of a heterosexual

couple. At the same time, she is envisioning something unheard of and building a new community through her presentation of her vision.

F. Jasmine's community creation is an uncanny process. It begins with imagining a kinship with each person she informs of her plans, feeling "an unexplainable connection... between herself" and "total strangers," including the Portuguese owner of a local inn, the Blue Moon café, a soldier in the café, and a woman sweeping her porch in a different part of town. Experiencing a unique joy in sharing her story, F. Jasmine swells with affection for the strangers who listen. The woman on the porch "leaned on the broom, listening," and "when [F. Jasmine] looked into the lady's eyes, she loved her, though she did not even know her name" (62). While F. Jasmine's love for this woman is not a sustained fixation like her love for Janice-Jarvis, it is similarly uncanny insofar as there is always something uncanny about love at first sight. One sees something, recognizes something she already knows, without quite knowing what this something is or how she knows it.

Freud's theory of the uncanny is helpful in mapping Frankie's community building and in examining her desire for the wedding. Furthermore, the work of fiction central to illustrating the theory in his essay, E.T.A. Hoffmann's "The Sandman," offers a useful point of comparison to *The Member of the Wedding*. Both texts confront the inherent uncanniness of falling in love, and a brief comparison of the experiences of their protagonists reveals crucial differences in how normatively and non-normatively gendered and sexually oriented subjects navigate this uncanniness.

In his eponymous essay, "The Uncanny," Freud offers an etymological examination of the concept, reviewing various dictionary entries for "*unheimlich*," the German word for "uncanny." The word "*heimlich*" literally means "homelike" and also connotes the domestic,

familiar, known, and safe, whereas “unheimlich”—unhomelike—connotes the foreign, strange, unsettling, and scary. However, Freud observes “heimlich” and “unheimlich” are not always defined as opposites and that in fact, in some of the definitions and examples, the “heimlich” morphs into the “unheimlich” and the “unheimlich” just as easily slips into the “heimlich.” Freud maintains that “*heimlich* is a word the meaning of which develops towards an ambivalence, until it finally coincides with its opposite, *unheimlich*. *Unheimlich* is in some way or other a sub-species of *heimlich*” (4). Ultimately Freud concludes that the uncanny “is in reality nothing new or foreign, but something familiar and old—established in the mind that has been estranged only by the process of repression” (13). The familiar and the uncanny are thus at times one and the same, and an uncanny occurrence performs an unexpected return of the estranged, repressed familiar.

Such is the wedding for Frankie—both familiar and strange, and thus compelling for reasons she does not understand. Frankie’s first few dialogue lines in the novel directly express the uncanniness of the (impending) Janice-Jarvis wedding: “It is so very queer.... The way it all just happened.... I have never been so puzzled.... I just never saw any two people like them. When they walked in the house today it was so queer” (3-4). The dreamlike vision of the wedding Frankie conjures up amid these remarks is similarly uncanny as well as unsettling:

Frankie sat at the table with her eyes half closed, and she thought about a wedding. She saw a silent church, a strange snow slanting down against the colored windows. The groom in this wedding was her brother, and there was a brightness where his face should be. The bride was there in a long white train, and the bride was also faceless. There was something about this wedding that gave Frankie a feeling she could not name. (4)

This generic picture eerily abstracts all particularity and individuality from the wedding couple and the wedding. There is only a church, presumably silent because empty, a generic faceless groom whom Frankie can intellectually identify but cannot experientially recognize as her brother, and a faceless as well as nameless bride, wholly interchangeable with any other. This scene resembling an archetypal dream is all Frankie can produce, at this early stage in the novel, in attempting to remember what it is she recognizes in the sight of Janice-Jarvis.

There is an inherent creepiness in this generic scene, evoked perhaps most strongly by a particularly creepy object: the nameless, faceless bride. A generic bride-as-object also serves as a focal point in Hoffmann's "The Sandman." "The Sandman" is a story about a young man, the university student Nathaniel, who falls in love with a doll, Olympia, because he is quite literally unable to distinguish between a woman and an inanimate object (similar to Tracy Deen's less literal but equally disturbing difficulty with differentiating between his lover and cornbread in Smith's *Strange Fruit*). Stated otherwise, it is a story about the impossibility of heterosexual love within a sexist imaginary that disregards the particularity and agency⁴ of women. Freud insists the story is about male castration anxiety, and he has a point, insofar as the failure to recognize and relate to another human being—a prerequisite for love—is a metaphorical act of self-castration. In Freud's view, the imagined agent of castration is the "bad" disciplining father—a reasonable hypothesis if this father is understood as a metonym for patriarchy. One could argue that the son is castrated by the father who has taught him to be heterosexual but has not taught him how to love. However, the son also castrates himself by accepting the model of power and desire introduced by the father. Olympia, the doll crafted by two of Nathaniel's evil father-surrogates, is not unlike the faceless bride or the idea of the wedding. She is interchangeable,

uncanny in her capacity to resemble any and all women, and a likely object of love at first sight in her ability to conjure up a theoretically infinite number of intangible associations.

Frankie, too, is socialized within a heterosexist imaginary, and, not conforming to her assigned gender role, she at times finds herself in a predicament similar to Nathaniel's. She falls in love, albeit momentarily, with a woman she has never met, who has never spoken to her, assuming, without any evidence, that the woman is interested in her story, just as Nathaniel's love for Olympia is amplified with each day he spends speaking to her while she says nothing, thus expressing, in his mind, their transcendent, spiritual connection. Aside from creepy, one-sided obsessions, however, Nathaniel and Frankie also share a particular kind of queer desire: the desire for something impossible within established economies of love that do not allow us to marry dolls or weddings. Because desire can only be repressed temporarily and the repressed always returns, heterosexist and heteronormative socialization is never fully successful, and its inevitable failure produces queer possibility.⁵

The uncanniness of the wedding, as Frankie imagines it in her vision, announces the wedding's queer possibility. One is puzzled at first about why the couple and their wedding strike such an uncanny chord for Frankie. Berenice, for instance, does not see them as strange at all, remarking that they constitute something rather unremarkable—"a nice white couple" (29). Yet, as Frankie's reverie reveals, nice white couples are creepy, as are white churches and white weddings. They are creepy because of their generic nature, their compulsory whiteness, and their suppression of desire—particularly female desire. And the creepy, I would suggest, is a not-so-distant cousin of the uncanny. Derived from the idea of stealthy motion, the creepy, like the uncanny, creeps up on us after a period of strategic hiding.⁶ Thus, the generic structure of the

wedding is uncanny because it is hiding something—or many things. In particular, blackness, queerness, and their conjunction are central among the specters hidden by Janice-Jarvis.

A scene Frankie witnesses during her epic story-telling, community-building journey through the town hints at the racial and sexual content repressed by Janice-Jarvis and reveals a connecting thread between Berenice and F. Jasmine: their shared understanding of the uncanniness of love. I quote at length, to capture the full effect of the passage:

[T]he main thing that brought back the wedding frame of mind was an accident that occurred on the way home. It was a mysterious trick of sight and the imagination. She was walking home when all at once there was a shock in her as though a thrown knife struck and shivered in her chest. F. Jasmine stopped dead in her tracks, one foot still raised, and at first she could not take it in just what had happened. There was something sideways and behind her that had flashed across the very corner edge of her left eye; she had half-seen something, a dark double shape, in the alley she had just that moment passed. And because of this half-seen object, the quick flash in the corner of her eye, there had sprung up in her the sudden picture of her brother and the bride. Ragged and bright as lightning she saw the two of them as they had been when, for a moment, they stood together before the living-room mantelpiece, his arm around her shoulders. So strong was this picture that F. Jasmine felt suddenly that Jarvis and Janice were there behind her in the alley, and she had caught a glimpse of them—although she knew, and well enough, that they were in Winter Hill, almost a hundred miles away.

F. Jasmine lowered her raised foot to the pavement and slowly turned to look around. The alley lay between two grocery stores: a narrow alley, dark in the glare. She did not look at

it directly, for somehow it was as though she was almost afraid. Her eyes stole slowly down the brick wall and she glimpsed again the dark double shapes. And what was there? F. Jasmine was stunned. There in the alley were only two colored boys, one taller than the other and with his arm resting on the shorter boy's shoulder. That was all—but something about the angle or the way they stood, or the pose of their shapes, had reflected the sudden picture of her brother and the bride that had so shocked her. And with this vision of them plain and exact the morning ended, and she was home by two o'clock. (74-75)

F. Jasmine is “stunned” by a seemingly unremarkable scene’s ability to invoke a haunting, uncanny feeling. There is nothing remarkable about two black boys, one with his arm on the other’s shoulder, just as there is nothing remarkable about a white middle-class heterosexual couple. Indeed, it is unclear at first what these two couplings have in common apart from their banality. What is significant is that they “reflect” one another in a striking and singular way that is difficult to explain. White reflected against black, heterosexual against homosocial: these are contrasts, but not exceptional or unique ones in any obvious way. Yet they are striking for Frankie, whose queer unconscious sees them as inextricably linked. The homosocial is never just homosocial⁷—it always contains the potential for queer connection, just as the heterosexual is not a self-evidently natural orientation, but rather a momentous achievement, marked by the culmination of years of successful socialization, internalization of taboos and prohibitions, repression of instincts, and proper direction of desire, resulting in the production of a mature, adult desiring subject.⁸ Just as the familiar, or *heimlich*, slips unexpectedly into its opposite, the strange or *unheimlich*, so is heterosexuality often at risk of resembling its supposed opposite, homosexuality. Similarly, as ideological racial formations founded upon dubious science and

history, whiteness and blackness risk blurring the boundary that separates them, a boundary policed for centuries in the U.S., during slavery and after, by official and unofficial codes of segregation. The two black boys startle Frankie, uncannily reflecting the “nice white couple” that exists to keep both blackness and queerness at bay.

Crucially, the scene Frankie witnesses is an “accident,” not merely an incident, as it unveils queerness, a phenomenon that can be rightly described as an accident of socialization—certainly not its intended effect—and also “a mysterious trick of... [an] imagination” necessarily unleashed, in the face of heteronormative conditioning, to envision alternative trajectories of love, sex, and sociability. Just as F. Jasmine describes the wedding as “more a feeling than a picture,” so is this scene, initially, blurry “half-seen,” or more felt than seen. Yet the intensity of the sudden feeling conjured up by the conceptually fuzzy tableau that catches Frankie’s peripheral vision gradually brings her desire into focus and perspective. And in this process there are momentary flashes of clarity, a “sudden picture,” a “glimpse,” a light-bulb moment connecting a vague feeling of queerness to the Janice-Jarvis assemblage.⁹

Uncanny black queerness emerges out of a dark alley, “stunning” Frankie with its bold, absurd resemblance to her attraction to the wedding couple. She is “afraid” at first to “look at it directly,” for she knows instinctively that there is something off, something not quite right, with the picture lurking in the shadows. We later learn about an incident perhaps present in the back of Frankie’s mind: the murder of a young black man, Lon Baker, in the alley next to Frankie’s father’s store (92). Alleys are thus dangerous and dark, containing scenes of black life, love and death, scenes repressed, suppressed, and at times violently obliterated by whiteness. And so, Frankie’s gaze seeks to domesticate the danger in the alley, perceiving the embrace of the two black boys as a banal occurrence, bewildering in its ability to conjure up the wedding. But such

domestication is impossible, as “the pose of their shapes,” the suggested entanglement of their bodies, makes their connection to the wedding unmistakable.

Because the narrator withholds our access to Frankie’s words as she relates the episode to Berenice, there is no way of knowing how she names, in this telling, a certain “feeling that she had never named before” (98), but Berenice’s response allows us to surmise that Frankie is talking about love, and in particular, the uncanny repetition of one’s own idiosyncratic recognition of love. Berenice is “astonished” (98) by Frankie’s story and immediately recognizes the intangible feeling to which she refers. This story, Berenice asserts, is “one of the queerest things I ever heard of” (99) because it verbalizes a feeling that has brought about uncanny repetitions in her own life:

“I know what you mean,” said Berenice. “Right here in this very corner of the eye.” She pointed to the red-webbed outside corner of the dark eye. “You suddenly catch something there. And this cold shiver run all the way down you. And you whirl around. And then you stand facing Jesus knows what. But not Ludie¹⁰ and not who you want. And for a minute you feel like you been dropped down a well.”

“Yes,” F. Jasmine said. “That is it.”

“Well, this is mighty remarkable,” said Berenice. “This is a thing happening to me all my life. Yet just now is the first time I ever heard it put into words.”

[...]

“Yes, that is the way when you are in love,” said Berenice. “Invariably. A thing known and not spoken.”

So that was how the queer conversation began at quarter to six on the last afternoon. It was the first time ever they had talked about love, with F. Jasmine included in the conversation as a person who understood and had worthwhile opinions. (99-100)

Berenice recognizes that Frankie has experienced love because Frankie has articulated love's fundamental connection to the uncanny, having stumbled upon an uncanny repetition that is part of a long series of repetitions that will structure Frankie's future libidinal trajectory. Fittingly, Berenice illustrates the workings of uncanny repetition as a structuring element of love by retelling a story she has told Frankie many times before: the story of Ludie Maxwell Freeman—the love of her life—their marriage,¹¹ his death, and her tendency to “copy [her]self forever afterward” in seeking reminders—and remainders—of Ludie in each of her subsequent choices of lovers and husbands (107). In one case, Berenice is attracted to, and eventually marries, a man because his disfigured thumb reminds her of Ludie's (104-5). As far as Berenice's unconscious is concerned, this man has acquired the thumb that was lost in Ludie's death and has thus brought Ludie back to life. Her subsequent husband has also acquired something that belonged to Ludie, and has done so in a much more literal fashion, by having purchased the coat Berenice pawned in order to give Ludie a proper funeral (105-6). To properly part with Ludie, Berenice also parts with a reminder and remainder of his—a remainder returned to her by another man. These new husbands are ciphers—vessels filled with traces of that which can never actually return yet returns endlessly in the psyche through the replicatory logic of the unconscious.

Perhaps because these repetitions of Ludie are consistently housed in men who prove to be violent, Berenice is distinctly aware of the dangers of love propelled by uncanny repetitions. Moreover, she envisions a potentially even bleaker future for Frankie because of the intangible nature of her first true love object.

“If you start falling in love with some unheard-of thing like that, what is going to happen to you? If you take a mania like this, it won’t be the last time and of that you can be sure. So what will become of you? Will you be trying to break into weddings the rest of your days? And what kind of life would that be?”

[...]

“You just laying yourself this fancy trap to catch yourself in trouble,” Berenice went on. “And you know it.” (108)

In Berenice’s view, that obscure object of desire, the wedding, ushers in a conceivably endless chain of impossible love objects and narratives. One is already sufficiently “caught” when following traces of a lost love leads her to a series of undesirable relationships. And for Berenice, Frankie’s future is potentially even less desirable. In her view, Frankie risks inhabiting the paradoxical and even more perilous position of being simultaneously “caught” and lost, because there is no clear roadmap for how to pursue her object of desire.

Berenice urges Frankie to escape from the path of desire that threatens to catch or trap her while escape is still possible. If Frankie were drawn to a love object with obvious character flaws that happened to arrive in a more socially acceptable form—for instance, “a nice white boy beau,” (109) as Berenice puts it—Berenice may be less likely to object. We convince ourselves, after all, that there is something romantic in our patterns of attraction to certain kinds of flaws in our lovers, that there is something romantic in being “caught” in these patterns. But there are other ways of being “caught” that are hardly romantic. As a working-class black woman living in the 1940s American South, Berenice is particularly attuned to what it means to be “caught” in a situation one cannot escape. Berenice explains to Frankie and John Henry that while everyone is

“somehow caught” in a certain set of circumstances through an accident of birth, Berenice is “caught worse” than both of them because she is black:

Everyone is caught one way or another. But they done drawn completely extra bounds around all colored people. They done squeezed us off in one corner by ourself. So we caught first-way I was telling you, as all human beings is caught. And we caught as colored people also. (119)

Being caught in a certain trajectory is intrinsic to the human condition, but some human subjects are caught in predicaments that are more difficult to escape because others have found it convenient and to their personal benefit, given the opportunity, to confine them to social categories that restrict their possibilities to live the lives they wish to live. Berenice is caught by a legacy of slavery and indentured servitude that not only forecloses for her the American promise of upward economic and social mobility but also significantly restricts her options for familial and social arrangements. Because of her job as a domestic worker—the most attractive employment option for a working-class black woman in America during this period, especially in the South—she is stuck in a kitchen with Frankie and John Henry for far too many hours of the day. Her other option would be to marry T.T. Williams, a friend to whom she is not attracted, who would be able to provide for her. Either way, Berenice is familially caught by being attached to a family that is neither biological nor chosen.

Frankie is attuned to the fact of Berenice’s confinement and its relationship to being black in America. Although she is not as aware of the additional economic disadvantages faced by black *women* in particular—as she admits to Berenice, she “didn’t realize” that Berenice earns six dollars per week until the latter informs her of this (85)—she is aware that black people are not afforded the material freedoms that allow Frankie to dream of a future as a privileged globe-

trotting American. It is John Henry who asks Berenice why she claims to be “caught worse,” as “F. Jasmine understood why she had said this” (119). Frankie is in the habit of walking by the town prison¹² and “star[ing] for a long time” (124) at the building, pondering conditions of immobility, confinement, incarceration, and unfreedom. She knows a few of the prisoners—“all of them colored”—including a friend of Berenice’s “accused by the white lady she worked for of stealing a sweater and a pair of shoes” (123). While this example highlights the asymmetry between (future) Frankie’s and her black neighbors’ personal sovereignty as (un)free citizens, visiting the prison while crafting a highly unrealistic plot to escape a heteronormative future also calls attention to the fact that both queer and black Americans are disenfranchised subjects. “The jail did not frighten her this evening,” we are assured, “for this time tomorrow she would be far away” (124). Yet we are well aware that her plan to elope with the wedding couple is as viable as the chances of escape for prisoners who “beat on the stone walls or wrench at the iron bars” of their cells (123).

Berenice knows this, too, and it is because of this knowledge and her attunement to multiple ways of being “caught,” both psychic and material, that she so ardently urges Frankie to abandon what strikes her as an utterly hopeless trajectory of romance. Berenice may hope that Frankie’s first love, her love for the wedding, is somehow controllable and therefore avoidable. If this is the case, then Berenice recognizes that one is not born queer; one becomes queer. And yet, it is worth asking whether a queer white tomboy who wants to marry a wedding is somehow more “caught” than a straight black woman who chooses her partners on the basis of their thumbs or coats. We are all equally caught in irrational webs of desire. What distinguishes desire that is socially recognized as queer is its social vilification on the basis of object choice, usually a highly generic form of object choice such as the gender of the potential partner or the number of

partners one wishes to have. It is easier to vilify the generic; doing so does not require an expansive imagination. Frankie's queer desire can easily be read as a combination of the generic sexual aberrations of bisexuality, incest, and polyamory. Indeed, when one combines aberrations, one becomes more aberrant than someone situated at a single node of queerness. Frankie could thus be read as triply queer. Even so, such a reading overlooks the unique queerness of desiring an abstraction—a marriage—as one's object choice.

Queer Subject Formation as World-Building

Frankie is aware that both she and her desire for the wedding are queer. Recovering from her uncanny reverie of the white wedding and its faceless bride and groom, she remarks to Berenice that “[w]hen [Janice and Jarvis] walked into the house today it was so queer” (4). For Frankie the wedding couple provokes queer feelings that call attention to her emergent queer identity.

Pondering an adolescent growth spurt that makes her stand out visually, Frankie reflects that “she was grown so tall that she was almost a big freak, and her shoulders were narrow, her legs too long” (4), and that if she continues growing at the same rate, by age eighteen “she would grow to be over nine feet tall. And what would be a lady who is over nine feet high? She would be a Freak” (19). A capitalized “Freak” is antithetical to “a lady,” whom conventional standards of beauty and feminine presentation expect to be of much smaller proportions.

Frankie's self-perceived freakishness reminds her of the freak show at the annual town fair, whose list of participants is fairly standard for a Southern town fair during this period: “The Giant,” who is over eight feet tall, along with “The Fat Lady,” “The Midget,” “The Wild Nigger,” “The Pin Head,” “The Alligator Boy,” and “The Half-Man Half-Woman” (19). Exhibiting a combination of physical abnormality, racial otherness, (racialized) animality, and

gender hybridity, these so-called freaks frighten Frankie because she detects a secret, shared kinship between her deviance and theirs. She fears interpellation by the freaks and what she perceives as their knowing gaze: “She was afraid of all the Freaks, for it seemed to her that they had looked at her in a secret way and tried to connect their eyes with hers, as though to say: we know you. She was afraid of their long Freak eyes” (20). This gaze is also uncanny because both familiar and unfamiliar, strange and familial. It pulls her toward a “home,” an otherness, a freakishness she recognizes in herself but seeks to repress. It summons a fear that her own freakishness may similarly confine her to spectacular, stigmatized otherness. Tellingly, the narrator repeats the image of the Freaks’ “long eyes” that “know” Frankie when she visits the prison. Looking at prisoners as they look out through their metal bars, “it seemed to her that their eyes, like the long eyes of the Freaks at the fair, had called to her as though to say: We know you” (124). While Frankie attempts to connect with strangers in town by gazing into their eyes, she instinctively rejects the gaze of freaks, prisoners, and otherwise socially banished subjects, and its invitation for connection. The freaks’ “long” eyes know too much about her, can see too far into her past and future, and probe too deeply into her hidden yearnings and fears. In fact, Frankie suspects she may become like them regardless of whether she returns their gaze intentionally, that, in other words, returning their gaze may be inevitable. “Do you think I will grow into a Freak?” (21), she asks Berenice, hoping for assurance that she will not, for she “doubt[s] if they ever get married or go to a wedding.... Those Freaks” (20). Frankie understands that normative rituals of inclusion exclude obvious deviants and hopes she can sneak into the wedding, with her deviance undetected, in order to hijack and marry it.

Frankie’s attempted disavowal of freaks and freakishness, however, is not consistent with her plans for the wedding. For to reject the gaze of the freak is also to disavow her own gaze, the

desiring gaze of a lover, community-builder, and world-builder—subject-positions coextensive with one another. *The Member of the Wedding* offers an articulation of the lover which McCullers elaborates upon in her 1951 novella *The Ballad of the Sad Café* (hereafter abbreviated as *Sad Café*). *Sad Café* suggests that a lover is someone who creates a world in which love is possible. Its narrator describes the lover thus:

First of all, love is a joint experience between two persons—but the fact that it is a joint experience does not mean that it is a similar experience to the two people involved. There are the lover and the beloved, but these two come from different countries. Often the beloved is only a stimulus for all the stored-up love which has lain quiet within the lover for a long time hitherto. And somehow every lover knows this. He feels in his soul that his love is a solitary thing. He comes to know a new strange loneliness and it is this knowledge which makes him suffer. So there is only one thing for the lover to do. He must house his love within himself the best he can; *he must create for himself a whole new inward world*—a world intense and strange, complete in himself. Let it be added here that this lover about whom we speak need not necessarily be a young man saving for a wedding ring—this lover can be man, woman, child, or indeed any human creature on this earth. (216, emphasis added)

In *Sad Café*, the lover's world is entirely of her own creation. Without a consenting beloved—which does not exist in *Sad Café*—the lover's world and the lover's vision of a world in which love is possible remain a figment of her imagination. Thus the *Sad Café* lover-beloved dyad is plagued by a fundamental incommensurability. The lover and beloved speak cross-purposes: each is necessarily talking *at* and not *with* the other for the simple reason that they are incapable of hearing each other. The lover remains isolated in her own world, which becomes the container

of a love with no viable outlet for expression. But the lover nonetheless creates that world, thus creating the potentiality for love. The lover *must* create that world—she is constitutionally compelled to do so—and this is true of any lover, including a lover who represents the most conventional and normative pairing of desire and embodiment imaginable: the young man saving for a wedding ring. A lover such as Frankie, a queer tomboy who desires something truly unprecedented, must therefore be exceptionally creative and imaginative in building this new world.

An additional obstacle emerges from the fact that wanting to marry a wedding is not just unprecedented but also, at least at first glance, quite absurd. It is significant, however, that some recognizably absurd desires are more viable than others. If one can have a relationship with a doll—as Nathaniel does in the Hoffmann story—then why can't Frankie have a relationship with a wedding? Both Frankie and Nathaniel have designs for the Other to which she cannot possibly consent, yet, up to a point, Nathaniel is able follow through with his plans. The key difference in their respective designs lies in the fact that while Frankie intends to disrupt a heteronormative arrangement, Nathaniel's plans are mitigated by a long-established heteropatriarchal narrative in which men choose the women they intend to marry, and these women have little choice in the matter. Hoffmann's story satirizes the non-consensual structure of patriarchy and compulsory heterosexuality¹³ by presenting a doll that cannot talk back as the ultimate fantasy of a man in love. But what is the ultimate love fantasy of a polymorphously-oriented twelve-year-old tomboy? This is much less clear. For even though Frankie appears singularly fixated on the wedding, the purview of her desire is in fact much broader. Her ultimate fantasy is perhaps the ability to form an instant emotional bond with any person or grouping of persons she encounters. And as with her plans for the wedding, Frankie is convinced that this is not simply a fantasy but

a reality. She forms these connections organically as she wanders about town telling the tale of the wedding, building (imagined) communities as alternatives to exclusive structures such as heterosexual marriage and cliques of popular kids, as well as to more inclusive structures to which she belongs but does not wish to, such as her non-normative, non-chosen kitchen family. The wedding then is not just a singular obscure object of desire but a focal point around which a larger assemblage of affective connections gathers. As Frankie tells its tale and strangers listen—or at least she imagines that they do—communities are gathered by the conjuring of a future gathering.

While it isn't possible for the wedding to consent to Frankie's plans, the wedding, unlike a single human subject who becomes the unsuspecting object of (unreciprocated) love, invites desire in a systematic and premeditated way. For it is not just Frankie's story about the wedding but the wedding itself that gathers desire. The white wedding of a white military couple in wartime constitutes a ritual celebration of the nation, its imperialist strivings, and its propagation through the idealized, heteronormative, nuclear family. Frankie is a properly desiring American subject insofar as she wishes to share in the prestige of a military family that travels and represents the nation overseas. She also desires heterosexuality, but her queer imagination produces its own interpretation of what this means. It never occurs to Frankie that she should be a bride—or even a groom for that matter—in a two-person heterosexual wedding, but she desires the (straight) couple because the couple itself is hegemonically desirable. Frankie, in other words, wants to *have* heterosexuality without wanting to be heterosexual.

The question, then, of what Frankie actually wants is quite complicated. She is not just an adolescent but also a queer adolescent who has a particularly fraught relationship to what she is supposed to want. It is easy—and not at all original—to dismiss Frankie's fantasies as symptoms

of a confused adolescent phase with no lasting or long-term significance. But adolescent fantasies and understandings of the world can be formative—as Berenice certainly understands—of one’s affective and sexual trajectory as an adult, and adolescent interpretations of normative sexuality can furthermore offer a fresh and instructive outsider’s perspective into the hegemonic social order that is attempting to initiate this outsider. Frankie’s desire to (literally) have heterosexuality without properly participating in the institution constitutes an effective refusal of heteronormative interpellation through a subversive response to the hailing of compulsory heterosexuality.

Subversive as Frankie’s desire may be, however, there remains the problem of its inability to be reciprocated and thus realized. This is the problem of the beloved. For McCullers, the beloved is often a surprising and unlikely object. The beloved, according to *Sad Café*, can conceivably be anyone or anything:

[T]he beloved can also be of any description. The most outlandish people can be the stimulus for love. A man may be a doddering great-grandfather and still love only a strange girl he saw on the streets of Cheehaw one afternoon two decades past. The preacher may love a fallen woman. The beloved may be treacherous, greasy-headed, and given to evil habits. Yes, and the lover may see this as clearly as anyone else—but that does not affect the evolution of his love one whit. A most mediocre person can be the object of a love which is wild, extravagant, and beautiful as the poison lilies of the swamp. A good man may be the stimulus for a love both violent and debased, or a jabbering madman may bring about in the soul of someone a tender and simple idyll. Therefore, the value and quality of any love is determined solely by the lover himself.

(216)

And while beloveds can differ infinitely in personality, appearance, morality, and lifestyle, all beloveds, at least in the world of *Sad Café*, share a common characteristic—they hate being beloved:

It is for this reason that most of us would rather love than be loved. Almost everyone wants to be the lover. And the curt truth is that, in a deep secret way, the state of being beloved is intolerable to many. The beloved fears and hates the lover, and with the best of reasons. For the lover is forever trying to strip bare his beloved. The lover craves any possible relation with the beloved, even if this experience can cause him only pain. (216)

The beloved bears the burden of being interpellated into a world not of her making, where she is expected to embody a projection of the lover's desiring vision. The wedding certainly cannot anticipate being hailed as the beloved in Frankie's world, and there is something creepy in Frankie's assumption that it will automatically consent to marrying her even though she has not discussed this possibility with Janice-Jarvis. However, the wedding-as-beloved also complicates the lover-beloved dynamic articulated in *Sad Café* because the white wedding itself is creepy, and it is moreover not merely a passive recipient of desire but a ritual that actively seduces people into believing that it is desirable.

The wedding is creepy not only because it perpetuates compulsory heterosexuality and racial segregation but also because of its compulsory likeability. One is required to like the wedding; one cannot dislike a wedding or even be indifferent to it without being cast (out) as anti-social. Given this requirement to like the wedding, how can one be blamed for liking it a little too much? I maintain that the wedding isn't really an innocent beloved after all; it is not a passive receptacle for Frankie's love. The wedding is an agent that acts on other agents—individuals, couples, families, and communities. The concept of a wedding preys on our fears—

of loneliness, isolation, and death—and consumes our hopes and dreams of being desired, loved, and cared for. In Frankie’s case, the wedding preys on these fears compounded with the added, peculiarly isolating experience of being a queer adolescent attempting—and failing—to locate her desires among accepted scripts of romantic and sexual companionship.

Yet this creepy parasite, the wedding, can also unwittingly stage scenes of transformative queer possibility. Insofar as the wedding also occupies the structural position of a lover within McCullers’ schema, it too can envision and create new worlds. A wedding could potentially invite many different kinds of desiring subjects to participate in it, and these subjects could in turn transform its designs for them. A wedding could then become a site for subversive queer performance. Elizabeth Freeman offers the example of a “marry-in” at the University of Chicago in the early 1990s where “a woman married her motorcycle, pairs of best friends stood up together, and a sexual threesome marched down the aisle” (x). Queers and other subjects interested in non-normative sexual and social arrangements could certainly respond in creative and disruptive ways to weddings that interpellate them as beloveds. In Frankie’s case, however, while her fantasy of marrying Janice-Jarvis is certainly subversive and queer, the wedding proceeds according to its own prior heteronormative plan without seeking her consent. The relationship between Frankie and the wedding, then, could also be articulated as a lover-lover deadlock, in which the worlds of the two lovers collide but cannot complement one another.

Compulsory Heterosexuality and Queer Resistance

Freeman argues in her reading of McCullers’ novel that “[b]ecause it is grounded in performance, ‘wedding’ foregrounds activity and transformation, instead of status and identity” (49-50). Prior to this potential scene of transformation, however, a wedding necessarily

engenders a scene of reinscription of the very modes of status and identity Frankie's fantasy ultimately resists. For Frankie is in fact interpellated by heterosexuality, within a strikingly disturbing and uncanny scenario that eerily foreshadows what she calls the "failure" of the wedding, when she is taken on a date by a man who shares her brother's occupation—a drunk soldier she meets while she wanders around town, presenting her narrative of the wedding through her newly discovered F. Jasmine persona.

An outstandingly obnoxious drunk, the soldier attempts to buy a dancing street monkey, which is clearly not for sale, from its owner and musical accompanist on portable organ when F. Jasmine first encounters him. While the monkey is not someone with whom F. Jasmine can share the story of the wedding, there is a kinship between these street performers—the dancing monkey and the storytelling Frankie. Perhaps because it too inhabits a liminal identity—as a non-human animal that has skillfully mastered certain human performative conventions—the monkey bridges the personas of F. Jasmine and Frankie. "The old Frankie had always loved the monkey and the monkey-man. They resembled each other—they both had an anxious, questioning expression.... After watching them a long time, the old Frankie, fascinated, began to take on the same expression as she followed them around. And now F. Jasmine was eager to see them" (66-67). Frankie/F. Jasmine doubly monkeys the monkey and the monkey-man, imitating both their expression and their doubleness. Like the monkey and the monkey-man, Frankie and F. Jasmine mirror each other, anxiously questioning who is who; who is in charge and who is performing. Thus Frankie/F. Jasmine is also an uncanny figure, embodying the trope of the double, a theme Freud develops in his essay. In Hoffmann's stories, Freud identifies characters whose "self becomes confounded," an occurrence represented "by doubling, dividing and interchanging the self" (9). This meeting of F. Jasmine and Frankie, who both enjoy the company

of the monkey and the monkey-man who mirror them in their doubleness, reveals the uncanniness of Frankie. Frankie always returns, despite F. Jasmine's attempts to repress an identity that refuses a trajectory directed toward a heteronormative ideal of maturity. F. Jasmine can never successfully separate herself from the "old"—but actually young, supposedly childlike—Frankie's fascination with playfulness, for she is in fact a product of this very tendency, fashioned out of Frankie's fanciful imagination, even while that imagination is tempered by externally imposed narratives of growth and maturation and their relationship to proper gender presentation.

The monkey senses Frankie/F. Jasmine's friendliness and appeals for her intervention when the drunk and "angry" soldier aggressively insists that the monkey be sold to him—actually "grab[bing] at [his] chain" (67). He climbs onto F. Jasmine's shoulder for safety and comfort and latches onto her head "with his little monkey hands" (67). This escape plan proves successful, momentarily stunning everyone, including the soldier, who stands "slack-jawed, surprised" that the "handful of dollar bills" (68) he holds in his hand are not sufficient to complete a transaction to which no one has agreed.

While the monkey and the monkey-man momentarily interpellate "the old Frankie," Frankie leaves the scene with the soldier as F. Jasmine, perhaps in an attempt to prepare herself to perform her F. Jasmine persona at the wedding. F. Jasmine could potentially perform—on Frankie's behalf—the heteronormative rituals in which Frankie cannot partake. F. Jasmine is perhaps the kind of double charged with fulfilling "all those unfulfilled but possible futures to which we still cling in phantasy, all those strivings of the ego which adverse external circumstances have crushed" (Freud 9). She may be a more successful interloper in the

heterosexual arrangement Frankie desires to participate in and thus queer. If Frankie cannot marry Janice-Jarvis, then perhaps F. Jasmine can.

Yet, F. Jasmine's agency is limited by the very system she seeks to infiltrate. The soldier violently interpellates her as a particular version of F. Jasmine—a fantasy version not unlike Nathaniel's Olympia. F. Jasmine's ability to engage in conversation, a characteristic that crucially distinguishes her from Olympia, is irrelevant in this context because the soldier is woefully lacking in this regard. In the obverse of the manifest narrative of the Hoffman story, it is the soldier, not F. Jasmine, who is the automaton. It is not clear what the soldier hears when F. Jasmine speaks, but it is clear that he does not process her words; he only registers the facts that she is young—though she appears much older to him than she actually is—female, and speaking to him. When F. Jasmine generously offers an expression of sympathy for his desire to own a monkey, he approaches her strictly as a speaking female entity who is addressing him, with what she rightly recognizes as “a set remark requiring a set answer”: “Which way are we going?... Are you going my way or am I going yours?” (68). “Not knowing the ready-made reply,” Frankie yet again opts to engage with the soldier generously, interpreting his invitation as that of “a traveler who meets another traveler in a tourist town” (68) and suggests that they explore the town together. Of course, such intentions of camaraderie are wholly absent from the designs of the soldier, who is only capable of generic anti-conversation directed toward a markedly clumsy attempt at seduction.

The soldier is something of a mirror image of the residents of the town, with whom Frankie connects by sharing the tale of her plans for the wedding. He is an outsider, a traveler, and, in Frankie's mind, “the only person that day who first spoke to F. Jasmine and invited her to join with him” (69). (In fact, F. Jasmine speaks to him first, but perhaps she interprets his

invitation as an equivalent to initiating a conversation.) Because he appears to take an active interest in her, and, crucially, asks her to “join” him, the soldier initially strikes F. Jasmine as a promising member of her imagined community united around her storytelling regarding the wedding. Furthermore, as a soldier who travels, he doubles Frankie’s brother and reminds her of her plans for the wedding:

Sitting across from the soldier at that booth in the Blue Moon, she suddenly saw the three of them—herself, her brother, and the bride—walking beneath a cold Alaskan sky.... [T]hey climbed a sunny glacier... and a rope tied the three of them together, and friends from another glacier called in Alaskan their J A names. She saw them next in Africa, where, with a crowd of sheeted Arabs, they galloped on camels in the sandy wind. Burma was jungle-dark, and she had seen pictures in *Life* magazine. Because of the wedding, these distant lands, the world, seemed altogether possible and near: as close to Winter Hill as Winter Hill was to the town. It was the actual present, in fact, that seemed to F. Jasmine a little bit unreal. (71-72)

Here Frankie’s fantasy takes her away from her “actual present” of sitting in a bar with a drunk soldier in the middle of the day, which strikes her as both nonsensical and undesirable, and pulls her toward the worlds she believes soldiers and heterosexuality can make accessible to her. If she can have the military couple, Frankie reasons, she can have any world she wants. She can enjoy many climates and landscapes and participate in the long-established and beloved western and American tradition of exoticizing cultural and geographic difference—a tradition made possible by military conquest. She can possess the images from *Life* magazine in real life and real time and consume them through the collective imperialist gaze of the “JA three of them.”

In the “actual present,” however, it is quite clearly the drunk, incoherent soldier and not Frankie who possesses the othering gaze. Frankie quickly recognizes that he is “staring at her with a peculiar expression, not as one traveler gazes at another, but as a person who shares a secret scheme” (72). Because she in fact does not share his scheme, his “words did not make sense to her,” and she feels “uneasy” with his “double-talk” (72). Being called a “cute dish,” for instance, strikes her as distinctly nonsensical—“There were no dishes on the table”—and she attempts to turn the conversation toward the subject of her brother and the military:

“I told you my brother is a Member of the Armed Forces.”

But the soldier did not seem to listen. “I could of sworn I’d run into you some place before.” (72)

The soldier’s thorough inability to engage in a dialogue constitutes a not at all inaccurate caricature of heterosexist romance, and F. Jasmine senses the connection between his refusal to engage with her as a fellow traveler, an equal, and her interpellation as a heterosexual woman. “She realized now that the soldier thought she was much older than she was, but her pleasure in this was somehow uncertain” (72). The soldier does not simply interpellate her through language; the soldier demands that she accompany him on a “date,” through an aggressive physical gesture, grabbing “a piece of her dress,” just as he “grabs” the chain of the monkey he feels entitled to purchase (73). While Frankie is excited to be asked to go on a date—“a grown word used by older girls”—she is acutely aware that she does not inhabit the body of a “grown” woman who goes on dates with soldiers, and this knowledge puts “a blight upon her pleasure” (74). Heterosexual interpellation, while flattering in its suggestion that F. Jasmine is in this instance successfully performing an approximation of mature womanhood, is ultimately

distinctly unpleasurable for Frankie in its interruption of and indifference to her own desires and fantasies.

This heterosexist indifference to alternative desires, and, in particular, female desire, is ultimately a form of social violence that often manifests itself as physical and sexual violence. During the soldier and Frankie's "date" later that evening, conversation similarly fails. In fact, there are "two [separate] conversations [that] would not join together, and underneath there was a layer of queerness that she could not place and understand" (133). Indeed, more than one layer of queerness lurks beneath: Frankie's, which cannot respond to the soldier's coded advances, and the soldier's, which performs the failure of the normative, the unquestioned, and the putatively intuitive. Frankie cannot see the soldier's normativity as normal, but compulsory heterosexuality initially thwarts her rejection of a not-so-coded sexual proposition. When the soldier invites Frankie to join him in his room at the inn, "F. Jasmine [does] not want to go upstairs, but she [does] not know how to refuse. It was like going into a fair booth, or fair ride, that once having entered you cannot leave until the exhibition or the ride is finished" (135). Compulsory heterosexuality has not taught Frankie how to say "no"; indeed, it has not even taught her how to tell the soldier that she is twelve years old. The comparison to the fair is telling: Frankie can easily reject the non-normativity of the freaks but has greater difficulty rejecting the normative perversity of the soldier. Thus, compulsory heterosexuality is like a carnival ride: it promises children that it will be fun and pleasurable and demands that they not only participate in but actually demonstrate excitement about an experience that may in fact terrify them. And, like the rape culture with which it is entwined, it demands consent—real or imagined—as a commitment and contract that cannot be retracted.

The scene of the soldier's attempt to rape Frankie is initially marked by an eerie silence. Nothing is said because compulsory heterosexuality takes for granted that the heterosexual act will happen; silence performs the taken-for-granted nature of the normative and the entitlement of the heterosexual man who expects the normative act to occur. Again the soldier grabs Frankie's skirt, after delivering, "in an unnatural voice," his only line in this scene: "Come on, Jasmine.... Let's quit this stalling" (136). To the soldier, Frankie's initial inaction does not communicate hesitation, uncertainty, or, indeed, the profound confusion she feels about her strange, silent visit to his hotel room. He can only take her inaction as a sign of postponing the inevitable because he cannot imagine the possibility of her refusal. She has said nothing and has followed him to his room—thus enacting gestures of seeming docility very much in line with compulsory heterosexuality's expectations for women.

In what follows the text aptly likens compulsory heterosexuality to a madhouse. From Frankie's point of view, the soldier's physical attempt at seduction is "like a minute in the fair Crazy-House, or real Milledgeville," the local mental institution (136). As Frankie heads toward the door, "for she could no longer stand the silence," the soldier makes his move:

[H]e grasped her skirt and, limpened by fright, she was pulled down beside him on the bed. The next minute happened, but it was too crazy to be realized. She felt his arms around her and smelled his sweaty shirt. He was not rough, but it was crazier than if he had been rough—and in a second she was paralyzed by horror. She could not push away, but she bit down with all her might upon what must have been the soldier's crazy tongue—so that he screamed out and she was free. Then he was coming toward her with an amazed pained face, and her hand reached the glass pitcher and brought it down upon his head. He swayed a second... and slowly he sank sprawling to the floor.... He lay

there still, with the amazed expression on his freckled face that was now pale, and a froth of blood showed on his mouth. But his head was not broken or even cracked, and whether he was dead or not she did not know. (136-7)

Attempted rape is horrifying regardless of whether it involves force, and it is significant that to Frankie the soldier's actions and movements are "crazier" than they would have been had they been "rough." The passage suggests that Frankie "could not push away" not because she is physically incapable of doing so but because she is immobilized by shock, "paralyzed by horror." The interaction thus emphasizes the element of psychological aggression in compulsory heterosexuality that exists in addition to, and in some cases even takes precedence over, the physical force on which rape culture in part relies.¹⁴ Compulsory heterosexuality is insane to Frankie, just like Frankie's resistance to it astonishes the soldier, who is in turn shocked when she bites his tongue. It is not clear how he plans to respond, but Frankie's instinct for self-defense is well placed given his consistent disregard for her consent to his various advances. This violence of the nonconsensual, this violence of the compulsory is rightly met with Frankie's swift incapacitation of the offending soldier.

Frankie's plan to marry Janice-Jarvis may constitute a queer escapist fantasy, but this queer escapism exists on a continuum with the highly practical queer instinct to effectively escape compulsory heterosexuality. Of course, marrying the wedding is unrealistic; as a twelve-year-old who is just becoming aware of her queerness, Frankie conceives of a boundless horizon of possibilities. And while, as part of the process of queer subject-formation, she attempts to reject an identification with the deviance of the Freaks, her attempted rejection of their gaze is a very different process from her eventual rejection of the soldier through an act of self-defense.

Frankie is afraid of the Freaks' long eyes because she secretly knows that they are her kin and that she cannot ultimately escape the freakishness of her deviance; her identification of the encounter with the soldier as the scene from a crazy house, however, reclaims the language of freak shows that ostracize social misfits and reinforce their marginality and redirects it toward a critique of the violence of dominant sexual regimes. The Freaks attempt to connect with Frankie because they believe she is of their community, but, unlike the soldier, they do not expect her to automatically consent to their interpellation.¹⁵ The soldier, on the other hand, enforces a compulsory heterosexuality that mandates consent without attending to the question of whether the subjects it summons identify with its program. Frankie's escape from the soldier thus becomes a pivotal moment likely to facilitate her realization that she is outside what Monique Wittig calls "the heterosexual contract."¹⁶

Her expulsion from the wedding is another such moment. As with her interaction with the soldier, Frankie cannot comprehend the heteronormative ritual of the wedding or her experience of it. The wedding proceeds on its own terms, without her consultation or involvement, and Frankie ultimately concludes "[i]t was a framed game. The cards were stacked. It was a frame-up all around" (148). The wedding "had been queer like the card games in the kitchen the first week last June" until Berenice and Frankie discover that the jacks and queens are missing, and John Henry eventually admits "that he had cut out the jacks and then the queens to keep them company" (145). Neither kings nor queens, the jacks exist in a liminal space and without female companionship, attracting the queer boy's attention. Perhaps not knowing how else they may be coupled, John Henry opts for their adulterous pairing with similarly "stolen" queens. Thus the card game is rigged through queer intervention, unlike the wedding, which is a very different kind of game, "framed" by queer exclusion.

Because of the separation of bride and groom before the ceremony, Frankie is not given a chance to share her plans with her “we of me” entity of Janice-Jarvis. The bride and groom are separated, not in a queer and playful fashion like the figures in the card deck, but in accordance with a patriarchal and misogynistic tradition where this separation is a precaution against the groom’s rejection of the bride should he find her unattractive. Frankie’s “we of me” is thus bisected and partitioned in a way that makes communication about love and desire impossible and prefigures the heteronormative life Janice and Jarvis are doomed to live despite Frankie’s earnest intention to offer an alternative:

She wanted to speak to her brother and the bride, to talk to them and tell them of her plans, the three of them alone together. But they were never once alone; Jarvis was checking out the car someone was lending for the honeymoon, while Janice dressed in the front bedroom among a crowd of beautiful grown girls. She wandered from one to the other of them, unable to explain. And once Janice put her arms around her, and said she was so glad to have a little sister—and when Janice kissed her, F. Jasmine felt an aching in her throat and could not speak. Jarvis, when she went to find him in the yard, lifted her up in a roughhouse way and said: Frankie the lankie the alaga fankie, the tee-legged, toe-legged, bow-legged Frankie. And he gave her a dollar.

She stood in the corner of the bride’s room, wanting to say: I love the two of you so much, and you are the we of me. Please take me with you from the wedding, for we belong together. (144)

Frankie, however, cannot speak. Even after the ceremony, during the reception, “Frankie hovered close to the two of them, but words would not come” (147). The ritual separation of Janice and Jarvis, where Frankie witnesses and experiences what is perhaps the most stark and

shocking manifestation of gender binarism and normativity in her life, disorients and traumatizes her, leaving her utterly speechless. Frankie is dumbfounded by the scene of “beautiful grown girls” who participate in the wedding without any plans to create a future collectivity out of it; confused and silenced by the interpellation as a “little sister” that accompanies Janice’s kiss; and likely more than a little disturbed by her brother’s manhandling and gibberish baby-talk as he directs his attention to a car rather than attempt any intelligible conversation with her or other human participants in the wedding. He is thus not unlike the anti-conversational soldier, handling Frankie much like the soldier may have done with the monkey he attempts to purchase.

The wedding is entirely incomprehensible to Frankie. “The wedding was all wrong, although she could not point out single faults” (145). Furthermore, “[t]he wedding was like a dream, for all that came about occurred in a world beyond her power.... [F]rom the beginning to the end the wedding was unmanaged as a nightmare” (144). The wedding proves to be a ritual of exclusivity and exclusion—hardly an antidote to the exclusion from popular kids’ “clubs” that Frankie seeks when she falls in love with it. Its uncanny oscillation between dream and nightmare unsettles Frankie’s queer plans as well as her emerging queer subjectivity, leaving her screaming after the newlyweds’ departing car in a final, desperate attempt to plead her case for inclusion into the Janice-Jarvis “we of me” (147).

Against Homonormative Closure

The abysmal failure of the wedding ultimately helps to usher in new queer possibilities for Frankie, while Berenice and John Henry’s fates are much less encouraging. The queer life we imagine John Henry would have lived is tragically terminated by meningitis in the fall that follows the summer of the wedding. When Frankie’s father decides they will move to a suburb,

Berenice gives notice of her resignation, deciding “she might as well marry [her friend] TT” and ensure her economic security (158). Having lost her queer family to death and marriage and her dream of the wedding to the reality of heteronormative coupling, Frankie directs her desire elsewhere.

A short-lived attempt to run away from home exemplifies the range of alternative possibilities Frankie imagines herself capable of pursuing. Frankie plans to take a night train heading north. “If the train went to Chicago,” she reasons, “she would go to Hollywood and write shows or get a job as a movie starlet—or, if worse came to worse, even act in comedies. If the train went to New York, she would dress like a boy and give a false name and a false age and join the Marines” (150). Thus gender identifications framed as life trajectories become as arbitrary as train schedules, and the contingency of spontaneous travel itineraries yields multiple performative possibilities: the high femme role of Hollywood starlet, the somewhat androgynous (and for Frankie, less desirable) role of comedienne, and, finally, the transition to maleness that may afford Frankie the highest degree of freedom to travel the world—and fulfill U.S. imperialist agendas.

With the latter option, McCullers arguably anticipates, in 1946, the contemporary development of homonationalism, as theorized by Jasbir Puar. Puar defines homonationalism as the correlation between the state’s of concession of certain rights and privileges to LGBTQ citizens and the latter’s participation in the state’s racist and imperialist projects.¹⁷ While there is no such social contract between queers and the state in 1946—on the contrary, in the U.S. the state inaugurates official forms of homophobia in the postwar years through its military, welfare, and immigration bureaucracies¹⁸—McCullers and Frankie nonetheless envision queer freedom through participation in U.S. imperialism.

In the aftermath of John Henry's death and Berenice's announcement, Frankie recruits a new love object, with whom she plans to form a queer and arguably also homonormative¹⁹ and homonationalist family. In the novel's final pages, Frankie meticulously prepares sandwiches, "cutting them into fancy shapes" (159), in anticipation of the arrival of Mary Littlejohn, whom Berenice describes as "marshmallow-white" and who, according to the narrator, has "long braids... of a woven mixture of corn-yellow and brown, fastened at the ends with rubber-bands, and, on occasions, ribbons" (160). Snow-white, blond, ribboned, and an expert on Michelangelo, Mary Littlejohn represents a future worlds apart from Frankie's past experience of building queer family with a black maid and a sickly queer boy through "raggedy-rhymes" about a disappeared cat and card games played with an incomplete deck. Frankie has this future—immediate and long-term—carefully planned out:

Mary was coming at five o'clock to take dinner, spend the night, and ride in the van to the new house tomorrow. Mary collected pictures of great masters and pasted them in an art book. They read poets like Tennyson together; and Mary was going to be a great painter and Frances a great poet—or else the foremost authority on radar. Mr. Littlejohn had been connected with a tractor company and before the war the Littlejohns had lived abroad. When Frances was sixteen and Mary eighteen, they were going around the world together. Frances placed the sandwiches on a plate, along with eight chocolates and some salted nuts; this was to be a midnight feast, to be eaten in bed at twelve o'clock. (159)

It would seem that, like homonationalism, the joke about lesbians who bring a U-Haul truck to the second date must date back to at least 1946, as the moving van and Mary Littlejohn appear almost simultaneously in the narrative. While Frankie's father's reasons for moving are not fully known, a move to the suburbs in the postwar years inescapably evokes the phenomenon of white

flight. Frankie's trajectory thus orients itself toward whiteness in multiple ways, as she prepares to say goodbye to Berenice, discuss the "great masters" of European art over a fancy midnight snack, and move to the suburbs with Mary Littlejohn.

The novel's apparent homonormative closure, however, should not be read as a *foreclosure* of queer possibility. According to Frankie's fantasy, Mary Littlejohn's implied affluence and cultural capital portends a future as a privileged American traveler—a future doubtless made possible by postwar U.S. hegemony, whose ethical implications, as we shall see in the next chapter, are thoroughly dissected in James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room*. And yet, given that such a future is clearly framed as fantasy and not reality, Frankie's love and desire for Mary Littlejohn much more likely plants a seed in Frankie's mind for future possibilities of queer life and freedom that are not confined to intra-racial, intra-national imaginaries.

Conversations with Berenice continue until the novel's last few lines, in which news from Jarvis's travels in Luxembourg inspire Frankie's own globetrotting ideas while summoning, in an ever-skeptical Berenice, thoughts about "soapy water" (162)—an allusion to Lux soap powder and its associations with luxurious whiteness.²⁰ Even as McCullers, in her visionary genius, anticipates homonormativity and homonationalism, we cannot dismiss the significance of a 1946 American novel ending on a note of excitement, an "instant shock of happiness" sparked by a doorbell that announces the arrival of a lesbian love interest (163). Moreover, while this doorbell announces a future, Frankie's fantasy of queer possibility does not abide by linear temporality:

"When Frances was sixteen and Mary eighteen, they were going around the world together."

What a strange and queer sentence. Whether Frankie (now self-fashioned as Frances) and Mary's world travels are set in the future, past, or past continuous remains an open-ended question. Their

temporality is one of queer fantasy; its possibilities unbound by the linear trajectories that circumscribe every form of normativity.

Chapter III

Love and Tragedy: The “Complexity of Manhood” in James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*

This chapter reads gender through performance and performance through gender.¹ I argue that James Baldwin’s novel *Giovanni’s Room* (1956) critiques a specific kind of liberal white American performative masculinity that perpetuates a heteronormative, racist, and imperialist social order, and attempts to conceptualize a more ethical and socially responsible gendered subjectivity through a theatrical critique of performativity. I theorize masculinities by distinguishing between accepted theories of performative masculinity and formations of masculinity and manhood that emerge from the novel by returning to a somewhat “old-fashioned” but ever-useful theater studies paradigm. I read the novel as a tragic narrative, where tragedy tells us something about gender. My contention is that there are in fact three central gender formations theorized by Baldwin, in the novel and elsewhere, that inform the novel: an immature and dishonest performative masculinity, a more mature and complex manhood, and a self-conscious, theatrical genderqueerness. A dialectical tension between what I identify as masculinity and manhood, respectively, is not resolved, but rather, exploded by the third register of theatrical genderqueerness/genderqueer theatricality, which brings the acting out of gender in the novel to its full tragic potential. It is through this theatrical vision of tragedy that *Giovanni’s Room* invites the emergence of an ethical imagination that exceeds the worldview of the novel and operates through performances that transcend existing genres, genders, and the value systems they express.

My primary object of analysis is *Giovanni’s Room* and its representation, evaluation, reinscription, and contestation of these categories of (primarily male) gender performance. To

contextualize this analysis within Baldwin's larger body of work, I also engage with a few of his essays. These essays express relevant insights and observations about the masculinity formations under discussion and offer direct expressions of Baldwin's own points of view, which cannot be accessed as easily in his fiction. The author's expository prose tends to be more polemical than his novels, which allow more room for the contestation, negotiation, and working out of multiple, at times conflicting and contradictory, positions in ways his essays do not.² Thus, putting the essays and fiction in conversation can offer a better informed reading of the novel, based on a more comprehensive understanding of Baldwin's thought.

Performative Masculinity and Complex Manhood

I identify a distinction between an allegedly immature performative *masculinity* and a more mature, more complex *manhood* in Baldwin. While Baldwin does tend to use the term 'manhood' when discussing a desirable ideal, this masculinity/manhood distinction is not one that he establishes. Rather, it is a distinction I find conceptually useful, which has a theoretical and historical basis.

Elaborating upon Michael Kimmel's conceptual and historical distinction between manhood and masculinity, Kevin Floyd explains that

manhood is defined as the epistemological normalization of the male body characteristic of the nineteenth century; masculinity is its twentieth-century analogue. Manhood referred to an 'inner quality,' a capacity for independence,

morality, and self-mastery that adult men were expected to have achieved
The opposite of manhood . . . was not womanhood but childhood. (87)

Nineteenth-century manhood, Floyd explains, is “defined internally” while

twentieth-century masculinity increasingly normalized the male body in terms of exteriorized ‘behavioral traits and attitudes’. . . . Masculinity had to be performed. It was a physical demonstration, not a moral or ethical one Its opposite was femininity. (87-8)

According to Kimmel, as twentieth-century capitalist developments such as Fordism and Taylorism made opportunities for the skilled labor—seen as evidence of a man’s inner manhood—increasingly scarce, men began to perform masculinity through a set of “behavioral traits and attitudes” (120).

In his fiction and essays, Baldwin theorizes a more ontologically stable ideal of manhood that bears some resemblance to the nineteenth-century model Kimmel and Floyd describe. However, while there are moments at which he rhapsodizes an ostensibly historically lost manhood with nostalgic notes, Baldwin’s vision of manhood is largely forward-looking. He imagines a reinvention of manhood that would be historically compatible with a twentieth-century world of emerging queer sexual identities. Baldwin anticipates Judith Butler’s theory of performative gender, if not its exact political and theoretical implications, by observing that performative masculinity is simply not the province of those whom he considers real men. Of course, one of Baldwin’s most immediately apparent differences with Butler is his belief in the

ontological reality of manhood and the authenticity of gendered subjectivity. Butler maintains that “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (1990, 32). In other words, we do not perform an identity that exists prior to the performance; identity is produced through performance. Perhaps a more generative point of comparison than the question of whether gender is ‘real’ lies in Baldwin and Butler’s respective definitions of identity.

Baldwin would agree with Butler’s theory of performative gender when applied to a performative masculinity he sees as a poor substitute for real, or perhaps fully realized, manhood. In an early essay, “The Preservation of Innocence,” published in the Moroccan journal *Zero* in 1949, Baldwin contrasts an immature performative American masculinity romanticized in hard-boiled detective novels with a complex, mature manhood that resists gender caricatures and stereotypes. The rejection of rigid distinctions between and simplistic generalizations about male and female gender is one “which experience alone is able to illuminate The recognition of this complexity is the signal of maturity; it marks the death of the child and the birth of the man” (Baldwin 1949/88, 597).³ The caricature of “that mindless monster, the tough guy”, glamorized in James M. Cain and Raymond Chandler novels, exhibits a “masculinity . . . found in the most infantile externals” (ibid.). Unlike this externally defined hyperbolic performer of masculinity, the mature man does not need to perform because he inhabits an internally defined identity. Neither Baldwin nor Butler sees gender identity as something we inherently possess. But while Butler theorizes gender identity as an external expression and performative accomplishment for all subjects, Baldwin understands it as an accomplishment of one’s interiority and character.

This distinction between an immature performative masculinity and a mature manhood is one Baldwin maintains throughout his writing career. He furthermore aligns performative masculinity with a specifically American nationalist ideology that stunts the gender and sexual development he believes a male adult should achieve. In “The Preservation of Innocence”, the writer declares that “it is one of the major American ambitions to shun this metamorphosis,” in which a boy becomes a man (ibid.). Indeed, the farcical but dangerous “tough guy” emerges out of “the truly awesome attempt of the American to at once preserve his innocence and arrive at a man’s estate” (ibid.). Similarly, in one of his last essays, “Here Be Dragons” (1985), Baldwin writes that

[t]he American ideal . . . of sexuality appears to be rooted in the American ideal of masculinity It is an ideal so paralytically infantile that it is virtually forbidden—as an unpatriotic act—that the American boy evolve into the complexity of manhood. (678)

Ironically, the very institutions created by the US Government with the intention of reclaiming manhood are precisely the ones Baldwin associates with the arrested development of American masculinity. According to Floyd, Theodore Roosevelt’s agenda for galvanizing white American manhood in the twentieth century led to “the founding of the Boy Scouts of America” as well as “educational programs that endorsed hunting, for example, as a practice facilitating national, racial, and manly vigor, energy, and self-reliance” (86). Additionally, these programs “would instill [in young white men] the qualities of competitiveness ostensibly fundamental to building a strong nation” (ibid.). Having observed the effects of these state-sanctioned programs

for bolstering national manhood, Cass, a character in *Another Country* (1962), *Giovanni's Room's* thematic sequel,⁴ remarks that America “isn't a country at all, it's a collection of football players and Eagle Scouts. Cowards” (406). This characterization is consistent with a depiction of the Boy Scout as the disingenuously innocent symbol of the nation and its masculinity in the concluding line of “The Preservation of Innocence”.⁵

Baldwin thus rejects Roosevelt's nation-building efforts and their re-invigoration of masculine and racial supremacy. Instead, he suggests that men who hyperbolically perform manly vigor represent a lack of personal as well as national integrity. The distinction, then, between ontological manhood and performative masculinity, is an urgent one for Baldwin, as it contains crucial ethical dimensions. In much of his fiction and many of his essays, the loss of ontological manhood is a fundamental character flaw that seriously impedes America's ability to become an equitable society. In the case of *Giovanni's Room*, a particularly Baldwinian ideal of manhood is mobilized within a tragic narrative that critiques, interrogates, and finally condemns the integral and constitutive racial and sexual violence of modern white American masculinity. While Baldwin's condemnation of American masculinity is largely effective, his almost exclusive focus on masculinity and manhood and exclusion of femininity also detract from the effectiveness of his analysis. By reifying manhood, Baldwin forfeits a more comprehensive critique of sexual and racial violence.

***Giovanni's Room* and the Performance of Guilt**

Narrated retrospectively by the protagonist David, a closeted gay white American expatriate, *Giovanni's Room* is set in early 1950s Paris, where David meets his lover, the Italian bartender

Giovanni. David and Giovanni meet while David's American fiancée Hella is in Spain, where she has journeyed in order to 'think' about whether she does in fact wish to marry David. Giovanni's employment is precarious and at the mercy of the bar owner Guillaume, an older gay man who is sexually interested in him. Guillaume eventually fires Giovanni. When Hella returns from Spain, David, who has been living in Giovanni's room and off of his income,⁶ abandons Giovanni, claiming that two men cannot have a life together. The emotionally and financially desperate Giovanni returns to Guillaume with the intention of regaining his job. Instead, the meeting ends, as we are led to believe by David's narration, in Giovanni's murdering Guillaume. After Giovanni is sentenced to death for the murder, Hella catches David with a sailor in a gay bar and consequently returns to the US alone. David is left to confront the question of his guilt for having abandoned Giovanni at a time of dire need, as well as the uncertain possibility of his redemption.

In the blurb for the 1962 Dial Press edition of *Giovanni's Room*, Baldwin writes that "David's dilemma is the dilemma of many men of his generation; by which I do not so much mean sexual ambivalence as a crucial lack of sexual authority" (qtd. in White 252). David's lack of 'sexual authority' and his sexual ambivalence, however, are not mutually exclusive terms. In fact, for David, it is *unambivalent* homosexuality and sexual authority that are mutually exclusive. What begins, for a teenage David, as a positive experience of desire leading to a sexual encounter with his male friend Joey, quickly turns into an experience of sexuality framed by revulsion against a femininity aligned with sickness and death. Joey's body is associated with emasculating anal imagery, likened to "the black opening of a cavern in which I would be tortured until madness came, in which I would lose my manhood" (Baldwin 1956, 9). The word 'cavern' appears again several sentences later, in connection with David's deceased mother and

his replacement of her as his father's companion: "I thought of my father, who had no one in the world but me, my mother having died when I was little. A cavern opened in my mind . . . full of dirty words. I thought I saw my future in that cavern. I was afraid" (ibid.). This reflection is followed by descriptions of David's childhood nightmares about his dead mother, replete, this time, with vaginal cavernous imagery of death and disease: David's mother, whom he fears resembling by losing his manhood to homosexuality, appears "blind with worms . . . straining to press me against her body; that body so putrescent, so sickening soft, that it opened, as I clawed and cried, into a breach so enormous as to swallow me alive" (10-11). David's negatively formed homosexuality is also racialized: emasculating caverns, such as the one on Joey's body, are black, and both Joey and Giovanni are described as having dark bodies and features—Joey's is specifically "brown" (8)—in contrast with David's blond whiteness.

David's performative masculinity, then, represents a predictable effort to negate his homosexuality; moreover, the latter is projected onto brown or effeminate men, such as a "fairy" with whom David is involved in the Army, "who was later court-martialed out" (20). The performance, which ultimately proves impossible to carry out successfully, involves passing for a straight man who fulfills a post-war ideal of wholesome white American reproductive masculinity—a fantasy of wholesomeness that evokes the false innocence of the Boy Scout image in "The Preservation of Innocence" and *Another Country*. David's performative masculinity, though a consciously constructed instrument of his elaborate sexual closet, becomes second nature to him for a time, and is to this extent very much in line with Butler's concept of performative gender. However, while Butler theorizes performative gender as a set of discursive practices imposed from outside oneself and adopted almost unconsciously through repeated performances (1991, 24), Baldwin imagines performative masculinity as a structure constituted

through a subject with more agency than that of Butler's subject, and this subject is faced with an ethical choice. The formation of David's performative masculinity begins as a conscious choice and eventually becomes his second nature.

David, in his narration, tells the reader of the exact moment at which he decided to inhabit a performative position that forecloses honest introspection and honest self-presentation in front of others. In David's words, after sleeping with Joey, "I had decided to allow no room in the universe for something which shamed and frightened me. I succeeded very well—by not looking at the universe, by not looking at myself, by remaining, in effect, in constant motion" (Baldwin 1956, 20). The novel acknowledges that internalized homophobia is largely what precludes David's ability to look at himself and, consequently, to really look at and see others, to relate to them in a transparent way. Yet, at the same time, Baldwin's ethical imagination also challenges us to resist these kinds of defensive performative postures even in the face of considerable structural challenges such as homophobia. Giovanni therefore identifies David's behavior patterns not simply as a set of performative gestures but as a hopelessly entangled web of lies. When David breaks up with Giovanni and claims that he cannot love him because he cannot love another man, Giovanni tells him, "[y]ou lie so much, you have come to believe all your own lies" (140). Lying is clearly a conscious decision, but, with enough repetition, it can become a seemingly natural part of one's everyday performative practices. Baldwin's performative, then, similar to Butler's, encompasses a system of learned behaviors, but endows the subject with a higher degree of ethical responsibility for these behaviors.

For Baldwin, David represents a particularly nefarious form of performative masculinity because of his ambivalent attitude toward understanding the motivations and desires of his performance. David says of his expatriation to France:

Perhaps, as we say in America, I wanted to find myself. This is an interesting phrase, not current as far as I know in the language of any other people, which certainly does not mean what it says but betrays a nagging suspicion that something has been misplaced. I think now that if I had any intimation that the self I was going to find would turn out to be only the same self from which I had spent so much time in flight, I would have stayed at home. But, again, I think I knew, at the very bottom of my heart, exactly what I was doing when I took the boat to France. (21)

“I wanted to find myself,” David suggests, is a phrase that expresses a peculiarly American brand of hypocrisy that both signals an awareness that one lacks self-knowledge and performs an ambivalence about (indeed, for David, a refusal of) embarking on a journey of self-discovery in good faith. David flees not because he truly wishes to find himself but because he fears the consequences of self-discovery. His journey is both facilitated by American imperialism—his status as a wealthy white American provides the resources for his travels—and emblematic of this very same imperialism, which makes grandiose and self-important claims.

David’s reflection also points to the limits of one’s access to self-knowledge and thus raises ethical questions about the nature of responsibility and guilt in the context of the performative. In Butler’s terms, if the performative is not something a “subject elects to do,” but, instead, the performance “constitutes as an effect the very subject it appears to express” (1991, 24), how can the subject be held responsible for the performance? If a performance that a subject has not consciously orchestrated has rendered that subject guilty of self-misrepresentation, how

can the guilty party truly understand the nature of his guilt? Again, Baldwin's variation on these questions assumes that the subject has agency and control over the performance. In his formulation, even an unconsciously executed performance is an effect of a prior willful refusal to engage with reality—more specifically, in David's case, to face an enormously important fact about oneself.

The critique of this kind of refusal is central to Baldwin's critique of American whiteness and white masculinity, a critique applicable to David's situation insofar as he embodies a type of white American masculinity Baldwin so frequently scrutinizes. I would like to suggest that David, who at certain points in the novel expresses liberal attitudes toward issues such as women's liberation while also treating women unethically and contemptuously,⁷ is not unlike the white liberal that Baldwin identifies as having a similarly hypocritical relationship to racial justice. Baldwin identifies guilt as an ambivalent emotion and structure that mobilizes and functions as a kind of metonym for the liberal subject's ambivalent attitude toward social justice. Specifically, his critique of white liberal guilt—a type of guilt structurally similar to David's—suggests that guilt, when felt but not understood, can only perpetuate the entitlement of a guilty party, especially when that party is in a position of power or privilege.

Throughout his work, Baldwin calls attention to white liberals' tacit complicity with white supremacy and the sexual regimes of power that perpetuate it. Significantly, the white liberals under scrutiny are often, though not always, men, and the critique is often inseparable from a judgment about these liberals' masculinity. (That these liberals are almost exclusively men suggests a troubling conflation between integrity and masculinity which I will address in the next section.) His book-length essay *No Name in the Street* (1972) is most explicit and exemplary in making these connections. In this work, Baldwin surmises that his "contempt for

most” white American liberals “dates from what [he] observed of their manhood” during McCarthyism, the period during which he wrote *Giovanni’s Room*, when friends betrayed one another and “justifi[ed] their treachery by learned discourses,” and “the cowardice and irresponsibility of the liberal community” was among the causes for the execution of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg (30). White liberal guilt, then, emerges as a structure of feeling⁸ that is not only formed by but also perpetuates the hypocrisy and cowardice of whites who both knowingly betray other whites and willfully ignore their implication in the structural racism they tellingly call “the Negro Problem” (54). Just as whites “were lying about their motives” for being disloyal to each other because they “were being blackmailed by their guilt” (31), so has “a guilty and constricted white imagination” (54) compartmentalized American racism as a black problem for which whites are not responsible. Stated otherwise, the guilt feelings of white liberals who were complicit in McCarthyist witch hunts has led to their refusal to acknowledge their motives, and this lack of understanding of the substance of their guilt has only perpetuated their complicity. Similarly, white liberals’ feelings of guilt about their complicity with the racist oppression of black Americans cause them to willfully ignore their implication in structures of racial injustice.

At its very worst, white male liberal guilt is a performative speech act that exonerates the speaker from responsibility for his actions—a performative profession of one’s innocence. David enacts a similar performance of guilt about having used Hella as a prop in the heterosexual masculinity performance intended to shore up his male privilege. When Hella, in the novel’s denouement, catches David, *in flagrante delicto*, as it were, at a gay bar, David tells her that he is sorry about having deceived her, that he was in fact only deceiving himself, and that, in his words, “whatever I’ve done to hurt you, I didn’t mean to do it!” (Baldwin 1956, 163). His evasive non-apology rightly strikes Hella as disingenuous and self-indulgent: “[H]ow guilty you

are,” she retorts sardonically, “how you love to be guilty!” (164). This particular profession of guilt becomes, for David, a source of pleasure not because it redeems him but because it allows him to feel entitled and justified in having misled Hella. And while it is true that David deceived himself and was encouraged to do so by structural homophobia, the fact that he does not seem to care that he has hurt and humiliated Hella suggests it is unlikely that he will develop a more ethical and accountable subjectivity as a result of coming out. What matters to him, in the end, is his own self-deception, not his unethical behavior toward others. He is assured of his innocence because he is more invested in this innocence than he is in honestly evaluating the motives for his actions and their consequences, just as ‘the guilty and constricted white imagination’ Baldwin describes is more interested in purging itself of its guilt than it is in examining it and attempting to act responsibly.

Manhood and Theatricality

Whereas Baldwin’s critique of David’s performative masculinity astutely dissects the ethical problems with both the masculinity norms David is compelled to perform and the performance itself, his representation of self-conscious gender theatricality as suspiciously effeminate weakens his critique of heteronormativity and male privilege. The essay “Here Be Dragons,” written toward the end of Baldwin’s life, is often cited as an affirmation of the author’s non-binary thinking about gender and race. “[W]e are all androgynous,” Baldwin asserts in its conclusion, “not only because we are all born of a woman impregnated by the seed of a man but because each of us, helplessly and forever, contains the other—male in female, female in male, white in black and black in white” (690). This conclusion, however, does not represent a position

he held throughout his entire career, but is rather the result of a lifelong dialectical process of engaging with, at times battling and at times reinscribing, binary categories—a process reflected in the narrative of the essay.

Baldwin describes his young self, on whom David and Giovanni are partially based, as an adolescent man who leaves Harlem to live in Greenwich Village. By his account, he dates a few white women who seek to sexually liberate themselves through the socially transgressive act of sex with black men, on whom they project special sexual powers. Subsequently, Baldwin finds “clouds of imitation white women” (1985, 686) in the men of the “queer—not yet gay—world” of the Village (685). Having been called a sissy on the streets of Harlem his entire life, Baldwin is “afraid that [he] already seemed and sounded too much like a woman” (ibid.) and feels further feminized by his interactions with these men. Not only do they express “speculations concerning the size of his organ,” not unlike the women he has dated, but their speculations are also “sometimes accompanied by an attempt at the laying on of hands” in public spaces (686).

The entitlement that allows white gay men to publicly attempt to grope Baldwin in a so-called ‘polite’ social space crucially distinguishes these men from Baldwin’s female lovers, a power differential he does not acknowledge. Thus, derisively calling these men “imitation white women” (ibid.) misguidedly identifies femininity as the root of racist oppression and crafts a fantasy of a more ethical masculine subjectivity unsullied by degenerate effeminacy.⁹ If white men were real men and not imitation women, Baldwin seems to be saying, they would not exoticize a black man and exploit him sexually. But in fact, the history of American racism suggests just the opposite through the phenomenon of lynching, whereby white men use white women and their safety as a pretext to perform sexual violence against black men.¹⁰ By positioning itself in opposition to femininity, Baldwin’s ideal of manhood aligns itself more

closely with twentieth-century performative masculinity, in Floyd's historical formulation, than the nineteenth-century ideal of a more ontologically stable manhood. In other words, Baldwin does not always succeed in theorizing a type of manhood that is necessarily distinct from performative masculinity, and his formulation of manhood at times only reinforces the rigid categories of binary gender it purportedly sets out to complicate.

Just as Baldwin's sexist characterization of Greenwich Village gay white men as 'imitation white women' detracts from his otherwise shrewd critique of the racist entitlement that allows them to molest black men, so do derisive descriptions of Giovanni's employer Guillaume and his friend Jacques as "old theatrical sisters" (Baldwin 1956, 31) and "disgusting old fair[ies]" (150) trouble the novel's dissection of power dynamics based on class, ethnicity, and citizenship. As a queer working-class immigrant, Giovanni is clearly a vulnerable target for men such as Guillaume and Jacques. When he is not ridiculing Guillaume's wardrobe and choice of perfume (107), Giovanni's analysis of the problem is quite accurate. Describing an episode in which Guillaume publicly humiliates him in front of his patrons, falsely accusing him of stealing, Giovanni explains to David that

You can tell when Guillaume is in a dangerous mood because he then becomes so respectable. When something happens to humiliate him and make him see, even for a moment how dirty he is, and how alone, then he remembers that he is a member of one of the best and oldest families in France. (106)

The respectable and wealthy Guillaume makes a scene in front of his wealthy friends in a sadistic display of his power over Giovanni, a scene in which his friends are more than happy to act as a supporting cast.

When Guillaume publicly accuses Giovanni, throwing money at him and throwing him out of the bar, all the other patrons

knew that Guillaume was right and I was wrong And, oh, the faces in that bar They were so wise and tragic and they knew that *now* they knew everything, that they had always known it, and they were so glad they never had anything to do with me. (109)

For Guillaume's wealthy entourage, the guilt of a working-class immigrant man is a foregone conclusion. This elaborate theatrical spectacle orchestrated by Guillaume, his public humiliation of Giovanni, serves the self-congratulatory purpose of reminding the powerful of their power, an enactment of respectability that, to Giovanni, is as 'disgusting' as it is pathetic because it signals that Guillaume is indeed alone and friendless, insofar as all of his social connections are mediated by capital. The family name, and the capital that comes with it, is all the powerful appear to have in the way of kinship or community.

From Giovanni's point of view, Guillaume is not a man because manhood cannot depend solely on bourgeois respectability and the theatrical rituals that reinforce it. Giovanni states this opinion directly in an earlier conversation with David, painting a picture evocative of the groping gay white men depicted in "Here Be Dragons": "I did not . . . altogether succeed in remaining untouched by him; he has more hands than an octopus and no dignity whatever He is really

not a man at all I do not know what he is, he is horrible” (61). Here Giovanni’s perspective is clearly aligned with the correlation Baldwin draws between manhood and ethics. Troublingly, ethical manhood is only evaluated through interactions men have with one another. David’s mistreatment of women, for example, is only a minor concern in the novel’s moral universe. Even more alarmingly, Giovanni’s description of Guillaume suggests that if one is not a man, one is not anything definable in human terms: a non-man translates to a non-human.

Theatrical Genderqueering

The novel’s representation of bourgeois theatricality, filtered through Giovanni’s relationship to Guillaume, positions the theatrical as a more self-conscious form of performativity as defined by Baldwin. Because this definition of theatricality is not too different from a definition proposed by theater scholars and practitioners, the field of theater studies can usefully illuminate this relationship between performativity and theatricality in the novel. According to Kate Bornstein, “we’re always performing identities, but when we *consciously* perform one, and people *acknowledge* our performance, it’s theater” (147). Theatricality is distinct from performativity not only because a theatrical performance is fully conscious and self-aware, but also because the performance is highly self-referential, calling attention to the fact that the spectator is watching a performance and inviting that spectator to consider the implications of the genre. As Alisa Solomon notes, theater is similar to performative gender as theorized by Butler in that both are “automimetic” (12), or in other words, copies of copies. There is no original that either theater or gender copies. Accordingly, there are no ‘imitation women’ or imitation men, just as there is no

imitation of life. “Theatrical presence”, in Solomon’s words, “displays the absence of any prior cap-T truth” (12), but, unlike gender, is always self-conscious about this absence.

While Giovanni’s recognition of Guillaume’s theatricality enables him to dissect and denaturalize Guillaume’s position of power, Guillaume has, in a way, already denaturalized his own subject position by being so flagrantly theatrical. He deliberately makes a scene—he *throws* the money at Giovanni—a scene which reminds the latter of his first encounter with Guillaume in the theater lobby where they fatefully met.¹¹ When performing in front of Giovanni, Guillaume is not invested in naturalizing his power over Giovanni because Giovanni is not in any position to question this power. Indeed, his ‘remembering’ that he is a member of one of the oldest families in France is a strategic appeal to the benefits of heteronormative lineage—a system whose ‘natural’ order a homosexual man inevitably questions. Self-consciously theatrical performance, then, is not necessarily a form of critique in and of itself, but it does open up a space for critique through its ability to reveal the performativity of all subject positions, including ones invested with social power over others.

The text also presents an anti-bourgeois¹² incarnation of theatricality—which I am calling genderqueer theatricality—that complicates Giovanni’s dismissive view of the theatrical as the province of unethical, wealthy non-men. Genderqueer theatricality in the novel questions and unsettles the binary between the fantasy of a fully realized manhood and the presumed ethical and existential inadequacy of performative masculinity. This form of theatricality does not amplify the performative, but rather transcends it by employing the dramatic genre of tragedy—a sensibility that, I argue, more closely approximates the complexity of gender Baldwin seeks to theorize than do his formulations of mature and ethical manhood.

It is not only the wealthy and powerful who are represented as theatrical in the novel, and their affected performances of tragedy—the ‘tragic’ faces they put on to condemn Giovanni—are mere shadows of the novel’s deeper tragic sensibility and its emphatically theatrical expression. While the theatricality and effeminacy of the corrupt and powerful Guillaume serves to highlight the novel’s equation of performative masculinity with failed masculinity, the theatricality of more intentionally gender-bending figures disrupts the text’s hierarchical system of gender-based value. One such figure in particular not only disturbs David’s sense of his own masculinity in a profound and visceral way but also questions the hierarchy of masculinity/manhood and their respective alignment with the performative and the ontologically stable by inhabiting the realm of tragic wisdom and prophecy.

On the night when David meets Giovanni in the bar where Giovanni works, an old “coquettishly” dressed gay man approaches David, “horrifying” him with the “lasciviousness” of his hips, the “violent . . . oil” in his hair, the “rag[ing] lipstick” on his mouth, his open shirt, and the “silver crucifix” glistening on his “hairless chest” (Baldwin 1956, 39). David is too disturbed by the man’s flagrantly feminine presentation to perceive him as human at first, likening him to “a mummy or a zombie” and repeatedly referring to him as “it” while describing his appearance and attire. His narration drops the objectifying and dehumanizing “it” when the man begins speaking to him. Yet the impossibility of denying the reality of his existence, which surfaces during this transition from “it” to “him,” arouses violent anger and gay panic in David: “It was impossible to hit him It did not seem real, he did not seem real” (ibid.).¹³ When David curses at the stranger in response to his inquiry about his interest in Giovanni and his cryptic warning that Giovanni is “dangerous,” especially “for a boy like you,” the face of the gender-

bending Tiresias-like prophet assumes “the mask of tragedy” (40). “You will be very unhappy,” he professes. “Remember I told you so” (ibid.).

While this prophetic, seemingly otherworldly character is not exactly cross-dressing or wearing drag, his disruption of the novel’s reification of manhood fulfills a function much like what Marjorie Garber has identified as the cultural role of the transvestite. Drawing on Lacanian theory, Garber aligns the figure of the transvestite with a “third term” that destabilizes a binary structure and embodies a liminal space of in-betweenness and possibility. This space enacts an interruption of familiar structures, signaling “not just another category crisis, but—much more disquietingly—a crisis of ‘category’ itself” (32). In a heteronormative and transphobic culture, people who are not easily placeable within an either/or gender schema can become targets of physical violence such as the violence David momentarily considers. When gender-non-conforming, genderqueer, or transgender people are met with verbal violence, it is often in the form of a demand to give an account of their existence, expressed in some form of the question ‘What are you?’ This ‘What are you?’ question, while ostensibly and literally directed at the genderqueer person, is a particularly urgent one for the speaker because it is in fact directed at himself. Garber’s transvestite figure, that is to say, does not embody a category crisis because the transvestite or transgender person is not the one who is experiencing a crisis. The crisis belongs to the normatively gendered or dressed person who becomes defensive and at times violent because the genderqueer has dared to question the category system to which the former is wedded and within which he hopes to maintain what he believes to be his secure position.

For David, then, the crisis is an existential one. The gender-bending figure has dared to directly confront him with the question of his closeted homosexuality by remarking on his obvious attraction to Giovanni and to indirectly confront him with the related crisis of his

masculinity simply by being effeminate and wearing makeup. “What are you?” is a question David must inevitably ask himself. Most of David’s friends in Paris are of “*le milieu*,” the Parisian gay community, and he is “intent on proving, to them and to [himself], that [he] was not of their company” (Baldwin 1956, 22). Earnest as David may be to make a case for his heterosexuality, he is largely unconvincing. When, in Guillaume’s bar, Jacques suggests that David offer Giovanni a drink, he defensively responds that he would only make such an invitation “[i]f that was his sister looking so good” (30). To this denial—a tellingly failed one in that it only affirms that Giovanni “look[s] . . . good”—Jacques responds with a “cheery, brave smile,” taking great pleasure in mirroring the verbal irony of David’s failed performance: “I was not suggesting that you jeopardize, even for a moment, that’—he paused—‘that *immaculate* manhood that is your pride and joy” (ibid.). David’s false conception of his “immaculate manhood” and (homo)sexual innocence is emblematic of the novel’s depiction of the immaturity of American masculinity. Jacques’ comment recalls David’s observation of the American men in line at the American Express Office in Paris who “seemed incapable of age” and “smelled of soap . . . their preservative against the dangers and exigencies of any more intimate odor,” who appear “unsoiled, untouched, unchanged,” and whose wives “might have been [their] mother[s]” (89-90). In this passage, washing and cleanliness conjure up protective gestures mobilized in response to fear of life experience, sexual or otherwise,¹⁴ that may lead to introspection and change—a fear that consistently shapes David’s decisions. His fear assumes the shape of a distinct horror when he is confronted with theatrical displays of gender ambiguity, both in his encounter with the aging, effeminate prophet of doom and at the sight of drag queens in the bar.

While both the prophet and the drag queens are self-consciously theatrical and disturb David by dramatizing and hyperbolizing the performative nature of gender, he is especially

horrified by the drag queens. His misogyny and its relationship to his internalized homophobia render the drag queens not just horrifying but also, in his view, abject. He describes the gossiping queens—“*les folles*”—in the bar as “screaming . . . parrots” (26) that “looked like a peacock garden and sounded like a barnyard” (27). Responding to the content of their gossip, he finds it “difficult to believe that they ever went to bed with anybody, for a man who wanted a woman would have certainly rather had a real one and a man who wanted a man would certainly not want one of *them*” (ibid.).

David’s terror of being gay thus translates to a fear of being not just a woman but an “imitation woman,” which is what he perceives these queens to be. To him this is a position so abject that it evokes the image of feces-eating primates. He avoids talking with one boy in particular, who dresses in drag, because “his utter grotesqueness made [him] uneasy; perhaps in the same way the sight of monkeys eating their own excrement turns some people’s stomachs. They might not mind so much if monkeys did not—so grotesquely—resemble human beings” (27). In contrast to David’s detailed description of the older, Tiresias-like figure, his narration offers few details about this boy’s appearance, except for the fact that he wears makeup and earrings and has “his heavy blond hair piled up high.” He also “[s]ometimes . . . actually wore a skirt and high heels” (ibid.). Young and blond, like David, this fairly generic gay boy dressed in drag becomes a site for David’s projection of his worst nightmare about his own fate: that by accepting his attraction to men he will become a woman and a parody of gender, a subject robbed of his manhood and thus, according to David’s sexist logic, of his humanity.

Theatricality and Tragedy

While David does not react to the Tiresias figure and the boy in drag in identical ways, his reactions are caused by an identical fear. On a symbolic level, David's fear is associated precisely with the Tiresias figure whose reality he has difficulty accepting. He fears becoming Tiresias-like, punished for his "crime" of being a man who is attracted to other men¹⁵ in the same way Tiresias was punished for his violent interruption of a pair of snakes in the act of coitus—by being made into a woman.¹⁶ While Tiresias's sexual crime is outwardly directed, David comes to understand his violation as primarily self-directed as he begins to realize that the crime of depriving himself of love is more serious than the social crime of his homosexuality. David's tragedy thus illustrates Raymond Williams's designation of liberal tragedy as "the struggle of individual desire, in a false and compromising situation, to break free and know itself" (1966, 99-100). According to Williams, historically, the genre of liberal tragedy, epitomized by the plays of Henrik Ibsen, is a development in which the struggle of the individual is a struggle against his society, and through this struggle the victim becomes the hero. Arguably, the journey of self-discovery of any queer person socialized in a heteronormative and heterosexist society and that person's rebellion against this "false and compromising situation" (1966, 100) follow, up to a point, the narrative of a liberal tragedy. A queer person's trajectory need not complete the narrative arc of tragedy, but it can under certain conditions. The heroic story of self-liberation becomes a liberal tragic narrative at the moment when this "heroic position of the individual liberator" turns into a position of "the self against the self." In liberal tragedy, guilt is self-imposed rather than assigned from the outside. Guilt "has become internal and personal, just as aspiration was internal and personal" (ibid.). Unlike Greek tragedy, where Tiresias is punished

for his crime by the goddess Hera, in Baldwin's liberal tragedy, David punishes himself. His punishment is his own guilty conscience, a punishment that exemplifies what Williams calls the "twentieth-century breakdown" (ibid.) of liberal tragedy—the foreclosure of its progressive promise.¹⁷ This liberal tragic narrative, useful as it may be in telling a coming out story in the pre-Gay-Liberation era, arguably places the wrong hero at its center. Indeed, the centrality of the bourgeois liberal hero may be among the root causes of the eventual and inevitable dissolution of the genre of bourgeois liberal tragedy.

The narrative's central focus on David's guilty conscience eclipses the struggle of Giovanni, the character most severely victimized by social inequities, mirroring the way in which an overly self-indulgent attention to one's own white liberal guilt can prevent the liberal from actually addressing the inequities for which he feels guilty. David, in a sense, usurps Giovanni's position as tragic hero. Giovanni's crime is very different from David's. His guilt is determined by external moral and juridical laws and not, as is the case with David, a psychological conflict marked by an internal recognition of having been unfair to himself and others. In fact, both Giovanni's crime and his punishment resemble crime and punishment in Greek tragedy in that both are assigned arbitrarily—not by gods but by people in positions of economic and social power.

If white male liberal guilt is a structure of feeling that perpetuates racial and sexual injustices, in *Giovanni's Room* working class immigrant guilt is an arbitrary condemnation of criminality that exemplifies these injustices. There is no reason to believe, in the end, that Giovanni is guilty of any social crime. Giovanni's trial for Guillaume's murder is not represented in the novel. There is also no way of knowing whether Giovanni in fact killed him. Guillaume is found dead in the private quarters above his bar, strangled with the sash of his dressing gown

(Baldwin 1956, 148), and David imagines an argument between Giovanni and Guillaume that ends in Giovanni's accidental strangulation of Guillaume (156-7).¹⁸ The only account of the murder, then, exists in David's imagination. It is David's imagination and narration that, in the end, condemn Giovanni. It is the guilty conscience and the guilty consciousness of the white American liberal that send the working-class immigrant hero to the guillotine.

David's condemnation of Giovanni suggests that he has fundamentally misunderstood Giovanni's tragic worldview as well as his own motivations. While Giovanni does express a kind of tragic determinism in his interpretation of history, David misconstrues the implications of Giovanni's point of view. In his first conversation with David, Giovanni offers the following analysis of what he perceives as the American understanding of history:

“The Americans are funny. You have a funny sense of time—or perhaps you have no sense of time at all, I can't tell. Time always sounds like a triumphant parade *chez vous*—a *triumphant* parade, like armies with banners entering a town. As though, with enough time, and that would not need to be so very much for Americans . . . as though with enough time and all that fearful energy you people have, everything will be settled, solved, put in its place. And when I say everything,” he added, grimly, “I mean all the serious, dreadful things, like pain and death and love, in which you Americans do not believe.” (34)

The American progress narrative, in Giovanni's view, pays little attention to the actual exigencies and limitations of history. It imposes itself imperiously and imperialistically, like a triumphant army—and often quite literally *as* a triumphant army—on the history of the rest of

the world. It does not believe that human factors such as pain, death, and love can or should complicate a narrow, single-minded view of progress. When prompted by David to explain how he sees time, Giovanni explains that “[t]ime is just common, it’s like water for a fish The big fish eat the little fish and the ocean doesn’t care” (34-5). Giovanni’s nautical simile is indeed deterministic, verging on reactionary pessimism, in its suggestion that the powerful inevitably win and that history is indifferent to this fact. However, given that his livelihood depends on the whims of an employer who sees him as an object he is free to exploit both economically and sexually, the comparison is a fairly accurate reflection of the world Giovanni inhabits. He can be fired, framed, convicted, and executed at the hands of the powerful without anyone caring to come to his defense.

It is significant, then, that David feels “a subtle war within” himself, when he responds that in the US, “the little fish have gotten together and are nibbling at the body of the whale” (35). Whether he is referring to communists, pacifists, early civil rights activists, or feminists, David conceivably feels a subtle sense of guilt, gnawing, nibbling perhaps, at his conscience, about his lack of participation in the populist movements he claims as his own—and possibly also an anxiety about the possibility of losing the privileges he is afforded by racial, economic, and gender inequities. Instead of recognizing the limitations of his own choices and addressing his own fears, he depicts Giovanni as a reactionary, Old World figure.

David tells Jacques, shortly after Giovanni’s sentencing, that

[i]t might have been better . . . if [Giovanni had] 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 . . . maybe he could have stayed down there and sung his life away and died in bed. (24-5)

While Giovanni does express misogynistic sentiments—for example, he quips that liberated women should be beaten into submission (80)—David, who knowingly takes advantage of women and is deathly afraid of being feminized by his homosexuality, is hardly a feminist. Yet, David sees Giovanni as essentially different from him, as fundamentally patriarchal because pre-modern, in a schema where the patriarchal, pre-modern world is represented as Giovanni's "Eden" (25). If David is the only American Giovanni knows well, then it is understandable that Giovanni would conclude that "Americans have no sense of doom" (143), as he says when David abandons him. David thwarts the progressive possibilities of tragedy and manifests its liberal bourgeoisification to a solipsistic extreme by displacing Giovanni from the position of tragic hero and placing himself and his guilty conscience at the center of the narrative.

While Giovanni's tragic demise is underwritten by his economic precarity, it is precipitated by the emotional despair he experiences in the wake of David's abandonment. David's misguided and impossible ambition to cultivate a conformist American masculinity through a preservation of sexual innocence becomes the catalyst for the tragic resolution of Giovanni's drama. Tellingly, Giovanni conceptualizes David's refusal of queer love as an absence of gendered embodiment. David, according to Giovanni, is "a lover who is neither man nor woman, nothing that I can know or touch" (139). The ungendered here is ultimately intangible, elusive, and unknowable. An absence of gender translates, for Giovanni, to an absence of love, similar to the way an absence of manhood translates to an absence of humanity for Baldwin.

Beyond Giovanni and David's individual tragedies lie, to borrow a term from David Scott, the tragic dilemma and paradox of Baldwin's simultaneous and fervent belief in two contradictory principles: the bankruptcy of the labels of binary gender and the promise of the manhood ideal as a way of inhabiting the complexity of gendered subjectivity. While Baldwin's own approximation of the sexual "dilemma" in the novel connects it to a "lack of sexual authority" over and against "sexual ambivalence," ambivalence, a defining component of tragedy, may in fact be the novel's most compelling and generative structural element. The ambivalence of David's guilt, and liberal guilt more generally, contains a potential for the transformation of guilt into a more decisive, authoritative, and ethical subjectivity, perhaps even creating a post-liberal subject who ceases to upstage other kinds of actors and stories. Similarly, Baldwin's ambivalent investment in the gender binary leaves the utility of the manhood ideal an open question, inviting the transformation of "the complexity of manhood" (1985, 678) into a more comprehensive conceptualization of the complexity of gender.

Chapter IV

Love and Revolution: *Les Blancs* and Lorraine Hansberry's Decolonial Queer Feminist

Thought

The polemical dimension of the term “Africa” flows precisely from the strange power that resides within it, the terrible ambiguity that it conceals like a mask.... The mask is the power of the double, the crossing of being with appearance.... [T]he mask always denounces itself as a mask. The name “Africa” plays the role of the mask in the drama of contemporary existence.

—Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason*

In this final chapter, I offer an examination of Lorraine Hansberry's important and understudied anti-colonial play, *Les Blancs*, completed by her ex-husband Robert Nemiroff after her death and premiered on Broadway in 1970. I explore the play's queering of accepted notions of political, anti-colonial subjectivity and subjecthood, and discuss how Hansberry is in conversation with both Jean Genet, to whose play *The Blacks (Les Nègres)* (1958) Hansberry's play responds directly, and Frantz Fanon, whose book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), I believe serves as a backdrop to both plays. Responding to the critically limited anti-colonial satire of Genet as well as Fanon's sexist and homophobic projections onto the colonized in his otherwise incisive anti-racist text, Hansberry unmask the intersections of patriarchal and racist humanism in the work of her two interlocutors.

Genet's *Les Nègres*, premiered in Paris in 1959 and in New York as *The Blacks* in 1961, is an absurdist play about European colonizers' inability to accept the death of colonialism as a just resolution to its existence and their attendant expectation that black Africans perform caricatures of themselves as a form of aesthetic and comic relief for the colonizers as they mourn

the demise of their supremacy. *The Blacks* is performed by an all-black cast of actors who play black characters in blackface and don white masks to play a royal European court that comprises the audience for a play-within-a-play performed by the black characters. While Genet— whose choice of blackface and white masks parodies racist theatrical conventions— effectively exposes the colonial invention of race as a mask, his play is not interested in the question of what lies beyond (yes, beyond, not beneath) the mask of race. In this sense, he also parodies Fanon's title of *Black Skin, White Masks* without offering an alternative formulation. *The Blacks* performs a critique of whiteness and its resistance to decolonization but does not go far enough in its critique. Genet's parody of whiteness and its colonial logics may express solidarity with the colonized but offers little in the way of hope and a vision for the future. Hansberry responds accordingly, turning the mirror on the whites (*Les Blancs*) once more, and crafting white characters capable of examining their complicity in colonial plunder and racial injustice and of accepting their role in a dying colonialism.

I have chosen Fanon as a kind of mediator for the transatlantic conversation between Genet and Hansberry for several reasons. The most obvious of these is Fanon's transatlantic thought and existence, as a French-educated Martinican intellectual working in Algeria during the period in which Genet and Hansberry write *Les Nègres* and *Les Blancs*, respectively. In addition to his Francophone African diasporic context, Fanon's specifically *North* African location offers a window into Genet's relationship to Africa. Genet, known for his political solidarity with Arabs, Palestinians, and American Black Panthers,¹ is ambiguously positioned in relation to the Black Africa that is the subject *The Blacks*. Fanon's insights on the white French relationship to Arabs, North Africans, and black Africans can be illuminating given Genet's background and political commitments.

Additionally, Fanon's work is both informed by and illuminates important contradictions within a tradition of male-dominated pan-African Black nationalist thought to which Hansberry responds. Fanon's writing very much works in tandem with this tradition but also exposes its contradictions, sometimes intentionally and other times in spite of itself, but often in ways helpful to a queer and feminist investigation of racism and colonialism. As Susan Gubar explains, "[a]lthough Fanon consistently universalizes the masculine perspective, his application of psychoanalytic concepts to the construction of racial subjectivity has encouraged critics to study race and gender as reciprocal, interactive categories" (xix). Thus queer and feminist critics of race and racism are enormously indebted to Fanon while also at times fiercely critical of his gender and sexual politics. This chapter is similarly informed and driven by what one might call a "complicated" relationship with Frantz Fanon, who, in his own messy complicatedness, helps us understand the conversation between such differently positioned figures as Lorraine Hansberry and Jean Genet.

Hansberry's *Les Blancs* offers a feminist and queer critique to the predominantly male-centered, anti-racist, anti-colonial humanism of her contemporaries. This chapter begins with an unpacking of the masculinist currents with which she is in dialogue through a reading of the interrelated anxieties about miscegenation and homosexuality in Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*. I argue that Fanon produces an imaginary sexually normative black male subject as a defense against the colonial and white supremacist production of racial otherness through the phobic specter of the black (often, though not always, implicitly male) body. Hansberry's play exposes the related masculinist and nationalist fictions of a universally heterosexual black male subject whose sovereignty as a subject is threatened not only by racism and colonialism as such but by racism and colonialism as specifically homosexual and culturally amalgamating systems.

It is precisely the homosexual and miscegenated subject in *Les Blancs* who understands the colonial situation with clarity and is most capable of directed and determined anti-colonial revolutionary action. After unpacking Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* as framework, I offer a close reading of Genet's *The Blacks* and conclude with Hansberry's response—both her initial reaction to Genet's play and her artistic response in *Les Blancs*.

Fanon, Miscegenation, and Homosexuality

Fanon's concern for the miscegenated colonial subject and anti-colonial intellectual is central to his work. Miscegenation in Fanon occurs at the level of the embodied, the cultural, and the intellectual. *Black Skin, White Masks* poignantly explores miscegenation in what is perhaps its most literal incarnation—in the realm of the sexual. Fanon discusses interracial sexual relationships at length in chapter-long case studies of two individuals – accessed through their autobiographically inspired literary writings – Mayotte Capécia, a Martinican woman who, according to Fanon, wishes to be white, and, René Maran, an Antillean man who is raised and lives in France and despises his blackness. From these case studies and reflections on his own experience of embodiment as a black man living under a colonial and white supremacist visual regime in the chapter on “The Fact of Blackness,” Fanon draws larger conclusions on “The Negro and Psychopathology” in an eponymous chapter. This chapter includes a lengthy footnote in which Fanon claims he has had “no opportunity to establish the overt presence of homosexuality in Martinique,” presumably because “of the absence of the Oedipus complex in the Antilles.” While he acknowledges “the existence of what are called there ‘men dressed like women,’” he is “convinced they lead normal sex lives.” However, in Europe, Fanon has observed Martinicans “who became homosexuals, always passive.” Nonetheless, even in Europe,

and even for those Martinican men thus transformed, heterosexual manhood remains intact. They do not engage in “passive” homosexuality because they desire to; rather they participate in a transactional, survival homosexuality: “[T]his was by no means a neurotic homosexuality: For them it was a means to a livelihood, as pimping is for others” (180.n44).

That this footnote appears within a text largely concerned with consensual heterosexual miscegenation is no accident. Sara Ahmed observes that because in a colonial, racist, and anti-black context, “compulsory heterosexuality is the grounds for reproduction of... normative whiteness,” the “prohibition of miscegenation and homosexuality belong, as it were, in the same register” (2006, 127).² Compulsory heterosexuality works analogously for Fanon, producing and reproducing an imaginary normative blackness within a colonial dynamic where blackness is produced as non-normative. Fanon’s study of Maran’s racial complexes on the one hand and Capécia’s double—racial and sexual—transgressions on the other pays asymmetrical attention to the body along gender lines in a situation in which female and male bodies are equally involved. While the black male body as a site of projection of the psychoses of white racism is a central focus in *Black Skin, White Masks*, the black male body as a *sexual* body is conspicuously absent. Conversely, female relationships (black or otherwise) to race and racism are always already sexual. Men can be sexually embodied, however, if they are homosexual. White men’s racist projections onto the bodies of black or otherwise racialized men, for instance, operate within a psychically “homosexual territory” (183). Fanon cannot conceive of the existence of lesbians (201) and believes black male homosexuality exists only in the context of survival sex work. Thus, Fanon’s sexually embodied figures in *Black Skin, White Masks*—(heterosexual) women and (male) (white) homosexuals—are necessarily either racially traitorous (black women) or simply racist (white men).³

Tellingly, in the same breath, Fanon also reveals an ignorance about and perhaps indifference to the sensuality and sexuality of women as well, astonishingly claiming it is unusual for a woman to comment on the desirability of another woman. Indeed, he is alarmingly frank about his indifference toward and his inability to *see* women of color in any meaningful way. As Teresa de Lauretis points out, the homosexuality footnote is “immediately contiguous” in the text with “the disclaimer about the woman of colour: ‘I know nothing about her’” (Fanon 180 in de Lauretis 63). Similarly, Fanon cannot know anything about the homosexual man, unless he is a white Negrophobe. “If he were black... much better to know nothing about him and think he does not exist” (de Lauretis 64, ellipses in the original). The sexuality of the woman of color and the queer man of color, while impossible *not* to see, remain in the murky zone of Fanon’s peripheral vision, forever deferred as an object of investigation.

It is somewhat ironic then that Fanon tells Michel Salomon, a doctor who believes black men are inherently more “sensual” (202) than their white counterparts, that “[t]he *eye* is not merely a mirror, but a correcting mirror. The *eye* should make it possible for us to correct cultural errors” (202). Fanon thus also alludes, intentionally or not, to what his own eye does not wish to see. While the eye of our perception can and should correct the inherited cultural biases that sexually fetishize black men, for Fanon the eye cannot look further and unflinchingly observe the sexual desires men have for other men and the displacement of their own desires on the purported “sensuality” of black men in particular. Fanon can only allude to this displacement as a white racist problem, not a larger male sexual problem compounded by racial and colonial power dynamics.

For all of Fanon’s pity for René Maran and vitriol against Mayotte Capécia, inescapably set against the backdrop of his own interracial relationship and, later, marriage to the white

French woman Marie-Joséphine (Josie) Dublé, Fanon's most virulent condemnation remains reserved for the white homosexual man, who is charged as singularly responsible for the failure of heterosexuality to produce a coherent and unadulterated black racial identity. Facing the impossible task of becoming unreachable by imperialists' predatory sexual habits, Fanon puts forth the fantasy that the black male body is by definition alien to homosexual desire.

Black(ed Up) Skin, White Masks

Fanon and Genet explore an identical metaphor, that of "black skin, white masks," to highlight the fictionality of race but arrive at dramatically different conclusions. Genet quite possibly read *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs*, originally published in 1952, or was at the very least aware of its existence, and his 1958 *Les Nègres (The Blacks: A Clown Show)*, featuring black actors in literal white masks as well as black actors in blackface, can be plausibly read as a response to and satire of Fanon's text, or at least its title. Because race is both fictional and performative, in Genet's play whiteness is simply a mask, and blackness nothing other than the racist theatrical convention of the "blackened up" actor. In the epigraph of the published script, Genet writes: "One evening an actor asked me to write a play for an all-black cast. But what exactly is a black? First of all, what is his color?" (3). One could answer Genet's first question quite simply. "A black" in the noun form is an absurd invention of the French and other European languages. There is no such person as "a black" because "a black" is not a person (nor a noun of any other kind). Genet was not asked to write a play for "a cast of blacks," but for an "all-black cast," where "black" in its adjectival form functions as a social and political designation of a human being and not the designation of "a race" or species suggested by the noun form. I am interested in exploring these questions through a reading of Genet that assumes

he is well aware of the distinction between “black” and “*a* black.” Let us assume that Genet is not misinterpreting and ridiculing the black actor in question by asking him, “But what exactly is a black?” but is instead directing this question toward the white audience for which he states the play is intended (4). “A black,” then, is in the first instance a racist caricature, represented in his play by a black person in blackface, intended to challenge the presumed racism of the white audience.

Yet, as a response to Fanon’s phrasing of “black skins,” “What exactly is a black?” also reads as a white man’s challenge to a black man’s seemingly essentialist formulation of racial embodiment. A superficial reading of Fanon’s text and his metaphor of skin and masks could posit an authenticity of “black skin” against a social façade of “white masks.” A more careful reading reveals Fanon uses not only the colloquial “skin” but also the scientific terminology of “phenotype” as a metaphor for socially constructed racialization. “The black man wants to be white,” writes Fanon (11), and the primary way in which the Antillean black man “becomes white” is through a process of acculturation that occurs by visiting the metropole. “The [Antillean] black man who has lived in France for a length of time returns radically changed. To express it in genetic terms, his phenotype undergoes a definitive, an absolute transformation” (19). In a footnote, Fanon clarifies what he means by the idea of transformation of phenotype: “Negroes who return to their original environments convey the impression that they have completed a cycle, that they have added to themselves something that was lacking. They return literally full of themselves” (19.n3). Black men who have visited the metropole return “full of themselves,” that is, full of illusions of cultural sophistication and of having gained a social status akin to that of the colonizer. Fanon purposely uses scientific terminology such as “genetic” and “phenotype” to describe this type of cultural whitening to impress upon us that there is

nothing biological about race and racialization. Like metropolitan sophistication, race, too, is a fiction invented by the colonizer.

Genet's play displays a similar understanding of race as a colonial invention but is specifically interested in investigating blackness as a performance for white people. Unlike *Black Skin, White Masks*, *The Blacks: A Clown Show* is not interested in the interiority of black people. The play does however expose quite a bit about, and also mercilessly mocks, the psychology of white Europeans faced with the potential consequences, on the eve of decolonization, of their colonial conquest of Africa. One could counter Hansberry's critique in her *Village Voice* review of the play (which I address below) that Genet projects feelings of hatred onto the colonized by observing that Genet is in fact critical of such projections by white Europeans. At the same time, it is difficult, if even possible, to entirely separate Genet from the white subject-position and psychology he satirizes. His focus on blackness as performance, then, perhaps constitutes not so much a projection as a deflection. Genet, in this play, cannot critique the psychology of the colonizer without also scrutinizing the opacity of the "other side" and its role in obstructing communication and a path to reconciliation.

One could even argue that since there are no white actors in the play, and the "white" characters are only white in scare quotes—black actor-characters in white masks in the play-within-a-play—only the opacity of "the Blacks" is immediately available to the audience for critical investigation. The absurd anxieties of the whites, lacking on-stage embodiment, are thus presented as less real and less serious. And yet, Genet is clear in his intentions that the play is meant to be seen by a white audience. Given that the stage is designated for black actors playing caricatures of black people, while the audience seats are meant for white spectators, the satire of

white racist psychological complexes that appears on the page does not fully materialize in the theater.

Genet's second opening note in the script, following his initial questioning of what it would mean for him, as a white playwright, to write a play for an all-black cast, belabors, with comic extravagance, the point that the audience will see a play written *by* a white person *for* white people.

This play, written, I repeat, by white man, is intended for a white audience, but if, which is unlikely, it is ever performed before a black audience, then a white person, male or female, should be invited every evening. The organizer of the show should welcome him formally, dress him in ceremonial costume and lead him to his seat, preferably in the front row of the orchestra. The actors will play for him. A spotlight should be focused upon this symbolic white throughout the performance.

But what if no white person accepted? Then let white masks be distributed to the black spectators as they enter the theater. And if the blacks refuse the masks, then let a dummy be used. (4)

The Blacks is not only a play written by a white man for white people, but also a play in which white men (the playwright Jean Genet and directors Roger Blin and Gene Frankel, of the French and American premieres, respectively) direct black actors who are meant to entertain white people. While the very loose plot of the play is structured by the device of diversion—the ritual sacrifice of a white woman is supposedly a diversion from “the Blacks’” execution of a traitor within their ranks—Genet's larger diversion concerns the direction of the black actors. The black Master of Ceremonies Archibald Absalom Wellington's constant on-stage direction of “the Blacks” in the play-within-a-play distracts the audience from the structural and material

conditions of the production they are seeing: white men's creation of a drama in which black actors entertain a white audience.

At the same time, Genet's note expresses a wish that black people will go see his play and even a fantasy of an evening on which an all-black audience patronizes his all-black-cast play, but only in order to further impress his point that the play is not for them. If no white person were to attend his play, and if Genet's imaginary all-black audience were to refuse to actively participate in the "clown show" of the play's American subtitle by wearing white masks, then let them be clowned anyway, instructs Genet—by the presence of a spotlight shone upon a white dummy sitting front-row, center.

It is worth noting that the comedic absurdity of the play presents a challenge to a critique of its racial politics. It is difficult to parse the intentions in Genet's expression of a fantasy that a play intended to be seen by white people will be attended by an all-black audience who shares the theater with a spotlight-illuminated white dummy. Comedic interruptions of dialogue and action throughout the play make Genet's commentary on the racial dynamics of a dying colonialism all but impossible to engage with. Yet, Genet chose to write a play about colonialism in the genre of the absurd, because the absurd is the exclusive theatrical genre in which Genet operates.⁴ And since he chose to do so, scholars in critical race studies have no choice but to engage the play's racial and gender politics despite the difficulties presented by its comedic absurdism and despite the ease with which such politics can be brushed off as "just absurd." It is by now an axiom in much of male-authored comedy that feminists have no sense of humor, just as people of color are repeatedly told that they do not understand racial satire, such as the racist caricatures of Charlie Hebdo publications, to name just one example. If absurdism and comedy are propped up as shields against political criticism, then it is all the more important that scholars

continue to engage with the politics of such supposedly depoliticizing (or politically uncriticizable) genres, particularly when their author is a gay white man from a colonizing nation who claims solidarity with colonized people and with people of color.

The Blacks: A Funeral for Whiteness

Genet's *The Blacks: A Clown Show*, opens with an apparent funeral for whiteness. The opening stage directions situate "a catafalque, covered with a white cloth" at the center of the stage. "At the foot of the catafalque, a shoeshine box," which will aid in the further "blacking up" of "the Blacks" as part of a ritual in which they execute white people. Around the catafalque stand "four Negroes in evening clothes—no, one of them, Newport News, who is barefoot, is wearing a woolen sweater—and four negresses in evening gowns are dancing a kind of minuet around the catafalque to an air of Mozart which they whistle and hum" (7). The stage is lit with a "very garish neon light," and "[t]he ladies' costumes—heavily spangled evening gowns—suggest fake elegance, the very height of bad taste" (7-8). We are clearly situated, from the outset, in both the theater of the absurd and the theater of camp. The funeral for whiteness is neither a somber nor joyful occasion; it is a neon-lit scene of four "negroes" who have not quite managed to dress in matching formal clothes, and four "negresses" humming Mozart, dressed in over-the-top, fake-elegant poor taste.

Poor taste and a campy attention to artifice and theatricality persistently punctuate Genet's absurdist play-within-a-play, undercutting serious statements and discussions about the relationship between (a dying) colonialism and (decolonizing) colonized nations. The play's all-black cast plays an all-black cast of actors in blackface divided into a group of actors donning white masks—the royal Court—and a group of actors without masks: the Blacks. The white

mask of each member of the Court “is worn in such a way that the audience sees a wide black band all around it, and even the actor’s kinky hair” (8). Thus the white audience for which the play is intended is at no point allowed to forget that all actors on stage, masked or not, are black people in blackface, playing caricatures of themselves. A white man, Genet, offers a white audience his understanding of not just black performance of blackness but also black performance of white fantasies about blackness. Moreover, he announces from the start that his play is determined not to arrive at any kind of understanding between white and black people. As members of the Court interrupt the black Master of Ceremonies Archibald Absalom Wellington’s opening remarks out of panic about impending violence from “the Blacks,” he assures the audience:

This evening we shall perform for you. But, in order that you may remain comfortably settled in your seats in the presence of the drama that is already unfolding here, in order that you be assured that there is no danger of such drama worming its way into your precious lives, we shall even have the decency—a decency learned from you—to make communication impossible. We shall increase the distance that separates us—a distance that is basic—by our pomp, our manners, our insolence—for we are also actors. (12)

Opacity and the refusal to communicate are central to “the Blacks’” performance of blackness; originality is not. Blackness here is not just a copy of a copy but also a performance learned from white people. While making communication with the colonizer impossible can be a strategy for survival or decolonization, the addendum that it is a practice learned from white people undercuts the inventiveness suggested by an all-black cast’s orchestration of a spectacle about race and its performativity.

The spectacle is indeed in many ways strikingly unoriginal, rehearsing some of the most vulgar white-supremacist and colonial stereotypes about black Africans. The central spectacle in the performance given by “the Blacks” is the supposedly repeated ritual sacrifice of a white woman, who is first “seduced,” or raped, then murdered by Deodatus Village (the character who comes closest to a protagonist in this play, played by James Earl Jones in the American premiere), followed by a funeral rite. According to Archibald’s running commentary, a rape and murder occur every evening because a “fresh corpse” is needed for each performance of the funeral rite. Each of these announcements of the details of the ritual is predictably followed by gasps and remarks from the Court about the barbarity of “the Blacks,” as well as empty threats of prosecuting them through the colonial justice system.

The Queen of the white-masked royal court (played by Maya Angelou in the U.S. premiere) doubles with the sacrificed white woman as a specter of white womanhood endangered by black barbarity used to justify racial and colonial violence against black bodies. Also a symbol of colonial power, the Queen sleeps through much of “The Blacks” performance, in an act of denial of impending decolonization. The Governor, who aims to suppress the “The Blacks” imagined insurrection through brute force wishes to awake the Queen and seek her approval. The Judge, on the other hand, understands the Queen’s sleeping and dreaming as an act of ideological resistance against decolonization. “She’s hatching,” he explains. “Hatching what? Celtic remains and the stained-glass windows of Chartres” (43). Imagined to possess unlimited symbolic power, the figure of the Queen hatches in her dreams artifacts of European civilization deemed “timeless” in one last desperate attempt to secure the immortality of European colonialism.

The Blacks performs, in the words of the Queen's Missionary, "the long death struggle" (47) of the royal Court and the European colonial regime it symbolizes. In addition to Celtic ruins and the windows of the Chartres Cathedral, the Queen also calls "to the rescue" a number of other European cultural emblems such as "Lord Byron, Chopin, French cooking," and "heroic couplets" (47). Yet, the futility of her invocations is clear to her, as is the paradox of colonialism's enthusiastic self-assertion during the process of its dissolution. In "a dying voice," the Queen remarks: "And we're still too lively, aren't we? Yet all my blood's ebbing away" (47). The dominant "white" voice in Genet's all-black-cast play for a white audience is thus a lively dying voice. This "white" voice is just as performative as the voices of "The Blacks," and while the performance by the black actors within the play refuses to reveal how they may actually feel about the moment of decolonization, the performances by the white Court, Genet seems to suggest, much more closely approximate how white colonizers may actually feel—by displaying a grotesque sentimentalism about the end of a colonial era.

Moreover, Genet intends to shame white people for their sentimentalism. In a brief scene just before the play's conclusion, the masked actors lift their masks, break the fourth wall, and address the (presumably white) audience in the theater:

The One Who Played the Queen: We masked our faces in order to live the loathsome life of the Whites and at the same time to help you sink into shame, but our roles as actors are drawing to a close. (114-15)

Genet thus stages black actors to facilitate the feelings of shame he demands of white people, but he refuses to explore how black Africans indigenous to decolonizing nations may feel about the monumental historical moment of decolonization.

In the play's conclusion, the masked actors once again don their masks, and the actors playing "The Blacks" symbolically kill each member of the royal Court and send them "off to Hell" (118-126), in an ironic gesture intended to horrify Christian colonizers who believe in Hell and missionaries who imported this concept to Africa. Decolonization is thus staged ironically. It must be so because, as Archibald announces, "[t]he time has not yet come for presenting dramas about noble matters" (126). Genet effectively dramatizes the absurdity of colonialism and satirizes Europeans' unwillingness to accept the inevitable end of their imperial rule over, in this case, the African continent, but he does not offer much in the way of hope or a future vision for the black audience members who may decide to attend his play.

Unmasking *Les Blancs*

Hansberry's play *Les Blancs* responds directly to *Les Nègres*, translated into English in 1960 and premiered on Broadway as *The Blacks: A Clown Show* in 1961.⁵ In her *Village Voice* review of *The Blacks*, Hansberry notes that in imagining how black Africans "should behave and feel" based on how "they have been treated" by European colonizers, Genet "has rendered an equation and calculated, one must say reasonably, for a sum" that comprises "an abstraction possessed of great flashes of power and... inventive poetry" ("Thoughts on Genet, Mailer, and the New Paternalism" 14). (Here, my reading of *The Blacks*, differs from Hansberry's, as I maintain that Genet in fact refuses to imagine how colonized Africans may feel. I do, however, generally agree with the rest of her analysis.) However, its artistic merits notwithstanding, Genet's calculation, in Hansberry's view, remains an abstraction that lacks a humanistic understanding of decolonial consciousness. In Genet's play we are "spared the anguish of *man*'s oppression of *man* because the abstraction is utilized to affirm, indeed entrench, the quite

different nature of pain, cruelty, ambition in ‘The Blacks.’ The dramatist does not impress upon us,” Hansberry continues, “the *sameness* of kind which oppressors most despise in the oppressed;” [that] “[i]t is the reflection of *oneself* that most enrages when we are enraged in our crimes against a fellow human creature” (14, second emphasis added).

Hansberry’s review, which also responds to Norman Mailer’s review of *The Blacks*, also dissects the problems with what she calls the “romantic racism” (10) of Genet, Mailer, and other white male critics who romanticize black dispossession as a way out of the perceived existential malaise of their generation’s white (and even black) bourgeoisie. Speaking on behalf of herself and other like-minded black artists and intellectuals, Hansberry opines that “[o]ur life-eating sense of fatigue began with, of course, the appearance of Norman Mailer’s ‘White Negro,’” the essay perhaps most starkly indicative of a tendency “on both sides of the Atlantic” to claim “fraternity” with “what the balance of society is always pleased to hope are ‘the damned’: prostitutes, pimps, thieves, and general down-and-outers of whatever persuasion” (10).

Hansberry also uses her review as an occasion to respond to “the new paternalists” criticisms of her renowned play *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959). She specifically mentions Jonas Mekas, who has understood *Raisin* as “of all things, a play about ‘insurance money’ and/or ‘real estate’” (10) and notes the irony and hypocrisy in self-avowed leftist critics’ refusal to treat her “homely, working-class” play with the same degree of critical sensitivity as work by Genet and Antonioni (14).

Hansberry contends her critics performed “a display of public dishonesty or stupidity by refusing to see that [*Raisin*] was, more than anything else, a long and, perhaps, laborious assault on money values,” alluding to the gradual transformation in the play’s conflicted protagonist Walter Lee Younger, who ultimately refuses to be bribed out of integrating a white neighborhood (14).

The rebuttal of *Raisin*'s critics serves Hansberry's larger purpose of condemning her interlocutors' romanticization of black poverty and dispossession and its attendant demonizing of the black middle class as reactionary, assimilationist, or somehow embodying "white" values. Her response eloquently illuminates the relationship between a willful refusal to appreciate the gravity of black dispossession and a willful misreading of black culture:

[B]lues or no blues, life roots or no life roots, Negroes of *all* classes have made it clear that they want the hell out of the ghetto as fast as the ascendancy of Africa, the courts, insurance money, job upgrading, the threat of "our image overseas," or anything else can thrust them.... Misery may be theatrical to the onlooker but it hurts him who is miserable.

That is what the blues are about. (14, original emphases)

Because these "new paternalists have mistaken [the black person's] oppression for the Negro," "the middle class Negro's search for comfort offends: it is an ugly fall from 'naturalness'" (14). For leftist intellectuals—among them writers such as Meekins, Mailer, and Genet—Hansberry suggests, appear quite confused about the sources and manifestations of oppression, conflating the oppressed subject with an essentialist idea of a racialized subject. The musical tradition of the blues is, for these critics, an expression of an essential nature that somehow thrives in suffering rather than an index of historical and ongoing oppression as well as the necessity for survival under such conditions. It is no wonder, then, that the strivings of the black middle class are offensive to white leftists whose unexamined racism precludes them from distinguishing between a person seeking to survive under systemic political and economic oppression and a fantasy of a person called a "Negro," who is destined to suffer to satisfy a cultural expectation of producing superior and more profound art than white cultural producers who are understood as

“unhip”—because not attuned to “hip” cultural blackness—by Mailer and some of his contemporaries.

While Hansberry’s reference to the “ascendancy of Africa,” when grouped with short-term tactics for economic advancement such as collecting “insurance money,” sounds somewhat flippant, it actually signals her unique perspective in connecting the struggles of black Americans with international struggles for liberation. Throughout the piece she delivers a number of similar seeming “throwaway” lines that in fact gesture toward complex and sophisticated connections between seemingly disparate realms of politics. After inviting her readers’ understanding that black Americans need to access a basic standard of living by whatever means the economy or the state may offer, Hansberry asserts that the “new” white paternalists’ disdain for the black middle class is in fact nothing new but only the latest iteration of “the spectacle of white people insisting on telling all sorts of colored peoples how they should behave to satisfy them” (14). Echoing her mocking allusion to Cold War politics’ role in black American civil rights—“our image overseas”—Hansberry insists that white Americans’ policing of the behavior of “all sorts of” people of color (presumably not only American ones) remains “the most characteristic aspect of the nation’s foreign policy” (14). This brief reference to the US’s monitoring of and working to suppress decolonial movements overseas reads somewhat abruptly in a text primarily concerned with white American paternalistic attitudes towards their fellow black citizens. Yet Mailer’s othering of black people renders them precisely “foreign” to hegemonic understandings of Americanness, which position white male subjects as normative. Hansberry’s attack on the racism of self-avowed leftists such as Mailer thus brings us back to the original occasion for her piece: to review Genet’s *The Blacks*.

For all his strivings for “hipness,” Hansberry’s response leads us to believe, Mailer is no less “square” than a CIA agent spying on the Mau Mau rebels in Kenya, whose revolutionary movement Hansberry’s dramatic response to Genet, her play *Les Blancs*, alludes to. Similarly, Hansberry suggests that for all of his anti-colonial sympathies, Genet’s caricaturesque (if parodic) rendering of Africans’ rage and violence in *The Blacks* reinscribes their racial othering and makes him complicit with a colonial representational regime that dehumanizes the colonized.

It is no wonder that someone like Mailer, who refuses to understand a basic point about Black people’s access to housing and public services, would share Genet’s cynicism toward the idea of a liberatory Black decolonial consciousness. Genet and Mailer, of course, are hardly the same caliber of artist. *The Blacks* is self-aware. Beyond mere cynicism about the future of decolonizing nations, its biting satire also assails a dying colonialism and the racial panic that accompanies it. It is perhaps for this reason that Hansberry’s grouping of Genet and Mailer is so important and revelatory. While Genet mocks Mailer’s brand of romantic racism, he does not venture to imagine what kind of human substance (and political vision) his black characters *do* possess. Despite the sophistication of his play, Genet in the end replaces one brand of racist paternalism with another. His worthy critique of colonial Europe gets lost in what one could argue is not just a satire of white paternalism but also a failed satire of the colonized, on whom he projects his own failure to imagine a truly decolonized world.

Confronting Insurrection: The Expatriate Returns

There are currently two print editions of the text of *Les Blancs*: one from 1972, which is the closest to the script used in the original 1970 productions, and one from 1983. In “A Note

about the 1983 Edition,” Nemiroff explains that a 1980 off-Broadway production of the play presented the opportunity “to reconsider some material which had been cut from the original production for reasons relating less to the text than to the dynamics of that particular mounting—and to sharpen the focus of some passages with small cuts and clarifications” (Hansberry 1983; 35). This chapter’s reading of *Les Blancs* relies primarily on the 1972 edition, whose text is closer to that of Hansberry’s original drafts, currently housed in the Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Books Division of the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

Hansberry’s *Les Blancs* responds to Genet’s essentialist production of racial difference by foregrounding the ethical conflict of the diasporic subject Tshembe Matoseh, a British resident who returns to his African homeland, a fictional country loosely based on Kenya,⁶ for his father’s funeral. Tshembe, who has maintained his childhood emotional ties to the European (Dutch and Scandinavian) missionaries who run a makeshift hospital in the village, is asked to join the violent insurrection against the occupying British forces that would surely obliterate the mission. While Tshembe’s initial hesitation to join the rebel forces counters the idea of a homogenous anti-colonial African consciousness, his character also refuses co-optation by Western liberal universalism and its ahistorical rhetorics of racial colorblindness.

Tshembe frequently refutes such rhetorics in conversations with Charlie, an aptly named white liberal American journalist visiting the Mission, who mistakes the historical antagonism between colonizer and colonized for a racial antagonism marked by the black African’s borderline pathological hatred for the white Westerner. During one of these conversations an exasperated Tshembe confronts Charlie with the question of why it is that he harbors “this absolute *lo-o-onging* for [his] hatred” (54). Tshembe’s response to Charlie’s fantasy of “tribal”⁷ hatred asserts that white Westerners should suspend their projection of feelings onto the

colonized and that what Hansberry sees as Genet's equation of how black Africans should feel based on how they have been treated is, while at first glance reasonable, also arrogant, presumptuous and unhelpful to the anti-colonial struggle.

In another conversation, Tshembe lucidly articulates the crucial distinction between the fiction of race and the material reality of racism, which Charlie fails to grasp: "[R]acism is a device that, of itself, explains nothing," but

it also has consequences: once invented it takes on a life, a reality of its own.... I may recognize the fraudulence of the device, but the fact remains that a man who has a sword run through him because he refuses to become a Moslem or a Christian—or who is shot in Zatembe or Mississippi because he is black—is suffering from the utter *reality* of the device. And it is pointless to pretend that it doesn't *exist*—merely because it is a *lie!* (67, original emphases)

Tshembe thus attempts to impart upon Charlie the importance of addressing and exposing lies of the magnitude and historical consequence of imperialist, racist ideology that cuts across nations and continents; such fateful and noxious lies cannot and will not, as Charlie wishes, evaporate on their own without a process of truth and reconciliation. Pretending that the lie is not a problem is akin to keeping an open secret: sooner or later the tides of history rupture the consensus of collective cognitive dissonance required to sustain the "secret."

Among the open secrets that propel the action in *Les Blancs* is the paternity of Tshembe's biracial brother Eric. The secret is not revealed to outsiders such as Charlie and the audience until late in the play. The racially mixed Eric is also portrayed as a gender and sexual deviant, and Tshembe suspects that his brother's relationship with the mission doctor Willy DeKoven is more intimate than he is comfortable with. Consequently, Tshembe violently, albeit privately, "outs" Eric by snatching his bag and "angrily" emptying its contents, which include "[a] woman's cosmetics! So, Eric," Tshembe charges, "if you cannot quite be a white man you have decided to become a white woman?" (63). Equally offensive to Tshembe is Eric's pith helmet,

which he “cruelly” knocks off of Eric’s head before continuing with his insinuations: “And toys like this! What else does he give you to make you his playtime little white hunter?” (63). While the representation of the putatively queer, white-fathered Eric appears to feed into masculinist pan-Africanist notions of white male effeminacy, Hansberry’s representation of Tshembe’s paternalistic treatment of his brother actually performs a critique of such narratives. “Tenderly” “[r]eaching out to embrace him,” Tshembe beckons Eric to return with him to England where he can be an uncle to Tshembe’s own mixed-race son (63). It is unclear why Tshembe imagines life in England will save Eric from the white men who presumably prey on him; the logic is lost – or perhaps found – in his own savior fantasy and guilt for having abandoned his family in their colonized homeland.

A discrepancy between the 1972 and 1983 editions of the play bears discussion here. Missing from the text of *Les Blancs* revised by Nemiroff in 1983 is a stage direction adding further context to Tshembe’s homophobic observations. In this stage direction, Hansberry literally frames Tshembe’s own “manhood” in quotation marks, immediately preceding his lecture on the distinction between race and racism. Both versions of the text which are currently in print preface his explanation with the direction that he “proceeds with the maximum clarity he can muster” (1972: 67; 1983: 92). The 1972 edition adds the following line absent from the 1983 revision: “It is a challenge that he relishes—for if at this point in life Tshembe can assert his ‘manhood’ in no other satisfactory way, there at least remains this: the power to articulate and define his world for himself without illusion” (67). We could speculate as to why Nemiroff removed this sentence after the play’s original production, but if we are to do justice to Hansberry’s feminist vision, our attention is better spent on the line itself.

Tshembe, at this stage in the narrative, has not yet resolved to join the insurrection and likely wonders what his hesitation suggests about his manhood, if manhood is defined by a resolve to fight injustice by any and every means necessary. Manhood in this context works as a kind of metaphor for true conviction and commitment to action, and Hansberry's scare quotes question the gendered nature of the metaphor as well as the legacy of European liberal Enlightenment that both requires a black man to make his humanity intelligible to a white man and equates "human" with "man," rendering that humanity always already male. Hansberry thus interrogates the misogynist structures of both colonialism and anti-colonial movements as well as a racist discourse that insists a diasporic African subject out himself as such by demonstrating an ability to speak the language of the European or American.

Hansberry proceeds to interrogate this genre of masculinist humanism through an exploration of Tshembe's ambivalence framed by contrasts with the consciousness of each of his brothers. Tshembe, Eric, and his presumably older brother, Abioseh (named after their father), each challenge patrilineal expectations for continuing their father's legacy as a leader in the village in ways that demonstrate their divergent understandings of and positionings with respect to the colonial situation. Tshembe, an expatriate intellectual, adopts a cosmopolitan and universalist perspective, in which he envisions a decolonized Africa and a post-imperialist Europe thriving in peaceful co-existence. Moreover, Tshembe is aware of the contradictions of this position, the difficulties of cultivating a peaceful relationship within a power imbalance derived from multi-century colonial legacies. His perspective is necessarily flawed but also situated within the play as a nuanced middle ground between the diametrically opposed positions of (as the play eventually reveals) a traitorous Abioseh and a militant Eric.

While sympathetic to the nuanced and ambivalent position of an intellectual such as Tshembe, particularly in regard to endorsing violent resistance, Hansberry also problematizes this ambivalence and points to its bankruptcy in moments when colonized people under siege must take swift action. When Tshembe hesitates to join the rebel forces in the village, claiming he is among the “men in the world... who *see* too much to take sides” (70, original emphasis), Ntali, an elder (known to settlers as the servant Peter), reminds Tshembe of the folk tale of Modingo, “the wise hyena who lived between the lands of the elephants and the hyenas” (70). Asked to settle a quarrel over land between elephants and hyenas—the hyenas were on the land first, but the elephants are large and need more land—Modingo asks for time to think. While Modingo thinks, the elephants act—and take over the hyenas’ land. “That is why the hyena laughs until this day and why it is such a terrible laughter,” Ntali explains. “Because it was such a bitter joke that was played upon them while they ‘reasoned’” (71). Tshembe is presented with the choice of interpreting the story as either a cautionary tale or a self-fulfilling prophecy. Finding the comparison between himself and Modingo fatefully accurate, Tshembe ruefully and with “quiet irony—at his own expense” declares: “If they need a Modingo to study the tides while the sea engulfs them—I am their man! But a leader I am not” (71). Seeing the reminder of the folk tale of Modingo has not sufficiently appealed to Tshembe’s reason or emotions (in perhaps summoning an expatriate’s nostalgia for the folklore of his motherland), Ntali calls on Tshembe to fulfill his father’s legacy.

Peter: Then become one! (*Tshembe turns away. Peter plays his ace in the hole.*)

Tshembe, your father—(*Softly—so as not to be overheard by anyone*) was my commander in the Freedom of the Land Army.

Tshembe: (*Staring at him, incredulous.*) My father? (*He is quiet as the revelation sinks in.*) You mean my father approved—?

Peter: (*Pointedly.*)—*Conceived*, Tshembe.

While Tshembe does not agree to join Peter/Ntali and his soldiers in armed resistance, Ntali's invocation of Tshembe's father and his role in the creation of a resistance army fundamentally transforms Tshembe's relationship to the idea of violent insurrection. Although Tshembe warns Ntali that the "few rifles and the spears of our fathers" (72) in the possession of his soldiers are hardly adequate to fight an occupying colonial army, the *ideals* of his father and the idea that he must do justice to his father's legacy shifts his understanding of the situation much closer to Ntali's. The word "conceived," not accidentally emphasized by Ntali, helps to mobilize a patrilineal understanding of legacy that ultimately compels Tshembe to think and act in a manner more closely approximating the subjectivity of a guerilla revolutionary than that of a cosmopolitan intellectual. Entering the scene as Peter/Ntali exits, Abioseh, oblivious to his role in the insurrection asks Tshembe for the reason of the former's visit. "He came to remind us that we are supposed to be our father's sons" (74), responds Tshembe, clearly moved by the elder's revelation and wishing Abioseh would have chosen a path more closely aligned with the patrilineal legacy carried by his name.

The Queer Rebel

Although Ntali clearly influences Tshembe's attitude toward the insurrection, it is from a conversation with his younger brother Eric, whose paternity and queerness subvert the heteronormative model of patriarchal lineage and legacy Tshembe finds so compelling, that Tshembe is able to gain greater clarity about the stakes of the rebel movement and his

participation in it. While the exchange with Peter/Ntali awakens Tshembe to the fact that he, through a familial connection, is more implicated in the actions of the rebels than his chosen position as an intellectual with critical and geographical distance from the decolonial struggle may have initially allowed, this exchange leaves Tshembe's ambivalence about the movement intact. Opposed to violence and its use against the doctors and missionaries whom he also considers family, Tshembe attempts to convince Ntali that the violent insurrection has already achieved its effects. The settlers, Tshembe argues, have been sufficiently scared by acts of violent resistance and are ready to negotiate with local leaders who demand self-governance (72-73). When the colonial government betrays the disingenuousness of previous promises to negotiate by arresting local leader Amos Kumalo on charges of "conspiracy," Tshembe's ambivalence turns to cynicism. Interrupting a confrontation between his two brothers, a discouraged and inebriated Tshembe mocks Eric's revolutionary fervor:

Abioseh: What do you know about any of it?

Eric: I know it is time to drive the invaders into the sea. And that *I* shall carry the spear and shield of our father.

Tshembe: (*Amused.*) You are half European. Which part of yourself will you drive into the sea?

Eric: I am African enough not to mock when my people call!

Tshembe: And what will you do when your doctor calls, Eric? It takes more than a spear to make a man.

Eric: (*Fighting tears of fury. Lashing out.*) What does it take, Tshembe? You teach me! What does it take to be a man? A white wife and son?

Eric's claim to the warrior legacy, the spear and shield, of their father, the old Abioseh, carries an implicit critique of the biologically essentialist, heteropatriarchal nationalist narratives, and their attendant constructions of masculinity, that inform Tshembe's understandings of that same legacy. Unlike Tshembe, the queer and "half-European" Eric has no ambivalence about participating in an anti-colonial insurrection. While Tshembe cannot decide if he wants to claim Africanness—on the one hand it is important for him to participate in the funeral rites for his father wearing the traditional clothing reserved for such rituals, and on the other, he informs Peter/Ntali that he "can longer think of [himself as a Kwi" but "[o]nly as a man" (70)—Eric observably "knows who he is." In response to Peter/Ntali's observations of Tshembe's cultural ambiguity—"Tshembe Matoseh, the Wanderer—who has come from Europe with the white man's tongue.... I hope you do not have his heart" (73-4)—Tshembe can only resort to deflection that targets Eric's racial hybridity and homophobic jabs at his masculinity. Eric is well aware that Tshembe, too, cannot conform to the heteropatriarchal expectations of reproducing a cultural and biological lineage and takes the opportunity to in turn expose Tshembe's apparent failings. Notably, all three sons exhibit pronounced failures in fulfilling their father's legacy—Abioseh in his colonized mentality and missionary work, Tshembe through his expatriation and interracial marriage, and Eric through his queer relationship with a European settler. Ironically, the queer and racially "mixed" Eric, who is, in the most literal and biological sense, not his father's son, is closest to inheriting the quality most relevant to the action of the play: old Abioseh's anti-colonial warrior spirit.

Tshembe and Abioseh share a paternalistic attitude toward Eric and argue over which one of them should act as his guardian. Tshembe wishes to take Eric with him to London, while Abioseh announces his plans to send Eric to a Catholic monastery.

Tshembe: [...] Eric would only run off.

Abioseh: They have ways at St. Cyprian's to keep boys from running off.

Tshembe: [...] Yes, come to think of it, they must.

Abioseh: (*Looking back at Eric.*) Father Mettinger would make him welcome.

Tshembe: (*Suggestively*) No doubt. (86)

Tshembe's opposition to Christian indoctrination bears a clear relationship to his previously stated concerns about Eric as target for sexually predatory white men. At the same time, he once again fails to coherently explain how London would benefit Eric, and remains unconvincing, especially in the face of Eric's passion for his motherland and devotion to the anti-colonial movement. Eric decisively rejects both of his brothers' proposals:

Eric: No. I am staying here—where I belong! (*Sits up. To Tshembe, pleading.*) They call me by the name my mother gave me—

Tshembe: (*Derisively.*) –Ngedi! (*He is mocking at the impulse toward national pride—the 'tired' revolutionary who cannot bear to face the pure, innocent fervor of the newborn revolutionary—who is, nonetheless, doing what he knows he should be doing.*)

Eric: Yes. Ngedi. They have asked me to take the oath. (87)

Perhaps the fact that he is not his father's son, that he is not the son of either of his fathers—the father of his brothers or the rapist of his mother—is not just incidental but formative in Eric's anti-colonial consciousness. For, much more fatefully, he is his mother's son, and he carries the legacy of the woman warrior who died giving birth to a queer rebel; perhaps the same woman warrior whom Hansberry envisioned as the protagonist in the earliest drafts of *Les Blancs*.⁸ A queer warrior, Eric fights colonialism alongside the patriarchal and nationalist allegorization of his mother as the ravaged African continent. That the queer Eric, conceived through a colonizer's

rape barely discussed by the characters in the play, is the most militant of the three brothers serves as Hansberry's most strident condemnation of the nationalist narratives of masculinity that only reinscribe colonial discourses even as they are putatively mobilized towards anti-colonial aims. Similarly condemning of such narratives is the simple naming of the traitorous son Abioseh. Performatively named as an intended copy of his father, Abioseh much more closely copies his mother's rapist, the British military Major George Rice, in his beliefs about the benefits of colonialism and Christianity for a previously "undeveloped" and heathen African nation.

Whiteness and Decolonization

We do not learn much about the relationship between Eric and Mission doctor Willy DeKoven beyond what is suggested in the brief exchange in which Tshembe confronts Eric over receiving gifts from DeKoven, including feminizing accessories such as a compact mirror and facial makeup marketed for women. In response to Tshembe's insinuations about his relationship with DeKoven, Eric offers a simple defense: "He is kind. No one else is kind. You and Abioseh were gone" (63). Having abandoned Eric for the metropole and the priesthood, respectively, neither Tshembe nor Abioseh can lay a legitimate claim to the role of a mentor for Eric. Yet, it is not so much that Willy DeKoven becomes a last resort for Eric's quest for love and companionship; he is, rather, a logical choice. The colonial situation makes intimacy with settlers inevitable. Tshembe, too, shares an intimacy with Madame Neilsen, albeit a platonic one. The kind settler becomes a friend and romantic partner of Eric's by virtue of his proximity to him. We are oriented, as Sara Ahmed reminds us, toward objects within our reach (15). It is not so much that colonialism makes Eric queer. An orientation or attraction towards a privileged settler

is in many ways normative. And while homophobia in a homophobic person can be sparked at the slightest provocation, it is perhaps exactly the non-spectacular and predictable nature of the relationship between Eric and DeKoven that makes it all the more infuriating for Tshembe. A homosexual relationship with a settler, despite everything it symbolizes under the interpretive rubric of nationalist and patriarchal anti-colonialism, is in the end hardly sensational when placed alongside the larger context of colonial plunder and genocide.

DeKoven's ability to grasp and poignantly articulate the nature and magnitude of these larger violences may, however, result in a more meaningful relationship with Eric than would a simple intimacy with a "kind" but less conscious settler. Relieving Tshembe of the maddening task of educating a liberal American about the dangers of liberal "solutions" to the daily horrors of life under colonialism, DeKoven explains the counterproductive nature of his own philanthropic work to Charlie Morris. DeKoven and his physician colleague Marta Goterling work in an unsanitary makeshift hospital that in and of itself symbolizes the larger disparities in basic standards of human living created by colonialism. As Tshembe tells Charlie in an earlier scene, "[I]n your own country you would not be paying tribute to this place, you would be campaigning to get it closed!" (68). DeKoven debunks the racist rationale provided by Marta Goterling for the hospital's existence in its present condition, which Charlie happily accepts—that "the African wouldn't come" (91) to a hospital resembling that which is standard in wealthier nations, explaining that "the struggle here has not been to push the African into the Twentieth Century—but at all costs to keep his *away* from it!" (91, original emphasis). Further, DeKoven acknowledges his own complicity, though his philanthropic work as a doctor, in normalizing colonial subjugation:

DeKoven: [...] I came here twelve years ago believing that I could—it seems so incredible now—help alleviate suffering by participating actively in the very institutions that help sustain it.

Charlie: You're not suggesting that lives have not been saved here, Doctor? Why, you alone...

DeKoven: Oh, I have saved hundreds of lives [...] and, in so doing, if you will please try to understand, I have helped provide the rationale for genocide. (92)

Charlie does not understand, and DeKoven therefore attempts to relate, through an anecdote, the extent of the structural violence that his philanthropy helps disguise. DeKoven recalls a bygone era when peaceful delegations of Kwi led by the old Abioseh would ask the Mission's Reverend Neilsen's advice before petitioning the colonial government for rights to their own land. The Reverend would meet with the delegations but provide little help, and the petitions would yield little success. "[T]hey were invariably herded on *less* land, the taxes were raised *higher*—or something" (93, original emphases). Failing to have basic and reasonable demands met, the delegations opted for a new strategy: to demand the impossible. During their last visit to the Mission, the members of old Abioseh's delegation announced they "were petitioning, of all things, to govern the colony; quite like that" (93). In demanding the impossible—impossible as long as colonial governance remains intact—the Kwi delegation forces the Reverend to articulate without equivocation how directly he is aligned with the agents of colonial violence, his philanthropy notwithstanding. DeKoven does not simply narrate but performs this part of the story, achieving a dramatic effect that renders his philanthropic work continuous with the Reverend's:

DeKoven: (*He is standing on the very spot, acutely recalling the moment.*) Yes. He had the most extraordinary expression when he finished reading the petition and he put it down—like this, you know— (*In telling, he has become the Reverend—so much so that Charlie—and we—are actually catapulted back in time to that fateful day.*) And he stood up and wiped his glasses and then put them back on, and he smiled at them and they smiled back as they always did, and then he walked among them, his arms outstretched, saying, “Children, children... my dear children... go home to your huts before you make me angry. *Independence indeed!*” [...] [U]ntil that moment, standing here, *I* hadn’t understood in the least, not the slightest, any different than he. The fact that it was all over was in the face of the second old man there, Abioseh. (94, original emphases)

In the moment of the Reverend’s rejection of the delegation’s demands, DeKoven understands that he is the same as the Reverend. He understands that until this moment he has been equally aligned with the colonial project in its full subjugation and cruelty. The Reverend’s reaction acts as a turning point marking the emergence of DeKoven’s anti-colonial consciousness. What DeKoven does not understand until much later is the meaning of the look in old Abioseh’s eyes. For Abioseh’s expression communicates “the fact that it was all over” not for the decolonial cause but for the settlers. DeKoven remembers, with nostalgia but also with hope, the delegation’s “pitiful piece of paper with its awkward syntax and utterly lucid demands which presumed to do what was and remains impossible: *ask* for freedom!” (94, original emphasis). DeKoven understands that the delegation’s demand remains impossible because one cannot ask for freedom; one must take it. And at the time of his reenactment of these events, DeKoven further comes to understand that the exhaustion of various delegations’ non-violent demands for

freedom and justice prefigures a bloody end to all colonial agents, including missionary clergy and doctors.

“They will murder us here one day—isn’t that so, Tshembe?” DeKoven asks, “undramatically,” seemingly resigned to his fate and capable of analytic detachment (94). Unlike Genet, Hansberry gives us a white character with a sober, unsentimental understanding of the necessity of his death in an anti-colonial revolution. Hansberry nonetheless gives a nod to Genet’s poignant representation of the grotesque sentimentality with which colonialism prepares for its own funeral. DeKoven continues:

And the press of the world will send a shudder through men everywhere. It will seem the crowning triumph of bestial absurdity. We pillars of man’s love for man rewarded for our pains: our very throats slit ear to ear by rampaging savages. [...] No, my friend, do not let the drums, the skins and the mumbo-jumbo fool you. We might as well stop pretending it is the middle of the night because the sun really *is* starting to rise in the world. *They* are quite prepared to die to be allowed to bring it to Africa. It is *we* who are not prepared. To allow it *or* to die. (94, original emphases)

Whereas Tshembe rightfully refuses Charlie’s invitations for a “man-to-man” (page #?) dialogue within a symbolic order that does not allow Charlie to fully see Tshembe as a “man” (a designation problematically equated with “human”), DeKoven instead opts for a sober colonizer-to-colonizer talk with the American. DeKoven shares Genet’s understanding of the “bestial absurdity” with which imperialist hegemony and its propaganda machines regard Africans who have exhausted every non-violent attempt to decolonize their land and societies. Africans “cannot be reasoned with” according to colonial logic, but this is so precisely because colonial power has refused every attempt at reason which recognizes the humanity and sovereignty of the

colonized. What Genet attempts to achieve through satire that risks reinscribing the racist, colonial tropes it seeks to expose and critique, Hansberry endeavors to do through a sobering soliloquy. If one approach to decolonization is to stage a conversation in which whites talk to other whites, as Genet does in *Les Nègres*, then, Hansberry seems to suggest, here is what they should say. Charlie is included in the “we” of colonizers who will die despite, or perhaps because of, their lack of preparedness to do so. He cannot be included in the “we” of the universal humanity he would like to share with Tshembe until he accepts his position in a colonial hierarchy as well as his place in a decolonized future.

In her analysis of *Les Blancs*, Cheryl Higashida makes the case for a relationship between DeKoven’s ability to empathize with the subjectivity of the Africans among whom he lives and his homosexuality. Higashida argues that Hansberry represents “homosexuality as a site of interracial, international reciprocity, thus countering the sexualized, racial othering that underpinned Genet’s cynicism about anticolonial struggle” (914), and, moreover, puts Hansberry’s imagining of interracial reciprocity in conversation with Fanon’s reflections on the relationship between violence and liberation in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961):

Like Fanon, Hansberry believes that in risking their lives in violent struggle, the colonized can become psychologically as well as politically liberated subjects [...].

Unlike Fanon, however, Hansberry explores forms of interracial reciprocity possible even within the Manichean colonial world. (914)

I similarly see a relationship between queer sexuality and interracial reciprocity but would like to complicate this argument by emphasizing that the attempted reciprocity is not only interracial and international, but, much more troublingly, one between colonizer and colonized. DeKoven’s capacity for reciprocity with black Africans is accompanied by an understanding of the colonial

situation that suggests his death may be necessary for the process of decolonization. In DeKoven's case (and, as I will show, also in Madame Neilsen's), interracial reciprocity informed by a decolonial consciousness, does subscribe to a binary, if not exactly a Manichean division, between colonizer and colonized and a binary distribution of life and death through violence. Co-existence under colonial conditions is not viable in DeKoven's view or Hansberry's. For DeKoven specifically, decolonization can only occur if the colonizer's existence on the colonized's land is extinguished.

And while, as I argue above, the fact of Eric's relationship with DeKoven is not an especially spectacular event for Eric in the context of life under colonialism, DeKoven's relationship with Eric may be radical for DeKoven. His reference to "man's love for man" in the rousing speech he delivers to Charlie in Tshembe's presence queers a missionary platitude by expressing an emotionally and politically profound meaning for DeKoven. His relationship with Eric subverts the Mission's mission of indoctrinating the Kwi into Christian morality by directly defying its puritanical and heteropatriarchal sexual prohibitions and their colonial aims. Beyond the goal of ideological colonization that creates what Fanon, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, has called the "colonized intellectual" (38) often seen in the character of Tshembe, and the collaborator personified in Abioseh, Christian indoctrination, particularly through its sexual prohibitions, enforces a narrowly circumscribed definition of love designed to foreclose the possibilities for radical empathy produced by queer sexuality. *Les Blancs* presents two examples of sexual encounters between colonizer and colonized: the heterosexual rape that led to the birth of Eric and the death of his mother and the queer relationship between Eric and DeKoven that has provided Eric with kind companionship and DeKoven with a radical consciousness. Within the logic of this contrast, the queer relationship in *Les Blancs* signifies unambiguously as a

harbinger of hope and healing, even as it emerges from conditions of possibility created by colonial violence. DeKoven's acceptance that an indigenous inhabitant of the land—perhaps even his lover—may murder him in the name of liberation, and justly so, is not only a recognition of his own complicity in that violence but also a dedication to decolonial justice that carries with it a revolutionary defiance of colonial declarations, made explicitly by Major George Rice, that a white life is worth more than a black one (76).

Decolonization, Mutuality, and Hospitality

Madame Neilsen, the wife of the reverend who founded the Mission, shares DeKoven's politics. Her solidarity with the colonized is not informed by queer sexuality but a rather normative and by all appearances classically colonial role as a female educator of the colonized who forms a maternal relationship with Tshembe and his brothers. In the play's penultimate scene, "Tshembe sits cross-legged at her feet, his head resting gently against her" (101). In this final manifestation of interracial mutuality in the play, Tshembe and Madame Neilsen share a moment of familial tenderness, as Madame Neilsen suggests she is preparing to die. "At my age one only goes home to die," Madame Neilsen explains in response to Tshembe's question concerning whether she will stay on the land in the wake of Reverend Neilsen's death at the hand of rebel warriors and the subsequent establishment of colonial Marshall Law by Major Rice. "I am already home" (101). Madame Neilsen remains a colonizer even in death, understanding the colonized land as her "home," and is moreover quite aware of the symbolism of her death *on* this colonized land. Like DeKoven, she understands her death as an augur of a just future for the colonized.

The relationship between Tshembe and Madame Neilsen as colonized and colonizer is especially complicated given Madame Neilsen's role in Tshembe's family history. This final conversation between her and Tshembe reveals the extent of her maternal role, played at the scene of Eric's birth, when she delivers Eric against the wishes of her husband, who wills Eric's death as well as his mother's, and allows his mother to die in childbirth. "I do not think most missionaries' wives would have delivered that child," Tshembe tells Madame Neilsen "affectionately" (102). As long as colonialism exists, so do affectionate and erotic relationships between colonizer and colonized as well as relationships between colonizers with diametrically opposed views on their respective roles in colonialism. Scripts for intra-racial, intra-national, and monogamous heterosexuality allow Madame and Reverend Neilsen to co-exist in a relationship despite their being at war ideologically.

Yet the appearance of peaceable co-existence is in fact only an appearance. "[Reverend Neilsen] never forgave me for interfering," Madame Neilsen reveals. "He never spoke of it again after that night—nor, as you know, acknowledged the existence of Eric" who "was the living denial of everything he stood for: the testament to three centuries of rape and self-acquittal" (102). Because of Madame Neilsen's humanitarian intervention, the Reverend, in lieu of murder, is left with sustained acts of symbolic and psychological violence against Eric: the persistent refusal to acknowledge his existence. His refusal to forgive Madame for her act of defiance likely manifested in ongoing and similarly silent punishments and acts of erasure. While she experiences a different form of violence from Eric, the retaliation she suffers aligns her subjectivity with his. Both colonizer and advocate for the colonized, Madame Neilsen becomes an ambiguous figure. Due to this ambiguity and her relationship with Tshembe, she is uniquely suited to address Tshembe's ambivalence about taking part in violent anti-colonial struggle.

Madame Neilsen encourages, one could even say, instigates Tshembe by following her recollection of his mother's death at the hands of the Mission with the question, "Do you—hate us terribly, Tshembe?" (103). Tshembe responds very differently than he does to a similar question from the American liberal (and newcomer) Charlie, who asks this question with the opposite intent: to sway Tshembe towards participating in the absurd project of achieving peace with colonial powers. I quote this conversation between Tshembe and Madame at length because of how thoroughly it illustrates the dynamics of their relationship, Tshembe's hesitation and ambivalence, and their respective relationships to the rather complicated concept of "home":

Tshembe: Madame, I have seen your mountains. Europe—in spite of all her crimes—has been a great and glorious star in the night. Other stars shone before it—and will again *with it. (Lightly, smiling at his own imagery.)* The heavens, as *you* taught me, are broad and can afford a galaxy.

Madame: And what of *your* mountains, Tshembe? Your beautiful hills. What will you do now?

Tshembe: *(She has touched a nerve and it is very painful.)* What will I *do*? Madame, I know what I'd like to do. I'd like to become an expert at diapering my son... to sit in Hyde Park with a faded volume of Shakespeare and come home to a dinner of fried bananas and kidney pie and— *(He is fighting tears now as a terrible anguish rises within him.)* turn the phonograph up loud, loud, until the congo drums throb with unbearable sweetness [...]. I'd like—I'd like my brothers with me. Eric—and Abioseh [...]. I want to go *home*. It seems your mountains have become mine, Madame.

Madame: Have they, Tshembe?

Tshembe: I think so. I thought so. I no longer know [...]. I am lying, Madame. To myself and to you. I *know* what I must do...

Madame: (*Simply.*) Then do it, Tshembe.

Tshembe: (*Desperately.*) But when I think of... (*He lowers his head to touch the top of hers.*) *Help me, Madame.*

Madame: [...] I once taught you that a line goes on into infinity, unless it is bisected. Our country needs *warriors*, Tshembe Matoseh. Africa needs warriors. Like your father.

Tshembe: (*Staring at her.*) You knew about my father...

Madame: *Warriors*, Tshembe. Now more than ever. (*Abruptly, but gently.*) Goodbye, child. Now leave me with my husband [...]. (103-104, original emphases)

Here Hansberry introduces another model of interracial, international, colonizer-colonized mutuality—a model of hospitality in which the two *exchange* homes. Madame claims Africa as her home, while Tshembe claims Europe as his. Tshembe's country is Madame's adopted home, and her mountains in Europe have become his. Both Madame and Tshembe, however, understand that while this model of hospitality and cosmopolitan exchange may suit their relationship, it is not a viable one for Europeans and Africans more generally as long as Africa is still colonized by Europe. The cosmopolitan Tshembe claims Hyde Park, Shakespeare, and congo drums as his, and expresses an expatriate's longing to permanently reunite with his family in one geographical place, where the fantasy of this place is often that it is a place unplagued by the problems of his native land.

Madame awakens Tshembe from a dream, perhaps through her claim to his homeland ("our land," original emphasis) as much as her exhortations that this land needs warriors. While colonialism allows Tshembe's home to become hers, her home can never become his as long as

it controls the resources of and governance over his people. Under Major Rice's military control, in these final scenes, the landscape Tshembe calls his home is showered with deadly explosives in an act of retaliation for Reverend Neilsen's death and attempted repression of the insurrection. As "the surge of live drums" on stage in one of these scenes "replaces and at last drowns out the sound [effects] of [military] destruction" (97), a "poet-warrior" named Ngago mobilizes resistance against the occupying army.

Les Blancs ends on a note of triumph as well as a cry of grief. An empowered Eric hurls a grenade at the Mission, destroying an institution both symbolic and iterative of the ideological colonial violences of racism, sexism, and homophobia that killed Eric's mother and produced him as a queer outcast within his family. With the destruction of the mission and death of Reverend Nielsen, Eric is vindicated and his mother avenged. Yet the violence of the play's finale also proves devastating for Tshembe, who is driven to kill his traitorous brother Abioseh in response to Abioseh's revelation of Peter/Ntali's identity as a revolutionary to the occupying forces which subsequently kill Ntali, and who embraces "Madame's lifeless body" (106) after she is shot by revolutionary warriors.

In the play's final sentence, Tshembe "throws back his head to emit an animal-like cry of grief" (106). Unlike Tshembe, Madame Neilsen understands the finality of her goodbye in the earlier scene, and unlike Genet's Queen, she gracefully accepts and resolutely awaits her fate. Perhaps his cry of grief, in addition to the immediate emotion it signals, is also indicative of the clarity (intellectual and visceral) he has gained about the necessity of revolutionary violence, and of having gained this clarity too late. Tshembe threatens Abioseh with a spear when he learns that his brother intends to betray Peter/Ntali but cannot kill him then, only to do so in the play's tragic resolution after Ntali, too, has been killed.

This tragic unraveling, coupled with Eric's triumphant and exuberant participation in the insurrection, culminates in an ambivalent conclusion. We are reminded that Hansberry could not finish this play due to her own death, tragic in its untimeliness, at age thirty-four. This ambivalent ending is admittedly unsatisfying to a scholar inspired by Hansberry's queer and feminist decolonial vision. It is tempting to blame Nemiroff, the straight white ex-husband of a black lesbian visionary, for concluding the play with the tragic ambivalence of the heterosexual male protagonist, a punctuating finish of too many dramas that can hardly be called queer, feminist, or decolonial. Genet's *Master of Ceremonies*, Archibald Absalom Wellington, concludes *The Blacks* by declaring that "the time has not yet come for presenting dramas about noble matters" (126). Nemiroff appears to say the opposite: that the time has not yet come to stop presenting dramas about noble matters, that we as audiences are not yet ready to relinquish our investment in glorifying the ambivalence of an arguably reactionary heterosexual male hero. Tshembe accepts a colonizer as his surrogate mother and rejects his brother's queerness even while being inspired by the rebellious spirit this queerness cultivates.

We cannot, however, lay the blame on Nemiroff. It does not lie with him or with anyone else. Hansberry, in her drafts, very much struggled with Tshembe's ambivalence. She did not write the female protagonist she envisioned in her earliest notes, and opted instead for a more traditional hero, instructive in his limitations. Tshembe's cry of grief is perhaps Nemiroff's in the face of his complicated love for Lorraine and her shockingly premature death. Or it is perhaps the cry of the unfulfilled promise. We do not have the black queer female revolutionary protagonist Hansberry may have given us had she lived to see the Gay Liberation movement. But we do have Eric, Tshembe's queer revolutionary conscience, to inspire us in our own decolonizing projects.

Notes

Introduction

¹ See Margot Canaday, *The Straight State* (2009).

² The framing of my project both riffs on the title of Grace Hong and Roderick Ferguson's *Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization* (2011) and engages with Hong and Ferguson's project of "imagining alternative modes of coalition beyond prior models of racial and ethnic solidarity based on a notion of homogeneity or similarity" (Hong and Ferguson 1).

³ I understand "white feminism," a prevalent term in debates on political organizing in recent years, to refer to a brand of feminism practiced predominantly by middle-to-upper-class cisgender white women that ignores how gender-based oppression intersects with other forms of oppression, thus rendering invisible the struggles of the majority of women in the world.

⁴ See D'Emilio (2003).

⁵ See Bell-Scott (2016), Randolph (2015), and Theoharis (2013).

⁶ See Samuel Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* (New York University Press), 1999.

Chapter 1

¹ See the chapter "Killing Sympathies: Racial Liberalism and Race Novels" in Melamed's *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism* (2011).

² I develop the idea of the uncanny and its relevance to a queering of racial liberalism in the next chapter.

³ I elaborate on the vulnerable position of the lover in the following chapter.

⁴ Kevin Floyd builds on the theories of Michael Kimmel to argue that US masculinity formations beginning in the early twentieth century are accurately described via a Butlerian model of gender performance, whereas earlier, nineteenth-century formations, more closely resemble a model of "manhood" judged by qualities thought to be internal, rather than externalized and performed. I further elaborate on this distinction in my analysis of James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* (1956) in the third chapter of this dissertation. See Floyd (2009) and Kimmel (1996).

⁵ I frame the word "race" in scare quotes when used as a noun to designate a racialized group of people, as this use of the word "race" has long been proven to be a fiction created by eugenicist scientific discourse. The fiction of biological race, however, has created a markedly non-fictional concept of sociological race. While there is no such thing as "a race" of people, race as a category of social division and political and economic disenfranchisement has remained, since shortly after the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade, among the most important concepts for understanding the uneven distribution of resources, freedom, violence, life, and death in our world. For a history of the development of the modern concept of race in relation to the Atlantic slave trade, see Mbembe 2017.

⁶ Hardly an advocate for queer experimentation with Lacan's formulae, Fink has even suggested that lesbian parent couples, gay male parent couples, and single parents are more likely to raise

psychotic children than their heterosexual couple counterparts. In a lengthy footnote, Fink writes: “Given how frequently the traditional family structure already fails, despite centuries of dividing love and Law between the sexes in considerably codified sex roles, what are the chances that both roles will be played by one parent alone or by two parents raised into similarly codified sex roles? Isn’t the incidence of psychosis likely to rise in such cases?” (*Clinical Introduction* 111.n71).

⁷ Judith Butler asks, rhetorically, “whether the notion of a lack taken from psychoanalysis as that which secures the contingency of *any* and *all* social formations is itself a presocial principle universalized at the cost of every consideration of power, sociality, culture, politics, which regulates the relative closure and openness of social practices” (1993, 202, emphases in the original).

⁸ The question of sex vs. gender was settled in 1990 by Butler’s argument that “sex” is no more prediscursive than gender—“sex” was “gender all along” (1990, 11)—yet many scholars continue to ignore Butler’s groundbreaking intervention, an obstinacy that speaks to the deeply entrenched influence of patriarchy and sexism in our institutions as well as its relationship to a persistent unwillingness to abandon binary thinking in favor of more imaginative modes of intellectual and creative engagement.

⁹ See Miranda Kronfeld, “How to Deal with Insomnia while Your Boyfriend Sleeps the Effortless Sleep of the Unoppressed Beside You,” *Reductress* 28 January 2019, Web.

¹⁰ I discuss Laura’s lesbianism in the final section of this chapter.

¹¹ Nonnie is described as light-skinned elsewhere in the novel, but here, on page 301, is the first mention of her as “mulatto.” While this is not a central motif in the novel, I explain in the next section how Smith may be alluding to and revising the trope of the “tragic mulatto.”

Chapter 2

¹ I examine the problematic achievement of queer freedom through U.S. imperialism, known today as homonationalism, in the concluding section of this chapter.

² I borrow this term from Gayatri Gopinath who “use[s] the notion of impossibility as a way of signaling the unthinkability of a queer female subject position within various mappings of nation and diaspora” (15). While McCullers’ historical context is markedly distinct from that of the South Asian public cultures Gopinath addresses, “impossible desire” strikes me as an appropriate term for a queer female instinct to disrupt white, American, heteronormative marriage. See Gopinath, *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures* (Durham and London: Duke UP, 2005).

³ To Berenice’s charge that Frankie is jealous of her brother because he is getting married, Frankie responds: “I couldn’t be jealous of one of them without being jealous of them both. I sociate the two of them together” (17). I am hyphenating “Janice-Jarvis” to highlight Frankie’s understanding of the pair as a single entity, as opposed to two people separable from one another, and her desire for that entity rather than its individual members.

⁴ By “agency,” a term that evokes a number of connotations and associations, I mean very simply the state of being a subject who is capable of action.

⁵ See Judith Butler’s “Imitation and Gender Insubordination” in *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories* (1991).

⁶ The first meaning of “creep” in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is “the action of creeping; slow or stealthy motion,” found in literary examples from 1818 (Keats), 1842 (Wordsworth), and 1862 (G.W. Thornbury). The *OED*’s second definition is of “a sensation as of things creeping over one’s body; a nervous shrinking or shiver of dread or horror. Usually in *pl.*, *the creeps* or *cold creeps* (colloq.)” Additionally, Freud maintains that the uncanny “belongs... to all that arouses dread and creeping horror.” “creepy, adj,” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2014, Web, 22 January 2015; Freud 1.

⁷ See Eve Sedgwick’s *Between Men: English Literature and Homosocial Desire* (1985).

⁸ In “Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification,” Judith Butler reads Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia” and *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* to demonstrate that masculine and feminine gender identity formations are coextensive with the production of heterosexuality and that such identifications are “the effects of laborious and uncertain accomplishment” and “are established in part through prohibitions which *demand the loss* of certain sexual attachments, and demand as well that those losses *not* be avowed, and *not* be grieved” (135; original emphasis).

⁹ Jasbir Puar adopts Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s concept of an assemblage to theorize a post-identity queer subject. For Deleuze and Guattari, an assemblage is both a multiplicity and an “increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes as it expands its connections” (Deleuze and Guattari 8 in Puar 212). In this sense, both Janice-Jarvis and Frankie are assemblages; Janice-Jarvis are among the various multiplicities that comprise Frankie’s larger assemblage of social connections.

¹⁰ Ludie Freeman is Berenice’s deceased ex-husband and the love of her life.

¹¹ Significantly, Berenice marries Ludie when she is thirteen years old, only a year older than Frankie, and so, both Berenice and Frankie meet their first true loves in early adolescence.

¹² McCullers uses the term “jail” colloquially in the text, and the text suggests that the building is used as both a jail and a prison.

¹³ Adrienne Rich defines compulsory heterosexuality as “the enforcement of heterosexuality for women as a means of assuring male right of physical, economic, and emotional access.” Rich also emphasizes that “heterosexuality has been both forcibly and subliminally imposed on women. Yet everywhere women have resisted it, often at the cost of imprisonment, psychosurgery, social ostracism, and extreme poverty.” This capacity for resistance, of course, crucially distinguishes women from dolls, and portraying women as dolls is among myriad tactics of obscuring the options of resistance and non-consent. See Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence,” 647, 653).

¹⁴ Rich quotes Catharine MacKinnon in reference to the continuum between normative heterosexual sex and rape: “As one accused rapist put it, he hadn’t used ‘any more force than is usual for males during the preliminaries’” (qtd. in Rich 642).

¹⁵ A fascinating counterpoint to the behavior of the Freaks in *The Member of the Wedding* is the representation of circus freaks who do have an agenda to incorporate and outsider into their group despite her lack of consent in Tod Browning’s 1932 film *Freaks*.

¹⁶ Wittig argues that lesbians are outside the heterosexual contract—a compulsory arrangement of male and female bodies and desires—because lesbians are also outside “the categories of sex (woman and man).” Wittig’s “heterosexual contract” largely inspires Judith Butler’s concept of “the heterosexual matrix.” While I do not think “lesbian” is the most appropriate term for Frankie’s emerging queer sexuality, her rejection of compulsory heterosexuality puts her in a

similar category to that of “lesbian” as used by Wittig. See Wittig, *The Straight Mind* (Boston: Beacon, 1992) and Butler, *Gender Trouble* (New York and London: Routledge, 1990).

¹⁷ See Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages* (2007).

¹⁸ See Margot Canaday, *The Straight State* (2009).

¹⁹ See Lisa Duggan’s “The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism” (2002).

²⁰ See Roland Barthes, “Soap-powders and Detergents” in *Mythologies* (1957).

Chapter 3

¹ Here and elsewhere in the essay I use “performance” and “perform” as umbrella terms that encompass more specific performance-related designations such as the performative (as derived from “performativity”), the theatrical, and the tragic.

² Rolland Murray argues that Baldwin’s critiques of patriarchy and masculinity are more comprehensive in his fiction than in his essays and more rigorous in his writing as a whole prior to 1964, a year Murray identifies as the start of Baldwin’s increasingly uncritical acceptance of masculinist Black Power ideology. I am not suggesting that the essays necessarily clarify what Baldwin is attempting to accomplish in his fiction; the two genres are clearly doing different kinds of work. However, these essays do articulate theoretical and political positions that inform his fictional work.

³ Baldwin does not offer an analogous statement to characterize mature womanhood. Although the essay argues that conformity to rigid gender roles is responsible for “the debasement of the relationship between the sexes” (1949/88, 595), its main concern is with male subjectivity and immature masculinity as a barrier to men’s involvement in meaningful relationships with people of any gender.

⁴ Baldwin initially drafted *Giovanni’s Room* and *Another Country* as a single novel. Set mostly in New York and partially in France, *Another Country* also addresses the relationship between expatriation, queer sexuality, and white male liberal guilt.

⁵ “A novel insistently demands the presence and passion of human beings, who cannot ever be labeled Without this passion we may all smother to death, locked in those airless, labeled cells, which isolate us from each other and separate us from ourselves; and without this passion when we have discovered the connection between that Boy-Scout who smiles from the subway poster and that underworld to be found all over America, vengeful time will be upon us” (Baldwin 1949/88, 600).

⁶ Here it is important to note that David does not need to be supported by Giovanni’s meager wages but chooses to be. He could write to his father and ask for money—and eventually does, when he decides to leave Giovanni—or even seek employment.

⁷ When Giovanni expresses indignation about Hella’s traveling extensively alone, without the companionship of her male partner, David explains that Hella is “intelligent” and “complex” and that he has no desire to restrict her mobility. He also points out that women “don’t seem to like [the] idea,” proposed by Giovanni, that “their inside life . . . is not like the life of a man” (Baldwin 1956, 80). At the same time, David knowingly uses a woman named Sue by having sex with her in an attempt to prove to himself that he is a properly heterosexual man and despises her desire for him. He uses Hella in a similar way, and over a much longer period of time, through

his engagement to her and his continuation of his relationship with her despite having fallen in love with Giovanni.

⁸ Raymond Williams distinguishes structures of feeling from terms such as “world-view” or “ideology” because a structure of feeling is “a social experience which is still in *process*,” “concerned with meanings and values as they are actively lived and felt” (1977, 132). Similarly, I see white liberal guilt as a dynamic process rather than a fixed ideology, an ever-evolving formation with both progressive and reactionary potentialities. In *Giovanni’s Room*, it is the latter that are realized, even while the former are presented as possibilities.

⁹ This is not to suggest that white femininity does not perpetuate racism or does not operate in racist ways; rather, the critique is of Baldwin’s isolation of femininity as a singular racist force without considering, in this instance, how it may operate in tandem with masculinity.

¹⁰ Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman poignantly defines lynching as “a kind of racialized gang rape” (21) in her discussion of Pauline Hopkins and William Faulkner novels.

¹¹ Giovanni tells David that he first met Guillaume in a movie theater lobby where Guillaume makes a scene after losing his expensive scarf, suggesting that Giovanni may have stolen it. “[N]ot even Garbo ever gave such a performance,” Giovanni insists (Baldwin 1956, 109).

¹² Although Guillaume descends from aristocracy (150), there is no evident distinction between a bourgeois class and a ruling class in the world of *Giovanni’s Room*. Guillaume, whose occupation positions him as bourgeois, is the most wealthy and powerful character in the novel and wields control over the livelihood of Giovanni and other working-class men.

¹³ The statement “it did not seem real” could also signal a moment of self-awareness, a momentary observation that the crisis in front of David is one that he imagines, which ultimately allows David to calm down.

¹⁴ The double entendre in Baldwin’s choice of the word “preservative,” the French word for condom, is especially evocative in this context.

¹⁵ While narrating a conversation with his French landlady after Hella has discovered his homosexuality and left him, David reflects: “My crime, in some odd way, is in being a man and she knows all about this already” (68). At this moment in the narrative, on the eve of Giovanni’s execution, David thus considers how in the eyes of the social order he is no less of a criminal than Giovanni.

¹⁶ For this and other versions of the Tiresias myth, see Luc Brisson’s “The Myth of Tiresias.”

¹⁷ “Liberalism, in its heroic phase, begins to pass into its twentieth-century breakdown: the self-enclosed, guilty and isolated world; the time of man his own victim” (Williams 1966, 100). The conditions that prolong the tragedy of David’s trajectory are largely self-chosen. While he is struggling with his internalization of structural homophobia, he is also depicted as someone who lacks the courage and resolve to pursue the socially taboo but personally fulfilling path of queer love. Giovanni’s trajectory, on the other hand, is directly circumscribed by the material conditions of his life in Paris, over which he has little control. His story, unlike David’s, is not a bourgeois liberal tragedy, but rather, an unmistakably working-class tragedy.

¹⁸ Matt Brim performs a stunning reading of the murder weapon, described by David as “theatrical,” as indicative of transphobic rage and transphobic violence in his book *James Baldwin and the Queer Imagination*.

Chapter 4

¹ See Sarah Schulman, “Feasting with Panthers (and Palestine): Edmund White’s Jean Genet.”

² Ahmed’s *Queer Phenomenology* performs a brilliant reading of Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* and is indebted to what Ahmed understands as Fanon’s own queer phenomenology of the black body. Interestingly, she does not engage with Fanon’s homophobia. For an in-depth study of the relationship between homophobia and miscegenation anxiety in the United States, see Siobhan Somerville’s *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Duke 2000). Other important literary studies on the subject include Susan Gubar’s *Racechanges: White Skin, Black Face in American Culture* (Oxford 1997) and Mason Stokes’ *The Color of Sex: Whiteness, Heterosexuality, and the Fictions of White Supremacy* (Duke 2001).

³ For excellent readings of this note and homophobia in Fanon, see Kobena Mercer, “Decolonization and Disappointment: Reading Fanon’s Sexual Politics”; Teresa de Lauretis, “Difference Embodied: Reflections on *Black Skin, White Masks*”; and Rey Chow, “The Politics of Admittance: Female Sexual Agency, Miscegenation, and the Formation of Community in Frantz Fanon.”

⁴ Although Martin Esslin’s reading of *The Blacks* is hardly anti-racist, Esslin usefully situates the play within Genet’s larger absurdist oeuvre in *The Theatre of the Absurd*.

⁵ The caption of the photo accompanying Norman Mailer’s review of the play in *The Village Voice* uses the subtitle “A Clown Play,” whereas “A Clown Show” is the subtitle in the published English version.

⁶ See Joy L. Abell, “African/American: Lorraine Hansberry’s *Les Blancs* and the American Civil Rights Movement.”

⁷ I am using this loaded term intentionally. “Tribalism” refers to the tendency for blind allegiance to one’s ethnic or religious group. Moreover, the tendency to refer to African societies and ethnic groups as “tribes” reinscribes the racist and colonial myth that African societies are more primitive and “tribal” in the aforementioned sense of the term.

⁸ See Adrienne Rich, “The Problem with Lorraine Hansberry.”

Works Cited

- Abdur-Rahman, Aliyyah. *Against the Closet: Black Political Longing and the Erotics of Race*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 2012.
- Abell, Joy L. "African/American: Lorraine Hansberry's *Les Blancs* and the American Civil Rights Movement." *African American Review* 35.3 (Autumn 2001): 459-470.
- Ahmed Sara. *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others*. Duke University Press, 2006.
- Badiou, Alain and Nicolas Truong. *In Praise of Love*. (2009.) Translated by Peter Bush. London: Serpent's Tail, 2012.
- Baldwin, James. "Here Be Dragons." *The Price of the Ticket*. Ed. James Baldwin. New York: St. Martin's/Marek, 1985.
- Baldwin, James. "The Preservation of Innocence." 1949. *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*. New York: Library of America, 1988. 594-600.
- Baldwin, James. *Another Country*. New York: Dial Press, 1962.
- Baldwin, James. *Giovanni's Room*. New York: Dial Press, 1956.
- Baldwin, James. *No Name in the Street*. New York: Dial Press, 1972.
- Barthes, Roland. *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*. (1977.) Hill and Wang, 2010.
- Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*. (1957.) Translated by Annette Lavers. New York: Hill and Wang, 1972.
- Bell-Scott, Patricia. *The Firebrand and the First Lady: Portrait of a Friendship: Pauli Murray, Eleanor Roosevelt, and the Struggle for Social Justice*. Alfred A. Knopf, 2016.
- Bornstein, Kate. *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women and the Rest of Us*. 1994. New York: Vintage, 1995.
- Brim, Matt. *James Baldwin and the Queer Imagination*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 2014.
- Brisson, Luc. "The Myth of Tiresias." *Sexual Ambivalence: Androgyny and Hermaphroditism in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*. 1997. Trans. Janet Lloyd. Berkeley: U of California P, 2002. 116-29.
- Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York and London: Routledge, 1990.
- Butler, Judith. "Imitation and Gender Insubordination." *Inside/Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*. Ed. Diana Fuss. New York: Routledge, 1991. 13-31.
- Butler, Judith. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York and London: Routledge, 1993.
- Butler, Judith. "Melancholy Gender/Refused Identification." *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories of Subjection*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997. 132-150.
- Canaday, Margot. *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America*. Princeton University Press, 2009.
- Chow, Rey. "The Politics of Admittance: Female Sexual Agency, Miscegenation, and the Formation of Community in Frantz Fanon." *The Rey Chow Reader*. Ed. Paul Bowman. New York: Columbia University Press, 2010. 56-75.
- Copjec, Joan. *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicist*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43.6 (July 1991): 1241-1299.

- D'Emilio, John. *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin*. New York: Free Press, 2003.
- D'Emilio, John. *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1983.
- De Lauretis, Teresa. "Difference Embodied: Reflections on *Black Skin, White Masks*." *Parallax* 8.2 (2002): 54-68.
- Delany, Samuel. *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*. New York: University Press, 1999.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Felix Guattari. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
- Duggan, Lisa. "The New Homonormativity: The Sexual Politics of Neoliberalism." In *Materializing Democracy: Toward a Revitalized Cultural Politics*. Edited by Russ Castronovo and Dana D. Nelson. Duke University Press, 2002.
- Esslin, Martin. *The Theatre of the Absurd*. 1961. Garden City, NY: Anchor, 1968.
- Fanon, Frantz. *Black Skin, White Masks*. (1952.) Translated by Charles Lam Markmann. New York: Grove Press, 1967.
- Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. (1961.) Translated by Constance Farrington. New York: Grove Press, 1963.
- Fink, Bruce. "'There's No Such Thing as a Sexual Relationship': Existence and the Formulas of Sexuation." *Sexual Identity and Lacan on Metaphor*. Special issue of *Newsletter of the Freudian Field* 5.1 and 5.2 (Spring/Fall 1991): 59-85.
- Fink, Bruce. *A Clinical Introduction to Lacanian Psychoanalysis*. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard UP: 1997.
- Floyd, Kevin. *The Reification of Desire: Toward a Queer Marxism*. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP, 2009.
- Freeman, Elizabeth. *The Wedding Complex: Forms of Belonging in Modern American Culture*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002.
- Freud, Sigmund, "The Uncanny." 1919. Trans. Alix Strachey. 1-21. PDF file. <http://web.mit.edu/allanmc/www/freud1.pdf> Accessed 30 March 2014.
- Garber, Marjorie. *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Genet, Jean. *The Blacks: A Clown Show*. Translated by Bernard Fretchman. London: Faber, 1960.
- Gopinath, Gayatri. *Impossible Desires: Queer Diasporas and South Asian Public Cultures*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2005.
- Gubar, Susan. *Racechanges: White Skin, Black Face in American Culture*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Hammond, Karla. "An Interview with Audre Lorde." *American Poetry Review* (March/April 1980): 18-21.
- Hansberry, Lorraine. "Thoughts on Genet, Mailer, and the New Paternalism." *Village Voice* (June 1, 1961): 10, 14, 15.
- Hansberry, Lorraine. *Les Blancs: A Drama in Two Acts*. 1970. New York: Samuel French, 1972.
- Hansberry, Lorraine. *Les Blancs*. 1983. In *The Collected Last Plays*. New York: Vintage, 1994.
- Hartman, Saidiya. *Scenes of Subjection. Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

- Higashida, Cheryl. "To Be(come) Young, Gay, and Black: Lorraine Hansberry's Existentialist Routes to Anticolonialism." *American Quarterly* 60.4 (2008): 899-924.
- Hoffmann, E.T.A. "The Sand-Man." 1816. *The Best Tales of Hoffmann*. Trans. Alexander Ewing. Ed. E.F. Bleiler. New York: Dover: 1967.
- Hong, Grace and Roderick Ferguson, eds. *Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization*. Durham: Duke UP, 2011.
- Kimmel, Michael. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*. New York: Free Press, 1996.
- Koestenbaum, Wayne. "Foreword: In Defense of Nuance." *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments*. By Roland Barthes. Hill and Wang, 2010.
- Kronfeld, Miranda. "How to Deal with Insomnia while Your Boyfriend Sleeps the Effortless Sleep of the Unoppressed Beside You." *Reductress* (28 January 2019). Web.
- Lorde, Audre. "Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power." *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984.
- Lorde, Audre. "Scratching the Surface: On Barriers to Women and Loving." *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. Berkeley: Crossing Press, 1984.
- Love, Heather. *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History*. Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Mbembe, Achille. *Critique of Black Reason*. (2013.) Translated by Laurent Dubois. Duke University Press, 2017.
- McCullers, Carson. *The Member of the Wedding*. 1946. Boston and New York: Mariner, 2004.
- Melamed, Jodi. *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2011.
- Mercer, Kobena. "Decolonization and Disappointment: Reading Fanon's Sexual Politics." *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation*. Ed. Alan Read. Seattle: Bay Press, 1996.
- Murray, Rolland. *Our Living Manhood: Literature, Black Power, and Masculine Ideology*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2007.
- Puar, Jasbir. *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007.
- Randolph, Sherie M. *Florynce "Flo" Kennedy: The Life of a Black Feminist Radical*. University of North Carolina Press, 2015.
- Reid-Pharr, Robert. "Living as a Lesbian." *Black Gay Man: Essays*. New York University Press, 1999.
- Rich, Adrienne. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence." *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5.4 (Summer 1980): 631-660.
- Rich, Adrienne. "The Problem with Lorraine Hansberry." *Freedomways* 19.9 (1979): 247-255.
- Schulman, Sarah. "Feasting with Panthers (and Palestine): Edmund White's Jean Genet." *Sessums Magazine* (2 November 2017). Web.
- Scott, David. *Conscripts of Modernity: The Tragedy of Colonial Enlightenment*. Durham: Duke UP, 2004.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1985.
- Sexton, Jared. *Amalgamation Schemes: Antiblackness and the Critique of Multiculturalism*. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008.
- Smith, Lillian. *Strange Fruit*. 1944. San Diego, New York, and London: Harcourt Brace, 1992.

- Solomon, Alisa. *Re-dressing the Canon: Essays on Theater and Gender*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
- Somerville, Siobhan. *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture*. Duke University Press, 2000.
- Stokes, Mason. *The Color of Sex: Whiteness, Heterosexuality, and the Fictions of White Supremacy*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001.
- Theoharis, Jeanne. *The Rebellious Life of Mrs. Rosa Parks*. Beacon, 2013.
- Thomas Sheila. "Intersectionality: The Double Bind of Race and Gender: Interview with Kimberlé Crenshaw." *Perspectives: A Newsletter for and about Women Lawyers* (Spring 2004): 1062-1083.
- White, E. Frances. "The Evidence of Things Not Seen: The Alchemy of Race and Sexuality." *James Baldwin and Toni Morrison: Comparative, Critical and Theoretical Essays*. Ed. Loyal King and Lynn Orilla Scott. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006. 239-60.
- Williams, Raymond. "Structures of Feeling." *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: OUP, 1977. 128-35.
- Williams, Raymond. *Modern Tragedy: Essays on the Idea of Tragedy in Life and in the Drama, and on Modern Tragic Writing from Ibsen to Tennessee Williams*. Stanford: SUP, 1966.
- Wittig, Monique. *The Straight Mind and Other Essays*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992.
- Žižek, Slavoj. "The Real of Sexual Difference." *Reading Seminar XX: Lacan's Major Work on Love, Knowledge, and Feminine Sexuality*. Eds. Susan Barnard and Bruce Fink. Trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2002. 57-75.