

ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: "YOUSE AWFUL QUEER, CHAPPIE": READING
BLACK QUEER VERNACULAR IN BLACK
LITERATURES OF THE AMERICAS, 1903-1967

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Read together, twentieth-century representations of black male homoeroticism and homosexuality written up to the Black Arts movement shape and complicate traditional definitions of a black racial literary canon. Far from marginal or clandestine, these black men differently depicted in prose and verse continue the kinds of "networks of affiliation" that Saidiya Hartman finds in the communal connections that shaped black life in the nineteenth-century US during slavery and Reconstruction, ones based on the "metaphorical aptitude" demonstrated by black vernacular folk tales and songs. Community founding was necessarily agile. It depended on presence of mind more than melanin as a strategy to wrest the sign of "blackness" from flesh indicating enslavement. It also incorporated rather than homogenized differences within a black racial "community among ourselves," as Hartman calls it.

"Youse awful queer chappie" examines how that kind of wily solidarity and resistance supports a body of texts that both contribute to a black literary tradition that Henry Louis Gates, Jr. characterizes as a gathering of "talking books" as well as fashion a particular hermeneutic and technique I call "black queer vernacular." Sometimes, but not always, with the word **queer**, the black writers I study with this

manuscript, tell a story of black masculinity not fungible but mobile. Any individual text or author provides merely one nexus in a textual technique of characters, types, words, and images that demonstrates how the sign of “blackness” incorporates both race and sexuality.

Less a rejoinder to scholarship in the fields of African American studies or gay and lesbian studies, the manuscript draws from poststructuralist, feminist, and queer theory to regard an already present dialogue in twentieth century black literary studies. By moving from W.E.B. Du Bois’ landmark The Souls of Black Folk, through the Harlem Renaissance and London’s Caribbean Artists movement, toward the Black Arts movement, the manuscript highlights how Diaspora informs, even as it fades from, analyses of black representation. It talks back to, and expands, the defining aesthetics of the black racial literary canon.

“YOUSE AWFUL QUEER, CHAPPIE”: READING BLACK QUEER
VERNACULAR IN BLACK LITERATURES OF THE AMERICAS, 1903-1967

by

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For my mother, Cheryl Lynn Silberman (17 September 1946—9 July 2001),
who gave me the blue eyes with which I see the world and
taught me the fulfillment in looking;

and

for Craig Allen Seymour II, who encouraged me to use those eyes to read and
managed always to lift me when my life was low. You are my friend.

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Introduction: Reading the Masculine Technique of Black Queer Vernacular

“You know, I never understood the whole art-for-art’s-sake, for example. Because it seems to me that’s pure **bullshit**. It’s not even an **argument**. The connection you’ve got to make has to be rooted **deep** in **you**. And that is really deep in something else.

“Most people learn how to **protect** themselves against life—very quickly. In my own case, if I learned how to protect myself, as I obviously **should** have, I’d have had to do it so soon that I would have to **die**. I’d—I would have to **die** then, you know, in effect. Since I couldn’t do that, I had to turn my back on that and go to the **extreme**, really. Which is to do my best to keep myself **open**. Really to work at **that**.

“Because, you know, if any person closes himself up, then he just ceases to grow. If a **writer** does it, then he just doesn’t become a **writer**, y’know. In a way, the best and the worst things **about** me are connected with that **necessity** ...”

...

“And, in this country [the US], what we call homosexuality is a grotesque kind of—of **waxworks**. You know? Which is the other side of what we call **heterosexuality** here.” ... “**Nobody** makes any connections! So naturally you get, you know, you get this truncated, de-balled, galvanized activity which thinks of itself as **sex**.

“It’s not sex at **all**. It’s pure desperation. It’s **clinical**. D’you know? It comes out of the effort to tell one’s self a lie about what human life is like. It comes out of the attempt to cling to definitions which cannot contain **anybody**’s life.

“American homosexuality is a waste primarily because, if people were not so **frightened** of it—if it wouldn’t, you know—it really would cease in effect, as it exists in this country now, to **exist**. I mean the same way the Negro problem would disappear. People wouldn’t have to spend so much time being defensive—if they weren’t **endlessly** being **condemned**. I know a whole lot of people who aren’t homosexual at **all**—who **think** they are. That’s **true**. I know a lot of people who turn into junkies because they’re **afraid** they might be **queer**.”

—James Baldwin, from interviews conducted between 1964 and 1966, quoted in Fern Marja Eckman’s *The Furious Passage of James Baldwin* (1968)

Even though I borrow this dissertation's title from Claude McKay's Home to Harlem (1928), I start "Youse awful queer, chappie" with two excerpts from the interviews that propel Fern Marja Eckman's monograph, The Furious Passage of James Baldwin. Cautiously, I begin with Baldwin and with these words of his. So typical is his epigraphic presence, his intimate remarks here on aesthetic politics and collective subjectivity might succumb all too easily to Baldwin's expected role in literary studies like mine: figurehead for contemporary black gay male writing, or avatar of the so-called "conundrum" of rendering simultaneously racial blackness and homosexual masculinity. Both roles for Baldwin can function only as they ignore "the best and worst things **about** [him]," as he explains it. I have no investment in contributing to the way scholars exploit or extrapolate his life through his work. They fashion the words he published, wrote, or spoke to render him as the sole mid-twentieth-century beacon in a literary history of progress, organized as a constant—and moral—refinement of representations that supplant one another and ameliorate not just literary discourse but everyday life for black people subsequently "out."

I prefer to see Baldwin differently—and I start with him in an effort to refigure the discussions about depicted black male homoeroticism. In so doing, and in honor of Baldwin's self-directive, I want to keep those conversations **open**—"Really to work at **that**," as he instructs. I want to render Baldwin as the conduit not the limit of dialogue about racial blackness and homosexual masculinity "rooted **deep**" in the project of black racial canon formation. I take Baldwin's sensorial **openness** seriously and perform its interpretive method throughout my selective study of early-to-mid-twentieth century representations of black male homoeroticism that includes, and

measures between, W.E.B. Du Bois' landmark collection, The Souls of Black Folk (1903), and LeRoi Jones' collected short stories, Tales (1967).¹

I regard this collection of prose and verse continuing the kinds of “networks of affiliation” that Saidiya Hartman finds in the communal connections that shaped black life in the nineteenth-century US during slavery and Reconstruction. Hartman argues that black communities then did not adhere to any singular conception of racial identity or local congregation. They developed from “connections forged in the context of disrupted affiliations, sociality amid the constant threat of separation, and shifting sets of identification particular to site, location, and action” (59). Community founding was necessarily agile. It depended on presence of mind more than melanin as a strategy to wrest the sign of “blackness” from flesh indicating an enslaved commodity to culture gesturing an expressive aesthetic, or what Hartman identifies as “blackness” “metaphorical aptitude.” Hartman explains that the social context informing “the significance of becoming or belonging together in terms other than those defined by one’s status as property, will-less object, and the not-quite-human” had little need to produce any romance of homogeneity as unity (61). Antebellum intra-racial commonality depended “less on presence or sameness than upon desired change [enacted through] forms of everyday resistance that were usually solitary” (59-60). Such purposive harmony not just incorporated, but necessitated, difference. Black people invested mutually in an oral tradition that Lawrence Levine calls “a world of

¹ Pointedly, I stop here before the academic institutionalization of black studies in 1968, and before the Stonewall Rebellion in Greenwich Village, New York, in June 1969, which facilitated a public shift in the discussion of newly “gay” and “lesbian” identities.

sound,” imagined a “community among ourselves,” as Hartman terms it, beyond any local subsistence because of “the limits and fractures of [traditional conceptions of] community attributable to the extremity of domination, surveillance, terror, self-interest, distrust, conflict, lack of autonomy, tenuous and transient connections, and fear” (6). After emancipation, with access to a school education that sponsored at least literacy, even when racist discrimination prevented little more, established verbal patterns of intimate affinity took to ink. The typically solitaire activity of writing became another means to resist or forge connection across space and time. Writing community does not supplant the oral tradition’s persistent imaginative reach; it incorporates the cosmology that black vernacular’s dynamism demonstrates.²

The writing with which I negotiate imagines men legibly different and connected to one another as well as coalesced around a situated black culture like the kind that Hartman finds “grappl[ing] with the differences that constitute community” (61). These texts evidence “incipient modes of friendship and solidarity” that Paul Gilroy, following Seyla Benhabib, labels “the politics of transfiguration,” or the “pursuit of the sublime, the [presentation of a] different hermeneutic focus [that] pushes toward the mimetic, dramatic and performative” (Black Atlantic 37). The volition forming the “friendly” scripted bonds I include here indicates the style with which these depicted men engage with—or, as Baldwin explains, the means with which they keep themselves **open** to—ongoing and transforming aesthetics known under the sign “black.” Taken together, they tell a story of black masculinity not

² See Lawrence Levine’s Black Culture and Black Consciousness (1979) for his discussion of black cosmology evidenced in folklore.

fungible but mobile—of an audible, visible metaphoricity that performs a remarkable technique. The male characters I study move through the center of what so many have identified as a black literary tradition. Any individual text or author provides merely one nexus in that textual technique of characters, types, words, and images. Where I consider biographic information or authorial intention, I regard that text as representationally similar to the seemingly more formal gestures of prose and verse. After all, writers’ ability to be a subject on the page comes through their craft. I read their words facilitating “the very act of reading [that] becomes a force for dislocating our belief in stable subjects and essential meanings,” following Diana Fuss who sees this kind of poststructuralist textualism as a feminist evaluation of words as well (35).³ With this attention to representation and the **open** connections writers inscribe in them, I begin with Baldwin and refigure him from personage to lexicon. I want to adhere to the muscle of his linguistic movement “**through** the world” and to situate my manuscript methodologically. Reading like Baldwin writes (and speaks) facilitates a needed tactic to think otherwise about a field of inquiry in which I work entitled now “black queer studies.”

Too often, scholars in this new field distinguish it from failures in black studies, women’s studies, and/or lesbian and gay studies.⁴ They think of their own

³ See also Jacques Derrida’s interview with Julia Kristeva included in Positions.

⁴ I choose “black studies” instead of “African American studies” because my manuscript stops with work published in 1967. Also, I do not want to reproduce the imperial leanings of “African American”—an example of which I illustrate in this Preface shortly. Of course, no word works independently of ideological baggage. In using “black,” I follow Wahneema Lubiano who likes “using the word ‘black’ instead of ‘African American’ because [she] want[s] to keep before us an ongoing tension of race relations in the United States between people of African descent and all others

field-work as a social revolution and package it as “the emergence of radical black lesbian feminists and gay men who have begun to address the forces within black culture and the culture at large that have rendered their experiences and sensibilities silent,” like Vincent Woodard remembers the April 2000 “Black Queer Studies in the Millennium” conference (1278). Axiomatic is the void of significant dialogue about categories now managed discretely as “either” racially “black” or “gay,” “lesbian,” “bisexual,” “trans.” Thus, black queer studies creates the lack it can address uniquely, authentically, experientially, or through a “queer of color critique,” as Roderick Ferguson extends chromatically with his recent contribution to the field.⁵ So often, selfsame work laments the incommensurability of a so-called “queer theory” with critical race theory, when it should provide a rejoinder to work that ignores the intersectional analytic that attended the entry of “queer theory” as such into discourse and as an analytic method.⁶ Race, ethnicity, gender, and class need not provide “something different, additional” to queer theory—particularly because its analytic interest as articulated in its first collective publication as such in a 1991 special edition of differences: a Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies edited by Teresa de Lauretis lies

here on this ground” (“Don’t Talk” n1 145). To keep present black-white racial hierarchies, I specify “race” often with a modifying “black.” In the same spirit I use “women’s studies” and not “gender” to signal the field’s history. Like Robyn Wiegman does in “The Progress of Gender,” I refuse to see “gender” supplanting or solving any problems with the term “women.”

⁵ See his Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique (2004).

⁶ See Kimberlé Crenshaw’s “Mapping the Margins” for her first illustration of “intersectionality,” a paradigm she coins as she applies it in legal theory that refuses to reproduce normative accounts of the political needs of women of color to individuate their race from their gender, and these from their class, and these from literacy and language access. Her sense of it as social praxis does not prevent its poststructuralist potential.

away from supplying addition and with refusing partition.⁷ As de Lauretis explains, queer theory wants to “problematize some of the discursive constructions and constructed silences in the emergent field of ‘gay and lesbian studies’” (iii). This methodological rejoinder aims to “explore questions that have as yet been barely broached, such as the respective and/or common grounding of current discourses and practices of homo-sexualities in relation to gender and to race, with their attendant differences of class or ethnic culture, generational, geographical, and socio-political location” (iii-iv).⁸ Still, I am not as interested in finding fault with black queer studies practitioners who consider themselves differently queer of color excavators as I am in rethinking their renditions of queer theory’s intellectual formation. Like my colleagues working in similar or different aspects of black queer studies, my own scholarship reflects the influence of academic innovations published recently, after the representational texts I study here. Nevertheless, I do not presume to rescue the past with the present. Or, to extend to my project Robyn Wiegman’s identification of the progress narrative organizing generational shifts in academic feminism, I do not see “the past as the error against which the heroism of the present can be constructed” (“Introduction” 13).

⁷ I borrow “something different, additional” from Jennifer Devere Brody’s “Theory in Motion: A Review of the Black Queer Studies in the Millennium Conference,” in which she quotes these words from Wahneema Lubiano’s closing remarks at the conference.

⁸ The contents of the special edition of *differences*, inspired by a February 1990 conference at Santa Cruz, demonstrate this intersectional understanding of a queer analytic, including work by Samuel Delany (“Street Talk/Straight Talk”), Ekua Omosupe (“Black/Lesbian/Buldagger”), Tomás Almaguer (“Chicano Men: A Cartography of Homosexual Identity and Behavior”), and Elizabeth Grosz (“Lesbian Fetishism?”).

I ascribe to the meaningful resonance of structurally interdependent formulations of “awful queer” black racial particularities in published or otherwise exchanged writing by individuals of African descent. If these representations require any radical re-interpretation at all, they urge us to reconsider any presumption of black queer studies’ meager historic resources and the so-called marginal presence of depicted male homoeroticism. Respect “rooted **deep** in [me]” for that abundance as well as for my colleagues’ work, to adapt Baldwin’s connectivity, facilitates the rigor with which I engage the depicted **openness** I read in print and talk with my colleagues’ scholarship. With the rest of this Introduction, I sketch how I ground my work within an ongoing black racial literary canon project. I consider the salutary consequences produced by reading W.E.B. Du Bois in company with Michel Foucault, a pairing through which I trace the poststructuralist, feminist, and queer theory helping me to regard an already present dialogue. I close by explaining why my study focuses on figural masculinity, by defining “black queer vernacular,” by sketching how the printed “networks of affiliation” I study foreground an imaginative mobility that supports my own movement across decades as well as continents, and by outlining my five chapters and conclusion.

Throughout my manuscript, I talk with and back to renditions of a black literary tradition. I linger over the many pages of The Norton Anthology of African American Literature (1997). Often, it guides me not because it serves as the singular definition of a black racial canon but because it interjects rather public intentions of legitimating both a body of words and a field led by senior scholars. It presumes to speak for the field. Or, as one of its lead editors, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., encapsulates

with “a note of triumph” to New York Times reporter Dinitia Smith: “We are canon makers!” (C15). Certainly, an “African American” inclusion in Norton’s best-selling series of college-and-university-taught anthologies proves provocative. As its other lead editor Nellie Y. McKay relates, collected black voices will inspire and engender new academic audiences: “Where the Norton anthologies go, black literature will go. No one will be able to say again they don’t know what to teach” (C19). Despite, or perhaps because of, its significant intervention, however, the Anthology’s expediently imperial and heterosexual vision of “African American literature” needs discussion. These assumptions limit black studies’ reach.

Still, I want to make clear that I have little interest in figuring this manuscript as a response to any systemic problem or lack, whether pernicious or careless, however the case may be with the Anthology. Truncated historiographies that do not make the fearless connections Baldwin implores in my epigraph only muddle the intellectual, ideological breadth of black writing. They foreclose the reach of blackness into a less-than-intersectional sense of “racial uplift.” They adhere to an observational idiosyncrasy that I do not accept and do not want to reify through rebuttal. To allow this less than **open** work to set parameters by negation or by essentialism relinquishes too easily the capaciousness of the sign “black.”

I entertain the Anthology here only because I owe a great deal to its contents and to the decades of scholarship to which its editorial board have contributed. I dismiss out of hand neither the Anthology nor the history it codifies. Without the century of public debate over how to think through blackness, represent it semantically, and create literary canons around it, my work could not have taken

shape. Nevertheless, only cautiously do I situate my contribution to the field alongside the Anthology's terms for a libratory black literature that, as Gates and McKay assert, "bears witness to the urge to be free and literate, to embrace the European Enlightenment's dream of reason and the American Enlightenment's dream of civil liberty, wedded together gloriously in a great republic of letters" (xxvii). With my dissertation, I regard the far more complicated evocation of everyday black life through literary form, or what Barbara Foley calls "the power and verisimilitude of the documentary mode" fueling black literature in "History, Fiction, and the Ground Between" (392). Foley accounts for this force with black texts' purposely feigning events that could have happened in order "to challenge the standard versions of truth" that relegate black life (397). Thus, these narrative forms deconstruct the differentiation of "fact" and "fiction" with structural irony. Because these forms look beyond any text's syntagmatic unfolding and connect to a tradition of communicating that project which extends to antebellum strategies informing folktales, for example, black narration reveals the kind of interweaving that Jacques Derrida understands as the textile character of written language.⁹ They encourage a kind of poststructuralist skepticism with what Zora Neale Hurston calls the hieroglyphic style of black vernacular.¹⁰ Those verbal mechanics shape the early-to-mid-twentieth century black

⁹ See Derrida's interview with Julia Kristeva, "Semiology and Grammatology," included in Positions. See, also, Lawrence W. Levine's Black Culture and Black Consciousness (1977) for his discussion of the social, political aesthetics of antebellum folktales.

¹⁰ See Hurston's "Characteristics of Negro Expression." Similarly, film theorist Sergei Eisenstein defines the principle of the hieroglyph as "denotation by depiction" in Film Forum (35).

literary discourse I follow. On the page, black racial semantics foster a vernacular tradition in which Richard Wright finds “conspicuous ornamentation.”¹¹

No less obvious is the Anthology’s usurpation of black writers born in the Caribbean as “African American.” Despite life stories that often place them outside the US, Jamaican writers like Claude McKay and Michelle Cliff fall seamlessly into the unqualified equation of African American literature as “imaginative writing in English by persons of African descent in the United States” (xxxvi). Certainly, locating authors by their writing (not birth) home could identify viably their contemporaneous influences. Yet, for McKay, for example, such situating would make Home to Harlem a French novel, not a US American one, since he lived in Marseilles while drafting it. Still, no one claims McKay to be French despite the influence his Harlem sequel Banjo: A Story without a Plot (1929) had on black Francophone writers.

Following the Anthology’s national license is its sexual one. Among others, it presents both McKay and Cliff heterosexually with life sketches that evade any fleshly intimacy they had (or have, since Cliff lives still) with people of the same sex. Such editorializing imagines that Cliff and McKay’s “blackness” operates independently from their samesexuality.¹² The Anthology’s sense of race overlooks the skill with which they demonstrate lexically, as Isabel Hoving argues elsewhere about Cliff’s writing, how “homosexuality functions prominently to mark the borders of the racial

¹¹ See Richard Wright’s “Blueprint for Negro Writing.”

¹² I use “samesexual” or “samesexuality” to bargain for the differently semantic appreciation of “homosexuality” in black literary communities. As I explore throughout, the racial whiteness attached to “homosexuality” or “homosexual” engendered different metaphor structures in pre-Stonewall texts.

community, and thus to delineate racial identities” (153).¹³ So set in differentiating same-sexuality from the blackness it traces, the Anthology can recognize its authorial subjects differently on only three occasions, in the biographic notes for Lorraine Hansberry (with the label “lesbian”), Samuel Delany (“bisexual”), and Essex Hemphill (“homosexual”). Of these three, only Hemphill’s life narrative offers upfront his sexuality as a salient aspect of his life, but it does so, notably, as a problem.¹⁴ As section editor Barbara Christian explains, “Hemphill wrote of the double alienation that occurs when a man tries to assert his identity as both a homosexual and an African American” (2608). I call out this example not to blame Christian individually for framing Hemphill so predictably.¹⁵ Her “double alienation” shorthand for Hemphill’s identity politic maintains merely the comfortable political template—one forced retroactively onto Du Bois’ Souls as a so-called “politics of juxtaposition.”¹⁶ Scholars read Du Bois’ two-ness as a dislocating struggle between differentiated identities

¹³ In “Harlem,” Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak calls this kind of process **lexicalization**, which “separate[s] a linguistic item from its appropriate grammatical system into the conventions of another grammar” (118). Changing registers like that proves the maleability of any border between them.

¹⁴ For Hansberry, her lesbianism crops up in paragraph 16 of 17 and as a political stance: “In several letters to The Ladder an early lesbian publication, she analyzed the political connections between homophobia and antifeminism, as well as the economic and psychological factors that pressure lesbians into marriage” (MacDowell and Spillers, “Lorraine Hansberry” 1727). For Delany, his bisexuality appears in paragraph 5 of 6, which praises his unusual and laudable science fiction “for its exploration of sexuality—the final frontier for the genre” (Christian, “Samuel R. Delany” 2342-2343).

¹⁵ Of course, anthologies are collaborative projects. I do not know if the diction choices reflected in the Anthology’s Hemphill biography are Christian’s or someone else’s.

¹⁶ I take this phrase from Alys Eve Weinbaum’s presentation of “W.E.B. Du Bois and the Politics of Juxtaposition,” taken from an introduction of the same title written collaboratively with Susan Gillman for their forthcoming anthology on the “inchoate traces”—Weinbaum’s words—of gender and sexuality in Du Bois’ work.

rather than as a “sketch [of] the spiritual world in which ten thousand thousand Americans live and strive” (5). Despite the recurring explication of Du Bois’ two-ness as an irreconcilable tension, Souls’ rendering of a “longing to attain self-conscious manhood” pulls from “deeper recesses,” away from “the world of the white man,” to provide “a tale twice told but seldom written” (11, 5). Independent of the “Negro problem” that he refuses to let limit his sights, Du Bois engages in speculative portraiture. He acknowledges the “problem” of the persistence of black racial ideology even in seemingly progressive liberalism but establishes plainly his stance toward the Veil he describes with the following sentence he presents in Souls’ first chapter: “To the real question, How does it feel to be a problem? I answer seldom a word” (10).

I, too, want to present a body of literature apart from restraint or complaint. I listen well to Baldwin’s charge in my epigraph and understand the challenges in regarding homosexuality away from the “**waxworks**” he identifies. Too comforting are the “definitions which cannot contain **anybody**’s life,” following Baldwin, because they are so ubiquitous. Not characterizing homosexuality enmeshed in any grotesque symbiosis can elicit anxiety. This understanding refuses the “habits of thought [that] reinforce and sustain the habits of power” that persist in differentiating homosexuality (No Name 87).¹⁷ After all, what can homosexuality bear if not the now trod narratives of systemic victimization or heroic resistance? Would homosexuality really, as Baldwin predicts in my epigraph, cease “in effect, as it exists in this country now, to **exist**” if we US Americans admit the far from clinical or desperate renderings of desire between people of the same sex, either by birth or alteration? Yes—and no. At

¹⁷ Here, I adapt Baldwin’s analysis of hegemony in No Name in the Street (1972).

best, this homosexuality could become an historic curiosity that would live still through ink. At the same time, I find powerful Baldwin's admission that he went "to the **extreme**, really" to ensure his aesthetic receptiveness to different erotic forms and relationships. For the study of literature, including the category of the literary, thinking **openly** in this way, aside from homosexuality as such, produces far more material for those of us studying representations within and across the fields of black as well as lesbian and gay studies. It enables us to pursue text over biographic sameosexuality. Or, as Shawn Stewart Ruff makes plain in his introduction to one of the better recent prose collections Go the Way Your Blood Beats: An Anthology of Lesbian and Gay Fiction by African-American Writers (1996): "You don't have to read literature by gay and lesbian writers to read meaningfully about homosexuality" (xxi). Reading from this vantage point can facilitate a more careful historicism, one looking outward to find the deep connections writers make over any surface considerations of sexual definitions. Relishing in biographic "proof" may populate a "lesbian" and "gay" historiography; but it does not suss out its articulating aesthetic. Moreover, presuming to find recent nomenclature for and sensibilities about "gay" people anywhere else maintains the methodological assumptions of "homosexuality" that Baldwin identifies as "waste"—a "truncated, de-balled, galvanized activity which thinks of itself as **sex**."

Similarly, Robert Padgug warns that when scholars presume a "predetermined ... sexuality, real history disappears" (55). He asserts the lexical import of sameosexuality, which cannot exist outside its own "construction by language, consciousness, symbolism, and labor, which, taken together—as they must be—are **praxis**, the production and reproduction of material life" (57). Padgug builds his work

from Michel Foucault's The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction (1978), in which Foucault elucidates sexuality's "over-all 'discursive fact'" that entails "polymorphous techniques of power" (11). Foucault asserts similarly that discursive approach to sameosexuality in a later interview published as "Friendship As A Way of Life": "Another thing to distrust is the tendency to relate the question of homosexuality to the problem of 'Who am I?' and 'What is the secret of my desire?' Perhaps it would be better to ask oneself, 'What relations, through homosexuality, can be established, invented, multiplied, and modulated?'" (135). Foucault finds subjectivity instead of truth in sex, much like Du Bois maps epistemology with his black racial Veil in Souls. Foucault retains the capaciousness of "the homosexual" by re-articulating that subject position as a **praxis**: "we have to work at becoming homosexuals and not be obstinate in recognizing that we are. The development toward which the problem of homosexuality tends is the one of friendship" (136).

I compare Foucault with Du Bois not because I want to give credence to the sloppy analogical arguments linking social understandings of racial blackness with sameosexuality that persist in presenting the latter like a racial minority. For some, this compulsory comparison operates politically like late-19th-century sexologists' push to prove the nature of homosexuality and thus contest judicial prejudice.¹⁸ Historically presenting "the homosexual" racially was a means to demarcate the humanity and

¹⁸ See Siobhan Somerville's "Scientific Racism and the Emergence of the Homosexual Body" for her elucidation of the racial analogies sexologists created by drawing from the existing "science" of comparative anatomy and eugenics. They formulated this argument to counter contemporaneous legislation. For example, in the US, the 1873 passage of the Comstock Act established constitutional definitions of obscene material and laid the grounds for equating criminality to those engaging in these depicted "lewd" acts.

legibility of members of a same-sex minority. Extending that homology over a century later reveals, as Gayle Rubin demonstrates with “Thinking Sex,” just how those “nineteenth-century moral paroxysms are still with us” (4).¹⁹ This juridical focus asserting homosexuality as biological nature or through “bounded beings, distinct, recognizable, delineated, subjects before the law,” as Judith Butler questions the phenomenon in Undoing Gender (2004), limits sexuality’s dynamism to a comparative if justice-seeking somatics (20). Appreciative of the ongoing “political predicament” that continues to inspire these kinds of race-sex correlations, Butler questions the untold affect these court-looking moves can have: “perhaps we make a mistake if we take the definitions of who we are, legally, to be adequate descriptions of what we are about” (20).

I do, too. I find models apart from liberal ontology in Du Bois and Foucault’s interventions. Nevertheless, I do not want to paint either Foucault or Du Bois too luminously, as thinkers beyond critique.²⁰ I situate them in dialogue to illustrate the affinity between their epistemological projects that look beyond identities adhered by fear, malfeasance, or expedience. I want to highlight how these two thinkers often credited with progenerating the fields of inquiry in which my manuscript engages call into question the staid positioning of a racial blackness or same-sexuality in opposition to whiteness or heterosexuality. They thwart as well any assumptions of mutually

¹⁹ See “Thinking Sex” for her discussion of legal and racial precedents on sex negativity as well as her argument that Western industrialization then generated for homosexuality “the institutional structure of an ethnic group” (17).

²⁰ See Hazel Carby’s Race Men for her discussion of how Du Bois’ Souls presents a conceptual failure to incorporate fully women that proves not to be, nevertheless, “a particularly egregious example of sexist thinking” (12).

exclusive differences between race and sexuality. I align Du Bois and Foucault to facilitate a conjunctural practice that could inspire the further dissembling of what Robert Reid-Pharr calls the “[US] American identity machine.”²¹ Despite the ease with which scholars in my fields have used bounded bodies as identities to articulate political and social worlds, and however important the fiscal, legal, or educational gains have been as a result of them, my fields of inquiry have produced as well a vibrant and efficacious school of thought that looks through, not exactly beyond, flesh. That intellectual tradition within the project of black racial canon formation reaches back before Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, or Foucault, to expound a mode of thinking now considered poststructuralist. I want to explicate how the writers I study provide functional models not documentary “realness” with which to negotiate representational politics. Verisimilitude shapes, not reflects. Metaphors bustle, strategize, and signify a communal knowledge over any denotative meaning for what appears on a page. So should our tools to read them.

As I will illustrate over the course of this manuscript, the representations I follow collect meaning through conspicuous connections to each other. The depicted group of black men I arrange through my work feign their racial subjectivity queerly—and often with the word **queer**, well before its recent academic reclaiming and theorizing. Within their narratives they signal what Derrida calls “the play of differences”; they wield “syntheses and referrals which forbid at any moment, or in any sense, that a simple element be **present** in and of itself, referring only to itself”

²¹ See Black Gay Man: Essays. See also Stuart Hall’s “The Emergence of Cultural Studies and the Crisis of the Humanities” for his discussion of the conjunctural practices that British cultural studies have fostered.

(26). The kind of everyday vernacular contact that these black queer masculine figures have demonstrates no clandestine group or subculture.²² Such differentiating does not jibe with, as Zora Neale Hurston relates, the conspicuous ease of bonding through “Negro expression,” or the “little plays by strolling players [that] are acted out daily in a dozen streets in a thousand cities, and no one ever mistakes the meaning” (225).

I focus my study of the aesthetic of figured black men and masculinity—not always but mostly written by men of African descent—because I want to show just how prevalently and consistently these representations shape the project of black racial canon formation. Hardly do they support the repeated lament that pre-Stonewall representations of black male sameosexuality come only with a “closeted” politics of sexuality constrained by black respectability. By reading these depicted men alongside each other, I want to focus on and inspire hopefully further work explicating the abundance of printed and handwritten material. I differentiate figured men from representations of black women and femininity because the latter gender grouping moves differently within the early-to-mid-twentieth century black racial canon. Certainly, there exist similarities across gender formations. For example, like Claude McKay in Home to Harlem, Nella Larsen uses “queer” in Passing (1929) to express the sexual, racial, and class affinities connecting the novella’s central female dyad. Moreover, as Ann duCille demonstrates by historicizing Larsen’s language within “the blues/bohemian/bourgeois moment” of the New Negro movement, Larsen can be read

²² See Eric Garber’s landmark essay, “A Spectacle in Color: The Lesbian and Gay Subculture of Jazz Age Harlem.” Despite his understanding of the dominant literary and musical motifs of black samesexual expression of the 1920s and 1930s New Negro movement, Garber stops short of regarding the “complex networks of institutions” fostering such expression beyond the model of “subculture.”

alongside McKay's own blues poetics to render the life of Ray, the effete, erudite man toward whom his friend Jake directs the phrase that provides my manuscript's title (438). At the same time—and I follow duCille herself here—Larsen's text gives voice to a particular circuit of purposively expressive black femininity. As duCille explains, all the “dressing and draping, primping and preening” in work by Larsen and Jessie Fauset provides “the literary equivalent of the woman-proud blues lyric—one of the not always subtle instruments through which both Fauset and Larsen sing and sign female sexuality” (430). Regarding these kinds of semiotic accoutrements with an intra-gender focus illustrates importantly a strategic character of represented femininity. With that same attention, I want to illustrate the black racial strategies figuring male homoeroticism and homosexuality masculinities. I do not want to promote any subordination of gender by lumping and thus equating black male and female representations of homoeroticism through sexuality.

By attending to one gender formation within Harlem-thinking writing, I do not mean to suggest that women bear but marginal importance in the New Negro movement. Such disrespect works independently from any singular gender analysis that supports a feminist project. A prominent example of a feminist assessment of literary masculinity within lesbian and gay studies is Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's foundational study Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire (1985). As Robyn Wiegman relates the book's significance, Between Men “extended feminist analysis by partaking in an important deconstructive move that gave both legibility and critical complexity to the dominant term of gender's powerful binary, but did so in the context of linking feminism to anti-homophobic critique” (“The

Progress of Gender” 114). I see my own work expounding upon the capaciousness of the signs “black” and “queer” in racial figures of male homoeroticism and homosexuality masculinities following the instruction of such deconstruction. Still, I appreciate how an analysis of men without women can signal by default a history of neglect.²³ Using the word “queer” and the analytic of “queer theory” to facilitate a project on male representations only enhances doubt because of the rather consistent evacuation of queer theory’s feminisms.²⁴ Without coincidence was its formation possible from work by feminist scholars Teresa de Lauretis, Judith Butler, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. I see as well queer theory’s refusal for repeating blindly the codifying mechanisms of patriarchy in the work of Monique Wittig.²⁵ This far from complacent tradition informs my use of “queer” and definition of “black queer vernacular” to highlight the dialogue “rooted **deep** in [the texts I discuss here].”

I want to make clear that my coining “black queer vernacular” nods merely to the knowing sophistication of black male homoeroticism rendered by lexical strategies either with the term or through a lens that could be called “queer.” The central, almost-ordinary presence of racial tactics figuring black male homoeroticism or homosexuality

²³ For example, in the first chapter of her path-breaking study Color, Sex, & Poetry: Three Women Writers of the Harlem Renaissance (1987), Gloria Hull explains that responds to Harlem Renaissance studies that “have not adequately dealt with women during the period” (4). Likewise, Ann duCille regards her own work on Lasen and Fauset following “the efforts of contemporary feminist criticism [like that by Hazel Carby] to establish black women as active agents within history rather than as helpless victims of history” (419).

²⁴ As I write this Preface in response to comments during my dissertation defense, I think of Robyn Wiegman’s remembrance of her own for a work “about men”: “As a feminist project, the dissertation was not fully legible to everyone on my committee, and indeed I felt a great deal of anxiety about the political consequences of its focus” (“The Progress of Gender” 111).

²⁵ See both Wittig’s “One Is Not Born a Woman” and “The Straight Mind.”

masculinities within the texts I study presents a different take on the “‘always ready’ of Afro-American culture” upon which Houston Baker expounds.²⁶ Not assumed in my working definition of that kind of black vernacular tradition are renditions of its hieroglyphics, following Zora Neale Hurston, that presume any notion of racial authenticity. I take seriously Barbara Foley’s attention to feigned “reality” so that I can regard the black vernacular tradition’s mobile aesthetics, or its interest in purposive indirection. Such movement Eric Sundquist illuminates as a self-conscious set of “communications within a culturally distinct, necessarily private communal language [which] may be seen to be governed by hidden semantic constructions and grounded in a signifying response to white culture dating from the origins of slavery” (60). I appreciate this dialectic and caution against a too transparent or a monochromatic understanding of black racial culture through text to think further about the common availability of black queer vernacular strategies. Again, I want to foreground the very accessibility of its epistemic lexicon.

Also indicative of black queer vernacular’s “networks of affiliation” is its mobile grasp, its associational logic, or what Hartman recognizes as “the elasticity of blackness and its capacious affects” (25). Black queer vernacular points beyond its local use in prose grounded by any local space, just as the black community of Harlem during its New Negro movement Renaissance heralded its own international amalgamation of black people. Indeed, central to the democratic aesthetic Alain Locke mapped with The New Negro (1925) was the civilizing function of Harlem as “the

²⁶ See Baker’s Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory (1984).

home of the Negro's 'Zionism'" ("Enter" 633). Black writers imagining the Diaspora city and cityscape Harlem as with verse and prose incorporated in that vision, as Brent Hayes Edwards argues, "the ways that discourses of internationalism **travel**, the ways they are translated, disseminated, reformulated, and debated in transnational contexts marked by difference" (7). Disregarding the metaphoric mobility of "blackness" throughout work produced during Harlem's Renaissance, and overlooking either the pan-Africanist politic of W.E.B. Du Bois' black racial "Veil" or the West Indian sensibility in the work of Jamaica-born Claude McKay, among other missteps, reproduces what Kenneth Warren identifies as the "necessary misrecognitions" of black Diaspora. Black figurations of Diaspora complicate any singular or confining definition of urban or national space. To reinforce black queer vernacular's transnational affinity my chapters reach beyond the national boundaries scholars inscribe to readily around Harlem's Renaissance, the Black Arts movement, and the Caribbean Artists movement.

In my first chapter, I revisit and re-assess Eldridge Cleaver's notorious "Notes on a Native Son" (1966) essay to think differently about the typical laments of Black Arts nationalism and homophobia. I want to examine instead the under-theorized maneuvers of Cleaver's "Notes." After all, this often-cited piece contradicts the assumptions of Black Nationalist ideology for which he stands as synecdoche. In an essay that distinguishes carefully James Baldwin from the "Negro homosexuals" mocks with callisthenic anal sex to signify racial self-hatred, Cleaver extols Norman Mailer's The White Negro (1959) and Richard Wright's The Long Dream (1958). Cleaver recalls the scene from Wright's novel in which characters go "punk hunting,"

or gay bashing, to compare empathetically that violence with lynching. With “Notes,” Cleaver does not establish the Black Arts shorthand for which scholars credit it. A far more complex sense of black masculinity and racial uplift informs Cleaver’s use of Baldwin’s fiction and Baldwin himself as a contested metaphor. To explicate how Cleaver’s aesthetic differs little from Baldwin’s fierce legibility across his published work, I read into and around Hilton Als memoir The Women (1996) for Als’ own negotiation of Baldwin’s legacy **as filtered by** Black Arts shorthand. Also, I examine Baldwin’s Nobody Knows My Name (1961), the first book of his that Als held, to reject the Black Arts-informed differentiation of Baldwin’s “black” nonfiction and “queer” fiction. I compare Als and Cleaver’s complex admiration of Baldwin to muddle the overbearing politics informing the burgeoning field of black queer literary interpretation. The question that those of us who work in black queer studies need to ask of the representational writing we study should not be “**Can** the Queen Speak?”—to borrow from Dwight McBride’s key essay exploring black racial authority and homosexuality—but “**How does** the Queen Speak?”

The second chapter elucidates just how “queer” speaks across six decades of black literature by tracing that word across four short stories: Langston Hughes’ “Blessed Assurance” (1963), Lila Marshall’s “The Queer Duck” (1944-1945), Zora Neale Hurston’s “John Redding Goes to Sea” (1921), and W.E.B. Du Bois’ “Of the Coming of John” (1903). Each story uses “queer” to express the difference felt by alienated protagonists, a longing for transcendence from the material lives that delimits their fellow characters. All four lead characters find refuge in a kind of “queer thought-world,” as Du Bois calls it, a world in which they pursue music, intellectual

study, or dreams of sailors and the sea, instead of women (Souls 145). These stories' queer thought-worlds and characters build upon 19th-century models of a black "community among ourselves" that Saidiya Hartman finds is "not reducible to race—as if race a priori gave meaning to community or as if community was the [sole] expression of race" (59). Instead, Hughes, Marshall, Hurston, and Du Bois elicit a recognition in the affinitive reader that expectations for a black community can alienate those who "are to be understood in terms of the possibilities of resistance [inscribed in] the very purposeful and self-conscious effort to build community" outside of narrow constructions of blackness (59). I read the purposeful possibilities of these stories backwards chronologically, from Hughes to Du Bois, to emulate the way Hughes uses his queer protagonist Delmar to re-read the queerly figured Harlem Renaissance. Reading backwards highlights how Delmar comes from, and speaks to, previous black literature and black literary tropes—even Hughes' own poetry and autobiography The Big Sea (1940). Those tropes signal a black queer reading practice that Du Bois uses in "John" to re-tell the Biblical story of John the Baptist.

I start pointedly with Hughes, whose sexual interest inspires the anxious posturing of Arnold Rampersad's landmark two-volume biography The Life of Langston Hughes. With Hughes, I want to show the vernacular capaciousness of black racial masculinity. Hughes' playful signifying in "Blessed Assurance" reveals the complicit, comfortable knowledge its black characters have of queer presentation. Also, it responds to and confounds the growing whispers (even by its publication in February 1963) about Hughes' own alleged homosexuality. "Blessed Assurance" both names Delmar's queerness and rejects Delmar's father John's panic over it. Still,

neither the story nor I assert that Delmar or Hughes should be labeled **gay**, a word now associated with an identity politic not publicly popularized until after Hughes' death. I explore the politics of such marking by engaging with Rampersad's studious Life, which demonstrates its profound respect for the man known now as the Poet Laureate of Harlem as well as decades of scholarship unable to think about Hughes the way that "Blessed Assurance" represents Delmar.

The third chapter examines the complicated racial-sexual conversation of figured characters and biographies that shaped Harlem's Renaissance, ones between critics like Alain Locke and Charles S. Johnson, and across queer narratives of Harlem by Richard Bruce Nugent, Wallace Thurman, and Eric Walrond. Too simply do scholars evoke Locke and his movement-defining anthology The New Negro, or the special edition of journal Survey Graphic (March 1925) that launched it, to show the alleged silencing of black queer men and representations of them. Such assertions abridge the myriad voices that The New Negro represents—particularly Charles S. Johnson's. For example, the editors of Survey Graphic approached **Johnson** to edit a special Harlem edition; but because Johnson preferred to stay in the background, he asked Locke to assemble and edit it. These assertions also miss the strategic black bourgeois public sphere that The New Negro and Survey Graphic present, one explored similarly by German philosopher Jürgen Habermas. The New Negro prescribes the public face that black literary representation and scholarship must assume to stimulate "race-consciousness" and counteract "Old Negro" representations of highly sexual or violent blacks popular since Reconstruction. Their strategic packaging of black arts or mainstream consumption does not dictate black people's

private lives, however. Locke's public reproach of the Harlem "of racy music and racier dancing, of cabarets famous or notorious according to their kind" **in print** did not affect his own private life at and beyond those congregational places ("Harlem" 629). By 1925, Locke had already courted (and chased) Langston Hughes across the United States and Europe. Locke benefited from the new sexual freedom for black Americans that the "racy music" of the blues expresses. This freedom, as Angela Davis illustrates in Blues Legacies and Black Feminism, came with "provocative and pervasive sexual—including homosexual—imagery" (3).

In print, Locke criticized public representations like the infamous journal Fire!!: Devoted to Younger Negro Artists (1926) that he felt whites would use to "prove" that blacks were primitive. He singles out Fire!!'s centerpiece, Richard Bruce Nugent's "Smoke, Lilies and Jade," as he warns that "the strong sex radicalism of many of the contributors will shock many well-wishers and elate some of our adversaries" ("Fire" 563). Yet his review did not renounce Fire!!'s queerness all together—just the class implications of **the way** in which Nugent presented it. I explicate Locke's reaction to Fire!! so I can illustrate why published queer representations garnered more public attention than the arrests of Augustus Granville Dill (then business manager of Du Bois' Crisis magazine) in 1928 and Wallace Thurman in 1925, each for having sex with men in a public toilet. The divide between public literature and private lives also explains how W.E.B. Du Bois can write that McKay's best-selling Home to Harlem "nauseates me, and after the dirtier parts of its filth I feel distinctly like taking a bath" but can profess ignorance and regret later about firing Augustus Granville Dill after his arrest ("The Browsing

Reader” 202). Even McKay was hesitant about the public affect of literature. He abandoned plans for his first queer novel Color Scheme (circa 1925) because, as McKay explains, it included “certain phrases [which] might still be too raw for the American public” (qtd. in Cooper 221). Such concern for the US American public continued when writing Home to Harlem. McKay “stressed he wanted no trouble with censors and was willing to change or delete passages to conform to acceptable standards” (237).

The fourth chapter explores the influential role psychology and psychoanalysis have had on conversations about and representations of black queer masculinity throughout the Diaspora. Despite the contemporary reticence toward psychoanalysis within black communities voiced in work by Hortense Spillers, Claudia Tate, and others, psychological and psychoanalytic concepts have been central to black Letters for almost as long as the history of psychoanalysis, a term Sigmund Freud used first in 1896. One year later, W.E.B. Du Bois published “Strivings of the Negro People” in Atlantic Monthly, an essay which later became the often-cited “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” chapter of Souls of Black Folk. In Souls, Du Bois offers “the veil” and “double consciousness” to describe black US Americans’ epistemology. Du Bois’ double consciousness navigates the threefold mesh of the burgeoning method and theory of psychoanalysis, the racial metaphors in sexology that helped bring “the homosexual” into language as such (as well as a host of other terms like “invert” and “third sex,” among others), and turn-of-last-century discourse on race and spiritualism, which blurred the now expected racial lines to be found around those influenced by African cultural retentions. Among the many influences within this mesh is William

James, a contemporary of Freud's and one of Du Bois' professors at Harvard University, who explores dual "constituents of the self" in The Principles of Psychology (1907). It is no coincidence, as Siobhan Somerville notes in Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture (2000), that "negotiations of the color line, which W.E.B. Du Bois pronounced to be the 'problem of the twentieth century,' shaped and were shaped by the emergence of notions of sexual identity and the corresponding epistemological uncertainties surrounding them" (3).

I focus on Du Bois' "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" and James Weldon Johnson's novella Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man (1912) published in the US, as well as on Jamaica-born and UK-living Andrew Salkey's Escape to an Autumn Pavement (1960) published in London, to trace the persistent presence of the racial-sexual psychoanalytic in texts across the black Atlantic. In particular, Salkey's Escape demonstrates the reach of Frantz Fanon's reading of Du Bois and Freud. I examine both Salkey's use of psychoanalytic tropes as well as the novel's virtual exclusion from scholarship on West Indian writing, which is all the more striking considering Salkey was one of three founding members of the Caribbean Artists movement (CAM) in London.²⁷ A large part of Escape's exclusion is its prominent focus on protagonist Johnnie Sobert contemplating his attraction to a white man named (of all things) Dick. Plus, Johnnie reconciles his queer desire with his sense of his West

²⁷ According to CAM scholar Anne Walmsley, "three Caribbean writers" started it: "Two had recently arrived in Britain—Edward (now Kamau) Brathwaite in 1965 and John La Rose in 1961. The third, Andrew Salkey, had worked in London since 1952" (1).

Indian social self, one within a London inundated by both “immigrant panic” and Cold War “male homosexual panic” encouraged by the US and by Senator Joseph McCarthy.²⁸ Also, Escape reflects the influence of Frantz Fanon’s provocative analysis of imperialism, cross-racial encounters, and sexuality in Black Skin, White Masks (1952). I demonstrate how Fanon’s racial reading of Freudian psychoanalysis through Freud’s chief celebrator Jacques Lacan illustrates, as Daniel Boyarin attests, that “psychoanalysis is **au fond** not so much a Jewish science as a science of the doubled colonized subject ... shared by Jews and other postcolonial (‘modernizing’) peoples” (212-213).

Finally, the fifth chapter follows three black queer male “outsider”-intellectual characters named Ray: the Ray of both Claude McKay’s Home to Harlem and Banjo: A Story without a Plot (1929), Ray McGhee of LeRoi Jones’ short story “The Alternative,” from his collection Tales (1967), and Ray Fouts of Jones’ play, The Toilet (1963). Not so coincidentally, all three have a way with words, either as a writer or an orator. They lead other characters with their queer insight, which comes from the “double” vantage point “outside and inside [the black community] at the same time,” as Jones writes in his essay “Black Writing” (1964). I read these Ray characters alongside McKay and Jones’ knotty relationships to these texts sparked by these queer leader characters’ rebuttal of the myth of the machismo “race man.” These Ray characters use their very “difference” that distinguishes them to lead other characters to a heightened understanding of themselves as black people. Moreover, McKay and

²⁸ See Robert J. Corber’s Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity (1997).

Jones' work does not shy away from representing these queer figures as a common part of the black community. For example, the causal reaction heterosexual Jake Brown has in Home to Harlem to "dark dandies ... loving up their pansies" shows that people like Ray are hardly exotic (30-31).

Linking my discussion of McKay and Jones' work is James Baldwin, whom both McKay and Jones met, and in whom they drew the unprotected connections Baldwin implores in my epigraph to create their queerly black masculine Ray characters. Baldwin met both McKay and Jones; and I weave renditions of those meetings into McKay and Jones' narratives. I return to Baldwin in my conclusion to frame this manuscript, but also to comment on Baldwin's lingering role in black queer studies scholarship on masculine same-sexualities. I read the Baldwin-thinking chapter of Dwight McBride's just published Why I Hate Abercrombie & Fitch: Essays on Race and Sexuality (2005) against Baldwin's own sense of craft to foreground the vision so profoundly connected to and between Baldwin's words published, written, or spoken. I return to Fern Marja Eckman's The Furious Passage of James Baldwin to regard how Baldwin fashions his own biography through the same queer analytic, or black queer vernacular, he employs in his crafted narratives. Baldwin himself explains that his vision was inspired by others, including his junior high French teacher and New Negro poet Countée Cullen and the painter Beauford Delaney. In particular, Delaney taught Baldwin how to use his eyes literarily, a skill that, as Baldwin explains in a short encomium on Delaney, "meant for me that memory is a traitor and that life does not contain the past tense: the sunset one saw yesterday, the leaf that burned, or the rain that fell, have not really been seen unless one is prepared to see them

everyday” (“On the painter” 45). I am prepared to see Baldwin’s everyday figurations throughout and beyond his own body of texts, and back to Richard Bruce Nugent, whose “Smoke, Lilies and Jade” precipitated the research that has now become this manuscript during my senior year as an English major. I close by discussing how Nugent’s published aesthetic challenges the so-called “conundrum” of rendering simultaneously racial blackness and homosexual masculinity. The contemporaneous ordinariness of its vernacular cadence protests its celebration in black queer studies scholarship as exceptional. With the words Nugent published, wrote, or spoke, he demonstrates significantly a known lexicon that makes the open connections between racial blackness, masculinity and homoeroticism for which Baldwin calls in my epigraph. Both Baldwin and Nugent look beyond the ostensible “**waxworks**” that keep differentiated “race,” “gender,” and “sexuality” to regard a body of literature I can only hope that my work will inspire others to see similarly.

Chapter One: Fierce legibility, masculinity, and affinity: Hilton Als & Owen Dodson,
James Baldwin & Eldridge Cleaver

My life in Europe was ending, not because I had decided that it should, but because it became clearer and clearer . . . that something had ended for me. I rather think now, to tell the sober truth, that it was merely my youth, first youth, anyway, that was ending and I hated to see it go. In the context of my life, the end of my youth was signaled by the reluctant realization that I had, indeed, become a writer; so far, so good: now I would have to go the distance.

—James Baldwin, Introduction to Nobody Knows My Name (1961)

For years before and after her death, I referred to myself as a Negress; it was what I was conditioned to be. . . . I have expressed my Negressity by living, fully, the prescribed life of an auntie man—what Barbadians call a faggot. Which is a form of kinship, given that my being an auntie man is based on greed for romantic love with men temperamentally not unlike the men my mother knew.

—Hilton Als, The Women (1996)

In 1975, in the Flatbush section of Brooklyn, 13-year-old Hilton Als sauntered to school sporting a silk ascot. He chose this precocious accoutrement to help convey the fruition of his “Negressity.” Als’ wrapped neck signaled, fully, his fierce identification with his mother and sisters’ energy—a familial sensibility to flaunt sartorially any singularity. As Als explains in his essay “Freaks,” one autobiographical antecedent to his memoir The Women, “difference is a legacy. . . . In my family, [it] is a trait, manifested, outwardly, in dress” (44).²⁹ For the pubescent stylist, his vested

²⁹ The young Als also found an ascot lover outside of the family, in “my hero at the time, Horace Greeley, the famous nineteenth-century journalist” and abolitionist (25). The son of a day laborer and farmer in New Hampshire, Greeley founded the short-lived literary journal The New-Yorker (not the hyphen-less one still in production for which Als currently, and perhaps ironically, writes) and the newspaper The New York Tribune.

interest demonstrated as well his love for address—his “monstrous ambition” to be both writer and reader (Women 129).

Much like James Baldwin does in Nobody Knows My Name, Als establishes his maturation with the monstrously ambitious achievement of The Women. Its memoir form emphasizes Als’ own literate, interlocuting character. Always a process of negotiation and interpolation, this sense of self adapts to reading whomever, or whatever, he acknowledges as an influence. Also like Baldwin does in Nobody, Als uses his Women to narrate a “sober truth” about his fleeting first youth, a blunt tale about death and self-reflection that ends with a “woman” more metaphoric than biological—writer and Howard University professor Owen Dodson. Dodson seals Als’ “reluctant realization that [he] had, indeed, become a writer,” to borrow from Baldwin whom Als first discovered through Dodson.

Baldwin occupies little space in The Women, but he resonates in Als’ syntax. Elsewhere, in “The Enemy Within,” a later autobiographical take on his prescient reading as an adolescent, Als revisits his Dodson days with Baldwin center stage. With “Enemy,” Als views the mid-1970s through his profound “sense of kinship” with Baldwin, a connection that manifests still a “particular kind of ambivalence” (79). Of course, ambivalence is Als’ *métier*, one borrowed from Baldwin despite any professed consternation over Baldwin’s work, including the first book of his that Als came across, Nobody Knows My Name. Lent to him by Dodson in 1976, Nobody affirmed the racial-sexual appellation the young Als was starting to articulate and provided a site for him to see first the syntactic exchange The Women enacts, a complex act of

reading literary and familial roots.³⁰ Nobody affirmed what the 14-year-old Als knew before holding it in his hands. The book showed him how to “go the distance” to be a writer, both inside its cover and through the other ties it bound. The perhaps unintended gift from Dodson—Als never did return the loan—was not just Baldwin’s words but Dodson’s interpretation of them, a practice that Dorian Corey articulates well in Jennie Livingston’s documentary of New York’s legendary late-1980s ball culture, Paris Is Burning (1990): “**Reading** is the real art form of insult.” Als’ remarks in The Women and “Enemy Within” illustrate what Corey sees as reading’s artful aesthetic of dissonant affinity: “When you are all of the same thing, then you have to go to the fine point. In other words, [if] I’m a black queen and you’re a black queen, we can’t call each other black queens. That’s not a read—that’s just a fact. So, then we talk about your ridiculous shape, your saggy face, your tacky clothes.”

Such interpretive acuity enacts the intimate antiphony of black queer vernacular. As a dialogue and syntax here, this vernacular vocalizes black masculine same-sexuality within and around black letters. In the hands of black men, black queer vernacular conveys and enables the sometimes conflicted yet always invested process of literate identification. It senses its own history to employ the fierce legibility of type.³¹ It offers words published and exchanged across decades, sometimes over

³⁰ I, too, read Als as text. My comments assume him to be a character in his memoir despite the veracity that The Women ascribes to the events he describes.

³¹ I borrow **fierce legibility** from Muriel Draper’s introduction to Born to Be (1929), the autobiography of singer Taylor Gordon, known for singing spirituals. Or, as David Levering Lewis notes insinuatingly, Gordon was “spontaneous, amoral, irreverent, yet respectful, always ready with a song or an outrageous remark about his race” (212). To Draper, a white literary salon host, judge at drag balls at the Savoy Ballroom, and friend to Carl Van Vechten, Gordon’s written “style is his own, formed to carry his

bodies of water, to gift critical readers. It inspires an agile, libidinal, and negotiated hermeneutic. It moves from being body-bound to embracing inter-subjective, unstable **readings** of “the self.” Attending to its sophisticated, published rhythms means seeing anew, emphatically, a body of work neglected, neither clandestine nor non-existent. Estimating its ready alternative to staid understandings of black writing recognizes a telling Diaspora like the kind Paul Gilroy predicates in Against Race (2000) as an affront to “the stern discipline of primordial kinship and rooted belonging [including] the popular image of natural nations spontaneously endowed with self-consciousness, tidily composed [with] perfectly formed heterosexual pairings” (123). Black queer vernacular’s political ken “points toward a more refined and more wieldy sense of culture” not encumbered by what Gilroy calls raciological identity boxes (122).³²

More wieldy affinities—like Als’ “auntie man” kinship—drive the literary representations of Harlem’s Renaissance, the New Negro movement. Often signifying new perspectives on kinship are black male characters who act **differently** with unencumbered insight. Rarely are they dressed with ascots, but often are they named with the word “queer.” These men were inspired, in part, by the queer harmony heard

experience into written words. The very words themselves become his own” (ix). Draper admits her “pleasurably hazardous” experience editing Gordon’s vernacular and explains that whatever changes she made were in service to the average reader “enfeebled . . . by the ‘fierce legibility’ of type” (xi). I use her regret to illustrate the bold apparentness of black queer vernacular immortalized in type.

³² Nowhere in Against Race does Gilroy acknowledge the kind of queer theory that would support new epistemologies of a same-sexual perspective. Still, his questioning the tyranny of raciological templates can move queerly and prod the necessary re-articulations in which I am invested. See also D. N. Rodowick’s “Reading the Figural” for his contention with the “concept of **speech** as the site of discourse, communication, meaning, and rational thought” which sets a fixed sense of identity (11). For Rodowick, the figural is “ever permutable—a fractured, fracturing or fractal space, ruled by time and difference—the concept of identity is unknown to it” (12).

in W. E. B. Du Bois' Souls of Black Folk and James Weldon Johnson's Autobiography of An Ex-Colored Man.³³ The contextual, canonical presence of black queer male figures like these affronts historiographies blind to the importance of queerly depicted black communities, enabled to voice principled critique.³⁴ Elsewhere, I explore how the literate construction of Harlem as city and cityscape in the 1920s and 1930s rested on a communal negotiation of this black queer vernacular, or what New Negro movement mogul Alain Locke called its "flesh values [which] to provide a healthy antidote to Puritanism" (563).³⁵

Here, I focus on the similarly mythic "flesh values" circling and commemorating the man most often tasked to represent the struggles of contemporary black gay men: James Baldwin. Too often, writers portray the public personage and metonym "James Baldwin" as the all but lone figure "dealing with homosexuality as part of the black community," as Samuel Delany does (xviii). But "James Baldwin," like the city and cityscape of Harlem, works epistemologically. He is a conduit who bears witness to, not begins or pioneers the language through which writers conceive

³³ These books have histories, too. Finding a "first" black queer male figure, or isolating the birth of black queer vernacular, has more to do with the perceived needs of historiography than with understanding the fabric of black literary production which has always included and supported **difference**. See also Monica L. Miller's "W. E. B. Du Bois and the Dandy as Diasporic Race Man" for a discussion of Du Bois' explication of "the feminine man" in his best known aesthetic statements. See the second chapter for more discussion of Du Bois' Souls and the fourth chapter for more discussion of Johnson's Autobiography alongside Souls.

³⁴ There is no coincidence that cultural and political commentary in Jean Toomer's Cane (1923), Claude McKay's Home to Harlem, and Nella Larsen's Passing, for three examples, come from same-sexual characters described as, and with, "queer."

³⁵ See my essay, "Reading Black Queer Vernacular in the 'Streetgeist and Folklore' of Harlem's Renaissance."

of black male same-sexual subjectivity.³⁶ Baldwin the writer continues a vernacular he learned as early as middle school—from New Negro poet Countée Cullen’s French lessons, which inspired Baldwin to go to Paris later and discover a different kind of “French.”³⁷ No doubt, **this** “French” interpolated Cullen’s own French experiences, like setting sail to Paris rather notoriously in June 1928 to start his Guggenheim fellowship. Cullen had just married W. E. B. Du Bois’ daughter Yolande but crossed the sea with his “friend” Harold Jackman, whom David Levering Lewis calls “matinee-idol handsome” (225). With **this** kind of “French,” Baldwin the writer contributed to black queer vernacular’s “flesh values” to signify on what Pekka Sulkunen, following Pierre Bourdieu, calls as “a common framework within which the members of the group understand their own and each other’s actions and through which the researcher can make sense of them” (108).³⁸

I bear witness to the “common framework” of “James Baldwin,” to his synthesizing function. Hilton Als points to the function of this framework when he explains that discovering Baldwin at age 14 clarified his understanding of his own

³⁶ See Joshua T. Miller’s “The Discovery of What It Means to Be a Witness” for another articulation of the framework Baldwin employs.

³⁷ At PS139, Frederick Douglass Junior High School, Cullen was Baldwin’s French teacher. But it was because Cullen “had given his allegiance to France during extended stays there,” as Fern Marja Eckman characterizes his devotion, that the young Baldwin became fascinated with “French” and later moved to Paris (49). Cullen was also in charge of Douglass’ literary club. His literary influence on Baldwin comes through despite his reluctance to acknowledge it to Eckman in the interviews from which she culled her biography.

³⁸ Sulkunen explains that **sense** denotes exactly Pierre Bourdieu’s **habitus** lens, which makes possible people’s contributory interactions—“not just as actors in a prefabricated play [but as] creative subjects [whose] actions and thoughts should not be interpreted in terms of a ‘logic’ but rather in terms of a ‘sense’ (hence the title of [Bourdieu’s] Le sens pratique)” (110).

“differences—which took the form of reading and writing, and hanging out with boys who called one another ‘girlfriend’” (“Enemy” 72). When first reading Nobody Knows My Name, the young Als heard “my secret voice, the voice of someone who wasn’t afraid to describe who he was and where he’d come from and what he’d seen” (72). By identifying this kind of meta-textual reading and listening, by finding himself extrinsically, Als reinforces and confirms that “James Baldwin”’s importance lies not with syntax alone but in this framework’s ability to trigger another’s self-consciousness, another’s introspection. “James Baldwin”’s fierce legibility and masculinity, what Als finds to be “a style that blended a full-throated preacherly cadence with the astringent obliquities of a semi-closeted queen,” enables interpretive affinity over any sedate aesthetic appreciation (76).³⁹ “James Baldwin” moves.

Baldwin himself exemplifies such motion in Nobody Knows My Name when he, as Als notes sardonically, writes “about some aspect of life or politics that reflected his interior self: he contained a multitude of worlds, and those worlds were his true subject” (79). Projected interior selves shape what Als calls Baldwin’s encumbered narrative form. Yet images inferred move not awkwardly; they echo the indirect signifying that has long voiced black cultural politics strategically.⁴⁰ With this essay, I explore how Als’ surface **reading** reflects the methodological slippage reinforced by the still lingering burden that black writing shoulders. The content of

³⁹ Similarly, and no less problematically, Gore Vidal remarked to me during our conversation before the 19 November 2003 symposium held in his honor here at Yale University that Baldwin was a tragic cross of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and Bette Davis. Vidal then referred to Baldwin with the feminine pronoun *she*.

⁴⁰ See Lawrence W. Levine, Black Culture and Black Consciousness, for examples of how this stratagem dates back to antebellum folk tales and conceptions of cosmology.

Als' work reads biographically, socially, because of a taught expectation for the documentary mode, a style in black writing not often regarded as narrative choice or as rhetorical affect.⁴¹ The form of Als' prose, however, exacts the hermeneutic of black queer vernacular. Clarifying this distinction not only illustrates the residue of (at least) a century of discourse; it shows how profoundly the stern discipline of the (auto)biographical clouds black vernacular's life-stories. Attending to "full-throated" form disassembles as well the staid epistemology of the black closet, which has garnered such mass media attention recently through the (usually pathological) figure of the lurking "D. L. Brother."⁴² The wily power of black, not always queer, discourse dims to transparent denotation.

The consequence for reading such diminution, for regarding black literature as transparently real, has particular effect on contemporary writing about black male same-sexual literary history. One example is Essex Hemphill's eloquent life narrative introducing Brother to Brother: New Writings by Black Gay Men (1991), in which he laments a lack of literature that would have provided a haven from "the swirling vortex of my adolescent sexuality as a wide-eyed, scrawny teenager, intensely feeling the power of a budding sexual drive unchecked by any legitimate information at home or on the streets" (xv). Importantly, literate information would legitimate his same-sexuality; it would end his "search for evidence of things not seen, evidence of black

⁴¹ See Barbara Foley, "History, Fiction, and the Ground Between: The Uses of the Documentary Mode in Black Literature."

⁴² See Benoit Denizet-Lewis' "Double Lives on the Down Low" for a particularly one-sided view of Atlanta nightlife for black men who have sex with men. See Steve Sternberg's "The danger of living 'down low,'" for one of many articles affixing D. L. Brothers with the unchecked spread of HIV within black communities.

gay experiences on record, evidence of ‘being’ to contradict the pervasive invisibility of black gay men, [which] at times proved futile” (xxi). I discount neither Hemphill’s need, nor his literary frustration. His own creative work addresses with great insight the desirous, sometimes public, identificatory process I study. I respond to Hemphill here, to an essay whose after-life has shaped a great deal of “evidentiary” scholarship and anthologies of black gay male writing, to qualify the paradigm within which black queer vernacular signifies loudly—the literary.⁴³ Printed pages may be out of print, not available readily at local bookstores or even online. They may be tucked away still in university library collections, waiting for critics to celebrate properly their aesthetic panache. Still, their lack of popularity does not mean they do not exist. Their lexical muscle may have little use in typically post-Stonewall evocations of gay male identity, but their historic work and worth can but be overlooked not denied when read alongside each other, or **read**, to borrow again from Dorian Corey, “to the fine point.” I call not for an intense hermeneutic disconnected from social, political praxis (no more than the Russian Formalists did in the early twentieth century).⁴⁴ Instead, I urge that we scholars of black male same-sexual literary representation attend to the discourse of knowledge presented semiotically with and within those descriptions.⁴⁵ Typesettings invoke a dialogue inclusive of writers, editors, and readers—those

⁴³ I use “after-life” here because the conversations I had with him in 1991 when Brother to Brother was first published made me think that his “evidence of ‘being’” was a nascent epistemological category. I think Hemphill’s Introduction has carried on after his death in ways that new Hemphill writing, if he were still alive, would not.

⁴⁴ See Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory: An Introduction (1983).

⁴⁵ See Antony Easthope, Literary into Cultural Studies (1991), in which offers “discourse of knowledge” to conceptualize a means to cojoin literary and popular culture studies.

involved with the processes of texts' creation and dissemination—that always returns to the interpreted, negotiated, and intimate word. This linguistic turn works independently of social and material structures, even as lexical verve inflects the experiences of its author. The enforced silence or curtailed political power of black gay men living now speaks rather differently on the printed page.

Als reproduces the understanding of this dialogue when he finds it in his mother's reading habits. He knows that she loved literature and was "attracted to self-expression as it is filtered through an elliptical thought process," but was reticent to reveal what motivated that, or any, attraction (27). Als felt there was **something** about her sensorial choices she shared not with him; so, he **read** her "as a kind of living literature" (19). As he explains in "Death Becomes Her," another earlier tribute, his impulse to write came from "imagining what my mother might have said" about her desires (29). More accurately, The Women gives not a posthumous voice to Als' mother but illustrates how critical reading reinforces Als' own "Negressity," a practice begun before her death. His book talks back to those she gave to him, ones "almost always by women, such as Alice Childress' A Hero Ain't Nothin' but a Sandwich, Maud Martha, by Gwendolyn Brooks, and anything by Paule Marshall," whose work his mother admired because of their shared Bajun descent (25). Als' mother invested her own experience into Marshall's Brown Girl, Brownstones (1959), "her second favorite novel," just as Als finds his own sense of self by reading black women both real and metonymic in The Women (26). Als may feel "dwarfed by my mother's spectacular sense of narrative and disaster" but his negotiation of difference through expressive choice honors her lived experience (19).

Als' unforgiving embrace of terms like "Negress" and "auntie man" continues his mother's dislike of "the American penchant for euphemism; she was resolute in making the world confront its definition of her" (11). His mother "took pleasure in manipulating the guilt and embarrassment white and black Americans alike felt when she called herself a Negress"; so does Als in prompting "the prescribed life of an auntie man" (11, 9). Als also models his recalcitrance on Dorothy Dean, Harvard graduate, one-time fact checker for The New Yorker, Fulbright scholar, slide curator at Brandeis University, and celebrated New York "fag hag," as Als lauds her. Dean "reigned, with both cruelty and compassion, over that site of urban gay culture she called 'the fruit stand'" (69). Like her, Als refuses "to take even a perfunctory interest in a politics of oppression she did not own—and could not own her" (81). Als' "fruit" stands for itself. He delves past the simply biographical or social, what Arthur Flannigan-Saint-Aubin laments as "the mere assumption of a blackgaymale identity" that colludes with a politic burdened with overcoming an imposed "invisibility" (389).⁴⁶ Als avoids the usual scenario where literary representation surrogates material and political power, where lexical acumen can only enact, and thus "prove," social disfranchisement.

⁴⁶ See also Charles I. Nero's "Toward a black gay aesthetic: Signifying in contemporary black gay literature," included in Brother to Brother: New Writings by Black Gay Men. Nero deduces that "black gay men have been in an invisible population" by reading for their absence, not presence, in "the intellectual writings of black Americans" (229). Arthur Flannigan-Saint-Aubin argues that this "invisibility" assumption guiding the poetics of Brother to Brother "fails or at least disappoints" (383). By returning to the same questions of "how is the black gay male to forge his own idiom, to speak, and to represent himself in an ethnocentric, racist, homophobic culture," Brother to Brother posits "visibility" not as self-expression but as self-defense (382).

Als' **reading** scripts process, affinity, intellect—"the real art form of insult"—not merely his own presence. Als' "auntie man" **status** lays claim to his centered semiosis with specifically West Indian discourse. "Auntie man" works as a culturally- and historically-specific tag signifying simultaneously race, nation, gender, and sexuality.⁴⁷ Als' mother "would not allow her feelings to be ghettoized; in her community, she was in the majority" (10).⁴⁸ Als writes the way she lived. So should we. For too long, scholars have limited black queer male subjectivity in literature to "abjection," or to what Robert Reid-Pharr calls "stark representations of the black abject, or ... the ghost of the homosexual" (368). Instead of noting an often-playful black queer resonance working within a black folk culture continued from antebellum songs and tales, scholars prefer to overlook the desirous and invested process of reading that would point them toward voices defining black masculinity and same-sexuality with vernacular open for interpretation, discussion.

Here, I explore one melodic line of black queer vernacular, that between Hilton Als, Owen Dodson, James Baldwin, Eldridge Cleaver, and Huey P. Newton. I stage it between two open-mouthed kisses to nod to the sequence's glottal rhythm, its sexual and textual intimacy. I pay attention to three moments of epiphany: Als reading

⁴⁷ While I do not explore Als' "auntie man" manipulation of gender here, it contributes significantly to his sexual politic. For example, he explains, "I perform vulnerability in the hope that it would elicit his [partner's] maleness. ... Seducing men into performing acts defined as male, but in circumstances they would describe as illicit ... disempowers their maleness. In an illicit circumstance, men are just as frightened and vulnerable as the next guy. That's what I like" (18). Assuming "my inheritance as a Negress" implies twisting patriarchal masculinity unawares (17).

⁴⁸ For a different take on this "majority" approach, see Stuart Hall's "Minimal Selves" for his discussion of the often-perceived "conundrum" of black people in London "occupy[ing] a new kind of space at the center" despite histories of racist disfranchisement (114).

Baldwin's Nobody Knows My Name, which I explicate by attending to Nobody's vernacular insight; Cleaver admiring while admonishing the power of Baldwin's fiction in his infamous "Notes on a Native Son," which includes its own references to Nobody; and Newton revealing the nature of Cleaver and Baldwin's face-to-face meeting after "Notes" first appeared in print. I collect these moments, each interacting with the common framework of a composed or libidinous Baldwin, to move beyond the expected evocation of Baldwin, to implode the existing, limiting black "gay" male historiographies, and to reveal the inertia of Black Arts-informed black studies methodology that helps produce skewed assessments of black literary production.⁴⁹ Like Als' "singularity" illustrated through his neck and syntax adornment, Baldwin's incorporates always a communally-inclusive queer commentary, to borrow from Laurent Berlant and Michael Warner, one "animated by a sense of belonging to a discourse world ... that can afford sex and intimacy in sustained, unchastening ways"

⁴⁹ See Andrew Shin and Barbara Judson, "Beneath the Black Aesthetic: James Baldwin's Primer of Black American Masculinity," for one example of Baldwin's typical and isolating exceptionalism. Their praise for Baldwin's "gay ethic well before 'gay' entered common parlance and certainly before the work of writers and scholars [who] legitimated 'queer theory' as a critical discourse" rests on a rather creative sense of black literary history (247). For example, they read black literature "from approximately 1940 to the mid-1970s [as] a masculinist enterprise" dominated by Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison (247). Gender parity, or "the recuperation of a black female literary history" does not take prominence until after Alice Walker "re-discovers" Zora Neale Hurston and scholars appreciate the "urban sensibility suggested by the novels of, among others, Nella Larsen, Ann Petry, and, of course, Toni Morrison" (247, 248). Such a reception-oriented historiography ignores the ways in which female writers were respected, not ignored, before the "mid-1970s." For example, even infamous misogynist Alain Locke wrote admiringly to Ann Petry after the 1946 publication of her celebrated The Street. Black historiographies like these maintain a Black Arts-inflected "masculinist enterprise." The record and contemporaneous critical reception of black literature stands quite differently.

that are attuned to the antiphonal structures in black expressive traditions (344).⁵⁰ Baldwin's work invokes a perceptive lexicon, centered and inviting in black letters long before the publication of his first novel Go Tell It on the Mountain (1953), which itself offers a pubescent boy discovering his "secret heart" much like Als does through Baldwin (21). Or, as Melvin Dixon reads Baldwin, "the imperative command of Go Tell It on the Mountain and the selfless, ironic simplicity of Nobody Knows My Name required my immediate attention" (38-39). The call and response Dixon found in Baldwin's life-texts spoke all he could "ever hope to tell on the mountain[—]the trembling cadence and mystery of my own name or identity, which is the most difficult task any writer must face" (39). Isolating that cadence exchanged between Baldwin, Als, Dodson, Cleaver, and Newton shows how readily adaptable black queer vernacular insights can be, how vocal they are.

The first kiss took place in New York in 1976, between then-15-year-old Hilton Als and 62-year-old Owen Dodson: "I entered Owen's mouth and his liquor-swollen tongue made a sound against mine" (Women 131). Another time, Als "put my tongue in his mouth after he had vomited into his soup plate" (124). Despite Als' scathing portrait of Dodson, "crippled by arthritis and ... incoherent half the time," The Women reveals just how much Als learned from Dodson (123). Shared saliva and meeting tongues inspired literacy in the work of a previous generation of **monstrously ambitious** men: "Entering his mouth with my tongue was like entering the atmosphere

⁵⁰ My racial use of Berlant and Warner's "queer commentary" comes not from their one reference to race intersecting with queer studies. Instead, I align the "wrenching sense of recontextualization" they see in "queer commentary" with black queer vernacular's project centering same-sexuality within black expressivity—a wrenching vision for those too tied to blanket misunderstandings of black homophobia (345).

of another age, his breath an asphyxiating growth to which were attached musty books inscribed in now fading India ink” (134). So breathtaking was this mouthy entrée to Dodson’s floor-to-ceiling bookcases, Als takes on Dodson’s toxin, too, including his cantankerous appreciation for New Negro writers. In Dodson fashion, Als calls them “the Negro fag intellectuals whose reflexive, sentimental race consciousness” showed merely that they were “children hungry for the comfort of group ideology (or therapy)” (119, 121). Als’ initial identification with Baldwin’s image over his words evokes Dodson, too. About Nobody Knows My Name, Als deadpans, “I liked the book less for what Baldwin had to say than for its dust jacket. The jacket showed Baldwin through the grid of a broken window standing in a pile of inner-city rubble. He projects a look of pathos meant to chip away at the invulnerability of the general reader” (130). Or, as Als expounds in “The Enemy Within”:

I had never seen an image of a black boy like me—Baldwin looked as if he could have been posing in my old neighborhood in East New York—gracing anything as impressive as a collection of essays. In fact, shortly after Owen gave me the book I began to pretend that the photograph of Baldwin was me, or the writer I meant to be, and that the book’s contents were my spiritual autobiography, or a record of the life I longed to lead. (72)

Still, Als’ desirous admiration of grace and spirit comes mitigated by Dodson’s raw memory of Baldwin, who was a poor house guest in May 1955, when Dodson

produced Baldwin's play, The Amen Corner (1954),⁵¹ at Howard University. Baldwin squatted with Dodson for two weeks, with Arnold, his lover at the time who was the inspiration for "Sonny's Blues" (1957), in tow. More grating to Dodson than the daily fifth of vodka and two quarts of milk they required then, or their generally disruptive boisterousness, was the undeniable fame Baldwin accumulated after that fortnight. Als conveys that "it was galling for Owen to know that Baldwin began writing one of his most widely anthologized essays, Notes of a Native Son, in Owen's home, fortified by Owen's liquor and attention" (Women 130).⁵² Als repeats such disdain for Baldwin's words in "Enemy Within," which reviews a new edition of Baldwin's works that "mercifully excludes his ill-conceived and poorly written plays, 'The Amen Corner' and 'Blues for Mister Charlie,' and the novels written after 'Another Country'" (79). Als claims to look beyond inferior text for any compelling affinity. So, Als admires "the high-faggot style of his voice," or Baldwin's "enormous eyes, like dark poppies in bloom, raised in mock or serious consternation" (72). Als sees his reflection in Baldwin's biography, not his diegesis.

Certainly, anyone can proffer a critical aesthetic; but Als' desire "to resist my identification with Baldwin [while knowing] we were uneasy members of the same tribe" rehearses the typical denunciation of black writing identifiably queer, a move resting on presumed Black Arts movement politics (72). Sure, that movement's "collective effort to bring about fundamental social reform," as Houston A. Baker Jr.

⁵¹ In 1954, the first act of Amen Corner was published in Zero magazine. In 1968, Dial Press issued a complete manuscript.

⁵² Likewise, David Leeming's biography of Baldwin paints a disgruntled portrait of Dodson.

relates in the canon-solidifying Norton Anthology of African American Literature (1997), included “clear misogyny and ugly homophobia,” the “sad accompaniments of earnest ventures” (1796, 1805).⁵³ But such inclusions hardly demarcate **all** contemporaneous movement-related or –inspired discourse. The supposed uniformity of movement misogyny and homophobia becomes “clear” largely through subsequent scholarship about it. For example, when Deborah McDowell and Hortense Spillers comment that Baldwin’s “essays were invariably praised at the expense of his fiction” in the Norton Anthology, which itself includes only “Sonny’s Blues,” a presumably “straight” representative of that fiction, they overlook Baldwin’s full influence to repeat the usual polemic between Baldwin’s “black” essays and “gay” fiction (1652).⁵⁴ Als contributes to this hasty distinction by praising only the “black” essays as “models of linguistic precision and critical acuity”—as if parsing the man who so often functions metonymically for black gay male subjectivity is possible (“Enemy” 75).

This polemic does not account for the essays and ordering of Nobody Knows My Name, for its strategies of disclosure that Hilton Als adapts. With 13 essays

⁵³ Dodson and Als’ slam of the New Negro movement takes a page from typically “sad accompaniments” of Black Arts rhetoric. For example, in Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: From Its Origins to the Present (1967), Harold Cruse asserts that the “Negro renaissance is a misnomer, a fad, a socially assertive movement in art that disappears and leaves no imprint [because it is] an emasculated movement” (37).

⁵⁴ Herein, other mis-characterizations abound. One is the categorization of Baldwin’s first novel, Go Tell It on the Mountain as his “straight” one. As if on cue, McDowell and Spillers remark that “many agree that Go Tell It on the Mountain is Baldwin’s most technically accomplished and narratively disciplined novel, although most conclude that his true **métier** was not the novel” (1652). That group of “most” also disregard protagonists John Grimes’ pubescent discovery: “In the school lavatory, alone, thinking of the boys, older, bigger, braver, who made bets with each other as to whose urine could arch higher, he had watched in himself a transformation of which he would never dare to speak” (19). But the novel certainly does.

previously published in magazines and organized into two parts, Nobody develops its own narrative arc that makes plain its spatial, racial, sexual dialectic in a collection that Baldwin introduces as “a very small part of a private logbook” (12). Part of that logbook comes through the associational placing of essays nine and ten in Nobody’s part two: “Notes for a Hypothetical Novel,” an address delivered at the third annual Esquire magazine symposium on the “Role of the Writer in America” at San Francisco State College on 22 October 1960; and “The Male Prison,” Baldwin’s critique of Madeleine (1952), André Gide’s confessional and often-overlooked last work.⁵⁵ Most cite “The Male Prison,” first published in 1954, as one of Baldwin’s rare nonfiction tracts on homosexuality; but I read it alongside Baldwin’s “Hypothetical Novel” and within Nobody to show how the collection foregrounds always its racial-sexual paradigm of affinitive reading, a process offering literate, not literal, transcendence through syntax. Such grammar Als repeats with his “auntie man” kinship.

⁵⁵ At first glance, Gide’s Madeleine—published in France under the title Nunc Manet et Te—appears to pay homage posthumously to his wife (and cousin) Madeleine. (Gide wrote the memoir after her 1938 death; and it was published after his own on 19 February 1951). But Baldwin finds in Madeleine Gide’s admission of his substitutive use of his wife in—and as—fiction to mask his homosexuality. Gide confesses his “habit ... of mentally associating her with my sorrows and joys” and identifies other exchanges she inspired, including those lexical (she appeared previously in his writing as “Emmanuèle”): “Perhaps I liked her real name only because, from my childhood on, it evoked all she represented for me of grace, sweetness, intelligence, and kindness” (3, 4). Lest anyone mistake his representational hyperbole for heterosexual romance, Gide displaces her flesh first for text: “I was mistaken about her! For the whole effort of my love tended less to bridge the gap between us than to bridge the gap between her and that ideal figure I invented. At least this is the way it strikes me today; and I do not think Dante acted differently with Beatrice” (6). Later, Gide relays that his story with Madeleine “stretches over too long a time, over [his] whole life,” and that it is “a constant, a latent, secret, essential drama marked by very few events; never openly declared” (50). Gide encourages the kind of analysis that Baldwin engages. See also Jerome de Romanet’s “Revisiting ‘Madeleine’ and ‘The Outing’”: James Baldwin’s revision of Gide’s sexual politics.”

Baldwin's "Hypothetical Novel" includes a looming male figure who, for Baldwin, "dramatize[s] ... that level from which any genuine work of the imagination springs" (119). Apart from his mother and father, this man is one of the first people Baldwin recalls. He remembers his younger self seeing this stranger "coming up our street, very drunk, falling-down drunk, ... stumbling past one of those high, iron railings with spikes on top, and he falls and bumps his head against one of these railings, and blood comes down his face, and there are kids behind him and they're tormenting him and laughing at him" (119). The drunk's corporeality provides a spectacle not unlike Owen Dodson's vomiting, "womanly" shell of whom he once was. The drunk, like Dodson for Als, "occupies too large a place in [Baldwin's] imagination" (119). Neither Baldwin nor Als picture an abject figure, however—what Robert Reid-Pharr calls "an inchoate, irrational nonsubject [who serves] as the chaos that both defines and threatens the borders of logic, individuality, and basic subjectivity" (354).⁵⁶ Neither are invested in expelling these riotous men to create

⁵⁶ Reid-Pharr's "Tearing the Goat's Flesh" offers a savvy negotiation of **the abject**, as explored by Diana Fuss and Julia Kristeva, which posits exactly the typical "lack" of same-sexual subjectivity in black literature that erases black queer vernacular and overlooks a wieldy sense of black cultural strategies for indirect discourse. He applies the abject-induced process of "negative interiorization [which] involves turning homosexuality inside out, exposing not the homosexual's abjected insides but the homosexual as the abject, as the contaminated and expurgated insides of the heterosexual subject," to the literary "production of African American masculinity" (353). But such a sexy polemic, where abjection is "the **dearticulation** of meaning and identity" bears little to help negotiate an agile, libidinal, negotiated, **and articulating** hermeneutic. Just like the folk tales that Lawrence Levine studies in Black Culture and Black Consciousness, black queer vernacular negotiates less "the specter of black boundaryness, the idea that there is no normal blackness to which the black subject, American or otherwise, might refer," than it does a fierce indirection, a kind of "auntie man" kinship (Reid-Pharr 353-354). Black queer vernacular acknowledges not any "negative interiorization." Even Diana Fuss cautions that any inside/out conceit, "if it

complete or discrete selves. Both Baldwin's drunk and Als' Dodson are central, not discretionary. As Baldwin explains, he transfers the drunk from psyche to syntax because the lumbering, bleeding figure establishes just how Baldwin "had become an American," how Baldwin "had walked right into, as I inevitably had to do, the bottomless confusion which is both public and private, of the American republic" (123).

This "American personality," as he names it, has little to do with Reid-Pharr's "inchoate, irrational subject." Hardly incipient, this personality negotiates an "enormous incoherence" particularly applicable to black queer vernacular (123, 124). For Baldwin, such incoherence "occurs, let us say, when I am frightened, I am absolutely frightened to death, and there's something which is happening or about to happen that I don't want to face" (123). He stages this knowing, unraveling fear with a hypothetical example of a friend who has murdered his mother and placed her corpse in the closet. Later, Baldwin sits with this friend. They are "trying to be buddy-buddy together" but Baldwin is all too aware of what remains despite its delayed utterability: "No matter what I say I may inadvertently stumble on this corpse. And this incoherence which seems to afflict this country is analogous to that" (124). Awareness of this corpse, if I can divest it from matricide and horror, indicates the kind of "open secret," to borrow from D. A. Miller, that black queer vernacular articulates. Its fierce legibility deploys a kind of "secrecy" (or "incoherence") only as "a mode whose ultimate meaning lies in the subject's formal insistence that he is radically inaccessible

remains undeconstructed, [will] disguise the fact that most of us are both inside and outside at the same time" (5).

to the [mass] culture that would otherwise entirely determine him” (Miller 195). Strategic inaccessibility provides Baldwin’s “bottomless confusion which is both public and private.” It speaks outward. It indicates its very US American-ness, not its marginalization. Its articulation as Baldwin’s hypothesis provides literate, not literal, transcendence from any supposed closet, metaphoric or otherwise.

Vivaciously expressive corpses of a different kind animate “The Male Prison,” in which Baldwin takes Madeleine to task for Gide’s egocentricity and for its far too romantic articulation of homosexuality while admitting that “there is something immensely humbling in this last document” of Gide’s (127). Baldwin’s interaction with Gide provides a provocative template for Als’ interaction with Baldwin and Eldridge Cleaver’s with Baldwin—complicitous, critical. Like Als’ reading of Baldwin, Baldwin’s of Gide foregrounds “the discomfort he caused me to feel”—an emotion prompted by the discourse of Gide’s “Protestantism and his homosexuality” (127). Gide’s Protestantism comes through Madeleine’s piety; but his homosexuality focuses much of Baldwin’s review. Baldwin’s problem with Gide’s homosexuality is its expression through guilt and a decidedly shameful secrecy, one **not like** D. A. Miller’s stratagem. For Baldwin, textual homosexuality should function much like the lumbering drunk of his memory—its highly visible “incoherent” spectacle should illuminate “that level from which any genuine work of the imagination springs.” Sexuality is germane to the racial, national, intimate diegesis he creates in fiction or nonfiction. For this reason, Baldwin uses Madeleine to expound how any debate that relegates homosexuality apart or ponders whether it is natural remains “completely pointless” (128). Those arguments can never be won, he explains, because they

“would rob the normal—who are simply the many—of their very necessary sense of security and order” (128).

In a move that predicts Teresa de Lauretis’ articulation of queer theory three decades later, Baldwin recasts same-sexuality both at the center of, and consequentially irrelevant to, ultimately, the transcendent possibilities of prose. This queer epistemology, which sees itself no longer “as merely transgressive or deviant vis-à-vis a proper, natural sexuality (i.e., institutionalized reproductive sexuality),” eludes Gide who “found no way to escape the prison of that masculinity” (de Lauretis iii; Baldwin 132). Most tragic about Gide’s self-image trap is the inconsequentiality of his romantic isolation, since “his sorrow was not different from the sorrow of all men born” (Baldwin 132). Baldwin uses Gide’s “extremely valuable failure” to warn how “we may very well be strangled by a most petulant and unmasculine pride” (132). Less effeminate than inarticulate, such pride enables the common suffering Baldwin addresses in his “Hypothetical Novel”: “I didn’t meet anyone ... who didn’t suffer from the very same affliction that all the people I had fled from suffered from and that was they didn’t know who they were” (122). For Baldwin, “the very same affliction” means accepting the social status quo in life-texts, in nonfiction like Madeleine, or in fiction coming from the “genuine work of the imagination,” for which, Baldwin admits, he is “absolutely helpless and ignorant” (119). Form and language **can move** through a diegetic not material world. His fierce syntax thus interlopes with the all-too-comfortable image of Baldwin bereft, exiled, lonely. Such an image shapes James Darsey’s essay, “Baldwin’s Cosmopolitan Loneliness,” in which he reduced Baldwin’s power of **poietes**—the ability to create out of the self to take the chaos of

the world into the self and represent it as [an] universal narrative” that Darsey finds to be “our shared destruction and despair.”⁵⁷

Not even Eldridge Cleaver paints Baldwin so pathetically. Cleaver revels in the sparkle of Baldwin’s syntax, in “that continuous delight one feels upon discovering a fascinating, brilliant talent on the scene, a talent capable of penetrating so profoundly into one’s own little world that one knows oneself to have been unalterably changed and **liberated**” (“Notes” 51). With that power, Baldwin interpolates Cleaver: “He placed so much of my own experience, which I thought I had understood, into new perspectives from which I derived new insights” (51). Cleaver sports no ascot, admits no “girlfriend” differences, but certainly engages in a kind of **reading**. Like Als assigns heterosexual gender performance to his sex with Dodson—“to his mind, my size made me a man in relation to his woman, his quivering vulnerability and position on the bed, which was one of acceptance”—Cleaver reads Baldwin “to the fine point,” **as a woman** (Women 131). Cleaver confesses: “It would have been a gas for me to sit on a pillow beneath the womb of Baldwin’s typewriter and catch each newborn page as it entered this world of ours” (51). Also like Als, Cleaver reflects on a kinship transfigured: “I knew why my love for Baldwin’s vision had become ambivalent” (51, 52). Cleaver’s particular love skewers Baldwin’s narratives, too, as it indicates a learned *métier*. Yet, in “Notes,” Cleaver admits that before he became “aware of an aversion in my heart,” before reading Another Country, he saw Baldwin’s “literary crime [in] his arrogant repudiation of one of the few gravely important expressions of our time,” Norman Mailer’s The White Negro (1957) (52). Thus, Baldwin’s self-

⁵⁷ See Caryl Phillips, The European Tribe (1987), for another example.

hatred comes not from the fact of his homosexuality, or even its literate, figural articulation, but from a critique of Mailer, which reveals Baldwin's "hatred for blacks" (52).

Cleaver's "Notes on a Native Son" then spirals in its own spectacular sense of narrative and disaster—a Baldwin kind of "incoherence" later expounded upon by Als. Only simplistically can Cleaver's essay serve as a stalwart paragon of virulent black homophobia, or "what would inevitably become some of the most homophobic rhetoric ever to be written by one black writer about another," as E. Patrick Johnson glosses (52). I argue, rather, that "Notes" compiles a "secret voice" like the kind Als admires and articulates in Baldwin (52). Through repetition, Cleaver lays bare his understanding of black queer vernacular's interpretive faculties, both in Baldwin and, in a section of "Notes" rarely explicated, in Cleaver's reading of Richard Wright's The Long Dream (1957). Cleaver bustles to create the same "cover and camouflage of the perfumed smoke screen" that he laments about Baldwin's prose (52). Again, "James Baldwin" acts as mirror. Cleaver sees himself reflected.

Cleaver's "Notes" should not be divorced from his role as Minister of Information for the Black Panther Party. The essay, published in Ramparts, a left-leaning, largely-white San Francisco rag, in June 1966, was his first run at crafting indelible images, the most famous of which for the Panthers was the picture of leader Huey P. Newton sitting in a wicker chair, a rifle in one hand and a spear in the other.⁵⁸ Of course, "Notes" gives another, the one of

⁵⁸ As a testament to queer portability, rapper Missy Elliott transforms this image of Newton on the inside cover of her CD This Is Not A Test! (2003). The rumored-to-be-

Negro homosexuals, acquiescing [to their] racial death wish, ... already bending over and touching their toes for the white man, the fruit of their miscegenation is not the little half-white sibling of their dreams but an increase in the unwinding of their nerves—though they redouble their efforts and intake of the white man’s spermatozoids. (54)

The most avid of Cleaver’s admirers and detractors see but James Baldwin in this vision of callisthenic anal sex, a perversion of the procreative act, since “Negro homosexuals” are “frustrated because in their sickness they are unable to have a baby by a white man” (54). Yet Baldwin appears nowhere in this paragraph depicting barren “reproduction.” He arrives in the next paragraph, the last of the second section of “Notes,” which aims to uncover Baldwin’s “misunderstanding” of Mailer. As if to emphasize Baldwin’s distinction from “Negro homosexuals” when “Notes” reappears in his collection Soul on Ice (1968), Cleaver rewrites that first sentence of the remarkable paragraph, to indicate a certain movement: “The case of James Baldwin aside for a moment, it seems that many Negro homosexuals, acquiescing in this racial death-wish, are outraged and frustrated because in their sickness they are unable to have a baby by a white man” (102). Such an obvious partitioning is hardly needed since Baldwin starts “Notes” giving birth to universally-desired texts: “I, as I imagine many others did and still do, lusted for anything that Baldwin had written” (51). After all, Baldwin pregnant cannot be a “Negro homosexual” infertile.

a-lesbian Elliott places herself as Newton in thigh-high leather boots. The flash of flesh above them echoes the afro-bearing ladies to either side of her wicker chair. They compensate for her empty-handedness and punctuate Elliott’s protests that she and fellow female rapper Trina are more than just friends.

The “racial death-wish” Cleaver does ascribe to Baldwin explains “the root of Baldwin’s violent repudiation of Mailer’s The White Negro” (54). The associative links Cleaver uses to read that “wish” in “Notes” provides far more grist than an easy target for hindsight moralizing. Deliberately polemic, “Notes” proposes to reconstitute “revolutionary black manhood,” a taunt that rather predictably evokes what Cornel West identifies as young black men’s acquisition of power from “stylizing their bodies over space and time in such a way that the[y] reflect their uniqueness and provoke fear in others [through] their own distinctive chaos [that] solicits attention [and] makes others pull back with some trepidation” (88-89). Cleaver’s ascot-free habit of revolutionary masculinity” sports nonetheless what Hazel Carby reasons is “a homosocial act of reproduction: a social and political upheaval in which men confront each other to give birth to a new nation, a struggle frequently conceived of in terms of sex and sexuality” (127). Cleaver’s stylistic approach enacts the transcendence that Baldwin explicates in the Gide chapter of Nobody Knows My Name: “I am certainly convinced that it is one of the greatest impulses of mankind to arrive at something higher than a natural state. How to be natural does not seem to me to be a problem.—quite the contrary. The great problem is how to be—in the best sense of that kaleidoscopic word—a man” (129). Through his own “unnatural” kaleidoscope, Cleaver targets Baldwin because he recognizes, like Als, that they are “uneasy members of the same tribe,” a connection Henry Louis Gates, Jr. discovered when he interviewed Cleaver in France in 1973: “What came gradually to me was that Cleaver really wanted to be a writer, and that Baldwin was, perforce, his blueprint of what a black writer could be” (“Enemy Within” 72; Gates 157-158).

Cleaver engages Baldwin with vernacular verve when he concludes, “I, like the entire nation, owe a great debt to him, but throughout the range of his work, ... all of which I treasure, there is a decisive quirk in Baldwin’s vision which corresponds to his relationship to black people and to masculinity” (55). So, Cleaver rereads his work, including Nobody Knows My Name, in which Baldwin proclaims to be menaced by American masculinity more than his peers. Cleaver’s retort—“O.K., Sugar”—introduces a reading of “Rufus Scott, the weak, craven hearted ghost of Another Country,” which echoes Owen Dodson’s readings of New Negro movement writing (55). For example, Dodson confronts similarly a poem by Countée Cullen, “To the Three for Whom the Book” (1929), with a revelation about public black masculinity not absent from Cleaver’s “Notes”: “Chile, one of the people Countee dedicated that poem to was his boyfriend, Harold Jackman, right after Countee decided he had to go straight and get married. I heard Harold’s sister, Ivy, burned all those fabulous letters Countee sent” (Women 141). Cleaver matches Dodson’s gossipy analysis with an understanding of black political agency “somewhere in one of [Richard Wright’s] books,” his novel The Long Dream (55). Cleaver instructs that Wright depicts “an encounter between a ghost and several young Negroes” in order to reveal

a classic, if cruel, example of a ubiquitous phenomenon in the black ghettos of America: the practice by Negro youths of going “punk hunting.” This practice of seeking out homosexuals on the prowl, rolling them, beating them up, seemingly just to satisfy some savage impulse to inflict pain on the specific target selected, the “social outcast,” seems to me to be not unrelated, in terms of the psychological

mechanisms involved, to the ritualistic lynchings and castrations
inflicted on Southern blacks by Southern whites. (55)

While Cleaver's discussion of The Long Dream makes it seem like the punk hunted, Aggie West, an effeminate church pianist, is white, Cleaver's recognition of Wright's Dream at all deserves significant notice. As Paul Gilroy notes, the overlooked Dream offers an "organic and systematic image ... dearly bought by Wright's deep fascination with ... economic, sexual, and cultural stratification ... in a manner that must have won Wright few friends" (Black Atlantic 183). Cleaver including Dream in an essay that ostensibly goes "punk hunting" in pursuit of James Baldwin suggests that Cleaver's "Notes" should be read more for its context than for the content of any excess.

Baldwin's own intuited response to Cleaver's "Notes" confirms as much—and provides my second kiss, which took place a few months after "Notes" publication, "in 1966 or the early part of 1967," according to Huey P. Newton ("Huey Newton" 84). About this intimacy, Cleaver complained to Henry Louis Gates, Jr., who relates Cleaver's concerns: "Baldwin was circulating a story about him impugning his manhood. He wanted me to know it was untrue" (157). But Baldwin never spoke publicly or wrote anything about the "long, passionate French kiss" between Baldwin and Cleaver that Newton witnessed (84). Rarely do scholars mention Newton's account of Cleaver's "impugning," which appeared in a 1973 Playboy magazine interview. I learned of it from a brief mention in black French scholar Georges-Michel Sarotte's book, Like A Brother, Like A Lover: Male Homosexuality in the American Novel and Theatre from Herman Melville to James Baldwin (1978). Interestingly,

Sarotte reads Newton's account as a response to Cleaver's *reading* of Baldwin, an extension of **literary debate**: "Adding to this literary furor were Black Panther leader Huey Newton's remarks in Playboy (May 1973). He reported that when Cleaver met Baldwin, they exchanged a long kiss on the mouth. According to Newton, Cleaver is a repressed homosexual, unsure of his masculinity, projecting his femininity onto another—in this case, Baldwin" (97). A similar read E. Patrick Johnson offers in Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity (2003): "Besides being an explosive bit of gossip, Newton's recollection of the events at this party become rich fodder for discussion of Eldridge Cleaver's anxiety regarding his relationship to James Baldwin, race, gender, and sexuality" (56-57). With more context, however, Newton's sensitivity can demonstrate just how black queer vernacular imagines a reading audience joined through attuned, not identity, politics. Baldwin understands this in No Name in the Street (1972). So does Hilton Als when he quotes from No Name in "The Enemy Within," despite his comment that "it is difficult to read Baldwin's description of Huey Newton in the same essay without wincing" (78). For Baldwin, Newton has "in him a dedication as gentle as it is unyielding, absolutely single-minded. [His] eyes take in everything, and behind the juvenile smile, he keeps a complicated scoreboard" (qtd. in "Enemy" 78).

Tallied on that scorecard are Newton's insights included in his "Letter from Huey to the Revolutionary Brothers and Sisters about the Women's Liberation and Gay Liberation Movements," first published in the August 15, 1970 issue of The Black Panther. In it, Newton proclaims that "whatever your personal opinions and your insecurities about homosexuality and the various liberation movements among

homosexuals and women (and I speak of the homosexuals and women as oppressed groups), we should try to unite with them in a revolutionary fashion” (14). While Newton can only conceive of “homosexuals” as men in his “Letter,” his anti-phobic stance on any black “revolutionary value system” demands gender and sexuality parity. For example, Newton asserts, “I don’t remember us ever constituting any value that said that a revolutionary must say offensive things toward homosexuals, or that a revolutionary should make sure that women do not speak out about their own particular kind of oppression” (14). Newton also instructs: “We should be careful about using those terms that might turn our friends off. The terms ‘faggot’ and ‘punk’ should be deleted from our vocabulary, and especially we should not attach names normally designed for homosexuals to men who are enemies of the people, such as Nixon or Mitchell. Homosexuals are not enemies of the people” (14).

Newton’s “Letter” foreshadows his analysis of Cleaver. Newton’s 1970 understanding of how men’s insecurities about homosexuality manifest in the “fear that they’re some kind of threat to our manhood” returns in his 1973 explanation: “Eldridge has to be understood as a disturbed personality rather than as a serious political problem” (Newton 14; “Huey Newton” 84). Newton continues and reveals his own gender assumptions: “It has always struck me that a male who goes out of his way to attack another male because of his sexual relations must have a psychological fear that he, too, might not be so masculine” (“Huey Newton” 84). Still, Newton’s “Letter” admission that “maybe a homosexual could be the most revolutionary” attests to his sense of kinship with both James Baldwin, the individual, and James Baldwin, the episteme (Newton 14). Newton’s Playboy recounting of Baldwin and Cleaver’s

kiss demonstrates the queerly interpolative function of narrative. I quote promiscuously from the interview to let Newton's story unfold and to show through it just how disinterested Playboy was with these details. The pull-quotes decorating the interview reference only Cleaver's divisive role in the Panthers, not his meeting or kissing Baldwin. The following description of that exchange lies nestled on the seventh of a nine-page interview—after several breaks for advertising:

Well, there was something that happened on the occasion when he and I met Baldwin. We met Baldwin shortly after he returned from Turkey, I guess in 1966 or the early part of '67. Eldridge had been invited to a party to meet him, and he asked me to go along. So we went over to San Francisco in his Volkswagen van and we got there first. Soon after, Baldwin arrived. Baldwin is a very small man in stature; I guess about five-one. Eldridge is about six-four, you know; at the time, he weighed about 250 pounds. Anyway, Baldwin just walked over to him and embraced him around the waist. And Eldridge leaned down from his full height and engaged Baldwin in a long, passionate French kiss. They kissed each other on the mouth for a long time. When we left, Eldridge kept saying, "Don't tell anyone." I said all right. And I kept my word—until now.

I was astounded at Cleaver's behavior, because it so graphically contradicted his attack on Baldwin's homosexuality in his article "Notes on a Native Son" which later appeared in *Soul on Ice*. In the article, Cleaver indicted Baldwin as a self-hater and homosexual.

“Homosexuality,” he said, “is a sickness just as baby rape or wanting to become the head of General Motors.” But unlike Cleaver, Baldwin makes no attempt to conceal his homosexuality: he thereby escapes the problems of the repressed homosexual. The problems and conflicts Cleaver has with himself because he’s engaged in the denial of his own homosexuality are projected onto an external self—Baldwin—in order to defend his own threatened ego. He attempts to project his own femininity onto someone else and to make someone else pay the price for his own guilt feelings. I didn’t understand it at the time, but now I realize that Baldwin, who hadn’t written a word in response to Cleaver’s attack on him, had finally spoken at that meeting. Using nonverbal communication, he had dramatically exposed Cleaver’s internal ambivalence. In effect, he had said: If a woman kissed Cleaver, she would be kissing another woman; and if a man kissed Cleaver, he would be kissing another man. (84)

Newton understands astutely that their “long, passionate French kiss” speaks nonverbally with the “words” that Otis Tilson, the drag queen protagonist of Iceberg Slim’s novel Mama Black Widow (1969), looks for in men’s eyes—“a flicker of sweet kinship for the ‘the’ secret message” (22). Selfsame flickers light black queer vernacular, or the “secret voice” that Hilton Als hears when reading Baldwin, “someone who wasn’t afraid to describe who he was and where he’d come from and what he’d seen” (“Enemy” 72). As Als, Owen Dodson, James Baldwin, Eldridge Cleaver, and Huey Newton show, an ambivalent but no less fierce legibility,

masculinity, and affinity reaches past, but from, the printed page. It moves with the kind of critical dialogue that Teresa de Lauretis envisions in queer theory, one which “can provide a better understanding of the specificity and partiality of our respective histories, as well as the stakes of some common struggles” (xi). Black queer vernacular imagines a reading audience joined through attuned, not identity, politics. The easy repetition of its melodic line I explicate here remonstrates how organic its familial sensibility can be. I hope my regards for black queer vernacular inspires more work re-conceptualizing black same-sexualities “as social and cultural forms in their own right”—and that such work will doff the residue that assigns those intimacies as inchoate or “emergent ones and thus still fuzzily defined, undercoded, or discursively dependent on more established forms” (de Lauretis iii). Our historiographies carry the weight of shaping future inquiries in a far-from-exhausted field of literature that should be still informed by an almost archaeological inquisitiveness. Precocious necks adorned with ascots await.

Chapter Two: Reading “queer” through a “community among ourselves”: Hughes to Marshall to Hurston to Du Bois

Everywhere not only ideas and plots are repeated, but the very words often are the same; one gets a new vision of the power of oral tradition.
—Octave Thanet, “Folk-Lore in Arkansas” (1892)

Networks of affiliation enacted in performance, sometimes referred to as the “community among ourselves,” are defined not by the centrality of racial identity or the selfsameness or transparency of blackness nor merely by the condition of enslavement but the connections forged in the context of disrupted affiliations, sociality amid the constant threat of separation, and shifting sets of identification particular to site, location, and action. In other words, the “community” or the networks of affiliation constructed in practice are not reducible to race—as if race a priori gave meaning to community or as if community was the expression of race—but are to be understood in terms of the possibilities of resistance conditioned by relations of power and the very purposeful and self-conscious effort to build community.

—Saidiya V. Hartman, Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America (1997)

Saidiya Hartman’s concept of “networks of affiliation” not reducible to race but propelled by purposeful and self-conscious efforts to build community illustrates the strategic use of the black queer vernacular I study. Those who know how to read black queer words “forged in the context of disrupted affiliations . . . and shifting sets of identification particular to site, location, and action” are members. The texts that use this vernacular create new forms of solidarity, what Benedict Anderson has called an “imagined community.” Members commune through the knowing recognition of each other in these texts, which offer black queer characters who resist the social and material expectations confining the other black characters in the narrative. These texts’ vernacular relationship with the reader relies on identification, restitution, and remembrance, acts Hartman finds crucial to any “black” “community among

ourselves.”⁵⁹ By using the oral tradition’s reading strategies of protection, resistance, and expression, black queer vernacular reveals its cultural (racial) grounding while it illustrates it is “defined not by the centrality of racial identity or the selfsameness or transparency of blackness.” In fact, the black queer characters in these texts are constantly defined against any “selfsameness or transparency of blackness.”

Through the repetition of black queer vernacular, the repetition of “ideas and plots [where] the very words often are the same,” following Octave Thanet, the alienated queer protagonists of Langston Hughes’ “Blessed Assurance,” Lila Marshall’s “The Queer Duck,” Zora Neale Hurston’s “John Redding Goes to Sea,” and W. E. B. Du Bois’ “Of the Coming of John” collectively long for transcendence from the material lives and community expectations that trap fellow characters. All four find refuge in a “queer thought-world,” as Du Bois writes, a world in which they

⁵⁹ Advisedly, I use “black”. Even though all the primary prose and verse texts I study in my manuscript are written by black writers, the literary movements I discuss throughout (the New Negro movement, the Caribbean Arts movement, and the Black Arts movement) are considered to be **black** literary movements, the reading community formed through these texts is not always “black.” I use “black” to signify Édouard Glissant’s cross-cultural imagination (or “transversality”) and Paul Gilroy’s notion of blackness, or “the political logic of ‘race,’” reconfigured as episteme, as a witnessing of “Europe’s failings not just as colonized people in distant conquered and exploited lands, but at the other end of the imperial chain, inside Europe as citizens, bystanders, and sojourners” that can be likewise “seen” by others (Against Race 76). With this sense of blackness, I regard how black queer vernacular rests not on a fixed sexual identity to gain “membership” in a black queer reading community. It rests not on fixed racial identity. As Richard Bruce Nugent explains in “What Price Glory in Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” the real “magnitude of my crime” of mocking the racist imagery of Ransom Rideout’s play Goin’ Home was that “the friends with whom I had discussed the play had been white” (25). Studying the cross-racial influence of literary movements nonetheless “black” is another project. Indeed, it is one that, as William Pickens concedes, will require a lot: “To profess unconventional opinions or to act contrary to tradition ‘along the color line’ in America requires more than ordinary courage” (607)

pursue music, intellectual study, or dreams of the sea and sailors instead of women (169). I read the conversation between the queer thought-worlds of these texts backwards chronologically, from Hughes to Du Bois, to emulate the way Hughes uses his protagonist Delmar to queerly re-read the Harlem Renaissance, including the queer sensibility in his own poetry and autobiography The Big Sea (1940). Hughes insightfully included his queer story in a collection of short fiction published near the end of his life, Something in Common (1963), a text that thus offers a career-spanning self-assessment of his accomplishments in prose. Hughes' sly re-reading presciently offers a narrative lens through which to read the black queer vernacular that continues to resonate in Hughes scholarship, though usually in the company of emphatic defenses of Hughes' "heterosexuality." Hughes' "Assurance" also demonstrates that Hughes read carefully The Souls of Black Folk, in which Du Bois enacts a queer reading practice and instructs that "herein lie buried many things which **if read with patience** may show the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the Twentieth Century" (3, emphasis mine).

Because of the importance of Hughes' queer "Assurance," its references to previously published Hughes work, and its subsequent presence in scholarship about and art inspired by Hughes, I return to Hughes' work and Hughes scholarship to shape the backwards transitions between Marshall, Hurston, and Du Bois. Centering this chapter's discussion of black queer vernacular around Hughes is important, particularly given the amount of speculation that Hughes' sexuality has generated over the years. One telling example is Rampersad's two-volume biography The Life of Langston Hughes. Rampersad's repeated defense against "speculation, without

convincing evidence, that [Hughes] was a homosexual” protect the poet as a “race man” who could never complicate racial identity with queer sexuality, imagined or otherwise.

Another example is the Hughes estate’s litigious response to Isaac Julien’s film Looking for Langston (1989), a meditation on the “very purposeful and self-conscious” same-sexual community in Harlem during the Renaissance. Julien, a member of the London-based Sankofa Film and Video Collective, explains that Langston explores “the role of the black artist in relationship to the black community and specifically the role of the black gay artist” (Hemphill, “Looking” 175). Hughes was “a perfect subject” to look for, so to speak, because “there had been a lot of controversy surrounding Hughes’s sexual identity anyway; it seemed to me to be a very important area to dwell in, even if it meant being at odds with different audiences and different sections of the black community. I thought it was imperative to at least suggest and visualize some of those anxieties” (175, 179-180). In fact, Hughes’ estate was “at odds” with Julien and the film. The estate challenged copyright permissions Julien obtained in Europe for Hughes poetry used in the film. Twice the estate successfully blocked Langston screenings in the US. As Essex Hemphill explains, “when it did finally screen in New York in October of 1989, the estate required that the volume be turned down on the poems by Hughes involved in the copyright dispute [literally] silencing Hughes’s work from being viewed in a homosexual context” (“Undressing” 183).

The Hughes estate (then led by the late George Bass) fought this battle over far more than copyright. The estate fought over public ownership and even discussion of literary icons. Hemphill concludes that

The questions that emerge from Bass's attempt to prevent American audiences from viewing Looking for Langston emerge directly from the practice of black academicians of ignoring [of] gays and lesbians in almost every articulation and theory concerning matters of race and culture. Additionally, the sexuality of black icons is deemed inappropriate for public discussion, and thus, electric fences are erected around those issues, fences of silence, confoundment, and denial. This is done in an attempt to prevent black icons from being undressed to discover whether they were really kings, queens, or ordinary tramps. (181)

The lasting myth of the masculinist and heterosexist "race man" in black studies scholarship erects electric fences. Yet even when Hughes "undresses" his iconic self with "Blessed Assurance," he does not exactly redress the "silence" the way Hemphill calls for "the silence surrounding black gay and lesbian lives [to be] meticulously dismantled" (183). "Assurance" labels neither a character nor any of the references to Hughes' past work **gay**, a word now associated with an identity politic not publically popularized until after Hughes' death.

"Assurance" does not herald Hemphill's call that "every closet is coming down—none are sacred—even if our liberation is considered profane" (183). But "Assurance" does mark the panic over "appropriate" public discussion about or

expression of black queer sexuality. It winks with its knowing references to the “Spectacles in Color” chapter of The Big Sea in which Hughes delicately recounts Countée Cullen’s wedding to Du Bois daughter Yolande as well as Hughes’ “one” visit to the annual Hamilton Club Lodge drag ball at Rockland Place Casino on 8th Avenue and 155th Street, “the largest annual communal event of New York’s gay society . . . which attracted thousands of white as well as black participants and spectators” (Chauncey 227-228). Hughes’ assured self-referencing also mocks the kind of panic over “appropriate” published discussions of Hughes’ own allegedly queer sexuality. With its black queer vernacular, “Assurance” offers communion through networks of affiliation where queer calls attention to characters longing to transcend “articulation[s] and theor[ies] concerning matters of race and culture,” networks that include Marshall’s “The Queer Duck,” Hurston’s “John Redding Goes to Sea,” and Du Bois’ “Of the Coming of John.”

“Blessed Assurance” lies nestled just before the last story of Hughes’ Something in Common. One of five new stories in a collection of previously published ones, scholars either trot it out—or forget it—when engaging in the ongoing debate over Hughes’ “alleged” homosexuality. For example, Rampersad reconciles “Blessed Assurance” as an anomaly in Hughes’ oeuvre:

Hughes’s body of work, extremely large and varied as it is, is virtually devoid of pieces that even hint at an interest in homosexuality.

However, in the summer of 1961, he started the first draft of “Blessed Assurance,” the only story he ever published explicitly on the theme of homosexuality. . . . Hughes’s interest in the theme of sex in literature in

the early 1960s could have been the huge success of James Baldwin's best-selling Another Country, on its appearance in June, 1962. (Volume II 334)⁶⁰

Rampersad's faulty chronology aside—"Assurance" and "Seven" were begun a year before Another Country was published—"Assurance" demonstrates hardly an anomaly in the scope of Hughes' body of work, "extremely large and varied as it is."⁶¹

⁶⁰ Rampersad reasons that Baldwin also sparked an unfinished short story "Seven People Dancing" (circa 1961) and notes for a novel Hughes expected to call Sex Silly Season (1963). Interestingly, Rampersad never mentions the four other stories not accounted for in the permission acknowledgments in Something in Common, "Rock, Church," "His Last Affair," "No Place To Make Love," and "Early Autumn."

⁶¹ The interaction between Hughes and Baldwin, particularly from 1959 until Hughes' death in 1967, but beginning in 1955 with "Hughes's negative comments about [Baldwin's] point of view in Notes of a Native Son," demonstrates a mutual competition over the title of "most respected" black American writer (Leeming 158). Perhaps in response to Hughes' reaction to Notes, Baldwin offered a "nonchalant dismissal" of Hughes' Selected Poems (1959) (Rampersad, Volume II 295). Arnold Rampersad explains Baldwin's attack in light of "his unrepented public attacks (notably the essay 'Everybody's Protest Novel') on his former friend and mentor Richard Wright in the late 1940s, Baldwin apparently had felt an almost Oedipal need to slay the paternal figure in the field of black poetry, Langston Hughes" (295-296). Yet David Leeming, who worked as Baldwin's secretary while doing graduate work at New York University in the mid-1960s, maintains that the competition did not prevent them from speaking "as friends" when they saw each other in public: "Late one night in 1964, Baldwin took me with him to a little restaurant in Harlem called Jenny Lou's. After we ordered porgy and grits, the specialty of the house, at the counter, Baldwin suggested that if I looked at the man in the corner of the booth nearest the back wall I would be looking at one of the great poets. At about the same moment Hughes saw Baldwin, smiled, and made a wide gesture of invitation with both arms. We joined him at his booth, and a long relaxed conversation followed, first about Jenny Lou's and the welcoming "Negro ambience" that prevailed there and in Harlem generally, then, about race and art. About the latter they disagreed, but the discussion never became rancorous" (159). As Leeming and Rampersad's accounts of this competition imply, their competition may have inspired Hughes to include "Assurance" in Something in Common to compete with the queerness in Baldwin's work. Then again, Baldwin could have been influenced by Hughes' Common hindsight. In his 1965 collection Going to Meet the Man, Baldwin includes several older, queer short stories, including "The Outing" (1951), a short story Leeming calls "an outgrowth of Crying Holy,"

In what Rampersad calls a tale “about Delmar, an effeminate young black man with an excellent mind and an exquisite voice,” Hughes asserts his own contributions to the black queer vernacular of the Harlem Renaissance sustaining its community “in the life” (334). And Hughes’ queer assertion, a six-page glimpse of a divorced black family where ex-husband John frets about his son, is far from subtle. “Assurance”’s first sentence with its deflecting syntax, an adverb and parenthetical sigh followed by a passive construction, personifies John’s reluctance to admit what he already knows. Its syntax adds drama to the sentence’s last word: “Unfortunately (and to John’s distrust of God) it seemed his son was turning out to be a queer” (227). Likewise, “Assurance”’s placement in Something in Common is far from subtle. Common was Hughes’ retrospective assessment of his short fiction without Jessie B. Semple, or “Simple” as he came to be called. Common collects and re-orders material from 1933 when Hughes first started publishing short stories,⁶² including stories from previous collections The Ways of White Folk (1933), Laughing to Keep from Crying (1952),

what Go Tell It on the Mountain was called originally, that plays with the double entendre of a church outing and the “outing” (in the contemporary sense) of Johnnie’s longing for David (75). The similarity between “The Outing” and Mountain and “Outing”’s perhaps more explicit depiction of homosexual desire could redirect readers to the queerness informing young John Grimes’ attraction to Elisha that typically evades discussions of Baldwin’s queer fiction.

⁶² Rampersad explains that after “reading D.H. Lawrence’s collection of short stories, The Lovely Lady (apparently he had never read Lawrence before” Hughes started to write short stories again: “In Lawrence’s short stories Hughes saw . . . glimpses of his own neuroses. Setting aside his current work, he turned to write his first short stories since 1927, which was also the last time he had touched on strongly sexual, possible autobiographical themes in his writing. Now he stressed the volatile mixture of race, class, and sexuality behind . . . the rituals of liberal race relations in the United States” (Volume I 269).

and The Langston Hughes Reader (1958), and re-titles four stories originally published in magazines.

Common came when Hughes abandoned plans for a third autobiography, during a time when he was pondering his own mortality: 1961 saw the death of two close friends, writer and editor Jessie Redmon Fauset, and Harold Jackman, Countée Cullen's "friend" whom Rampersad calls "the elegant Harlem boulevardier,"⁶³ as well as the onset of five book-length studies of his work which to Hughes seemed "funereally tinged, as if he had died already and become his papers" (Rampersad, Volume II 350, 360). In June 1962, four months after his sixtieth birthday, Hughes attended a conference at Makerere University College in Kampala, Uganda, where he received embarrassedly a five-minute tribute from South African writer Ezekiel Mphahlele and a reading of a few of his poems by American writer and critic J. Saunders Redding. Hughes also received a different 'honor' by an audience member: "a young black man apparently came up to him and said, 'I have never thought the day would come when the great Langston Hughes would be an Uncle Tom'" (354).

Whatever Hughes may have felt at this time, being celebrated and impugned as a poet

⁶³ Certainly, the London-born West Indian Jackman was Cullen's closest friend—in the same way that Alain Locke uses "friend" in a sexual sense when writing to Richard Bruce Nugent about Richmond Barthé in a 2 February 1929 letter, cited in Thomas H. Wirth's Gay Rebel of the Harlem Renaissance: Selections from the Work of Richard Bruce Nugent (2002). About Barthé, Locke explains, "Now you have the friend whom you needed—and if there is further need, my own friendship in the background standing in understanding guardianship and benediction" (Introduction 25). Or, as Nugent explains in an interview with Thomas Wirth, Locke similarly offered his "friendship": "Locke offered me his body. A professor of philosophy and a person old enough to be your father doesn't lie on the bed in their shorts and say, 'Do anything you want.' What can you do except be embarrassed? And be a little disappointed in the person who did it. I was a lot disappointed. I was traumatized by it" (qtd. in Wirth, Introduction 24).

of an “earlier era” with nothing new to add to the growing tide of the Civil Rights Movement and in its wake the Black Panther party in the US, and among the Négritude debates at the Ugandan conference, Hughes’ inclusion of “Blessed Assurance” in Something in Common could not have been haphazard.

Likewise, “Assurance”’s use of the word **queer** is not accidental. When the collection was published in 1963, someone “turning out to be queer” was no longer just an “odd” person. 1963 was the year of the historic March on Washington, the organization of which Bayard Rustin was not allowed to publicly lead because “Southern Christian Leadership Conference organizers feared that ‘segregationists might try to smear the effort with histrionics about Rustin’s leftist affiliations and homosexual proclivities’” (Morgan 113). 1963 was three years after Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. threatened Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. that if he did not call off a planned protest at the Democratic Party convention Powell “would announce to the press that King and Rustin were having an affair,” and it was ten years after Rustin was arrested with two other men in Pasadena, California and “served thirty days in jail on a morals charge” (Miller 361). “Assurance,” then, boldly reinforces what Richard Bruce Nugent read in Hughes’ work all along: “As I read his poetry and I used to talk with him, it’s true he didn’t forget one of us, he didn’t forget any” (Wirth, “Interview #3”).⁶⁴ “Assurance”’s placement within Common, sandwiched between stories

⁶⁴ Hughes took pride in the way he presented race pride as “a normal aspect of world humanity” to a general audience: “‘I’ve never felt,’ he asserted to a black friend in 1961, ‘that my “me” was any less or any more than anybody else. Nor have I ever felt very race-conscious in the ingrown sense—which is maybe why I have an objectivity of sorts in my writing which is not as ‘colored’ as it seems to be on the surface’” (Rampersad, Volume II 358).

underscoring US American affiliation across race, reinforces Nugent's reading of Hughes' humanist inclusion.⁶⁵ Framing "Assurance" with two affirmations of unity across difference only emphasizes John's distress over his son's queer difference.

"Assurance" rests the recognition of Delmar's queerness with his father "John's distrust of God" and it avoids first-person narration to let John (as a "ghost" third-person narrator) guide readers' recognition of Delmar's queerness as well as the symbols Delmar employs to reflect his queer self (227). Through John, "Assurance" reveals that John/the reader already knows what a queer man is and what symbols he uses to mark himself. John dreads these symbols, praying, "God, don't let him put an

⁶⁵ Before "Assurance" comes "Breakfast in Virginia" which relays a white man's insistence on breaking bread with two black corporals, one from the South and one from the North, on the Florida Express train heading to Washington D.C. When the steward will not serve them in the dining car, the white man invites them to his room where he sends for a table. He tells them about letters he received from his son in the military fighting in North Africa and about "his pride in all the men in the military services who were giving up the pleasures of civilian life to bring an end to Hitlerism" (226). Originally titled "I Thank You for This," the last line of dialogue spoken by Corporal Williams, the southern black corporal, and published in Common Ground, the quarterly magazine of the Common Council for American Unity formed by Louis Adamic whose advisory board Hughes served on. Common Ground "aimed to foster unity among Americans of diverse backgrounds, 'to overcome intolerance and discrimination because of foreign birth or decent, race or nationality . . . and share fully and constructively in American life'" (Volume II 40). "Breakfast"'s humanism through patriotic service imagines what many black soldiers expected upon their return from World War II but rarely saw, a nationalistic unity also envisioned in the story after "Assurance," "Something in Common." Originally included in Laughing to Keep from Crying, "Common" depicts a white and black American sharing drinks in a bar in Hong Kong who fight when the white American paternalistically talks to the black American, calling him George and assuming a familiarity since they're both from "down home," and when the black American complains about the "good old U.S.A." During their fight, the only thing they find in common is their love of gin—"Gin's something we both got in common"—but once the British bartender escorts them out of the bar for causing too much of a commotion, they patriotically unite and go back in: "Arm in arm, they staggered back into the bar, united to protect their honor against the British—or anybody else who might at the moment come between them" (234, 236).

earing in his ear like some” while Delmar suggests to the Junior Choir at the Tried Stone Baptist church that they render a jazz recessional: “This while [Delmar] was trying to grow a beard like the beatniks he had seen when the Junior Choir sang in New York and the Minister of Music had taken Delly on a trip to [Greenwich] Village” (229). Throughout “Assurance” Delmar marks his body queerly, prompting John to question Delly about his clothes for school. First, he asks why Delly insists on wearing “white Bermuda shorts [when] most of the other boys wear levis or just plain pants” which they simply wash out every night, not iron (228). He pleads, “I want you to be clean son, but not that clean”(228). Then, he warns Delly about how his clothes “match so perfectly”: “This school you’re going to’s no fashion school—at least, it wasn’t when I went there. The boys’ll think you’re sissy” (228). Or, as John instructs, “If you’re going to smoke, Delmar, hold your cigarette between your first two fingers, not between your thumb and finger—like a woman” (228).

Also, John worries he failed Delmar by not enforcing the patrilineal name John, Jr., allowing “his son to be named Delmar—Delly for short—[because] the mother had insisted on it. Delmar was her father’s name” (227). With John’s panic over what caused Delly to be “nelly,” “Assurance” presumes homosexuality can be biologically traced: “Did the queer strain come from her side? . . . None who acted even remotely effeminate could John recall as being a part of his family” (227). Ironically, John’s search for biological blame nonetheless refutes homosexuality as a “choice” or an aberrant, seductive, or alien influence. It locates his “turning out to be a queer” in heredity not circumstance. Delly’s trip to Greenwich Village, for example, didn’t turn him queer as much as show himself queerly. But John is more concerned

with Delmar signifying his homosexuality in public: “Since colored parents always like to put their best foot forward, John was more disturbed about his son’s transition than if they had been white. Negroes have enough crosses to bear” (227).⁶⁶

John’s concern over the public intelligibility of Delmar’s homosexuality exemplifies the kind of caution that scholars often exact on discussions of Hughes and his intimate life. I use Rampersad’s biography of Hughes to interrogate that watchfulness because the particularly rich Life of Langston Hughes remains unmatched by other Hughes studies in its scope and appreciation. I have the greatest respect for Rampersad’s careful attention to archives left and to remembrances recounted by Hughes’ friends surviving still when Rampersad was preparing the volumes published in 1986 and 1988. Any criticism I generate here comes from my suspicion of the driving trope—and function—of the archive in black historiographies that Brent Hayes Edwards identifies as a “sense not so much of a site or mode of preservation of a national, institutional, or individual past, but instead of a ‘generative system’ ... that governs ... ‘what can and cannot be said’” (7). For black literary history, the archive reinforces the expediency of a set sense of racial identity so much so that any evidence to the contrary fades from sight. Compounding this filter is the weight of Hughes’ rock star role in the first black literary collective of the twentieth century in New York, which makes particularly threatening even the suggestion that Hughes’ alleged asexuality could be read as anything but heterosexual.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ See Hughes’ poem “Café: 3 a.m.” (1951) for another example of public panic over “spotting fairies” and lesbians that nonetheless asserts queer people’s sentience.

⁶⁷ Certainly, any critique directed at Rampersad’s biography, however qualified, might seem unwarranted given the advances in critical analysis of race and sexuality—or

I navigate Rampersad's biography here merely to illustrate how compellingly the governing black racial archive can entreat us to read Hughes' sexuality and the sexuality evident in his writing as rare, ambiguous, or even sexless. Rampersad's deductive "proof" begins with another example of his creative chronology, which marks Hughes' entrance into "the world as a poet (that is, to publish for the first time in a national magazine)" (45). Rampersad celebrates Hughes' publication of "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (June 1921), one of Hughes' first "adult poems" addressing race. Yet Hughes first submitted poems to Jessie Redmon Fauset and Augustus Granville Dill, the editor and literary editor of the monthly Brownie's Book, "a magazine for black children," in September and October 1920 (45). Two of those submitted, "Fairies" and "Winter Sweetness," were published in Book in January 1921.⁶⁸ He later sent them "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" which they published in Crisis—Fauset was also Crisis' literary editor with Dill acting as business manager. But "Fairies" and "Winter Sweetness" do not directly address race the way Hughes' poetry "should." For Rampersad, Hughes' "child" poems signal merely Hughes' "delayed maturation," or the reduction of Hughes' early poetry as an uncomplicated

even the nuanced appreciation of same-sexuality in print—developed since they were published over two decades ago. However, not all of the foundational texts in what scholars call now "queer studies" were published after Rampersad's first Life. A year before came Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire. Other methodological antecedents of the queer analytic I employ, like Wittig's "One Is Not Born a Woman" (1981) and "The Straight Mind" (1980), or Foucault's History of Sexuality, came even earlier. Even earlier came the Combahee River Collective's landmark essay "A Black Feminist Statement" (1979). At the same time, I can hardly fault Rampersad for not seeking such theoretical or methodological to complete his biographic inquiry.

⁶⁸ Rampersad mentions "Fairies" and "Winter Sweetness" in Volume I, but he leaves them out of The Collected Poems of Langston Hughes he edited.

reflection of his fatherless childhood. Nevertheless, this kind of biographic shorthand provides a stereotypical “telltale sign” of a young man’s queerness:

this passivity [in Hughes’ early poems] reflects the negative aspect of Hughes’ impulse to delay the onset of manhood, or the related consequences of his having been brought up without [a] strong male example, in the care of a proud but essentially defeated woman such as his grandmother. Even if his sexuality remains ambiguous or androgynous, Hughes as a poetic persona is capable of achieving adulthood in certain moments of his poetic creation, when momentarily he assumes full command of his ego. However, he reaches these moments most brilliantly (as in “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” “Aunt Sue’s Stories”, and “Mother to Son”) only when he first becomes a child again, then transcends childhood by celebrating the unique power of the black race to nurture him. (44-45)

Rampersad links Hughes’ childhood with his “ambiguous or androgynous” sexuality and discounts it as “passivity” and contrasts it with “the unique power of the black race” yet notes its presence is needed in his most brilliant poems. Most telling, however, is Rampersad’s leap from Hughes’ grandmother into his sexuality, as if Hughes’ maternal lineage would have anything to do with his sexuality. This first reference to Hughes’ sexuality is also curious considering none of the poems Rampersad discusses thus far in Volume I deal with sexuality whatsoever.

Rampersad’s recognition of and reaction to the “speculation, without convincing evidence, that [Hughes] was a homosexual” clearly informs his

interpretation of Hughes' life and work. With my extended critique here, I do not make light of Rampersad's invaluable contribution. I understand that Rampersad's two volumes of Life were published before key texts in lesbian and gay studies that may have engaged him to approach same-sexuality differently. His repeated assertions of Hughes' "heterosexuality" are less the result of methodological neglect than they are evidence of the influence of expedient Black Arts notions of "race" on black studies, which overpowers even Rampersad's occasional admission that Hughes' sexual life was complicated: "Perhaps Hughes was telling the truth, though not necessarily the whole truth, about his sexual history" (Volume I 46). Rampersad also reveals more complexity than he perhaps intends or recognizes when he explains that Hughes'

career suggests psycho-sexual complication of a kind far more rare than homosexuality. What Langston appears to have sought and felt for much of his early life was a quality of ageless, sexless, inspired innocence, Peter Pan-like, which race and even sex brought down to earth without sully. "Langston," a close friend in some of his more bohemian years would say, "Was like the legendary Virgin who walks through mud without soiling even the hem of her robe." (46)

Rampersad sullies Hughes' robe a bit in Volume II, however, when he admits that "Hughes found some young men, especially dark-skinned men, appealing and sexually fascinating," including one young man named Langston Hughes Mickens whose "difficult family situation touchingly reminded Langston of his own loneliness as a child" (336-337). Or, as Lindsay Patterson, friends with Hughes in the sixties and one of the last people to see Hughes alive, confides,

Langston knew at the end that he was being snickered at behind his back because of the young men about him. But he didn't care. He cultivated the people he felt he had to cultivate—white or black—and he kept on with his writing. His smile made everything possible. He hid many things. He hid the fact that he was very well read, and had strong ideas. He would see a play, dissect it, but refuse to put his critical idea in print. He mastered the smile, the grin, the surface pleasantness. (338)

Not content to leave Patterson's assessment that Hughes "hid many things,"

Rampersad launches yet another belabored protest that "Hughes's reputation as a homosexual [which] is based almost exclusively on rumor and suspicion" (337). Yet his defense of Hughes and Mickens' relationship evokes more images of their intimate interaction than it explains:

There were those who wondered why a man of Hughes's years and station could be so close to a plain black boy, unless some form of homosexual attraction was involved. For his part, however, far from being furtive or clandestine about their relationship, Langston behaved in public like a man completely above such a charge. . . . The mixture of incredulity and affection with which he viewed the boy and his world comes through in an excerpt from a letter to Arna Bontemps: "4 A.M. now. My full-name godson just this minute phoned. 16—but a night owl like me. . . . My godson was looking at my TV LATE-LATE-LATE Show in the front room last week." (337)

Of course, a sixteen-year-old spending time with a man almost forty-six years his senior,⁶⁹ a man not part of his family, at four in the morning, could be entirely innocent.

The care with which Rampersad draws intimate details nonetheless provides two contrasting assertions about Hughes' life. First, Rampersad claims in Volume II that Hughes "was never called upon to assert or deny that he was a homosexual, but it is clear that—whatever the truth—he did not want to be considered gay. Whether this attitude derived from a personal aversion to homosexuality, or only from shame or fear, is impossible to say" (337). Yet is it not also impossible to say that no one "called upon" Hughes to account for his sexuality. Would Hughes have kept a record of such an event given that "Langston knew at the end that he was being snickered at"? More telling are the assumptions of his friends, which clearly reflect he was already "considered gay." One such friend, Jamaican-born poet Lebert "Sandy" Bethune, who visited Hughes with Patterson just before the prostrate operation from which he never recovered and died of septic shock ten days later, explains that he thought Hughes' prostrate trouble was simply a ruse: "I had come to the hospital thinking the worst. . . . I don't know why, but I had assumed that Langston was gay, and I just imagined that he had been injured in some homosexual encounter, and that prostrate trouble was a euphemism" (422). Second, Rampersad confounds his own persistently heterosexual reading of Hughes' words when he includes the following description of a bordello Hughes visited with the sailors of the West Hessel during a stay at Lagos in 1923:

⁶⁹ Hughes' letter to Bontemps is dated 25 January 1964, 7 days before his sixty-second birthday.

He was evidently among them at least once, if not more often, for he would remember distinctly the “vile houses of rotting women” in Lagos. Nor were all his experiences heterosexual. Decades later, Hughes would confide to one of his secretaries that the first homosexual episode of his life, a swift exchange initiated by an aggressive crewman, with Hughes as the “male” partner, came on this voyage. In some hastily compiled notes on sex, also composed late in life, his visit to Santa Cruz in Tenerife (“Tenerife. All those houses on the hills.”) would evoke a similar association.

“Won’t it hurt you,” I said.

“Not unless its square,” he said. “Are you square?”

“Could be,” I said.

“Let’s see,” he said . . . (Volume I 77)

Calling the Lagos bordellos “vile houses of rotting women” contradicts the heterosexual interest Rampersad implies when characterizing Hughes’ “casual patronage” of prostitutes. Further incongruity comes with Rampersad’s jutting non-sequitur from the “rotting women’ in Lagos” to “nor were all [Hughes’] experiences heterosexual.” More perplexing still is the inclusion in Life of these “swift” and “hastily composed” notes. Perhaps Rampersad felt their inclusion, however awkward, would compensate for other evidence that Steven Jones, friend of Richard Bruce Nugent, professed in a 1991 telephone interview with me that Rampersad had found. (Jones, however, would not tell me what this “evidence” was). Whatever the source, Rampersad’s new paragraph after the “square” notes provides a poor escape from

Hughes' sexuality: "Not all of Hughes's learning was about **sensation**" (77, emphasis mine).

Rampersad's narrative exhibits one kind of "lying" that Hughes reveals in his poem "Liars" (1925):⁷⁰

It is we who are liars:
The Pretenders-to-be who are not
And the Pretenders-to-be who are.
It is we who use words
As screens for thoughts
And weave dark garments
To cover the naked body
Of the too white Truth.
It is we with the civilized souls
Who are liars.

Rampersad's Life reinforces a community of blind readers "who use words / As screens for thoughts." He "weave[s] dark garments / To cover the naked body / Of the too white Truth" in Hughes' writing, including Hughes' accounts of Tenerife and the "swift exchange" on the West Hesseltime. Yet calling Hughes **gay**—as some criticize Rampersad for not doing anywhere in the volumes of Life—would provide only another word to screen thoughts and weave dark garments to cover Hughes' black queer vernacular.⁷¹ After all, **gay** and its contemporary identity politic were not

⁷⁰ First published in the March 1925 Opportunity.

⁷¹ Black gay film maker Marlon Riggs rightly contends that gayness cannot be reduced

publicly popularized until after Hughes' death. "Liars," like "Blessed Assurance," concedes multiple voices—even multiple "Pretenders"—as it faults those "civilized souls" for cloaking "Truth" with reserved words. "Liars" evokes the criticism of those too concerned with public approval that Hughes expanded a year later in "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain." There, Hughes praises the unashamed folk artist, extolling that "We younger Negro artists who create now intend to express our individual dark-skinned selves without fear or shame. If white people are pleased we are glad. If they are not, their displeasure doesn't matter either. We build our temples for tomorrow, strong as we know how, and we stand on top of the mountain, free within ourselves" (694). On the "Racial Mountain," Hughes celebrates "the low-down folks, the so-called common element, and they are the majority—may the Lord be praised!" (693).

Hughes also evokes this "low-down freedom within" in the "chansons vulgaires" of "Young Singer" (1923):⁷²

One who sings "chansons vulgaires"

In a Harlem cellar

Where the jazz-band plays

to sexual acts: "If homosexuality is just the sum of homosexual acts, then perhaps there is a problem with defining Hughes as such. But if homosexuality is not dependent upon acts but upon a psychology, a state of mind—fantasies, dreams, hopes, psychosocial dispositions—then the man was gay" (Lyle Ashton Harris 11). In so far as that "state of mind" can be found in Hughes' work, I support Riggs' "psychosocial" reading. Despite the fact that Hughes would explain that "life makes poetry" at public readings, making the ontological leap between writing and living establishes methodological problems creating "closets" in African American Letters where none exist.

⁷² First published in Crisis (August 1923), and later included in his first collection, The Weary Blues (1926).

From dark to dawn
Would not understand
Should you tell her
That she is like a nymph
For some wild faun.

The young singer's "chansons vulgaires," a double entendre meaning popular or common songs and crude songs,⁷³ refers to the bawdy blues most associated with Harlem's 1920s, a "folk tradition" that differs, as E. Franklin Frazier argues, from the "genteel tradition" of the black bourgeoisie.⁷⁴ These bawdy blues reflect the young singer's artistry in the wake of black bourgeois "morality" and anxiety over public displays of sexuality. As Frazier explains, the educated elite "were supposed to be differentiated in their morals as well as in their manners from the Negro masses. . . . It was only 'common' Negroes who engaged in premarital and unconventional sex

⁷³ The french "chansons vulgaires" literally means 'vulgar songs' or 'coarse songs' as well as 'popular songs.' **Vulgaires'** verbal form **vulgariser** means both 'to popularize' and 'to coarsen.'

⁷⁴ For Frazier, both the blues and the spirituals are engaged in the same cultural work. They reflect the otherworldly "philosophy of life of the Negro folk" (118). They look "to another world for . . . escape from the evils of the present world" (118). In their otherworldly reach, the blues also show their indebtedness to the ways in which the Great Migration changed the everyday lives of black people: "The secular folk songs of these black troubadours in American industrial society are living records of their actions of the uprooted black folk in the world of the city. In the countless 'storefront' churches of northern cities, the Negro migrant has vainly attempted to cling to the traditional religious life of the rural South. But more often with the loss of his simple faith, in the world of the city he has sought salvation in the various religious cults, some with nationalistic aims, which are indicative of his gropings to find an escape from the white man's world. (119) In chapter five of The Black Bourgeoisie, Frazier argues that the blues, the spirituals, and black nationalism are examples of "the folk culture of the Negro masses [that] were regarded largely with indifference by the increasing number of Negroes who were acquiring a middle-class outlook on life" (112).

relations” (77-78). Her “not understand[ing]” some finding her “like a nymph / For some wild faun” shows less her naïveté than it does her lack of concern for “respectability”⁷⁵ or what the public might think of how she “express[es her] individual dark-skinned sel[f] without fear or shame.” At the same time, “Young Singer” signifies on what was the most popular way in which Harlem’s men and women “in the life” gave voice to their everyday experiences with black queer vernacular. Blues songs like Lucille Bogan’s “B.D. Women Blues” in which she warns “B.D. women sure is rough / They drink up many a whiskey and they sure can strut their stuff,” Gertrude “Ma” Rainey’s “Sissy Blues” and “Prove it on Me Blues,” or George Hanna’s “Freakish Blues” and “Sissy Man Blues,” where he confides “if you can’t bring me a woman, bring me a sissy man,” revel in black queer vernacular. Writers, in turn, use the blues as a kind of queer short-hand. For example, Claude McKay signifies black homosexuality in Home to Harlem through Bessie Smith’s “Foolish Man Blues”: “And there is two things in Harlem I don’t understan’ / It is a bulldyking woman and a faggoty man.”

“Blessed Assurance” similarly celebrates Delmar’s musical artistry. John’s concern over Delly’s queerness intensifies in the story’s telling setting, the Tried Stone Baptist church. Setting John’s brooding over Delmar’s sexuality within the black church echoes earlier black queer literary works like Baldwin’s Go Tell It on the Mountain, what Hughes called “a low-down story in a velvet bag—and a Knopf

⁷⁵ Frazier explains the black bourgeois who were expected “to go forth and become the heads of conventional families. Was this not the best proof of respectability in the eyes of the white man, who had constantly argued that the Negro’s ‘savage instincts’ prevented him from conforming to puritanical standards of sex behavior?” (78).

binding,” and Richard Bruce Nugent’s “Smoke, Lilies and Jade” (Rampersad, Volume II 205). Setting the queer display of this “sweet boy” who chose glasses with “the style of rather exaggerated rims [which] made him look like a girl rather than a boy” within the black church might seem an odd choice to some (“Blessed Assurance” 228). But it is precisely in the church where “nelly” Delly, like young John Grimes of Mountain and Alex of “Smoke,” finds himself within his community (227). In the choir Delmar earns the respect of Tried Stone’s Minister of Music, Dr. Manley Jaxon who writes an original anthem based on the story of Ruth for the church’s spring concert: “The work was dedicated to Delmar who received the first handwritten copy as a tribute from Dr. Jaxon” (230). With the pun of Jaxon’s first name, “Assurance” deliberately contrasts Jaxon’s support of Delmar’s singing abilities as metonym for queerness with John’s heterosexist patriarchal panic. In fact, Jaxon’s cool blessing of Delmar performing “the solo lead—Ruth’s part” infuriates John-as-narrator: “Perversely enough, the composer allotted it to Delmar” (230). Jaxon justifies giving it to Delmar “without respect to gender” because of Delmar’s talent: “No one else can do it justice”; and “The girls in the ensemble really have no projection” (230).

Delmar’s performance certainly does bring down the house, even Dr. Jaxon. Once his solo begins “Delmar’s voice soared above the Choir with all the sweetness of Sam Cooke’s tessitura, [while] backwards off the organ stool in a dead faint fell Dr. Manley Jaxon. Not only did Dr. Jaxon fall from the stool, but he rolled limply down the steps from the organ loft like a bag of meal and tumbled prone onto the rostrum, robes and all” (230-1). Jaxon’s tumble is less horrific than comedic, though. It and the light-hearted reaction by Tried Stone’s Reverend Dr. Greene only further emphasizes

John's excessive agitation. It also signifies everyone's disregard of the religious message in the church—even Reverend Greene's—for the performance of the anthem. For example, Greene springs "from his chair on the rostrum [and tries] to think what to say under the unusual circumstances" (231). But "'One down, one to go,' was all that came to mind" (231). Greene even ponders that in his travels to "numerous sophisticated cities where Negroes did everything whites do [he] had seen other choir directors take the count in various ways with equal drama, though perhaps less physical immediacy" (231). Greene is more concerned about the collection than Jaxon. He entreats the congregation, "Dr. Jaxon has only fainted, friends. We will continue our services by taking up collection directly after the anthem" (231). Likewise, Delmar's sister Arletta diffuses Jaxon's fall with the following explanation to John: "'Some of the girls say that when Delmar sings, they want to scream, they're so overcome,' whispered Arletta. 'But Dr. Jaxon didn't scream. He just fainted.'" (231). Yet John seems unconcerned with the congregation's rush to revive Jaxon. John's horror starts with Delmar's first note as Ruth, not with Dr. Jaxon's fall. Yet neither John's cries from the pews to "shut up" nor the congregation's pause until Dr. Jaxon lifts his head stops Delmar's singing. In fact, Delmar sings phoenix-like "over the limp figure of Dr. Jaxon lying on the rostrum, [while] flood[ing] the church as if it were on hi-fi" (231).

Almost twenty years earlier than "Assurance," Lila Marshall's short story "The Queer Duck" (1944-1945)⁷⁶ also uses public associations with certain music—jazz for

⁷⁶ First published in *Negro Story* (December-January 1944-1945). Coincidentally, the page before Marshall's story contains four of Langston Hughes' "Madam" poems

Marshall—and queerness. “Duck” also ends with a “dead faint,” albeit a more permanent one: protagonist Joe Walton’s head rolls on his mahogany desk after drinking chloroform. Unlike “Assurance,” though, Joe’s “queerness” names not his otherwise heterosexual life. It labels only what characters assume his piano playing signifies. Still, this labeling shapes Joe, makes him feel separated, different. “Duck” foregrounds Joe’s separation as he packs his belongings in the attic bedroom of his uncle Will Bentley’s house in Chicago in 1927, ten years after he left his wife Amelie in New Orleans with her family. Joe recounts his romance with and alienation from Amelie; and “Duck” later reveals that Joe separated himself from his family, too. After Lena, his uncle’s wife, takes her life and after Joe learns that Amelie has stopped waiting for him to send for her, Joe drinks himself away. Being “utterly lonesome” sparks his chloroform suicide. Initially, though, Joe’s own sense of difference attracts him to Amelie with his first glimpse of her, then sixteen and waiting with other Creole girls for the pullman porters to step off the train. When Joe first steps onto New Orleans soil, he quickly develops an affinity for her as opposed to the other girls also waiting: “The other girls had flirted gaily with the porters. It was like the treatment

written in celebration of Margie Polite who sparked an uprising on 1 August 1943 in Harlem when she ran into the street screaming that a white police officer had shot and killed a black soldier. The soldier was only wounded. In the uprising five were killed, four hundred injured, and property damage was estimated at five million dollars. While Hughes did not necessarily celebrate the uprisings per se, as Rampersad explains, “Langston believed the riot to be a justified response to conditions in Harlem” (*Volume II* 76). Moreover, Hughes found middle-class black reaction to the uprising amusing. In a letter to friend and patron Noël Sullivan Hughes writes, “The better class Negroes are all **mad** at the low class ones for the breaking and the looting that went on. The letters I have received from the better colored people practically froth at the mouth. It seems their peace was disturbed even more than the white folks” (75). And to Carl Van Vechten he writes, “All the best colored people declare they have been set back Fifty Years. I don’t exactly know from what” (76).

given sailors when they entered into a port on a South Sea Island. But Amelie only stood there, not seeming to belong. Coupled off, the others went for ice cream sodas. That left him alone with her” (52). Her physical difference from the other Creole girls—she was “a grey eyed, red-haired creature, her long braids hanging below her waist,” not olive skinned with black hair and black eyes—only added to “the romance of this French town [which] shrouded them in its mystery” (51, 54). Joe felt comfortable with someone also different: “Somehow, he could talk to this shy little girl. He had always been bashful from a small boy—a ‘queer kid’ they had all called him. He had stayed at home, read, played the piano and dreamed most of the time—played rarely with the other boys” (52).

Joe’s “queerness” transforms from difference to alienation, aloofness, and reconnects with playing piano after he meets Amelie’s family who hate him because “Joe was brown, a dark hindu brown,” too dark for them (53). Joe feels alienated when he visits the family house, and wants to create a life for him and Amelie away from her family. He asks Amelie to come with him to Chicago where he lands a job as a Post Office clerk; but she refuses to leave her family. Joe leaves, later ignoring her letters, “sweet romantic letters, asking him to send for her, telling him she was ready to come to him [because] the hatred of her family had seared deeply into his ‘closed-in’ mind” (55). He ignores her letters because he enjoys Chicago: “he had all sorts of women now—yellow ones, white ones, black ones. Women were the more attracted to him because they could not understand him—his aloofness” (55). He enjoys living with his relatives who “were used to his shy, retiring ways, never intruding upon his

privacy, except to call him to the phone” (55). Still, the piano in their house offers him comfort:

Daily he went downstairs and played on the old piano; he was taking a correspondence course in jazz music. He bumped out his tunes, not minding [his uncle’s] children, but if visitors came, he would rise abruptly from the piano stool and stride up stairs. The family liked him, but once he had overheard them calling him “a queer duck.” This hurt him. For a week after this he had not gone down to the piano. (55)

For Joe, playing piano recalls his “closed-in” youth, his retreat from visitors; even his correspondence course in jazz music reflects his avoiding direct contact. Playing jazz consoles him because it reminds him of New Orleans, jazz’s “birth city.” “Duck” underscores this reference through Lena, Joe’s uncle’s wife: “Sometimes, she sang while he played the piano. She, too, came from New Orleans. She knew Amelie’s family and his story” (55). For Joe’s family, however, jazz represents what James A. Rogers, staff writer for The Messenger and The Amsterdam News, calls in “Jazz at Home”⁷⁷ its queer “seamy side”: “Whatever the result of [any] attempt to raise jazz from the mob-level upon which it originated, its true home is still its original cradle, the none too respectable cabaret. And here we have the seamy side of the story. Here we have some of the charm of Bohemia, but much more of the demoralization of vice” (667).

⁷⁷ Originally published in the May 1925 Survey Graphic Alain Locke edited and turned into The New Negro. While Rogers’ essay was also included in The New Negro, the pagination here reflects Survey Graphic.

Rogers argues that jazz with its free-flowing improvisation queerly defies any convention: “The true spirit of jazz is a joyous revolt from convention, custom, authority, boredom, even sorrow—from everything that would confine the soul of man and hinder its riding free on the air” (665). Or, as Lawrence Levine cites jazz scholars, “jazz was seen by many contemporaries as a cultural form independent of a number of the basic central beliefs of bourgeois society, free of its repressions, in rebellion against many of its grosser stereotypes. Jazz became associated with what [Aaron] Esman has called the ‘vital libidinal impulses . . . precisely the id drives that the superego of the bourgeois culture sought to repress’” (293). These libidinal impulses in jazz, this “joyous revolt,” argues Rogers, expresses itself vernacularly, through performance: “The earliest jazz-makers were the itinerant piano players who would wander up and down the Mississippi from saloon to saloon, . . . **They would ‘whip the ivories’ to marvelous chords and hidden racy, joyous meanings, evoking the intense delight of their hearers who would smother them at the close with huzzas and whiskey**” (665, emphasis mine). Implicit, joyous communication between performer and “hearers” was the hallmark of jazz. As Rogers explains, Jasbo Brown, “a reckless musician of a Negro cabaret in Chicago,” was one of its earlier disciples who played [Memphis Blues] and other blues, blowing his own extravagant moods and risqué interpretations into them, while hilarious with gin. To give further meanings to his veiled allusions he would make the trombone “talk” by putting a derby hat and later a tin can in its mouth. The delighted patrons would shout, “More, Jasbo. More, Jas, more.” And so the name originated. (666)

The “veiled allusions” in Jasbo Brown’s performance and the “hidden racy, joyous meanings” of the Mississippi River’s vagrant piano players, however, hardly need decoding. Unless, perhaps, the “hearer” comes not from the community, or is not an aficionado of jazz and the blues. Those knowledgeable understand exactly what the music and the lyrics signify.

For example, no knowing listener mistakes Bessie Smith crooning “put some sugar in my bowl” as a literal request. Such a “double entendre” simply reflects how artists openly expressed sexuality in the blues. As Angela Davis demonstrates in Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude “Ma” Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday, this sexual expression marks precisely the blues’ contribution to black culture and its reflection of the new lives black people led post-emancipation, post-Great Migration in northern black enclaves like Harlem:

The historical context within which the blues developed a tradition of openly addressing both female and male sexuality reveals an ideological framework that was specifically African-American. Emerging during the decades following the abolition of slavery, the blues gave musical expression to the new social and sexual realities encountered by African Americans as free women and men. The former slaves’ economic status had not undergone a radical transformation—they were no less impoverished than they had been during slavery. It was the status of their personal relationships that was revolutionized. For the first time in the history of the African presence in North America, masses of black women and men were in a position to make

autonomous decisions regarding the sexual partnerships into which they entered. Sexuality thus was on the most tangible domains in which emancipation was acted upon and through which its meanings were expressed. Sovereignty in sexual matters marked an important divide between life during slavery and life after emancipation. (4)

The blues' free expression provided "provocative and pervasive sexual—including homosexual—imagery" (3). Or, as Rogers illuminates, "the jazz spirit, being primitive, demands more frankness and sincerity" (712). So, Joe's family calling him a "queer duck" because he plays jazz does not act as a "hidden" reference. They acknowledge the ideological framework Davis elucidates.⁷⁸ This obvious vernacular

⁷⁸ Such is the scene in Claude McKay's Banjo when London Agrippa Daily, called "Banjo," and his band break into "Shake That Thing," their version of "The Jelly Roll Blues" (named for New Orleans' Jelly Roll Morton), at Café African in Marseilles. There "it roused an Arab-black girl from Algeria into a shaking-mad mood. And she jazzed right out into the center of the floor and shook herself in a low-down African shimmying way. . . . She was big-boned and well-fleshed and her full lips were like a savage challenge. Oh, shake that thing!" (47-48). And there it connects black American Banjo and the seamen from across the Diaspora who comprise his band, his acquaintances. Banjo and his band's vagabond life in Marseilles' "Ditch," an area by the breakwater where black seamen without ships or without papers bum, provides the perfect bohemian backdrop for the "transplanted exotic" or "epidemic contagiousness of jazz" across the Diaspora, as well as the perfect backdrop for Ray, the transplanted black queer Haitian intellectual who buddies with Banjo in the same way he does with Jake in McKay's Home to Harlem, where Jake hums Bessie Smith's "Foolish Man Blues" after meeting Ray (Rogers 665).

Banjo's "Shake That Thing" fulfills jazz's popular mission, according to Rogers: "in spite of its present vices and vulgarizations, its sex informalities, its morally anarchic spirit, jazz has a popular mission to perform. Joy, after all, has a physical basis. Those who laugh and dance and sing are better off even in their vices than those who do not. Moreover jazz with its mocking disregard for formality is a leveler and makes for democracy" (712). The "rough rhythm of darkly-carnal life" in Banjo's "Shake That Thing" defiantly provides life "In the face of the shadow of Death. Treacherous hand of murderous Death, lurking in sinister alleys, where the shadows of life dance, nevertheless, to their music of life. Death over there! Life over

reference voices the networks of affiliation organized by queerly free music just like Delly's lingering, nelly note in "Blessed Assurance," "a high C such as Tried Stone Baptist Church had never heard" (231).

Delly's lingering, nelly note resonates as well in Hughes' "Spectacle in Color" chapter of The Big Sea, a title Eric Garber uses for his 1989 study of what his subtitle calls "the Lesbian and Gay Subculture of Jazz Age Harlem." The "lesbian and gay subculture" Hughes' "Spectacle" relates, however, is no sub-culture. The resonance of Harlem's black queer presence lies interwoven in and not marginalized from Harlem's reverence for performance, an interlocking collection of which provides Hughes' "Color." Its first spectacle is the annual Hamilton Club Lodge Ball at Rockland Palace Casino on Eighth Avenue and 155th Street, what was known then as "the Faggot's Ball," "where men dress as women and women dress as men" (273). Hughes reports "it was fashionable for the intelligentsia and social leaders of both Harlem and the downtown area to occupy boxes . . . and look down from above at the queerly assorted throng on the dancing floor" (273). But Hughes quickly assures Big Sea's general reader that he only "once attended as a guest of A'Lelia Walker" to study the infamous event, describing detachedly that "from the boxes, these men look for all the world

here! Shake down Death and forget his commerce, his purpose, his haunting presence in a great shaking orgy. Dance down the Death of these days, the Death of these ways in shaking that thing. Jungle jazzing, Orient wriggling, civilized stepping. Shake that thing! Sweet dancing thing of primitive joy, perverse pleasure, prostitute ways, many-colored variations of the rhythm, savage, barbaric, refined—eternal rhythm of the mysterious, magical, magnificent—the dance divine of life. . . . Oh, Shake That Thing!" (57-58). This queer dance divine, its "perverse pleasure, prostitute ways," are what Joe's family hear when he plays jazz in "The Queer Duck."

like very pretty chorus girls parading across the raised platform in the center of the floor” (273).

Hughes again emphasizes that “Harlem likes spectacles of one kind or another” then extends the scene of circulation, segueing into other antiphonal queer performances (274). With the same remove he admires the elaborate, parading funeral processions “filling the air on Seventh Avenue” long after the sun had set. But even women “in their white regalia with swinging purple capes, preceded by the brothers in uniform, with long swords at their sides and feathered helmets” could not compare with “another spectacle that had Harlem talking for a long time,” Countée Cullen’s 9 April 1928 wedding to W.E.B. Du Bois’ only daughter Yolande (274). Hughes’ detachment reinforces the wedding’s surreal spectacle ensured by its hyper-importance as the “social-literary event of the season” (275). Yet the short-lived marriage could not sustain the weight of its orchestration: the dusk service “in the church pastored by Countee Cullen’s father, one of the largest Negro churches in the world [could not] begin to hold the crowd” (275). So many of Harlem’s “social-literary” group knew before attending the dusk ceremony that the event could not be what it seemed because Cullen’s real love relationship was with Harlem socialite Harold Jackman. When the marriage dissolved shortly after the wedding, Yolande Du Bois made sure “the Harlem press reported Cullen was infatuated with another woman, but she confided to her father that Cullen’s homosexuality was the problem” (Chauncey 265). And when Cullen sailed for Europe with Jackman and his father a headline jibed “GROOM SAILS WITH BEST MAN” (Rampersad, Volume I 162). For Hughes not to mention (or even suggest) Cullen and Jackman’s relationship, however, is not

simply a “closeted” move.⁷⁹ Hughes signals the wedding’s duplicity associatively and playfully, in part by highlighting his rented suit’s mistaken color at the wedding of “our leading poet” whose first collection of poetry is titled Color (1925).⁸⁰ Hughes also couples Cullen’s wedding with the annual drag ball (275). This plurisignation, one of the figurative elements of black vernacular that Zora Neale Hurston illustrates by arguing “the Negro thinks in hieroglyphics,” is “highly dramatised” and necessitates a knowing, responsive audience (225).⁸¹

⁷⁹ While I do not doubt that Hughes and Cullen were hardly the closest of friends, Rampersad uses his idea of their “feud” to organize much of their interaction in The Life of Langston Hughes, and he interprets so much of The Big Sea to do so. If this feud inspired the intense emotions Rampersad describes, it is interesting there is no mention or hint of it in The Big Sea. By contrast, Hughes has no problem including “I hated my father” (49). Also, nowhere does The Big Sea demonstrate the vehemence Rampersad finds in Hughes’ characterization of the wedding in The Life of Langston Hughes. Rampersad directs that Cullen, who “adored a pageant,” insisted “on the most formal, swallow-tail attire for the party [and] detailed it (‘pardon for the impertinence of this reminder’) to a disgruntled Hughes, who showed up for Cullen’s ‘parade,’ as he snidely called it, in a shiny, threadbare, rented version of this costume to escort the bride’s mother to her seat” (Volume I 162). Yet in a 27 February 1928 letter to Alain Locke anticipating the affair, Hughes teases that “Countée’s wedding is going to be very grand. He wants me to be an usher,—so I’ll be in it, too,—with a swallow-tail coat on! Do be there to see it. . . . He and Yolande are both getting fat” (Alain Locke Papers, Box 164-38 Folder 6, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University).

⁸⁰ Hughes’ knowing commentary about Cullen’s wedding comes through his mishap of renting a suit at a pawnshop so he could fulfill his “job to escort the bride’s mother to her seat” during the wedding: “In the rental shop the suit looked black, but once outside, it looked rusty green . . . and the trousers were stove-piped” (Big Sea 275). He explains he “felt very self-conscious . . . but, nevertheless, [he] enjoyed being in the wedding” (275). Of course, the rented pawnshop suit was hardly the only reason for Hughes’—or anyone’s—self-consciousness at the wedding.

⁸¹ This intentional dramatization over explicit disclosure exemplifies what Melvina Johnson Young finds in the interviews conducted with ex-slaves for the Work Progress Administration in 1937, what Young calls personal reserve. This reserve elucidates perceptively-incorrect responses given in the WPA interviews, a façade Lawrence Levine concurs was facilitated since emancipation by antiphonal black vernacular which caused “freedmen [to be] frequently delighted at the mistakes

[whites made] in [trying to] comprehen[d] their linguistic practices” (145). Or, as Levine expounds, “there is no reason to doubt that slaves may have used their songs as a means of secret communication” (51-2). Levine also cites Miles Mark Fisher who concurs that slaves’ songs were “filled with innuendo and hidden meaning” (52). Thus, they argue, black vernacular has always celebrated black linguistic practices as well as offered a reserve of in-group communication. Rampersad notes that Hughes himself was conscious of “insider”/“outsider” relations with his friendship with Carl Van Vechten: “Langston [Hughes] harbored only a slight suspicion of friendly whites like Van Vechten . . . Because he had lived more among whites than blacks all his life, he was sure that he could read them with reasonable accuracy” (Volume I 109).

Rampersad recognizes that Hughes’ Sea is also “filled with innuendo and hidden meaning”: “The Big Sea is astudy in formal sleight of hand, in which deeper meaning is deliberately concealed within a seemingly disingenuous, apparently transparent or even shallow narrative” (Volume I 376). Sea’s “balancing act” reflects the burden of “the double audience that almost any black writer bearing a racial message but dependent on a white publisher has to keep in mind”(378, 379). But Blanche Knopf only found Sea’s apparent shallowness when Hughes submitted it, and told him that Sea was “a fine performance [that] badly needs certain revisions” (qtd. in Volume I 376). At issue was what Knopf called the “Harlem Cavalcade,” the tedious Harlem Renaissance section. Eager to please, Hughes quickly cut fifty pages from the Harlem section but defended it in a 8 February 1940 letter to Knopf as “the background against which I moved and developed as a writer, and from which much of the material of my stories and poems came” (qtd. in Volume I 376). Hughes even reveals Sea’s deeper meaning for select readers: “some small portions of it may have vital meaning only to **my own people**” (376,emphasis mine). Carl Van Vechten knew the importance of this vital meaning and successfully defended Hughes’ vision to Knopf. Hughes, as Van Vechten assured him in a December 1939 letter urging him to **expand** not cut Sea’s Harlem passages, was “the last historian of that period who knows anything about it” (qtd. in Volume I 376).

Still, as Rampersad concludes, Sea frustrates expectations as an autobiography: “In a genre defined by confession, Hughes appears to give nothing away of a personal nature” (377). Hughes’ return to the Salem Methodist church on 7th Avenue where Cullen was married by his adoptive father at the end of “Spectacle” is no different. This time Hughes focuses on his interaction with Reverend Dr. Becton, who used the church for revivals and who was “a charlatan if there ever was one, but he filled the huge church—because he gave a good show” (275). Perhaps Becton was an inspiration for the fiscally minded Reverend Greene in “Blessed Assurance.” Within the innuendo-filled “Spectacle,” with metonymic links from drag to the parades of funeral processions to Cullen’s wedding pastored by his own father. Becton’s confidence in Hughes emphasizes the chapter’s focus on façade. In a meeting Dr. Becton calls to ask if Hughes would become the literary editor for the magazine Becton owned, “The Reverend Dr. Becton told me he had been a student of behavioristic psychology for a longtime—that was why he had his audience get up and down so much, to rest them and hold them longer at his services. And thus (I knew) he

Fourteen years earlier than “Characteristics,” Hurston elicits a similar audience that is “a necessary part of any drama” with her first published short story, “John Redding Goes to Sea” (1921)⁸² (231). “John Redding” explores the queer thought-world most associated with Hughes: the homoerotic world of sailing and seamen. Even Hughes admits this association in his letter defending Sea to Knopf: “Black readers ‘would certainly give me a razzing if I wrote only about sailors’” (Volume I 376). Unlike Hughes’ first-hand reminiscing—in a February 1923 letter to Alain Locke, Hughes confides that the sailors he spent time with were “the finest fellows I’ve ever met—fellows you can touch and know and be friends with”—“John Redding” explores only young John’s dreams of touching, knowing, and being friends

was able to take up more collections in one evening than if the people started to drift out early. . . . He said he knew the effects of music and rhythm on the human emotions, for he had made a study of audiences and their reactions, and he knew how to handle them” (277-8).

Hughes declined the offer without explanation and succinctly finishes “Spectacle” with the Reverend’s death: “A few years later he was shot and killed in Philadelphia, some say by racketeers” (278). This (melo)dramatic end to Hughes’ tightly-woven chapter of parading Harlem reveals that Hughes, too, was “a student of behavioristic psychology.” With “Spectacle in Color” and “Blessed Assurance” Hughes lays bare the personally-motivated façades of Becton and Greene as well as the telling, misdirected anxieties of John or even himself in “Spectacle” when he is self-conscious about the rusty green suit with stove-piped pants he wore to Cullen’s wedding. Yet neither “Spectacle” nor “Assurance” directly reveal the motivation guiding the queer characters and people in each narrative. Both only infer the queer thought-world of Delmar, Countée Cullen, or even Hughes as he “reports on” the Faggot’s Ball.

⁸² The short story was originally published in the Howard University student publication Stylus in May 1921. While “John Redding” was published before 1925, the year Hurston arrived in Harlem and the year Locke’s The New Negro was published, a marker of the Movement’s “dress rehearsal” that Charles S. Johnson organized at the Civic Club on Twelfth Street near Fifth Avenue in New York in 1924, Hurston’s work is part of what constitutes the New Negro Movement’s publications. And it was reprinted in Opportunity, the journal whose annual literary prizes contributed to the Movement, in January 1926.

with sailors (qtd. in Volume I 61). Rather than erotic, tender verse about sailors—like Hughes’ “Poem (To F. S.)” (1922) or “Port Town” (1926)⁸³—“John Redding” reflects its protagonist’s unfulfilled desires. Still, like “Blessed Assurance,” “John Redding” makes plain John’s queerness in its first sentence: “The Villagers said that John Redding was a queer child” (1). Like Delly, young John’s queerness comes from his intellect and creativity. John’s thinking, feeling, and dreaming mark his difference from the “simple folk” of the Florida village he lives in: John “grew to manhood, playing, studying and dreaming. He attended the village school as did most of the youth about him, but he also went to high school at the county seat where none of the villagers went” (4). Because of his constant impulse towards difference his mother Matty is convinced “our boy’s got a spell on ‘im” (1). But Hurston’s spell of a story does not explain away John’s queer desires as forced by conjuring. Like Hughes’ “Assurance,” “John Redding” links his queerness to his parents. Here, too, there is a hereditary connection but not one of paternal panic. John’s father Alfred admits “Yas, son, Ah have them same feelings exactly, but Ah can’t find no words lak you do. It seems lak you an’ me see wid de same eyes, hear wid de same ears an’ even feel de same inside. Only thing you kin talk it an’ Ah can’t” (10).

John’s intellect and creativity manifest both a self-consciousness of his difference and his vagabond impulse, a “longing to get away” (10). As John explains, “I feel that I am just earth, soil lying helpless to move myself, but thinking. . . . Me, well, just soil, feeling but not able to take part in it all. . . . Oh, yes, I’m a dreamer. . . .

⁸³ “Port Town” was published first in The Weary Blues (1926).

I have such wonderfully complete dreams” (10). Because of these wonderfully complete dreams

John was the subject of much discussion among the country folk. Why didn't he teach school instead of thinking about strange places and people? Did he think himself better than any of the “gals” there about that he would not go a-courting any of them? He muss be “fixed” as his mother claimed, else where did his queer notions come from? Well, he was always queer, and one could not expect the man to be different from the child. (4)

John's desire to think “about strange places and people,” to travel to the sea, started when he was a “ten-year-old [who] was puzzling to the simple folk [because] he was an imaginative child and fond of day dreams” (1). He would cast dry twigs into the St. John River from the banks where there grows “numerous palms, luxuriant magnolias” and where “on the bosom of the stream float millions of delicately colored hyacinths” (1). John watches “them sail away down stream to Jacksonville, the sea, the wide world and John Redding wanted to follow them” (1). And, to signal John's “emasculated” creative dreams, he weeps when his twigs become caught in the weeds which encroach the stream, to which Alfred responds: “Well, well, doan cry. Ah thought youse uh grown upman. Men doan cry lak babies. You mustn't take it too hard 'bout yo' ships” (2).

His florally decorated vagabond dreams, however, are discouraged by his mother Matty. He stays because she pleads “You wouldn't kill yo' po' ole mamma, would you?” and “then the unexpected happened. John married Stella Kanty” (5, 6).

Perhaps to please Matty, this impulse likewise falls out of the narrator's understanding of John's motivation: "John's change was occasioned possibly by the fact that Stella was really beautiful; he was young and red-blooded, and the time was spring" (6). But whatever the reason for John's attempt to stay and (pro)create a connection with his community, his impulse quickly faded: with "the raptures of the first few weeks over, John began to saunter [and] his thoughts would in spite of himself, stray down river to Jacksonville, the sea, the wide world—and poor home-tied John Redding wanted to follow them" (6-7). John tries to talk to Stella about his desires but Stella already knows what being home-untied signifies: "John, folks allus said youse queer and tol' me not to marry yuh, but Ahjes' loved yuh so Ah couldn't help it, an' now to think you wants tuh sneak off an' leave me" (7).

John does actualize his sea dream, what Alfred recognizes as he tells Matty "dontcha know our boy is different from any othah chile roun' heah. He 'lows he's goin' to sea when he gits grown, an' Ah reckon Ah'll let him" (3). But his dream comes through his death, the story's unforeseen reversal. A new character enters, "Mr. Hill, the builder of the new bridge that was to span the river," who is recruiting men to complete the bridge before the ensuing storm hits (11). John goes, the storm comes, and John dies violently, found by his family the next day:

Alfred shaded his eyes with his gnarled brown hand and gazed out into the stream. Sure enough there was a man floating on a piece of timber. He lay prone upon his back. His arms were outstretched, and the water washed over his brogans but his feet were lifted out of the water whenever the timber was buoyed up by the stream. His blue overalls

were nearly torn from his body. A heavy piece of steel or timber had struck him in falling for his left side was laid open by the thrust. A great jagged hole wherein the double fists of a man might be thrust, could plainly be seen from the shore. The man was John Redding. (16)

This gruesome dénouement comes right after John moves closer to his sea dream and exclaims “Got a chance to join the Navy, mamma, and go all around the world. Ain’t that grand?” (9). Of course, Matty condemns it and John again acquiesces to “wait another year, but I am going because I must” (10). But Alfred gives John unspoken and unspeakable support: “Alfred threw an arm about his son’s neck and drew him nearer but quickly removed it. Both men instantly drew apart, ashamed for having been so demonstrative” (10).

“John Redding Goes to Sea” thus offers narrative protection from “having been so demonstrative.” Still, John’s queer presence does not fade so easily. Even in John’s death we are reminded of Alfred’s recognition of himself in John: Alfred’s “gnarled brown hand” echoes John’s gnarled body, which in turn echoes Alfred’s earlier understanding that they “see wid de same eyes, hear wid de same ears an’ even feel de same inside”(10). And John’s posthumous, vagrant floating leaves the reader as open as John’s outstretched arms and great jagged hole, or as unkempt as Alfred insists his son’s body remain. Refusing to let the bridge workers extract John’s body from the water, he is left “bobbing up and down as if waving good bye, piloting his little craft on the shining river road, John Redding float[ing] away toward Jacksonville, the sea, the wide world—at last”(16). John’s death at least symbolically achieves his dream to

be at sea, one that Hughes depicts in the second stanza of “Death of an Old Seaman” (1926)⁸⁴:

Put no tombstone at my head,
For here I do not make my bed.
Strew no flowers on my grave,
I’ve gone back to the wind and wave.
Do not, do not weep for me,
For I am happy with my sea.

Young John’s death allows him to go “back to the wind and wave” and makes him “happy with my sea.” But while his death arrests the possibility of John’s homoerotic bonding with, as Hughes reminisces, some of “the finest fellows I’ve ever met—fellows you can touch and know and be friends with,” it cannot change the fact that “the villagers said that John Redding was a queer child,” that “he was always queer” (qtd. in Volume I61; Hurston, “John Redding” 1, 4). Such recognition presages John’s own and thus demonstrates that the villagers already knew what queer meant (at least) before John Redding was born.

Another knowing community populates Altamaha, Georgia, in W. E. B. Du Bois’ “Of the Coming of John,” the second-to-last chapter of The Souls of Black Folk.⁸⁵ “Coming” offers a queer protagonist not unlike Delly in his difference from the black community of his hometown, Altamaha. Du Bois’ narrative enacts the communion-through-reading that black queer vernacular offers. Du Bois’ queer John

⁸⁴ “Death of An Old Seaman” was published first in The Weary Blues (1926).

⁸⁵ Perhaps not-so coincidentally, Hughes’ “Blessed Assurance” is the second-to-last story of Something in Common.

Jones does not wear white Bermuda shorts or soar “with all the sweetness of Sam Cooke’s tessitura,” but he is “a brilliant queer” like Delly. In fact, John’s brilliance, his embrace of the queer thought-world of book learning at the Wells Institute, transforms him irreconcilably and leads him, as if by fate, to the story’s grim end.

“Of the Coming of John” reflects the “profound preoccupation with the Christian gospel” that Cornel West finds “is a distinctive feature of Afro-American culture [and] the unique Afro-American encounter with the modern world” (“Subversive” 161). John Jones’ struggle with freedom signifies on the enigmatic Biblical story of John the Baptist, cousin of Jesus Christ. (To emphasize Jones’ namesake, Du Bois even sets the Wells Institute in Johnstown). While Jones does not wear “clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist,” eat locusts and honey, or appear “in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near,’” he is a prophetic figure (The HarperCollins Study Bible, Mt 3.4; 3.1-2).⁸⁶ Like John the Baptist, John Jones’ adversity through knowledge relies upon the reader to fulfill his call for change. Jones, too, implores radical change: John the Baptist urges baptism to “You brood of vipers,” while Jones insists that the ceremony of baptism is not as important as a “good and true” life (Lk 3.7; Du Bois, “Coming” 173). Also like John the Baptist, Jones’ message is not entirely understood by those who hear it.⁸⁷ What remains—or perhaps what was written in place—are

⁸⁶ All subsequent Biblical citations come from this edition.

⁸⁷ For example, almost all of John the Baptist’s sermons were edited from the Gospels of the New Testament because of embarrassment in Christian circles that John baptized Jesus. Some felt that Jesus’ submitting to baptism, a forgiveness of sins, implies John’s messianic superiority. See David Wenham and Steve Walton, Exploring the New Testament: Volume 1: Introducing the Gospels and Acts.

speeches supporting Jesus' preeminence: "I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming; I am not worthy to untie the thong of his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire" (Lk 3.16).⁸⁸ Similarly, only a fragment of John Jones' words delivered in "unknown tongue" at Altamaha's Baptist Church remains in "Coming":

"To-day," he said, with a smile, "the world cares little whether a man be Baptist or Methodist, or indeed a churchman at all, so long as he is good and true. What difference does it make whether a man be baptized in river or wash-bowl, or not at all? Let's leave all that littleness, and look higher." Then, thinking of nothing else, he slowly sat down. A painful hush seized that crowded mass. Little had they understood of what he said, for he spoke an unknown tongue, save the last word about baptism; that they knew, and they sat very still while the clock ticked.

(173-174)

Emphasizing Jones' remove from his community as well as the radicalness of his message, an old man "on [whose] face lay the intense rapt look of the religious fanatic" responded: "John never knew clearly what the old man said; he only felt himself held up to scorn and scathing denunciation for trampling on the true Religion" (174).

John Jones is, "to use some fancy academic language" as John Dominic Crossan does to explain John the Baptist's prophetic function, "an apocalyptic

⁸⁸ Jesus' tempered praise of John also supports the re-adjustment presence of John in the Gospels: "I tell you, among those born of women no one is greater than John; yet the least in the kingdom of God is greater than he" (Lk 7.28).

eschatologist. An eschatologist is somebody who sees that the problem of the world is so radical that it's going to take some kind of divine radicality.”⁸⁹ Because his message is “so radical,” Jones, like John the Baptist, is killed.⁹⁰ For Du Bois, John Jones’ tragic story illustrates that “divine radicality” through revealing how racism, “the problem of the world,” influences the contradictory freedoms afforded to black Americans after slavery. Jones’ story serves as social critique in the tradition of what L. Michael White finds in John the Baptist: “what he is really is a critic of society, of worldliness” (“John the Baptist”). The story thus personifies two elements Cornel West finds that “black interpretation of the Christian gospel [has] accented”: “the tragedy in the struggle for freedom and the freedom in a tragic predicament” (162). To nudge “Gentle Readers” (as he addresses them at Souls’ outset) that Jones’ individual story works as social critique, Du Bois closes “Coming” with the following sentence describing John’s last thoughts before being lynched: “And the world whistled in his ears” (179).

John’s death is central to “Coming”’s eschatological tone. Unfolding the events foreboding John’s lynching for the reader begins with his weathered

⁸⁹ From Part 1 of PBS show Frontline’s series From Jesus to Christ, which initially aired 6 April 1998.

⁹⁰ Because John the Baptist was publicly critical of King Herod Antipas. As Harold W. Attridge explains, “All of the sources agree on that, both Josephus [a first century Jewish historian] and the testimony of the gospels. Exactly what was involved in that critique is not entirely clear. The material in the gospels suggests that it had to do with Herod’s marital practices and his personal morality. There may have been something more political involved in John’s condemnation of Herod, insofar as Herod Antipas was tied in intimately with the Roman imperial authorities. In any case, John was executed by Herod as a troublemaker and a political upstart” (“John the Baptist”).

introduction on the “wide green lawn” of the Wells Institute at the end of Carlisle Street.⁹¹

When at evening the winds come swelling from the east, and the great pall of the city’s smoke hangs wearily above the valley, then the red west glows like a dreamland down Carlisle Street, and, at the tolling of the supper-bell, throws the passing forms of students in dark silhouette against the sky. Tall and black, they move slowly by, and seem in the sinister light to flit before the city like dim warning ghosts. Perhaps they are; for this is Wells Institute, and these black students have few dealings with the white city below. (165)

Such “sinister light” creating “dim warning ghosts” particularly flickers on lone John who “hurries last and late toward the twinkling lights of Swain Hall,—for Jones is never on time” (165-166). His difference from the other black students manifests in his gait and his clothing: “A long, straggling fellow he is, brown and hard-haired, who seems to be growing straight out of his clothes, and walks with a half-apologetic roll. He [seems] so perfectly awkward” (166). In part, Jones’ unusualness, his inability to comply with the rules like the other students, facilitates both his ability to see differently and his solemn fate. His bizarreness “long puzzled” the Institute’s faculty, including the teacher who narrates the story:

⁹¹ When John the Baptist baptizes Jesus in the River Jordan, a similar apocalyptic image signifying divine intervention comes from the sky: “And just as [Jesus] was coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens torn apart and the Spirit descending like a dove on him” (Mk 1.10).

For a long time the clay seemed unfit for any sort of moulding. He was loud and boisterous, always laughing and singing, and never able to work consecutively at anything. He did not know how to study; he had no idea of thoroughness; and with his tardiness, carelessness, and appalling good-humor, we were sore perplexed. (167)

Because John's "last escapade was too much," the faculty suspended him from the Institute "on account of repeated disorder and inattention to work" (167, 167-168). When he returns, there is a "serious look that crept over his boyish face [and] never left it again" (168). His newfound determination makes him excel at the Institute's preparatory school and go on to college. But his seriousness begets a queer awareness of race and society, of what Du Bois calls living "within the Veil, raising it that you may view faintly its deeper recesses,—the meaning of its religion, the passion of its human sorrow, and the struggle of its greater souls" (3). Within the allegory of John Jones' life and death "lie buried many things which if read with patience may show the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the Twentieth Century" (3, emphasis mine).⁹²

Reading patiently reveals John Jones' coming to his queer thought-world at the Institute through books, through history and linguistics. Because this queer book learning enables John to discover his own interiority as well as "the strange meaning of being black," "Coming" demonstrates the communion that readers of black queer

⁹² See Cynthia D. Schrager's "Both Sides of the Veil: Race, Science, and Mysticism in W.E.B. Du Bois" for an excellent discussion of how Du Bois both creates "a kind of spiritual counterculture to white materialism" of the day that influenced Booker T. Washington and offers a "critique of the enlightenment rationalist project, a project that is problematically complicit with the institution of slavery" (554).

vernacular can find. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick asserts a similar “kind of genius loci for queer reading” in the introduction of her anthology Novel Gazing: Queer Readings in Fiction (2). Synthesizing the work she includes, Sedgwick identifies a common, “often quiet, but very palpable presiding image”:

the interpretive absorption of the child or adolescent whose sense of personal queerness may or may not (yet?) have resolved into a sexual specificity of proscribed object choice, aim, site, or identification. Such a child—if she reads at all—is reading for important news about herself, without knowing what form that news will take; with only the patchiest familiarity with its codes; without, even, more than hungrily hypothesizing to what questions this news may proffer an answer. (2-3)

Young John’s queer “interpretive absorption” enables him to see and live within “the Veil,” about which even Du Bois admits that he outlines with “only the patchiest familiarity” in the introductory “Forethought” to Soul: “I have sought here to sketch, in vague, uncertain outline, the spiritual world in which ten thousand thousand Americans live and strive” (3). “Coming”’s “uncertain outline” points to Saidiya Hartman’s understanding of “the strange meaning of being black” where black communities find meaning not by melanin but through purposeful and self-conscious “networks of affiliation.” “Coming” shows that John’s blackness may be hereditary but his understanding of racial “connections forged in the context of disrupted affiliations” comes only through his active and queer mental pursuits (Hartman 59). John’s queer reading “may or may not (yet?) have resolved into a sexual specificity of proscribed object choice,” following Sedgwick. Still, it may have developed from

something already present in John “in vague, uncertain outline,” as the dangling presence of the word queer suggests when John leaves Altamaha, Georgia. His departure concerns the white people who “shook their heads when [John’s] mother wanted to send him off to school. ‘It’ll spoil him,—ruin him,’ they said; and they talked as though they knew. But full half the black folk followed him proudly to the station, and carried **his queer little trunk and many bundles**” (166, emphasis mine).⁹³ This kind of reading invokes John’s spiritual namesake who is himself the subject of much sketchy speculation, revision, (possible) indirection, and debate over the subsequent interpretation by Biblical scholars of the meaning of the Greek word **malakoi**.⁹⁴ As if to emphasize this connection, Jones “pondered long over every new

⁹³ Even though this part of the narrative takes place chronologically before John’s determined book learning at the Institute, the unnamed faculty member at the Institute guides the at-times third-person and first-person-plural narration. To read John’s “queer little trunk and many bundles” as queer baggage of sorts or queer potential would be following the faculty member’s lead who saw potential despite the “long time [John’s] clay seemed unfit for any sort of moulding” (167).

⁹⁴ As L. Michael White confirms, “Our knowledge of the figure of John the Baptist is very limited” (“John the Baptist”). John Dominic Crossan explains that some of the indirection about John the Baptist comes from his baptizing Jesus: “That Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist is as certain as anything historians know about Jesus. It is somewhat clouded, however, in our present texts by the fact that later followers of Jesus thought it was not appropriate that the Messiah should be baptized, and apparently inferior, therefore, to John the Baptist” (“John the Baptist”).

There has even been debate over John the Baptist’s sexuality stemming from the Greek word **malakoi** used to describe Jesus’ description of John the Baptist’s clothing in the Gospels according to Matthew and Luke. In both, Jesus defends John’s dress to an audience who might think his leather and camel hair odd: “When John’s messengers had gone, Jesus began to speak to the crowds about John: ‘What did you go out into the wilderness to look at? A reed shaken by the wind? Someone dressed in soft robes? Look, those who put on fine clothing and live in luxury are in royal palaces. What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet’ (Lk 7.24-27). (Interestingly, Jesus starts his defense of John’s “soft robes” only after John’s messengers go away).

Malakoi, Greek for “soft,” has elsewhere been translated as “effeminate,”

Greek word, and wondered why this meant that and why it couldn't mean something else, and how it must have felt to think all things in Greek" (168).

When John first finds his "Greek" consciousness through reading, he "sat rapt and silent before [its] vision, or wandered alone over the green campus peering through and beyond the world of men into a world of thought" (168). His new thought-vision was so different, "the thoughts at times puzzled him sorely; he could not see just why the circle was not square, and carried it out fifty-six decimal places one midnight,—would have gone further, indeed, had not the matron rapped for lights out" (168). In fact, these new thoughts were so overwhelming, he often disregarded his own corporeality: "He caught terrible colds lying on his back in the meadows of nights, trying to think out the solar system" (168). With his difference came his strength, his "pausing perplexed where others skipped merrily, and walking steadily through the difficulties where the rest stopped and surrendered" (169).

After he leaves the Institute, his new vision remains. Queerly looking back into the world made visible the Veil that had always filtered his sight:

He had left his queer thought-world and come back to a world of motion and men. He looked now for the first time sharply about him, and wondered he had seen so little before. He grew slowly to feel almost for the first time the Veil that lay between him and the white world; he first noticed how the oppression that had not seemed

"homosexual," or "sodomite"—uses that reflect the contemporary adaptation of the word but not its use in the Bible. For example, **malakoi** has been translated as **sodomite** in the following list of "wrongdoers" from the apostle Paul: those who "will not inherit the kingdom of God" include "fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites" (1 Cor 6.9).

oppression before, differences that erstwhile seemed natural, restraints and slights that in his boyhood days had gone unnoticed or been greeted with a laugh. (169)

Because he can now see this oppression, John cannot go home to Altamaha—“as the day approached he hesitated with a nameless dread” (169). Instead, he accepts “with eagerness the offer of the Dean to send him North [to New York] with the quartette during the summer vacation, to sing for the Institute” (169). Yet going to New York only draws him nearer to “his boyhood days,” seemingly by chance. New York also offers, to again cite my opening epigraph from Octave Thanet, the “ideas and plots [which] are repeated” in the black queer vernacular of the work by Hurston, Marshall, and Hughes I have already discussed. Du Bois no longer uses queer to describe John’s post-Institute journey but he emphasizes John’s otherworldly connection to music. When John finds transcendence in music like Joe Walton and Delmar he enters a “dreamland.” John is also attracted to homosocial environments and the sea like John Redding. In fact, John Jones transforms the public spaces of New York into all-male world, noticing women only after rapturous descriptions of men. For example, John’s first look at New York “brilliant with moving men” revels in faultlessly-dressed men before acknowledging a woman’s presence—with a man (169). These men

reminded John of the sea, as he sat in the square and watched them, so changelessly changing, so bright and dark, so grave and gay. He scanned their rich and faultless clothes, the way they carried their hands, the shape of their hats; he peered into the hurrying carriages. Then, leaning back with a sigh, he said “This is the World.” (169-170)

John follows the men (“and a little talkative lady”) into a theater where “he sat in a half-maze minding the scene about him; the delicate beauty of the hall, the faint perfume, the moving myriad of men” (170). John was overcome with new sensations as “he sat in [this] dreamland . . . when, after a hush, rose high and clear the music of Lohengrin’s swan” (170). With the sound of the wail “a deep longing swelled in all his heart to rise with that clear music out of the dirt and dust of that low life that held him prisoned and befouled” (171). John’s dreamland vision recalls home, the sea, and his family:

When at last a soft sorrow crept across the violins, there came to him the vision of a far-off home,—the great eyes of his sister, and the dark drawn face of his mother. And his heart sank below the waters, even as the sea-sand sinks by the shores of Altamaha, only to be lifted aloft again with that last ethereal wail of the swan that quivered and faded away into the sky. (171)

So great was his “deep longing” to be swept away by this transcendent music he did not hear the racist white man who said to his female companion, “you must not lynch the colored gentleman simply because he’s in your way,” as John entered the theater (170). John did not hear this white man boast “you will not understand us at the South [where] intimate relations between white and black . . . are everyday occurrences” (170).

The white man continues to praise his view of southern race relations—“I remember my closest playfellow in boyhood was a little Negro named after me, and surely no two,—well!”—but abruptly stops when he approaches his seats and sees

John sitting next to them (170). Later, when John is asked to leave because “some mistake had been made in selling the gentleman a seat already disposed of,” the white man (as well as the reader) realizes he knows John Jones: “For the first time the young man recognized his dark boyhood playmate, and John knew that it was the Judge’s son. The white John started, lifted his hand, and then froze into his chair; the black John smiled lightly, then grimly, and followed the usher down the aisle” (171). This event sends black John home to his “manifest destiny” in Altamaha: “perhaps they’ll let me help settle the Negro problems there,—perhaps they won’t” (172). But black John’s “manifest destiny,” as his return home illustrates, is his draw to the sea and to “dreamland” transcendence.

Once home, black John delivers his “misunderstood” sermon at the Baptist Church. He then convinces the Judge to allow him to open a school, as long as he “accept[s] the situation and teach[es] the darkies to be faithful servants and laborers”(175). But when “the other John came home, tall, gay, and headstrong” and tells his father that Jones is “the darky that tried to force himself into a seat beside the lady I was escorting,” the Judge closes the school (176, 177). At this second defeat he heads “toward the sea . . . with his head down” and resolves that he must leave: “‘I’ll go away,’ he said slowly; ‘I’ll go away and find work, and send for [my family]. I cannot live here longer’” (178). Here, the weather’s pause foretells his fate as much as the story’s opening storm. It relinquishes him from any earthly hold, allows him to finally embrace his “dreamland” transcendence, and cues the story’s final act: “There came from the wind no warning, not a whisper from the cloudless sky. There was only a black man hurrying on with an ache in his heart, seeing neither sun nor sea, but

starting as from a dream at the frightened cry that woke the pines, to see his dark sister struggling in the arms of a tall and fair-haired man” (178). He stops white John from raping his sister “with all the pent-up hatred of his great black arm; and the body lay white and still beneath the pines, all bathed in sunshine and blood. John looked at it dreamily, then walked back to the house, and said in a soft voice, ‘Mammy, I’m going away,—I’m going to be free’” (178-179). John’s freedom entails going back to the sea where white John’s body lies, remembering playing with white John as a child, and thinking “of the boys at Johnstown” where he was first enthralled by his queer thought-world (179). He transforms his seaside spot into the New York theater and blends the sounds of the coming mob with the music of Lohengrin’s swan:

Then as the sheen of the starlight stole over him, he thought of the gilded ceiling of that vast concert hall, and heard stealing toward him the faint sweet music of the swan. Hark! was it music, or the hurry and shouting of men? Yes, surely! Clear and high the faint sweet melody of rose and fluttered like a living thing, so that the very earth trembled as with the tramp of horses and murmur of angry men. (179)

Du Bois again signals the communion found in carefully reading “Of the Coming of John” with John Jones’ final act on the beachfront. As John “leaned back and smiled toward the sea [he] looked steadily down the pathway, softly humming the ‘Song of the Bride’” in German (179). While the song employs a marriage metaphor to depict salvation—“for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels”—John singing it in German

signifies his book learning at the Institute (Isa 61.10). For John, erudition enables his transcendence from the Earth and its racism. The “faint sweet melody” he learned, like the black queer vernacular to which Du Bois, Hurston, Marshall, and Hughes contribute, fluttered on twenty years later during Harlem’s Renaissance.

Chapter Three: Situating Harlem amid the queer “streetgeist and folklore” of the New Negro movement

[Harlem] is a sociological el dorado. With its rise, its struggles, its beginnings; its loves, its hates, its visionings, its tossings on the crest of the storming white sea; its orgies, its gluttonies; its restraints, its passivities; its spiritual yearnings—it is beautiful. . . . Harlem at dusk—is exotic. Music. Song. Laughter. The street is full of people—dark, brown, crimson, pomegranate. Crystal clear is the light that shines in their eyes. It is different, is the light that shines in these black people’s eyes. It is a light mirroring the emancipation of a people and still you feel that they are not quite emancipated. It is the light of an unregenerate.

—Eric Walrond, “The Black City” (1924)

If we were to offer a symbol of what Harlem has come to mean in the short span of twenty years it would be another statue of liberty on the landward side of New York. . . . Harlem represents the Negro’s latest thrust towards Democracy.

—Alain Locke, “Harlem” (1925)

In the first and title essay of The New Negro, Alain Locke proclaims Harlem a Diasporic “race capital,” a “laboratory of a great race-welding” attracting “the African, the West Indian, the Negro American” (“New Negro” 7, 6). In Harlem, “folk-expression and self-determination” signal a new “common consciousness” among two sets of black people whom Locke sees collaborating symbiotically: “In a real sense it is the rank and file who are leading, and the leaders who are following” (7). The city provides a site for “dissimilar elements [to find] a common area of contact and interaction,” particularly in the “self-expression of the Young Negro, in his poetry, his art, his education and his new outlook” (6, 5). Still, following W. E. B. Du Bois’ idea of the Talented Tenth, Locke argues that black intellectuals, “the more advanced and representative classes,” lead by crafted narrative the so-called migrant masses who

recognize in print “as yet only a strange relief and a new vague urge,” or a “transformed and transforming psychology” (10, 4). Reading material available (ostensibly) in mass contemplates the recently urbane New Negro reader, desirous for and transformed by words.⁹⁵ This new circuit imagines that the printed word fulfills its “mission of rehabilitating the race in world esteem from that loss of prestige for which the fate and conditions of slavery have so largely been responsible”(14).⁹⁶ For Locke, this kind of communal black artistry facilitates a “race-welding” of racial uplift across the Diaspora and sheds “the old chrysalis of the Negro problem” rooted in racist eugenics and chattel slavery.⁹⁷

Locke’s heady anthology does not just theorize about black literature’s public powers of transformation. The New Negro amasses eight short stories, thirty-nine poems, a play, and two folk tales, as well as twenty-two essays about black literature, art, music, drama, folk culture, and sociology, so readers can experience the “transformed and transforming psychology” for themselves. It collects work by some of the most-discussed figures of Harlem’s Renaissance (Langston Hughes, Jean

⁹⁵ Of course, not every book sells the same, or is “available” in quite the same way— independent publishers often do not produce large first printings, which in turn can determine a smaller “reading public” because some may not even know of the book. Nonetheless, the principle of publication still stands. A stranger can purchase words that could have been—or might likewise be—bought by another reader and join a “common area of contact and interaction,” to borrow from Locke, through the text.

⁹⁶ See Arjun Appadurai’s “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy” for another articulation of “**the imagination as a social practice**” (274).

⁹⁷ See Pierre Bourdieu’s The Field of Cultural Production, particularly “Field of Power, Literary Field and Habitus,” for his definition of a site-inspired literary field as “an independent social universe with its own laws of functioning, its specific relations of force” (163). In a different and shorter version of this chapter included in Public Spaces, Private Lives (2004), with the title “Reading Black Queer Vernacular in the “streetgeist and folklore” of Harlem’s Renaissance,” I make more use of Bourdieu’s **habitus** to elucidate Locke’s New Negro Harlem.

Toomer, Zora Neale Hurston, James Weldon Johnson, Countée Cullen, W. E. B. Du Bois) as well as those largely overlooked in recent studies of Harlem (Georgia Douglas Johnson, Jessie Redmon Fauset, Willis Richardson, Anne Spencer, Eric Walrond, Angelina Weld Grimké, Rudolph Fisher). Published by Albert and Charles Boni, The New Negro was a streamlined while expanded version of the already-popular “Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro,” the special edition of Survey Graphic (March 1925) that sold over twice the magazine’s regular circulation and, as David Levering Lewis explains, “primed the mainstream pump of expectations for more writings” like it (W.E.B. Du Bois 161).⁹⁸

The New Negro met those expectations. It marketed “the attainment of a significant and satisfying new phase of group development, and with it a spiritual Coming of Age” that Chandler Owen, Irene M. Gaines, Mary McLeod Bethune, among others, had been exploring in essays about cabaret culture, black literature, and the new effects of urban living on black people (Locke, “New Negro” 16).⁹⁹ The New

⁹⁸ The editorial differences between Survey Graphic and The New Negro reflect Locke’s eye toward a larger audience. Cut are essays highlighting racism or essays that might not be easily accessible: Kelly Miller’s “Harvest of Race Prejudice,” Eunice Roberta Hunton’s “Breaking Through,” Winthrop D. Lane’s “Ambushed in the City,” George E. Haynes’ “The Church and the Negro Spirit,” Konrad Bercovici’s “The Rhythm of Harlem,” and Rudolph Fisher’s “The South Lingers On.” Also cut is W. E. B. Du Bois’ short story “The Black Man Brings His Gifts,” a story outlining how black Americans are responsible for any truly American cultural or scientific innovation. Other essays were changed in content and title from Survey Graphic to The New Negro. Charles S. Johnson’s “Black Workers in the City” becomes “The New Frontage of American Life,” a title that no longer reveals its class- and race-centered analyses; Melville J. Herskovits’ “The Dilemma of Social Pattern” loses its dilemma to become “The Negro’s Americanism”; and Walter F. White’s “Color Lines” becomes the more philosophically-named “The Paradox of Color.”

⁹⁹ Owen’s essay “The Black and the Tan Cabaret—America’s Most Democratic Institution” (published in The Messenger, February 1925) argues that egalitarian

Negro channeled the hyperbole and mythic presence that Harlem inspired in the work of black writers and the imaginations of everyday black people. For all, Harlem was both city and cityscape. Harlem was a metonym for black people's "new phase of group development" and took on human characteristics. In literature, as Sidney H. Bremer acknowledges, "Africa America's capital city is organic, not mechanical. It is fleshy—and embodied in lively colors, tastes, and sounds" (49). For Eric Walrond, expressive Harlem garners rich metaphor for its Diaspora "race-welding."¹⁰⁰ As he describes in my epigraph, Harlem's "spiritual yearnings"—what Locke calls spiritual emancipation in "The New Negro" a year later—become, not just echo, the visuals accompanying West Indian and African emigration to New York, "tossings on the crest of the storming white sea." Or, as Wallace Thurman confirms in 1928, "Harlem is a dream city pregnant with wide-awake realities" (91). Locke built his packaging of

cabaret space signals new social developments. Garies' "Colored Authors and their Contributions to the World's Literature" (The Messenger, November 1923) reflects the 20s attention to black literature in her black authors survey which looks back to fifteenth century writer Mohaman Koti. Bethune's "The Problem of the City Dweller" (Opportunity, February 1925) explores how black people turning their eyes "toward the city as [their] El Dorado" has transformed black culture and everyday black lives and desires (473).

¹⁰⁰ See Walrond's short story "City Love" (1927) for another seafaring description of Harlem: "From a gulf in the dark low sea of rooftops there came mounting skyward the fiery reflexes of some gaudy Convention Night on Lenox Avenue" (84). In the story, like Paul Gilroy establishes in Against Race, and like Locke does in "The New Negro" when he describes Harlem as "the home of the Negro's 'Zionism,'" Walrond highlights the Jewish antecedent for the term **Diaspora** ("The New Negro" 14). From "a gulf in the dark low sea," Walrond sends the narrative eye "**carombolling** 'cross the fizzing of a streetlamp, caught [on] the rickety vision of a bus, top heavy with a lot of fat, fanning Jews, tottering by on the cloudy August asphalt" (84). Later, protagonist Primus takes Nicey to "a Hebrew hat shop on the Avenue" from which she comes with "a prim little bonnet with bluebells galloping wildly over it" (90). Her hat is no mere adornment; it is the last item Primus needs to convince her to go to a hotel room with him, the culmination of his own "mission."

this pregnant city not only upon Walrond's work. He borrowed the title and catch phrase New Negro, which had already been used by John M. Henderson in a paper delivered at a meeting of the Bethel Literary Society in Washington in 1896, by Sutton Griggs in his 1899 novel Imperium in Imperio, by Booker T. Washington in the title of his 1900 book, and by William Pickens in the title of his 1916 book. In 1919, W. A. Domingo proclaimed that "the New Negro has arrived with stiffened back bone, dauntless manhood, defiant eye, steady hand and a will of iron" (22).¹⁰¹

Still, Locke amplified Harlem's dreamy hyperbole as no one had done before. The New Negro's "timely and definitive appearance," as Arnold Rampersad argues, strengthened "a series of literary contests and dinners sponsored notably by Opportunity magazine [and] the Crisis—[events which] deliberately includ[ed] some of the leading white writers, editors, and publishers of the day" ("Harlem Renaissance" 933). Because of its timeliness, as Houston A. Baker, Jr. applauds in Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance, The New Negro is "a seminal discursive act" (72). By kismet, this discursive act came months after another pivotal cross-racial book, white writer DuBose Heyward's novel Porgy, what William H. Slavek has argued "was the first longer piece of fiction with predominantly Negro characters to appeal to the whole country" (qtd. in Rhodes 194).¹⁰² The New Negro thus "helped set the stage for the high phase of the movement in the second half of the decade" (Rampersad, "Harlem Renaissance" 933). Its self-assured encapsulation of the

¹⁰¹ Domingo's essay "If We Must Die," borrowing the title of Claude McKay's poem, was first published in the September 1919 edition of The Messenger.

¹⁰² Porgy also inspired the 1927 Broadway play in which Richard Bruce Nugent performed as an extra and met Philander Thomas.

aspirations for a black city within a city contributed to the speed with which Harlem-as-cityscape materialized despite Harlem's slowly changing population and its less-than El Dorado-like wealth for new black residents.¹⁰³ Anthology, manifesto, and the first cross-disciplinary African American studies compendium at the same time, The New Negro casts Harlem as the site of racial urbanity where “the African, the West Indian, the Negro American” could “celebrate [their] full initiation into American democracy [and] their attainment of a significant and satisfying new phase of group development, and with it a spiritual Coming of Age”: “The pulse of the Negro world has begun to beat in Harlem” (“New Negro” 7, 16, 14). Locke was invested in pushing that “beat” away from black music “which has always found appreciation” and toward black writers’ literary accomplishments, the “larger, though humbler and less acknowledged ways” in which black culture celebrates US American democracy (15).

Harlem’s music had found plenty of appreciation after Mamie Smith’s “Crazy Blues” hit stores in 1920, selling (by some estimates) as many as one million copies. Record companies knew then that “there was a market for black music and they lost no time supplying it” (Levine 225). With The New Negro, Locke wanted to tap into that market and waste no time supplying them with literature “forecasting in the mirror

¹⁰³ In When Harlem Was in Vogue David Levering Lewis resolves that Harlem “seemed to flash into being like a nova [even though] the development of black Harlem was . . . not really so swift and unheralded as it seemed” (27). By 1923, blacks “represented no more than 30 percent of the total Harlem population. Whites evacuated Harlem as reluctantly as Afro-Americans flocked to it” (26). Sidney H. Bremer argues that the flash of Harlem’s symbolic presence more than compensated for its economic strictures: “Although seriously compromised by poverty, undependable white patronage, and a colonized color consciousness, Harlem also had its own cultural institutions—political organizations, clubs and cafés and theaters, newspapers, and places of worship. Like the Lower East Side, it was touted as a ‘city within a city’” (48).

of art what we must see and recognize in the streets of reality tomorrow, foretelling in new notes and accents the maturing speech of full racial utterance” (“Negro Youth” 47).¹⁰⁴ The verve with which Locke merged “racial awareness with a desire for literary and artistic excellence,” asserts Rampersad, “exuded a confidence in the black world emerging from generations of repression in the United States” (“Harlem Renaissance” 932). Locke was determined to accomplish what James Weldon Johnson had asserted four years previously: “nothing will do more to change the mental attitude [of society] and raise [the Negro’s] status than a demonstration of intellectual parity by the Negro through the production of literature and art” (Lewis, Harlem 149).

Locke’s status and the characterization of The New Negro as “virtually the central text of the Harlem Renaissance” typically rest unchallenged in contemporary black studies scholarship (Rampersad, “Alain Locke” 960). Even in work castigating Locke’s personal politics, like Gloria T. Hull’s Color, Sex, and Poetry: Three Women Writers of the Harlem Renaissance, Locke’s supremacy remains untarnished. While

¹⁰⁴ Locke’s forecasting and foretelling does not exactly conform to definitions of black modernity so often applied to New Negro movement writing. In “Critical Memory and the Black Public Sphere,” Houston A. Baker, Jr. asserts that “black modernity in the United States—like modernity in general—is articulated through the twin rhetorics of **nostalgia** and **critical memory**” (3). Baker clarifies that black modernism **nostalgia** signifies not a longing for a perfected past but “suggests **heimweh** or homesickness [for] a past filled with golden virtues, golden men, and sterling events” (3). **Critical memory** entails “the historical continuities of black-majority efforts, strategies and resources for leadership and liberation” (31). Yet in “The New Negro,” Locke celebrates neither The New Negro’s golden past nor historical continuities. The very and sudden **newness** of “the Negro to-day” necessitates “moving forward under the control of his own objectives” (10). The New Negro did not exist in the past and could not have been “a collaborator and participant in American civilization” in the same way (15).

Hull uses Locke as “an excellent, though, upsetting” example of blatant anti-female prejudice, she equally bolsters his credentials:

Alain Leroy Locke . . . was such an indispensable personage that Langston Hughes said he helped to “mid-wife” the Renaissance into being. A Harvard-trained Ph.D., Rhodes scholar, and Howard University philosophy professor, Locke gave definitive shape to “the New Negro” in his 1925 anthology of that name. More importantly, his smooth, learned manner inspired patrons to make of him a conduit for their largesse to black artists. Thus, Locke dispensed not only money but also advice, support, and vital aid to many needful young writers. His handling of his role was controversial, but no one denied its centrality. (7)

Indeed, Locke’s “indispensable personage,” credentials, and influence are impressive. But measuring the New Negro movement’s literary output by such a singular notion of Locke as mid-wife and watchdog ignores the collaborative effort that crafted Harlem as cityscape and its Renaissance as a delicate balance of public pageant and representational redress.

Despite Locke’s best intentions, Locke-centered Renaissance histories did not spawn immediately after the first edition of The New Negro, or even after the movement ended. In 1939, J. Saunders Redding, whom Henry Louis Gates, Jr. calls the “veritable dean of Afro-American literary critics,” does not mention Locke once in the thirty-three pages of his “Emergence of the New Negro” chapter about the movement in To Make a Poet Black, a book Gates calls the “canonical work of Afro-American

literary criticism” (“J. Saunders Redding” vii, viii). Redding’s deliberate “oversight” comes after John Frederick Matheus’ praise of Locke in “Some Aspects of the Negro Interpreted in Contemporary American and European Literature” in Negro: an Anthology (1935): “Alain Locke’s New Negro re-emphasized and launched the works of James Weldon Johnson, Countée Cullen, Langston Hughes, Jessie Fauset, Claude McKay, Walter White, George Schuyler, Rudolph Fisher, Willis Richardson, and others less widely known” (84). Of course, Matheus’ praise begins and ends with this one sentence; and Matheus’ short story “The Fog” appears in The New Negro. Locke also fleetingly appears in Franck L. Schoell’s “La ‘Renaissance Nègre’ aux États-Unis,” the first French-language review of the movement (published in the January-February 1929 edition of La Revue de Paris). In an introductory footnote Schoell notes that his research included The New Negro, along with fourteen other books and three plays; but he only mentions Locke once within his essay in a paragraph noting how figures of the Renaissance travel abroad. Schoell mentions neither Locke nor The New Negro in his review of Harlem’s literature. However, he does glowingly praise the radical journal often placed at odds with The New Negro, Fire!!: Devoted to Younger Negro Artists: “La production nègre est à l’avant-garde de l’actualité littéraire, à telles enseignes qu’il existait il y a quelques mois—peut-être vit-elle encore—une revue trimestrielle d’avant-garde, Fire (“le Feu”) consacrée aux jeunes artistes nègres et rédigée par eux [translation: Black literature is the vanguard of literary news; so much so that there was for a few months—maybe it is still alive—a revolutionary quarterly, Fire devoted to young Negro artists and written by them]” (152).

Locke came forward to helm the movement when it needed to be criticized to differentiate the Black Arts movement. Effete, erudite, and bourgeois, Locke perfectly—and queerly—personified the problems with the Harlem Renaissance in Black Arts writings like Harold Cruse’s The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: “The Negro renaissance is a misnomer, a fad, a socially assertive movement in art that disappears and leaves no imprint [because it is] an emasculated movement” (37).¹⁰⁵ For Cruse, Harlem’s Renaissance is “limp” and does not provide the “stiffened backbone [and]dauntless manhood” that W. A. Domingo finds because it has an insufficient economic base. Unlike the Greenwich Village renaissance that started in 1912 “under the rare guidance and sponsorship of a patroness with a very broad and cultivated background, in the person of Mabel Dodge,” Cruse asserts that Harlem had no moneyed and cultured equivalent (24). The closest to Dodge was Madame C. J. Walker, the millionaire who made her fortune from hair straightening and skin lightening products. Cruse argues that

Walker exemplified the emergence of a new economic class—the black bourgeoisie. This class, of course, was never to achieve any substantial

¹⁰⁵ Leroi Jones offers a similar attack in two different essays from 1963, both included in Home: Social Essays, “A Dark Bag” and “What Does Nonviolence Mean?” In “What Does Nonviolence Mean?” Jones slams “middle-class Negroes” too-consumed by presenting “positive” images to a white (mass) audience so that their opinion of blacks will change, exactly the kind of assimilationist politics Locke has become a symbol of. And by inference, Jones denigrates the New Negro movement with the kind of argumentation that Harold Cruse makes more explicit four years later: “A legitimate Negro protest movement unstalemated by the sham of tokenism and filthy bourgeois intention might succeed in remaking this society, and establishing an honest connection between it and the rest of the nonwhite world. But most of the leaders of what passes as such protest, the middle-class Negroes and white liberals, who have access to courtrooms and picket lines, have already lost their souls. (“What Does Nonviolence Mean?” 153).

stake in American high finance. . . . Being late [to the US business world], limited, and marginal, the black bourgeoisie as a class, did not achieve the kind of cultural and intellectual maturity that would have produced a Mabel Dodge for the Harlem Renaissance. But it produced most of that movement's creative artists. (24)

It also produced Locke, the first black Rhodes scholar, whom E. Franklin Frazier counts prominently as one of “the young intellectuals among the emerging black bourgeoisie[who] began expressing their orientation to American life in what has come to be known as the Negro Renaissance” (122).¹⁰⁶ Since the black bourgeoisie “was based upon social distinctions such as education and conventional behavior, rather than occupation and income,” and since the most successful arm of the black bourgeoisie was the publication of writing which supports its “social myth,” Locke’s “smooth, learned manner,” his bourgeois family history,¹⁰⁷ and his proximity to The New Negro and black creative writers made him an ideal public figure for the Renaissance (20). Illustrating Locke’s panache and homosexuality as a product of his bourgeois status—and leveling the same equation onto Renaissance writers—is often a foregone conclusion in post-Black Arts criticism. Even Hilton Als complies when he assesses sarcastically in The Women that Harlem’s “Negro fag intellectuals whose reflexive, sentimental race consciousness comprised much of the aesthetics and the

¹⁰⁶ Frazier finds that “the ‘first fruits’ of the Negro Renaissance were published in The New Negro, edited by Alain Locke” (122).

¹⁰⁷ David Levering Lewis explains that the “Lockes were an old family—‘O.P.s’ (Old Philadelphians) like Jessie Fauset’s. Pliny Locke, Alain’s father, had received a law degree, in 1874, in the fourth class to graduate from Harvard’s law department” (Harlem 149).

ideology that informed the Harlem Renaissance ... defended their right to be 'oppressed'; as agents of the rhetoric of oppression, they were insistent on their 'correctness'" (119-120). Yet all these "Negro fag intellectuals" presented ultimately was "a model of repressed and repressive colored middle-class aspirations" (121). As if by necessity, the Renaissance's queerness creates its failure: "Often [their] position resulted in bad prose and (for more often) bad poetry" (120).

As I explore in my introduction, associating Harlem's "failure" with its "queerness" fortifies the machismo "race man" who leads the Black Arts movement.¹⁰⁸ This kind of Black Arts perspective permeates African American studies scholarship, even work like Hull's that seeks to challenge the "race man" and its attendant upholding of uncomplicated and non-sexual notions of race as the field's fundamental category of analysis. Hull's important study of Alice Dunbar-Nelson, Angelina Weld Grimké, and Georgia Douglas Johnson investigates insightfully the ways gender and race influenced their work as well as the "quieter, less-visible female support networks [for black female writers which] could often only amount to consolation circles for the disfranchised" (11). Still, her legitimate discussion of the façade of "full participation of women in the Harlem Renaissance [where] one can [merely] discern broad social factors and patterns of exclusion" repeats Black Arts' panic over homosexuality (7). For Hull, Locke's homosexuality symbolizes the movement's failure to fully include women. Of course, she tries to temper her perhaps unconscious Black Arts politic with a good-intentioned remark that (unnamed)

¹⁰⁸ See my essay "The Fact of Blackness: Directives for African American Studies at the Millennium" for another take on Black Arts' return to and reproach of the New Negro movement.

heterosexuals are equally driven by their sexuality and a reassurance that black women were definitely excluded. Nonetheless, Hull concludes that

Locke's behavior [toward women] becomes even more problematic because of his obvious partiality toward young males, to whom he was sexually attracted. Locke, in fact, functioned within a homosexual coterie of friendship and patronage that suggests that literary events were, in more than a few instances, tied to "bedroom politics" and "sexual cronyism" [sic]—as they no doubt may have been in the heterosexual world also. The point here, though, is that women were definitely excluded from Locke's beneficence and this particular sphere of favoritism. (8)

Depicting Locke as the mid-wife of "a homosexual coterie of friendship and patronage" masquerading as the New Negro movement obscures Locke's genuine contribution, the articulation of a black public sphere, a "black" reading public, that African American studies scholars have since used to conceptualize public debate over and discussion of representations of African Americans in popular culture, politics, and literature.¹⁰⁹ Yet characterizing Locke as the movement's sole mid-wife also

¹⁰⁹ See "The Black Public Sphere," a special edition of *Public Culture* (7.1, fall 1994) edited by Arjun Appadurai, Lauren Berlant, Carol A. Breckenridge, and Manthia Diawara for examples. I place **black** in quotes because, as I argue earlier, the reading public of black literature is not always of African descent. Moreover, popular texts like Du Bose Heyward's novel *Porgy*, which primed publishers to invest in black writers, were not written by black people. Still, the black public sphere birthed from these published texts is no less "black" in its concern with race and representation issues. A similar group of cross-racially "black" thinkers and readers called Maroon communities formed in the Caribbean and organized around the "will of the self-emancipated to confront plantation society [and offered] opportunities to alter those

neglects Charles S. Johnson’s crucial role in the creation of the special edition of Survey Graphic which led to The New Negro. According to John Frederick Matheus, “the wave of a recrudescence of [Harlem’s] Negro writers” started only because it was first “sponsored by that astute critic, scholar and leading sociologist Charles S. Johnson” (84). Johnson first argued in print about the importance of public opinion in “Public Opinion and the Negro.”¹¹⁰ Locke then fashioned Johnson’s arguments into a black bourgeois public sphere in the Harlem Survey Graphic and The New Negro.¹¹¹ In both texts, Locke envisions newly urbane New Negro readers who could transform US race relations after discovering “the transformations of the inner and outer life of the Negro in America that have so significantly taken place in the last few years” (“Foreword” xv). Literature offers a transformative space to praise and represent black life in Harlem—“the Negro’s latest thrust towards Democracy”—aesthetically and politically. Central to Locke’s “thrust” is the work of the black intelligentsia, “the advanced-guard of the African peoples” (“The New Negro” 14). With this work, “he now becomes a conscious contributor . . . and participant in American civilization” (15). Aspirations for this kind of literary citizenship where democratic representations

relations” (Santiago-Valles 52). These Maroon communities consisted of “Africans, Black Creoles, Aborigines, escaped European convicts, smugglers, Christian priests and Sephardic Jews who, together, created new ties of reciprocity and solidarity” (52).

¹¹⁰ “Public Opinion and the Negro” was his 23 May 1923 address to the National Conference of Social Work in Washington DC, which was published in the July 1923 Opportunity.

¹¹¹ My use of **public sphere** and **bourgeois public sphere** comes from scholarship in the early 1990s rehabilitating German philosopher Jürgen Habermas’ Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit, originally published in 1962, and translated in 1991 by Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence with the title The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society. Habermas’ theory of a bourgeois reading public helped me decipher Locke’s politic.

contradict racist, primitive caricatures of blacks as excessively sexual or violent result from Locke's sense of class status.¹¹² An ennobled Locke (and others from the black intelligentsia) can guide the "migrant masses" toward "strange relief and a new vague urge" (4). But such leadership is not exactly, or solely, paternalistic. Locke felt that the already in-process and popular revolution of the New Negro necessarily transforms everyone: "the present tone and temper of the Negro press [and] the shift in popular support [reflects a move] from the officially recognized and orthodox spokesmen to those of independent, popular, and often radical type who are unmistakable symptoms of a new order" (8).

Frazier regards this class-enabled literary citizenship less optimistically. He asserts that "the Negro press" promulgates a romance of urban life that "represents essentially the interests and outlook of the black bourgeoisie. Its demand for equality for the Negro in American life is concerned primarily with opportunities which will benefit the black bourgeoisie economically and enhance the [public] status of the Negro" (174). The public sphere that Locke articulates creates "a world of make-believe into which the black bourgeoisie can escape from its inferiority and inconsequence in American society" (174). Or, as Margaret Serandour demonstrates,

¹¹² I argue **sense** because, as Frazier delineates in Black Bourgeoisie, the black bourgeoisie in the United States does not have the same economic base as the white bourgeoisie. Not money but "education has been the principal social factor responsible for the emergence of the black bourgeoisie" (23-24). Since the economic basis for the black middle-class comes largely from white-collar jobs, Frazier argues that the touting of a black bourgeoisie brags of a "world of make-believe in which Negroes can realize their desires for recognition and status in a white world that regards them with contempt and amusement" (25).

According to Nathan Hare, sense of class status is far more important than actual class. In a special "Black Middle Class" issue of Ebony in August 1973, Hare quips that "whatever class you thinketh you are in you are in" (cited in Serandour 40).

whatever nominal “material success” the black middle class may achieve, it does “not lead to benefits enjoyed by [white] middle-class Americans, resulting in feelings of marginality” (46). Such feelings are compounded by the uncertain “chance for children of middle-class blacks to inherit their parents’ status” (46). Published writings that “thrust toward Democracy” compensate for and envision equal middle-class status for black people. For queer Locke to envision this “make-believe” status engenders even more anxiety in post-Black Arts criticism and helps obscure Johnson’s contributions to Locke’s New Negro vision.

After I highlight Johnson’s role in shaping Locke’s black bourgeois public sphere, I re-situate Locke’s symbolic Harlem within—not apart from—the complicated maneuvering around representations and discussions of male homosexuality in black literature, what David Levering Lewis calls “streetgeist and folklore—nitty gritty music, prose, and verse” (Harlem 95). Harlem’s simultaneous inclusion of queer sexuality and projection of racial uplift creates what often looks like the “city of dualities [and] paradoxes” that Eric Walrond celebrates in “The Black City” (271, 272). These “dualities” are what Locke calls Harlem’s “special significance . . . deep under the Harlem that many know but few have begun to understand” (“Harlem” 629). Indeed, few have begun to understand that the black queer vernacular of Harlem complements rather than combats what Michael L. Cobb calls “Alain Locke’s vexed, but important, The New Negro” (329). Rarely do scholars acknowledge the friendship between Locke and Richard Bruce Nugent, and their families. Nugent’s inclusion in The New Negro with short story “Sahdji”—he and

Locke later developed it into a ballet—signals the “dualities” of New Negro race and sexuality discourse.

Too often, scholars use “openly queer” Nugent to “simplify” or distract from Harlem’s queer dualities. For instance, Arnold Rampersad uses Nugent and his family’s class status to disassociate both Harlem and Langston Hughes from homosexuality:

Nugent aimed mainly to shock. From the black upper class (one distant relative may have been Blanche K. Bruce, a United States senator during Reconstruction and later register of the treasury), Nugent nevertheless sometimes dispensed with wearing socks in public, sometimes with shoes; only a few years later, when he had more fully developed his personality, he would be remembered as “a soft young fellow with a purr, like a cat’s, and a little gold bead in one ear.” In a culture that shrank from the mention of homosexuality, Nugent at nineteen was already openly gay, a fact that cost him many friendships—but not one with Hughes. Definitely not sexual, according to Nugent, their relationship was yet warm and spontaneous. (Volume I 106)

Scholars likewise use Nugent’s infamous story “Smoke, Lilies and Jade” to divert attention from similarly queer stories set in a sophisticated, urbane Harlem like Eric Walrond’s “The Adventures of Kit Skyhead and Mistah Beauty” (1925)—or from texts that implore a similar queer reading of Harlem and its Renaissance like Wallace Thurman’s Infants of the Spring. Such maneuvering around convenient ideas about

Nugent—for example, he may have been born into a black upper middle class family but Nugent, his mother, and his brother, hardly basked in money and its privileges—and his “singular” presence in Harlem merely conform with a surface reading of Thurman’s articulation of the movement in Infants. Its Nugent-inspired character certainly stands out; but he is not alone in Thurman’s roman-à-clef novel. Nor was Nugent alone among Harlem’s black intelligentsia. I close the chapter by examining another, more-tempered “scandal” in Harlem, the arrest of Augustus Granville Dill, then business manager of Du Bois’ Crisis magazine, for having sex with a man in a public toilet 1928. Du Bois fired Dill, supposedly for his “indiscretion,” shortly before his daughter’s wedding to Countée Cullen. These 1928 events contribute to Harlem’s black queer vernacular and illustrate how black male same-sexuality informed the “strange relief and new vague urge” the New Negro elicited.

Section A: From Johnson to Locke, from Survey Graphic to New Negro

The rise of a genuine New Negro Movement was fostered and encouraged by one person, Alain Leroy Locke, who became its creative editor and its chronicler.

—Eugene C. Holmes, assistant to Locke at Howard University for more than 20 years, quoted in John Henrik Clarke’s “The Neglected Dimensions of the Harlem Renaissance,” from Black World’s special issue, “The Harlem Renaissance Revisited” (November 1970)

Perhaps Holmes’ deference to his former boss is understandable. But John Henrik Clarke’s almost frothy praise of Locke as a neglected “major intellect” brought

new critical attention to Locke for the Black Arts era (124).¹¹³ Black World's special issue on the Harlem Renaissance, expanded to one hundred and thirty pages, was managing editor Hoyt W. Fuller's response to "those who hold the opinion that there is no evidence of a guiding ethic [in the literature] of the Twenties, [to those] who doubt the propriety of [its] designation [as a] 'Renaissance'" (4, 65). Fuller asserts that "it is important that the new generation know something of the forces at work during the Renaissance and of the people who figured prominently in it" (130). Clarke felt that Locke "stood astride this period in such a way that no competent history of the period can be written without a reference to him" (124). And his essay had company in Richard A. Long's "Alain Locke: Cultural and Social Mentor": "It is no exaggeration to say that the Harlem Renaissance as we know it is marked strongly by the presence of Alain Locke, and would have been something rather different without him and the role of mentor which he filled with modesty and elegance" (90). Ironically, Black World's cover art director Herb Temple did not see the Renaissance so "elegantly." Temple's cover collage of important men who "figured prominently in the literary phase of that legendary 'rebirth' in Black art" included only Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Countée Cullen, Arna Bontemps, and Sterling Brown ("On the Cover" 4).

¹¹³ In his biographical essay on Hoyt Fuller, managing editor of Black World, Houston A. Baker, Jr. calls the journal "an arm of the new Black Aesthetic" ("Hoyt Fuller" 1809). Baker explains that Fuller deliberately changed the journal's name from Negro Digest after serving as Digest's editor for a few years to signal the journal's self-conscious link to the Black Arts movement. The black reading public understood this link as well: "When Black World was threatened with discontinuation by Johnson Publishing Company, masses of black people assembled in the street outside the company's Chicago office and burned copies of Ebony, its glossy black bourgeoisie magazine" (1809).

Still, Clarke and Long's adulation of Locke left ripples in subsequent studies of the Renaissance. As Arnold Rampersad's biography of Locke in The Norton Anthology of African American Literature attests, "no senior intellectual matched [Locke's] zeal in personally meeting and encouraging younger artists or his learning and cosmopolitanism in illuminating the question of race" ("Alain Locke" 961). Because of that enthusiasm, "the importance [of the Harlem Survey Graphic] is hard to overestimate"—and The New Negro must confirm Locke's central influence (961).

Rampersad offers the following Charles S. Johnson-less story of both texts:

Paul Kellogg, editor of [Survey Graphic], had decided to devote [the] entire [March issue] to the question of race and black New York. As special editor for this project he chose Alain Locke, who subtitled the issue Harlem: Mecca of the New Negro and imaginatively included a wide variety of articles, poems, stories, and other pieces by writers such as Du Bois, James Weldon Johnson, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, Angelina Grimké, and Anne Spencer. The special issue was an extraordinary success. Eight months later, Locke brought out The New Negro, an anthology including most of what had appeared in the Survey Graphic (much of it revised) along with a good deal of new material, including stunning artwork depicting blacks by the Bavarian artist Winold Reiss. Serving as coherent and articulate announcement of a new spirit among black Americans, The New Negro was virtually the central text of the Renaissance. (960)

In service to the imaginative Locke, Rampersad's "coherent and articulate" account neglects the fact that even before Kellogg approached Johnson about the March 1925 edition devoted to "the question of race and black New York." Johnson was already organizing "a little group which meets here [at the Opportunity office], with some degree of regularity, to talk informally about 'books and things,'" as he informs Locke in a 4 March 1924 letter.¹¹⁴ Johnson lists "[Eric] Walrond, Cullen, Langston Hughes, Gwendolyn Bennett, Jesse Fauset, Eloise Bibb Thompson, Regina Anderson, Harold Jackman, and myself" as "persons interested" and advises Locke that

it was proposed that something be done to mark the growing self-consciousness of this newer school of writers and as a desirable time the date of the appearance of Jesse Fauset's book [There Is Confusion] was selected, that is, around the twentieth of March. The idea has grown somewhat and it is the present purpose to include as many of the new school of writers as possible—Walter White (who in a sense is connected with this group), Jean Toomer, and yourself. But our plans for you were a bit more complicated. We want you to take a certain role in the movement.¹¹⁵

Yet Johnson's "plans" factor little in Rampersad's "Harlem Renaissance" section of The Norton Anthology where he mentions Johnson "of Opportunity and the National Urban League" only in its introduction ("Harlem Renaissance" 933). Johnson is not a

¹¹⁴ Alain Locke Papers, Box 164-40 Folder 24, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

featured writer. Such an omission, as David Levering Lewis illustrates in When Harlem Was in Vogue, could be the result of Johnson's anonymity by design:

For one of the most prolific sociologists of his generation, written evidence of Charles Johnson's vast influence on the Harlem of the New Negro is curiously spotty. This is not because he lived in Manhattan, where a telephone call or a stroll down an avenue could put him in touch with most of the people worth knowing, and letters did not need to be written. Other Harlem leaders of equal or greater distinction left entire libraries of official and unofficial correspondence. Even after allowance is made for the destruction by fire of Urban League archives and for the possibility of letters yet to surface, the record is still too skimpy not to have been planned that way by Johnson. It seems to have been his nature to work behind the scenes, recruiting and guiding others into the spotlight. (90)

Johnson himself helped push the spotlight onto Locke, praising him as "an important maker of history" and a "brilliant analyst trained in philosophy, and an esthete with a flair for art as well as letters" (qtd. in Clarke 125). Lewis explains that Johnson "allowed himself to appear to stand in Alain Locke's shadow, when in reality the situation was the opposite. In an uncharacteristically candid remark about Locke, Johnson once said as much—that the Howard professor had been 'cast in the role merely of press agent'" (Harlem 125).

Johnson cast Locke in that role after his dinner party doubling as a literary symposium at the Civic Club on Twelfth Street near Fifth Avenue on 21 March 1924,

“the dress rehearsal of what was soon to be known as the ‘Harlem Renaissance’” (90). Johnson, like Locke, was “keenly aware” of the marketable potential that black literature could have “as a means of improving racial standing” and felt that black writers should take advantage of and control over the growing popularity of black culture in plays and novels that offered primitivistic or paternalistic representations (91, 90). In fact, he details this position in “Public Opinion and the Negro” two years before the Harlem Survey Graphic was published. New literature would not only bolster a newly created black reading audience—according to Johnson, black “illiteracy has been reduced to 25 per cent”—it would counteract “the belief in the innate mental inferiority of the Negro [which] tends to crush the Negro’s hope of improvement through education” (203).

In his study of “the influence of public opinion on race relations” Johnson determines there are “three important and highly sensitive elements” guiding this influence: “the facts upon which this opinion rests, the theories about these facts, and most important of all, the actions based on the theories” (201). The most malleable of the three are the “generalizations and theories built upon these assumed and actual facts that do change as society develops, and as false statements are refuted and new facts come to light” (201). These generalizations and theories form a “mass of ideas about the Negro, accumulated through experience, passed on through tradition, embedded in the mores and absorbed [by society] even without conscious attention” (202). Locke calls this mass of ideas the “Old Negro [who] had long become more of a myth than a man”—more narrative than human being (“The New Negro” 3). For Johnson, too, this mass of ideas has its roots in representation:

This body of ideas, compounded of time-saving generalizations, stereotypes, myths, conventions, dogma—what Walter Lippman in his excellent volume on Public Opinion calls “the picture within our heads”—determine our attitudes, our way of interpreting facts, our way even of seeing facts. To quote this author: “Except where we deliberately keep prejudice in suspense, we do not study a man and judge him to be bad,” . . . “We see a bad man.” (202)

So Johnson calls for new “pictures,” new theories, to replace the old ones that are “said to control in one form or another most of the thinking about Negroes” (202). In order to make the public “see a good man” when they see a black man, three old pictures of black people must be changed: “first, that they are mentally inferior; second, that they are immoral; and third, that they are criminal” (202).

Common to the negative influence of all three pictures is sexuality. Of course, “the constitutional immorality of Negroes” rests on sexual excess and prowess (203). Johnson provides a representative quote of such thought from “a volume published in 1910 [which] gave the stamp of authority to the belief that ‘their minds are filled with that which is carnal, their thoughts are most filthy and their morals generally beyond description’” (203). But sex also guides criminality: “An alleged peculiar emotional instability predisposes them to crimes of violence, **particularly sex crimes**, and a constitutional character weakness addicts them to petty thefts” (204, emphasis mine). Johnson’s revealing choice of words when linking mental inferiority to sexuality demonstrates the aversion to the “overly sexual” so many scholars associate with Locke: “Another **queer** assumption connects their arrested mentality with sexual over-

development, thus combining two popularly accepted traits” (203, emphasis mine).

Like Johnson, Locke wanted to avert the “popularly accepted” representations of black people as (queerly) sexual. Locke concludes in “The New Negro” that such an aversion “requires that the Negro of to-day be seen through other than the dusty spectacles of past controversy” (5).¹¹⁶ For Locke, New Negroes must “turn therefore in

¹¹⁶ The responsibilities for “the intelligent Negro of to-day [who] is trying to hold himself at par, neither inflated by sentimental allowances nor depreciated by current social discounts” that Locke delineates in “The New Negro” also recall the ideals for “Negro talent” posed in Alexander Crummell’s lecture, “Civilization, the Primal Need for Race” delivered 28 years earlier at the first meeting of the American Negro Academy in 1897 (8). Like *The New Negro*, Crummell’s address is a call to arms to the black leaders who were gathered before him. Crummell commends his audience for their gathering to inspire “the civilization of the Negro race in the United States, by the scientific processes of literature, art, and philosophy, through the agency of the cultured men of this same Negro race” (285). The attainment of civilization for Crummell is paramount for blacks because without civilization, with which he equates art, science, philosophy, and scholarship, blacks will never succeed in the United States, blacks will never “hold our place in the world of culture and enlightenment,” because “to make **men** you need civilization; and what I mean by civilization is the action of exalted forces, both of God and man” (285).

The etiology of Crummell’s exalted forces, however, does not exactly stem from formal Christian doctrine. While Crummell grounds his doctrine in religious metaphor, he equates social and civil progress with civilization, art, nationality, culture, and enlightenment. Crummell even anticipates Locke in his reliance on disembodied fictions to achieve racial uplift: “Neither property, nor money, nor station, nor office, nor lineage, are fixed factors, in so large a thing as the destiny of man; that they are not vitalizing qualities in the changeless hopes of humanity. The greatness of peoples springs from their ability to grasp **the grand conceptions of being**. It is **the absorption** of a people, of a nation, of a race, in large majestic and boding things which **lifts them up to the skies** (286, emphasis mine).

Crummell’s spiritual renewal rebuts materialist methods for racial uplift by embracing the grand conceptions of being, which he defines as the “height of noble thought, grand civility, a chaste and elevating culture, refinement, and the impulses of irrepressible progress” (287). For Crummell, spirituality is often used metaphorically “to transform and stimulate the souls of a race or a people, a work which will require the most skilled resources and the use of the scientific spirit” (287).

Crummell suggests that these conceptions can only be interpreted by the scholars, thinkers, and philosophers of the race who must also be philanthropists so that they can “employ their knowledge and culture and teaching and to guide both the

the other direction to the elements of truest social portraiture, and discover in the artistic self-expression of the Negro to-day a new figure on the national canvas and a new force in the foreground of affairs” (“Foreword” xv, emphasis mine). Johnson fought to create this new figure by angrily refuting eugenics-informed anthropological arguments about black inferiority in Opportunity magazine.¹¹⁷

Because of this attention to the ideological and sociological effects of representation, Johnson, Locke, and others were critical in 1924 when “some white writers had already found the Afro-American a salable commodity [as a primitive innocent against dehumanizing industrialization] in the literary world” (Lewis, Harlem 91). At the same time, they had been heartened by Emily Hapgood’s productions of white playwright Ridgely Torrence’s Three Plays for a Negro Theater, the first Broadway production to feature an all-black cast, which opened on 5 April 1917 at the Garden Theatre. Despite the fact that the production closed before the end of the month, it raised hope that stories of black life that did not rely on caricature could flourish. Such hope intensified with the Fournoy Miller and Aubrey Lyles’ musical Shuffle Along (1921), “the first postwar musical with music, lyrics, choreography, cast, and production entirely in Afro-American hands” (91). As David Levering Lewis raves, “it left the country singing Eubie Blake’s ‘I’m Just Wild about Harry’ and

opinions and habits of the crude masses” (287). While the dogmatic aspect of Crummell’s solution to “uplift all the latent genius . . . of this neglected Race” clearly influenced Du Bois’ “Talented Tenth,” and Locke’s exalted “New Negro,” Crummell even prefigures Habermas in portraying what for Habermas is the “feeling that first gave rise to the replacement of the earlier cultural stratum with its roots in the middle class by the social group that we call the ‘intelligentsia’” (174).

¹¹⁷ See “Mental Measurements of Negro Groups” (February 1923), “Racial Theory and the Negro” (August 1923), and “Another Vexation for the Biologists” (July 1924) for examples.

‘Love Will Find a Way’ long after it closed” (91). Taking advantage of the mass popularity that black themes could have was on many black writers and critics’ minds, including literary critic Benjamin Brawley’s. In a 9 May 1922 letter to James Weldon Johnson, Brawley suggests that “we have a tremendous opportunity to boost the NAACP, letters, and art, and anything else that calls attention to our development along the higher lines” (qtd. in Lewis 92).

Such an opportunity sparked Johnson to organize his soiree with its strategic guest list and speakers who aimed to spark new black literature, both among black writers and white publishers. Johnson’s guest list included white railroad heir and Urban League board member William H. Baldwin III who made sure that Harper & Brothers editor Frederick Lewis Allen attended. As Baldwin recalled, “Allen invited a ‘small but representative group from his field,’ and Charles S. Johnson ‘supplied an equally representative group of Negroes’” (qtd. in Lewis 93). Johnson’s hand-picked speakers particularly addressed Allen’s “representative” publishers and editors. Celebrating black achievements like Fauset’s novel or Shuffle Along in front of Allen’s colleagues hoped to sell them on publishing and promoting new black writing. As Lewis explains with the expected comment about Locke’s sexuality, Johnson selected Locke to introduce the speakers: “The master of ceremonies was dapper Alain Locke, habitually ceremonious to the point of prissiness. Charles Johnson spoke briefly about the need to encourage the creative writers of the race, then yielded the floor to Locke” (93).

Johnson’s dinner was a success. It so impressed attendee Paul Kellogg that he proposed the Harlem Survey Graphic after the dinner ended. Kellogg “stayed on to

talk with Countée Cullen, Eric Walrond, Jessie Fauset, and the others and then approached Charles Johnson with an unprecedented offer. [Kellogg] wanted to devote an entire issue to [the issues addressed at the dinner]” (95). As Johnson wrote to Ethel Ray Nance, whom he persuaded to come to New York to work as his secretary, “A big plug was bitten off. Now it’s a question of living up to the reputation. Yes, I should have added, a stream of manuscripts has started into my office. . . .” (qtd. in Lewis 95). Interested more in creating a community in Harlem by encouraging writers to move and take part in the burgeoning movement, Johnson soon “asked Alain Locke to assemble and edit materials for the project” (Lewis 95). Johnson, “a masterful organizer and entrepreneur,” preferred to manipulate others from the background. About Johnson’s avoidance of the limelight, Nance concedes, “as some people say, . . . he maneuvered people like chess on a board” (qtd. in Lewis 126).

Equally from Johnson’s chosen anonymity and Locke’s self-aggrandizing, Locke quickly came to regard the Survey Graphic project “as his own unique operation” (Lewis 95). In a 22 May 1924 letter to Hughes, Locke boasted that his special issue would not be “as deadly sociological as most special issues, if I have anything to do with it” (qtd. in Rampersad, The Life, Volume I 91). But the collaborative Survey Graphic reflected both Johnson and Locke’s vision. Lewis allows that

Locke and Johnson made a perfect team because, at bottom, both wanted the same art for the same purposes—highly polished stuff, preferably about polished people, but certainly untainted by racial stereotypes or embarrassing vulgarity. Too much blackness, too much

streetgeist and folklore—nitty-gritty music, prose, and verse—were not welcome. (95)

Locke propelled their vision of Harlem without “too much streetgeist and folklore” in his essays in Survey Graphic and The New Negro. (However much Johnson manipulated, Locke’s words consistently endorse his vision of a black public sphere). This vision still informs scholarly appraisals of Renaissance literature because it reflects the consensus of critics and writers of the time, not just the unique vision of the man that David Levering Lewis calls “prissy.” But scholars’ ready castigation of “too much streetgeist and folklore” in Renaissance writing, “nitty-gritty” prose and verse which includes “too queer” stories, listens little to the intent guiding “prissy” Locke’s published criticism of “racial stereotypes or embarrassing vulgarity.” In particular, ongoing reactions to Harlem’s black queer vernacular ignore the nuances of Locke’s black bourgeois public sphere while they attempt to adopt its sophisticated praise of “highly polished stuff.”

Section B: Lighting Harlem’s Renaissance aFire!!: Richard Bruce Nugent and Alain Locke reading each other

Most Harlem Renaissance scholars know about Richard Bruce Nugent. Poet, painter, short-story writer, dancer, playwright, sketch artist, actor, and novelist, Nugent was an accomplished “renaissance” man who was friends with and an intermittent if reluctant member of the “inner circle” of Harlem’s New Negro movement. Because he was one of the longest living survivors of the movement,

Nugent's recollections of the 1920s and 1930s have been immortalized in many books, including David Levering Lewis' When Harlem Was in Vogue. In these texts, Nugent lurks in endnotes; he lingers on the page to serve merely as witness for other people's lives.¹¹⁸ Harlem scholars also use Nugent to personify the "streetgeist and folklore" they claim contradicts New Negro aesthetics. So, Nugent prances flamboyantly across their sentences: in his pictorial Renaissance survey, Steven Watson calls him "the perfumed orchid of the New Negro movement" (90); according to poet Albert Rice, Nugent is "the bizarre and eccentric young vagabond poet of High Harlem" (Garber 216); and Claude McKay biographer Wayne F. Cooper boasts that Nugent "enjoyed an active social life [and] frankly admitted that he was a dilettante in all the arts save painting and that he enjoyed the role" (296).

Such characterizations are not altogether false. Nugent often wanted to shock those around him. As if on cue, Carl Van Vechten wisecracks about Nugent's appearance at an Opportunity literary contest dinner in an 11 May 1927 letter to Langston Hughes: "And as I went out William Pickens caught my arm to ask me who the 'young man in evening clothes' was. It was Bruce Nugent, of course, with his usual open chest and uncovered ankles. I suppose soon he will be going without trousers" (Kellner, Letters 95-96). Still, only a surface appreciation of Van Vechten's (professed) dismay over follows this letter; and such an understanding of Nugent's "shock value" misses the way that the much-bally-hoed "Smoke, Lilies and Jade" affected Harlem's New Negro movement. Any scandal inspired by the infamous focus

¹¹⁸ As Thomas Wirth explains, Nugent's accounts were always proven reliable, "corroborated by documentation discovered later" (Introduction 11).

of journal Fire!!: Devoted to Younger Negro Artists came not from its unrepentant allusion of two men having sex, but from its easy depiction of male homoeroticism as central to the lexical creative possibilities of Harlem's movement aesthetics, of which Nugent's work presents a key but by no means the only example. Only Nugent's paintings and drawings have found praise in recent scholarship for their vital contributions to Harlem's visual vocabulary.¹¹⁹ Mention of Nugent as writer rarely delves deeper than historical anecdote. According to most scholars, Nugent's infamous "Smoke" is the first extant publication by an African American to openly depict homosexuality. Yet such a claim (even when scholars mean it complementarily) overlooks the similar black queer vernacular across Harlem's literary movement. Stoking either the singularity or the "controversy" of "Smoke" and Fire!! obscures the only passing "shock" that "Smoke" inspired, which was less from its unrepentant depiction of two men having sex than from its easy portrayal of same-sexual eroticism as central to New Negro aesthetics. After all, many of the men of Harlem's "inner circle" slept with men or knew that others did.¹²⁰ The act itself in "Smoke" did not jolt them. Its proximity to a Harlem literary salon dramatizes how close the sexuality of

¹¹⁹ See Ellen McBreen's "Biblical Gender Bending in Harlem: the Queer Performance of Nugent's Salome" and Walter Kalaidjian's American Culture between the Wars : Revisionary Modernism & Postmodern Critique.

¹²⁰ Many of the women slept with women as well, and new that other women and men had lovers of the same sex. Nugent, who was Zora Neale Hurston's roommate for a while, explains that Hurston, too, was "an integrated person" (qtd. in Boyd 132). Hurston Biographer Valerie Boyd writes that "Zora certainly new about—and was comfortable with—Nugent's homosexuality, for example. In turn, Nugent knew that when Zora had certain company, his added presence constituted a crowd. 'Whatever I "knew" about Zora and her loves,' he recalled, 'didn't mean anything to me except "Don't stay too long . . . maybe they want to be alone," that sort of thing'" (132). Nugent adds, "I knew that Zora was very capable of doing whatever she wanted to do with her life and her body" (qtd. in Boyd 132).

black writers “in the life” is to their literature, and how they used words to express themselves. More than a pronouncement of black queer vernacular, “Smoke” signifies its function.

Scholars’ distorted focus on “Smoke” also unduly separates it from the rest of the journal. Analysis of “Smoke” disregards how it exemplifies the journal’s urban aesthetic and self-conscious attention to narrative—“the picture within our heads” that Walter Lippman and Charles S. Johnson link to public opinion.¹²¹ “Smoke” and Fire!! follow rather than contradict The New Negro. Countée Cullen encourages readers to see this connection, beyond the journal’s “wish to shock,” in his January 1927 “The Dark Tower” column in Opportunity:

The outstanding birth of the month was that of Fire, the new quarterly devoted to work by the younger Negro artists [which] on the whole, represents a brave and beautiful attempt to meet our need for an all-literary and artistic medium of expression. Its contents are, in places exemplary of the tyro, but in the aggregate there is enough good writing and art in the issue to establish for it a definite *raison d’être*. There seems to have been a wish to shock in this first issue, and though shock-proof ourselves, we imagine that the wish will be well realized among the readers of Fire. However, ample extenuation for what some

¹²¹ If any of the four prose narratives included in Fire!! “does not fit” an urban aesthetic, it’s Zora Neale Hurston’s “Sweat,” set in Florida. (Nugent and Thurman set their stories in Harlem; Gwendolyn Bennett sets hers in Montmartre, then the “Harlem” of Paris. But ongoing praise of Hurston’s oeuvre overrides such a recognition. Along with the cover drawing by Aaron Douglas and selections by Langston Hughes and Countée Cullen, Hurston’s “Sweat” is saved from the flames that still mar “Smoke.”

may call a reprehensible story can be found in the beautifully worded Smoke, Lilies, and Jade, by Richard Bruce. (25)¹²²

Too often, mentions of the “beautifully worded” “Smoke” mimic David Levering Lewis’ sophomoric denigration of it as “a montage of pederasty and androgyny, . . . prose dissolving into pointillistic soft pornography” (197). While Lewis-like reactions to or anecdotal praise of Nugent’s work perpetuate its exclusion from serious analyses of the literary Harlem Renaissance, they are not necessarily the products of adulterated homophobia. These reactions enthusiastically adhere to a surface-level appreciation of Locke’s black bourgeois public sphere, Locke’s sense of Harlem as “the stage of the pageant of contemporary Negro life” (“Harlem” 630). At first glance, Locke’s Harlem as metonym for “the drama of [Negro life’s] new and progressive aspects” seems to condemn all representations of queer sexuality (630).

Thus, most scholars conclude that “witnessing the resurgence of a race” cannot incorporate black male homosexuality (630). After all, as Johnson asserts, representations of black people guided by their sexuality merely confirms the still-popular belief of black primitivism, lasciviousness, and inferiority. Or, as Frazier asserts, the black inferiority enforced by racism makes the black middle class “compensate” by adopting “the standards of the puritanical family and sex mores, which set [the black bourgeoisie] apart from the black masses” (147). So, unlike the “racy music and racier dancing” Locke finds in “cabarets famous or notorious

¹²² I admit that I, too, overlooked Cullen’s praise in deference to the repeated claims that “Smoke” and Fire!! elicited only anger and silence. Tucked behind the lead review of John W. Vandercook’s Tom-Tom, Cullen’s praise of “the outstanding birth of the month” comes **after** his criticisms of Vandercook. And unlike Tom-Tom, Fire!! has no accompanying graphic.

according to their kind,” the progressive aspects Locke praises in New Negro literature should inspire a metamorphosis in readers, “an intelligent realization of the great discrepancy between the American social creed and the American social practice [which] forces upon the Negro the taking of the moral advantage that is his” (“Harlem” 629; “The New Negro”13). Through the written word black writers manifest and the “migrant masses” complete this “intelligent realization” in publicly available texts.¹²³

¹²³ In fact, Locke’s arguments about the “bourgeois public sphere” and its potential influence on public opinion are quite similar to those in Jürgen Habermas’ study of **bürgerliche Öffentlichkeit** (the bourgeois public sphere) in The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere.

For Habermas, the significance of the ideological power of fiction lies in the socio-political and economic conditions that fostered the “birth” and popularity of the novel in Western Europe. Much like the “new black bourgeoisie” that Frazier identifies as disconnected from the older upper-class, mixed-race black families “who really stood for a middle-class way of life,” Habermas finds that the newly formed reading public in eighteenth-century Germany consisted of those with recently-advanced class status, “‘capitalists’ [belonging] to that group of the ‘bourgeois’ who, like the new category of scholars, were not really ‘burghers’ in the traditional sense. This stratum of ‘bourgeois’ was the real carrier of the public, which from the outset was a reading public“ (23). For this reading public, the novel “refined the role of the narrator through the use of reflections by directly addressing the reader, almost by stage directions [so that] the novel [would] place a final veil over the difference between reality and illusion. The reality as illusion that the new genre created received its proper name in English, “fiction”: it shed the character of the **merely** fictitious. The psychological novel fashioned for the first time the kind of realism that allowed anyone to enter into the literary action as a substitute for his own, to use the relationships between the figures, between the author, the characters, and the reader as substitute relationships for reality (50).

With the creation of characters, the reader has a heightened sense of interaction—and individual freedom—with fiction. Because of the assumed intimacy of the form, these readers’ sense of themselves grew increasingly tied to their interaction with it; and thus these readers became “**sujets de fiction**” (50). As Habermas summarizes, readers of fiction “formed the public sphere of a rational-critical debate in the world of letters [which], by communicating with itself, attained clarity about itself”—and about the class critique that inspired this written “political confrontation [which] was peculiar and without historical precedent [because it

Locke saw the potential of fiction as the key medium for New Negroes to “attain clarity about themselves” and to celebrate black culture. Fiction is a means to affect public opinion, or to educate; it is “the truest social portraiture [for] whoever wishes to see the Negro in his essential traits, in the full perspective of his achievement and possibilities, [for those who] must seek the enlightenment of . . . the present developments of Negro culture” (“Foreword” xv). This enlightenment depends upon creating new representations to separate black people from racist ideologies and myths reducing their potential to primitive, instinctual, and sexual bodies. At the same time, Locke appreciates fiction as an amalgamation of both the public sphere of social and political debate and the private sphere, which could include black people’s intimate, sexual lives. In the foreword to The New Negro, Locke asserts that “this volume aims to document the New Negro culturally and socially,—to register the transformations of **the inner and outer life** of the Negro in America that have so significantly taken place in the last few years” (xv, emphasis mine). Locke pursues literature’s both public and private roles in his “Negro Youth Speaks” essay, in which he argues that capturing the “inner life” of black Americans is the black writer’s greater responsibility. As Locke explains, “the artistic problem of the Young Negro

employed] people’s public use of their reason (**öffentliches Raisonement**)” (51, 27). Despite this clear reason, the political ramifications of fiction were sometimes obscure because it represented and manipulated both the private sphere (the individual) and the public sphere (public opinion, political action). It is precisely this indecipherability between fact and fiction, however, that makes fiction so powerful ideologically. This indecipherability makes it possible to proffer a “simple” narrative, a perfected view of reality, that despite its perceived apolitical aesthetic argues its socio-political ideals through representation.

has not been so much that of acquiring the outer mastery of form and technique as that of achieving an inner mastery of mood and spirit” (“Negro Youth” 48).

Black Americans’ “inner life” is the most important—albeit not completely defined—element of Locke’s vision of the New Negro movement. Locke’s “inner” metaphors point toward a polyglot image of Diaspora Harlem as a conductor of a psychological awakening. What lies behind the façade of “outer mastery of form and technique,” behind the recognized symbolic weight of Harlem, guides Locke’s topographic “Harlem” essay opening the Survey Graphic. After praising Harlem’s democratic ideals and acknowledging the “exotic fringe of the metropolis,” its blues clubs that attract “the connoisseur in diversion as well as the indiscriminating sightseer,” Locke reports on another subterranean Harlem: “Beneath this lies again the Harlem of the newspapers . . . a Harlem, in short, grotesque with the distortions of journalism” (629). Deeper still lies the fact that “Harlem is neither slum, ghetto, resort or colony, though it is in part all of them” (629). In “The New Negro” essay, Locke personifies this earthen “inner life” as “a transformed and transforming psychology [which] permeates the masses” (7).¹²⁴ The aspects of black people’s “inner life are yet in process of formation, for the new psychology at present is more of a consensus of feeling than of opinion, of attitude rather than of program” (10). But from “this new group psychology” comes “finally the rise from social disillusionment to race pride” and expression that marks the coming of the New Negro (11).

¹²⁴ Here, I quote from The New Negro; but the same concepts guide its earlier version in Survey Graphic, “Enter the New Negro,” in which Locke calls this “inner life” “the Negro’s ‘inner objectives’” (632).

Locke's focus on the "inner life" comes in response to the outward performances that had long restrained public opinion about black people and created the "Old Negro [who] was a creature of moral debate and historical controversy" (3). Locke admires the earthen "inner life" in the work of "the young Negro writers [who] dig deep into the racy peasant underoil of the race life"—writers like Nugent—despite Michael L. Cobb's insistence in his essay "Insolent Racing, Rough Narrative: The Harlem Renaissance's Impolite Queers" that Locke was "an icon who needed to be broken by the likes of Nugent" and "a convenient figure of literary repression and obsession with quasi up-lift projects that stifle the younger artists of Fire!!" ("Negro Youth" 51; Cobb 330). Not only does Locke's "inner" aesthetic match all that appears in Fire!!, Locke's acknowledgment that "we are having and will have turbulent discussions and dissatisfaction with the stories, plays and poems of the younger Negro group" foreshadows reactions to Fire!! (50).

In fact, Fire!! seems to have had no effect on Nugent and Locke's friendship or on the intimacy of their letters.¹²⁵ Two years after "Smoke"'s publication, Locke supported Nugent's unsuccessful application for a 1929 Guggenheim Foundation fellowship. When Henry Allen Moe, from the Foundation's Office of the Secretary, wrote Locke on 16 November 1928 for his "opinion in the case of Mr. Richard Bruce Nugent who has applied and referred us to you," Locke replied that "Mr. Nugent has talent and versatility—he writes well, has a sense of the theatre, draws, paints, and

¹²⁵ I base this claim on the letters of Nugent's that remain in the Alain Locke Papers at Howard University. Only a guess could render the number of letters Nugent may have written Locke, or the number Locke may have thrown away. If, indeed, there were letters in which they discussed "Smoke," Locke's actions—including sending Nugent money in 1937—would contradict any strife between them.

designs.”¹²⁶ Locke expresses doubt that Nugent is prepared for the “general study of the art theatres of France, Germany, Italy, and Russia” he wants to undertake—“his talent might possibly compensate for his lack of academic training and background”—yet Locke holds no reservation for Nugent’s raw abilities.¹²⁷ Locke writes that “I have known him for five years, [and] have seen him get by sheer intuition what others can barely get through arduous formal training.” Locke’s ongoing admiration for Nugent may have also been influenced by his mother’s long friendship with Nugent’s grandmother. As Nugent explains, “I have kind of known Locke all my life. . . . My grandmother and his mother were friends, but kids don’t pay attention to the son or daughter of a friend of your grandmother’s. So I didn’t pay any attention to Locke. He didn’t become important until I became an adult” (qtd. in Wirth, Introduction 2-3). Locke’s attention to Nugent¹²⁸ ensured his inclusion in The New Negro with “Sahdji,” a short story he later developed into a ballet with Locke’s help,¹²⁹ included in Locke

¹²⁶ Alain Locke Papers, Box 164-75 Folder 18, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University. Locke’s response letter is undated, and included in this folder which contains all of Nugent’s correspondence.

¹²⁷ Ibid. Nugent continues his description of his “general study” as one about “theatrical literature, decoration, presentation, and directing with the intent of using ideas and knowledge gleaned from such a study to the furthering of Negro art theatres in America” in his November 1928 prospectus he sent to the Foundation from Chicago, where he was on tour with the traveling Porgy production, a copy of which can be found in Locke’s correspondence files.

¹²⁸ Locke’s “five year” friendship would place their meeting in 1923, when Nugent was seventeen. Perhaps this is when Locke first “paid attention” to Nugent.

¹²⁹ In a 20 February 1942 letter, Carl Van Vechten asks Locke for information about “Sahdji” for Van Vechten’s papers at Yale University: “As my own books have mostly gone already to New Haven, I couldn’t look it up, and I can’t quite recall whether Bruce’s scenario first appeared in the New Negro, in the Survey Graphic, or in Fire As YOU are mentioned on the score as collaborator, I am turning to you and I hope you will take the trouble to write out for me in longhand a complete history of the collaboration and publication of Sahdji” (Alain Locke Papers, Box 164-83

and Montgomery Gregory's Plays of Negro Life (1927), and "mounted at the Eastman School of Music in 1931 to considerable acclaim" (Wirth, Introduction 3). Locke's attention inspired Countée Cullen's. Cullen includes Nugent in his wish list of contributors for the volume of Palms he edited.¹³⁰

Another reason for Locke's interest could have been their shared sense of class.¹³¹ Both came from families ensconced in black bourgeois ideals. Of course, this common referent did not equal their like ownership of those ideals. While Locke largely accepted his family's class-based ideals, including the "refinement" education produces,¹³² Nugent was not completely indoctrinated into the black upper crust

Folder 18, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University).

¹³⁰ In a 19 November 1925 letter to Locke, Cullen asks for Locke to submit something and lists "Langston, Jessie [Fauset], Du Bois, the two Johnsons [Georgia Douglas and Helene], Clarissa Scott, Anne Spencer, and perhaps something from Bruce Nugent and Lewis Alexander" in his wish list (Alain Locke Papers, Box 164-22 Folder 38, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University).

¹³¹ The paternal tendencies evident in Locke's "The New Negro" essay can be read into Nugent's use of the term **menial** when describing his sexual interests in an interview with Wirth: "Latins—they were really quite something. A very interesting kind of rapport grew up for me, and **any** Italian that I happened to meet to buy things from or anything. I always **knew**. Even if they were blond and blue-eyed, I knew that they were Italian. And they turned me on. When I turn on, I guess I light up, because they knew it immediately, and they **liked** it, and they would be **nice** to me. . . . I have a **real** empathetic **love** for Italians, Latins, and menials. And the only way I can ever show love is to **show** it. And so I do. I **never** want anyone to feel any of the rejection that I have felt frequently. I have been a busboy; I've been a waiter; I've been a porter; I've been a menial. And I know how **excluded** menials are from the lives or the concern or the regard of the people they serve. ("You See" 271-272)

However genuinely sympathetic Nugent is, any **empathy** he has with so-called "menials" is fleeting. He may have **been** a busboy and waiter; but these were merely passing jobs—not an identity in the way that "Italians" and "Latins" seem associated with **menial**. Note the rapport Nugent has with Italians in the beginning part of the quote are Italians "I happened to meet to buy things from or anything."

¹³² Frazier argues that two defining characteristics of the black bourgeoisie are education, "the principal social factor responsible for the emergence of the black bourgeoisie," and the related "assimilation of European culture [since] the Negro

society of his grandparents because of his mother Pauline's marriage to his father, Richard Henry Nugent, Jr., who had darker skin. The union displeased her family, the Bruces of Washington DC, so much, and affected Pauline so deeply, that when Nugent's father died in 1919, when Nugent was thirteen, Pauline "refused to throw herself onto the charity of her family [and] moved to New York, where she could pass for white, to work as a domestic and waitress for wages much higher than she could earn in Washington" (Wirth, Introduction 8-9).

Nugent hustled a series of jobs to help generate money because his mother's "higher wages" could not support her, Nugent, and his brother Pete¹³³ in New York. Despite their rough finances, however, Nugent maintained a certain bourgeois perspective.¹³⁴ Brandishing ideology without money reflects the black bourgeois status quo, according to E. Franklin Frazier; yet even Nugent's recalcitrant flair could be tolerated within bourgeois "Negro 'society,' or . . . the world of make-believe"

intelligentsia, or what Du Bois called "the 'Talented Tenth,' was created by philanthropic foundations supported by northern [white] industrialists" (24, 96). David Levering Lewis makes Frazier-like associations in *When Harlem Was in Vogue* when he finds Locke's "assimilation" in his frail, light-skinned body. For Lewis, Locke's grandmother helped set into motion his corporeal destiny: "One of Alain Locke's earliest memories was of his grandmother hanging clothes on the line in a broad bonnet and long white gloves, lest the summer sun darken her light skin, and turning to scold him for playing outdoors when he was already much too dark. Convinced that he had a bad heart and an unappealing physical appearance, there was little else left to Locke but to win the world's indulgence through intellectual excellence" (149).

¹³³ His brother's name is Gary Lambert Nugent; but the family called him "Pete."

¹³⁴ As I argue in "Looking for Richard Bruce Nugent and Wallace Henry Thurman: Reclaiming Black Male Same-Sexualities in the New Negro Movement," Nugent's "sense of freedom . . . came from [his] wealthy family, the Bruces of Washington D.C., [who were] free since at least the 1820s. His mother often passed as white. While Nugent did not have any of the money his family did, his social status, ensured by being raised in affluent circles, spared him from much of the economic and social oppression over race, class, and sexuality that many contemporaneous [black men "in the life"] experienced" (59-60).

(Frazier 25). Frazier explains that the black bourgeoisie could disregard the “traditional values [of] the older upper-class families in the Negro community, who really stood for a middle-class way of life, [including] the canons of respectability [that] required a stable family life and conventional sex behavior” (126-127). Especially for the newly bourgeoisie, “divorces and scandals in family and sex behavior do not affect one’s social status; rather the notoriety which one acquires in such cases adds to one’s prestige” (127).¹³⁵

Such a sociological analysis explains Nugent’s continued acceptance among Harlem’s intelligentsia (and “Negrotarians”¹³⁶ like Carl Van Vechten)—not Nugent’s own artistic motivation. Nugent himself was not motivated by notoriety or by touting himself as a blazingly “rude queer,” as Michael L. Cobb does. If Nugent was, he would have continued to wield his “young, Bohemian insolence . . . to slap convention, and usher in the possibility of new forms of artistic and narrative expression” well beyond “Smoke, Lilies and Jade” (Cobb 343). In Harlem, the journal project after Fire!!, also with Wallace Thurman as editor, Nugent neither continues “Smoke”—the end of the story boasts “. . . To Be Continued. . . ”—nor offers a like-minded erotic

¹³⁵ According to Frazier, “new recruits” do not have the deeply ingrained sense of “superior status” of the older upper-class families, which “resulted partly from [their] mixed ancestry. The [upper-class] family heritage consisted of traditions of civilized behavior and economic efficiency [reinforced by their] light skin-color [which] was indicative not only of their white ancestry, but of their descent from the Negroes who were free before the Civil War, or those who had enjoyed the advantages of having served in the houses of their masters” (20).

¹³⁶ Valerie Boyd explains that “Zora [Neale Hurston] soon coined a term for . . . influential whites who supported the New Negro movement and who took an interest in black life itself. Because their philanthropic interests had a distinct racial angle, they were not merely humanitarians, in Zora’s view. Instead, she called them ‘Negrotarians’” (100).

romp. Instead, he offers the biting “review” of Ransom Rideout’s play Goin’ Home in which Nugent is more interested in slamming naïve and narrow reactions to race representation, what he calls “no views except time worn and familiar prejudices” (“What Price” 25). Nugent’s critique of the pomposity of those who insist upon “racial uplift” imagery—an attitude Locke shares in another theatre review¹³⁷—supports his poetics. But it does not produce the “queer violation” that Cobb attributes to his “patron bohemian,” a “violation of either a body or a sentence, so as to produce the adequate ‘cackling chuckle’ that will make legible the place of the queer within an otherwise strictly black, and polite, tradition” (343). In fact, nowhere in Nugent’s published work during the 1920s or 30s does he “rudely flaunt,” as Cobb celebrates, any violation.

The letters Nugent wrote to Locke likewise offer no “cackling chuckle.” I begin with them before I analyze Locke’s published review of Fire!! and “Smoke”’s poetics both to humanize the “bizarre and eccentric young vagabond poet of High Harlem” and to illustrate how Nugent was not the insouciant outcast scholars portray him to be so that they can maintain the ideological divide between “race” and “homosexuality” in “High Harlem.” The revealing and tender letters also provide the

¹³⁷ In his review of Ernest Howard Culbertson’s play Goat Alley for the February 1923 Opportunity, Locke warns that “it is not the business of plays to solve problems or to reform society. But plays of [Goat Alley]’s character must either be inevitably and spontaneously racial, or else produce a painful impression of having been written to show the Negro up. It is the distortion of the average social perspective in race matters which is primarily responsible for this, and only the finest and most accurate regauging of the true human perspectives in art can escape the effect of it. For this reason, **mistakenly or not, the intelligenza [sic] of the Negro people want uplift plays. They are wrong, I think, in wanting them to the exclusion of plays of other types, as well as wrong in complaining when others do not write them**” (30, emphasis mine).

appropriate context for Nugent and Locke reading each other, their intimate friendship and Nugent's admiration of Locke and trust in his judgement. In a letter postmarked 28 November 1928, Nugent confides, "I think that what I really want badly is just to see you for a few minutes. For no specific reason other than a rather complicated one. I seem to clear out—if you know what I mean—after talking—about anything or nothing—with you."¹³⁸ Their epistolary conversations disclose and maintain their close connection. Or, as Nugent explains in a 24 January 1929 letter, "at least in letters it makes things seem nearer and right now I want to think of my few friends as near."

Nugent offers that his poetics are not calculated effrontery, but a manifestation of how "I cut life to the pattern of my dreams instead of being saner and reversing the process," as he explains in a letter dated "Jan 4th or 5th 1928." These dreams were made possible with his parents' encouragement. As friend and executor of Nugent's estate Thomas H. Wirth explained to me in a conversation on 6 March 1994, "unlike many others, [Nugent's] family never had a problem with his homosexuality; he was seen by his family and by the black high society in Washington D.C. as 'eccentric' and rebelling against social norms, not as a faggot" (qtd. in Silberman, "Looking" 60). But Nugent's "eccentricities" were hardly singular in the Nugent household. As Wirth explains in the introduction to Gay Rebel of the Harlem Renaissance, Nugent's parents regularly "welcomed accomplished people from the arts into their home [and] took their sons regularly to performances of the Lafayette Players, an African American theater group resident in Washington that performed for audiences excluded from the

¹³⁸ Alain Locke Papers, Box 164-75 Folder 18, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University. All of the letters from Nugent to Locke that I cite come from this folder.

white theaters” (7). Still, Nugent was not confident about the artistry that he had the support to develop in letters to Locke. He apologizes for manuscripts he sent at Locke’s request: “You will very likely be very much disappointed in them. . . . They are really nothing but notes. The drawings I think you will like. They are facile and amusing, the drawing is good, indeed. Frequently excellent and the distortion of anatomy will please you. In that alone I think I will earn your approval.” In a 24 January 1929 letter, Nugent proclaims “I am an artist” but admits that “things come so easy and are great” only on the day he writes:

On the morrow [the words] are cheap—shoddy—not at all what they could be. Then begins the torture. Tearing down, building up. And for what? Never say a man can not suffer the pangs of child birth. Even more. After the pangs a minute’s relief in which to gather strength to realize that the offspring is a maimed and cripple incomplete thing. Then the work of a surgeon father trying to save his flesh and blood, only more, his brain child. Cutting, moulding, adding, throwing away, building. Giving this thing parts of your very self and then. Only to discover that it needs a little more. That though you feel drained to the very bottom, from some where in you, you will find the necessary parts and life to endow this by now hateful thing. No time to love it because all the while you have been conceiving the next to drag you thru the same hells.

Nugent's insecurity about his writing, rather than his dismissal of pursuing a career as a writer, as I had once believed,¹³⁹ arrested his work.

Even with Locke's continued encouragement and inquiries about progress on projects, Nugent seems unable to recover from the "hells" of "conceiving"—or publishing. In a 5 February 1937 letter, Nugent professes

I am still as interested in [my writing] as ever—I still think that I can do it well—but I don't seem to have the ability to make any use of it—I don't know how to get rid of it, get it before the public I mean—it certainly is of no use to me either as a medium for furthering financial status or building an artistic reputation at the present time—by present time I don't mean today or anything so stupid—so I guess that I will just keep on writing and sitting on things that I write and sometime maybe place them.

Such declared confidence about his writing, however, comes after a page and a half of money worries: "That is a terrifically important issue with me right now and I can think of very little else." Because he has no money, "I am and have been in no frame of mind to do anything about the things I write." Without the ability to write, it is easy for him to be "really very excited about the ballets, when I have time to be, and everything else I have started"—and just as easy for him to decide "I no longer think

¹³⁹ See my essay "Looking for Richard Bruce Nugent and Wallace Henry Thurman: Reclaiming Black Male Same-Sexuality in the New Negro Movement," especially pages 59-60. Nugent's friend Steven Jones told me in a May 1991 interview that Nugent "was always an artist. He did not care about material objects or tomorrow. He loved people. He did not care about commercial success [for his art] like Langston" (qtd. in "Looking" 60). Nugent's letters to Locke show a different concern about writing and publishing.

that I should spend all of my time writing things and never doing anything about them. They bring me no returns at all and so I have decided that there is no use in writing them just to tuck away and look over on some rainy day when I am fresh out of something to read.” (Locke’s response to this letter was to send a check). Of course, Nugent’s money was never stable during the 1920s or 1930s when he did write and publish; and money problems did not stop other New Negro movement writers like Zora Neale Hurston from pursuing their craft.¹⁴⁰ Rather, Nugent’s attitude toward his work and the projects on which he worked inspired emotions like the “terrible crisis psychologically” he suffers in his letter postmarked 28 November 1928: “You can see by this erratic note that I am in a state.” He asks Locke, “How did you like ‘Harlem’? I thought it was God-awfull [sic]. Not a decent thing in there. Nor a commendable attitude really. Save possibly two things. But I suppose I had idealized the project as per usual.”

Nugent shared these feelings with Locke because of their rapport. As he illustrates in his 24 January 1929 letter, Nugent hid them around others: “Am passing thru one of those awful spells of depression during which I am irritable (and hide it), have an insane desire to weep (and hide it) and feel as tho there is no one on earth that gives a damn.” Perhaps Locke entertained these disclosures because he was sexually attracted to Nugent. In a 27 June 1983 interview with Wirth, Nugent reveals that “Locke offered me his body” one evening he visited Locke’s 1326 R Street, NW apartment in Washington DC: “A professor of philosophy and a person old enough to

¹⁴⁰ See Valerie Boyd’s Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston for Hurston’s repeated fiscal trials and how she managed them and pursued her education, literary goals, and anthropology studies despite them.

be your father doesn't lie on a bed in their shorts and say, 'Do anything you want.' What can you do except be embarrassed? And be a little disappointed in the person who did it. I was a lot disappointed. I was traumatized by it" (qtd. in Wirth, Introduction 24). Nugent gives no date for this "trauma."¹⁴¹ But his rebuke of Locke's offer could not have inspired Locke's review of Fire!!, in which he decries the journal's "effete echoes of its contemporary decadence" ("Fire" 563). Their letters continued (at least) eleven years after that review's publication.¹⁴² Moreover, Locke may have not minded Nugent's refusal. He praises Nugent when he laments the Renaissance's decline to patron Charlotte Osgood Mason in a 10 July 1931 letter: "The younger Negroes . . . are about on their last legs, with the exception of Nugent, a genius" (qtd. in Lewis 288).

Regardless, neither Locke's advance, nor repercussions from it, stifled the respect Nugent garnered by others without any sexual motives well after the publication of his allegedly notorious "Smoke." "Genius" Nugent was still invited to "such highbrow affairs as the reception for the Spanish academician Salvador de

¹⁴¹ Whatever "trauma" Nugent may have suffered was not permanent. In a different interview with Wirth, Nugent admits that his youthful perceptions were often more indignant than they needed to be. He explains that he often made himself available to British suitors who "went right to Harlem to find themselves a black bedmate for at least one night": "I was fairly visible, and so I was invited to many of their rooms, **bathed thoroughly**, so I wouldn't really contaminate their sheets, and had my sex, or their sex, and there would always be a pittance left on the mantel for me, because they always went out and left me there, which was a sign, of course, that I was absolutely untrustworthy. I remember being **very** insulted when I found money left for me, because I hadn't considered myself quite the whore that I now know I was. . . ." ("You See" 270-271).

¹⁴² The last letter in Locke's papers was sent in 1937.

Madariaga” (126).¹⁴³ As Geraldyn Dismond reports in the 10 February 1928 edition of The Inter-State Tattler,

Mr. and Mrs. Charles S. Johnson had as their guest on Monday evening at the home of Miss Jessie Fauset, a group of the younger writers and artists to meet Mr. Madariaga. . . . [The evening’s events included] a talk by Mr. Madariaga, spirituals by the Utica Jubilee Singers, two solos by Alexander Gatewood, and readings by the following poets from their works—Countée Cullen, Langston Hughes, Arna Bontemps, Georgia Douglas Johnson, Jessie Fauset, and Richard Bruce. (qtd. in Lewis 126)

If “Smoke” was so outrageous or contrary to movement aesthetics, why would Johnson invite Nugent to read his own work alongside “celebrated” New Negro stars Hughes, Cullen, Bontemps, Johnson, and Fauset?

Nugent’s acceptance as a member of the movement must be read into Locke’s review of Fire!!, in which he expresses his dissatisfaction with the journal’s “strong sex radicalism.” Not exactly parochial, the review asserts that a different kind of “sex radicalism” would have been better. Still, Locke’s dissatisfaction over the journal’s approach, particularly Nugent’s “Smoke,” does not prevent him from praising the journal for its “modern” achievement, or from seeing

a good deal of it . . . reflected in Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, Dreiser, Joyce and Cummings, recast in the context of the Negro

¹⁴³ De Madariaga taught at Oxford University from 1928-1931. His scholarship includes history, international relations, literary criticism, and social psychology. He also served as both the Spanish ambassador to France and the United States.

experience. This alone would be significant as an opening up of the sluice-gates of the closed and long stagnant channels of Negro thought; but there is in back of this obvious rush toward modernism also a driving push toward racial expression. (“Fire” 563)

Cobb finds Locke’s praise of Fire!! hard to believe; but Locke’s applause for modernism “recast in the context of the Negro experience” and for Fire!!’s “charging brigade of literary revolt” matches his accolades for the achievements of the new generation of black writers “bring[ing] the artistic advance of the Negro sharply into stepping alignment with contemporary artistic thought, mood and style” in The New Negro: “They are thoroughly modern, some of them ultra-modern, and Negro thoughts now wear the uniform of the age” (“Fire” 563; “Negro Youth” 50).

Cobb also mistakes Locke’s “reprimand” of “Smoke” as an example of “race criticism’s sexuality amnesia” (328). Locke’s concern that “Smoke” will “shock” the newly urbane New Negro readers he is trying to cultivate does not ignore or invalidate black male homosexuality within their New Negro reading experiences. Locke’s concern comes from his directive for New Negro literature to fashion “a new figure on the national canvas” historically marked by black caricatures (“Foreword” xv). Locke worried that blues lyrics and club culture would dedicate Harlem as a site for touristic sexual adventures instead of artistic achievement. As Ellen McBreen relates, Locke’s worries were well founded: “Collier’s magazine labeled Harlem a ‘synonym for naughtiness’ in 1933, reflecting the idea that Harlem itself was an escapist sexual commodity for downtown whites, many of them gay men, wishing to indulge in a rebel and exotic sexuality without fear of censure by their own social group” (24).

Even so, Locke's "reprimand" of Fire!!'s "naughtiness" does not resort to the kind of queer baiting that movement scholars like David Levering Lewis have used to criticize Locke. What Cobb labels Locke's "restrained and polite approach to the representation of the race" does not reflect his inability to read or write about "a sentence that can accommodate the often-overlapping qualities of both race and queer sexuality" as much as Cobb's own essay does (331, 342).¹⁴⁴ Instead, Locke offers another queer muse he would have preferred Nugent and Fire!! to pay homage to:

But if Negro life is to provide a healthy antidote to Puritanism, and to become one of the effective instruments of sound artistic progress, its

¹⁴⁴ One of the rather ironic effects of scholars' representation of a steadfast, exacting Locke that Cobb promotes is its stifling effect on serious study of black male homosexuality within black communities and literatures of the Americas. After all, Locke was known for courting Langston Hughes in Paris' Parc Monceau in July 1924 as well as for his predilection for "well-read" young men. Nevertheless, scholars employ the genteel image of the New Negro to reinforce the platitude that homosexuality is an anathema to racial uplift.

In "Insolent Racing, Rough Narrative: The Harlem Renaissance's Impolite Queers," Cobb reprimands deservedly Arnold Rampersad's excision of Nugent from the "Harlem Renaissance" section he edited in The Norton Anthology of African American Literature because Nugent was "far more concerned with his gay identity" (Cobb 329). But much like Rampersad, Cobb separates his "rude queers" from the black community and from Harlem's Renaissance as well. Cobb is too enamored with his sexy conceit and too influenced by Eldridge Cleaver when arguing that "impolite queer sexualities [signify] a racial death-sentence" to see the often-flouting Nugent as a trickster figure, central to black cultural traditions for centuries, or to see black queer representations complementing and helping shape a communal New Negro movement (332).

Perhaps Cobb's "safe" excision of "rude queers" from the Renaissance inspired the celebration of the special issue of Callaloo in which it appears, "Plum Nelly: New Essays in Black Queer Studies" (winter 2000), edited by Dwight McBride—"Plum Nelly" received special citations from the Crompton-Noll Award Committee of the Modern Language Association. Awarding the cordoning off of "rude queers" in order to celebrate them gives the illusion of progressive scholarship while perpetuating the same grist that African American studies has afforded discussions of black queer sexualities since the Black Arts movement.

flesh values must more and more be expressed in clean, original, primitive but fundamental terms of the senses and not, as too often in this particular issue of Fire, in hectic imitation of the “naughty nineties” and effete echoes of contemporary decadence. Back to Whitman would have been a better point of support than a left-wing pivoting on Wilde and Beardsley. (563)

If Locke’s reprimand is an example of “race criticism’s sexuality amnesia,” why does he assign any value to “flesh”? Why reference Walt Whitman whose poems in the “Calamus” section of Leaves of Grass¹⁴⁵ were one way men knowingly “clung” to each other, as in his poem “We Two Boys Together Clinging,” “Arm’d and fearless, eating, drinking, sleeping, loving” (133)? Locke wanted this type of “clinging” when he happily received a flirtatious letter from Langston Hughes in which he asked if Locke liked Whitman’s “‘Song of the Open Road’ and the poems in the Calamus section? I do, very much” (qtd. in Rampersad Volume I 69).¹⁴⁶ Also in this letter, Hughes wishes “we had some gathering place of our artists,—some little Greenwich Village of our own.”¹⁴⁷ Still, for Locke—and many others in the 1920s—Whitman’s

¹⁴⁵ Whitman first self-published Leaves of Grass in 1855. Before his death in 1892, he published many different editions and revisions of its poems. I cite from a 1931 reprint of the 1891-1892 edition, of which Whitman himself preferred.

¹⁴⁶ While this letter is undated, Rampersad includes it in his 1921—1923 chapter of Volume I. At the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University, this letter is dated “circa May 1923.”

¹⁴⁷ Alain Locke Papers, Box 164-38 Folder 3, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University. Hughes uses a Greenwich Village reference “of his own” in “Blessed Assurance” as well. In the letter, Hughes also criticizes the attitude of those in the Village: “But would our artists have the pose of so many of the Villagers? I hate pose or pretension of any sort.”

“flesh values” were far more subtle than Oscar Wilde’s.¹⁴⁸ Whitman was not the popular metonym for male homosexuality that Wilde was after his April 1895 trial during which a passage of his novel The Picture of Dorian Gray (1890) was read to prove that he slept with men.¹⁴⁹ Neil Bartlett calls the trial “a contrived spectacle” that sparked “the ‘discovery’ of homosexuality in London,” a finding that quickly spread across the Atlantic Ocean (128). Wilde as queer metonym also carried an upper-class status that Locke did not want associated with the folk-praising New Negro. As Alan Sinfield makes plain, Wilde cemented the “queer bricolage of effeminacy, aestheticism, and class [as the] opposite extreme [of] mainstream working-class values” (146). While Locke was ensconced in his own black bourgeois bearing, he still felt that “any Afro-American expressive project must find its ultimate validity in a global community—the world of the black masses, as it were—of Africans, both continental, and diasporic” (Baker, Modernism 81). Alienating the “rank and file” masses whom Locke needed to promulgate the “universal aesthetic” of black art was not an option—even with a story by the man he would later call a “genius.” Thus,

¹⁴⁸ Whitman somehow foresaw this sexual “invisibility” in the final poem of the “Calamus” section, “Full of Life Now,” in which he directs his reader: “When you read these I that was visible am become invisible” (138). Hughes’ public association with and admiration for Whitman during the 1920s and 1930s acknowledged their similarly “free form” or US American aesthetics, not their shared homoerotics. Even Rampersad’s Life of Langston Hughes maintains this stylistic.

¹⁴⁹ The trial was a trap for Wilde set by the Marquess of Queensberry, the father of his former lover Lord Alfred Douglas. Queensberry began to harass Wilde after learning of his relationship with Douglas. On one occasion Queensberry “left his card at Wilde’s club, with the writing, “To Oscar Wilde, ponce and Somdomite [sic]” (qtd. in Miller 47). Wilde sued Queensberry for libel. But Marquess wanted the suit so he could prove Wilde slept with men, which Marquess’ lawyer did using Wilde’s own writing. The judge threw out the libel case. But Queensberry’s intended victory came hours after the judge’s decision, when Wilde was arrested and charged with sodomy and indecent behavior.

Locke's "flesh" advice was no censure against queer representation. Locke's advice was a strategy for making black queer vernacular an "effective instrument" of the New Negro movement.

Moreover, Wilde was too public a figure to try to adapt otherwise. For example, Malcolm Cowley, a critic and one-time editor of the small art and literary magazine Broom (1921—1924), reveals how popular a queer understanding of Wilde was in 1920s New York when he admits in his memoir Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s that he received letters at Broom's 45 King Street office addressed to "45 Queer Street" and "mention[ing] Oscar Wilde" (qtd. in Chauncey 230). Locke's uneasiness with Nugent's embrace of Wilde in "Smoke" was similar to Cowley's fear that all modern artistic expression would become "homosexualized": "I came to believe that a general offensive was about to be made against modern art, an offensive based on the theory that all modern writers, painters and musicians were homosexual" (230).

Some could read Nugent's "Smoke" as support for such "an offensive." For artistic protagonist Alex, his sexuality and his artistry "prove" each other, as if by tautology; and they explain "why was he so different from other people" (33). Meeting Adrian—Alex calls him Beauty—on a street in Harlem at four o'clock in the morning after leaving a literary salon expresses that artistry, and in effect "continues" the salon, as much as Alex's contentment with not participating in everyday bourgeois society:

he wondered why he couldn't find work . . . a job . . . when he had first come to New York he had . . . and he had only been fourteen then was it because he was nineteen now that he felt so idle . . . and contented . . .

. or because he was an artist . . . but he was an artist . . . was one an
artist until one became known . . . of course he was an artist . . . and
strangely enough so were all his friends (34)

At nineteen Alex understands that the city provides the sophisticated setting he and his
artistic friends need. He explains this through the following comparison with New
Bedford, New Jersey:

New Bedford was a nice place . . . snug little houses set complacently
behind protecting lawns . . . half open windows showing prim interiors
from behind waving cool curtains . . . inviting . . . [. . .] naively proud
of their pseudo grandeur . . . banks . . . called institutions for saving . . .
all naive . . . that was it . . . New Bedford was naive . . . after the
sophistication of New York it would fan one like a refreshing breeze . .
. and yet he had returned to New York . . . and sophistication (34)

Nugent's equation of urbanity with artistry exemplifies the cognitive and
representational politic that Locke establishes for "the Younger Generation [of New
Negro writers who] are the first fruits of the Negro Renaissance" ("Negro Youth" 47).
Nugent's expression of that equation with "Smoke"'s elliptical narration demonstrates
"the increasing tendency to evolve from the racial substance [to] something
technically distinctive, something that as an idiom of style may become a contribution
to the general resources of art" that Locke celebrates (51). "Smoke"'s linguistic
innovation enacts the "transfusions of racial idioms with the modernistic styles of
expression" that Locke sees in New Negro literature: "In flavor of language, flow of
phrase, accent of rhythm in prose, verse and music, color and tone of imagery, idiom

and timbre of emotion and symbolism, it is the ambition and promise of Negro artists to make a distinctive contribution” (51). “Smoke”’s ambitious “flavor of language” draws from the vernacular tradition in black literature, “racial idioms” that employ oral story-telling devices like call and response to mark local communities. Or, as Robert O’Meally asserts, work of the vernacular tradition asserts “its in-group and, at times, secretive, defensive, and aggressive character: it is not, generally speaking, produced for circulation beyond the black group itself (though it sometimes is bought and sold as exotic material by those outside its circle)” (“The Vernacular Tradition” 1). Nugent signifies playfully on his story’s (as well as Fire!!’s own devotion to younger Negro artists) in-group character with the following lines Alex remembers his mother saying to him: “where you get your nerve I don’t know . . . just because you’ve tried to write one or two little poems and stories that no one understands . . . you seem to think the world owes you a living” (34).

Nugent self-consciously devised “Smoke”’s elliptical narration to signal its vernacular character; but its printing demonstrates the limits of capturing oral devices with print.¹⁵⁰ As Nugent explains, he crafted story’s elliptical approach to approximate speech: “When you talk . . . you have these periods. Shorter and longer periods. It wasn’t originally written with three dots between everything. [I intended it to have] three dots, now five dots, now two dots. The printer said ‘We can’t be bothered with doing that. We don’t have that many dots’” (qtd. in Smith 214-215). Folklorist Elsie

¹⁵⁰ So does Zora Neale Hurston’s short story contribution to Fire!!, the vernacularly-driven “Sweat.”

Crews Parsons echoes the inherent modification of vernacular in print when she laments that

the characteristic emphasis of Negro tales, the drawl, and the tricks of speeding up, are difficult to indicate on paper. . . . Italics and exclamation points are but feeble indicators, and how can one express by printers' signs the significance of what is not said?—A significance conveyed by manner or by quietness of intonation, of which a good storyteller is past master" (qtd. in Levine 89).

Still, "Smoke"'s three-dot ellipses are more than "feeble indicators" of its voice. Its narration, at times hesitant, drifting, or coy, switches between third- and first-person, or from one thought to another. It affects a live voice, and seems to be still sorting out how to arrange the details of the story. The reader has to connect the narration's idiom of associated fragments and snippets of internal monologue and dialogue. This active reading forces a heightened sense of interaction with Alex as well as with the narration.

The reader's active reading also echoes Alex's own understanding of reading as a means of signifying his membership in a present-day community of Harlem's writers as well as past writers who have helped inform Nugent's vernacular:

Alex . . . was content to lay and smoke and meet friends at night . . . to argue and read Wilde . . . Freud . . . Boccacio and Schnitzler . . . to attend Gurdjieff meetings and know things . . . Why did they [Alex's family] scoff at him for knowing such people as Carl . . . Mencken . . . Toomer . . . Hughes . . . Cullen . . . Wood . . . Cabell . . . oh the whole

lot of them . . . [...] Langston was a fine fellow . . . he knew there was something in Alex . . . and so did Rene and Borgia . . . and Zora and Clement and Miguel . . . and . . . and . . . and all of them (33, 34)

Oscar Wilde, Sigmund Freud, Giovanni Boccaccio, Arthur Schnitzler, and James Branch Cabell signal the company in which Nugent sees “Smoke”’s literary approach to language, love, and sexuality.¹⁵¹ Carl Van Vechten, H. L. Mencken, Jean Toomer, Langston Hughes, Countée Cullen, Clement Wood, George Ivanovich Gurdjieff,¹⁵² Zora Neale Hurston, Miguel Covarrubias,¹⁵³ “and all of them” decidedly situate “Smoke”’s literary world within Harlem. Referencing a multi-racial group of writers, artists, and journalists with the familiarity implied by single names, “Smoke” employs call and response. It assumes its readers’ equal investment in and knowledge of

¹⁵¹ Boccaccio (1313-1375) was a Florentine writer most known for the Decameron, a collection of stories written in the vernacular celebrating true love as a deep, lasting and often tested phenomenon of beauty. The first English translation of the Decameron appeared in 1903.

Arthur Schnitzler (1862-1931), a trained doctor living in Vienna, is often regarded as a literary counterpart to Freud. Like Freud, Schnitzler viewed sexuality as human beings’ prime motivator. Freud’s own use of literature to explain his psychoanalytic concepts and to present his analyses of the subjects that he studied highlights the affinities between these two Viennese Jewish figures. Critics call his pioneering Leutnant Gustl (1900; Lieutenant Gustl) the first truly successful application of the interior monologue technique. Gustl, along with its companion piece Fräulein Else (1924) reads like one of Freud’s psychoanalytic case studies. Recently Schnitzer’s Traumnovelle (1926; Dream Story) has garnered increased attention: it was the basis for Stanley Kubrick’s last film, Eyes Wide Shut (1999).

¹⁵² See Jon Woodson’s To Make a New Race: Gurdjieff, Toomer, and the Harlem Renaissance for a study of Russian mystic, psychologist, and writer Gurdjieff’s influence on Jean Toomer and others as well as his take on modernism as informed by people’s “fragmented condition.”

¹⁵³ Mexican artist most often known for his black-face drawing of Carl Van Vechten entitled “A Prediction.”

Harlem as communal metonym for black bourgeoisie's "new phase of group development" ("The New Negro" 16).

Alex interacts with Harlem as both a physical and intellectual site. City streets line blocks and lead to characters in books. (To borrow from Locke, Harlem works as both an outer and an inner space). In a café, Alex imagines meeting Duke Jurgen, the protagonist of James Branch Cabell's Jurgen, A Comedy of Justice (1919), a novel detailing Jurgen's erotic fantasies and exploits that became embroiled in an October 1922 obscenity trial:

he sat and waited . . . that was a clever idea he had had about color music. . . but after all he was a monstrous clever fellow . . . Jurgen had said that . . . funny how characters in books said all the things one wanted to say . . . he would like to know Jurgen . . . how does one go about getting an introduction to a fiction character . . . go up to the brown cover of the book and knock gently . . . and say hello . . . then timidly . . . is Duke Jurgen there . . . (35)

While Alex surmises that such a meeting is just "foolishness," Nugent continues to assert that literature can provide queer "introductions" and expressions of "difference." Slyly, Nugent includes Hughes in his queer reading:

but Cabell was a master to have written Jurgen . . . and an artist . . . and apoet . . . Alex blew a cloud of smoke . . . a few lines of one of Langston's poems came to describe Jurgen

Somewhat like Ariel

Somewhat like Puck

Somewhat like a gutter boy
Who loves to play in muck.
Somewhat like Bacchus
Somewhat like Pan
And a way with women
Like a sailor man

Langston must have known Jurgen . . . suppose Jurgen had met Tonio
Kroeger [the protagonist of Thomas Mann’s 1903 novella Tonio
Kröger] . . . what a vagrant thought . . . Kroeger . . . Kroeger . . .
Kroeger . . . (35)

Alex’s “vagrant thoughts” about Cabell and Jurgen invent lines from a Hughes poem that recount more literary references. Using Greek mythology, these lines direct the reader to fairies or to sexuality: Ariel and Puck, two mercurial fairies from Shakespeare’s The Tempest and Midsummer Night’s Dream, respectively; Bacchus, the Roman name for the Greek god of wine, Dionysius; and Pan, the randy Greek god of fertility and unbridled male sexuality who often behaves “like a sailor man” in Greek myth.¹⁵⁴

Alex’s evening (and morning) with Beauty continues the literary connection. Like his affinity with Duke Jurgen and Tonio Kröger, Alex looks at Beauty as Salome looks at Iokanaan, the Prophet, in Salome. He looks upon Beauty as if he had read about him inside the brown cover of a book:

¹⁵⁴ There is a “wild faun”—what the Romans called the satyrs, Pan-like beings who drank and had sex—in Hughes’ poem “Young Singer” (1923). But nothing else of Hughes’ “Singer” resembles the verse here.

Beauty was smiling in his sleep . . . half his face stained flush color by the sun . . . the other half in shadow . . . blue shadow . . . his eye lashes casting cobwebby blue shadows on his cheek . . . his lips were so beautiful . . . quizzical . . . Alex wondered why he always thought of that passage from Wilde's *Salome* . . . when he looked at Beauty's lips . . . I would like to kiss your lips¹⁵⁵ . . . he would like to kiss Beauty's lips . . . Alex flushed warm (37)

The blue shadows on Beauty's cheek are the remains of the evening, their romantic, dream-like encounter on Alex's way home from a literary salon at Monty's "nice place in the Village" (37). Like the rest of "Smoke," the narration of their meeting blends present and past with Alex's inner thoughts. Third-person narration of their encounter on the street and subsequent return to Alex's bed incorporates Alex's recollections of the literary salon from which he was returning that night. The street that opens the passage shimmers in blue and resounds with staccato clicks that sound the dots of the narration's ellipses:

the street was so long and narrow . . . so long and narrow . . . and blue . . . in the distance it reached the stars . . . and if he walked long enough . . . far enough . . . he could reach the stars too . . . the narrow blue was so empty . . . quiet . . . Alex walked music . . . [. . .] the click of his heels kept time with a tune in his mind . . . he glanced into a lighted café window . . . inside were people sipping coffee . . . men . . . why did

¹⁵⁵ The line from *Salome* that Nugent signifies is "I will kiss thy mouth, Iokanaan" (304).

they sit there in the loud light . . . didn't they know that outside the street . . . the narrow blue street met the stars . . . that if they walked long enough . . . far enough (36)

The music that Alex walks almost seems to produce Beauty and their intimacy:

Alex walked and the click of his heels sounded . . . and had an echo . . . sound being tossed back and forth . . . back and forth . . . some one was approaching . . . and their echoes mingled . . . and gave the sound of castanets . . . Alex liked the sound of the approaching man's footsteps . . . he walked music also . . . he knew the beauty of the narrow blue . . . Alex knew that by the way their echoes mingled . . . he wished he would speak . . . but strangers don't speak at four o'clock in the morning . . . at least if they did he couldn't imagine what would be said . . . maybe . . . pardon me but are you walking toward the stars . . . (36)

When Beauty does speak, his words, like his footsteps, echo Alex's desire: "perdone me señor tiene vd. fósforo¹⁵⁶ . . . Alex was glad he had been addressed in Spanish . . . to have been asked for a match in English . . . or to have been addressed in English at all . . . would have been blasphemy just then" (36). But their simpatico attraction needs no words as Beauty follows Alex home because "the stranger knew the magic of blue smoke also . . . they continued in silence . . . the castanets of their heels clicking rhythmically . . . Alex turned in his doorway . . . up the stairs and the stranger waited for him to light the room . . . no need for words . . . they had always known each other .

¹⁵⁶ Wirth adds the accents to the reprint of "Smoke" in Gay Rebel of the Harlem Renaissance. The literal translation: "Excuse me sir, do you have a match," where **you** is formal, not familiar.

.....” (36). Alex ponders the inevitability of “why he liked Adrian so”: “was it that he was so susceptible to beauty that Alex liked Adrian so much” (36).

Alex’s “susceptibility” to beauty complicates a relationship not mentioned thus far in the story—Alex’s relationship with a woman named Melva. Alex never denies this love (though, arguably, sex with Melva is presented less erotically than sex with Beauty), which complicates scholars’ embrace of “Smoke” as the first extant publication by an African American to openly depict “black gay male experience” or “defend homosexuality.”¹⁵⁷ For Nugent and Alex, “Smoke”’s sexuality theme is less “a defense of homosexuality” than Alex’s embrace of the beauty of every aspect of his sexuality, which includes both Adrian and Melva:

Beauty could make him believe in Buddha . . . or imps . . . and no one else could do that . . . that is no one but Melva . . . but then he was in love with Melva . . . and that explained that . . . he would like Beauty to know Melva . . . they were both so perfect . . . such compliments . . . yes he would like Beauty to know Melva because he loved them both . . . there . . . he had thought it . . . actually dared to think it . . . (36-37)

The story ends with Alex “daring” to imagine being with both Melva and Adrian. Alex takes Melva to Coney Island and rides the roller coaster and Ferris Wheel with her.

¹⁵⁷ Alden Reimonenq praises “Nugent’s more developed homosexual story . . . now praised as the first published African-American gay short story. . . . The story is a major achievement in gay literary history because it can be read as a defense of homosexuality while it also poignantly thematizes male-male love as beautifully natural and wholesome” (360). Joseph Cady gushes that “Smoke” is “the first frank portrait of black gay male experience in American writing” (32).

The narration of both rides alludes to sexuality.¹⁵⁸ As they walk along the water during sunset, Alex imagines Adrian with them; the third-person narration echoes Alex's thoughts by describing their walk and their parting with the music of Alex's evening with Adrian:

they walked hand in hand . . . and the moon came out . . . they walked
in silence on the silver strip . . . [. . .] where is Adrian . . . Alex . . .
Melva trod silver . . . Alex trod sand . . . Alex trod sand . . . the sea sang
for her . . . Beauty . . . her hand felt cold in his . . . Beauty . . . the sea
dinned . . . Beauty . . . [. . .] Melva walked music . . . Melva said . . .
don't make me blush again . . . and kissed him . . . Alex stood on the
steps after she left him and the night was black . . . down long streets to
. . . Alex lit a cigarette. . . and his heels clicked . . . Beauty . . . Melva . .
. Beauty . . . Melva . . .and the smoke made the night blue. . . (39)

That night Alex resolves that "one can love two at the same time" (39). He imagines through narrative, through words, his contentment with loving both Adrian and Melva, though the final lines of the story do favor images of Adrian.

Equally "daring" as Alex's final resolution are Alex's thoughts of Adrian during a performance of a spiritual written by Langston Hughes and violinist and

¹⁵⁸ For the roller coaster: "up . . . up . . . slow . . . jerk up . . . up . . . not fast . . . not glorious . . . but slow . . . up . . . up into the sun . . . slow . . . sure like fate . . . poise on the brim . . . the brim of life . . . two shining rails straight down . . . Melva's head was on his shoulder . . . his arm was around her . . . poise . . . the down . . . gasping . . . straight down . . . straight like sin . . . down" (39). For the Ferris Wheel: "out and up . . . over mortals . . . mortals drinking nectar . . . five cents a glass . . . her cheek was soft on his . . . up . . . up . . . till the world seemed small . . . tiny . . . the ocean seemed tiny and blue . . . up . . . up . . . and out . . . the tiny red sun . . . Alex kissed her . . . up . . . up . . . their tongues touched" (39).

playwright Hall Johnson, with whom Nugent lived in 1925.¹⁵⁹ Alex casually uses the words and performance of the spiritual, called “Fyah Lawd,”¹⁶⁰ to fan his passion for Beauty where readers would expect that holy fire would induce repentance. The nonchalance with which Alex does this in a Harlem church surrounded by people associated with the Renaissance—“every one was there”—invites the reader to likewise be at ease (38). By continually placing Alex within Harlem’s scene here, Nugent suggests that queer Alex is not so uncommon in Harlem.

Alex illustrates this democratic social, sexual vision by weaving both Adrian and Melva into his thoughts while sitting on “rows of benches [that] were brown and sticky” just as he does on the sands of Coney Island (38). Alex weaves the spiritual performance with his remembering kissing Adrian with the dream he had about black poppies and red calla lilies as he slept with Adrian:

who had ever heard of red calla lilies . . . they were applauding . . . a young man was playing the viola . . . what could it all mean . . . so many poppies . . . and Beauty looking at him like . . . like Monty looked at Zora . . . another young man was playing a violin . . . the first real artist to perform . . . he had a touch of soul . . . or was it only feeling . . . they were hard to differentiate on the violin . . . and Melva was standing in the poppies and lilies . . . Mr. Phillips was singing . . . Mr. Phillips was billed as a basso . . . and he had kissed her . . . they were

¹⁵⁹ Johnson also composed a violin accompaniment for Hughes’ poem “Mother to Son.”

¹⁶⁰ In an interview with Jeff Kesseloff, Nugent gives credit solely to Hall Johnson for the spiritual “Fire!”—no doubt the inspiration for “Fyah Lawd” as well as the name of the journal.

applauding . . . the first young man was singing again . . . Langston's spiritual . . . Fy-ah-fy-ah-Lawd . . . fy-ah's gonna burn ma soul . . . Beauty's hair was so black and curly . . . they were applauding . . . encore . . . Fy-ah Lawd had been a success . . . Langston bowed . . . Langston had written the words . . . Hall bowed . . . Hall had written the music . . . the young man was singing it again . . . Beauty's lips had pressed hard . . . cool . . . cool . . . fyah-Lawd . . . (38)

Again, the narration offers Alex's sexual experience with Adrian through a text: "Langston had written the words." The applause for and singing in "Fyah Lawd" almost seems to be before Alex's thoughts of Adrian's lips and Melva standing among poppies and lilies. But the blur between performance and audience activity before and after it mingles all those in attendance at the church or in Alex's mind. Around the performance, Alex says hello to Paul Robeson—"there was Mr. Robeson . . . how are you Paul"—as well as to others while relishing Adrian's "cool . . . cool" lips. Snippets of conversation and the line "fy-ah Lawd" from the spiritual linger in Alex's head: "Beauty's lips . . . fy-ah Lawd . . . hello Dot [Dorothy Peterson] . . . why don't you take a boat that sails . . . when are you leaving again . . . and there's Estelle . . . every one was there . . . fy-ah Lawd . . . Beauty's body had pressed close . . . close" (38). Alex's tongue-in-cheek name-dropping includes Nugent himself and continues as they move to a party thrown by sculptor Augusta Savage: "then to Augusta's party . . . Harold [Jackman, Countée Cullen's lover] . . . John [Davis, one of the editors of

Fire!!] . . . [Richard] Bruce [Nugent] . . . Connie¹⁶¹ . . . Langston . . . ready . . . down one hundred thirty-fifth street . . . fy-ah” (38).

The mingling that “Smoke” depicts was an everyday occurrence in Harlem. As pianist and singer Helen Brown explains,

At Hall Johnson’s, the door was always open, and people just dropped in. There was nothing special about it.

If you met anybody, Langston Hughes, let’s say, “C’mon, we’re going up to Countee’s” or “We’re going here.” Everybody was there.

Zora Neale Hurston was a classmate of mine, and she’d just say, “C’mon along.” (Kisseloff 287)

Interweaving Alex’s erotic musings and references to Oscar Wilde as well as queer representations by James Branch Cabell and Thomas Mann within this mingling blurs neighborhood and racial boundaries more than some residents admit to in interviews about their experiences. As Helen Brown maintains, “When I first came to Harlem, Bruce was living down in [Greenwich] Village, which was a magnificent bohemian

¹⁶¹ Connie could be Connie Immerman who owned Connie’s Inn along with his brother George. They bought the old Shuffle Inn basement club at 2221 Seventh Avenue (on the corner of 131st Street and Seventh Avenue), renamed it, and made it one of Harlem’s big four clubs. (The other three: The Cotton Club, Small’s Paradise, and Baron Wilkin’s Club). David Levering Lewis relates that “dark faces were almost as scarce [at Connie’s] as in the Cotton Club, but the Immerman brothers, Connie and George, were warmer types, stylish high rollers with roots in the community. Before buying and renaming the old Shuffle Inn basement club, the Immermans had run a Harlem delicatessen where Fats Waller worked as delivery boy. They knew and understood Harlem, recognized faces and spoke the argot, and the music at their place was musicians’ music—not always as polished as Ellington’s or as gymnastic as Calloway’s, but sometimes more original. The Immermans opened Connie’s to musicians from other clubs for early morning jam sessions, something unknown at the haughtier Cotton Club” (210). Also unlike The Cotton Club, blacks were allowed into these after hours’ parties.

place. He said he was sleeping under the fountain at Washington Square. He was just living day to day. He was very much bohemian. I didn't find Harlem to be bohemian at all" (Kisseloff 286-287). Publishing the connections Alex makes in "Smoke" made queer mingling accessible to a reading public.

Nugent relates that "Smoke"'s inclusive sexual vision within Harlem was the "unspeakable thing" that Fire!! printed:

We had done an unspeakable thing when we published. There were things in Fire!! that you didn't talk about, like [Thurman's] story about a prostitute or [mine about] homosexuality. It was a scandalous magazine that didn't really have enough weight to be a scandal. So many people hated it. I remember soon after it appeared, Wallie [Thurman] and I went up to a restaurant in Sugar Hill, and there was Paul Robeson and his wife sitting there. She didn't like it at all, and Paul didn't want to say anything in front of her. He just turned his head toward us and gave us a wink.

I think everybody was upset who hadn't done it who thought they should have, like [W. E. B.] Du Bois. I remember Du Bois did ask, "Did you have to write about homosexuality? Couldn't you write about colored people? Who cares about homosexuality?" I said, "You'd be surprised how good homosexuality is. I love it." Poor Du Bois.

(Kisseloff 288)

David Levering Lewis takes Fire!!'s "unspeakable" scandal to heart, emphasizing the wordlessness of Nugent's exchange with Paul Robeson: "At Craig's,

the restaurant hangout of literate Harlem, the magazine's contributors were given the silent treatment by all, even the visiting Paul Robesons" (194). Lewis also includes a letter to Countée Cullen from friend Fred Bair who wrote that just mentioning Fire!! to Du Bois hurt his "feelings so much that he would hardly talk to me" (qtd. in Lewis 194). But Nugent's admission of Fire!!'s "unspeakable" themes shows two examples of important Harlem figures "speaking" about it to him. Robeson's wink and Du Bois' questions illustrate how speakable and understandable "Smoke"'s vocabulary for queer difference was. Du Bois' protest over Nugent writing "about homosexuality" when Nugent never uses the term in "Smoke," provides one demonstration of just how effective the story's metaphors were for 1926 readers.

As Langston Hughes relates matter-of-factly in The Big Sea, the story's connection to Wilde was also effective in eliciting public slander for Fire!!: "the Negro press called [Fire!!] all sorts of bad names, largely because of a green and purple story by Bruce Nugent, in the Oscar Wilde tradition, which we had included" (237, emphasis mine). Nugent's self-conscious embrace of Wilde could not have been more prescient. While period shock to "Smoke" and Nugent was fleeting—Eric Garber offers that he was "ostracized for not more than a few days"—African American studies scholarship enhances Nugent as a singular queer icon "in the Oscar Wilde tradition" (330). In such scholarship Nugent becomes like Wilde who, as Neil Bartlett explains, "presented such a threat to the status quo" (147). For example, Michael Cobb sees Nugent's "Smoke" as a direct linguistic assault:

Nugent offers up the radical possibility of simultaneous racial expression and queer sexuality by breaking with a reliance on

traditional narrative forms and traditional articulations of appropriate racial content. In a way, the typical English sentence needs to be violated in order for the queer not to have to die in polite literary sentences that code the queer as the lazy, as the not productive literary posture. (346)

But the supposed queer linguistic “threat” that Cobb identifies in “Smoke,” like Oscar Wilde’s 1895 trial, becomes “the means by which the silence was re-imposed” around Harlem homosexuality (Bartlett 147).¹⁶² As Helen Brown attests, “I didn’t find Harlem to be bohemian at all.”

The maintenance of Nugent’s symbolic queer presence virtually stifles the central role that Langston Hughes had in the creation of “Smoke” and Fire!!.¹⁶³ Not only was the journal Hughes’ idea; meeting Hughes at one of the literary salons

¹⁶² Nugent and “Smoke” divert attention from the free queer mingling in Harlem much like Wilde’s relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas deflected from queer relationships in British Parliament. As Neil Bartlett explains, “Lord Alfred Douglas’s brother, Viscount Drumlanrig, had been involved in a relationship with the prime minister, Rosebery. Rosebery had elevated him to the peerage, and had made him his private secretary so that he could keep him close by, in the Houses of Parliament. Then in October 1893 Drumlanrig had died in what could have been interpreted as either a shooting accident or a suicide. There was a passing threat of scandalous rumours, revelation if Douglas’s choice of companions was scrutinized too carefully. Thus the whole process of Wilde’s trial, however it appears, was directed towards stifling rather than exposing Wilde and the men he was seen to represent. (147)

Locke expresses in his review of Fire!! that reading “effete echoes” in “Smoke” might spark a revelation for much the same reasons that Rosebery feared “close readings” of Viscount Drumlanrig. If Harlem’s New Negro movement was “scrutinized too carefully,” its queer mingling might become too evident to the general reader.

¹⁶³ Only Alden Reimonenq acknowledges that “the story is the fictionalization of an evening Nugent spent walking and talking with Langston Hughes” (“The Harlem Renaissance” 370). David Levering Lewis finds Beauty “a composite of Valentino, Miguel Covarrubias, Harold Jackman, nameless Narcissi of the Village, and the Hughes with whom the author once walked back and forth all night” (Harlem 197).

Georgia Douglas Johnson held every Saturday at her house at 1461 S Street, NW, in Washington DC inspired and encouraged Nugent. Hughes submitted “Shadow,” Nugent’s first published poem, to Opportunity after finding it in Nugent’s trash; and urged him to move to New York to take part in the Renaissance. For both of them, their meeting inspired other emotions as well, as Nugent remembers:

There was a woman in Washington who was fantastic. She was a very good poet, Georgia Douglas Johnson, and she had salons. I met Langston at her home. We took to each other immediately. Someone wrote once that Langston and I were lovers. It is at least hinted that I had a crush on Langston. And the hint may have more truth to it than I used to think, because, as I look back on it, Langston had a physical appearance that was everything I liked at the time. He looked Latin, and he looked like me complexion-wise. Yes, I had quite a crush on Langston. Years later, I discovered Langston had a very strange kind of unnecessary envy of me, that I seemed to be so free and easy sexually, and apparently he wasn’t. We kind of had a crush on each other.¹⁶⁴

We spent that whole night walking from his mother’s house to my grandmother’s house. They were only four blocks away, but we weren’t anywhere near through talking, so we just walked each other back and forth all night long. That was the thing that was beautiful about Langston. There were always things to talk about. That’s the

¹⁶⁴ Wirth insists that Nugent’s inspiration for the Latino “Beauty” of “Smoke” is Juan José Viana, “the scion of a prominent Panamanian family [who] had been sent to New York to learn ‘American ways’” (Introduction 11).

night Fire!! was born. Hall Johnson, at whose house I was living, had written a spiritual called “Fire!”:

Fire, fire, Lawd fire burn my soul.

Fire, fire, Lawd fire burn my soul.

I ain’t been good. I ain’t been clean.

I been stinkin’ low down mean.

But fire, fire, Lawd fire burn my soul.

Both Langston and I were very fond of that. As we were walking back and forth, I think it was Langston who said we—by we I mean blacks—should have a magazine of our own, in which they could have art, in which they could express themselves however they felt.

(Kisseloff 285-286)

Far less forthcoming is Hughes. But the memories of meeting Nugent inform the “pleasure” with which he remembers Washington DC in a 1927 essay for Opportunity:

Washington is one of the most beautiful cities in the world. For that I remember it with pleasure. Georgia Douglass [sic] Johnson conversed with charm and poured tea on Saturday nights for young writers and artists and intellectuals. . . . And the few fine and outstanding men and women I met who had seemingly outgrown “society” as a boy outgrows his first long trousers,—those men and women I remember with pleasure. (“Our Wonderful Society” 227)

Section C: “An All-Negro Evening in [and around] the Coloured Cabarets of New York”: Walrond, Thurman, and Dill

In some places the autumn of 1924 may have been an unremarkable season. In Harlem, it was like a foretaste of paradise. A blue haze descended at night and with it strings of fairy lights on the broad avenues.

—Arna Bontemps, “Harlem the Beautiful” (1965)

Attention to Nugent “moving tieless and sockless from Gay Street to Striver’s Row like some Lost Generation version of the medieval holy man” makes work by Eric Walrond and Wallace Thurman and the arrest of Alexander Granville Dill less conspicuous (Lewis 196). How could anyone compete with the way scholars have written about the “blue haze” and “fairy lights,” to borrow from Arna Bontemps, in “Smoke, Lilies and Jade”? Certainly Eric Walrond cannot in the scant mention he garners in New Negro movement scholarship. Like Nugent, Walrond was “a presence in Greenwich Village artistic circles,” according to David Levering Lewis; but Walrond remains an enigma (164). Like Charles S. Johnson, with whom he worked on Opportunity, Walrond did not promote himself before or after the publication of his widely-praised collection of short stories Tropic Death (1926). Yet neither reticence for publicity nor his failure to follow the success of Tropic Death with any other book accounts fully for his obscurity.¹⁶⁵ After all, Jean Toomer only produced Cane, which

¹⁶⁵ See Carl A. Wade’s “African-American Aesthetics and the Short Fiction of Eric Walrond: Tropic Death and the Harlem Renaissance” for his explanation of Walrond’s “enigmatic” status.

has its own W. W. Norton Critical Edition; while the equally-lauded Death is out of print.¹⁶⁶ Nonetheless, Lewis considers Death

one of the truly avant-garde literary experiments of the Harlem Renaissance, a prism so strange and many-sided that even Professor Benjamin Brawley, Afro-America's fatuous literary critic, saw its iridescence: 'It is hardly too much to say that in a purely literary way, it is the most important contribution made by a Negro to American letters since the appearance of [Paul Laurence] Dunbar's Lyrics of Lowly Life. (Harlem 189)

Like Brawley, Tony Martin claims that Death provided a "potential infrastructure for the Harlem Renaissance"; and Carl A. Wade finds the Guyana-born Walrond's influence throughout the New Negro movement: "He was one of three men of West Indian origin who contributed significantly to this milestone in African-American political and cultural history, the others being Claude McKay, the poet and novelist, and, of course, the political and ideological leader, Marcus Mosiah Garvey," with whom Walrond worked as an associate editor of Garvey's journal Negro World from 1921 to 1923 (Martin 156; Wade 403).

Walrond's work on central Harlem journals, his Tropic Death, and his iconoclastic reviews of celebrated New Negro texts—Hughes threatened to punch Walrond in the eye after his "ugly, childish, little review" of Jesse Fauset's There Is Confusion—garners less discussion, either celebration or consternation, than Nugent.

¹⁶⁶ Incidentally, both Cane and Tropic Death had poor sales. Death had one small printing in 1926, and another in 1972.

Walrond's important contributions to Harlem's black queer vernacular also go unnoticed. His short story "The Adventures of Kit Skyhead and Mistah Beauty: An All-Negro Evening in the Coloured Cabarets of New York," published in the March 1925 Vanity Fair, twenty months before Nugent's "Smoke" and in the same month as the Harlem issue of Survey Graphic, flaunts the sly, queer urbanity for which Nugent has become so infamous. Walrond's "Adventures" was a likely inspiration for Nugent's own "gender bending": "[Alex in 'Smoke'] called the man beautiful and you didn't call a man beautiful. I did it. I even named one Beauty" (qtd. in Smith 214). So did Walrond. Like "Smoke" does, "Adventures" blurs "fiction" and "reality," with its characters mingling with "real" people in Harlem, and thwarts narrative expectations. It seems to offer a "report" of Harlem's night life—via third-person narration—for novices yet relies on its readers to already know what it purportedly "introduces" to them.

While Thomas Wirth does not mention Walrond at all in his introductory essay about Nugent in Gay Rebel of the Harlem Renaissance, and I have no "proof" of Nugent admiring or reading the story, Nugent was an interested reader in a wide variety of fiction and nonfiction rendering same-sexuality. Plus, Nugent and Walrond traveled in the same circles. Before Nugent left for New York in August 1925, Walrond and Nugent were both repeated guests at Georgia Douglas Johnson's literary salons, where Walrond could have read a draft of "Adventures." As Lewis describes, "Locke came regularly to enjoy the train of famous and to-be-famous visitors [and] often, the suave Eric Walrond accompanied [him]" (Harlem 127). Walrond also associated with friends of Nugent's, including Countée Cullen (who dedicated a poem

in Color to Walrond), Dorothy Peterson, and Carl Van Vechten. In February 1925, Walrond introduced Van Vechten and Harold Jackman at Peterson's.¹⁶⁷ No doubt, Nugent knew and respected Walrond's "accented, rippling wit, his urbanity and fearless independence" (Lewis, Harlem 128). Or, as Ethel Ray Nance remembers, Walrond "had flashing eyes; his face was very alert and very alive" (qtd. in Lewis 128).

Perhaps not known to Nugent was that Walrond harbored similar insecurities about his writing. In a 4 June 1924 letter to Alain Locke, Walrond refers to his work on Tropic Death as "a loosely constructed, baldly unadorned novel."¹⁶⁸ He blames not financial hardships but "the sterile environment in Harlem" for both his lack of productivity and his "high-strung, unnatural, morbid, discontented state of mind." This letter also reveals Walrond's participation in Harlem's black queer reading community. He assures "My dear Lockus" that "despite my fears and disillusion [while working on what would become Death] I am doing a lot of reading and I am plumbing the depths of that glowing sahara you pointed out to me the evening we were at Glenn's . . ." Walrond's need to leave Harlem—"Perhaps (I don't know) conditions out of the country may make it possible for me to go back to it and try to get [my writing] in shape"—aligns him with Claude McKay's queer Diaspora

¹⁶⁷ Van Vechten reminisces about this evening in an 8 February 1941 letter to Jackman. See Kellner's Letters of Carl Van Vechten, page 176. During the spring of 1925, Van Vechten and Walrond often went out together to enjoy Harlem's night life together, or in the company of others. In a 23 November 1924 letter to Locke, Cullen notes, "Eric and I dined with Carl Van Vechten Friday evening" (Alain Locke Papers, Box 164-22 Folder 37, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University).

¹⁶⁸ Alain Locke Papers, Box 164-90 Folder 23, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University. All of Walrond's correspondence to Locke is in this folder.

sojourns, as well. Yet neither Walrond's years in Paris, spent in part in the company of Cullen and Jackman,¹⁶⁹ nor his later London years made him any more productive.¹⁷⁰ Despite his professed distaste for "the sterile environment in Harlem," and its affect on his work, Walrond's animated, vernacular rendition of the black queer city in "Adventures" anticipates Nugent's "Smoke" as well as McKay's Home to Harlem.

In "Adventures," Kit and Mistah Beauty's skip from one venue to the next. They start at The Cotton Club—Lewis calls it "Harlem's gaudiest and best-known nightspot" renowned for not admitting blacks—then move to the Bamville Nest, a "rendezvous of the Negro big timers," and land finally at Sonny Decent's (Lewis,

¹⁶⁹ Pictures of Walrond during this time that Louis Parascandola uses in "Winds Can Wake Up the Dead": An Eric Walrond Reader are from Cullen and Jackman's papers. Painter Hale Woodruff remembers seeing Walrond during the years he spent in Paris: "I knew people like Eric Walrond, the writer; Claude McKay, the poet; Augusta Savage, sculptor; Walter White of the N.A.A.C.P.; Alain Locke, philosopher and art critic, etc. These and many others made up what was known as the 'Negro Colony' in Paris" ("Oral History"). At the same time, Woodruff places Walrond back in the United States, where "there was being published a magazine concerning blacks called Fire—you probably know about it. Eric Walrond, Countee Cullen, Langston Hughes were among those contributing to this magazine. There was a race consciousness and this was stimulated in part by the late Nancy Cunard." While Woodruff's history is jumbled at best—neither Walrond nor Nancy Cunard, editor of Negro: an Anthology, had anything to do with Fire!!—Woodruff's placement of Walrond's work alongside Fire!!'s urbane New Negro aesthetics suits "The Adventures of Kit Skyhead and Mistah Beauty."

¹⁷⁰ Jamaican novelist and critic John Hearne has also commented on "the association that Walrond must have had with the 'Movement' in France, but he, too, is puzzled that no record documents what might have been an 'interesting' period" (Bogle 476). David Levering Lewis notes that Charles S. Johnson "said very little about his growing disappointment in his prize candidate for literary greatness, Eric Walrond. Walrond had resigned from Opportunity shortly before Johnson had. Boni & Liverlight announced his book about the Panama Canal for March 1928. Zona Gale and the Guggenheim Foundation had awarded him fellowships to complete the manuscript, but rumors reached Johnson from Europe that Walrond had squandered the stipends and written nothing. On his way to a weekend in the country with E. M. Forster, Richard Bruce Nugent encountered Walrond in a London railway station in late 1929. That was about the last heard of him" (Harlem 233-234).

Harlem 209; “Adventures” 174). Kit and Mistah Beauty do not stay long at The Cotton Club because, as Kit explains, there was “not a jigaboo,¹⁷¹ but a whole lot o’ o’fay¹⁷² gals. This is Mr. Eddy’s¹⁷³ place or I don’t know what it is all about” (174). Then they go to Bamville Nestwhere Kit observes “Kind o’ dickty¹⁷⁴ here, ain’t it?” and notes the presence of a “Whole lot o’ yella wimmin. . . . bunch o’ blue boys. . . . Ladies and mah friends” (175). In the annotations of the story’s reprint in “Winds Can Wake Up the Dead”: An Eric Walrond Reader, Louis J. Parascandola concludes that these “blue boys” are “very dark complexioned” black men (334). This definition comes from Bruce Kellner (Parascandola mentions Kellner as one of his sources) who elaborates that blue is “alphabetically, the first of a great many expressions to indicate color variations among members of the black race” (The Harlem Renaissance 428). But nowhere in “Adventures” are these “blue boys” described as very dark complexioned. Rather, “Adventures” emphasizes the kaleidoscope of blackness found in the Nest’s party boys, “High yellows, medium browns, low blacks [as well as] boys the colour of chocolate pudding, hair black and sleek” (“Adventures” 175). Lewis confirms that Bamville Nest boasted a “deft mixture of black and tan swank and raunch” (209). Thus, Kellner’s other blue definition, blue vein, more usefully elucidates the dickty “blue boys” at Bamville. Blue vein refers to “the upper crust in

¹⁷¹ In his The Harlem Renaissance: A Historical Dictionary for the Era, Bruce Kellner explains that a **jigaboo** or a **jig** is a black person, usually male. The term, a different spelling of **zigaboo**, is only derogatory when used by a white person.

¹⁷² **O’fay** is a generally derogatory term for whites. Bruce Kellner notes that such derogatory use depends upon context.

¹⁷³ Kellner explains that **Mister Eddie** or **Mister Charlie** are terms for white men.

¹⁷⁴ Kellner explains that **dickty**, also spelled **dicty**, means swell, grand, or high-toned.

black society, organized after the Civil War by mulattoes into the Blue-Vein Circle” (Kellner 428).

Walrond uses blue again but differently when Kit and Mistah Beauty arrive at Sonny Decent’s and find “hordes of blue people” (177). Sonny Decent’s is their favorite cabaret, a “laboratory for song and dance” where “the family feeling runs high” (176). Unlike the Cotton Club (“Mr. Eddy’s place”) and the Bamville Nest (“too dickty”), they feel comfortable at Decent’s because it is “the ‘openest’ cabaret in Harlem, you’ve got to be part of the underworld pattern to fit in. Here folk lie prostrate. Insouciance. Here everybody knows what it is all about” (176). Readers who know “what [the cabaret’s ‘openness’] is all about” recognize the blueness of the “hordes of blue people” who are “part of the underworld pattern”: Alex uses a similar knowing blue to signify his sexuality in Richard Bruce Nugent’s “Smoke.”¹⁷⁵ Also like Alex, Mistah Beauty provides a roster of Harlem figures at Decent’s, amid the fierce “boom-booming, tom-toming [of] Africa undraped”:

Out of the contracting mass Mistah Beauty recognized Spoofo Moses, Four Eye Shadow, the prizefighter; Tunnah Kasha, Mr. Burt’n, Bread and Cheese, Erasmus B. Black, Polanque, Woomsie Nurse, Miguel Covarrubias, Trick Skazmore, Bo Diddle, Eric Walrond, Jim Ar’try,

¹⁷⁵ **Blue** signifies Alex’s artistry as well as what he and Beauty have in common: “he knew the beauty of the narrow blue . . . Alex knew that by the way their echoes mingled” (36). When Alex takes Beauty home, even the morning light honors their sexuality: “as they undressed by the blue dawn . . . Alex knew he had never seen a more perfect being . . . his body was all symmetry and music . . . and Alex called him Beauty . . . long they lay . . . blowing smoke and exchanging thoughts . . . and Alex swallowed with difficulty . . . he felt a glow of tremor . . . and they talked and . . . slept . . .” (36).

West Henry, Mary Stafford, Dolly May, Rachel Spilvens, Camilia Doo
Right. . . . (177)

Parascandola concludes that “Walrond’s inclusion of himself is probably a playful reference to his frequent visits to cabarets” (335).¹⁷⁶ Parascandola explains that “two of the more notable [ones] are Mexican artist Miguel Covarrubias, who illustrated two of Walrond’s pieces in Vanity Fair, including [Walrond’s “Adventures”], and Mary Stafford, a blues singer” (335). But Walrond’s self-conscious referencing is not just playful. Placing Stafford within the cabaret gives its Vanity Fair readers a familiar context through which to read about their “Adventures.”¹⁷⁷ Placing Covarrubias at Decent’s highlights why Walrond went so frequently to the cabarets, for their blue, Diaspora “family feeling.”¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ In Volume I of The Life of Langston Hughes, Rampersad relates an evening on the town with Walrond, Carl Van Vechten, and Hughes after the 1 May 1925 Opportunity magazine literary contest dinner where “The Weary Blues” won first prize that evokes “Adventures”: “Also in the rush to congratulate Hughes was Carl Van Vechten, the tall, shambling white man with ugly buck teeth whom he had met on the night of his return from Europe. Eric Walrond, Van Vechten, and a white friend, Rita Romilly, were going out for a night on the town—as soon as Carl’s wife, the popular, Russian-born actress Fania Marinoff, who didn’t care much for Van Vechten’s hard drinking and Harlem club-crawling, was safely home. The Harlem YMCA was sponsoring a benefit dance at the Manhattan Casino; then some of the performers from the glamorous Cotton Club, which admitted very few blacks, would be performing at the more egalitarian Bamville. Would Hughes care to join them? (108) Perhaps, Kit and Mistah Beauty’s adventures were ones Walrond had led for others many times. As David Levering Lewis offers, Walrond “was an ideal tour guide” (164).

¹⁷⁷ Carl Van Vechten’s articles on the blues, which many assert started Harlem’s vogue for white New Yorkers and created “Mr. Eddy places” like the Cotton Club, had already appeared in Vanity Fair.

¹⁷⁸ Covarrubias’ caricatures were a recognizable part of Harlem’s bohemian culture. His illustrations include those for Van Vechten’s novel The Blind Bow-Boy (1923) and Zora Neale Hurston’s Mules and Men (1935). He illustrated Hughes’ first collection of poetry The Weary Blues after Walrond introduced him to Hughes in August 1925 (Berry 64). Covarrubias also illustrated Blues (1926) a volume on the

Anyone familiar with the blue cabarets of Harlem would know “what it is all about” in Walrond’s “Adventures.” Harlem’s blue places, its cabarets, speakeasies,

blues edited by W. C. Handy and Abbe Niles, illustrations about which Van Vechten glows, “no other painter, living or dead, had depicted the American Negro—it must be remembered that up to date this Mexican’s work has almost entirely concerned itself with cabaret or Lenox Avenue types—with the imagination and fidelity to spirit to be observed in his drawings [where] you will find you can not only **see** these people, you can also **hear** them” (qtd. in Kellner, “Keep” 52). Van Vechten confesses that it is “difficult to summon up more glowing superlatives” for Covarrubias’ “cabaret types” (52). Van Vechten was hardly the only one to recognize the ubiquity of and representations in Covarrubias’ work. In a review of Hughes’ Not Without Laughter (1930) in New Masses, Walt Carmon laments that Laughter “was not Marxist enough [but was] ‘the first definite break with the vicious Harlem tradition of Negro literature sponsored by Van Vechten and illustrated by Covarrubias’” (qtd. in Lewis 252).

With Covarrubias, Walrond continued his affinity for Spanish culture that Walrond developed when at the age of thirteen he and his family moved from Georgetown, Guyana, his birth city, to Colón, Panama. Walrond’s affinity for black people also of Spanish ancestry also shows in his essay “El Africano” (1923), about Canary Islands-born artist Nestor Martin Fernandez de la Torré. Here, too, Walrond sees bohemian links: “de la Torré, when he is not painting [he] goes to the great centers of Europe designing magnificent dresses for women of princely rank. He also designs jewelry, necklaces and gowns, and in this field he is said to be the equal of Erte,” the Russian “gay” artist born Romain de Tiroff who contributed greatly to the development and acceptance of art deco and illustrated the covers of Harper’s Bazaar magazine (67).

In Colón, he became fluent in Spanish and first saw the connection that black culture could provide, there amid Panama’s polyglot population. Walrond found this solidarity again in Harlem, as he celebrates in “The Black City” (1924): “Harlem, with its 185,000 beings, the melting pot of the darker races, . . . is a sociological el dorado. . . . On its bosom is the omnipresent symbol of oneness, of ethnologic oneness. Of solidarity! Hence its striving, its desperate striving, after a pigmentational purity, of distinctiveness of beauty. [And yet] it is neither white nor black” (271). Jamaican W.A. Domingo finds a similar solidarity in Diaspora in “Harlem’s seventy or eighty blocks [where] for the first time in their lives, colored people of Spanish, French, Dutch, Arabian, Danish, Portuguese, British and native African ancestry or nationality meet and move together” in “The Tropics of New York” (1925) (648). There, despite West Indian discrimination, “a dusky tribe of destiny seekers, these brown and black and yellow folk, eyes filled with visions of their heritage—palm fringed sea shores, murmuring streams, luxuriant hills and vales—have made their epical march . . . to Harlem[, a] romantic pilgrimage to the El Dorado of their dreams,” an El Dorado sometimes found in Harlem’s clubs and cabarets, where another West Indian artist found himself drawn to after leaving his home in Gouyave, Grenada, and later Meharry College in Nashville, Tennessee (648).

drag balls, buffet flats, and rent parties, were “the ‘in’ place[s] to go for music and booze, and it seemed like every other building on or near Seventh Avenue from 130th Street to 140th was a club or a speakeasy,” recalls singer and dancer Ada Beatrice Queen Victoria Louisa Smith, known as Bricktop because of her startlingly red hair (Chauncey 246). Like Bricktop, who “put sin back into syncopation,” these places were not only well-known, they were symbolic locations, ones that often functioned as metonym for the “family” of Harlem’s men and women “in the life” (Volume I 85). Even Minister Adam Clayton Powell’s easily recognized the meaning of the metonym. He “launched a sensational attack on homosexuality in the African-American community—and particularly in the rectory”; and the New York Age covered it (Chauncey 254). A banner headline on 16 November 1929 reads: “DR. A. C. POWELL SCORES PULPIT EVILS.” As the Age reports, Powell identifies and denounces the “steadily increasing” spread of this “perversion” when he “delivered a scathing and bitter denunciation of perversion as practised by many moral degenerates who not only are men and women of prominence in the secular world, white and colored, but many of whom fill the pulpits of some of the leading churches of the country” (qtd. in Chauncey 254). A week after this report, Powell claimed his office was inundated by letters revealing how much more extensive this “degeneracy” was. Much of the problem could be blamed on “young people’s ‘contact and association’ with homosexuals in the world of dance halls, cabarets, and rent parties when he warned that ‘the seeking for thrills of an unusual character by the modern youth’ led many to experiment with homosexuality” (Chauncey 255).

One of the most visible figures in this “world of dance halls, cabarets, and rent parties” was Gladys Bentley, “‘huge, voluptuous [and] chocolate colored,’ according to one fan” (252). As famous for her notorious shows at Hansberry’s Clam House on 133rd Street that she performed in a white tuxedo and top hat as she was for her girlfriends, Bentley ad-libbed popular ballads, turning Broadway tunes “Sweet Georgia Brown” and “Alice Blue Gown” into odes for anal sex. She inspired white writer Blair Niles to create Sybil, an openly lesbian singer in Strange Brother (1931). Also famous was drag queen Gloria Swanson (born Winston) who was “so perfect a woman [people] came and left never suspecting his true sex” (Chauncey 251). As Dr. Herman Warner remembers,

Gladys and Gloria were extremely popular. Gloria Swanson used to sing a song called “Hot Nuts.” . . . As soon as you would enter [the club], he would make you sing the song: “Hot nuts, tell it to the peanut man. You see that man walking there in green? He has good nuts but he won’t keep ‘em clean. (Kisseloff 323)

Such participation was not limited to just those in one of Harlem’s many bohemian institutions, like 267 House on 136th Street where Richard Bruce Nugent and Wallace Thurman lived, Edmond’s Cellar on 132nd Street and Fifth Avenue, or Lulu Belle’s on Lenox Avenue near 127th Street. As Cotton Club dancer Howard “Stretch” Johnson recalls, bohemian culture spread further:

There was another place, where they had a chorus of all homosexuals, who used to come out and dance in drag. That was the 101 Ranch [on 140th Street], which is where they invented a dance called the Shim-

Sham Shimmy, which became a kind of a national anthem for dancers.

Practically every dancer in Harlem could do the Shim-Sham Shimmy.

(323)

The “101 Ranch” or “The Daisy Chain,” as it was also called, became so well-known that both Fats Waller and Count Basie commemorated it with songs. Harlem’s bohemian culture became so popular that many black performers “in the life” like Bessie Smith, Alberta Hunter, Josephine Baker, Ethel Waters, and comedienne Jackie “Moms” Mabley who regularly wore men’s clothes, flirted comfortably with bisexual imagery in their work.

So open and inviting were these flirtations to Harlem’s residents that Marion Moore Day fondly remembers going to The Faggot’s Ball, the annual drag ball at Rockland Palace Casino on Eighth Avenue and 155th Street, what George Chauncey calls “the largest annual communal event of New York’s gay society” (227). She enjoyed the ball with her sister and her mother, a “family feeling” that speaks to the complex public and private interactions with bohemian culture in Harlem, considering her father was Fred Moore who edited the New York Age and its reports of Powell’s anti-bohemian crusade. As Day recounts, they enjoyed the gender blurring of the ball:

We went to the Rockland Palace to the faggots’ ball. My sister and I always had short haircuts. We’d go in our sequin dresses, and you couldn’t tell the men from the women. They were dancing and having a good time, and they would come up to us. We’d say, “We’re women, no, no.”

My mother went, too. She enjoyed it. We'd have a box and sit there and watch. It was amazing. When they'd come up and talk to us, they didn't know whether we were the real thing or not. (Kisseloff 323)

A similar kind of widely-recognized "family feeling" guides Wallace Thurman's roman-à-clef novel Infants of the Spring in its satire of the New Negro movement. At a literary salon organized by Dr. A. L. Parkes, the character based on Alain Locke, Sweetie May Carr (Zora Neale Hurston¹⁷⁹), boasts about the queerness that fuels white people's interest in Harlem's Renaissance:

Being a Negro writer these days is a racket and I'm going to make the most of it while it lasts. Sure I cut the fool. But I enjoy it, too. . . . I get my tuition paid at Columbia. I rent an apartment and have all the furniture contributed by kind hearted o'fays. I receive bundles of groceries from various sources several times a week . . . all accomplished by dropping a discreet hint during an evening's festivities. I find queer places for whites to go in Harlem . . . out of the way primitive churches, sidestreet speakeasies. They fall for it. About twice a year I manage to sell a story. It is acclaimed. I am a genius in the making. Thank God for this Negro literary renaissance! (230)

One of these "queer places" is 267 West 136th Street, a house owned by Iolanthe Sydney where Thurman and Nugent lived from 1926 to 1928. (Assembling Fire!! was their first "house" activity). In Infants, Paul Arbian (Nugent) calls 267 House both "a

¹⁷⁹ Like Hurston, Carr is "a master of southern dialect, and an able raconteur" (230).

miscegenated bawdy house” and “Niggeratti Manor”¹⁸⁰ in light of the “performing” for whites that Sweetie May relates (267). Protagonist Raymond (Thurman), chuckles when reading about 267 House in a New York Call (New York Age) editorial “typical of its columns” (197). The editorial warns of

a house in Harlem [where] a number of young Negro writers and artists ... were spending their time drinking and carousing with a low class of whites from downtown. Racial integrity they had none. They were satisfied to woo decadence, satisfied to dedicate their life to a routine of drunkenness and degeneracy with cheap white people, rather than mingle with the respectable elements of their own race. (197)

Even less respectable to some was the thin veneer between Infants’ “characters” and actual movement figures.

Like Nugent’s “Smoke” and Walrond’s “Adventures,” Infants’ staging makes it seem “wholly autobiographical” as Dorothy West finds it in “Elephants Dance: A Memoir of Wallace Thurman” (82). But Infants’ “unrespectable autobiography” is not entirely factual. The “Jezebels, pimps and other underworld fauna” who populate Infants are not exactly Thurman’s creation, either. The idea for Infants came from Nugent’s own roman-à-clef novel about Niggeratti Manor, Gentleman Jigger (circa 1930¹⁸¹), from which Thurman borrows character names and Manor events like a rape

¹⁸⁰ Based upon Infants, David Levering Lewis, Arnold Rampersad, and others give credit to Thurman and Hurston for this term. Yet a great deal of Infants cribs outright from Richard Bruce Nugent’s roman-à-clef novella Gentleman Jigger (written, but never finished, two years before Infants was published) in which Stuart, the Nugent-inflected character coins the term.

¹⁸¹ One of the pages of the Jigger draft is dated “March 7th 1930.” Thomas Wirth,

investigation and Dr. Parkes' literary salon.¹⁸² While Nugent gave his blessing to Thurman, Nugent ends Jigger with Stuartt (Jigger's Nugent character) confronting Raymond (Thurman) about taking "my very words" for his novel about 267 House.¹⁸³

Nugent's executor, also estimates that the bulk of Jigger was written in 1930.

¹⁸² In Gentleman Jigger, Nugent names his Thurman character Raymond Pellman. His nickname is Rusty. Like Infants' Hughes character Tony Crews, Nugent names his Hughes character Tony. Also like Infants' Alain Locke character Dr. A. L. Parkes, Nugent names his Locke character Dr. Parke. In both Jigger and Infants there is a rape case and a literary salon at Niggeratti Manor.

¹⁸³ Nugent uses this confrontation to dramatize the demise of both the Manor and Nugent and Thurman's friendship. However, Nugent never mentions any problems with Thurman in the many interviews he granted about the Renaissance before his death. According to Nugent, he encouraged Thurman to borrow from Jigger. Such an offer agrees with Nugent's disregard for publishing. Still, the last chapter of Jigger makes plain that Rusty/Thurman's roman-à-clef novel that he reads aloud comes from Stuartt/Nugent's. (The scene from the novel that Rusty reads about attending the Faggot's Ball does not appear in Infants).

Throughout the hand-marked draft of Jigger, Nugent has crossed out "real" names and substituted character ones as well as added sentences. In the passage below, I note the name-crossing by typing the struck-out name in small capital letters and inserting in parentheses the name Nugent wrote on top of the crossed-out name. Other crossed-out text is left crossed-out. I note other handwritten text with a double underline. I have also corrected spelling and typing errors in the original manuscript. I leave the changing names and spellings of Mariel/Muriel and Alice, both rewritten interchangeably as both Edna and Lounette.

When the 'Vagabond poet' went down to the 'fuliginous playwrite's' room, he found him curled up in bed, still in the shirt he had worn to the ball the night before. Rusty was holding court. Just like in the days of 267. There was ~~JØE~~ (Hal), and ~~JEANETTE~~ (Marvel), ~~ALICE~~ (Lounette), and ~~MARIEL~~ (Edna). They all had that rapt expression on their faces that only Rusty could call forth. He was adding vivid color to the incidents of last evening when Steward [spelled Stuartt elsewhere in the Jigger manuscript] crept under the covers and lay beside him. Steward's presence meant that Rusty would have to dilute his narrative a little. For after all he had been to the ball also. And Rusty had learned that the could no longer depend on Steward to help embroider escapades and incidents with vivid and alluring color. In fact, Rusty could depend on Steward for very little now. He was no longer **Simpatico**. And that was inhibiting to say the least. It was the beginning of 'the end.' Or vice-versa.

“lo JOE (Hal).” Steward opened a sleepy eye as he snuggled down under the covers. “I’m still asleep but my bed is cold.”

Rusty giggled, “Well I never—” with his rising inflection. JOSEPH (Hal) kicked several typewritten pages from Rusty’s dresser. Pages of Rusty’s novel about 267. The conversation continued desultorily. JEANETTE (Marvel) perched herself more comfortably on the side of the bed. MURIEL (Lounette) was playing with the goldfish. She was still gasping over the revelations of last night’s ball.

“But they had such beautiful skin.”

“And why can’t a man have beautiful skin?” Steward opened an eye and looked at her. She payed no attention to him.

“But did you see that one in white feathers? He made a beautiful woman.” ALICE (Edna) spoke as JEANETTE (Marvel) finished and lit a cigarette.

“I just can’t believe that some of them were men.”

“They weren’t.” Rusty answered pertly with a little sneer. Rusty had a perfect nose for sneering.

“You danced with one.” Steward was reaching over Rusty for a cigarette.” And he wasn’t even in costume. JOSEPH (Hal) interrupted before Rusty could answer.

“~~Why~~ this sounds exactly like some of your novel, Steward.”

“It is.” Steward was brief.

“But I thought it was Rusty’s.”

“It is.” Again brief.

“But—” Steward interrupted him.

“Just that Rusty decided that it would go better in his. He hasn’t much faith in my ever publishing anything.” Rusty laughed an easy laugh.

“Not at all. Steward and I write so differently that it will never matter.”

“But it’s **no** different, Rusty. You use my very words.”

“Oh, I don’t. I merely use an idea. I had forgotten all about that incident and you reminded me of it. I thanked you.”

“So you use my very words?” Steward was sarcastic.

“Only in one sentence. How can one help sounding like another when both are writing about the same time and people?”

“After I remind you about them. But I thought we write so differently?”

“We do.”

“Yet JOSEPH (Hal) recognizes my writing despite the fact that it

Maintaining that Infants is a reflection of Thurman's own "bachelorhood and bohemianism," as West argues, localizes the queer reading of the Renaissance that Infants offers (80). West and others rewrite Infants' focus on the Renaissance's "queer places" and "underworld fauna" as Thurman's individual disillusion with yet attraction to Harlem's "drinking sessions, the all night talk fests, the queer assortment of queer people, and the general disregard for established customs" (West 81). Alain Locke personalizes Infants by backhandedly praising Thurman for documenting this "queer assortment of queer people":

The trouble with the set [depicted in Infants], and with the author's own literary philosophy and outlook, is that the attitude and foibles of Nordic decadence have been carried into the buds of racial expression, and the healthy elemental simplicity of the Negro folk spirit and its native tradition forgotten or ignored by many who nevertheless have traded on the popularity of Negro art. As the novel of this spiritual failure and perversion, Mr. Thurman's book will have real documentary value, even though it represents only the lost wing of the younger generation. ("Black Truth" 16)

is yours. Sounds like plagiarism I'm afraid. There are other spots you know."

"You're a damn liar."

Every one in the room was silent. Steward's voice had been deliberately teasing and aggravating. Rusty's had become more and more heated. The three girls and JOSEPH (Hal) were silent. They had never seen Steward and Rusty battle before. They ~~never did~~ (seldom had) in public. They had never seen anyone so complacently expose Rusty before.

Again, Locke defends in print his “black masses”-incorporating New Negro from being queerly classed with any association with “Nordic decadence.” Or as Blyden Jackson explains, “those who would be considered genteel almost always attempt to dissemble when they feel an attack too potentially threatening to the basic tenets of US American racism warrants a tactical move from them to protect the system of arbitrary advantages conferred upon them by caste” (Gates, “The Black Person” 18). J. Saunders Redding offers a similar assessment of Infants’ “documentary value” in To Make a Poet Black, where he discards “the degenerates, the parasites, [and] the vampires who slunk through Wallace Thurman’s slimy demi-world” along with “Claude McKay’s black roustabouts, Jake and Banjo” in Home to Harlem (108).¹⁸⁴ Others overlook the queer elements of “Thurman’s slimy demi-world” in favor of Thurman the brooding intellectual and satirist. In his “Harlem Renaissance” chapter of The Norton Anthology of African American Literature, Arnold Rampersad praises Infants as “one of the most illuminating contemporary views of the Harlem Renaissance” (“Wallace Thurman” 1230). But he finds Thurman “a fascinating but troubled man” in The Life of Langston Hughes: “Able to read several lines at once, he had already raced through more books than most of his friends would read in a lifetime; very opinionated, his gift allowed him to find fault, in detail with so many great writers that the lesser talents, including his own, shriveled under his scrutiny” (Volume I 118-119).

¹⁸⁴ Still, Redding mentions Infants in his Harlem Renaissance chapter while he ignores The New Negro.

Scholars also reduce Infants' queer reading by localizing it around Paul Arbian (Nugent), and castigating Paul/Nugent for his "excessive" queerness. As Michael L. Cobb explains,

Thurman's queer character, Paul, is characterized as constantly wandering, without home, and narrating 'his latest vagabond adventure.' And because Paul is a fictional disguise for Richard Bruce Nugent, whom Hurston's biographer¹⁸⁵ describes as 'probably the most Bohemian of all the Renaissance artists,' we might then consider . . . the queerness of Paul [as the] critical [device] through which the stability of a Lockean model of race is narratively dissolved by the physical and vocal wanderings of characters (real or fictional) unable to employ a more coherent and clean version of a New Negro literary expression. (337)

For Cobb, Paul is Infants' "only main character who openly announces his queerness" as opposed to "the other quasi-queer characters in the novel, especially Raymond himself, who shares an oddly close affective bond with Samuel" (339, 349 n17). Cobb's reading, however, overlooks the ways in which Raymond uses Paul's symbolic queer presence as a kind of black queer vernacular through which he can express his own queerness.¹⁸⁶ Like the novelists Raymond lists—"To Raymond, Thomas Mann and Andre Gide were the only living literary giants"—Paul's writing

¹⁸⁵ Cobb refers here to Robert E. Hemenway. In the recently published, Wrapped in Rainbows: The Life of Zora Neale Hurston, (published three years after Cobb's essay), biographer Valerie Boyd finds Nugent to be a compatriot of Hurston's, both aesthetically and otherwise.

¹⁸⁶ Thurman, too, expresses Infants' queerness through borrowing from Jigger's.

enables him to voice his more than “affective bond” with Stephen Jorgenson (Carl Van Vechten), not Samuel Carter (35).

Cobb quotes from the scene where Stephen reads aloud Paul’s letters that Raymond shows him, but Cobb uses the scene to argue Raymond’s disgust with Paul:

Paul is thought to risk the kinds of substantial work Raymond sees as crucial for the Renaissance’s insured longevity. Paul, for instance, is described as “an illustration of my [Ray’s] statement that the more intellectual and talented Negroes of my generation are among the most pathetic people in the world today.” What enables Raymond to articulate this damning sentiment is a condemnation of two things: first, the sentence follows a reading of Paul’s letter art, riddled with Paul’s excessive hubris and self-proclaimed assurance of his literary superiority; and second, the statement recalls his decadent behavior indicated through both his wandering ways, as well as his explicit confirmation of his queer lifestyle. (339)

Cobb’s assertion that Raymond is “riddled with Paul’s excessive hubris [and] his decadent behavior” overlooks Raymond’s praise of him in *Infants*’ first chapter, when he first welcomes Stephen to 267 House. Samuel calls Paul “the most impossible person in the world”; but Raymond counters: “Paul is one of the most delightful people in the world. I only hope he drops in before you leave, Steve. You’ll enjoy meeting him” (12). Sure, Paul’s plan to “pass for Spanish” annoys Raymond; but by the end of the chapter Raymond smiles along with Paul’s guffaws when Eustace (Iolanthe Sydney) informs them that she is going to turn 267 House “into a dormitory

for Negro working girls between the ages of eighteen and thirty” (263, 268). Paul’s crack that Eustace plans “to play Queen Sappho to this new Isle of Lesbos” spoils the three weeks’ notice Eustace was going to give them; yet Raymond does not curse Paul for his “excessive hubris.” He only feels lonely after the end of Niggeratti Manor:

Raymond felt very much alone. It was amazing how in such a short time his group of friends had become separate entities, wrenched apart, scattered. . . . Paul migrated to Greenwich Village after having been expelled from Niggeratti Manor for obscene lèse majesté, and so immured in the idiocies of another lunatic fringe that he had no time for subway trips to Harlem. (271)

Raymond’s feelings of neglect inspire his flippant remark about “another lunatic fringe” of Paul’s. A similar defensiveness makes Raymond call Paul one of “the most pathetic people in the world today.”

Raymond shows Paul’s letters to Stephen during their reconciliation after Stephen sent Raymond a letter telling him “I’m gone. Don’t ask me why. I can’t stand it any longer. That party last night finished me. I’ve drunk my fill of Harlem” (190). Raymond returns a missive explaining that “A messenger boy will bring your clothes. I do not care to see you just yet. I cannot see that any good can come of it” (193). Raymond is distressed that he left without saying goodbye, and without Raymond confessing his feelings. Such a confession is unnecessary: Stephen deduces why Raymond has “difficulties” with Stephen kissing Aline but, ironically, Paul interrupts

them.¹⁸⁷ Nonetheless, Raymond offers Paul's words when Stephen returns, after they disagree about literary trends. As usual, literature works as a metaphor for sexuality. Raymond asserts that "we are living in an age when only the abnormal [in a Thomas

¹⁸⁷ The following is the conversation Stephen and Raymond have:

"I'm glad you came in, Steve"

"You don't look very joyful." He threw his books down on the table. "Did you finish your review?"

"Yeah . . . with difficulties."

"What kind of difficulties?"

"Yours, Steve."

"Mine? . . . Say . . . what the hell's eating you tonight?"

"Your love affairs."

"Will you talk sense? Or are you drunk?"

"Janet's been talking to me about you."

"What've I done to her?"

"She says she loves you."

"Horse collar."

"She says you prefer Aline to her, because Aline's almost white, but she's going to make you despise her brown skin."

"Are you completely nuts?"

"I'm not that imaginative, Steve"

"But I've hardly noticed the girl, since I've been chasing Aline."

"Since? Then you have given her a play?"

"Oh, hell, I've kissed her, I guess, when I was drunk, and she's asked me to take her out every night for the past week but I've always had a date with Aline, and couldn't. I didn't think she was serious."

"Well, she thinks she is. She's all het up to have a white man. Since you're the most desirable one in sight you'd better give her a break."

"I'm not that ambitious."

"Must you be monogamous? Go ahead, give the girl something to be thrilled about."

"Ray . . . you're the damnest . . . What's eating you anyhow? If I thought . . ."

He was interrupted by Paul bursting excitedly into the room.
(100-101)

Mann's Tonio Kröger kind of way] is interesting" while Stephen retorts that "the abnormal is receding into its proper sphere" (222). Raymond relies on Paul's letters, which in turn reference Nugent's "Smoke,"¹⁸⁸ to finally voice what their "mental affinity" means to him (194).¹⁸⁹ Raymond uses them to express why "their friendship had become something precious, inviolate and genuine" in Raymond's heart, why "they had become intimate in [one month] as if they had known one another since childhood" (34). When after reading aloud the letters Stephen remarks "He must be crazy," Raymond defends Paul: "Not crazy, Steve . . . merely an illustration of my statement that the more intellectual and talented Negroes of my generation are among the most pathetic people in the world today" (225).

Paul's so-called "decadent behavior" inspires Raymond. Paul's letters do not help Raymond consummate his "abnormal" intimacy with Stephen. But voicing his desires through Paul arouses Raymond's artistic energy:

After Stephen's unexpected visit and their long conversation together, Raymond seemed to have developed a new store of energy. For three

¹⁸⁸ In Paul's letter he proclaims, "You lack the most priceless jewel best to set yourself off. I am that jewel. An artist. A genius. A citizen of the world" (224). In "Smoke," Alex calls himself a misunderstood "tragic genius" like any other great "artist." He makes this claim with another reference to Oscar Wilde: "was it Wilde who had said . . . a cigarette is the most perfect pleasure because it leaves one unsatisfied . . . the breeze gave to him a perfume stolen from some wandering lady of the evening . . . it pleased him . . . why was it that men wouldn't use perfumes . . . they should . . . each and every one of them liked perfumes . . . the man who denied that was a liar . . . or a coward . . . but if ever he were to voice that thought . . . express it . . . he would be misunderstood . . . a fine feeling that . . . to be misunderstood . . . it made him feel tragic and great . . . but may be it would be nicer to be understood . . . but no . . . no great artist is" (35).

¹⁸⁹ Raymond refers to Stephen's "affection and mental affinity for me" in his letter to Stephen explaining that a messenger will send his clothes (194).

days and nights, he had secluded himself in his room and devoted all his time to the continuance of his novel. For three years it had remained a project. Now he was making rapid progress. (226)

Raymond's energy starts the Harlem Renaissance chapter of Infants, Chapter XXI, during which Dr. Parkes (Locke) tries to put together for "the ever increasing number of younger Negro artists and intellectuals gathering in Harlem . . . a distinguished salon . . . for the purpose of exchanging ideas and expressing and criticizing individual theories" (228). However, Raymond's queerly-inflected conversations with Stephen about art, literature, and theory throughout Infants undercut Dr. Parkes' "first and last salon" (245). Dr. Parkes, who "played mother hen to a brood of chicks, he having appointed himself guardian angel to the current set of younger Negro artists," succeeds only in creating a heated debate (180).

Moreover, Chapter XXI consistently highlights the queer dialogue that informs the movement hardly led by Dr. Parkes. Sweetie May Carr (Hurston) brags about "find[ing] queer places for whites to go in Harlem" (230). Paul and Raymond lambaste Dr. Parkes' New Negro urging that they "must not, like your paleface contemporaries, wallow in the mire of post-Victorian license. You have too much at stake" (234). Helping them is "Cedric Williams [Eric Walrond], a West Indian, whose first book, a collection of short stories with a Caribbean background, in Raymond's opinion, marked him as one of three Negroes writing who actually had something to say, and also some concrete idea of style" (232-233). Again, like Locke's published review of Fire!!, Dr. Parkes does not condemn "the decadent strain which seems to have filtered into most of your work" per se (234). He concedes at the salon, "I know

you are children of the age and all that,” but urges that they should not write about it (234). As Parkes cheers, “you are the outstanding personalities in a new generation [who] will cause the American white man to reestimate [sic] the Negro’s value to his civilization, cause him to realize that the American black man is too valuable ... to be kept down-trodden and segregated” (234). In order to realize this equality, Parkes dictates, “the young Negro artist must go back to his pagan [African] heritage for inspiration. [He] should develop [his] inherited spirit” (236-7).

The first to speak out, Paul quips “I ain’t got no African spirit” (237). Paul’s response inspires further critique from Raymond and Cedric, who eventually storms out of the salon in protest. Paul also elicits giggles and an ambiguous look from Tony Crews (Langston Hughes): “Sweetie May giggled openly at [Paul’s come-back], as did Carl Denny’s¹⁹⁰ wife, Annette. The rest looked appropriately sober, save for Tony, whose eyes continued to telegraph mischievously to Raymond” (237). Unlike “Smoke”’s more suggestive implications that “Langston must have known Jurgen,” Infants offers only Tony’s inscrutable glances (35). Still, the question of Tony’s queerness concerns Raymond throughout the salon:

Tony was the most close-mouthed and cagey individual Raymond had ever known when it came to personal matters. He fended off every attempt to probe into his inner self and did this with such an unconscious and naïve air that the prober soon came to one of two

¹⁹⁰ Carl Denny could be Winold Reiss, the Bavarian artist whose drawings accompany The New Negro.

conclusions: Either Tony had no depth whatsoever, or else he was too deep for plumbing by ordinary mortals. (232)

Raymond's questions only intensify when, after Dr. Parkes launches his New Negro directive,

a glance at the rest of the people in the room assured [Ray] that most of them had not the slightest understanding of what had been said, nor any ideas on the subject, whatsoever. Once more Dr. Parkes clucked for discussion. No one ventured a word. Raymond could see that Cedric, like himself, was full of argument, and also like him, did not wish to appear contentious at such an early stage in the discussion. Tony winked at Raymond when he caught his eye, but the expression on his face was as inscrutable as ever. (235)

Tony's winks may not reveal his sexuality but Tony's self-conscious playing with Raymond demonstrates that he knows what Raymond (and others) are thinking about him. Like Hughes' Whitman-referencing letter to Locke, Tony understands the black queer signifying practice that *Infants* relates, one that relies on the reader (or, here, Raymond "receiving" Tony's wink) to recognize not just an individual queer character but an epistemological, associative process signaled through vernacular, the queer "networks of affiliation" I trace between Hughes, Lila Marshall, Zora Neale Hurston, and W. E. B. DuBois' use of queer in Chapter One. In this way, Tony, Raymond, Stephen, Sweetie May, are as involved in this practice in *Infants* as Paul. *Infants* does not distinguish between the queer and "quasi-queer" characters that Michael Cobb finds. Locating their queer affiliation around Tony/Hughes' "inscrutable" expressions

foreshadows the way Hughes' sexual biography has become a locus for contemporary panic and speculation about Harlem's black queer sexualities, as I discuss in my second chapter.

At the same time, Thurman had the foresight to broaden the queer affiliation in Infants to depict more comprehensively the ways in which black queer vernacular was maintained by a variety of interlocutors. Even Euphoria Blake¹⁹¹ contributes to Infants' black queer vernacular when she delivers an embellished "story of her life" to a captive audience at Niggeratti Manor (78). Her story commands attention like Paul's vagabond adventures for which "everyone remained silent and listened intently as if hypnotized" (44). Euphoria relates how a lynched black man still dangling from a telegraph pole "haunted me day and night" when attending "a little state normal school in the backwoods of Georgia" (78, 80, 78). Because she stayed to herself and had nightmares,

The girls used to shun me. The matrons were mean. **They said I was kinda queer.** I guess I was. My only recreation was to go off in the woods and read. The solitude there sorta pacified me. It was just about this time that I begin to notice copies of The Crisis in the school library. From them I learned about the National Association for the

¹⁹¹ I am not certain who Euphoria Blake is modeled after. In Gentleman Jigger there is a similar Euphoria character whose name Nugent marks out and renames Yolande. From the "biographical" details that Infants gives of Euphoria during her Paul-like story she tells from pages 78 to 90, she could be "the maid of a prominent actress" who threw a party that "Carl and Langston ate black beans and rice at" on 7 July 1926 (Rampersad, Volume I 133).

Advancement of Colored People. And I also got a crush on Joan of Arc.
(80, emphasis mine)

Euphoria makes a connection between queerness and reading that also racially marks her. Her perceived queerness in solitude and reading leads her to The Crisis and the NAACP. Her crush on Joan of Arc also works as racial expression:

I don't blame the folks in the school for thinking me crazy. I went to that school for three years and was left absolutely alone. It was only in the woods that I was happy. I went there constantly. They wasn't far from the campus. And no one ever bothered me. By that time I was determined to be a black Joan of Arc, pledged to do something big for my race. (80-81)

While Euphoria is not a lesbian—Paul is most intrigued by her story when she mentions her white male lover—her easy emulation of Paul reinforces Infants' black queer vernacular as an open epistemological and associative process. Queerness is not the exclusive purview of queer men and women. Plus, queerness needs an audience—someone to recognize it as such. Euphoria models her story-telling after Paul for an audience at the Manor; and her school mates identify Euphoria's bookish "recreation" as queer.

Paul also signals this open queer process, dependent on reader recognition, when Stephen first asks him about his loudly colored phallic drawings:

"Now, Paul, tell me about your drawings."

"That's easy. I'm a genius. I've never had a drawing lesson in my life, and I never intend to take one. I think that Oscar Wilde is the

greatest man that ever lived. . . . I also like Blake, Dowson, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Poe and Whitman. . . .”

“But that’s not telling me anything about your drawings.”

“Unless you’re dumber than I think, I’ve told you all you need to know.” (24)

Within the hyper-referential narrative structure of Infants, Paul’s signifying “all you need to know” with references to Wilde, Verlaine, Rimbaud, and Whitman makes plain that Paul’s queerness is well understood by literate people. Paul continues his literary approach to sexuality when he playfully undermines Samuel Carter after recounting “his latest vagabond adventure,” which interpolates details, images, and Beauty from Nugent’s “Smoke” (44). Samuel wants to corner Paul about Beauty, the gender-less presence in Paul’s adventure who disturbs Samuel’s “natural conservatism” on race issues (29). Paul’s queer response, though, signifies less his own sexual practice—what Samuel wants to reveal in order to marginalize Paul—than to a democratic, inclusive poly-sexuality. After Paul answers “Certainly” to both Samuel’s “Did you ever have an affair with a woman?” and “Did you ever indulge in homosexuality?” questions, Samuel asks the following:

“Which did you prefer?” [Samuel] smiled to himself. Now he had him. Surrender was inevitable. His eyes prematurely evinced the light of victory. Prematurely, because Paul found the one available loophole. With a toss of his head, he quickly replied:

“I really don’t know. After all there are no sexes, only sex majorities, and the primary function of the sex act is enjoyment. Therefore I enjoyed one experience as much as the other.” (47)

Paul’s queer “loopholes” continue—even through his orchestrated suicide at Infants’ close, an event Eleonore van Notten reads reductionistically as Thurman’s “compulsive need to bring closure to this phase in his life. The novel must be seen in the context of this need for cathartic relief from the experiences of Harlem’s black bohemia and from the people associated with it” (246).¹⁹² By reading Gentleman Jigger’s last chapter too literally, Van Notten asserts that Thurman’s need to break away from Harlem’s black bohemia was largely fueled by his “declining affection [for and] changing relationship” with Nugent (295). Similarly, Michael Cobb reads Thurman’s representation of Nugent’s/Paul’s queerness as “an example of race-betrayal” (340). Through Paul, Infants warns that “one risks danger if one becomes too individually-directed [like Paul], if one does not care about the race community one comes from, or, in other words, if one becomes queer” (340). But Paul’s dramatic wrist slashing “with a highly ornamented Chinese dirk [in a bathtub while wearing] a crimson mandarin robe [with his head wrapped] in a batik scarf of his own designing” points more to Infants’ vernacular readings of bohemianism than the melodrama van Notten or Cobb insist upon (282-3). Paul’s suicide does personify the end of the

¹⁹² Cobb over-reads Paul’s death as well. He uses it to reinforce how “rude queers” invoke “a racial death-sentence” in Harlem literature (332). To prove this, Cobb includes but three texts, Nugent’s “Smoke, Lilies and Jade,” Nella Larsen’s Passing, and Thurman’s Infants, the latter two end in a death. Had Cobb included more black queer texts of the 1920s, the deaths that Thurman and Larsen write here would seem less significant.

Movement's era in the novel. More importantly, how Paul kills himself points to the link between queerness and reading that black queer vernacular professes.

Before Paul kills himself, he papers the floor with pages from the manuscript of his novel called Wu Sing: the Geisha Man whose contents are “rendered illegible” by the water and blood that overflow from his ceremonial tub (283). All that remains is its dedication page: “To / Huysmans’ Des Esseintes and Oscar Wilde’s Oscar Wilde / Ecstatic Spirits with whom I Cohabit / And whose golden spores of decadent pollen / I shall broadcast and fertilize / It is written / Paul Arbian” (284). Wu Sing’s dedication reinforces Infants’ own hyper-referentiality. Dedicating his now “illegible” novel to a character and to Wilde’s characterization of himself, Paul’s final act supports the blurring between person and character throughout Infants. And the rest of Infants’ final page references the narrative of the Movement itself. Underneath the dedication

he had drawn a distorted, inky black skyscraper, modeled after Niggerati Manor, and on which were focused an array of blindingly white beams of light. The foundation of this building was composed of crumbling stone. At first glance it could be ascertained that the skyscraper would soon crumple and fall, leaving the dominating white lights in full possession of the sky. (284)

Like Infants, Wu Sing seemingly indicts what it portrays as the failures of Harlem’s renaissance. Yet even Ray’s assessment of the “sodden mass” of what remains of Wu Sing is only “at first glance.” Infants and Wu Sing’s final signifying squarely places Thurman’s contribution within a self-conscious body of Harlem’s black queer vernacular. Thurman’s voice, as Dorothy West recalls, “was without accent, deep and

resonant. That voice was the most memorable thing about him, welling up out of his too frail body and wasting its richness in unprintable recountings,” like Wu Sing’s sodden pages (77).

Another “unprintable” queer voice was even more easily discarded since Augustus Granville Dill did not publish literature. But Dill was no stranger to the Harlem Renaissance. A graduate of Harvard and Atlanta University, where he also earned a Master’s Degree, and worked as Associate Professor of Sociology for three years, Dill was active in the NAACP and edited Brownie Book, the magazine for children that was also the home of Hughes’ first two published poems. As Bruce Kellner explains, Dill was no less involved in Harlem’s black queer vernacular, choosing to queerly class himself à la Wilde: his “personal flamboyance brought him north” to Harlem, and he was “something of a dandy . . . recognized by the bright chrysanthemum he wore in his buttonhole” (The Harlem Renaissance 100).¹⁹³ Or as Arnold Rampersad attests, Dill was yet another queer man smitten with Langston Hughes: “A short, brown, gushing man with a very big head, Dill was a skilled lover of the ‘pianoforte,’ as he called it. . . . Dill was so entranced by Hughes’s first visit that ‘from that day until this—and even to the end,’ he writes to Hughes on 21 January 1951 as Ruth to Hughes’ Naomi, ‘Where I am there may ye be also’” (qtd. in Volume I 53-54). Dill was also “quite fond” of Locke. On the same day in 1951, he writes Locke

¹⁹³ In Who Was That Man?: A Present for Mr. Oscar Wilde (1988), Neil Bartlett elucidates the importance of flowers in metonymically representing homosexuality at the turn of last century: “In inventing homosexual characters who are all our Ladies of the Flowers, [artists] gave shape and colour to a phenomenon that had only just been given a name—**homosexuality**. Beneath the corrupt glamour of the orchids, beneath the strange perfume of the Parma violets which [Oscar Wilde’s] Dorian [Gray] wears in his collar, we can see a new mythology taking root” (46).

about his recent visit to New York: “I was glad to see you looking so much more like your own dear self—as I well remember you now many years ago. Keep that up, too! As I grow older (not old) I see so many, many reasons for deep and abiding friendships—I have enjoyed so many and still do—and that makes life worth living!”¹⁹⁴ Twenty-five years earlier, Dill was equally thrilled for another vision of Locke, a picture he sent Dill from Paris, as he explains in a 6 October 1926 letter: “For years and years I’ve wanted ‘you,’ to frame and hang on the walls of my small apartment. Now I have ‘you’—framed and hung, and all done with due ceremony and great joy!”

During the sixteen years Dill worked as the “gnome-like”¹⁹⁵ business manager of the Crisis, as David Levering Lewis explains, “Du Bois took their interdependence, his and Dill’s, for granted; whereas it sustained Dill’s very identity” (W. E. B. Du Bois 204). In the fall of 1927, Du Bois noticed that Dill needed a vacation. As Lewis recounts,

[Du Bois] had encouraged [Dill] to attend a family reunion, his first intwenty-five years, and Dill returned to work claiming to be refreshed, though obviously still tired. Shortly afterward, this cultured, fastidious man’s life fell apart in a homosexual encounter and arrest in a public lavatory. Du Bois’s reaction was one of formal Victorian displeasure masked by genuine compassion. Never for a moment had

¹⁹⁴ Alain Locke Papers, Box 164-23 Folder 28, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University. All of Dill’s correspondence to Locke is in this folder.

¹⁹⁵ Horace Mann Bond, whom Du Bois hired as a special research assistant in 1926, called Dill “gnome-like” and described his office as “something out of Dickens” (qtd. in Lewis, Du Bois 204).

he “contemplated continuing my life work without you by my side,” his letter terminating their relationship began. But the work of The Crisis was more important than individuals. (204-205)

The whispers behind Lewis’ narration of that fall—Dill’s distant relationship with his family, his “fatigue,” his collapse after being “caught”—imply a troubled man fearful of public acknowledgment of his homosexuality, an image that contradicts “the bright chrysanthemum [beaming from] his buttonhole.” They even contradict Du Bois’ urging him in his termination letter to “forget the little incident that has so worried you out of all proportion to its significance” (qtd. in Lewis 205). Lewis argues that the financial reasons for firing Dill were less important than Du Bois’ “Victorian displeasure” over the “little incident”: “Du Bois had already begun to think that Dill would have to go even before the ‘little incident.’ Afterward, however, he heaped more than a fare share of blame on Dill for the [Crisis] falling circulation, confiding to Dill’s sister that, ‘although he has tried hard to stem the tide,’ the business manager simply was not ‘fit for the work’” (205).¹⁹⁶

Lewis quotes from what he calls Du Bois’ “self-reproachful admission” in his posthumously-published autobiography to support his focus on Du Bois’ “displeasure” with Dill’s arrest (205). Yet the profound regret that Du Bois admits in his passage about Dill (the words Lewis quotes are in bold) is not necessarily the product of Dill’s arrest or his sexuality:

In the midst of my career there burst on me a new and undreamed-of aspect of sex. A young man, long my disciple and student, then my

¹⁹⁶ Du Bois wrote to Mary Dill Broaddus on 14 November 1927.

cohelper and successor to part of my work, was suddenly arrested for molesting young men in public places. I had before that time no conception of homosexuality. I had never understood the tragedy of an Oscar Wilde. I dismissed my coworker forthwith, and spent heavy days regretting my act. (Lester 730)

Yes, Du Bois fired Dill soon after his arrest (forthwith); but even by Lewis' account, Du Bois had considered firing him before the "little incident" because of money problems at the Crisis. Moreover, if Du Bois was truly aghast over Dill's "new and undreamed-of aspect of sex," he would not have let Dill retain his post until February 1928. Nor would Du Bois have used Nugent-esque references in his mention of Dill's departure from the Crisis in the March 1928 issue. Du Bois praises Dill, "by nature and training, the sensitive artist," yet relays that despite his "loyal and efficient service," "it is with deep regret" that Dill leaves "with the good wishes of all" (96). Maybe Du Bois "never understood the tragedy of an Oscar Wilde"; but he was breaking bread with "sensitive artists" regularly. Du Bois' secretary at the Crisis from early 1927 to 1928, Marvel Jackson Cooke remembers "there was a club in [Greenwich] Village where Dr. Du Bois ate. Many of the young literati would go there. I was included and I met them. My social life was with them" (Currie, "Interview #3" 61). Included in this "close-knit group" were Langston Hughes and Eric Walrond (61).

Du Bois and the magazine's financial crisis worsened after Dill's last day. Their relationship further deteriorated. Dill wrote to ask for his last pay check; but Du Bois held the \$125 balance of Dill's salary "until we clear away some things," as Du

Bois explained in a 5 January 1929 letter—almost a full year after Dill’s last day of work (qtd. in Lewis 288). To make matters worse, Du Bois reminded Dill that “the debts that we are paying now were accumulated while you had full charge of our business” (qtd. in Lewis 288). Dill took this accusation as the dissolution of the trust and mutual admiration that had guided their long friendship. The loss of Du Bois—not his arrest—was what cause Dill’s life to fall apart. As Lewis admits, “For sixteen dedicated years, the forty-six-year-old, bachelor business manager had had no other life than The Crisis and its master” (204). Of the Crisis’ debts, Lewis holds steadfastly to Du Bois’ other motives:

It would be unpardonable if a mere business matter were to undermine a twenty-five-year bond between the Du Bois family and the “one man’ Dill family,” he wrote affectionately. The record is unclear as to whether the salary was ever paid, but by the end of 1930 Du Bois learned that Dill was living on money borrowed from prominent whites. “There is no reason in the world why he shouldn’t go to work and support himself,” the editor upbraided the broken man’s sister. Privately, though, Du Bois knew that there was another reason for Dill’s indigence. “His mind is giving way,” he told Arthur Spingarn. (288)

When Du Bois wrote to Spingarn on 30 September 1930, his mind was “giving way” as well: “Du Bois had been compelled to defer repeatedly repayment of [daughter] Yolande’s portion of the French divorce to his former son-in-law,” Countée Cullen (288). Du Bois also unsuccessfully pled to Spingarn “to save his Harlem property

[whose] second mortgage of \$6,409.07 with Nail & Parker was months overdue” (288).

Of course, Du Bois had been concerned about the Crisis’ money problems since the fall of 1927 and the spring of 1928. Marvel Jackson Cooke remembers that

Dr. Du Bois told me he was leaving the Crisis, and that he felt kind of responsible for me, and he wanted me to know it, to make plans for my future. I didn't want to leave New York for many reasons, some of them purely social. I went looking for a job. It seemed to me to be logical to go to a magazine or a newspaper. The only newspaper I knew was the Amsterdam News, and I applied for a job and very easily got one. [I had a] much better job at the Crisis, but I needed a job, you know. There weren't that many around. For social reasons, I wanted to stay in New York and not go back to Minnesota. (Currie, “Interview #4” 66-67)

Du Bois’ urging to find a new job came with the same warmth Du Bois saved for friends, in private.¹⁹⁷ Cooke explains that

¹⁹⁷ In fact, in a light moment in an interview with Kathleen Currie, Cooke implies that Du Bois was **very** friendly:

Currie: So did Dr. Du Bois work directly with you?

Cooke: Yes, yes. We worked together once a month. Off the record, I could tell you some interesting things about that, too. [Laughter.]

Currie: Okay, well, do you want to tell me, and then if you want to take them off——

Cooke: No, no. I'll tell you when we have dinner or something.

Currie: What else did you learn from Dr. Du Bois?

Cooke: How to make a cocktail. [Laughter.]

people felt that Dr. Du Bois was very, very stiff and unapproachable [yet] he was actually the warmest person on that staff. He called everybody by their first name. He explained to me that he had to learn to not be friendly for the public, because when he went out to speak, after a speech, people would come up and shake his hand so hard that he was almost ill when he'd leave. (Currie, "Interview #3" 55)

If Du Bois extended such concern for Cooke, whom he had only just met and employed, certainly he must have extended the same to Dill. As Cooke remembers, "we were all treated equally. I'm sure of that" (Currie, "Interview #3" 55). Only after Dill left the Crisis and did not seek and secure a new job like Cooke did Du Bois write about Dill's mind "giving way." Dill was publicly embarrassing him because he wasn't maintaining, either through employment or style, his middle-class status. In 1931, Du Bois "received a distressing note from the Civic Club secretary that Dill was sleeping in the lounge, which triggered the sternest of reproaches to an associate who was becoming a discredit to the race: 'Your actions are distressing and humiliating to all of your friends beyond endurance'" (Lewis 288).

By not listening to the nuances between public and private included in his biography of Du Bois, Lewis proves what Du Bois and Dill argue about the seductive

Currie: What cocktail?

Cooke: He was a very friendly person. Did I tell you that before?

Currie: Not in quite this way.

[. . .]

Currie: What was his favorite cocktail?

Cooke: Eggnog. He used to make them. (Currie, "Interview #3" 54-55).

but gossip allure of morality when discussing race matters in Morals and Manners among Negro Americans, the Atlanta University report they co-edited (1914):

“Manners and morals lend themselves but seldom to exact measurement.

Consequently, general impressions, limited observations and wild gossip supply the usual data; and these make it extremely difficult to weigh the evidence and to answer the charge” (5).¹⁹⁸ The general impressions and limited observations Lewis provides in his account of Du Bois and Dill supports the separation of Harlem from its queer “streetgeist and folklore” in Harlem Renaissance scholarship. It perpetuates the misrepresentation of the complex relationship between public literature and private lives, between racial uplift and black queer men, which can be seen even in W. E. B. Du Bois’ reviews. His review of Claude McKay’s best-selling Home to Harlem—it “nauseates me, and after the dirtier parts of its filth [associated with queer character Ray] I feel distinctly like taking a bath”—does not contradict his later declaration of ignorance and regret about firing Dill after his arrest “for molesting young men in public places” (“The Browsing Reader” 202; Lester 730). For Du Bois, McKay’s novel was “dirty” because it centered queer Ray within a public medium organized by racial uplift. Erudition should not be distracted by “flesh values,” refined by Locke or otherwise, that could evoke racist social myths for readers. As Du Bois and Dill explain in Morals and Manners, there is a perception that “the Negroes as a race are rude and thotless [sic] in manners and altogether quite hopeless in sexual morals, in regard for property rights and in reverence for truth” (5). Du Bois only considered Dill

¹⁹⁸ First published as a book by the Atlanta University Press in 1914, this report a social study also doubled as the proceedings of the 18th Annual Conference for the Study of the Negro Problems, held at Atlanta University, on Monday, 26 May 1913.

“thotless in manners and altogether hopeless” when he publicly disgraced him. Yet even then, he protested what he saw as Dill’s willful indigence and his refusal to carry on the intellectual legacy bequeathed to him—not his queerness. As Lewis explains, “Du Bois was appalled when artists arrogated the right to express themselves without due, circumspect regard for racial sensibilities or just plain good manners” (175).

Chapter Four: Speaking black queer vernacular psychoanalytically: Du Bois and Johnson, Fanon and Salkey

As an intellectual, Du Bois was obviously concerned about the continuity of intellectual generations, what I would call the reproduction of Race Men. This anxiety permeates and structures the [chapters in The Souls of Black Folk] on his son, on Alexander Crummell, and on the two Johns. The map of intellectual mentors he draws for us is a map of male production and reproduction that traces in its form, but displaces through its content, biological and sexual reproduction. It is reproduction without women, and is a final closure to Du Bois's claim to be "flesh of the flesh and bone of the bone," for in the usurpation of the birth of woman from Adam's rib, the figure of the intellectual and race leader is born of and engendered by other males.

—Hazel Carby, Race Men (1998)

Generations of Howard undergraduates could recall [Alain Locke's] classroom iteration that the "highest intellectual duty is the duty to be cultured." But many of the young men also became intimately acquainted with the cultured philosophy professor's epicene creed of the "superiority of the third sex," and, as the legendary Will Marion Cook's son, Mercer, revealed with mellow disapproval years after Locke's death, many a yokel freshman's head was turned in the beautiful apartment just off campus on R Street Northwest.

—David Levering Lewis, W. E. B. Du Bois: The Fight for Equality and The American Century, 1919-1963 (2000)

In men the most complete mental masculinity can be accompanied with inversion.

—Sigmund Freud, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (1905)

For W. E. B. Du Bois, intellectual generations engendered by other males come from celebrating "storytelling, versifying, painting, and the rest . . . to the extent that society stood to gain something positive from them" (Lewis 175). As William L. Andrews, Frances Smith Foster, and Richard Yarborough deduce in The Norton Anthology of African American Literature, Du Bois' social and aesthetic ambitions came from "his childhood in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, [where] he had

cherished a fondness for books and a desire for intellectual distinction” (606). They claim that Du Bois first wrote of these ambitions “on his twenty-fifth birthday [in 1893], while studying for his Ph.D. at the University of Berlin, [when he] confided to his journal the following goals: ‘to make a name in science, to make a name in art and thus to raise my race’” (606).¹⁹⁹ Yet years before his trips to Germany, his ambitions were also formed by his mother, Mary Burghardt Du Bois, and the burden she was to him. His “ambivalent feelings” about her, as Claudia Tate argues, “define the unique sexual constitution of his fantasmatic pattern for structuring his political attachments” in his writing (57).²⁰⁰

In part, Du Bois’ ambivalence came from “his mother’s sexual transgression,” an “illegitimate” son born five years before Du Bois (58). His birth “embarrassed [Du Bois] and made him silently question his own birth” (58). Added to her “transgression” were her low class standing and dark skin, which literally colored him much more than his light-skinned, mulatto,²⁰¹ and middle-class father did. According to David Levering Lewis, the young Du Bois also believed that his mother “had deserted his father and was largely responsible for their demeaning material predicament” (qtd. in Tate 58). Her failing health when Du Bois was a high school

¹⁹⁹ Perhaps his scholarly pursuits gave voice as well to these heady claims he makes in the same journal entry, what Du Bois names “Quarter-Centennial Celebration of My Life”: “I rejoice as a strong man to win a race and I am strong—is it egoism—is it assurance—or is it the silent call of a world spirit that makes me feel that I am royal and that beneath my sceptre a world of kings shall bow” (qtd. in Tate 68). This “grandiose, indeed regal discourse,” as Tate labels it, is not much different than Alain Locke’s notorious self-promotion.

²⁰⁰ Tate focuses on the “fantasmatic pattern” in his novel Dark Princess (1928).

²⁰¹ I use **mulatto** advisedly as the term used then to describe people of mixed racial ancestry.

senior amplified his feelings about her, both sad and resentful. Sociologist Allison Davis,²⁰² whose life work focused on the personality and development of children and adolescents, particularly the influence of social class on learning, argues that “Du Bois was relieved when his mother suddenly died. He felt free” (qtd. in Tate 58). Her death in 1885 did enable his college career, and thus helped him realize his ambitions: in sympathy and respect after her death, “the townspeople of Great Barrington, Massachusetts, who had long marveled at his genius, took up a collection and sent him to Fisk University, thereby launching him in his career of racial uplift” (56-57). Tate contends that since Mary Burghardt Du Bois’ dark skin “placed Du Bois decidedly behind what he would later call the ‘veil’ of racial difference, . . . Du Bois’s veil also acts as a trope of [his] ambivalent feelings [towards his] lost mother” (58-59). Du Bois confirms his mother’s influence on his racial reading when he dedicates his library to her in his twenty-fifth birthday journal entry.

Du Bois’ “veil” in The Souls of Black Folk also signifies queerly. As I illustrate in my second chapter, Du Bois’ “Of the Coming of John” chapter in Souls makes queer its protagonist John Jones’ transcendent desires and recognition of racism. In the story, the black community living with John in Altamaha, Georgia, recognizes casually the queerness that informs his self-conscious intellect, his bookishness at the Wells Institute, and his attraction to music for self-expression. John lives internally through activities that aspire to a kind of aesthetic transcendence. Thus, the “intellectual distinction” John Jones earns at the Institute (much like the

²⁰² Davis was the first black scholar to be hired and receive tenure at a major, predominantly white university. He was hired by the University of Chicago, and worked for more than 40 years there.

distinction Du Bois desired as a child) incorporates what David Levering Lewis discounts as “Alain Locke’s brand of homosexuality, circumspect yet evident, [which] was a factor in Du Bois’s distaste for the man” (162). Certainly, Du Bois saw his own “distinction” differently than Locke’s; in the January 1926 *Crisis*, Du Bois warns, “If Mr. Locke’s thesis is insisted on too much, it is going to turn the Negro renaissance into decadence” (“Our Book Shelf” 141). Yet while Du Bois was not known for the “epicene” cultural orientation that Locke brandished at Howard or during “private tutoring” sessions where many a freshman’s “head was turned,” as Mercer Cook attests in my epigraph,²⁰³ Du Bois’ intellectual instruction was equally desirous. As Tate defines it, the force of such desire cannot be curtailed to just “sexual longings but all kinds of wanting, wishing, yearning, longing, and striving—conscious and partially unconscious” (10). Despite the presence of this longing in black writing, scholars “seldom recognize the surplus of desire associated with black subjectivity because . . . we persist in reductively defining black subjectivity as political agency” (10).

The “erotic delight” that Tate finds in Du Bois’ writings on art and propaganda, the way Du Bois “suggests that the public satisfaction of racial equality is connected and somewhat analogous to the private pleasure of eroticism, for eros and polity are mutually signifying,” comes from the interdependent discourses at the turn of the twentieth century which influenced him and to which he responded with “the veil” and “double-consciousness,” metaphors of black epistemology that have since

²⁰³ Mercer Cook’s disapproval of Locke is curiously ironic, since his father Will Marion Cook and his mother Abbie Mitchell were part of the “artistry” that, as Thomas H. Wirth asserts, helped to serve as a bohemian model for the young Richard Bruce Nugent to follow.

guided scholarship on black people and culture (49). Du Bois' work to make a name in science and in art "thus to raise my race" had to lift his metaphors through the threefold mesh of the burgeoning method and theory of psychoanalysis, the racial metaphors in sexology that helped bring "the homosexual" into language as such (and as a host of other terms, "invert" and "third sex," among others), and turn-of-the-century discourse on race and spiritualism, which blurred the now expected racial lines differentiating those of African descent from others. These overlapping discourses contributed to what Andrews, Foster, and Yarborough call the "Decades of Disappointment," years racked by racial violence in and out of the courts ("Introduction" 465). Ordained by judges, anti-miscegenation and Jim Crow laws were crowned by Plessy v. Ferguson, the US Supreme Court ruling that blacks and whites be "separate but equal." About this mesh, Siobhan B. Somerville ponders: "Is it merely a historical coincidence that the classification of bodies as either 'homosexual' or 'heterosexual' emerged at the same time that the United States was aggressively policing the imaginary boundary between 'black' and 'white' bodies?" ("Scientific Racism" 245). Another "historical coincidence" is the year of both Plessy v. Ferguson and Freud's first use of psychoanalysis in reference to his new method: 1896.²⁰⁴ 1896 was also the year Freud "first took the fundamental step of equating neurosis with a pathologically repressed, or 'negative' state of sexual perversion, [a] key insight [with

²⁰⁴ In Freud: Biologist of the Mind, Frank J. Sulloway argues that "**psychoanalysis** was used by Freud for the first time with reference to [his] new method in [the following] two papers he drafted almost simultaneously" in 1896: "Heredity and the Aetiology of the Neuroses" and "Further Remarks on the Neuro-Psychoses of Defence" (74).

which] psychoanalysis became an integral part of the nascent science of sexology” (Sulloway 277).

Some scholars admit begrudgingly that Du Bois’ metaphors, “the veil” and “double-consciousness,” were formed during this time, when he finished his Ph.D. at Harvard University under the tutelage of white psychologist William James. Du Bois tells a different story, however: “I landed . . . squarely in the arms of William James, for which God be praised” (qtd. in Hutchinson 36). Such an “embrace” by the man Du Bois calls “my friend and guide to clear thinking” signals a reproduction of the intellectual that expands the map Hazel Carby articulates in my epigraph (qtd. in Hutchinson 36). Racial authenticity impedes black studies scholars from appreciating fully the “embraces” shaping Du Bois’ work. Scholarly racial anxiety takes Du Bois’ northern birthplace, as Paul Gilroy explains, to signify “his life as an inauthentic and insufficiently black [because of the North’s] remoteness from the institution of slavery” (Black Atlantic 116). At the same time, Du Bois must be as “black” as he can be because of his commonly-agreed-upon role as progenitor of black studies.²⁰⁵ Du Bois needs to. Scholars are reticent to admit that the “famed” metaphor by the man Eldridge Cleaver calls “one of the intellectual giants of the modern world” was as much the product of Du Bois’ affiliation and friendship with a white man and his interest in a discourse known for its focus on sexuality, particularly homosexuality, as

²⁰⁵ In the Preface to the Centenary Edition of Souls, Henry Louis Gates Jr. extols Du Bois as not only the “black ‘Person of the Century’” but also as “the first professionally trained historian of the African and African American experience, he was also one of the founding fathers of the discipline of sociology” (vii). See Roderick Ferguson’s Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique for his insightful explanation of the generating and limiting influence of sociology on black studies.

it was the exploration of “the strange meaning of being black here in the dawning of the Twentieth Century” (Soul on Ice 88; Souls 3). By no means am I implying that Du Bois’ metaphors are not his own or not the product of his lived experience as a black man; but the “distress” of cross-racial influence signals more the methodological inertia of African American studies than the result of The Souls of Black Folk being “read with patience,” as Du Bois instructs in its “Forethought” (3). Certainly “my friend and guide” William James, who was part of the “American emphasis upon developmental and functionalist interpretations of psychological phenomena,” and whose chapter on love and sexuality in his Principles of Psychology²⁰⁶ was “remarkably Freudian,” informed some part of Du Bois’ thinking (Sulloway 290). Considering Du Bois’ feelings about his mother and the “stain” of her influence, so to speak, it is hardly unfathomable that he would find interesting Freud’s theories about “hostile impulses against parents (a wish that they should die) [which are] an integral part of neuroses” (qtd. in Sulloway 205).²⁰⁷

Where “patient reading” of the psychological in Du Bois exists, it has been influenced by the recent re-appraisal of Martinique-born Frantz Fanon’s first book Black Skin, White Masks²⁰⁸ as a template for reading race psychoanalytically.

Revaluating Fanon as a psychoanalyst shifts substantially his typical celebration among black writers in the United States as a call-to-arms revolutionary, or what

²⁰⁶ James’ Principles was published in 1890—thirteen years before Souls, the same year Du Bois earned his B.A. from Harvard, and five years before he graduated with his PhD from Harvard. No doubt James taught from and about his Principles during Du Bois’ tenure at Harvard.

²⁰⁷ Freud first wrote about this kind of “sublimation” in 1897.

²⁰⁸ Black Skin was first published in Paris as Peau Noire, Masques Blancs in 1952. An English translation was published in 1967.

Stuart Hall calls a “signifier of a certain brand of incendiary Third World-ism” (“After-life” 14).²⁰⁹ In April 1965, Time magazine saw Fanon somewhat differently, calling him “an apostle of violence” and “a prisoner of hate” (qtd. in Wyrick 155). Of course, scholars have long debated heatedly their different interpretations of Fanon. As Deborah Wyrick cautions, “it would be a mistake [to characterize recent work as] a ‘rediscovery’ of Fanon. The level of political and academic interest in him has remained remarkably constant over the past decades, despite its varying focuses” (151). Fanon signifies in and of himself an ideological commitment that Hortense Spillers calls the “socionom”²¹⁰ of black studies. For example, since The Wretched of the Earth’s English-language debut in 1968,²¹¹ the book contributed quickly to Black Arts rhetoric and to the institutionalizing language of black studies. Bobby Seale, co-founder of the Black Panthers along with Huey P. Newton, reinforces this “historical coincidence” when recalling Newton’s first response to Wretched: “Man, let me tell you, when Huey got a hold of Fanon, and read Fanon ... Huey’d be thinking. Hard. We would sit down with Wretched of the Earth and talk, go over another section or

²⁰⁹ Fanon’s “Third World-ism” came from his meetings with West African nationalists like Ghana’s Kwame Nkrumah, Angola’s Holden Roberto, and Guinea’s Sekou Touré, who used periodically Fanon’s writings as political tools. His work in and writing about Algeria made him a hero; Algeria’s first prime minister Ahmed Ben Bella praised Fanon as “not only our brother-in-arms but also our guide—because through his spiritual and political testament he has bequeathed us a doctrine that guarantees the Algerian Revolution” (qtd. in Wyrick 153).

²¹⁰ I borrow this term from Hortense Spillers who defines “socionom” as “the speaking subject’s involvements with ideological apparatuses, which would embrace, in turn, a theory of domination” (“All the Things” 88). Spillers uses “socionom” to adjust “classical psychoanalytic theory” from what she sees as its “universalizing” assumptions. Borrowing from Louis Althusser, she identifies the ideological state apparatuses embedded in Lacan, for one, that urge an embrace of “a theory of domination.”

²¹¹ Its first publication in Paris as Les damnés de la terre was in 1961.

chapter of Fanon, and Huey would explain it in depth” (qtd. in Wyrick 155). In fact, Fanon’s revolutionism has persisted so that the four case studies closing Wretched of the Earth entitled “Colonial War and Mental Disorders” fade typically from subsequent praise of the book. It seems that Fanon’s critique of “French and international psychiatrists [who seek] to ‘cure’ a native properly [in order] to make him thoroughly a part of a social background of the colonial type” is not as “revolutionary” as his exhortation that successful African decolonization “will only come to pass after a murderous and decisive struggle between [Africans and their European colonizers]” (249-250, 37).

Acknowledging the psychoanalytic worth of Fanon outside the United States has never been as difficult. In the first book-length study of West Indian literature, Islands in Between: Essays on West Indian Literature, also in 1968, Louis James freely acknowledges “the profound psychic wounds of slavery that Frantz Fanon analyzes in The Damned of the Earth [sic]”(3).²¹² Or, in Racial Identity and Individual

²¹² While Louis James is white, Anne Walmsley attests that he, too, had a “Diaspora” upbringing in The Caribbean Artists Movement. Walmsley asserts that James biography and continued work in black literatures established the many common bonds he had with Edward Kamau Braithwaite, and that James was a founding member of the movement (CAM) as well: “Louis James was brought up and educated in Zambia (then Northern Rhodesia); his first academic post after Oxford was in the Extra-Mural Department at Hull, where he introduced African literature. So he shared with [Edward Kamau] Braithwaite first-hand knowledge of Africa, and the scope and challenge of extra-mural university work. Both were far-sighted, energetic and innovative young university lecturers—James was in the process of setting up the first course on West Indian literature at the University of Kent.” As Walmsley demonstrates with the following biographic detail, James helped think though CAM in Jamaica, a few years before it started in London: “Even back in Jamaica [where James taught at the University of the West Indies, Mona, from 1962-1965], I remember talking with Eddie [Braithwaite] about the direction in which a Caribbean artists’ movement might go. there was a need for bringing together, in particular, those who

Consciousness in the Caribbean Novel, published six years later in Guyana, Michael Gilkes illustrates Fanon's commonplace psychic focus (one traceable to Du Bois, as well) by calling the "division of consciousness a peculiarly Caribbean theme, the main leitmotif in the Caribbean novel, and one that is capable of a much deeper and altogether more meaningful formulation than 'a search for identity' suggests" (5). So ordinary is this leitmotif, Gilkes mentions neither Fanon nor Du Bois, even though he interacts with psychoanalytic research like Fanon and uses two-ness to signal an awareness of the "Caribbean condition of racial admixture" (8).

In fact, such Diaspora acceptance of Fanon's complete project helped shape Fanon's psychoanalytic "return" in the States.²¹³ In London in 1995, two events

left the Caribbean to come to London or go to New York. ... I remember being very impressed earlier on by what happened in the formation of Ghana by movements in London" (54-55).

Brathwaite must have had a slightly different perspective on James' scholarship. In his review of Islands, he lambastes it for including work that illustrates "a terrifyingly simple and Eurocentric view [of West Indian literature because of] its selection of writers and more especially in the critical methods used in discussing them" ("Caribbean Critics" 114).

²¹³ In my essay, "The Fact of Blackness: Directives for African American Studies at the Millennium," I argue that the return to Fanon in African American studies scholarship is also part of the millennium-inspired retrospect by those working in the field and its beginnings with the Black Arts movement of the late 1960s. Like other looks back, "the current figuring of Fanon's psycho-analysis is ideologically fraught. Even his recent academic 'return' defers to the ideological residue of the 'political presence' of the Black Arts Movement, a residue which inspired Time magazine to brand Fanon 'an apostle of violence' and 'a prisoner of hate' in 1965 and inspired scholars to overlook the psycho-analytic case studies concluding Les damnés de la terre [Wretched of the Earth] to use his model for committed and informed black activism to justify the Black Panthers' armed resistance. Fanon's 'return' is misleading as well because academic discussion of his psycho-analytic work has been constant since its first publication. This posturing, Deborah Wyrick explains, creates readings of Fanon where 'one scholar's Fanon may bear little resemblance to a second scholar's Fanon, while a third scholar's Fanon is a hybrid of the other two'" (Silberman, "The Fact" 283).

sparked this “return”: Mirage: Enigmas of Race, Difference and Desire, an exhibition, and “Working with Fanon: Contemporary Politics and Cultural Reflection,” a conference, both at the Institute of Contemporary Arts. These events produced the collection The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation,²¹⁴ in which Stuart Hall insists that Fanon’s engagement with Freudian psychoanalysis offers more than “some mere textual or theoretical squabble” with Jacques Lacan’s “mirror stage” (“After-life” 27).²¹⁵ Black Skin explores “a much deeper, more serious, more politically and theoretically resonant problem than that” (27).²¹⁶ Yet similar projections of the foresight and political relevance of Fanon’s vision met resistance during the conference. An irate audience member accused Homi Bhabha of distorting the “real” Fanon: “You have managed to move Fanon from politically committed to some sort of trendy postmodern bullshitter” (Bhabha, et. al. 41).

²¹⁴ The collection culls conference papers from and dialogues with Stuart Hall, Françoise Vergès, Homi K. Bhabha, Kobena Mercer, bell hooks, Lola Young, Isaac Julien, Renée Green, Lyle Ashton Harris, Ntozake Shange, Gilane Tawadros, and others.

²¹⁵ Fanon is primarily interested in Lacan in “The Negro and Psychotherapy,” Chapter 6 of Black Skin. But in teasing out Lacan’s mirror stage, he also engages with work by other French psychoanalysts like Charles Odier and Joachim Marcus.

²¹⁶ Françoise Vergès confirms that Fanon uses Lacan to undermine “colonial psychiatry [which] was heir to both the school of degeneration . . . and social Darwinism” and affirmed the natural, biological inferiority of black people through the notion of “psychological race” (53). One practitioner of “psychological race” was Gustave Le Bon. In 1894, he published Les lois psychologiques de l’évolution des peuples (Psychological Laws of Human Evolution) in which he argues “each people possesses a mental constitution which is as fixed as its anatomical characters,” and “each individual is not only the product of his parents, but also, and in fact above all, of his race, or, in other words, of his ancestors” (qtd. in Vergès 53). Le Bon also makes connections between gender and race, arguing that “proof of female inferiority, and of similarities between women and Negroes, was provided by craniology” (qtd. in Vergès 53). Homi Bhabha’s presentation reads Fanon’s resistance psychiatry in Wretched, as “the fulfillment of a promise that languishes and lashes at the end of Black Skin, White Masks” (201).

This audience member's spirited resistance to psychoanalytic analyses of race matters is not an isolated response. In fact, it is fairly typical. In "All the Things You Could Be By Now, If Sigmund Freud's Wife Was Your Mother": Psychoanalysis and Race," Hortense Spillers explains that Fanon's "psychoanalytics" (her term) cannot sustain the forward-thinking hopefulness of racial uplift: "It seems to me that the Fanonian approach to the psychoanalytic object spins its wheels because it cannot deliver a practice of 'disalienation' (Fanon's word for it) within the resources of black culture, or an ethical position that is worth delineating according to the future of those cultures" (96).²¹⁷ So great is Spillers' belief that psychoanalysis' nihilism²¹⁸ is

²¹⁷ Living in the United States is not necessarily a prerequisite for protesting psychoanalytic discussions of race. Paul Gordon, a psychotherapist living and working in London, finds psychoanalysis antithetical to the social focus of racial uplift. He asserts that scholars have turned to psychoanalysis after "the defeat of the emancipatory political projects begun in the 1960s. . . . It was in the wake of such defeat that a great many individual radicals turned to psychoanalysis both as a form of individual therapy and as a tool for understanding ideology, particularly mechanisms of domination and submission" (18). But such a shift in analytic focus is a poor substitute: "It is, in other words, a lot easier to turn one's attention to the focus of psychoanalysis, that is the individual psyche, to what is supposedly 'inside' one, than it is to look outwards to the wider society. The former does not require one to do, so much as to analyse and analyse; the latter calls upon one to make decisions and act" (18).

²¹⁸ As Spillers declares with the following hyperbole, discourse analysis cannot do the race work that needs to be done like sociological analysis can: "If colonized society, as the colonized experienced it, is entirely predicated on negativity, or I would daresay, on negativity at all, then we should not be surprised that the way out appears to be entirely impossible. I would go so far as to contend that the limitations of a nationalist or ethnic analysis will not be surmounted unless and until the culture worker breaks through the 'perceptual camp' that focuses his/her eyeball on 'The Man' rather than the **dynamics of structure** that would articulate psychic order and its massive displacements **with the realm of social-political-administrative institutions**" (96).

While Spillers does use the term "psychic order," her focus on the socio-economic—this is the kind of "**dynamics of culture**" she wants the culture worker to attend to—reveals her 1960s structuralist-Marxist methodology. Raman Selden elucidates this position as follows: "The intellectual life of Europe during the 1960s

incompatible with a black cultural practice or analytic, she projects her own doubt onto Black Skin: “While Fanon offers our clearest link to psychoanalysis in the African/third world field, there is sufficient enough doubt concerning the efficacy of psychoanalysis, implied in some of his writings, that he appears to withdraw with the left hand what he has proffered with the right” (89). Claudia Tate signifies this ongoing distrust of psychoanalysis to engage in and support race work when she worries that black studies scholars will reduce her study Psychoanalysis and Black Novels: Desire and the Protocols of Race to her “‘roll in the hay’ with Freud and company” (5). As Françoise Vergès concedes in The Fact of Blackness, “in our post-antipsychiatry and post-Foucault moment, psychiatry has acquired a bad reputation for disciplining and punishing; as a scene of racism and indifference to sexual and cultural differences, especially in the [Third World]” (50). Spillers overstates Vergès’ caveat by offering her own:

Little or nothing in the intellectual history of African Americans within the social and political context of the United States would suggest the effectiveness of a psychological discourse, revised or classical, in illuminating the problematic of “race” or an intersubjective field of play, nor do we yet know how to historicize the psychoanalytic object

was dominated by structuralism. Marxist criticism was not unaffected by this intellectual environment. Both traditions believe that individuals cannot be understood apart from their social existence. Marxists believe that individuals are ‘bearers’ of positions in the social system and not free agents. Structuralists consider that the individual actions and utterances have no meaning apart from the signifying systems which generate them. However, structuralists regard these underlying structures as timeless and self-regulating systems, but Marxists see them as historical, changeable and fraught with contradictions” (37-38).

and objective, invade its heredity premises and insulations, and open its insights, subsequently, to cultural and social forms that are disjunctive to its originary imperatives. (76)

Not only is psychoanalysis inadequate to illuminate racial issues beyond its “originary imperatives,” Spillers further discredits literary critics’ use of psychoanalysis:

“Clearly, we are making use of the psychoanalytic echo toward an end that practitioners would neither recognize nor endorse” (83).²¹⁹

Yet Freud himself saw literature and creative writers as proof of psychoanalytic theory’s divided subject; and Freud borrowed from Greek mythology (a narrative) to elucidate his most-known and -refuted psychoanalytic concept, the “Oedipus Complex.” Frank J. Sulloway confirms Freud’s connection to creative writing when he explains that “many of those who later became Freud’s followers had at one time possessed strong literary interests that received reinforcement from reading Freud” (453n6). In “Creative Writers and Daydreaming,” Freud provides that reinforcement by arguing that fiction offers a rich research site for studying the divided subject germane to psychoanalytic theory: “the psychological novel in general no doubt owes its special nature to the inclination of the modern writer to split up his ego, by self-observation, into many part-egos, and, in consequence, to personify the conflicting currents of his own mental life in several heroes” (654). Likewise, reading an author’s “part-egos” inflected in fictional characters affords a pleasure that

²¹⁹ With such a vociferous claim also comes the following recognition that “Ralph Ellison, Toni Cade Bambara, Alice Walker, David Bradley, and Toni Morrison . . . have posed a staging of the **mental theater** as an articulate structure of critical inquiries into the ‘souls of black folk’” (76, emphasis mine).

psychoanalysis can help elucidate: “When a creative writer presents his plays to us or tells us what we are inclined to take to be his personal daydreams, we experience a great pleasure, and one which probably arises from the confluence of many sources” (655).²²⁰

Du Bois, too, uses narrative to depict “the confluence of many sources” that produces his “double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a word that looks on in

²²⁰ The creative writer’s “**ars poetica** [art of poetry] lies in the technique of overcoming the feeling of repulsion in us which is undoubtedly connected with the barriers that rise between each single ego and others” (655). Thus, readers’ identification in the text—one of the central assumptions of formalist criticism—induces a “**forepleasure** . . . which is offered to us so as to make possible the release of still greater pleasure arising from deeper psychical sources. In my opinion, all the aesthetic pleasure which a creative writer affords us has the character of a forepleasure of this kind, and our actual enjoyment of an imaginative work proceeds, from a liberation of tensions in our minds” (655-656).

Serge Leclaire argues that Freud asserts literature’s “liberation of tensions” because of Freud’s sense of self was fundamentally linked to his admiration for books and monographs, tied to the following childhood memory: “It had once amused my father to hand over a book with **coloured plates** (an account of a journey through Persia) for me and my eldest sister to destroy. Not easy to justify from the educational point of view! I had been five years old at the time and my sister not yet three; and the picture of the two of us blissfully pulling the book to pieces (leaf by leaf, like an **artichoke**, I found myself saying) was almost the only plastic memory I retained from that period of my life. Then, when I became a student, I had developed a passion for collecting and owning books, which was analogous to my liking for learning out of monographs: a **favourite hobby**. (The idea of ‘**favourite**’ had already appeared in connection with cyclamens and artichokes.) I had become a **book-worm**. I had always, from the time I first began to think about myself, referred this first passion of mine back to the childhood memory I have mentioned. Or rather, I had recognized that the childhood scene was a ‘screen memory’ for my later bibliophile propensities” (qtd. in Leclaire 26). Leclaire analyzes the event detailed by this childhood memory as a purposeful maneuver by Freud’s father: “Jakob Freud was consciously offering [his son Sigmund] the possibility of carrying out his oedipal phantasm by means of substitution”(27). Freud’s recounting of “this (screen) memory seems indeed to indicate what he made of this singular form of ‘reading’: an extraordinarily satisfying defoliation and transgression” (27).

amused contempt and pity” (Souls 8).²²¹ In Souls’ first chapter, he recounts his first awareness of his racial difference “being a problem” after a discriminatory “glance” from a tall white girl—Freud would call this splitting up the ego through self-observation. Du Bois may have realized his “second-sight” after her glance, but Du Bois’ narrative makes plain that his second-sight is biologically determined. In this way, Du Bois also emulates the biological element of Freudian psychoanalysis, what Frank J. Sulloway calls “the crypto-biological nature of Freud’s entire psychoanalytic legacy to the twentieth century” (Sulloway 237). This similarity between Du Boisian and psychoanalytic concepts of double-consciousness comes from their shared racial foundation. As Daniel Boyarin contends, psychoanalysis is “a science of the double colonized subject—more perhaps than its [subsequent] practitioners have realized or conceded” (212-213).

Equally less realized are the substantial ways that race discourse of the late nineteenth century shape sexology research. Researchers then were well aware of their racial metaphors. For example, in the landmark Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Havelock Ellis asserts that “the question of sex—with the racial questions that rest on it—stands before the coming generations as the chief problem for solution” (qtd. in Somerville 15, emphasis hers). Somerville explains that Ellis’ attention to race was not coincidental in his book published a year after Plessy v. Ferguson, which was itself “a moment when the racialization of American culture had been dramatically articulated

²²¹ Ernest Allen Jr. and Bernard W. Bell trace this legacy to two antecedents of the “Of Our Spiritual Strivings” chapter of Souls, the first published version of the chapter, “The Strivings of the Negro People” (Atlantic Monthly, August 1897), and “The Conservation of Races,” a paper presented at the American Negro Academy in March 1897.

and reconfigured” (1). The “separate but equal” ruling was meant to maintain the ideological boundary between black and white bodies, to stave off panic over miscegenation and “race suicide” which was building since Emancipation. It came not-so-coincidentally when eugenicists, comparative anatomists, and the like, were working—and measuring—to find identifiable, permanent differences between black and white people. To help justify the separation of the races, the mulatto had to be a failure of a person by design. As eugenicist Charles Davenport claims, “miscegenation commonly spells disharmony—disharmony of physical, mental and temperamental qualities . . . A hybridized people are a badly put together people and a dissatisfied, restless, ineffective people” (qtd. in Somerville 30-31). Even early pan-Africanist Edward Blyden gives evidence of “a badly put together people” in “On Mixed Races in Liberia,” where here lates the “inextricable ‘muddle’” and “frail tenure of [mulattoes’] existence” in the Annual Report of the Board of Regents of the Smithsonian (388, 387). Blyden asserts that the “death and disease [that] have made sad ravages” on mulattoes in Liberia are biologically determined (386). Because their body is ill-equipped, they survive only by chance.²²²

²²² Blyden offers the following gender and national comparisons: “It seems the females of mixed blood, who are not obliged to put forth much exertion, and not subject to much exposure, last longer than the males. It appears, also, that mulattoes born an brought up in America, if they can pass through the acclimating process, stand the climate much better than those born here, but only engaging in as little physical or mental labor as possible. Persons having an admixture of foreign blood are very frail, easily take cold, and seldom recover from a severe attack of illness” (387). For Blyden, this report for a white reading audience furthers his anti-imperialist imperative. It argues with somatic evidence his belief that “the presence of white blood imparted greater aptitude for learning [and being] fitted for teachers [abandons] black boys of hale and hearty **physique** [who] are left to grow up unnoticed” (387). Despite an intellectual predilection, these “half and three-fourths white **protégés**”

In this contested discursive terrain, sexologists' use of the mulatto figure to assert the 'inborn nature' of homosexuality did not differ greatly from others' use of the mulatto to "prove" the degeneracy of homosexuality. Opposing arguments based on the same figural source were possible because sexologists' racial discourse was the same discourse used to maintain racial stratification in the United States after the end of (official) racial slavery. During Reconstruction, as Martha Hodes asserts, "the separation of blacks and whites was essential to Southern whites who were determined to retain supremacy after the Civil War; consequently, the 'mixture' of [races] became a much more serious taboo" (60). Before slavery had ended "white Southerners displayed some degree of toleration" for mixing only because the institution of slavery ultimately maintained racial stratification (59).²²³

meant to lead the Liberian people "are all dead" (387). Another, "is a raving maniac, and may die at any moment" (387). Blyden concedes "I do not charge guilt upon any one in the past [for the bankruptcy of Liberian leadership], for I believe that these things were not done at the instigation of wrong passions, but under the delusion of a false theory" (388).

²²³ Racial stratification was as important in the North among abolitionists. While abolitionists argued against the institution of slavery, their debates over the "Future of the Family" confirmed the inherent "moral inferiority" of blacks. Civil marriage and the patriarchal family, as argued in two early postwar *Nation* editorials, were crucial in taming "the sexual passion—the animal, brute passion, through which God, apparently in ignorance of the laws of "moral progress," had provided for the perpetuation of the human species—[which] is the most untamable of all passions. . . . Its regulation . . . was the very first step in civilization. The founding of the family was the first attempt to regulate it. The first object of marriage is still to regulate it" (qtd. in Gutman 294). Such mid-nineteenth-century beliefs also reveal racial beliefs about blacks because slave families were not "sanctioned by the civil law and therefore 'the sexual perversion' [of such unions] went unrestrained" (qtd. in Gutman 295). Charles K. Whipple clarifies the racial stratification inherent in the ideology of family in his 1858 pamphlet *The Family Relation as Affected by Slavery*. He argues slaves were denied civil marriage because it "necessarily annihilated, to the slave, that beautiful, blessed relation, which we understand by the 'family'" (qtd. in Gutman 295). Whipple also confirms the tautological definition of the sexual licentiousness of black people:

Finally, “tolerant” mixing can also be found in turn-of-the-century discourse on race and spiritualism. As Cynthia D. Schrager argues, in

white middle- and upper-class spiritualist discourses [contemporary with Du Bois’ Souls], discourses that may well have been influenced by African cultural retentions in ways that are only just beginning to be explored, the trope of the ‘veil’ signified the dividing line between this life and the ‘other side’ of the grave, between the material and the spiritual worlds. (553-554).

Schrager explains that Du Bois’ “veil” places black people “‘on the other side’ as a kind of spiritual counterculture to white materialism” (554). For Du Bois, this cross-racial anti-materialism works within a solely black context as well. It contests Booker T. Washington’s “programme of industrial education, conciliation of the South, and submission and silence to civil and political rights” (36). Du Bois embraces black “spirituality that refuses to materialize [and] locates both the ‘difference’ and the power of the race” in that refusal, while Washington wants to “materialize the Negro,” “to make her/him visible to white America at the expense of erasing [black] ‘difference’” (Schrager 553). Du Bois’ rhetorical move distinguishes his bookish, male reproduction of “race men” from the empty bourgeois class in which Washington stakes his claim for black equality. In so doing, Du Bois reclaims erudition as a black,

“Think what is the too well known extent of licentiousness at the North—in city and country, among old and young; think of the difficulties encountered, and the expense lavished, the risks run, the laws violated, and the disgrace hazarded in the pursuit of illicit indulgence there; then think what it **must be** in the South, where **all** these obstacles are removed; where the temptation is always at hand—the legal authority absolute—the actual power complete” (qtd. in Gutman 295). For Whipple, sexual licentiousness was not exclusive to blacks but certainly expected.

not an assimilative or bourgeois, cultural practice; and he proclaims that black equality can only come from black people embracing their ‘difference,’ or their ‘veil,’ and recognizing the complementarity between black and white Americans.

By respecting mutual difference, Du Bois argues, the “two world-races may give each to each those characteristics both so sadly lack” (qtd. in Schrager 554).

Schrager notes that Du Bois’ vision of the ‘veil’ as two halves of an American whole recalls the heterosexual complementarity at the heart of sentimental culture’s gendered division of the public and private realms. Occupying a position analogous to that of the “feminine” in sentimental culture, “blackness” functions in Souls—to borrow from Kenneth Warren’s apt formulation—as a “posture of dissent” against the materialism of American culture. (554)

Du Bois’ “posture of dissent” also establishes the epicene creed so associated with Alain Locke, the “circumspect yet evident” homosexual for whom Du Bois supposedly had such distaste. Whether or not Du Bois actually “never understood the tragedy of an Oscar Wilde” during the 1920s, or when he fired Augustus Granville Dill, his “feminine” erudition “supporting the assertion of manhood rights” illustrates how in tune his Souls was with US American sexology research that influenced Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Freud (Lester 730; Souls 41). The “heterosexual complementarity” of Du Bois’ veil pulls from the same duality that sexologists like James G. Kiernan used to explain innate bisexuality: “The original bisexuality of the race, shown in the rudimentary female organs of the male, could not fail to occasion functional, if not organic, reversions [where] it seems certain that a femininely

functioning brain can occupy a male body, and vice versa” (qtd. in Sulloway 292). Du Bois’ “mental masculinity,” then, to borrow from Sigmund Freud in my epigraph, “can be accompanied with inversion.”²²⁴

In this chapter, I elucidate how the threefold considerations I have outlined manifest in Du Bois’ first chapter of Souls, “Of Our Spiritual Strivings,” the chapter in which he explains through narrative his desirous metaphors, “the veil” and “double-consciousness.” I read this chapter alongside James Weldon Johnson’s novella Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man, whose queer, bookish protagonist bears a compelling resemblance to young Du Bois, with one notable plot “inversion.” Johnson’s unnamed protagonist does not know he is black at first because his mother passes for white.

Then, I trace how Du Bois’ “race psychology” was received in the Caribbean, including its influence on Négritude. I illustrate how Diaspora figures and scholars fostered the reception and adaptation of double-consciousness. Du Bois’ own Diaspora presence through the five pan-Africanist congresses he organized from 1918 to 1945 helped solidify this link. (Langston Hughes’ frequent presence and translation of

²²⁴ Certainly, the degree to which Du Bois “inverts” gender roles when needed in his “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others” chapter of Souls attests to Du Bois’ self-conscious navigation in the field of “mixed metaphors” at the turn of the twentieth century. For example, twice he castigates Washington for the “unmanliness” of his politics, which do not support “the assertion of the manhood rights of the Negro by himself” and do not reflect the “manly self-respect [that] is worth more than lands and houses” (41, 42). Yet a similarly “effete” image serves as Du Bois’ celebration of the higher education that Washington discouraged: “the picture of a lone black boy poring over a French grammar amid the weeds and dirt of a neglected home” (37). The leisure-class implications of this “lone black boy” disregarding everyday life or his neglected, dirty home are precisely the ones that Alain Locke protested in Richard Bruce Nugent’s “Smoke, Lilies and Jade.”

Haitian writer Jacques Roumain did not hurt this exchange.) Du Bois’ “double-colonized subject” fit well with West Indian notions of self-difference within its own socio-historical circumstances. For example, Edward Kamau Brathwaite finds that Caribbean experiences of colonialism have created “a subtle but telling dichotomy in the West Indian creative spirit” (“Roots” 28).²²⁵ Such “dichotomy” helped define a transnational Négritude, which black gay writer Melvin Dixon calls “the celebration of a black consciousness through literature” (qtd. in Carby, “Proletarian” 46). They also set the stage for Frantz Fanon’s explicitly psychoanalytic analysis of the “disalienation of the black man” in Black Skin, White Masks. Even C. L. R. James credits Fanon’s debt to Du Bois in the West Indian intellectual tradition he celebrates and sees himself in: “We do not see Fanon correctly if we do not see him as a natural development after what [George] Padmore²²⁶ represented, and Padmore as the political stage of the wide avenue opened by Du Bois and Marcus Garvey” (461).

²²⁵ Hazel Carby illustrates this “telling dichotomy” when she highlights the contradiction in Trinidadian James’ “scholastic career as a scholarship boy in Trinidad [which] forced upon him the contradictions of the intellectual in the colonies” (“Proletarian” 40). And the bookishness of protagonist Haynes in James’ only novel Minty Alley (1936) reflects James Weldon Johnson’s take on Du Bois’ race psychology. This kind of “dichotomous” West Indian epistemology reveals its similarities to the “divided subject” of psychoanalysis in the Trinidad-set A Morning at the Office (1950) by Guyana-born Edgar Mittleholzer, in which passing references to Freud-associated concepts like the Oedipus complex and neuroses—as well as passing queer moments and secondary characters—inform the fabric of the novel’s exploration of Trinidadian class and race politics.

²²⁶ Born Malcolm Ivan Meredith Nurse in Trinidad in 1902, Padmore was a childhood friend of James. Padmore, James, and Kwame Nkrumah are considered to be the three architects of twentieth century pan-Africanism which contributed immensely to the liberation of the African world. Padmore helped found the Pan-African Federation. In 1957, Padmore was appointed chief adviser on African affairs in the newly-independent Ghana led by Nkrumah's Convention People's Party.

Finally, I show the Fanon-like engagement with racial “psychoanalytics” in Andrew Salkey’s under-discussed Escape to an Autumn Pavement (1960). Salkey’s narrative demonstrates how available black male homoeroticism can be within the highly metaphoric and racial field of “psychoanalytics.” I close with Escape not to trace a neat genealogy from Du Bois to Salkey, but to show how the latter’s novel configuration of Diaspora in the metropole refuses the typical laments that “institutionalized and personalized homophobia and homohatred in parts of the Third World [facilitates silence] in the Caribbean, South America, and Africa, [where] very few individuals are brave enough to sign or identify themselves as gay to the public” (Rowell 339).²²⁷ Neither does protagonist Johnnie Sobert. But Salkey projects Johnnie’s own anxiety so deliberately, and with such paranoia, that it seems tragic, even to Larry, Johnnie’s most respected West Indian compatriot. By showing such support between characters, and by refusing the contemporaneous, expected leitmotifs for Caribbean writing, Escape rejects the kind of homophobia-as-racial-authenticity so often assumed for the West Indian cultural expressions.²²⁸ With its open rendition of Diaspora sensibilities, with its own black queer vernacular, Escape assumes that readers, like Larry, can recognize Johnnie’s black queer masculinity for themselves. Escape’s insight illustrates the Jamaican saying that Salkey sent to Peter Nazareth when he was studying and writing about Salkey’s work: “Those who won’t see can’t see.” As Nazareth explains, Salkey’s characters’ “problem is the[ir] inability to think and break out of the imposed pattern” (29). For Salkey, the reader is “part of th[is]

²²⁷ I adapt Charles Rowell’s lament closing his edited Shade: An Anthology of Fiction by Gay Men of African Descent (1996).

²²⁸ See Thomas Glave’s “Whose Caribbean?: An Allegory, in Part” (2004).

problem. There are chains on the reader's mind: Salkey knows these chains have to be broken or the reader will refuse to see" (29).

Section A: Harlem's Double-Consciousness and "great wandering shadows": W.E.B. Du Bois and James Weldon Johnson

It is in the early days of rollicking boyhood that the revelation first bursts upon one, all in a day, as it were. I remember well when the shadow swept across me. I was a little thing, away up in the hills of New England. . . . In a wee wooden schoolhouse, something put it into the boys' and girls' heads to buy gorgeous visiting-cards—ten cents a package—and exchange. The exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card,—refused it peremptorily, with a glance. Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil. I had thereafter no desire to tear down that veil, to creep through; I held all beyond it in common contempt, and lived above it in a region of blue sky and great wandering shadows.

—W. E. B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk

Du Bois' narrative moves from "rollicking boyhood" to the discovery that he was "shut out from their world by a vast veil" because of a peremptory "glance" from a tall white girl. Because of her glance, Du Bois realizes he was "born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world" (8). And he embraces his new consciousness, his new perspective from behind the veil, his epistemological blackness. After all, Du Bois "had thereafter no desire to teardown that veil, to creep through." Instead, he lives in the "great wandering shadows."

Such an awareness of identity based on alienation, somatic difference, and visual trauma shapes psychoanalytic discourse as well.²²⁹ Freud and Lacan fashion a similar self-difference by “representing racial acculturation through dramatic crises” (Bergner 242).²³⁰ Lacan’s mirror stage, “an essential stage of the act of intelligence” where the infant first identifies, then misrecognizes, himself in a mirror, draws from Freud’s “The Uncanny” (“The mirror stage” 1).²³¹ In “The Uncanny,” Freud recounts looking accidentally into a mirror and seeing his racial self in someone else, a Jew: “I can still recollect that I thoroughly disliked his appearance” (qtd. in Boyarin 211). Daniel Boyarin identifies that Freud’s disliking this “Jew” recognizes the “dreaded circumcision—dreaded because this act cripples a male by turning him into a Jew” (211-212). For Freud, the castrated penis—what Boyarin calls “the most visible metaphor for the race and gender of Jewish males”—also represents the Jew’s difference from (other) white men as well as from the social and political power structure of Vienna, Austria, in the late nineteenth century, where Freud lived (217).

²²⁹ Ernest Allen Jr., Bernard W. Bell, and Adolph Reed Jr. all assert that “double consciousness” was also influenced by American Transcendentalism, particularly the work of Ralph Waldo Emerson who “employed ‘double consciousness’ in a multitude of ways: to signify . . . tensions between the individual and society as well as between the oppositional pulls of fate and liberty (or necessity and freedom), and in a more elevated sense, to signify the division between the moral and immortal selves of the individual” (Allen 51).

²³⁰ According to Gwen Bergner, “Freud’s ‘primal scene’ generates the castration anxiety that precipitates a boy’s Oedipus complex and allows him to internalize a masculine gender identity. Lacan’s mirror stage instantiates the infant’s self-difference. This primary alienation underlying subjectivity resembles the self-difference of double consciousness” (242).

²³¹ Lacan himself references Freud in a footnote in “The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I in psychoanalytic experience,” Lacan’s 1949 version of the mirror stage: “Throughout this article I leave in its peculiarity the translation I have adopted for Freud’s **Ideal-Ich** [i.e., je-idéal]” (*Écrits* 7 n1).

Of course, Freud knew there were other physical attributes associated with Jews. Certainly, his circumcised penis was not on display when, as he writes in An Autobiographical Study, “in 1873, I first joined the University [of Vienna and] experienced some appreciable disappointments. Above all, I found myself inferior and an alien because I was a Jew” (qtd. in Sulloway 423). Thus, Freud’s penis works as a palimpsest of Jewish difference that takes as a given Jewish assimilation—a rather fantastic vision of the nonetheless polyglot society of late nineteenth-century Vienna, or even Paris, where the 1894 trial of Captain Alfred Dreyfus sparked anti-Semitic rhetoric and violence. Dreyfus, the first Jew to serve on the French army general staff, was convicted of espionage based on a scrap of paper purported to have his handwriting on it, publicly stripped of his military medals, and sentenced to life imprisonment on Devil’s Island, a French penal colony off the coast of French Guiana. Dreyfus was “proof” of Jewish treachery and helped shape the genesis of Zionism in the mind of Theodor Herzl, a Jew and University of Vienna alumnus²³² covering the case for the liberal Vienna newspaper Neue Freie Presse. Inspired by what he saw in France, Herzl argues in Der Judenstaat [The Jewish State] (1896) that anti-Semitism is an immutable factor in human society unsolved by assimilation.

Frank Sulloway argues that too much has been made of the force of Viennese anti-Semitism on Freud’s work—“Freud was never inhibited in his scientific research or in the publication of his results”—and that Freud’s sense of isolation “was part of a

²³² Herzl earned his Ph.D. from the University of Vienna in 1884; his family moved to Vienna from Budapest in 1878. Freud took his qualifying exams for his medical degree in 1881. At the time of the Dreyfus trial, Freud taught at the University as a Privatdozent, or Assistant Professor.

whole generation of alienated Viennese intellectuals”; but as Freud himself confesses in a letter to Lou Andreas-Salomé (that Sulloway includes), “the problem of the Jewish character ‘has pursued me throughout the whole of my life’” (463; qtd. in Sulloway 478). This “problem” of Jewish character, which sounds like the “problem” of the color line Du Bois pursues, is better explained by sociologist Robert E. Park,²³³ who attributes Jewish isolation to often inconsequential social changes, to the effect of immutable anti-Semitism that Herzl finds despite any supposed “assimilation.” In “Human Migration and the Marginal Man,” Park charts the kind of cosmopolitan intellectuality that marks Du Bois double-consciousness:

When, however, the walls of the medieval ghetto were torn down and the Jew was permitted to participate in the cultural life of the peoples among whom he lived, there appeared a new type of personality, namely, a cultural hybrid, a man living and sharing intimately in the cultural life and traditions of two distinct peoples; never quite willing to break, even if he were permitted to do so, with his past and his traditions, and not quite accepted, because of racial prejudice, in the new society in which he now sought to find a place. . . . The emancipated Jew was, and is, historically and typically the marginal man, the first cosmopolite and citizen of the world [with] his keen intellectual interest, his sophistication, [and] his idealism. (165)

For Freud at the University of Vienna, or for Du Bois at “a wee wooden schoolhouse” in the hills of New England, “the fate of being in the Opposition and of being put

²³³ Perhaps coincidentally Park worked on his Ph.D. in Germany, just like Du Bois.

under the ban of the ‘compact majority.’ The foundations were thus laid for a certain degree of independence of judgment” (Freud, An Autobiographical Study, qtd. in Sulloway 423).²³⁴

Daniel Boyrain asserts that Freud’s “sophisticated” sense of his Jewish self²³⁵ as a “cultural hybrid . . . not quite accepted” lays post-colonial groundwork:

Before Fanon, Freud seemed to realize that the “colonized as constructed by colonialist ideology is the very figure of the divided subject [that] psychoanalytic theory [posits] to refute humanism’s myth of the unified self.”²³⁶ In a profound sense, “humanism’s myth” is a colonial myth. It follows that psychoanalysis is au fond not so much a Jewish science as a science of the doubled colonized subject [or] the crisis shared by Jews and other postcolonial (“modernizing”) peoples, whose double consciousness gives them particular insight. (212-213)

²³⁴ Fanon signifies a similar awareness of difference through the connection between education, “Opposition,” and a foundation for insight in Black Skin, except for Fanon the educated black person finds himself likewise “put under the ban of” his own people: “The educated Negro, slave of the spontaneous and cosmic Negro myth, feels at a given stage that his race no longer understands him. Or that he no longer understands it. Then he congratulates himself on this, and enlarging the difference, the incomprehension, the disharmony, he finds in them the meaning of his real humanity” (14). At the same time that Fanon and Freud congratulate themselves on their insight and achievement, their burden pursues them. A doppelgänger, an imposed racialized image of themselves persecutes them, restricting them mentally and socially. Like Freud, Fanon argues in Black Skin, that “a Negro is forever in combat with his own image” (194).

²³⁵ Boyrain traces Freud’s Jewish “uncanny” to his last book Moses and Monotheism, his study of the unique character of the Jewish people, where he argues that circumcision “makes a disagreeable, uncanny impression, which is to be explained no doubt by its recalling the dreaded castration” (qtd. in Boyrain 211).

²³⁶ Boyrain quotes from Benita Parry’s “Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse.”

Moreover, Boyarin argues that these postcolonial similarities are not simply metaphoric. The divided subject of Freud's "uncanny" look into a mirror came from anti-Semitic rhetoric of the day that cast Jews as Africans: "Freud feared that some feature would betray his thinking as 'of Jewish descent' and his discourse as merely a 'Jewish science'" because of the popularly acknowledged "African character of the Jew" in Austria (220). Contributing to this belief was "Houston Stewart Chamberlain, Wagner's son-in-law and Hitler's hero, [who] wrote that the Jews are a mongrel race that had interbred with Africans" (220).²³⁷ Du Bois discovered first-hand how interchangeable blacks and Jews were to white gentiles in late nineteenth-century Europe. When traveling in Slovenia, during the Dreyfus trial, Du Bois was mistaken for a Jew: "Arriving one night in a town north of Slovenia, the driver of a rickety cab whispered in my ear, 'Unter die Juden?'. I stared and then said yes. I stayed in a little Jewish inn. I was a little frightened as in the gathering twilight I traversed the foothills of the dark Tatras alone and on foot" (qtd. in Gilroy, Black Atlantic 212).

Boyarin argues that Freud's fear of being recognized by his "Jewish character" "marks a precise historical moment making psychoanalysis possible" (212). A similar, imposed and persecuting racialized image makes Du Bois' "double-consciousness" possible. The "great wandering shadows" that mark young Du Bois' racial difference linger over the black community from the taint of slavery:

The Nation has not yet found peace from its sins; the freedman has not yet found in freedom his promised land. Whatever good may have

²³⁷ For more examples of the "blackness" of Jews, see Sander L. Gilman's Jewish Self-hatred: Anti-Semitism and the Hidden Language of the Jews.

come in these years of change, **the shadow of a deep disappointment** rests upon the Negro people,—a disappointment all the more bitter because the unattained ideal was unbounded save by the simple ignorance of a lowly people. (Souls 10-11, emphasis mine)

This shadow bestowed by discriminating ignorance “has wrought sad havoc with the courage and faith and deeds of ten thousand thousand people,—has sent them wooing false gods and invoking false means of salvation, and at times has even seemed to make them ashamed of themselves” (10).

For Du Bois, one of these “false gods” is Booker T. Washington who parades his “gospel of Work and Money to such an extent as apparently almost completely to overshadow the higher aims of life” (42). To combat Washington’s “soulless materialism,” Du Bois embraces what Cynthia Schrager calls “the ‘feminine-mystical,’” a term she borrows from William James to articulate the spiritual grounding of “the gift of ‘second sight’” that Du Bois delineates in Souls, or “the province of the seer, whose occult power allows him access to both this world and the other-world” (568). Schrager makes a compelling case for reading Du Bois’ “seer” as “something closer to an occult priest than to a social scientist,” for appreciating “the meaning of [the Veil’s] religion, the passion of its human sorrow, and the struggle of its greater souls” (568; Souls 3). According to Schrager, Du Bois’ mystical passion makes double-consciousness “a privileged locus of knowing” instead of “a debilitating state of being,” and it “succeeds in harnessing the prophetic and transformative power of the mystical register without sacrificing an analysis of the material conditions that shape the ‘worlds within and without the Veil’” (575, 577). But she overstates her

argument when she sacrifices the psychological in Du Bois: “Although Du Bois’s use of the term double-consciousness was congruent with a burgeoning contemporary medical literature on dual personality as a manifestation of individual pathology, the author of Souls clearly saw the dilemma of double-consciousness in spiritual rather than medical terms” (569). Suddenly, his “feminine-mystical” passion becomes a “dilemma.” Plus, Schragger overlooks her own use of William James’ work to explain that passion as well as Du Bois’ clear inclusion of the psychological in his “province of the seer.” For example, Du Bois explains that “Mr. Washington came, with a simple definite programme, at the psychological moment when the nation was a little ashamed of having bestowed so much sentiment on Negroes, and was concentrating its energies on Dollars” (Souls 36). As Bernard W. Bell explains, double-consciousness was hardly Du Bois’ term. It had been in psychological parlance since 1817 (8-9). As Bernard W. Bell explains,

The O[xford] E[n]glish D[ictionary] identifies the rise of double consciousness as a diagnostic term in psychological discourse in 1882 as “a condition which has been described as a double personality, showing in some measure two separate and independent trains of thought and two independent mental capabilities in the same individual.” But the term actually appeared as early as 1817 in a psychological case study of Mary Reynolds [by William S. Plumerm] entitled “A Double Consciousness, or a Duality of the Person in the Same Individual.” (89-90)

Still, Schrager is not alone in denying over-emphatically that Du Bois' double-consciousness could have been influenced by the psychoanalytic concepts William James discussed with Du Bois in any way.²³⁸ For example, in his Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Du Bois, David Levering Lewis mentions James once, a passing reference to them visiting Helen Keller years after both had left Harvard. Perhaps their repudiations come from their anxiety over attributing any influence for creating to a white man, an example of what Werner Sollers calls "the desperate belief in purity which still informs literary and cultural discussions in one of the world's most openly syncretistic countries" ("Never" 294). As Paul Gilroy explains in Small Acts: Thoughts on the politics of black cultures, authenticating a singular blackness is the only defense in a time when racial narratives of the past no longer reflect the changing history of the present-day black lives:

This is a difficult moment for the black cultures of the Western world and for their critics, wherever they are located in the African diaspora. In England as elsewhere, the effortless certainties that guided the creation and the use of dissident black cultures in earlier times have evaporated in stressful new historical conditions for which no precedents exist. The fundamental, time-worn assumption of homogenous and unchanging black communities whose political and

²³⁸ Examples otherwise do exist. In The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White, George Hutchinson reasons why Du Bois found "clear thinking" in James' pragmatism: its "emphasis upon process, its embrace of pluralism, its insistence that truths and morals are produced through historically specific practices, its liberating acceptance of epistemological uncertainty [which] helped undermine Victorian beliefs that supported, among other things, 'scientific racism', imperialism, and Anglo-American ethnocentrism" (33).

economic interests were readily knowable and easily transferred from everyday life into their expressive cultures has, for example, proved to be a fantasy. To make matters worse, the ideal of racial purity, the appeal of phenotypical symmetry and the comfort of cultural sameness have never been more highly prized as attributes of black social life than they are today. (1)

Because of this ideological necessity to maintain a discreet “blackness,” imagining that a professor and mentor could have held sway over his student’s mind becomes unconscionable. Equally outrageous is the idea that this professor could have introduced the student to a book, a school of thought, or a science that in turn informed that student’s work. Of course, these kinds of panicked dismissals come from university professors who direct graduate students’ theses and thinking every semester.

One telling example of this ideological pressure comes in Adolph L. Reed Jr.’s W.E.B. Du Bois and American Political Thought. Reed discusses the Du Bois-James relationship with his own kind of “two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings.” Reed accepts the plausibility that these two friends—Du Bois kept in touch with James well after he graduated—would have discussed their work with each other yet maintains emphatically that Du Bois’ double-consciousness could not have been influenced by James or any psychological research James contributed to. Reed sees freely the links between James and American Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson: “James’s divided self torn by natural and spiritual forces, seems in one sense to be a restatement of Emerson’s double consciousness in a gloomier key” (104). Yet “no such evidence

joins James to Du Bois” (105). Reed must perform linguistic somersaults to maintain this claim and to pull together the following flip-flopping assessments:

James saw the divided self as alternately a psycho-physiological and a spiritual or mystical phenomenon; for Du Bois the idea was sociological and historical. To James, therefore, the condition and the path to transcending it were individual, even random, but to Du Bois both problem and remedy were bound up with the ascriptive lot of a racial collectivity. Although it in no way resembles James’s “field of consciousness” or his specific discussions of pathological and spiritual splitting of consciousness, one might argue that Du Bois’s formulation may have been influenced by James’s suggestion that heterogeneous personality could result from inheritance of “traits . . . of incompatible and antagonistic ancestors.” Du Bois, however, makes no hint at biology at all in his two-ness claim. In addition, his essay proclaiming blacks’ double consciousness appeared originally in the Atlantic Monthly in 1897, five years before James’s publication of The Varieties of Religious Experience. Of course, James and Du Bois did communicate after the latter left Harvard, and it is possible that some of their interaction could have ranged to James’s reflections on the divided self. [Gerald E.] Myers, though, notes that “James was skeptical about any automatic transfer of parental traits to children” and had begun to express his doubts no later than 1898. In any event, attempts to establish direct links between James and Du Bois would

require very elaborate arguments and layers of supposition and presumption. Nor would they—even if arguably successful in establishing some plausible, though remote tie—shed much light either on Du Bois’s thinking or his relation to his contemporary world. (105)

All but the last sentence of this paragraph needs an emphatic transition (therefore, although, however, in addition, of course, though, in any event) to help readers navigate through Reed’s selective, thorny reading of Du Bois, which he tries to ensure by browbeating anyone who would dare connect Du Bois and James.

Without this paragraph ending, presumably, readers would see through Reed’s claims. For example, Reed alleges that Du Bois “makes no hint at biology at all in his two-ness claim”; but Du Bois remarks in Souls that he was “born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world” (8). Or, readers might notice that “the ascriptive lot of a racial collectivity” that Reed asserts does not coincide with the individualism of Du Bois’ narrative. Du Bois asserts that “the history of the American Negro is the history of this strife . . . to merge his double self into a better and truer self” but his illustration of “this strife” comes through his individual experiences that differentiate him from other black people (9). Du Bois zealously fights the assumptions of black inferiority in the girl’s peremptory glance: The “sky was bluest when I could beat my mates at examination-time, or beat them at a foot-race, or even beat their stringy heads” (8). But Du Bois’ reaction to the veil was his own: “With other black boys the strife was not so fiercely sunny: their youth shrunk into tasteless sycophancy, or into silent hatred of the pale world about them and mocking distrust of everything white; or wasted itself in a bitter cry” (8). Unlike “other black boys,” Du

Bois was afforded a middle-class education after his mother's death; so he is a member of his so-called Talented Tenth who can work toward "the end of his striving [and] be a co-worker in the kingdom of culture" (9). Presaging Fanon, Du Bois is the "educated Negro [who] feels at a given stage that his race no longer understands him" (Fanon 14). In Souls, these "educated Negro" co-workers include "the black artisan," "the Negro minister or doctor," and the "would-be black savant," who most closely resembles Du Bois himself (9). The savant knows "the soul-beauty of a race which his larger audience despised, and he could not articulate the message of another people" (10). This knowledge promotes

the ideal of "book-learning"; the curiosity, born of compulsory ignorance, to know and test the power of the cabalistic letters of the white man, the longing to know. Here at last seemed to have been discovered the mountain path to Canaan; longer than the highway of Emancipation and law, steep and rugged, but straight, leading to heights high enough to overlook life. (11)

His second-sight may be inborn, and social discrimination may have to happen for him to recognize it, but his zeal to climb that "mountain path to Canaan" to pursue "the ideal of 'book learning'" is his individual journey.

Similar "book learning" guides the journey of James Weldon Johnson's protagonist in The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man—through his life story written ostensibly by an unnamed, mixed-race narrator. The Ex-Colored Man himself finds "company in books, and greater pleasure in music" after he discovers the veil that peremptorily shatters his "rollicking boyhood"; and the novella itself shows the

fruits of his climb to Canaan (10). The Freudian “self-observation” that his Autobiography provides allows the Ex-Colored Man “to personify the conflicting currents of his own mental life” (Freud, “Creative Writers” 654). Or, as Alice Dunbar Nelson illustrates: “It was in 1912 that the reading public among Negroes and friends of Negroes was shaken to its inner core by the appearance of a book, surely the strangest that had ever been written by or about the Negro [that] could hope to penetrate into the mysteries of racial psychology” (337). Ever-cognizant of Du Bois’ double-conscious, Johnson crafts cannily a narrative of “racial psychology” with a character that embodies the fusion of race and sexuality seen in psychology and sexology at the turn of last century. “The publishers” assert this in The Autobiography’s preface: “In these pages it is as though a veil had been drawn aside: the reader is given a view of the inner life of the Negro in America” (vii, emphasis mine).

Like Du Bois, Johnson was plausibly in contact with psychological discourse while at Columbia University under the tutelage of literary critic and novelist Brander Matthews, who was then “the university’s most famous professor” (Lewis, Harlem 145). Like Du Bois’ ongoing friendship with William James, Johnson and Matthews’ relationship lasted well after Columbia and was more than professorial. Matthews convinced Johnson to pursue a career as a writer instead of his already-lucrative career as a songwriter,²³⁹ which Johnson did while also pursuing a diplomatic career.

²³⁹ Not only did Johnson write “Life Every Voice and Sing,” what many refer to as the “Negro national anthem,” he, his brother, and Bob Cole (who was white) wrote tunes “heard in Broadway’s most successful shows” (Lewis, Harlem 145). Harold Cruse cites Cole as a precursor to Mabel Dodge Luhan who hosted literary salons at her

Matthews suggested the format of and wrote the introduction for Johnson's collection of poetry Fifty Years and Other Poems (1917). J. Saunders Redding notes Matthews sometimes lone support when praising The Autobiography—"[it] foreran its time"—and relating its chilly reception: "from 1903 to 1917 there was no place for [work like Johnson's], though Brander Matthews himself might praise [it]" (88). The Autobiography signals Johnson's reading in psychology and sexology. Or, it uncannily reproduces that discourse's combination of race and sexuality at precisely the time when these ideas—via Freud, especially—were gaining popularity among the white American left (including Matthews). Either way, The Autobiography's combination of race and psychology foresaw the psychoanalytically-tinged popularity of Harlem's black art among the white American left during the peak of the Renaissance. As David Levering Lewis attests, "Freudian notions and the postwar quest for divertissement sweeping Europe and American were at the source of the new popularity of the Negro" (Harlem 92).²⁴⁰ The Autobiography also foresaw Harlem's

apartment at 23 Fifth Avenue beginning in 1912: "Mabel Dodge's salon did not represent the first contacts between Negro and white in the artistic fields. This had already taken place in the theatre as far back as 1898-1900—before Negro Harlem was created—when the talented pioneer Bob Cole wrote music and sketches for white vaudeville shows" (27-28).

²⁴⁰ Whatever scholars' own aversion to reading the psychoanalytic alongside the racial, writers of the Harlem Renaissance knew that "the new religion of Freudianism" fueled the widespread popularity of their black art (Lewis 99). Lewis attests that this post-war Freudian impulsion infuriated black writers who "simmered indignantly over Gertrude Stein's Three Lives, E. E. Cumming's Jean Le Nègre in The Enormous Room, or Dreiser's Nigger Jeff. Talented Tenth lives, certainly, were not summed up by music, sex, primeval instincts, and an incapacity for logic" (92). Certainly, black writers were disturbed by stereotypical representations. But Lewis' lumping of psychoanalysis with these representations reflects New Negro resistance to the sexual that Alain Locke and Charles S. Johnson crafted and marketed more so than any unilateral response to "the new religion of Freudianism" (See Chapter Two).

queer “streetgeist and folklore” seen in the work of Richard Bruce Nugent, Eric Walrond, and Wallace Thurman, that I discuss in Chapter Two. The “racy music and racier dancing” that Alain Locke finds in the “cabarets famous or notorious according to their kind” appears in The Autobiography at “The Club,” “a center of colored bohemians” where Ex-Colored Man plays ragtime (49).

Throughout The Autobiography, the Ex-Colored Man’s own sexuality teeters seemingly with each new mishap that alters his life. Shifting any volition about sexuality to external forces or other characters defines the kind of “elusive” homosexuality reproduced by black queer vernacular and helps signal Ex-Colored Man’s connection to the literary trope often identified as the “tragic mulatto,” what Phillip Brian Harper calls “a stock figure in U.S. fiction by blacks and whites alike” often presented as a woman who “stands in an ambiguous relation to the tragedy with

Moreover, not all reactions to Stein’s “Melanctha” in Three Lives were negative. (See Carla L. Peterson’s “The Remaking of Americans: Gertrude Stein’s ‘Melanctha’ and African-American Musical Traditions” for an extended discussion).

Other reactions to Freud and the psychological during the Renaissance include Rudolph Fisher’s playful, insightful detective novel The Conjure Man (1932). As Maria Balshaw notes smartly, Fisher includes psychoanalysis among the many “conflicting interpretations of African American city life” (43). The novel “deliberately constructs African American urban culture as a series of conversations about the nature of racial being [which] are explored through drawing on competing philosophical and popular traditions; ranging from African myth and African American spiritualism, to American pragmatism, applied determinism, scientific rationalism, psychoanalysis, popular science and vernacular street culture. This rather heady mixture is yoked together through a classic detective plot where the conundrum of an impossible murder resolves itself as down-to-earth revenge for sexual infidelity” (38-39).

Within “this rather heady mixture” psychoanalysis has particular importance in “the nature of racial being.” In a novel where “conjure and superstition hold sway . . . as the most forceful vernacular reading of urban space and identity alongside the blues,” its “most important symbol” of conjuring, Frimbo, is, by turns, “the African prince, conjure man, psychoanalyst, quack doctor, philosopher, ladies’ man” (41, 43).

which she is associated” (103, 104). For example, soon after arriving in Atlanta to attend university, someone steals his tuition money he naively leaves in his trunk. So, he goes to Jacksonville, Florida, and works in a cigar-making factory. Just as he is about to settle down into his fate and his heterosexuality, the factory closes for an unknown reason and he goes to New York City where he quickly becomes absorbed in the bohemian nightlife of the “Club” near Sixth Avenue²⁴¹ where he meets a white queer cosmopolitan gentleman he calls “my benefactor” with whom he has “arguably the most fully rendered erotic bond in The Autobiography,” according to Siobhan B. Somerville (122). As the Ex-Colored Man narrates (and Johnson shifts the story with Deus ex Machina-like manipulation),

Just when I was beginning to look upon Jacksonville as my permanent home, and was beginning to plan about marrying the young school teacher, raising a family, and working in a cigar factory the rest of my life, for some reason, which I do not now remember, the factory at which I worked was indefinitely shut down. Some of the men got work in other factories in town, some decided to go to Key West and Tampa, others made up their minds to go to New York for work. All at once a desire like a fever seized me to see the North again, and I cast my lot with those bound for New York. (41)

²⁴¹ The Autobiography locates the “Club” two blocks away from Ex-Colored Man’s lodging-house on “27th Street, just west of Sixth Avenue” but does not note which direction he “walked two blocks, and turned to the west into another street” to get there (42, 44).

The equivocal fate that directs him also intensifies his relationship with “my millionaire friend,” “a clean cut, slender, but athletic looking man, who would have been taken for a youth had it not been for the tinge of gray about his temples” (56, 54). At first, he hires the Ex-Colored Man to play piano in his apartment: “He would sometimes sit for three or four hours hearing me play, his eyes almost closed, making scarcely a motion except to light a fresh cigarette” (54, 56). But after a shooting at the “Club” rattles Ex-Colored Man, he accepts his offer to travel to Paris, London, and Berlin where “my ‘millionaire’ entertained a party of men composed of artists, musicians, writers and, for aught I know, a count or two” (65). When Ex-Colored Man wants to return to the States, he worries about “breaking [up] with my ‘millionaire’” as if they had more of a relationship than he conveys with his narration: “Between this peculiar man and me there had grown a very strong bond of affection” (66).²⁴²

²⁴² Taken within the context of *The Autobiography*'s racial narrative empathetically exploring the psychological effect of Ex-Colored Man's second-sight, his “very strong bond of affection” with “this peculiar man” also reflects the homoeroticism central to American anti-slavery writings published between 1790 and 1820. According to John Salliant, these writings came at a time when ideas about race and slavery were in flux, not yet settled into the extremes of a proslavery view presupposing black inferiority and a liberal, sometimes perfectionist abolitionism” (403). These works also introduced two new elements in American writing: “the erotic representation of the black male body—its visage, hands, muscle, skin, height, sex—unparalleled by the representation of any other body [and] a **communitas**, blending sentimentalism and homoeroticism, shared by black men and white men who unite in opposition to slavery” (403).

Ex-Colored Man and his “millionaire” unite against racism but Johnson continues the anti-racist tradition that Karen Sánchez-Eppler identifies: “Miscegenation provides an essential motif of virtually all antislavery fiction” (qtd. in Salliant 405 n4). Moreover, much of their relationship echoes a novel Salliant explores, Joseph La Vallée's *Le nègre comme ily a peu de blancs* [translated as *The Negro as There Are Few White Men*, and *The Negro Equalled by Few Europeans*] (1789).

Keeping Ex-Colored Man's "desire like a fever" ambiguously queer allows Johnson to play with the new racial and sexual categories formed in the wake of studies by Havelock Ellis, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Carl Heinrich Ulrichs, Edward Stevenson writing as Xavier Mayne, and others. The Autobiography continues the work of sexologists who felt "the body was a legible text" and who "racialize perceived sexual ambiguity" in their work (Somerville 23, 27).²⁴³ The Autobiography signifies on sexologists' use of the mulatto figure to assert the rationality of homosexuality-as-biology. Johnson uses the queered mulatto to rationally present "a bird's-eye view" of race relations and discrimination in the United States as well as its effects on the psyche and life choices of the Ex-Colored Man (vii). As Werner Sollers maintains, The Autobiography uses the life story of its mulatto protagonist "as a national allegory and as the subject for a tragic construction of the conflict between real blood ties of family relations and the social barriers of slavery and color line" (305). The Autobiography's preface assents that the story "makes no special plea for the Negro, but shows in a dispassionate, though sympathetic, manner conditions as they actually exist between the whites and blacks to-day" (vii). The American-ness of mixed-parentage coincides with the empathetic function of the mulatto character to illustrate that black Americans are as much a legitimate part of the national "family" as white Americans are. As Katherine Fishburn demonstrates, the so-called "tragic mulatto" who is "uncannily successful" and talented works to establish black people's "mental ability [over] manual dexterity [to] prove them intellectually and socially

²⁴³ Somerville builds on Sánchez-Eppler and Salliant's work to show how miscegenation provides an essential motif in sexologists' anti-pathology studies of homosexuality.

equal to whites. That these heroes . . . are predominantly light-skinned further served the programmatic goal of convincing white readers that those exemplary black achievers they read about were very much like themselves” (145).

Similarly, sexologists use the mulatto figure to assert that the “mixed” homosexual is very much like any other sexual being. Tellingly, though, their assertions about the biology of homosexuality take on some of the miscegenation anxiety that the mulatto figure references.²⁴⁴ In fact, the very terms to name homosexuality reveal this anxiety as well as their “mixed” etymologies. For instance, Havelock Ellis laments that homosexual is far from “colorless,” noting that the “barbarously hybrid word” “has, philologically, the awkward disadvantage of being a bastard term compounded of Greek and Latin elements” (qtd. in Somerville 32).

Others like Xavier Mayne’s “colorful” term **Intersex** draws explicitly from the

²⁴⁴ For some the anxiety surrounding the figure of the mulatto matched the anxiety surrounding homosexuality. While Richard von Krafft-Ebing was influenced by Carl Heinrich Ulrichs’ work “openly discuss[ing] the problem of sexual inversion and had sought for a revision of the German legal codes in this domain” because, as Frank J. Sulloway calls him, Ulrichs was “a self-confessed homosexual,” von Krafft-Ebing was not exactly celebratory when studying what he called **conträre Sexualempfindung** (“contrary sexual feeling”) (281). While von Krafft-Ebbing rallies against stereotypes of and discrimination against those with **conträre Sexualempfindung**, he still asserts that these “natural instincts” are a perversion, the “result of a neuro-psychical degeneration”: “As we study into the abnormal and diseased conditions from which this malady results, the ideas of horror and criminality connected with it disappear, and there arises in our minds the sense of duty to investigate what at first sight seems so repulsive, and to distinguish, if may be, between a perversion of natural instincts which is the result of a disease, and the criminal offences of a perverted mind against the laws of morality and social decency. By doing so the investigations of science will become the means of rescuing the honor and re-establishing the social position of many an unfortunate whom unthinking prejudice and ignorance would class among depraved criminals. It would not be the first time that science has rendered a service to justice and to society by teaching that what seem to be immoral conditions and actions are but the results of disease” (qtd. in Sulloway 280).

gradations of skin color produced by mixed parentage to celebrate the spectrum of gender and sexuality: “Between the whitest of men and the blackest negro stretches out a vast line of intermediary races as to their colours: brown, olive, red tawny, yellow. . . . Nature abhors the absolute, delights in the fractional. . . . Intersexes express the half-steps, the between-beings” (qtd. in Somerville 32). The delight in the natural reality of the sexually fractional that Mayne asserts resembles the “cultural historical given that black Americans are mulattoes” that Kimberly A. C. Wilson makes plain: “few descendants of slavery can truthfully claim a lineage that does not include a racial hybrid. . . . As a metaphor and as a reality, then, the figure of the mulatto is self-reflexive: we represent, through our myriad colorations, the creation of a new race by way of the transformation of previous ones” (104).²⁴⁵

But not all racial metaphors were used to prove the biology of homosexual “between-beings.” In fact, the same racial metaphor Mayne uses in defense of homosexuality, Cesare Lombroso uses “to bolster his argument that sexual deviates were on a lower stage of the evolutionary ladder than normal heterosexual individuals” (Bullough 10). Lombroso argues that such degeneracy is evidenced through “behavior common among primitive groups” (10). While Lombroso argues that such degenerates should not be ‘punished’ for being ‘morally insane,’ Lombroso’s technique for studying this group—“measur[ing] the skulls, bodies, sexual organs, [as well as] the features of criminals, prostitutes, idiots, arsonists, and the ‘sexually

²⁴⁵ James Hugo Johnston concurs matter-of-factly in his 1937 dissertation: “Miscegenation was a normal consequence of human beings living and working together at common tasks. No unusual moral qualities, on the part of either group, need to be assumed” (1).

perverted' [to prove] that such individuals had a large number of primitive characteristics such as jutting jaws, malformed craniums, and close-set eyes"—mirrors the techniques of comparative anatomy used to prove popular racist mythology (10). Lombroso's mirroring the techniques of comparative anatomy to discuss sexuality is not such a leap of "scientific" faith; in fact, comparative anatomy's "proof" of biological determinism was already perceived to be "common knowledge." As Sander Gilman notes, "any attempt to establish that the races were inherently different rested to no little extent on the sexual difference of the black [subject]" (qtd. in Somerville, "Scientific Racism" 250-251). Miscegenation, after all, was "not only a question of race, but also one of sex and sexuality" (Somerville 257).

Some scholars still project eugenicist Davenport's "disharmony" or pan-Africanist Blyden's "muddle" onto Johnson's *Ex-Colored Man* instead of recognizing Johnson's strategic emulation of Du Boisian dramatic crises to make plain the "the mysteries of racial psychology" (Nelson 337). Or, scholars think the mulatto as a kind of postmodern vanguard like Neil Brooks does in "On Becoming an Ex-Colored Man: Postmodern Irony and the Extinguishing of Certainties in The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man." But Brooks cannot read the knowing disclosures of The Autobiography as anything but "the great secret of my [Ex-Colored Man's] life" (Autobiography 1). How can the novella "narrate a life of concealment and disguise [that] produce[s] a text that can only be understood through what it conceals, through the gaps and the unspoken" when the Ex-Colored man reveals "the great secret" in the first chapter, a secret that was actually his mother's (Brooks 84)? After all, he did not willingly or knowingly "pass" as white; he thought he was white because she never

explained differently. Plus, how much of a “secret” is the Ex-Colored Man’s racial revelation when it happens at school in his classroom—and therefore in public? Understandably, this revelation is a shock for him; but it creates only a momentary crisis. After school that day, he searches in the mirror for what he had never seen before and then questions his mother. But “for days [thereafter] I could talk of nothing else with my mother except my ambitions to be a great man, a great colored man, to reflect credit on the race, and gain fame for myself” (Autobiography 21).

Still, Brooks maintains that the Ex-Colored Man’s “lack of [a] stable identity is underscored by the protagonist remaining unnamed [which] is evidence of his failure to be a complete person” (90). To make this point, Brooks disregards The Autobiography’s design. Ex-Colored Man is not nameless; he does not disclose it in his narration of events. His namelessness references the tracts of sexologists as well. Because sexologists like Carl Heinrich Ulrichs were, as Frank J. Sulloway relates, “self-confessed homosexual[s],” they feared retribution for their work (281). Ulrichs published under the pseudonym of Numa Numantius from 1865 and 1875 as he asserted, “the instincts he found in himself were not ‘abnormal’ but were inborn and therefore natural” (Bullough 6). Ulrichs thus urges that homosexuality should not be illegal under the German legal code. Likewise, Karoly Maria Benkert published under the pseudonym Kertbeny when he coined homosexual in 1869 in an open letter to the Prussian minister of justice in which he argued “Nature in her sovereign mood has endowed at birth certain male and female individuals with the homosexual urge” (qtd.

in Bullough 7).²⁴⁶ He petitioned that such an endowment should not be illegal under the Prussian legal code. The Autobiography knowingly plays on the political and personal nature of these tracts by purporting in its first edition in 1912 that it actually was autobiographical. (In 1927, the reprinting of The Autobiography at the behest of Carl Van Vechten, included Johnson's name as author).

Like Brooks, John Sheehy argues that The Autobiography presents a metaphoric incompleteness. Sheehy finds "his image in the mirror [that day after school] both troubling and inconclusive" (401). Perhaps projecting Sheehy's own panic over the supposedly "ambiguous" racial identity of mixed-race people or passing narratives, Sheehy reads ahead to the novella's ending where Ex-Colored Man lives as "white," or "not-black," and asserts that this mirror moment is the start of Ex-Colored Man's "peculiar position: He may choose his race. This choice, of course, is not an uncomplicated one, entailing as it does either the denial of his own history, on one hand, or the acceptance of an unjustifiable but undeniable economic and social subjugation, on the other" (401). To do so, Sheehy must read over Ex-Colored Man's awareness of the "capital joke I was playing" about which he "laughed heartily over" (93). After the "sword-thrust that day in school" neither Ex-Colored Man nor the reader can choose to deny his history (8). How, too, can he overlook that the reader is included in this "capital joke"?

The Autobiography expects that readers know Du Bois' Souls as well. Johnson grounds its knowing racial psychology with references to Souls and its awareness of

²⁴⁶ As Vern Bullough explains, Benkert's letter was "more or less forgotten until it was republished and widely disseminated by Magnus Hirschfeld in **Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen**, VI (1905)" (165 n8).

racial identity based on the alienation, difference, and visual trauma explored in psychology. In chapter ten, after he returns from Europe alone, the Ex-Colored Man cites “that remarkable book by Dr. Du Bois” as a great source for “the future Negro novelist” (79). He also grounds the novella’s racial epistemology by recreating the dramatic crisis that Du Bois uses to identify the veil in Souls. Just as in Souls, the Ex-Colored Man’s dramatic crises makes him conscious of—and embrace—his blackness in a space where he already embraced his mental abilities, school:

One day near the end of my second term at school the principal came into our room, and after talking to the teacher, for some reason said, “I wish all the white scholars to stand for a moment.” I rose with the others. The teacher looked at me, and calling my name said, “You sit down for the present, and rise with the others.” I did not quite understand her, and questioned, “Ma’m?” She repeated with a softer tone in her voice, “You sit down now, and rise with the others.” I sat down dazed. I saw and heard nothing. When the others were asked to rise I did not know it. When school was dismissed I went out in a kind of stupor. A few of the white boys jeered me, saying “Oh, you’re a nigger too.” I heard some black children say, “We knew he was colored.” “Shiny” said to them, “Come along, don’t tease him,” and thereby won my undying gratitude. (Autobiography 7)

Johnson emphasizes the knowing looks of this passage (the teacher’s, the black children’s, “Shiny”’s) by what happens directly thereafter. Ex-Colored Man’s rushes home and “up into my own little room . . . and went quickly to where my looking-

glass hung on the wall” (7-8). He becomes transfixed by his image: “How long I stood there gazing at my image I do not know” (8). He has a Freud-like “uncanny” moment in front of his mirror “mis-recognizing” his former “white” self, noticing the beauty of his features and how they make his skin “appear whiter than it really was” that John Salliant finds in anti-slavery writings from a century before:

For an instant I was afraid to look, but when I did I looked long and earnestly. I had often heard people say to my mother, “What a pretty boy you have.” I was accustomed to hear remarks about my beauty; but, now, for the first time, I became conscious of it, and recognized it. I noticed the ivory whiteness of my skin, the beauty of my mouth, the size and liquid darkness of my eyes, and how the long black lashes that fringed and shaded them produced an effect that was strangely fascinating even to me. I noticed the softness and glossiness of my dark hair that fell in waves over my temples, making my forehead appear whiter than it really was. (Autobiography 8)

Like Du Bois’ ease with staying behind the veil, Ex-Colored Man finds beauty in himself despite the “sword-thrust that day in school” (9). He understands that despite the “ivory whiteness” of his skin, he is black. For example, when his mother protests after he asks “Tell me, mother, am I a nigger?” he concedes to the reader, “the more she talked the less I was reassured” (8). As she explains to him that his father is white and that “the best blood of the South is in you,” he studies her face like he did his own in the mirror. He discovers the same beauty and blackness in her:

There were tears in her eyes, and I could see that she was suffering for me. And then it was that I looked at her critically for the first time. I had thought of her in a childish way only as the most beautiful woman in the world; now I looked at her searching for defects. I could see that her skin was almost brown, that her hair was not so soft as mine, and that she did differ in some way from the other ladies who came to the house; yet, even so, I could see that she was very beautiful, more beautiful than any of them. (8)

He also finds that he is more beautiful—more prototypically “feminine”—than his mother: “her hair was not so soft as mine.”

These back-to-back face-studies of racial identification depict Freud’s “uncanny” fusion of race and gender, albeit in a more “positive” or accepting manner. While Freud “thoroughly disliked” the Jew he saw in the mirror, *Ex-Colored Man* “was strangely fascinat[ed]” by the beauty of his and his mother’s racial features. Still, like Freud, the *Ex-Colored Man* finds a racialized and feminized image. For the *Ex-Colored Man*, his feminized fascination repeats Freud and links *The Autobiography* to the trope of the mulatto. As Phillip Brian Harper concludes, *Ex-Colored Man*’s face-studies indicate

the degree to which mulatto identity implicates both the intermingling of African and European features and a feminized process of erotic ‘fascination.’ ... Moreover, this feminine characterization is intensified through the clearly narcissistic nature of the protagonist’s own fascination, which entails not only his obsession with his mirror

reflection, but also his minutely detailed description of and rumination on his appearance in a way that seems to epitomize stereotypically feminine vanity. (108-109)

While the Ex-Colored Man's "feminine vanity" symbolizes his social disfranchisement, his ruminations also spark a Du Boisian embrace of his blackness regardless of any enforced social caste. At the moment he recognizes he is "no longer" white, he sees the "beauty of my mouth, the size and liquid darkness of my eyes, ... the softness and glossiness of my dark hair." Part of that beauty is his body's ability to present itself "whiter than it really [i]s"; but that is more a "capital joke" played on whites than any renouncement of his blackness. His acknowledgement of his ability to "pass" comes in tandem with his understanding of both the social disenfranchisement and beauty of black people.

Section B: Diaspora Négritude, or "the celebration of a black consciousness through literature"

Il y avait même eu un premier contact [comme pendant la guerre quand les Noirs d'Amérique battais], sur sol français, entre Noirs d'Amérique et Noirs d'Afrique. Je ne sais pas très bien ce qu'ont pu se dire Sénégalais et Géorgiens. Sans doute leur conversation s'est-elle bornée à quelques verres bus ensemble, car entre le français yolof des uns et l'excellent yankee des autres, il n'était sans doute guère d'échange possible. [There was the first contact on French soil between black Americans and black Africans (like the contact had when black Americans fought during World War I). I do not know very well what could have been said between Sénégalaise and Georgians. Without a doubt, their conversation was marked by several celebratory toasts,

because between the french Wolofs and the excellent Yankee among authors, there is hardly a doubt that there were pleasant exchanges].
—Franck L. Schoell, “La Renaissance Nègre aux États-Unis”
(1929)

Diaspora assessment of Du Bois and his Souls of Black Folk attests to his stalwart dedication in organizing five Pan-Africanist Congresses, from 1919 to 1945. Despite the respect Du Bois commanded, the “Pan-African Congresses had never quite caught on with the NAACP board of directors [since] Du Bois had launched them after World War I. [Any] ethos of internationalism and democratic idealism [was] broader than it was deep” (Lewis, Du Bois 499). Even though the board consented to the fifth Congress, members Thurgood Marshall and Roy Wilkins thought it “was irrelevant to the battle against segregation” in the States (499). Despite this underwhelming support, as David Levering Lewis extols, “in Du Bois the Pan-African idea found an intellectual temperament and organizational audacity enabling it to advance beyond the evangelical and literary to become an embryonic movement whose cultural, political, and economic potential would assume, in the long term, worldwide significance” (38). After the second Congress, which took place in London, Brussels, and Paris from 29 August to 6 September 1921, the London Challenge “concluded that [Du Bois] was more than a ‘personal force’: he symbolized the New Negro” (42). Parisian newspaper Echo de la Bourse attests to Du Bois’ “personal force”: “Whether or not you like Mr. Burghardt Du Bois . . . you have to bow to his brilliant intellect and his devotion to the black race” (qtd. in Lewis 44).²⁴⁷

²⁴⁷ Lewis quotes this translation from Jessie Redmon Fauset’s “What Europe Thought.”

An important example of Du Bois' "personal force" is Franck L. Schoell's "La 'Reniassance Nègre' aux États-Unis,"²⁴⁸ an article that Brenda Berrian notes "served to introduce Afro-American poets to Haitian poets on a broad scale" (30).²⁴⁹ In the epigraph for this section, Schoell never mentions "l'excellent yankee des autres" [the excellent Yankee among authors] by name at all, while later in the article he never includes the opening initials of his name, as if readers would already know the Du Bois to which he refers.²⁵⁰ Another important example is C. L. R. James' essay, "Black Power," his study of the pan-African, West Indian roots of Black Power. For James, Du Bois transcends his Massachusetts birth: "W. E. B. Du Bois was South and North, everywhere, and in the world outside: his was a universal mind" (461). Du Bois' transnationalist mind places him as an important forerunner of Fanon's: "We do not see Fanon correctly if we do not see him as a natural development after what [George] Padmore represented, and Padmore as the political stage of the wide avenue opened by Du Bois and Marcus Garvey" (461).²⁵¹ James finds the link between Du

²⁴⁸ All English translations of Schoell's articles included here are mine.

²⁴⁹ Berrian cites that Philippe Thoby-Marcelin, one of the principals of Indigénisme, "said to Naomi Garrett, the Black American literary scholar and teacher, during an interview conducted in 1952, that it was the Schoell article that incited his interest in Afro-American poetry, as well as that of other members of his group who did not know English at the time" (30).

²⁵⁰ The only other person Schoell mentions with just one name is the Russian writer of African descent Alexander Pushkin, whom Schoell calls "Pouchkine." But this could just be a truncation of the two Alexander's that would appear in this sentence otherwise: "Il est fréquent de se voir rappeler dans les revues ou périodique noirs qu'Alexandre Dumas et Pouchkine—ces deux 'géants de la littérature modiale'—avaient du sang noir dans les veines" [In literary reviews, black journals remember frequently the work of Alexander Dumas and Alexander Pushkin—two giants of world literature—who have black blood in their veins] (146).

²⁵¹ US-generated "histories" of the Diaspora are not so transnationally equal. Even where Diaspora discussions are noted, black US American writers often take center

Bois and Fanon in their resistance to accept the status quo of racism and imperialism. For Du Bois, that resistance comes after the discovery of his double-consciousness, like the “divided subject” that Freud developed.

stage, creating a US-imperialist version of the black Atlantic. As Hazel Carby argues in “Proletarian or Revolutionary Literature: C.L.R. James and the Politics of the Trinidadian Renaissance,” national culture supports such literary imperialism. She warns that we must be “in a state of constant political confrontation with the imperialist discourse that structures ‘first’ world education systems” that support such scholarship (39-40). We must engage in “a constant and consistent critique of the forms of knowledge production that maintain the European and American cultural hegemony in which our students are embedded: either that or we [teachers, scholars, and students of Caribbean culture] remain politically marginal” (39). This critique must “offer a coherent alternative political vision: a way of thinking critically across relations of cultural production in the ‘third,’ ‘second,’ and ‘first’ worlds” (40). The disciplines in and methodologies through which we engage in critique must be questioned as well. The best of recent scholarship working toward these goals has fostered theories of “transnationalism” where “ethnic nationalism and internationalism [a]re not mutually exclusive,” as Robin D.G. Kelley explains (105). But both the scholarly chauvinism that maintains a US-centric black Diaspora and “transnationalist” visions of black culture in response are hardly recent inventions.

In 1927, Thomas L.G. Oxley insists upon an Anglo-centered “history of Negro literature” in the otherwise transnationalist *The Messenger* which “must clam our full attention in a special degree. It is intensely national as well as American. In fact, it is more American than anything else” (298). His “American” survey includes Jamaica-born Claude McKay and British West Indies-born George Reginald Margetson. Linguistically, they support Oxley’s Anglo history but their birth countries hardly make McKay and Margetson American. Oxley uses them to misrepresent “Negro literature” as “American Negro literature.” So powerful is “America” as an ideological symbol, as Oxley reasons, that Jamaica and the British West Indies acquiesce to it quietly. After all, they all speak English. Two years earlier, however, Wilfrid Adolphus Domingo illustrates the transnationalist and multi-lingual character of Harlem in “The Tropics of New York”: “Within Harlem’s seventy or eighty blocks [where] for the first time in their lives, colored people of Spanish, French, Dutch, Arabian, Danish, Portuguese, British and native African ancestry or nationality meet and move together” (648). There, despite West Indian discrimination, “a dusky tribe of destiny seekers, these brown and black and yellow folk, eyes filled with visions of their heritage—palm fringed sea shores, murmuring streams, luxuriant hills and vales—have made their epical march . . . to Harlem[, a] romantic pilgrimage to the El Dorado of their dreams” (648).

The “race psychology” of Du Bois was well known throughout the Caribbean. Brenda Berrian agrees with James when she asserts that “W. E. B. Du Bois was the active spirit behind the creation of an international black elite. He was the twentieth-century father, at least, of Negritude as a political manifestation. [Moreover,] he was not without poetic instincts, and his prose often qualifies as poetry of Negritude” (34). Franck L. Schoell helped promote this poetry of Négritude when he argues that the Renaissance’s three best texts are

un fort bon livre de James Weldon Johnson, The autobiography of an ex-colored Man, publié en 1912 mais depuis longtemps épuisé, et ... un roman, d’ailleurs fort bon, présenté par le tout jeune écrivain noir Eric Walrond: Tropic Death (1926). La production nègre est à l’avant-garde de l’actualité littéraire, à telles enseignes qu’il existait il y a quelques mois—peut-être vit-elle encore—une revue trimestrielle d’avant-garde, Fire (“le Feu”) consacrée aux jeunes artistes nègres et rédigée par eux. [a very good novel by James Weldon Johnson, The Autobiography of an Ex-colored Man, published in 1912 but since out of print, and an even better novel presented by the very youngest black writer Eric Warlond, Tropic Death. Black writing constitutes the vanguard of today’s literature—so much so that for the past few months—perhaps further issues will follow—there has been circulating an avant-garde quarterly journal called Fire, devoted to younger black artists and written by them]. (151-152)

No doubt, the French-speaking readership to whom Schoell introduced the Renaissance included Léon Damas, who admits in a 15 March 1975 interview with Brenda Berrian, “I have read Fire” (48).²⁵² Léon Damas recalls that the ongoing transnational exchange that included the black queer representation in Fire!! as well as Du Bois’ desirous “veil” came with Du Bois’ Pan-African Congresses:

The Second Congress was held in 1938 in Paris. I attended this one.

While there, I met Langston Hughes, Jacques Roumain²⁵³ and Nicolás

Guillén.²⁵⁴ One night, after the meetings, Langston Hughes and I

²⁵² Also in that readership was Jean Price-Mars, whose iconoclastic Ainsi parla l’Oncle (1928)—in which he attacked what he termed “le bovarysme de l’élite” [the cattle-like mentality of the elite]—suggests Fire!! (qtd. in Knight 30). Price-Mars, “the father of Haitianism, [brought] the works of Black Americans to the attention of Haiti’s intellectuals and writers. Price-Mars counseled young Haitian poets to follow the example of Black American poets, because they were victims of a social situation not unlike Haiti’s own under the American occupation of the island” (Berrian 7). Likewise, Martiniquans Paulette and Jean Nardal, Haitian Léo Sajous, and Guadeloupian Me Jean-Louis, who co-founded the journal La Revue du Monde Noir, “diffused the ideas of the Harlem Renaissance through translating the poems of Claude McKay and Langston Hughes” (7). The Nardal sisters’ literary salons in Paris during the 1930s were opportunities for black francophone and black American writers to meet and talk. Also part of this readership was Aimé Césaire who remembers “very well that around that time [when La Revue du Monde Noir first appeared] we read the poems of Langston Hughes and Claude McKay. I knew very well who McKay was because in 1929 or 1930 an anthology of American Negro poetry appeared in Paris” (Depestre 71). Most likely, Césaire met McKay as well, since McKay was acquainted with the Nardal sisters and urged Alain Locke to meet them. In a note dated 10 February without a year—McKay biographer Wayne F. Cooper reasons “it might have been as early as 1923 or as late as 1928”—McKay informs Locke that “Mlle. Nardal is giving an ‘afternoon’ for her sister just arrived from a visit to Martinique and they are anxious to meet you” (Cooper 215).

²⁵³ Roumain was born in Haïti and educated in Switzerland. With Philippe Thoby-Marcelin, Carl Brouard, and Antonio Vieux, he co-founded La Revue Indigène: Les Arts et la Vie in 1927.

²⁵⁴ Guillén was born in Camaguey, Cuba of parents of mixed African-Spanish descent. In 1930, he published Motivos de son, eight short poems written in in Afro-Cuban vernacular, which were inspired by the Son, a popular Afro-Cuban musical

visited some speakeasies. We spent several hours in one—on rue Pierre Chauon, near the Champs Elysées. We talked about music, literature, the dance called the *béguine*, etc. Later, Hughes left for Spain with Jacques Roumain and Nicolás Guillén, where he hoped to visit with some Afro-American mercenaries. Langston was in close contact with Guillén. After the death of Jacques Roumain, Mercer Cook and Langston Hughes collaborated on the translation of Roumain's *Gouverneurs de la Rosée*. (Berrian 51-52)

Included in this travel was cross-cultural scholarship at universities: “In Paris, the West Indian Ari Méry, prepared a thesis on James Weldon Johnson, while, at Howard, [Martiniquan] Louis Achille did one on Paul Laurence Dunbar. It is the best work done on Dunbar, even today” (52).

But black Atlantic travel was not always for study or for congresses. Eric Walrond, Countée Cullen, and Claude McKay lived in Europe for part of the 1920s and 1930s. Alain Locke spent his summers during the Renaissance networking in Europe. Langston Hughes crisscrossed the Atlantic among sailors. In fact, ships were a

form, and the daily living conditions of Cuban blacks. Hughes and Howard University professor of Spanish Ben Frederic Carruthers translated a collection of Guillén's poetry entitled *Cuba Libre* (1948). As Arnold Rampersad explains, “Impressed by the young Cuban, Langston had started translating his work almost from their first meeting in 1930 in Havana. Around 1944, he had begun discussions with Carruthers, a professor of Spanish who had also visited Cuba, and who had translated some of Guillén's verse, about a book of translations. . . . The size of the [printing of the] proposed edition—five hundred copies—discouraged Langston. The venture would be ‘a labor of love,’ he judged. But he was eager to honor Guillén, and accepted the terms. The fifty poems came from Guillén's early books—*Motivos de Son* (1930), his breakthrough into Afro-Cuban language and rhythms, largely inspired by Langston's visit to Havana that year; *Sóngoro Cosongo* (1931); and *Sones para turistas y cantos para soldados* (1937) (Volume I 154-155).

metonym for transnational blackness long before Paul Gilroy uses the ship as a symbol of black modernity in The Black Atlantic. Even Gilroy admits as much: “The involvement of Marcus Garvey, George Padmore, Claude McKay, and Langston Hughes with ships and sailors lends additional support to Linebaugh’s prescient suggestion that ‘the ship remained perhaps the most important conduit of Pan-African communication before the appearance of the long-playing record’” (13). As I argue in my second chapter, images of ships and sailors signify the circulation of black queerness as well. Like sexologists’ figure of the mulatto, ships and sailors simultaneously reference race and homosociality, if not homosexuality.²⁵⁵ The circulation of Du Bois and concomitant black queer vernacular—including “un fort bon livre de James Weldon Johnson”—set the stage for both Frantz Fanon’s Black Skin, White Masks and Andrew Salkey’s Escape to an Autumn Pavement.

²⁵⁵ Robert Reid-Pharr offers a similar reading of Gilroy in “Engendering the Black Atlantic”; but for Reid-Pharr, Gilroy’s use of the already-homoerotic ship creates a problem and references the US military’s “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy on homosexuality—not black literature or culture. More problematic is the morass of sentences that Reid-Pharr offers subsequently, which move from the overdetermined homosociality of the ship to that image as “one of the last great bastions of male (heterosexual) exclusivity”: “The image of the ship disallows the notion of some hermetically sealed tradition, or ‘roots’ as Gilroy would have it. Instead the emphasis is on ‘routes,’ the manner in which culture is transferred and shared across time and space. I would like to suggest, however, that the image of the ship, the living micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion, is already heavily overdetermined by notions of male homosociality, if not homoeroticism. I am reminded of the rather severe phobias generated by the suggestion that ‘gay’ and ‘straight’ sailors might shower together on board Navy cruisers if the U.S. military lifted its ban against homosexuals. I do not mean to imply that women were or are altogether absent from maritime life. Instead I mean to suggest that ships continue—at least in the U.S. national imaginary—to be seen as one of the last great bastions of male (heterosexual) exclusivity” (12).

Section C: “Those Who Won’t See Can’t See” Narrating race, sexuality, and imperialism anew in Andrew Salkey’s *Escape to an Autumn Pavement*

The love of the home I left
is the art of the impossible;
to keep loving it is easier
than going straight back to it.

—Andrew Salkey, “Only Change Will Do,” from *Away* (1980)

Novelist and poet Andrew Salkey’s journey to “Mother England” from Jamaica in 1951 echoes the numerous stories of post-war Caribbean migrants who came to Britain after the *SS Empire Windrush* first anchored at Southampton in June 1948. These journeys of exile command metaphor in work by and about West Indian writers, typifying their precarious—if not fated—struggles with and link to London as the site of then-colonial power. Metropolitan London, this work relates, lures, educates, and alienates the black writer who struggles indefinitely to reconnect with rural Caribbean roots, to find balance in a now-altered identity.²⁵⁶ To do so, the West

²⁵⁶ West Indian writers struggled with British publishers as well. In response to collecting rejection letters throughout the 1940s, Edgar Mittleholzer described himself as “the head of an army [whose] enemy was the life-cum-editors-and-publishers in London” (qtd. in Walmsley 36). London changed West Indian writers irrevocably and “inevitabl[y],” according to Louis James. In his introduction to *The Islands In Between: Essays on West Indian Literature*, the first book of criticism in this field published in 1968, James explains that “There were no adequate publishing houses in the Caribbean. . . . Even if there had been . . . the readership there was so small that writers had to rely on interest from a European and American public to make a living by writing. The knowledge of this put great temptations in the way of a writer trying to be honest to his West Indian experience. (36)

Those readers still in the West Indies reminded Andrew Salkey of this perceived change when he returned to Jamaica in 1961 to speak at what was then the University College of the West Indies. Undergraduates there threw accusations like “‘you have deserted us,’ ‘you present a fake picture of us in England,’ [and] ‘you serve up what English publishers require’” (Carr 100). So persistent was this “severe mauling” during Salkey’s stay, his “third of a scheduled series of [radio] broadcasts

Indian writer often celebrates Caribbean folk culture and proclaims the imperial enforcement of economic and cultural inequality for West Indians living in London. But such generalizations do not apply to Salkey's London-set novels published during the 1960s, Escape to an Autumn Pavement, The Late Emancipation of Jerry Stover (1968), and The Adventures of Catallus Kelly (1969). These novels blister any easy or nostalgic visions of home, migration, or racial authenticity. They undercut the crisis and nostalgia that characterize other West Indian writing published around 1960, like friend and fellow writer George Lamming's "The Occasion for Speaking," one of the interrelated essays in his foundational collection The Pleasures of Exile. For Lamming, separation from the "islands [West Indians] know best [for a life] almost wholly foreign to them" produces an endless loop: "We are made to feel a sense of exile by our inadequacy and our irrelevance of function in a society whose past we can't alter, and whose future is always beyond us" (12). Still, he questions, "Is their journey a part of a hunger for recognition? Do they see such a recognition [in London] as a confirmation of the fact that they are writers?" (12).

Resoundly, Salkey's London novels—particularly Escape to an Autumn Pavement—answer "no." And because of them, Salkey's body of work "has received very little extended critical consideration," admits Daryl Cumber Dance. He is mentioned in most (though by no means all) surveys and studies of Caribbean literature, but in most cases there is little more than passing notice" (424). About Escape, Bill Carr praises, "I suspect that one of the reasons for the book's unfriendly

took the form of an angry, almost impromptu, reply to his critics" (100). As Bill Carr explains, "another West Indian had 'come home'" (100).

reception is to be found in its originality” (107). Kenneth Ramchand acknowledges this “unfriendly reception” in an essay celebrating Salkey’s life after his death in 1995: “Looking back at his novels now, it is surprising to realise how out of tune Salkey was with the optimism of the 1950’s and early 1960’s, how much of a strain it must have been to him to be one of the boys and to keep himself up” (84). That strain surfaces when long time friends and book publishers Jessica and Eric Huntley, owners and editors of Bogle-L’Ouverture Press, discuss Salkey. They lament that “he passed away without getting the credit due to him” and told me that Salkey was disappointed about being overlooked but “never said it openly” (Interview).

Even though Salkey’s London novels radically narrate race, sexuality, and imperialism, their relative absence from extended criticism of West Indian literature indicates the degree to which scholars must read over Salkey’s central literary contributions. As one of the founding members of the Caribbean Artists Movement (CAM)—along with writers John LaRose and Edward Kamau Brathwaite—Salkey helped shape the West Indian artistic community in London. His tireless support for West Indian writing started with his work as a freelance broadcaster, interviewer, and scriptwriter for the BBC’s Caribbean Voices program in the mid-1950s. Unlike LaRose and Brathwaite, Salkey singly fostered a community of West Indian writers in the 1950s that CAM institutionalized a decade later.²⁵⁷ Both LaRose and Brathwaite

²⁵⁷ Neither LaRose nor Brathwaite were in London when Salkey was working at Caribbean Voices. LaRose was politically active and produced a fortnightly radio program in Trinidad in the 1950s. When he came to London in the early 1960s he saw “the need for an organisation of writers and artists [in London,] a kind of Mecca for the Caribbean writer” (Walmsley 38). Brathwaite graduated with a degree in history at Cambridge in 1953 and took a Diploma in Education the following year. Then he

“knew that Andrew Salkey was regarded as the key person for West Indian intellectuals in London, as a published novelist, poet and anthologist, through his work with at the BBC, and because of his particular personality” (Walmsley 43). As Kenneth Ramchand relates, Salkey’s

home was a meeting place for many of the West Indian writers of the 1950's: it was the place where Jan Carew would regale you with one of his endless tales of the Guyanese bush or metropolitan jungle; a place where you would get to hear who was in the city and who was writing what now; a place where a writer trying to make his way would not only be sure of a hospitable transit, but might even hear of an opportunity to publish, review, or give a talk. (83)

As Salkey reasons, “I was the one that most of them got on with. I also made sure that I was of service to the friendships” (qtd. in Walmsley 44). Or, according to George Lamming,

He was able to bring into the same room men who in no circumstances would want to share the same space with each other. For Salkey, they came. [He] didn’t only bring people together and hold them together in that way but he made sure that if necessary everyone would know where to find anyone. If you were trying to find LaRose and you couldn’t find LaRose, you would call Salkey and he would say “He is

worked in what was then the West African colony of the Gold Coast (now Ghana) until 1960, when he returned home to Barbados. After teaching at the University of West Indies at Mona, Brathwaite came back to Britain in the summer of 1965.

in Trinidad, here's the address and telephone number." ("The Coldest Spring" 9)

Salkey's "service to the[se] friendships" included introducing V.S. Naipaul to his future publishers, supporting the publication of Kenneth Ramchand's landmark study The West Indian Novel and Its Background (1970), and convincing Charles Monteith at Faber and Faber to publish Wilson Harris' first novel Palace of the Peacock (1960) after six readers "had made neither head nor tail of it, and advised rejection" (Walmsley 45).²⁵⁸ Salkey asserted to Monteith, "If you and your firm can take a chance on William Golding, certainly you can take a chance on Wilson Harris" (44).

Still, Salkey's London novels seem to contradict the very tenets of West Indian literature he helped to create through CAM. These tenets, as Anne Walmsley outlines in Caribbean Artists Movement, 1966-1972: A Literary & Cultural History (1992), urge West Indian writers "to discover their own aesthetic and to chart new directions for their arts and culture; to become acquainted with their history; to rehabilitate their Amerindian inheritance and to reinstate their African roots; to reestablish links with the 'folk' through incorporating the peoples' language and musical rhythms in Caribbean literature; [and] to reassert their own tradition in the face of the dominant tradition" (xvii). The unstated influence for these tenets is the then-popular combination of Marxism and structuralism which influenced discussions about black subjectivity and black characters in literature. Such marxist structuralism argues that individuals bear (not choose) their social, historical position. Individuals express that

²⁵⁸ Salkey's friendship with Monteith began through editing Salkey's anthology West Indian Stories (Faber and Faber, 1960). Monteith asked Salkey to read Harris' Palace.

burden with language that signifies the very economic and social domination colonialism shapes, what Aimé Césaire calls the “boomerang effect of colonization” in Discourse on Colonialism, which sounds like DuBois’ published recanting of Locke’s “decadence” (20). Césaire asserts that everyone, including the bourgeoisie who reap the benefits from colonial and imperial economies, suffers this taint of history: “it is an implacable law that every decadent class finds itself turned into a receptacle into which there flow all the dirty waters of history” (45). Even as Césaire strives “to create a new language [in his poetry], one capable of communicating [an] African heritage,” “a black French that, while still being French, had a black character,” Césaire admits that the French language’s “traditional forms—burdensome, overused forms—were crushing me” (“Interview” 67). Black expression still resonates “the great historical tragedy of Africa [which is] not so much that it was too late in making contact with the rest of the world, as the manner in which that contact [took place, as] Europe began to ‘propagate’ at a time when it had fallen into the hands of the most unscrupulous financiers and captains of industry [responsible] for the highest heap of corpses in history” (Discourse 23-24).

Like Césaire’s “black French,” CAM’s rehabilitating Amerindian inheritance and reinstating African roots acts as an artistic, linguistic intervention. It undoes the damage, both symbolic and physical, done to West Indians by the conscious or unconscious “acceptance of the inferiority of negroes to whites,” argued Elsa Goveia at CAM’s first conference in September 1967 (Walmsley 97). Articulating CAM’s aesthetic attention to the folk in her paper “The Socio-Cultural Celebration of the Caribbean,” Goveia praises the new celebration of calypsoes as well as folk songs and

dances “deeply influenced by the political changes of the 1940s and 1950s” (98). West Indian writers create “the optimism of the 1950's and early 1960's” that Ramchand identifies by using Creole, by writing stories about the West Indies, by painting black West Indian people as not inferior” (98). Salkey’s optimism, however, does not depend on rehabilitating Creole, celebrating calypso, or recreating a lost “home” for West Indian’s fragmented from their former “whole” selves. Escape’s optimism arises from delving inward, from articulating the psychological morass of the West Indian psyche through its Jamaican-by-birth protagonist Johnnie Sobert. Within Britain’s post-war social and political climate Escape explores the mental legacy of colonialism through present-day imperialism. With its approach to terrain typically disparaged as psychoanalytic and castigated as ahistorical or politically naive, Escape examines the persistence of prejudice through racial identification, desire, and fantasy. As Christopher Lane contends in “Psychoanalysis and Race: An Introduction,” “Freud effectively asks, could be more political than fantasy when it determines the fate of entire communities, nations, and even continents?” (7).²⁵⁹

²⁵⁹ Lane argues for the necessity of psychoanalytic approaches to race and racism in light of the recent resurgence of arguments about racial superiority like Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray’s The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life (1995). For such arguments about the “genetics” of intelligence (as well as racial violence in the US and elsewhere in the world) to persist despite “countless studies of Europe’s and North America’s colonial past, and the extensive research that ethnographers, sociologists, linguists, and political theorists have published on cultural and political differences” demonstrates the failure of Marxist-influenced analysis of race and racism as a historical and social phenomenon (3). These analyses, following Karl Marx’s infamous statement that “It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness,” argue that individual expressions of racism express not the individual but his/her historical and social conditions. Why then do the “genetic” assertions of The Bell Curve come 132 years after the abolition of slavery in

Escape differs from Salkey's other London novels, however, with its first-person, empathetic portrayal of Johnnie's desire for Dick Snape, a white chauffeur who lives in the same Hampstead tenement that Johnnie does. Later, Johnnie moves out with Dick, to a flat near Leicester Square. Despite his following Dick, Johnnie is hardly comfortable with his sexuality. Yet Escape's unfolding of that desire indicates that Johnnie projects his inchoate fear onto others' reactions to his disclosure of his feelings. And by contrasting Dick with manipulative Fiona, also white, Escape makes it more difficult for readers to rebuke Dick offhandedly. Fiona, the mistress of Mr. Trado who collects rent for the Hampstead tenement's owner, pursues Johnnie first for consolation about her difficult relationship with Trado. Then she aggressively seduces Johnnie. Unlike Dick, who simply enjoys Johnnie's company, Fiona's motivation for pursuing Johnnie is not always clear. Perhaps she is trying to recreate her relationship with Joseph, her "'charming' African lover" from Lagos, with whom she has a child, and of whom Trado is still jealous (40). Dick, by comparison, cares for Johnnie so, he

the US; and why do they so closely resemble arguments during Reconstruction justifying black people's "natural predilection" to slavery because of their "servile abilities"?

Lane asserts that The Bell Curve's (among other examples) historicity alone cannot fully explain its racialized arguments. Calling The Bell Curve "merely a cultural fixation or residue of historical prejudice is not sufficiently helpful. ... We cannot also approach [examples of racist thought] as if they were only historical constructions; the intensity of prejudice in fact complicates our relation to history" (3). For example, "individuals are not simply the imprint of their national and symbolic structures, as though the two are locked in a cause-effect relation" (4). Moreover, the social, economic, and political state of affairs for race and racism in the US now differ from those during Reconstruction. Rather, a psychoanalytic approach to racial fantasy and group identification better anticipates why "prejudice is cogent and palpable today because it has never left us" despite social, economic, and political change (3). Its residue in "desire, fantasy, identification, and prejudice [illustrate] the genuine complexity of history, narrative, and temporality" (15).

sacrifices his own desires for Johnnie. Escape ends with Dick leaving their Leicester Square flat so Johnnie can decide whom he wants to pursue, Dick or Fiona. In the note Dick leaves, he explains, “I had to go or I’d only torment you and keep reminding you of how hopelessly involved and in love I am with you; and this, I know, would merely further complicate things” (207). Yet complications prevent Johnnie from pursuing Dick throughout. They even prevent him from focusing on Fiona. When Fiona asks Johnnie why he is so withdrawn during their first sexual encounter, for example, Johnnie replies, “I’m with you in the same way Dick’s with me. It’s all in the mind, as the man in the Goonery department would say” (105). Johnnie’s mind, his continual, internal self-questioning about Dick, almost drowns out the counsel he nervously seeks from friends. And most scholars who acknowledge Escape relate Johnnie’s apprehension as the novel’s conclusion about homosexuality, likewise drowning out Salkey’s easy inclusion of homosexuality.

While Escape is not the first published novel by a West Indian writer to represent male same-sexual desire, Escape comes during the same year (1960) that restless members of Britain’s House of Commons urged that the government should finally implement the then three-year-old Wolfenden Committee recommendations to repeal the law criminalizing homosexual sex.²⁶⁰ Escape was published two years after bans on “homosexual themes” in plays and films had been lifted, when public discussion of consensual relationships between men took place in the press.²⁶¹ Surely

²⁶⁰ For a summary of British sex law reform in the 1950s and 1960s, and its effect on art, see Neil Miller’s Out of the Past, pages 280-295.

²⁶¹ In 1958 Lord Chamberlain lifted the ban on “homosexual themes” in plays, “permitting ‘sincere and serious’ portrayals of homosexuality in the theater” (Miller

Salkey's easy inclusion of homosexuality helped make Escape "out of tune" with other West Indian novels of its day; but homosexuality alone does not radicalize Escape. Johnnie reconciling his sexuality folds into Escape's larger, psychoanalytically-driven exploration of the alienated West Indian psyche. Escape explores how West Indian Londoners navigate their sense of self in a country both dependent upon West Indians to meet post-war labor shortages and intent on undercutting whatever freedom the end of Empire may have implied. As Cecil Gutzmore explains, "relatively organized attacks on blacks" during the 1950s happened alongside the continued criminalization of the West Indian community in the press: "From very early on the press targeted the black community, highlighting black involvement in crime and vice. White vice was not reported in the same way" (Presentation). Both led to the Notting Hill uprisings during August and September 1958. The uprisings "proved" that blacks were as violent as the press had presented them, and gave the British government a reason to inculcate the Commonwealth Immigration Act of 1961, limiting West Indian migration. Within the context of

284). In 1960 the British board of Film Censors lifted its ban as well. The change in policy in the arts came after the Wolfenden Committee's recommendations made front-page headlines—"VICE OFFICIAL: NO WHITEWASH, NO PRUDERY AND NO HYPOCRISY in the Daily Mirror; RELAX THIS SEX LAW in the Evening Standard; and VICE, THE STARK FACTS in Scottish Daily Record—and sparked largely favorable response in the press (Miller 284). The Committee, headed by then Home Secretary Sir John Wolfenden, was created after a series of very public arrests for "importuning men for an immoral purpose" or for an "indecent attack," including Labour Party member William Field in January 1953, actor Sir John Gielgud, Edward John Barrington Douglas-Scott-Montagu (known as Lord Montagu, the third Baron Montagu of Beaulieu), film director Kenneth Hume, and diplomatic correspondent for the Daily Mail Peter Wildeblood. After the Montagu trial ended, an editorial in the Sunday Times asserts that "the case for reform of the law as to acts committed in private between adults is very strong" (qtd. in Miller 283).

racially-polarized violence and legalized surveillance, Escape's assertion that sexuality prominently factors within West Indians racialized alienation makes plain its debt to psychoanalysis.

Salkey nods obviously to psychoanalytic discourse with a shadowy, silent character called "the other" (and always marked with italics in Escape) who works as a waiter with Johnnie at a West Indian nightclub in Oxford Circus. Much like Johnson's Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man, Escape incorporates psychoanalytic discourse's numerous mirrors (both actual and figural) and alludes both to Freud's "Uncanny" and to Jacques Lacan's mirror-stage. Like Fanon, Salkey employs the mirror-stage to explain the alienating effect of imperialism on the West Indian psyche. Stuart Hall identifies this kind of looking as the association "between racism and what has come to be called the scopic drive—the eroticisation of the pleasure in looking and the primary place given in Fanon's text to the 'look' from the place of the 'Other'" ("After-life" 17). Salkey intentionally facilitates the reader's recognition of Escape's many "looks" at that psyche with protagonist Johnnie's often-naive first-person narration, forcing the reader to "see" before Johnnie does. Such a move illustrates the Jamaican saying Salkey sent to Peter Nazareth when he was studying and writing about Salkey's work: "Those who won't see can't see." Salkey enables the reader's new vision of race, sexuality, and imperialism through Johnnie's struggles to show the artificial constraints of the sight Johnnie accepts. As Nazareth explains, Salkey's characters' "problem is the[ir] inability to think and breakout of the imposed pattern" (29). For Salkey, the reader is "part of th[is] problem. There are chains on the reader's

mind: Salkey knows these chains have to be broken or the reader will refuse to see” (29).

Escape “breaks chains” that have since become conspicuous in debates about identity after postmodernism and post-structuralism. Escape confirms, as Stuart Hall argues in his essay “Minimal Selves,” that “the postmodern” reflects less “something new [than] a kind of recognition of where identity always was at” (115). Johnnie Sobert’s “minimal self,” like Hall’s, rests on his dialectical difference from others, even before his journey to London characterizes that difference through his migrant status. Without any rooted, “whole” sense of identity at “home” in Jamaica, Johnnie embodies the sense of self Hall found through his own move from Jamaica to England.²⁶² Like Hall, Johnnie is “aware of the fact that identity is an invention from the very beginning. . . . Identity is formed at the unstable point where the ‘unspeakable’ stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history, of a culture” (115). Johnnie embraces this “unstable point” because his at-best tenuous middle-class status **already** removes him from the stable, expected working-class West Indian identity. Sounding like E. Franklin Frazier who contends that the black American middle class must maintain a “world of make-believe” in order to exist in Black Bourgeoisie, Johnnie explains to Fiona, “Can you imagine a middle class that doesn’t exist, but is actually part of the **thinking** of a people in a society?” (46, emphasis mine). His sometimes-naïve narration²⁶³ and his deliberations over sexuality only confirm further his

²⁶² Interestingly, Hall explores a Salkey-esque West Indian consciousness in a short story of his own, “Crossroads Nowhere,” that Salkey included in his West Indian Short Stories (1960) anthology.

²⁶³ Peter Nazareth argues that Salkey “does exploit the limitations of Sobert’s vision”

difference from any rigid or expected West Indian identity. Yet Johnnie's difference is hardly marginal. Escape intends for the reader to "see" like Johnnie. Through Johnnie's first-person narration Escape wants the reader to recognize that black West Indian consciousness comes from an "unstable point" of sometimes-conflicting narratives not grounded by any Eden-like Caribbean. Escape thus presciently depicts the well-grounded sense of self that Hall has "been puzzled by" in the 1990s: "young black people in London today are marginalized, fragmented, unenfranchised, disadvantaged, and dispersed. And yet, they look as if they own the territory. Somehow, they too, in spite of everything, are centered, in place: without much material support, it's true, but nevertheless, they occupy a new kind of space at the center" (114).

Salkey's Escape and Hall's "minimal self" articulate the kind of centered disenfranchisement that novelist Orlando Patterson explores in his paper "Is there a West Indian Aesthetic?" Delivered at a 6 January 1967 CAM meeting, and fiercely challenged at subsequent ones, Patterson's paper asserts that any West Indian aesthetic "must begin with [the] recognition [that] West Indian society . . . is in many ways traditionless" (qtd. in Walmsley 52). Because of this lack of tradition, the West Indian

by using the following extended quote, adding his own italics, from William Riggan's Pícaros, Madmen, Naïfs, and Clowns: The Unreliable First-Person Narrator (Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1981): "First person narration is . . . always at least potentially unreliable, in that the narrator, **with . . . human limitations of perception and memory and assessment, may have easily missed, forgotten, or misconstrued certain incidents, words, or motives.** Furthermore, precisely because the narrator sits before us as a human being—albeit a fictional one—we naturally react to him in varying degrees in human terms **and not just as a disembodied voice** providing us with information. Much of what he tells us **also gives us an idea of what he himself is like . . . Emotional ties also enter into such assessments and reactions on our part as auditors and readers of his account**" (33).

“doesn’t have a basis for retaliation against the colonial experience in an indigenous culture as occurs in the case of the African or Asian” (52). Like Hall, Patterson views “traditionless” West Indian society embracing “displacement as a place of ‘identity’ [that] you learn to live with, long before you are able to spell it. Living with, living through difference” (Hall, “Minimal” 116). For Patterson, West Indians “living through difference,” or a West Indian epistemology, can be best vocalized through Frantz Fanon, from whom Patterson quotes “All one has, has been learned from the colonial experience” (qtd. in Walmsley 52).²⁶⁴ Fanon expresses West Indian epistemology better than Négritude, even though it was “essentially a West Indian movement” (qtd. in Walmsley 52).²⁶⁵ But unlike Fanon’s characterization, as Patterson reasons, Négritude “provided no alternative [voice], despite its positive usefulness for understanding West Indian historical development, and despite the evident survivals of African culture in the Caribbean, most importantly Haiti” (qtd. in Walmsley 52).

Escape embraces its West Indian epistemology of “living through difference” through its Anancy-like approach to the living, **created** word. Escape’s design never loses sight of the creative, manipulative possibilities of narrative, from Salkey’s playful “author’s note” about his innocent though “improbable” naming of an Indian character which “might, indeed, cause some offence,” to Johnnie’s self-conscious

²⁶⁴ Fanon surfaces elsewhere in CAM discussions of West Indian aesthetics as well: Kenneth Ramchand championed “the writing of certain white West Indians, with what he dubbed—in a phrase from Frantz Fanon—their ‘terrified consciousness’” at CAM’s first public meeting on 10 March 1967.

²⁶⁵ Patterson’s ironic logic has to read over Fanon’s repeated praise of Aimé Césaire in Black Skin: “I wish that many black intellectuals would turn to him for their inspiration” (Fanon 187). Fanon may express the racial psychology of Négritude differently; but his Black Skin works in the shadow of Négritude.

narration, to Johnnie's (as well as others') references to literature or film (6). Words that tell stories can conjure untold images. They sparkle in readers' eyes. Creating, after all, is Anancy's forté, as Mervyn Morris explains: "Though sometimes bested, he is the great survivor ... **Is Anancy meck it:** a reminder that the West African ancestor of Caribbean Anancy was an Akan Creator God" (qtd. in Nazareth 18). The life of Anancy's sometimes-irreverent creations comes from what it unearths, "things about which every one knew, but concerning which one might not ordinarily speak in public," as white British anthropologist R.S. Rattay relates from his ethnographic research (qtd. in Levine 102). Rattay concludes "beyond a doubt, that West Africans had discovered for themselves the truth of the psychoanalysts' theory of 'repressions,' and that in these ways they sought an outlet for what might otherwise become a dangerous complex" (qtd. in Levine 102). Delving into and purging the unconscious, concurs Peter Nazareth, is "the Anancy way of reading. Anancy is a trickster: one function of the Anancy story is to bring buried contradictions to the surface" (18).²⁶⁶ Anancy-style reading "give[s] the reader a nudge, a start or ashock to shake them out of dangerous fixed perceptions so that they will see and think"—and thus act—differently (8).

²⁶⁶ By grounding its critique of essentialism within West Indian cultural **epistemology**, Escape does not reproduce the kind of postmodernism that perhaps not-so-coincidentally ignores black peoples' existence or contribution to postmodernism. bell hooks rightly questions such discussions of postmodernism in "Postmodern Blackness," included in Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics (1990): "It never surprises me when black folks respond to the critique of essentialism, especially when it denies the validity of identity politics by saying, "Yeah, it's easy to give up identity, when you got one." Should we not be suspicious of postmodern critiques of the "subject" when they surface at a historical moment when many subjugated people feel themselves coming to voice for the first time?" (28).

The Anancy figure, as Salkey describes him in his short story “Anti-Apartness Anancy” (1990), “is a proper African New World spider and a natural man, fuse up with a clenched fist of high cunning, usual cause bafflement and perplex head amongst every enemy he got” (18). One of “cunning” Anancy’s long-standing enemies, Nazareth explains, is the often-blind reader. Anancy works “to break past the[ir] defences, to trick the audience into seeing” (1). Salkey long triumphed the “bafflement and perplex head” inspired by Anancy figures in his work. According to Jessica and Eric Huntley, who call Salkey “Mr. Anancy,” he “single-handedly reinvented the folk hero” (“Interview #2). Nazareth argues that Salkey “provides us with clues as to how to read” the Anancy presence throughout his work in his “author’s note” to Anancy’s Score (1973), a collection of short stories:

Where would Afro-Caribbean folk tales be without the seminal support of the African Anancy? Indeed, how could this book ever have been written without it, or without Anancy’s historical authority, or without my having tapped Anancy’s score in his first home country? . . . I have plucked my Anancy from the great folk tales of West Africa and the Caribbean, and I have made him inhabit both worlds, the old and the new, locked deep in my own imagination; he also inhabits the ready minds of children, **and crashes the defences of most adults**. He holds no reservations; makes only certain crucial allowances; he knows no boundaries; respects no one, not even himself, at times; and he makes a mockery of everybody’s assumptions and value judgements. (qtd. in Nazareth 18; italics are Nazareth’s)

Escape's "Anancy way or reading" involves Johnnie making "a mockery of everybody's assumptions and value judgements" about the migrant West Indian experience in London as well as the reader's easy understanding of his Anancy reading. Johnnie's character "holds no reservations" in thwarting expected, rigid notions of "the West Indian experience" through his difference from other West Indians in Escape and in other West Indian novels published in the 1950s and 1960s. Or, as Hall reminds, "new conceptions of identity requires us also to look at redefinitions of the forms of politics which follow from that" ("Minimal" 118).

Understanding that

the self is always, in a sense, a fiction, just as the kind of 'closures' which are required to create communities of identification—nation, ethnic group, families, sexualities, etc.—are arbitrary closures [inspires a] recognition of difference, of the impossibility of 'identity' in its fully unified meaning, does, of course, transform our sense of what politics is about. It transforms the nature of political commitment. (117)

Here, I explicate how Escape's "Anancy way of reading" psychoanalytically unfolds the melding of race and sexuality. First, I survey Escape's Fanon and Lacan markers through examining "the other," who provides necessary context for the many mirrors and mirroring throughout Escape. Salkey's mirroring, like Lacan's spectral mirror-stage, marks the creation of the individual subject through the misrecognition (**méconnaissance**) of his image in the mirror, the discovery that his mirror image is just an image, not an idealized vision of himself. For Salkey (and Fanon) the migrant West Indian's **méconnaissance** reflects the still-imposed, now-internal pattern of

colonial history where the West Indian Londoner does not see his family or culture represented in the power structures of British society. Or, following Elsa Goveia, the migrant West Indian's **méconnaissance** comes from the "acceptance of the inferiority of Negroes to whites" (Walmsley 98). Escape illustrates how this **méconnaissance**, which for Lacan sparks the creation and fragmentation of the individuated subject, occurs before—not because of—the fated Windrush landing on British soil. The novels' backwards-looking book titles "Notes in the Present for a Time Past," "More Notes in the Present for a Time Past," and "A Time Past" chronicle four **sequentially-forward** months Johnnie spends in London. Never does Escape depict Johnnie's Jamaican past. But his past lingers within Johnnie. In fact, his "present" look at his "past" signals another psychoanalytic link, Freud's concept of **Nachträglichkeit**, what Lacan calls rewriting history or deferred action. Or, as Shuli Barzilai summarizes in Lacan and the Matter of Origins, "The future of a nation, like that of a person, inexorably marches toward the point where it catches up with its past" (55). Johnnie catches up with his past in London, revealing that his "new" experiences in London with Dick are not simply the "undue influence" of cosmopolitan London, what Johnnie self-deprecatingly calls "my immigrant experience, **my new sophistication**" (192).

Another sign of psychoanalysis, as well as a commonly assumed metonym for male homosexuality, is the omnipresence of Johnnie's mother, both inside Johnnie's head and through letters to Johnnie from Jamaica. Johnnie may have left Jamaica, just like Stuart Hall left Jamaica "in order to get away from my family [but] the problem, one discovers, is that since one's family is always already 'in here,' [so] there is no

way in which you can actually leave them” (“Minimal” 115). For Daryl Cumber Dance, Johnnie’s mother as well as the other women in Salkey’s London novels invite “the implication that the power, strength, and domination of the women contribute to the ambivalence and emasculation of the men and are thus destructive” (423). Under their domination are “lost, weak, undirected sons” with ambivalent or no relationships with their fathers: “We are forced to infer in each case that this absence of a father has some impact on the son’s doomed quest for identity” (422, 420). Dance’s assessment recalls the mother figure in Johnson’s Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man as well as Du Bois’ own feelings about his mother. Dance’s appraisal also references Freud’s “Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of his childhood” (1910): “In all our male homosexuals there was an intense erotic attachment to a feminine person, as a rule to the mother, which . . . was produced or favored by too much love from the mother herself, **but was also furthered by the retirement or absence of the father** during the childhood period (qtd. in Fodor 73, emphasis mine).

For Lacan, weaning from that potentially-domineering mother (sevrage) creates the mirror-stage in his first 1938 essay exploring it, “Les complexes familiaux dans la formation de l’individu” [Family Complexes in the Formation of the Individual], an essay about which David Marriott explains “it is worth noting—although I do no more than note—that Fanon’s understanding of le stade du miroir derives from Lacan’s 1938 article in Encyclopedie française, ‘Les complexes familiaux’” (427). However, Lacan’s re-reading of that mirror stage in 1949 with the title “Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je” [“The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience”] garners

the recognition as **the** explication of his mirror-stage.²⁶⁷ Shuli Barzilai explains that while both the 1938 and 1949 essays pursue the same phenomenological questions—“How is reality constituted for human consciousness? How is the I in which subjects recognize themselves constructed?”—the means through which the infant forms her/his subjectivity shifts (20). In 1938 “Lacan highlights the formative value of the family complexes”; while in 1949 he focuses on “the visual determination of the subject. In brief, the specular image (in)forms the ‘I’” (20). Barzilai concludes that “visuality is **antithetically** linked to maternity in Lacan’s texts. The more the one is valued, the more the other is diminished” (129-129). Yet Fanon continually portrays Lacan’s “family complexes” visually, through projection, “scenes,” and imagination in *Black Skin*.²⁶⁸ Johnnie, too, associates his mother with projection. His incomplete or lingering sevrage from his mother helps locate and determine Johnnie’s psyche.

Escape’s attention to such “scenes” demonstrates, as George Lamming asserts, “the discovery of the novel by West Indians as a way of investigating and projecting the inner experiences of the West Indian community” (“Coldest” 16).²⁶⁹ For Salkey, narration and representation implicate us, Anancy style, in those “inner experiences.”

²⁶⁷ Alan Sheridan selected the 1949 essay for the definitive Lacan collection, *Écrits: A Selection* (1977). My discussion of Lacan’s mirror-stage comes from this essay.

²⁶⁸ No doubt Fanon saw Lacan’s 1949 “Le stade du mirror.” In *Black Skin* he cites an article by Joachim Marcus from the same April-June issue of *Revue Française de Psychoanalyse* in which Lacan’s new mirror-stage article was published. Perhaps, “Le stade du mirror” enabled Fanon to see the visual elements already present in “Les complexes familiaux.”

²⁶⁹ For Lamming, “the discovery of the novel” is the third important event in British Caribbean history. The first is the “discovery” of the islands; and the second includes both the abolition of slavery and “the arrival of the East—India and China—in the Caribbean Sea,” which created a community of people “forced to use a common language [and] to make something of their surroundings” (“Coldest” 16).

Escape's self-conscious (almost hyper) attention to narrative form and its implications for reader identification includes a debate Johnnie has with a black man at the Latimer Road tube station about the relative effects of racist representations on the BBC and a racist pamphlet urging Londoners to "avoid mongrelism" (118). The tube station man objects to the BBC "putting on Coon shows [because they are an] insult to your people"; and Fiona worries about Johnnie's reaction to the racist pamphlet (70-71). But, as Johnnie informs the tube station man, "what's wrong with the colour problem [are] people like you! People like you, the so-called enlightened ones! Your kind are obviously pulling the effort apart at the seams. I've often found this true. Absolutely true. The enlightened coloured man is nothing more than the black man's Judas!" (73). Johnnie's sarcastic reaction to the pamphlet reflects Larry's, which emphasizes the pamphlet's limited sway **as a representation**: "Now, old man, read this and tell me if the old motherland not getting like a bad C film, nuh" (118). Escape thus questions the kind of mono-causal influence that Marxist structuralism would find governing the production and reception of these kinds of representations. The novel asserts that the possible effects of one such representation can never be individually assessed. Instead, like Fanon argues in Black Skin, Escape shows that "only a psychoanalytical interpretation of the black problem can lay bare the anomalies of affect that are responsible for the structure of the complex" (10). Johnnie can see these anomalies because of his difference in class and sexuality. Johnnie's "Anancy way of reading" can see what Fanon calls "the fact of the juxtaposition of the white and black races [that] has created a massive psychoexistential complex" (12). As Escape's protagonist, Johnnie imparts this vision to readers to enable them to "see" like he does. Such

radical reading cost Salkey the credit he and Escape deserve. Johnnie's anomalous vision did not fit into the fabric of work by and about West Indian writers then. As Fiona tells him, "You escape like nobody I've ever known, Johnnie" (133).

1. Johnnie's **other** (mirror)

The truth is: I'm beginning to know why
all the eyes in our mirror are turned north
and north-east. Isn't it really because
we haven't looked at the arc of our lives
in the cloud and curve of our breathprints?

—Andrew Salkey, "Looking Back (for Jessica Huntley), from
Away (1980)

Johnnie's "other" never speaks for himself. Instead, he echoes Johnnie²⁷⁰ in the Oxford Circus West Indian night club where they work, or he does what Johnnie cannot: "**The other** darted about earnestly, probably trying to get out of Sandra's [the owner's] way. He did it successfully. I envied him" (203). Yet Johnnie doesn't mention his **other** in the first eight pages he narrates about (and in) the night club. **The other** enters the narrative only when Bidy, the bartender, names him as such. She tells Johnnie to stay upstairs despite the slow night he's having, assuring him that "**the other** can cope without you" downstairs (31). Later, Johnnie recounts Bidy's naming: "**The other**. The other waiter. Bidy certainly knows how to shorten things; how to speak racy dialogue; how to simplify matters of men and moment" (33). But Bidy's "racy dialogue" does not "simplify matters" as much as it signals "the other"'s psychoanalytic function. Salkey never develops the nameless "other"'s

²⁷⁰ An example: "**The other** and I said 'Cheers' like mossy, modest employees" (204).

character but his “racy” entrance via Bidy is significant, considering Johnnie’s assessment of her a few lines before: “Talking to Bidy is like talking to one’s bathroom mirror. Everything you don’t say or say comes back at you plus the reflection of one’s naked body” (30). Named by someone who nakedly reflects Johnnie, “the other” highlights the mirrors and mirroring Salkey uses to dramatize Johnnie’s inward search. Johnnie’s “other” also nods to the psychoanalytic lineage of Fanon-Lacan-Freud-Du Bois.

At the center of this lineage is Jacques Lacan’s mirror stage, Lacan’s best-known and most widely-applied re-reading of Sigmund Freud, a re-reading that has circulated throughout Caribbean Letters since Frantz Fanon’s re-reading of Lacan and Freud in Black Skin, White Masks. For Lacan, the mirror stage marks the first recognition of individual subjectivity, the birth of the speaking subject: “We have only to understand the mirror stage **as an identification**, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term, [with] an image ... indicated by the use, in analytic theory, of the ancient term **imago**” (2). Lacan narrates this identification with the imago with “the startling spectacle of the infant in front of the mirror” (1). The infant’s movement toward the mirror “in a flutter of jubilant activity” leads to “situational apperception,” the understanding gained from the infant seeing his/her own body independently, no longer an appendage of the mother. The infant sees her/his body as a new center, within the context of the persons and things around it reduplicated in the mirror image, what Lacan also calls “the **Ideal-I**”²⁷¹ (1, 2). The jubilant if clumsy infant identifies

²⁷¹ Lacan’s own footnote at his first use of **Ideal-I** explains its Freudian root: “Throughout this article I leave in its peculiarity the translation I have adopted for

with the image of himself/herself in relation to the repetition of her/his movements by the “double” in the mirror. Yet once the infant discovers that the mirror’s “double” is just an image—perhaps by touching the mirror, discovering the mirror’s hard surface—this new understanding (**méconnaissance**) shatters the perfected image of “the **Ideal-I**,” a “mirror-image [that] would seem to be the threshold of the visible world” (3). This moment of discovery elicits the “dialectic of identification”—Lacan also calls it a “drama”—which “situates the agency of the ego,” or elicits the infant’s continual search for another double to recreate the initial jubilant discovery of “the **Ideal-I**” (2).²⁷² With the mirror-stage Lacan thus builds on and differentiates himself from Freud by showing “us not to regard the ego as centered on the perception-consciousness system, or as organized by the ‘reality principle’” as Freud argues (6). Instead, the mirror-stage “shows that we should start instead from the **function of méconnaissance** that characterizes the ego in all its structures” (6). The dialectic of identification within this function of **méconnaissance** thus facilitates all our subsequent social interactions. It distinguishes “the deflection of the specular I into the

Freud’s **Ideal-Ich** (i.e., **je-idéal**), without further comment, other than to say that I have not maintained it” in the remainder of the article. Instead, Lacan just uses **I** (7 n1). Similarly, Lauren Slater notes the importance of personal pronouns in Freud as she recalls “the shock I had when I finally read this old analyst in his native tongue. English translators of Freud make him sound maniacal, if not egomaniacal, with his bloated words like id, ego and superego. But in the original German, id means under-I, ego translates into I and superego is not super-duper but, quite simply, over-I. Freud was staking a claim for a part of the mind that watches the mind, that takes the global view in an effort at honesty. Over-I. I can see. And in the seeing, assess, edit, praise and prune” (47).

²⁷² Despite the infant’s “motor incapacity and nursling dependence,” the mirror stage illustrates how “the **I** is precipitated in a primordial form, before it is objectified in the dialectic of identification with the other, and before language restores to it, in the universal, its function as subject” (2).

social I” (5). But it also recognizes what Lacan sees as the subject’s inherent lack: “the spatial captation manifested in the mirror-stage, even before the social dialectic, [illustrates] the effect in man of an organic insufficiency in his natural reality” (4). For Fanon, the **méconnaissance** of Lacan’s mirror stage demonstrates the alienation that colonial interaction creates **for white people**:

It would indeed be interesting, on the basis of Lacan’s theory of the **mirror period**, to investigate the extent to which the **imago** ... built up in the young white at the usual age would undergo an imaginary aggression²⁷³ with the appearance of the Negro. When one has grasped the mechanism described by Lacan, one can have no further doubt that the real Other for the white man is and will continue to be the black man. And conversely. Only for the white man The Other is perceived on the level of the body image, absolutely as the not-self—that is, the unidentifiable, the unassimilable. (Black Skin 161 n25)

Yet Fanon insists that “for the Antillean the mirror hallucination is always neutral” (162 n25). Despite his contention, however, Fanon outlines how “the Antilles perception always occurs on the level of the imaginary” by exploring a mirror moment

²⁷³ In “Aggressivity in psychoanalysis,” also included in Écrits, Lacan explores more explicitly the phenomena of aggression. Lacan pursues aggression as a manifestation of the alienation and fragmentation in the subject that the mirror image creates. Lacan’s discussion elicits images of the castrated Jew of Freud’s “The Uncanny” as well as the ruptures and brutal dislocations of French Caribbean history that Édouard Glissant explores in Caribbean Discourse: “Among these **imagos** are some that represent the elective vectors of aggressive intentions, which they provide with an efficacy that might be called magical. These are the images of castration, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, bursting open of the body, in short, the **imagos** that I have grouped together under the apparently structural term of **imagos of the fragmented body**” (11).

similar to Freud's in "The Uncanny," from which Lacan developed his own mirror stage (163 n25). Like Freud perceives his Jewishness how anti-Semitic Austrians would,

It is in white terms that [the Antillean] perceives one's fellows. People will say of someone, for instance, that he is "very black"; there is nothing surprising, within a family, in hearing a mother remark that "X is the blackest of my children"—it means that X is the least white. I can only repeat the observation of a European acquaintance to whom I had explained this: in terms of people, it is nothing but a mystification. Let me point out once more that every Antillean expects all the others to perceive him in terms of the essence of the white man. In the Antilles, just as in France, one comes up against the same myth; a Parisian says, "His is black but he is very intelligent"; a Martinican expresses himself no differently. (163 n25)

The disconnection between black self-perception and the "white terms that [the Antillean] perceives one's fellows" also elicits Du Bois' second-sight. Or, to borrow from Lacan, the Antillean discovers the "organic insufficiency in his natural reality" within the **lack** enforced upon the colonial subject within the colonial dialectic. And the colonial dialectic is not predicated on place; it is internal. After all, the Parisian and the Martinican express themselves "no differently."

Johnnie's **other** likewise signals Johnnie's own lack, his own social drama driven by **méconnaissance**, not the "reality" created by Windrush, a drama to find himself reflected in others. Escape best illustrates Johnnie's social drama, the novel's

psychoanalytic bridging of race and sexuality, through his relationship with Larry, a West Indian barber whose shop provides Johnnie a West Indian community. For Johnnie, Larry represents the quintessential, successful West Indian in London. As Johnnie explains, “Autumn pavement’s certainly working out successfully for Larry” (65). Larry retains the “folk wisdom” from the Caribbean unlike Ringo, a Bajan customer at Larry’s barber shop whom Johnnie dubs the “West Indian intellectual on permanent loan to Britain” (66).²⁷⁴ Larry doesn’t speak a “piece-a-college talk,” what Larry playfully calls Johnnie’s banter (116). His untainted “back-yard ethics” feed the stories he tells while he cuts hair (69). They inform his deliberations on Jamaican independence, ferreting out the “something fishy about that politics that going on in the intellectual circles in Jamaica. Things look to selfish to me. Things look like they want to glorify one man instead of the dream nation that everybody dreaming about. Is a funny thing, but I can smell out a man who want to go down in history as a big-time independence-bringer” (68). Larry’s attention to community makes him the ideal confidant for Johnny: “Larry’s rawhide intelligence, his irresponsible, irrepressible lifemanship, his courage, his abandon could be of use; could be trusted” (173).²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ Ringo is the only customer with a name at Larry’s barbershop.

²⁷⁵ Even before Johnnie talks to Larry, Larry figures as a friendly black advisor when Johnnie searches for what he and Dick have in common: “A kind of cowardice. Not exactly child-like. Not exactly adult, either. More ‘in-a-between-a’ as Larry would say. Cowardice mixed with false pride and a developing adult restraint, Ringo would inform me from a great height if I ever was mad enough to ask him. It’s nothing killing, Bidy would advise. Play it cool, daddy-o, ‘taint no sweat, DuBois B. Washington might say if Bidy wasn’t around to hear him. It’s life, my dear, would be Sandra’s contribution” (138). Of the three people whom Johnnie would consult (each marked by the conditional **would**), Larry is the only black person. Johnnie would never be “mad enough” to ask Ringo for fear of condescension; and DuBois B. Washington, a black American mariner with whom Bidy has a relationship, cannot

Johnnie finally gathers the courage to ask Larry “D’you think there’s anything wrong with me; anything that you would consider a problem” on Christmas morning when he finds him in Piccadilly Circus (173).²⁷⁶ Johnnie cannot hear Larry’s response over his own anxious self-questioning, his own expectations for Larry’s condemnation of his feelings for Dick. Johnnie’s narrative commentary during their dialogue also reflects Johnnie’s unease. After Johnnie confesses he “sort of” has woman trouble but “it’s hard to explain in a single go,” Larry knowingly asks “You have sort of a distraction?” (174). Then Larry follows:

“Another woman?”

“No.”

“No?”

Larry was excellent. He was getting it out of me like an expert.

He slightly unnerved me with his sudden earnestness.

“Well, actually, Larry. I . . .”

“Boy! You really got a problem there.” (174)

speak without Bidy being around, which reflects his peripheral presence in the narrative.

²⁷⁶ Perhaps Johnnie finding Larry in Picadilly Circus is not exactly random. Setting Johnnie’s nervous “coming out” to Larry who **already knows** in Picadilly Circus, an area known to be frequented by men who sleep with men, only highlights this scene’s irony. Picadilly Circus physically marks the site that was signified by **Picadilly Polari**, slang used by young men who slept with men and would frequent bars in neighboring Soho. As journalist Peter Burton explains, “for us, there was something deeply reassuring about polari. This bizarre secret language gave those of us who used it an additional sense of corporate identity. We were part of a group—and that knowledge was both a comfort and a curious protection” (qtd. in Miller 295).

Neil Bartlett’s explanation of polari evokes the strategic evasiveness of black queer vernacular that I discuss in my second chapter: “Polari epitomizes the pleasures of being incomprehensible. It was designed to be used, if necessary, within earshot of the naffs; a true code” (81).

Larry continues after Johnnie explains that he left Fiona “and took a flat with a friend of mine”:

“A man? English?”

“Yes.”

“What sort of man?”

“How d’you mean?”

“Just that, Johnnie.”

“I’m not sure.”

“You get on well together.”

“Very well.”

“You happier that way than with the woman?”

“I’m sure of it!” Perhaps I stressed that too much; I nearly shouted it. As if in defence. As if aware of exposure. I had these second thoughts; but all too late. Larry had been given his clue.

“You think that this is bad, eh, boy? Not natural like?”

“Not really. What d’you think? D’you think it’s beginning to show?” (175)

Here, Johnnie’s anxiety over saying “I’m sure of it!” and leaving “clues” for Larry ignores what Larry’s questions imply. Larry does not need to “get it out of Johnnie”: Larry **already knows**. Larry knows Johnnie left Fiona for a white English man and pragmatically mirrors Johnnie’s “friendship” with his “relationship” as if the two were the same, whatever Johnnie chooses to call them.

Despite Johnnie's narrative commentary about "poor Larry [being] stunned" and his conjecture that "I shouldn't think he was embarrassed, but I do think that he thought I was," Larry was merely concerned for the turmoil he could see Johnnie putting himself through (175). Johnnie, however, can only be offended: "Everything he did or said had a touch of sympathy, a touch of understanding. After a while I began to resent it. I had to. I wasn't accustomed to it" (175). Johnnie doesn't recognize that Larry is more disturbed by Johnnie's cultural shift "beginning to show," not his interest in Dick. For Larry, Fiona and Dick's whiteness is the same; their gender difference is irrelevant. More important is Johnnie's talking

in one big compromise fashion; just like how **they** talk to you in the first indication of racial pressure. Why should you bring the white side into it? Can't you see that you doing something that is not your duty to do? Your duty is to feel sorry for your own people, not to try to compromise. As a matter of fact, that's what I really notice wrong about you. That's the change that I notice, Johnnie. Nothing else; see God there! (176)

Even here, Johnnie does not listen to what Larry says, again nervously reading Larry's response as a judgment against his sexuality instead of as the racial allegory he offers. Johnnie's first response reveals his blinded focus on sexuality: "D'you think a woman would be unable to put up with this new side to me?" (176). Afterwards Johnnie frets, "I felt that Larry had had too much of my needling questions, so I asked him nothing more" (177).

Johnnie continues to worry when he comes by Larry's barbershop the next day for a haircut to find Larry closing the shop. Larry tells him to come back New Year's Eve Day when he has returned from a trip to Liverpool, but Johnnie reads this as "being avoided, rejected" (192). As Johnnie walks away he thinks "[Larry] pretended not to understand, but I knew better. As far as he could work it out, he'd swear that I was a sick man; and maybe he'd say that it was all my own fault, my own way of paying for my immigrant experience, **my new sophistication**" (192).

When Johnnie returns to have his hair cut, Larry tells Johnnie "what I sure of where you is concerned. I going to tell you the truth now" (199). Larry's "truth now" is different in two ways: Larry explicitly evokes psychoanalytic discourse which evokes Fanon's rereading of Lacan's mirror in Black Skin, White Masks; and now, instead of Johnnie projecting his anxiety onto Larry, Larry projects his own anxiety onto Johnnie. Again, Larry reads **racially** Johnnie's indecision between **white** Fiona and **white** Dick, refining his racial allegory of Johnnie's "one big compromise" into a selfish individualism that betrays his West Indian duty, his responsibility to his people:

You're a self-seeking man. A real old-time selfish, ever-grasping individual. Take me and Ringo and the other West Indians in this country; you don't even think of us as important to your life. You only use us, you know, for your convenience. You come down here to my barber shop to get a break from your new life, your new sophistication, your new sophisticated worthless sort of existence. We don't matter to you in now way, at all. (199)

Larry observes that Johnnie's need to see himself reflected in a West Indian community, his need for "situational apperception" within this kind of community mirror, comes from his perceived **lack**, his postcolonial identity, not his feelings for Dick:

You're looking for a sort of mirror which will make you out to be somebody worth while. You want an identity like. You want to feel that you have a nation behind you, a nation that you can call your own, a national feeling is what you looking for. . . . You feel **lacking** in all that because you're a colonial boy with only slavery behind you. . . . **I can see the symptoms** in a boy like you quite easy and natural." (199-200, emphasis mine)

Because Johnnie is "discontented in a bad way," Larry reasons, he runs from his symptoms "as if you hoping to find something to lean on for support" (200). Larry then judges Johnnie's "most unnatural feeling that" for the first time:

You dart away from your friends and countrypeople, and then you take refuge in a kind of decadent world that you don't ever derive any benefit from except headaches and frustration. You must remember that a decadent world like the one that you holding on to is a world that have its own code of behavior and mixed-up history. You know what? That world is a meeting-house of a mess! A proper rass mess! (200)

Larry's rant both exemplifies what Johnnie expects from Larry and projects Larry's own anxieties, as Larry admits later when he comes to Johnnie's club that night:

For God's sake don't take what I say to you this afternoon seriously. I was talking the truth but not to the right man. As a matter of fact, it is really myself I was talking about; talking to. You get the shower of abuse because you was haunting me with your troubles and I was more than worried about my own. And I was more than worried. You see, Johnnie, I am the one that's going to pieces in this man's town. (202)

Larry confesses that he is “almost suffocating from all the mess I have to live with [and that he] make[s] up my own set of tricks in order to solve that set of situations; what's more, all of them are unorthodox bad-bad,” including Larry's white, blonde girlfriend (202). Larry's racial allegories of either “one big compromise fashion” or an individualism with a “new sophisticated worthless sort of existence,” then, reveal themselves to be a function of **méconnaissance**, to borrow from Lacan. In this moment just before the drunk crowd at Johnnie's West Indian bar breaks into “Auld Lang Syne” in an “enormous circle of hands, clasped, sweaty hands,” Escape shows that Johnnie's perception of Larry's beliefs is merely Johnnie's projection (203). With the coming of a new year, a time of retrospection during which Johnnie ponders his “year with a decision to make,” Johnnie figuratively touches the mirror (201). Larry's admission frees Johnnie from the condemnation he thought his “mirror” (Larry, as model West Indian) would reflect. But like the revelation of Lacan's mirror-stage, Johnnie's does not end his “flutter of jubilant activity.” Johnnie's revelation here does not resolve his “choice”—not, at least, in the last page of the novel. After Johnnie reads Dick's note explaining that he left to avoid “further complicating things,” Johnnie walks into Dick's bedroom to find himself in front of another mirror: “The

aroma of his Old Spice shaving lotion was the only part of him left behind except for some traces of dusting powder at the base of the wardrobe mirror” (207, 208). He then leaves the flat, wanders into Leicester Square, then Piccadilly Circus, then towards Green Park, contemplating “a choice of lives before me. A choice of loves. And, perhaps, a choice of enemies” (208).

Still, Larry facilitates Johnnie’s optimism about “my next move” with the discourse of psychoanalysis (208). Larry’s admission makes Johnnie realize that his “next move”—not Larry’s reaction or advice—“was worth waiting for” (208). This “truth about myself, and the courage and ability to recognize it when it came” inspires Johnnie even as Escape’s “undecided” end maintains Johnnie’s “divided” subject, tidily closing the narrative with a final psychoanalytic highlight (208). After all, the figure of the divided subject lies at the center of Fanonian, Freudian, and Lacanian psychoanalysis. As I explore earlier, this “divided” colonial subject in psychoanalytic discourse comes from Freud’s experiences as a raced Jew constructed by anti-Semitic discourse in late nineteenth-century Vienna where the circumcised penis was a symbol of the Jewish man’s lack of masculinity, his effeminacy, his homosexuality. As Daniel Boyarin relates, Freud “once described the subject’s internal alterity as ‘the State within the State,’ a pejorative phrase for the German state’s twin others: women and Jews” (213). Fanon’s easy application of Freud’s Jew as racial and sexual other to the black Caribbean man “fixated at the genital; or at any rate he has been fixated there,” illustrates the resilience of Freud’s postcolonial epistemology (Black Skin 165). And Fanon readily sees the Antillean “double process” within Lacan’s Freud. Fanon’s “double process,” “primarily economic [disenfranchisement]; [and] subsequently, the

internalization—or, better, the epidermalization—of this inferiority” shares Freud’s look “toward a new humanism” not trested in colonial ideology (11, 7).²⁷⁷

With Escape’s re-enactment of Fanonian-Freudian psychoanalysis (Johnnie’s “divided” subject, Larry’s projected espousal of Fanon-like racial allegories), Salkey narrates a distinctly West Indian look inward at the postcolonial psyche. Like Orlando Patterson’s praise for Fanon’s unique articulation of “traditionless” West Indian culture to a dissenting audience, Escape affirms Fanon’s belief that “that only a psychoanalytic interpretation of the black problem can lay bare the anomalies of affect that are responsible for the [colonial] structure of the complex” to a dismissive audience (10). Escape’s psychoanalytic depiction of Johnnie’s psyche in dialogue with and in anticipation of Larry, the model West Indian, confirms its distinctly West Indian approach to “living through difference,” living through and with (post-)colonial experiences. For Larry, the rite of the West Indian living in London is the choice “between his family and European society” that Fanon explores in Black Skin, the desire to enter the mirror and become color-less (read white) instead of epidermalized through white people’s eyes: “in other words, the individual who **climbs up** into society—white and civilized—tends to reject his family—black and savage—on the

²⁷⁷ This new humanism, as Jean-Paul Sartre praises Fanon’s work in his Preface to Wretched of the Earth, lays bare the colonial antecedent of European humanism (“you can see it, quite naked, and it’s not a pretty sight”), of Europe’s “Enlightenment”: “there is nothing more consistent than a racist humanism since the European has only been able to become a man through creating slaves and monsters” (24-25, 26). See Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze’s Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader (Cambridge, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) for a selection of usually-overlooked writings by Enlightenment thinkers which outline how race and racism influenced the “humanism” of the Enlightenment.

plane of imagination” (149).²⁷⁸ Elsewhere in Black Skin, when analyzing the Antillean’s psychic dialectic with the colonial “mother country” in Aimé Césaire’s Cahier d’un retour au pays natal, Fanon concludes that “it is understandable, then, when at the news that [Cahier’s speaker] is getting into France (quite like someone who, in the colloquial phrase, is ‘getting a start in life’) the black man is jubilant and makes up his mind to change” (21-22, emphasis mine). For Fanon, Larry, and Johnnie, this jubilantly “changed” mind assumes new sexual choices because, as Fanon asserts, “in relation to the Negro, everything takes place on the genital level” (157). Or, as Fanon instructs, “if one wants to understand the racial situation psychoanalytically, not from a universal point of view but as it is experienced by individual consciousness, considerable importance must be given to sexual phenomena”(160).

Escape’s re-enactment of Fanonian psychoanalysis to show Johnnie’s distinctly West Indian look inward arrests easy conclusions that Johnnie’s “divided” racial-sexual subject is a direct result of his “new sophistication” in London. Highlighting Johnnie’s “living through difference,” or his “minimal self,” Escape both avoids Windrush narratives of fragmentation and employs the Freudian theory of **Nachträglichkeit**, the deferred action that Freud often applied to “awakening[s] of sexual excitations in the individual” delayed by specific traumatic events (Barzilai 52).²⁷⁹ As Freud explains in a 6 December 1896 letter to Wilhelm Fleiss, looking back

²⁷⁸ For Antilleans, as Fanon contends, “the mirror hallucination is always neutral. When Antilleans tell me that they have experienced it, I always ask the same question: ‘What color were you?’ Invariably they reply: ‘I had no color’” (162 n25).

²⁷⁹ In Project for a Scientific Psychology (1895), Freud writes “that a memory arouses an affect which it did not give rise to as an experience, this is nevertheless something quite unusual in the case of the sexual idea, precisely because the retardation of

illustrates a central psychic mechanism: “the material present in the shape of memory traces is from time to time subjected to a re-arrangement in accordance with fresh circumstances—is, as it were, retranscribed” (50). For Lacan, **Nachträglichkeit** “reappears inside every moment of human time [where] conjectures about the past are balanced against promises of the future” (qtd. in Barzilai 54). Both present and past imply and invoke “all sorts of presences,” as the titles of the three books into which Escape’s narrative is divided, “Notes in the Present for a TimePast,” “More Notes in the Present for a Time Past,” and “A Time Past,” assert (qtd. in Barzilai 54). One of Escape’s three time-conscious epigraphs, an excerpt from T.S. Eliot’s Four Quartets renders Lacan’s presences of time in verse: “Time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future, / And time future contained in time past.”²⁸⁰ This re-arrangement of the past, Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis explain, is the reason why “psycho-analysis [continually returns to and] is often rebuked for its alleged reduction of all human actions and desires to the level of the infantile past. . . . In actuality Freud has pointed out from the beginning that the subject revises past events at a later date (**nachträglich**), and it is this revision which invests them with significance” (50).

Fanon explores likewise this retranscription of the past in Black Skin as it addresses the epidermalization of the “massive psychoexistential complex” set in motion by colonialism (12). Retranscription of the (black) family structure within the

puberty is a general characteristic of the organization. Every adolescent individual has memory-traces which can only be understood with the emergence of sexual feelings” (qtd. in Barzilai 53).

²⁸⁰ Escape’s other two epigraphs (Max Beerbohms’ quote “There is always something rather absurd about the past,” and the last line of an excerpt from David Jones’ The Anathemata, “but when **is** when?”) also focus on the ‘blurring’ of times into one vision from the present encompassing, and composing (rewriting) past and future.

(white) nation-state, Freud's "the State within the State," guides Fanon in explicating the Antillean "double process." After citing psychoanalyst Joachim Marcus, who argues that "the individual assimilates all the authorities [of the state] to the authority of his parents: He perceives the present in terms of the past," Fanon identifies the colonial manifestation of this **Nachträglichkeit**, where—"and this is an important point—we observe the opposite in the man of color" (143). Fanon asserts that "a normal Negro child, having grown up within a normal family, will become abnormal on the slightest contact with the white world" (143). But the moment of "slightest contact" when the Antillean's "phenotype undergoes a definitive, an absolute mutation" is diffused by a "material [postcolonial] present in the shape of memory" (19).²⁸¹ As Fanon traces the jubilant journey of the Martiniquan man drawn to the **Ideal-I** reflection of France, "even before he had gone away, one could tell from the almost aerial manner of his carriage that new forces had been set in motion. [His] habitually raucous voice hinted at a gentle inner stirring as of rustling breezes" (19-20).

²⁸¹ As if articulating a Caribbean **Nachträglichkeit (a prophetic vision of the past)**, Édouard Glissant addresses the responsibilities of the Caribbean writer within Caribbean "history [that] emerges at the edge of what we can tolerate, [an] emergence [that] must be related immediately to the complicated web of events in our past. The past, to which we were subjected, which has not yet emerged as history for us, is, however, obsessively present. The duty of the writer is to explore this obsession, to show its relevance in a continuous fashion to the immediate present. This exploration is therefore related neither to a schematic chronology nor to a nostalgic lament. It leads to the identification of a painful notion of time and its full projection forward into the future, without the help of those plateaus in time from which the West has benefited, without the help of that collective density that is the primary value of an ancestral cultural heartland. That is what I call **a prophetic vision of the past**" (63-64).

2. Looking back at, and projecting, Johnnie's Mother

Away, here I am,
in search of a country,
trying hard to find myself
a land of fruit trees
to return to,
a sweet mango, perhaps,
with my mother's face
on its slowly yellowing skin,
my father's own exile
scattered among the leaves,
my brother's immaturity
and my own
nervous leaping
up and down
on the stones and trash
which hide the roots
from all of us.

—Andrew Salkey, "Sweet Mango," from Away (1980)

The cause for Johnnie's "inner stirring as of rustling breezes," the "specific traumatic event" that delays his assessment of his past, is not named outright. But whatever the event was, Johnnie's mother factors prominently in it. The only invocation of Johnnie's family or his past in Escape are two letters from and a dream-like "scene" starring his mother. Her two letters, reproduced in their entirety, in italics, imply others: both hers ("**I haven't heard from you for some weeks, now.**") and his ("**Your letters tell me that there's something troubling you.**") even though Escape never mentions more letters, or Johnnie writing to her (50, 147). Instead, Johnnie's ongoing interaction with his mother takes place in his head, echoing Stuart Hall's assertion that "one's family is always already 'in here'" (115). Her letters voice what Johnnie hears "in here": "**Remember that I've always found my answers in prayer,**

and I'm doing the same for you, my love, even though I know you'll laugh it off when you've read this letter. Please, pray at nights before retiring, son. I saw to it when you were a boy at home. You ought to be able to carry on without my having to be there to bully you into doing it" (50-51). For Daryl Cumber Dance, Johnnie's "bullying" mother lingering "in here" after Johnnie has left her and Jamaica for London "contribute[s] to [his] ambivalence and emasculation" (422-423). *Escape*, however, employs Johnnie's mother, her letters and her lingering "in here" to (again) signify psychoanalytically, to further allude to Lacan's mirror stage, to evoke Fanonian retranscription. By pointing toward psychoanalysis, she highlights the necessity of reading past *Escape*'s plot points to consider the shape and expression of Johnnie's thoughts as well. As Johnnie's mother reminds him in the second letter, **"You must remember that I'm good at reading between the lines"** (147).²⁸²

For Lacan, the mother figure simultaneously signals two functions which enable and maintain the child's individuated subjectivity.²⁸³ For Fanon, she equally directs "the

²⁸² In her psychoanalytically-inflected analysis of the representation of black women and black families in scholarship and narratives like Linda Brent/Harriet Jacobs' *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Hortense Spillers considers "we might interpret the whole career of African-Americans, a decisive factor in national political life since the mid-seventeenth century, in light of the **intervening, intruding** tale, or the tale—like Brent's 'garret' space—"between the lines," which are already inscribed, as a **metaphor** of social and cultural management" ("All the Things" 79).

²⁸³ Her presence ("first conceived of as fully present, then as almost absent, and finally—after a period of occlusion—she returns under the aegis of the phallus") informs Lacan's many explorations of the birth of subjectivity, the birth of the speaking subject through the magnetic (both attracting and repulsing) relationship between identification and alienation that Lacan calls the mirror-stage (Barzilai 2). Barzilai maps this mother trajectory, negotiating **connaissance** and **méconnaissance** in the following three works of Lacan: "Les complexes familiaux" (1938), "Le stade du miroir comme formateur de la fonction du Je" (1949), and "La relation d'objet" (1956-57).

concept of the family as a ‘psychic circumstance and object,’ with the following caveat: because of the “matriarchal structure” of black Caribbean families, black mothers keep the Oedipus complex “far from coming into being among Negroes [for] which we heartily congratulate ourselves” (141, 152). Escape’s psychoanalytic mother fulfills—and builds upon—her Lacanian and Fanonian references. She “initiates [Johnnie] into the realm of language, law, and culture,” the expectations of society; and because of that initiation, she exercises dominion over Johnnie’s superego, “first formed in response to **maternal** authority” **before** the Oedipus complex or any paternal intervention (Barzilai 43, 41). This maternal superego, Freud biographer Peter Gay concedes, “harbors the conscience and, beyond that, unconscious feelings of guilt” (Gay xviii-xix). She also, according to Lacan and Freud, “represents more than anything the cultural past,” what Fanon would argue is the black mother’s matriarchal African lineage (Freud 96).²⁸⁴ Yet **too much** maternal influence over the male superego can “create” homosexuals, as popular culture and enforced politics in post-war Britain and the United States attests: “incomplete” weaning causes “underdeveloped” sexuality.²⁸⁵ Or, as Fanon notes succinctly: “Fault, Guilt, refusal of

²⁸⁴ Freud asserts that the superego evokes parental influence, including “in its operation not only the personalities of the actual parents but also the family, racial and national traditions handed on through them, as well as the demands of the immediate social **milieu** which they represent” (16).

²⁸⁵ This association of an overbearing, un-weaned maternal figure with an “underdeveloped” homosexuality is often credited to Freud, though Freud does not make such an assertion in An Outline of Psycho-Analysis (1940), what the editors of its W.W. Norton edition explain is “his terse survey of the fundamentals of psychoanalysis for professionals, or for intelligent laymen willing to pay close attention” written at the end of his life (xxi). Freud does outline his developmental analysis of sexuality (the “normal” child moving from oral to sadistic-anal to phallic to genital phases), but he also establishes that this developmental analysis is merely an

guilt, paranoia—one is back in homosexual territory” (Black Skin 183). Escape highlights this “homosexual territory”—much to Fanon’s chagrin, no doubt—by creating for Johnnie an Oedipus complex. Fiona, whom Johnnie freely associates with and substitutes for his mother, becomes his “maternal” sexual partner in a world where his father is already dead.

In Escape, Johnnie continually remembers how his mother initiated him into society, instructing him how to behave “like a **civilized chap** ... the way a **little**

analytic conceit: “Nevertheless, certain facts have always been known which do not fit into the narrow framework of this view. (1) It is a remarkable fact that there are people who are only attracted by individuals of their own sex and by their genitals. (2) It is equally remarkable that there are people whose desires behave exactly like sexual ones but who at the same time entirely disregard the sexual organs or their sexual use; people of this kind are known as ‘perverts.’ (3) And lastly, it is a striking thing that some children (who are on that account regarded as degenerate) take a very early interest in their genitals and show signs of excitation in them” (22).

Importantly, Freud differentiates here between “people who are only attracted by individuals of their own sex and by their genitals” and “perverts.” Later in Outline, Freud calls homosexuality a “perversion” and a “developmental inhibition” that “was present and in most cases persisted in a **latent** condition” (26, 27). But, the existence of homosexuality—again, a fact that has “always been known”—helps illuminate “the fact that as a rule the processes necessary for bringing about a normal outcome are not completely present or absent, but **partially** present, so that the final result remains dependent on these **quantitative** relations. In these circumstances the genital organization is, it is true, attained, but it lacks those portions of the libido which have not advanced with the rest and have remained fixated to pregenital objects and aims. This weakening shows itself in a tendency, if there is an absence of genital satisfaction or if there are difficulties in the real external world, for the libido to hark back to its earlier pregenital cathexes (**regression**)” (27).

Thus, homosexuality may be a **perversion**—while homosexuals are not **perverts**—but so-called “normal” sexuality is only “**partially** present,” and not so predestined. It can only be achieved through “**quantitative** relations.” And an absence of “genital satisfaction” from any number of times one has sex with a person of the other gender, the libido can hark back to homosexuality.

Freud’s assertion that anyone’s sexuality could “hark back to homosexuality” does, ironically, evoke the fear surrounding Cold War “male homosexual panic” even though Freud’s theory of “The Development of the Sexual Function” does not support the moral aberration that Cold War politics needed male homosexuality to represent.

gentleman is brought up to behave” (20).²⁸⁶ Instilled with this initiation was his conscience, which he now personifies by evoking his mother: “Mother always warned me about my unpreparedness to face up to stark realities. Bless her and her warnings! Unpreparedness, fear, disinclination, or anything she’d like to call it!” (83). Johnnie re-enacts a warning with a dream-like “scene” one August Tuesday when he has a “strangeneed for [Fiona’s] company, suddenly” (92). Drifting off on his bed, he watches “funny little shadows on the ceiling” and falls into a dream-like “scene” where his mother urges him to get a “first-class pass in the Senior Cambridge Certificate Examination” after he has wasted away his day: “Believe me, son, you’re heading for a fall. The world’s geared to certificates, diplomas, degrees and the rest. It’s a specialist world, and you’re right outside it if you don’t get the necessary qualifications. The Senior Cambridge is a start. It’s not much, but it’s a start” (93). After Johnnie awakes, he thinks “She ought to see me, now. Fully dressed, shoes and all, sprawling across the bed. A lighthearted reminder like, ‘A little gentleman never lies down in his clothes’ wouldn’t mean a thing at this moment” (94).

His mother’s continued dominion—in absentia—over his super ego often spills into his thoughts, into the narrative. In this way Johnnie follows Freud’s fundamental rule of analysis, “to tell us not only what he can say intentionally and willingly, what will give him relief like a confession, but everything else as well that his self-observation yields him, everything that comes into his head, even if it is **disagreeable** for him to say it, even if it seems to him **unimportant** or actually **nonsensical**” (51-52). And his attention to the neuroses that family, masculinity, and sexuality can

²⁸⁶ Haynes’ mother in James’ *Minty Alley* has the same domineering presence.

generate does not hurt. For example, when thinking about needing a haircut, Johnnie ponders “I wonder why it’s so easy to let yourself go in a strange country? First the hair, then the morals. Sounds like something Mother would have said” (56). Her maternal authority echoed by her matriarchal lineage in the absence of his father looms large when Johnnie tries to account for his sense of masculinity, for where he learned to be “a prince of waiting long hours for consolation”:

Must have got it from somebody or the other. Whom? The old lady? Could have. Could have been the old man, for all I know. I wonder what he’d say to that? Me. Actually taking after him in some murky detail. Wouldn’t believe it, I bet. No, sir! Not the old man. Not that “real man.” That hard-working, level-headed bulwark. Must have got it from an aunt on my mother’s side. Or the grandmother. Quite possibly. True. Mother’s mother. Gong-gong, the real force. (76-77)

Johnnie ponders his father’s absence, acceding that “when an airmail envelope means a father’s presence, then there’s bound to be a problem later on. Much later, maybe. For a child and mother” (77). Here, he sarcastically implies that his “problem” was not learning from a father figure how to be a “real man.” Johnnie’s anxiety over his “fatherless” masculinity demonstrates the premonitory influence family has on children as well as the super ego function of his cultural past (echoing Patterson’s “traditionless” West Indian culture). Johnnie’s association of family with illness and neuroses further signals psychoanalytically:

A father is an important ailment to have as a child. He may be any type. Doesn’t matter. Having him around completes the shape of

things to come. Having him on another planet is also an ailment, butter on bread but not quite the same like other boys' ailments, if you see what I mean. Yet a grandmother is an ailment, too—matrilineal society and all that effort. Grandmothers are forces, warriors, pre-war calm and post-war neuroses. (78)

Johnnie's birth into a "matrilineal society" with warrior ("Mother's mother") grandmothers, Jessica Huntley explains, reflects Salkey's "conscious decision [to] deliberately incorporate aspects of womanhood [in his work], particularly in his Anancy stories with Carribea" (Presentation).²⁸⁷ For Huntley, Salkey is one of the "few writers" in whose work "women play pivotal, understanding role[s]." Perhaps because "he grew up in a house of women" Salkey had a "tremendous amount of respect for women" (Presentation, Interview). And he invests this respect in Johnnie and the women of his family with the resonance of black women as instructors of Caribbean cultural heritage. Inspired in part by Salkey's own family, Escape thus illustrates how conscience evokes a cultural past into Johnnie's day-to-day life in London. Certainly Johnnie's description of Gong-gong ("Dynamic. Bigger than a dozen airmail envelopes arriving on the same Saturday. Her influence was her magic. Her magic, her life.") invokes the magic that Salkey invests in his own maternal grandmother telling stories on the barbeque (78). As he explains, "There used to be a slave thing called barbeque" on which coffee and produce dried, and on which stories

²⁸⁷ In "Anti-Apartness Anancy" Carribea, "a deep sea woman, broadminded when mostly everybody inside her have narrow heart and tight ways," sends for Brother Anancy "because she feel him could well use some of the back-home tactics to help out the township folks in South Africa" (17-18). Carribea has "a long, long tradition-culture of serious risk-taking and rescueation" (17).

were told (Huntley Presentation).²⁸⁸ Wrapped in a shawl, her “legs [would hang] over the side,” and with a “real story telling voice full of pauses” she performed her story with a “beautiful kind of rendering.” Her performance “was not theater,” Salkey confirms. It was “the woman herself coming out of the life.”

Salkey’s life also included an absent father who worked in Panama, first for the Americans in the Canal Zone and later as an entrepreneur, while his grandmother, and later his mother, raised him in Jamaica. With his father’s existence confirmed only by a monthly check religiously sent to his mother, Salkey first recalls seeing his father’s face in 1960 when Salkey returned to Jamaica on a Guggenheim fellowship. But Escape does not simply “com[e] out of the life” of Andrew Salkey alone. Within the narrative, Johnnie’s absent father and all-too-present mother also reflect the larger social, historical, and political context of post-war Britain during the height of the Cold War, when “incomplete” weaning was popularly used to “explain” male homosexuality. Such a deduction permeated popular and political cultures in the United States, as Robert J. Corber explains in Homosexuality in Cold War America, where “the national-security state discouraged forms of male homosocial bonding . . . promoted by the armed services [during the war because they] became a source of anxiety” once World War II ended and the Cold War began (11).²⁸⁹ “Male homosexual panic,” encouraged by Senator Joe McCarthy and others, ensured the transition from “the all-male world of the armed forces” to the model of nuclear

²⁸⁸ These Salkey quotes come from an audio tape that Jessica Huntley played during her presentation.

²⁸⁹ Corber’s book focuses on the manifestation of the discourse of “male homosexual panic” in popular movies, film noir.

family capitalism which would spur economic growth, develop “new forms of male subjectivity,” and defend the country against the communist scourge (11). Men who did not embrace “their roles as breadwinners and homeowners, roles that increasingly revolved around the consumption of durable goods ... were most likely to become objects of suspicion [because they] refused to settle down and raise a family” (11-12). Similar “male homosexual panic” in Britain was actively encouraged by the United States. As Neil Miller illustrates, the steady rise of homosexual men entrapped by police in public lavatories in Britain (1,666 in 1950, and 2,504 in 1955, compared with a pre-war yearly total averaging about 500) was

at least [partly] related to the Cold War and McCarthy period atmosphere, especially after the disappearance, in May 1951, of two senior British diplomats, Guy Burgess and Donald McLean, accused of spying for the Soviet Union. (They turned up in Moscow in 1956.) Both were widely assumed to be gay. Two weeks after their disappearance, the Sunday Dispatch newspaper alluded to the event, suggesting it was time to follow the American policy of “weeding out both sexual and political perverts.” According to Peter Wildeblood [diplomatic correspondent for the Daily Mail] who was to be arrested in the most famous [homosexual] sex scandal of the decade, the American security agencies pressured their British counterparts to do exactly that. Wildeblood asserts that it was after a meeting with FBI officials in the early fifties that the new Commissioner of Police at Scotland Yard, Sir John Nott-Bower, stepped up arrests of homosexual men. (281)

While new forms of white British male subjectivity were developing in response to the Cold War-induced “male homosexual panic,” new forms of West Indian subjectivity were developing in response to post-war “immigrant panic” influenced by de-colonization of the former British colonies in the Caribbean. Both panics invoked a police state through monitoring and laws to keep control of “contagion,” people who could taint or distort the British nation. As Anna Marie Smith asserts, “it cannot be overemphasized that the status of entire black populations was abruptly changed precisely at the time of de-colonization. Although they had been British passport-holders with full legal rights to settle in the United Kingdom, they [instantly] became foreign **immigrants** who were subjected to extensive immigration controls” while they were simultaneously being called to meet post-war labor shortages (129-130, emphasis mine). Without the structure of Empire, the influx of West Indians threatened to blacken Britain.²⁹⁰ So, nomenclature maintained colonial

²⁹⁰ As Cecil Gutzmore attests, black presence on the British Isles can be traced to Septimus Severus, the African Roman Emperor ruling Britain from 208-211. While Severus’ “public pictures needed to look like the house he usurped [to prove] he was part of this dynasty,” his sons, “both look[ing] stereotypically, archetypically black” are depicted in a ceiling mural in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne (Presentation). Presence of blacks alone does not usurp British national identity. Decolonization coupled with the growing number of black Caribbeans migrating to Britain threatened it. Powellism, for example, arose to accommodate the new “weakness” of the British metropole that West Indian’s post-war presence in Britain signaled: “[Enoch Powell] argued that the British had to reject two powerful and harmful myths, that ‘Britatin wasonce a great imperial power’ and that ‘Britain was once the workshop of the world.’ If they continued to believe that the strength of their nation had depended on its ability to dominate its colonies, then de-colonization would only signify the end to British greatness. In other words, these two ‘bad myths’ were structured according to a supplementary logic, and, as such, revealed the fundamental weakness within the metropole. Powell proposed an entirely different myth. He argued that British imperial rule was extended through a series of blunders, misfortunes and entanglements, and that the Conservatives invented the Empire at the turn of the century because ‘about

power relationships in Empire's literal absence. Figuratively, language attempted to maintain the bodily control enforced by colonialism. The British Empire now became the Commonwealth, which "merely covered over the loss of the Empire, and allowed the British people to ignore the fact that the colonies had unilaterally rejected the 'mother country'" (131). Black British subjects under Empire also had to be re-classified to accommodate the "new" Commonwealth: "re-naming the colonized as 'immigrants'" worked to erase Britain's colonial dependence on its colonies for labor and national identity as well as to redefine the growing West Indian community in Britain "as the late additions to an already complete body. The 'known' colonized became 'unknown' 'strangers' in the land of their own making. Above all, the movements of these peoples provided the occasion for the re-closure of the broken [British] body" (130).

Escape's embrace of the very immigrant status meant to corporeally dislocate black West Indians from the body of Britain ascribes the same "basic importance to the phenomenon of language" as Fanon does in Black Skin (17). As Fanon asserts, "the colored man's comprehension of the dimension of **the other**" includes his knowledge that "to speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization" (17-18). Or, as Fanon elaborates on the implied dialectic of civilization and colonial subject inscribed in the body of "the Negro":

that one could make stirring speeches without needing actually to alter anything" (Smith 131).

In the **Weltanschauung** of a colonized people there is an impurity, a flaw that outlaws any ontological explanation. Someone may object that this is the case with every individual, but such an objection merely conceals a basic problem. Ontology—once it is finally admitted as leaving existence by the wayside—does not permit us to understand the being of a black man. For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man. (109-110)

Johnnie's ontology, a middle-class Jamaican now living in London and previously raised both under the watchful eye of the British Empire and his super ego mother, exudes a Fanonian dialectic. Johnnie speaks, thinks, acts, assumes "the weight of [Britain's colonially-defined] civilization." In fact, Johnnie's self-conscious "bi-cultural" influence, his "living through difference," blurs any "pre-colonial" or pre-**méconnaissance** understanding of West Indian epistemology or culture where Fanon is far less comfortable.

Fanon clings to sentimental, "authentic" blackness in what Kobena Mercer blasts is "the contradictory logic" of the often-cited footnote in Black Skin where Fanon claims "I had no opportunity to establish the overt presence of homosexuality in Martinique. This must be viewed as the result of the absence of the Oedipus complex in the Antilles" (Mercer 125; Fanon Black Skin 180 n44). Fanon's footnote seems to be a non-sequitur in the middle of a block quote from French psychiatrist Henri Baruk about anti-Semitic psychoses about one of his patients whose obscenity "transcended all the French language could furnish and took the form of obvious pederastic allusions" (qtd. in Fanon 180). But representing homosexuality—or, here, pederastic

allusions—as **transcending language**, as “unexpressible” through any “overt presence,” indicates the knowing, deafening “silence” so often associated with black Caribbean homosexuality as it contradicts Fanon’s dialectic ontology.

Fanon’s dismissal of the Oedipus complex comes after two pages detailing how the “double Oedipus complex” in white women explains the “Negro is raping me” fantasy, the fourth (and last) time in Black Skin’s psychoanalysis chapter that he uses sex between a black man and a white woman to illustrate the mythic sexuality attributed to black people. Using the Oedipus complex to settle white motivation for racist sexual fantasies—what makes “the Negro . . . the keeper of the impalpable gate that opens into the realm of orgies, of bacchanals, of delirious sexual sensations”—explains Fanon’s finding “the absence of the Oedipus complex in the Antilles” (177). For Fanon, Oedipal relations characterize tainted black-white relations; so “normal” pre-colonial black culture was Oedipus-free. Remember, Fanon establishes, “a normal Negro child, having grown up within a normal family, will become abnormal on the slightest contact with the white world” (143). Yet, if the black man “must be black in relation to the white man” how could there be an absence of the Oedipus complex in the Antilles” in 1952? Twelve years before, when France was under Vichy rule during World War II, Martinican racial identity irrevocably changed, as Deborah Wyrick explains. The French Atlantic fleet harbored in Martinique was not allowed to leave; the influx of 10,000 French sailors increased Martinique’s white population by 500 percent (8). If race in Martinique “was neither an essential category nor a hardened position” and not more important than “economic status and social class” before World War II, the French sailors only “saw the islanders through the lens of racial

prejudice. To them, Martinicans were Negroes, indistinguishable from Africans, undifferentiated among themselves, at best second-class citizens and at worst savages. Fanon called this confrontation with institutionalized racism the Martinican's 'first metaphysical experience'" (8). How then in 1952 could **any** Martinican—let alone Fanon²⁹¹—regard "blackness" outside its relation to "whiteness" and institutionalized racism, what Fanon articulates with the Oedipus complex?

Instead of using the footnote to reveal Fanon's self-contradictory argument, Kobena Mercer proclaims it an example of the "pervasive presence of homophobia in Black Skin, White Masks" (123). Fanon's footnote is the "indispensable resource" for the contemporary, disappointing "counter-hegemonic vision of universal liberation [which] has given way to a horrific mirror-image of the politics of resentment and retribution" (121). Mercer takes the silence Fanon projects at face value when explaining that Fanon's "footnote—which initially suggests that Fanon knows little about homosexuality, but which then reveals that he knows all too much—can be taken as a symptom of homophobic fixation and disavowal in the political economy of masculinity in black liberationist discourse" (125). Fanon's footnote may indeed be a symptom (in a strictly Freudian sense), a "substitute for an unachieved instinctual gratification" in black liberationist discourse, if this discourse's incomplete reading of

²⁹¹ Wyrick adds that "during this time, Fanon developed a racial consciousness quite different from that taught by his parents" when describing a fight that Fanon and his friends stopped in Fort-de-France (9). Two French sailors were beating up a young Martinican who had stolen money from them. Fanon saved his countryman and "wasn't bothered to learn later" what the young Martinican had done (9). To Fanon, "the incident demonstrated a clear, racially motivated injustice that called for an immediate remedy," a reaction no doubt influenced by the institutional racism that the French sailors enforced when living in Martinique (9).

Fanon is the “result of a process of repression” (Freud, Dictionary 151). Seemingly unbeknownst to some, Fanon supports his professed ignorance—his supposed “disavowal”—with the following: “We should not overlook, however, the existence of what are called there ‘men dressed like women’ or ‘godmothers’” (Black Skin 180 n44). Fanon then reveals: “Generally they wear shirts and skirts. But I am convinced they lead normal sex lives. They can take a punch like any ‘he-man’ and they are not impervious to the allures of women—fish and vegetables” (180 n44). He ends his note acknowledging a strategic black male homosexuality in Europe: “In Europe, on the other hand, I have known several Martinicans who became homosexuals, always passive. But this was by no means a neurotic homosexuality: For them it was a means to a livelihood, as pimping is for others” (180 n44). Such an acknowledgment of different models of male homosexuality—like Larry’s understanding of Johnnie—“hears” the deafening “silence” of black Caribbean homosexuality. And Fanon’s hearing deserves careful explication. Standard US American or Western sexuality “visibility politics” (a gay man is either “out” or “in the closet”; Fanon is either “pro-gay” or “homophobic”) cannot be used to read or define “progressive” expressive black homosexualities across the Diaspora.²⁹²

²⁹² Still, scholars like Charles Rowell, editor of African American and African literary journal Callaloo, do. Rowell explains the “very difficult” task of making Shade: An Anthology of Gay Men of African Decent, a collection he co-edited with Bruce Morrow, “an international project” as follows: “it was not North American gay bashing that made difficult our tasks as co-editors of Shade; the institutionalized and personalized homophobia and homohatred in parts of the Third World paralyzed our efforts, making it impossible to gather materials from . . . the Caribbean, South America, and Africa [where] very few individuals are brave enough to sign or identify themselves as gay to the public” (338, 339).

Sure, Fanon does not boldly proclaim that the struggles of sexual and racial minorities are intertwined like Black Panther leader Huey P. Newton does in “A Letter to the Revolutionary Brothers and Sisters about the Women’s Liberation and Gay Liberation Movements.”²⁹³ Nor did Fanon meet with members of the Women’s and Gay Liberation movements as Newton did at the “Revolutionary People’s Constitutional Convention” in Philadelphia from 5-7 September 1970, a conference attended by over 6,000 people and organized by the Panthers “in order to rewrite the U.S. Constitution, which according to the group, did not go far enough in protecting the rights of oppressed people” (Hornsby 150). But Fanon’s lack of flag waving and meeting do not erase the fascinating disclosures of his footnote nestled in Black Skin’s chapter explicitly focusing on psychoanalysis, “The Negro and Psychopathology.” Contemporary mis-readings of Fanon—about which Mercer complains—have nothing to do with the psychoanalytic dynamic within which Fanon offers the disclosures he does. Too often, the methodology of psychoanalysis, where psychiatrists themselves are anything but a firmly objective viewer “outside” the psyches they study, is

²⁹³ Officially released as a Black Panther Party manifesto, Newton’s “Letter” was also published in Berkeley Tribe (5-12 September 1972). Since then, it has been anthologized in numerous gay anthologies and BLK magazine. Yet, still, it engenders a silence in studies of Newton or the Black Panthers. Newton’s “Letter” is not included in the masculinist mythology of Newton and the Black Panthers. In A Huey P. Newton Story (2001) [Spike Lee-directed version of Roger Guenveur Smith’s Obie award-winning one-man play], Smith conflates Newton’s sexual and racial politics. For example, as Newton Smith belittles J. Edgar Hoover for cross-dressing (making numerous slights about high heels creeping up behind him) as if cross-dressing itself was shameful and worthy of critique. (As Newton, Smith does not use Hoover’s private cross-dressing to illustrate Hoover’s hypocritical public fanning of the “male homosexual panic” in the US and Britain since typically non-heterosexual, non-nuclear forms of male subjectivity—like cross-dressing, homosocial behavior, and homosexuality.) See my first chapter for my discussion of Newton’s “Letter.”

tragically overlooked. To do this, scholars must overlook the fact that Fanon is not “outside” the Antillean community of psyches Black Skin studies. Fanon himself directs in his introduction: “Since I was born in the Antilles, my observations and my conclusions are valid only for the Antilles—at least concerning the black man **at home**” (14). Even without Fanon’s biography, as Freud reminds, psychoanalysis is a science “based on observations and experiences” (31). Psychiatrists can only arrive at the conclusions of their science “through the medium of our [own] psychic apparatus” (31). Thus, reading Fanon’s infamous footnote **psychoanalytically** would find it “a precarious and fragile thing which is rarely the master of its own house—the id or ‘it’ out of which ‘I’ emerges,” what Mercer himself attests is the fundamental understanding of the self that psychoanalysis promotes (121). So, Fanon should not (simply) be taken at his word.

Escape illustrates just how much Fanon’s “precarious and fragile” words breathe, how much they show “the **Weltanschauung** of a colonized people,” when it combines the maternal superego figure responsible for Johnnie’s initiation into society with the Oedipus complex narrative that guides ontological, dialectical “blackness.” Johnnie himself offers this connection with his facetious reply (“Yes, Mummy darling. You make Cream of Wheat the bestest in the whole wide world.”) to Fiona’s questioning “Aren’t you enjoying me?” (105). Fiona (again) evokes a memory of his mother one night after Johnnie has returned from his night club, when, unknown to Johnnie, she waits in his still-dark room. Fiona is there to confess her tumultuous affair with Gerald Trado (“I’m not Mrs. Trado. There is a Mrs. Trado but I’m not her. Gerald sees to that. He no more wants a divorce than the man in the moon. All he

wants with me is a nice cosy life insin.”), as well as her past affair with Joseph, her “‘charming’ African lover” from Lagos (40-41, 40). But before Johnnie sees her, he smells Fiona’s “‘terribly strong” perfume and “stare[s] up at the camouflaged ceiling, a mosaic of curious shadows and shimmering lights sprinkled on the ceiling from the street-lamp blinking below the window-box” (38). The perfume and the ceiling send Johnnie inward, reminding him

of the results which the projector my brother and I made when we were children used to give us, when we held private showings to impress mother on a Sunday evening. Poor mother! Every new experiment would cost her at least two cinema fares and a shilling extra for nuts and ice-cream. The trouble was that our projector hardly did anything else but spill out light and shadow, simply because we never got around to making our own films. That’s a laugh! (38)

Johnnie’s olfactory and visual association figuratively and literally projects his mother, his childhood, and his “failed” creativity (“We made a type of light and shadow cardboard lantern-slide, perforated all over; and that was as far as we ever got.”), onto the ceiling throughout this scene, Johnnie’s first conversation with Fiona alone (38).

The conversation that Johnnie and Fiona have establishes the themes and anxieties that guide Escape and Johnnie, symbolized here by the light and shadow projection of that cardboard lantern-slide. Fiona immediately echoes the light and shadow projection when she explains to Johnnie that “Gerald resents everything about you” since Johnnie is black like Joseph (39). She also relates Joseph’s projections,

which echo Johnnie's anxiety about his masculinity: "Joseph hated West Indians like poison. He used to refer to them as 'halfies' (42). For Joseph, racial authenticity presents itself as heterosexual masculinity; so, removal from the continent, life with "new sophistication" in a University evokes anxiety over homosexuality, which Joseph projects onto the West Indians "he was envious of" since they are already "once removed" from the African continent (42).

Johnnie and Fiona's conversation about exile invokes mirror-stage-like identification and alienation through Fanonian retranscription. Fiona's questions about Johnnie's migration ("What are you going to do here that you couldn't do over there?") assumes a Fanonian "normalcy" when the individual and the projected (racial) image of the nation reflect each other: "I don't know where I'm going and I don't care a damn. The only difference actually is that I'm living in my own nasty country, and you're not" (45, 44). Johnnie counters Fiona's "national normalcy" distinctions by explaining how the "mother country" **already** exists for the Jamaican middle-class, a status "that doesn't exist, but is actually a part of the thinking of a people in a society" (46). Before this Jamaican middle-class ever leaves the island, Johnnie explains, they jubilantly gravitate toward the **Ideal-I** of the "mother country" with an "almost aerial manner of [their] carriage," as Fanon describes the Martiniquan man's journey to "mother" France (Fanon, Black Skin 19). For Jamaicans, "there's no middle-class bit [but] there's a sort of behavior which adds up to it. Which damn' well strangles everybody. The thing doesn't exist, yet a tight bunch of people move and hope and act as if they're being guided by it" (Salkey, Escape 46). Johnnie continues by illustrating the first part of Fanon's "double process" ("primary economic

[disfranchisement]”) when Fiona contends that if Jamaica’s middle-class think and act middle-class they are: “How can they be, Fiona? How can they be when the society isn’t ready for that kind of step forward? What we have is a suggestion of a middle-class—the bare bones. A shadowy outline. Surely it takes much more than a hundred and twenty-eight years after the Abolition of Slavery for a middle class to evolve?” (46-47).

Johnnie asserts he is a living example of the **méconnaissance** gained from the Jamaican approaching the British mirror image: “I’m the result of that misconception. That misconception plus what your gracious Gerald would call colonial endowment. Look! I’m unskilled. I’m puffed up with my own importance. . . . I’m an escaped product of this premature middle-class mess! With all the play-acting that goes with it, too” (47-48). This **méconnaissance** is internal: “It has affected my conscience” (47). And it creates the slippery remove that a West Indian identity implies: “Isn’t that the West Indian problem? Not being totally anything identifiable?” (48). Fiona confirms this remove by reproducing Joseph’s argument that as an African he “has a solid reality which is his strength” (48). Johnnie’s response asserts a “traditionless” West Indian-ness by asserting his own rootless reality: “Where must I search for this reality, Fiona? Where does anybody actually come face to face with his national identity? Can you tell me that? Where?” (48). Johnnie even confesses “I want to feel just a little something [for England since West Indians have] been fed the Mother Country myth. Its language. Its history. Its literature. Its Civics. We feel chunks of it rubbing off on us. We believe in it. We trust it. Openly, we admit we’re a part of it. But are we? Where’s the real link?” (48).

Escape makes plain the link between Fiona's maternal presence and the novel's "homosexual territory" when Dick asks that she "referee" after the following exchange he has with Dick about Johnnie having to make a decision, an exchange that has all the cagey defensiveness of Johnnie's discussions with Larry:

"What decision, Dick?"

"Your homosexuality, Johnnie."

Biddy was right, I heard myself say. I couldn't look at Dick. I began to top up my drink. It obviously didn't need it. He noticed that, too.

"I owe you this talk. I've owed it to you for weeks, now. Do you want me to go on?"

I attempted to brave it out.

"It's all right by me, Dick; but I'm sure I won't understand you."

"Why?"

"Well, for one thing, you're on the wrong track about my being homosexual." That sounded feeble and positively stupid; yet it was a try.

"Am I?"

"Aren't you?" This, I thought, could go on for quite a long time. Back and forth, back and forth, and to no avail. The whole thing was stupid, utterly stupid. I didn't want to talk about it. (181)

After Fiona does arrive, Johnnie's guarded rant notes the psychoanalytic rendering of sexuality through repression as well as Cold War-induced "male homosexual panic": "You, my dear Fiona, are to advise me about my latent **or, if you like, my repressed**, homosexuality, or still better, my bisexuality. . . . Am I to be homosexual or not? Am I to be bisexual or not? **Am I to be a whole man or not?**" (188, emphasis mine).

Fiona's reaction both confirms what the reader has "seen" all along as well as smashes the either-or solution any labeling would presume: "Frankly, Johnnie, I do think you're homosexual, but I can't say to what extent or anything. And this doesn't mean that I don't want you as my lover. I couldn't care less. You're what I've been waiting for, homosexual or not" (188).

"I've been criticised for not being anthropologically faithful. Now, to be frank, novelists find it very difficult to be faithful to anthropology. The thing that intervenes in any novelist's work is his or her thrusting imagination. The fictive element predominates. Lying, which is a great literary art, is very persuasive as soon as you start telling a story. Even the recounting of the life of one's own mother; you can't imagine the interventions that creep in in the retelling of a life."

—Andrew Salkey, "Andrew Salkey Talks with Anthony Ilona"
(1992)

Johnnie's guarded reaction to Dick and Fiona's solution for Johnnie's "decision" temporarily collapses. *Escape*'s narration does, too, first sliding mid-sentence from Johnnie's usual first-person reporting into italics (just like Johnnie's mother's letters), and then into another narrator: "I had been told identical truths: **by a woman, whose love I did not want, and by a man who wanted to love me unconditionally. In short, Johnnie was being a damn' 'hard case,' and enjoying**

every moment of it, he believed. He was refusing, not terribly unlike Miss Otis, to dine with either of his admirers” (190). This new omniscient narrator who takes over for two paragraphs both signals to knowing readers that he has a particular connection to Johnnie’s “decision” and instructs general readers to empathize with Johnnie.

Signifying on Cole Porter’s song “Miss Otis Regrets (She’s Unable to Lunch Today),” this narrator-interloper implies that he knows—perhaps first-hand—how Porter’s songs were used Anancy-style to allude to homosexuality. As George Chauncey explains,

Gay men, in other words, used gay subcultural codes to place themselves and to see themselves in the dominant culture, to read the culture against the grain in a way that made them more visible than they were supposed to be, and to turn “straight” spaces into gay spaces. When they read the classified ads, watched films starring Greta Garbo, or Bette Davis, or listened to Cole Porter songs, they appropriated them for the gay world and thus extended the boundaries of the gay world far beyond those officially tolerated. (288)

Porter as gay sub-cultural signifier “read[s] against the grain” like Anancy who “knows no boundaries,” following Salkey (qtd. in Nazareth 18). And Miss Otis airs “things about which every one knew, but concerning which one might not ordinarily speak in public,” following R.S. Rattay (qtd. in Levine 102).²⁹⁴ Signifying on Porter

²⁹⁴ When one did speak in public, Chauncey explains, there were sometimes consequences. In New York, Porter was a clear signifier for homosexuality to the

also nods toward Escape's bridging of race and sexuality. The white American lyricist had no black ancestry but his songs had currency in black American and European communities where they were widely known and performed by black blues and jazz singers. Porter was a guest of Clinton Moore's infamous parties in Harlem in the 1920s and 1930s (Garber). One of Porter's lovers was Grenadian pianist Leslie "Hutch" Hutchinson. Plus, according to Hutch biographer Charlotte Breese, Porter was Anancy-like himself: "Cole was perpetually reinventing his past" (38).

The Porter-referencing narrator-interloper also presumably marks the return of Salkey himself, who starts the novel with an Anancy-like apology signed "A.S." A.S. explains that the name Shakuntala Goolam (one of the residents of the Hampstead tenement) combines both a Hindu first and Muslim last name, a combination not meant "to embarrass anyone, or to utter propaganda on behalf of Hindu-Muslim Unity, or anything of the sort" (6). A.S. then pleads ignorance, innocence, and invention, finally reasoning that Goolam has no real impact in Escape "beyond her appearance as a minor character" (6). Such a tongue-in-cheek beginning to the narrative only emphasizes the manipulative possibilities of the narrative to follow, possibilities which fade away into the verisimilitude of Escape's plot points and characters who do not "embarrass anyone."

police: "In 1950 [police] revoked the liquor license of the Salle de Champagne, a nationally known Greenwich Village restaurant cabaret popular among the theater crowd, because a black performer who, it turned out, had been denied a cabaret card on the basis of two prior convictions for homosexual solicitation had been permitted to sing several songs in a loosely organized amateur night, even though the restaurant had not hired the singer. Although the restaurant claimed that he had simply sung a 'show tune ... [perhaps by] Cole Porter,' ... investigators charged that 'he acted like a degenerate' and 'sang songs that had to do with fairies and lesbians'" (352-353).

A.S.' return brakes that verisimilitude with meta-narrative commentary after Johnnie hears "identical truths" so that the reader will fully appreciate the effects of Escape's great literary art of lying "crash[ing] the defences of most adults" (qtd. in Nazareth 18). Yet A.S.' seemingly factual summary also exposes the toll Johnnie's own lying levies against himself. With one parenthetical phrase, Salkey reminds that no matter how "very persuasive [lying can be] as soon as you start telling a story" its everyday consequences for Johnnie can be serious:

In short, again, and perhaps less flippantly so, things could be summed up as follows: Fiona loved Johnnie. Johnnie was free with Dick. Dick was prepared to take over Johnnie completely if only he'd acknowledge his homosexuality and learn to be reconciled to it (it's a fact, which by its very nature, is inescapable, is and always will be, omnipresent), learn to be honest with himself and so fulfil the purpose of his thwarted manhood. (Ilona 45; Salkey, Escape 190)

Here, too, Salkey inverts Cold War-induced definitions of heterosexual manhood.

Johnnie could free "his thwarted manhood" "if only he'd acknowledge his homosexuality and learn to be reconciled to it."

Salkey's meta-narrative commentary is the most obvious of many nods to what he calls "the fictive element" of narrative itself in a self-consciously narrated text from its opening lines ("The name's Sobert. Johnnie Sobert. Jamaican. R.C. Middle Class. Or so I've been made to think.") that constantly references literary posturing and reading as well as other narratives (11). Sometimes Johnnie reads through literary

figures: “[Fiona’s] coming out of her John Donne and entering, with aplomb, her wicked Gertrude Stein mood, now” (101). And Escape references both W.E.B. Du Bois and Booker T. Washington through the name of Bidley’s black American boyfriend, DuBois B. Washington. Describing Washington at the night club one night Johnnie alludes to fellow Jamaican Claude McKay’s poem “If We Must Die” (1919), the poem often attributed to be the start of the Harlem Renaissance, a poem exhorting blacks to no longer meekly exist: “DuBois B. Washington looks as if he’s **penned in an inglorious spot**, to me. He’ll wriggle out of it, I suppose” (120).

Even though Johnnie notes his reading, and nods to a previous generation of West Indian writing, Escape is still at odds with the documentary, revolutionary lens attributed to contemporaneous West Indian novels. As the title of George Lamming’s essay from The Pleasures of Exile that I start this essay with indicates, the novel offers West Indian writers their “Occasion for Speaking.” It documents **their own** coming to voice, their own resistance to racism, to the history of colonialism, to ongoing imperialism. And since Lamming, scholars of West Indian writing have argued that such a “documentary” resistant voice (often signified by reading and writing in the text) is the central trope in black Caribbean Letters.²⁹⁵ The editors of The Post-

²⁹⁵ In The European Tribe (1987), for example, Caryl Phillips traces his own journey to becoming a writer back to reading Richard Wright’s Native Son (1940) on the beach in Los Angeles during a break from his studies at Oxford: “I walked down to the beach with the Richard Wright book, and pointed my deck chair towards the Pacific. . . . When I rose from the deck chair it was dark and I had finished my reading by moonlight. I felt as if an explosion had taken place inside my head. If I had to point to any one moment that seemed crucial in my desire to be a writer, it was then, as the Pacific surf began to wash up around the deck chair. The emotional anguish of the hero, Bigger Thomas, the uncompromising prosodic muscle of Wright, his deeply felt sense of social indignation, provided not so much a model but a possibility of how I

Colonial Studies Reader, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, likewise offer that this **postcolonial** literature was the first means of “counter-colonial resistance” to assemble the interaction between imperial and indigenous cultures, “hybrid **processes** of self-determination to defy, erode and sometimes supplant the prodigious power of imperial cultural knowledge” (1). Postcolonial theory thus existed in literature “a long time before that particular name was used to describe it,” long before the term was in “danger of losing its effective meaning altogether [from misuse which may] mask and even perpetuate unequal economic and cultural relations” (1, 2).

Salkey’s London novels certainly use narration as a “hybrid **process** of self-determination,” a means of “counter-colonial resistance” but their **occasion for history**, their occasion to speak up against “unequal economic and cultural relations” comes only through the internal, the psychological. And because Salkey’s London novels are as much about individual **perception** of the self within society, within history, as they are a product of post-Windrush West Indian history, they do not facilitate the slippage scholars engage in when reading West Indian literature as history, as documentary. For these readers, novels depicting experiences of West Indian migration to England often pass as testimony affirming someone individual experiences of migration. For example, George Lamming uses Sam Selvon’s novel The Lonely Londoners (1956) interchangeably with his and Selvon’s own experiences coming to England in a celebration of Selvon’s work after his passing:

Sam and I had left home for the same reasons. We had come to

England to be writers and now as we were about to be anchored at

might be able to express the conundrum of my own existence” (7-8).

Southampton, we realized we had no return tickets. We had no experience in crime; moreover our colonial status condemned us fortunately to the rights of full citizenship—in no circumstances could we qualify for deportation. There was no going back. And all the gaiety of reprieve which we felt on our departure had now turned to complete apprehension. Like one of the many characters he has since created, Sam said to me on the deck, “Who send me up in this place?” ... One finds this question repeated in various ways in his work. It was as though we had no concrete choice to make—there was simply some force at work that sent you up in this place. It is the situation that the ‘boys’ run into all the time in The Lonely Londoners. (“Coldest” 4-5)

Escape, however, asks no such questions. Nor does it simply look “home” to the Caribbean for (common) comfort. Neither does Escape offer any easy conclusion for Johnnie. The last sentences of Escape find Johnnie leaving his flat then wandering into Leicester Square and Piccadilly Circus, then towards Green Park, contemplating “a choice of lives before me. A choice of loves. And, perhaps, a choice of enemies” (208).

Escape ends without Johnnie’s choice. His wandering could be seen as one of Johnnie’s many “escapes” throughout the novel, what Bill Carr calls his “smart, rootless idiom . . . the acquired idiom of a conscious and unhappy outsider” (108). But the geography of Johnnie’s wandering at the novel’s end suggests otherwise. He wanders not the outskirts but **central** London through **queer** Piccadilly (with its bordering Soho) and toward Green Park, which surrounds Buckingham Palace.

Moreover, the novel's Anancy-structure points beyond Johnnie Sobert's self-questioning, critical that "I didn't try hard enough to do anything about my condition" (Escape 145). As Carr illustrates, "a basic wit operates against Sobert and so helps to give the book a positive meaning" (108). Johnnie understands that he has a choice; and Salkey reinforces that power to select with the creative vigor of the sometimes-irreverent Anancy that guides Escape's narration. As I argue earlier, Salkey's Anancy unearths "things about which every one knew, but concerning which one might not ordinarily speak in public," what white British anthropologist R.S. Rattay calls "the truth of the psychoanalysts' theory of 'repressions,' and that in these ways they sought an outlet for what might otherwise become a dangerous complex" (qtd. in Levine 102). Escape's Anancy-like narration predicates the kind of "seer" that Du Bois posits in The Souls of Black Folk, gifted with the kind of "second-sight," "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" (8). This "outsider" sight boldly unearths truths. Salkey's Anancy illustrates a "racial psychology" like Du Bois' that draws from "the resources of black culture"²⁹⁶ that Hortense Spillers thinks is impossible, one that necessitates being "read with patience," following Du Bois (3).

So powerful is this creative, mischievous, and literate black queer outsider, hecreates chronologically-impossible dialogues for Peter Nazareth, who praises Johnnie Sobert for his insight in the following passage:

Finally, I realized that I was headed nowhere like a hundred million others: I had escaped a malformed Jamaican middle class; I had

²⁹⁶ In "Anancy and Andrew Salkey," Mervyn Morris asserts that "one of the ways in which Salkey asserts his Jamaican origins is in continued use of the Anancy figure" (39).

attained my autumn pavement; I had become a waiter in a Dantesque night club; I had done more than my fair share of hurting, rejecting, and condemning; and I had created another kind of failure, and this time, in another country. (145)

For Nazareth, Johnnie's "balanced and complex rhythms [shows that] he is coming closer to acknowledging his inner problems. 'Another country' refers not only to England but also to the title of James Baldwin's novel about the people who inhabit 'another country,' including homosexuals" (38). However, this logic relies on faulty chronology. Salkey's Escape was published three years before Baldwin's Another Country. As I argue in the next chapter, Baldwin blinds many with his black queer insight; he also connects the Diaspora-informed and -influenced work of Claude McKay and LeRoi Jones.

Chapter Five: “Youse awful queer, chappie”: The kinship and insight of black queer “outsider”-intellectuals

Why must this book freak your caresses anxious?
This screed of dark disclosures from a man
Cocked up between his Hella and his Giovanni
Not sure how the balls will roll?

Let Baldwin plant his milestones on his own road.
Our love is a today (and a forever?).
I love the all of you, and no man’s body
Yet.

—Mervyn Morris, from “After she had read Giovanni’s Room”
(1968)

“He was very easy to raise. He lived in books. He’d sit at a table with a child in one arm and a book in the other. The first book he ever read through was Uncle Tom’s Cabin. I think it came to us from a friend. Jimmy was about eight. There was something about that book. I couldn’t understand it. He just read it over and over and over again. I even hid it away up in a closet. But he rambled around and found it again. And, after that, I stopped hiding it.”

—Emma Baldwin, speaking about her son James in Fern Marja Eckman’s The Furious Passage of James Baldwin
(1968)

Jamaican Rhodes scholar Mervyn Morris’ poem “After she had read Giovanni’s Room” illustrates the reach of Baldwin’s black queer vernacular. It leaps from his novel into the mind of the speaker’s partner,²⁹⁷ “freak[ing her] caresses anxious.” After having read how Baldwin’s David was unable to act freely on his love for Giovanni, she looks at her partner differently, as if with a Du Bois-like “second-sight.” The verse that Morris’ speaker writes in response to assure “how the balls will

²⁹⁷ In the introduction to The Islands In Between, Louis James asserts that Morris’ poem “refers to his wife’s reaction to Baldwin’s novel of homosexuality.” While such biographic criticism may be plausible, nothing in the poem marks the female companion of the speaker as his wife.

roll” hardly quells her questions.²⁹⁸ Not only does he conclude, “Our life is a today (and a forever?)” in the last stanza, he leaves open the possibility that her reading has introduced: “I love the all of you, and no man’s body / Yet.” Louis James finds such wit to be an extension of the speaker’s reading of Giovanni’s Room, a novel which “questions, by implication, conventional sexual morality. Morris goes beyond this to question the resultant clichés of unconventional love that have been so disturbing to Baldwin’s reader” (33). But unlike his partner, Morris’ speaker seems far less than disturbed.

His first-person response displays no anxieties in its literate understanding of “Cocked up” Baldwin’s “dark disclosures.” In fact, “After” rests on his intuitive reading of Giovanni’s Room **before** his partner’s—a reading heightened by his own skills as a writer. With “After,” Morris illustrates the kind of black queer “networks of affiliation” I trace through this manuscript. In “After,” Baldwin gives Morris’ speaker a template for showing how his perhaps unrealized desire for a “man’s body”—“Yet.”—is confined by his current heterosexual relationship and its incumbent expectations. Whatever the source of his uncertain sarcasm, what Louis James calls Morris’ “significant ambiguity,” the speaker illuminates Baldwin’s insight through reading and writing. Between writers, Morris reveals what Baldwin calls “the **specialness** of my experience [that] could be made to connect me with other [writers] instead of dividing me from them” (James 33; “Discovery” 171).²⁹⁹

²⁹⁸ The following rhetorical questions earlier in the poem are hardly forceful, considering the poem’s conclusion: “Are my eyes befuddled, do you read / Ambiguous embraces in each night’s collision?”

²⁹⁹ In “The Discovery of What It Means to Be an American,” Baldwin finds an

Baldwin's first textual connection like this came with his discovery of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852), the book his mother rather ironically hid from him in the closet. Biographer Fern Marja Eckman argues that Baldwin's childhood fascination with Cabin offered one of the few respites from his abusive stepfather. Eckman also notes that "the descriptions of [Topsy] must have reminded [Baldwin] irresistibly of his stepfather's taunts: 'wicked,' 'odd and goblin-like,' 'a gnome from the land of Diablerie,' 'so ugly, and always will be'" (41). Nonetheless, Baldwin's zest in re-reading Cabin came from seeing his misfit self in the novel's

stock comedy figure, Topsy, who must have struck the boy as his feminine counterpart. She was exactly his age and, like him, a misfit, isolated, ridiculed, repugnant to those around her. She had his own round eyes, his own solemnity, his own quickness and keenness (she even learned to read, as he had, with magical speed), his own generosity and his own misery. (41)

Seeing himself reflected in print like this recalls Freud's "uncanny" glimpse of his Jewish self in the mirror, as I explore in the last chapter. Yet while Freud "recollect[s] that I thoroughly disliked [the Jew's] appearance," Baldwin found solace in recognizing his grotesque "specialness" in print (qtd. in Boyarin 211). Cabin inspired him to pursue writing, to create more characters like Topsy, because "I could write to be eighty and be as grotesque as a dwarf, and that wouldn't matter" (qtd. in Eckman 45-46).

intrinsic connection with other writers: "I found my experience was shared by every American writer I knew in Paris" (172).

Eckman offers this interpretation of young misfit Baldwin so she can direct his destined path toward “Baldwin the legend” for which he is still known: the queer, lonely, and bug-eyed outsider who could turn a phrase with his blistering insight on race. Her psychoanalytically-informed evaluation of “that nightmare that was his childhood” comes with pity for a young Baldwin “rubbed raw by his stepfather’s sadism,” a victim of a “father whose paranoia distorted Jimmy Baldwin’s childhood and destroyed it” (34, 47,35). According to Eckman, stepfather David Baldwin was a “stern, implacable, pathologically malevolent deacon [who] detected little cause to smile in the bleakness that enveloped him” (35). By contrast, Eckman shows how Baldwin’s mother Emma “sought in vain to modify the magnitude of her husband’s inadequacies. It was she who sent the notes to Jimmy’s teachers (‘She had the gift of using language beautifully,’ Mrs. Ayer recalls; ‘I remember her above all other mothers’), and earnestly checked on his progress” (qtd. in Eckman 43-44). Such facile family dynamics not only ignore some of Baldwin’s own testimony;³⁰⁰ they strip the

³⁰⁰ Such a portrayal of **earnest** Emma Baldwin differs a bit from the recollection about her Baldwin offers, with which Eckman opens the chapter where she establishes the dichotomy between Emma and David Baldwin: “My mother used to say I was just like him. Whenever she said that, she looked very worried: ‘Just like him—just like your father.’ That was when she would, you know, slap me—or something. And it frightened the shit out of me, too! I must say. I thought, in those days—I thought (and I also knew that she didn’t mean that)—I thought, taking it at its face value, that she meant I was like, you know—Mr. Baldwin. But I knew very well—somewhere—that that was not what she meant. You know, it was—I didn’t know—you know it’s horrible to be a child! Because you know more as a child than you do as a grown-up and you can’t—you can’t—you can’t cope with it” (qtd. in Eckman 34).

Baldwin turns this childhood insight on his father as well. Baldwin sees that his stepfather David was in pain: “I think it **hurt** him—because I was not actually his son” (qtd. in Eckman 37). Baldwin also detects a certain kind of *simpatico* in their fights: “There was a very funny kind of knowledge that he had of me. . . . In some ways, I think my fight **pleased** him. That he liked it, you know. Because **he** was very

complexity of the psychoanalysis it invokes to provide an expected homosexual “type,” the product of a doting mother and an emotionally distant father, just as constructed as the “stock comedy figure” Topsy.

For Eckman, this homosexual “type” safely contains Baldwin as a self-exiled “outsider” from the black community **because** of his homosexuality. Or, as Richard Dyer explains, “the role of stereotypes [like this “homosexual” one] is to make visible the invisible, so that there is no danger of it creeping up on us unawares; and to make fast, firm and separate what is in reality fluid and much closer to the norm than the dominant value system cares to admit” (16). Stereotypes “insist on boundaries exactly at those points where in reality there are none”—like the “Yet.” that ends Mervyn Morris’ “After” (16).³⁰¹ Dyer’s examination of the tragedy often afflicted onto effeminate male characters or mannish female characters in mainstream film fits well with Baldwin’s image in Eckman’s Furious Passage, written by and for those not (necessarily) in Baldwin’s black queer community of “**specialness**”:

In gay usage, [the effeminate and mannish types] may be an assertion of an in-betweenism or more generally of a refusal of rigid sex role-playing; but in their use within the dominant culture they are more

complex, too. And he was somewhere—unwillingly—very **proud** of me” (qtd. in Eckman 37).

³⁰¹ Dyer distinguishes between **stereotype** and **type**. **Stereotypes**, coined by Walter Lippmann, work as “projection[s] on to the ‘world’ [but they are] not concerned primarily [with] distinguish[ing themselves] from modes of representation whose principal concern is not the world” (Dyer 13). **Types** “are primarily defined by their aesthetic function, namely, as a mode of characterization in fiction” (13). Thus **stereotypes** “are a particular sub-category of a broader category of fictional characters, the type. . . . The type is any character constructed through the use of a few immediately recognizable and defining traits, which do not change or ‘develop’ through the course of the narrative” (13).

characteristically portrayed as people who in failing, because of not being heterosexual, [are] tragic, pathetic, wretched, despicable, comic, or ridiculous figures. (37)

In Eckman's hands, Baldwin's "failure" registers corporeally and mentally. His difference is profound, for example, during "the catalyst called puberty [which] overstimulated Jimmy Baldwin's awareness of the evil within and without" (67). For this otherwise normal period of development, he was unprepared "from a psychological point of view"(67). The natural change in his body "was interpreted by him as conclusive proof of his innate wickedness" (67-68). For Eckman, the failure of Baldwin's body manifests his self-exile like a birthright: "His alienation is much more than skin deep; it pervades every crevice of his being" (26).³⁰²

From these crevices comes "a piercing understanding of the function of blacks in the white racial imagination, especially the function of black males," as Deborah E.

³⁰² Caryl Phillips imagines Baldwin's house in St. Paul de Vence, France, where he visited him in the early 1980s, manifest Baldwin's exile: "Whenever I arrive at the tall iron gates separating James Baldwin from the outside world, my mind begins to wander. The gates remind me of prison bars. I wonder if Baldwin has been in prison, or whether this exile, his homosexuality, or his very spacious home are the different forms of imprisonment. My mind becomes supple, it feels strong and daring, and although the questions and thoughts Baldwin provokes are not always logical, I have always found that there is something positive and uplifting about his presence. Baldwin, unlike anybody else I have ever met, has this ability to kindle the imagination" (39). For Phillips, every detail confirms Baldwin's material and metaphorical exile from the black American community in which he was raised, including Baldwin's choice to live outside St. Paul de Vence's old walled city where cars are not allowed to drive: "Living outside the village walls means not only having a garden in which to roam, but also that you could easily afford to live inside the village walls if you wished—it is a **voluntary exile**" (41, emphasis mine). Phillips finds that his housesuits his "exile, his homosexuality" and matches his "lonely" detachment: "I had never noticed how lonely Jimmy was. His garrulity could always overwhelm any occasion, company, or atmosphere; he is a larger-than-life character" (43).

McDowell and Hortense Spillers assess in their Baldwin entry of The Norton Anthology of African American Literature, as long as sexuality does not dilute it (1952). For example, McDowell and Spillers acknowledge and derogate Giovanni's Room and Another Country in which “he waged a twin assault on such racial and sexual intolerance and, **somewhat sentimentally**, dramatized blackness and homosexuality as liberating influences” (1953, emphasis mine). They also praise Go Tell It on the Mountain as “Baldwin’s most technically accomplished and narratively disciplined novel”—coincidentally, the novel that most perceive to **not** “dramatize” homosexuality, despite Baldwin’s own urging to read it as “implicit in the boy’s [John Grimes’] situation” and “‘almost explicit’ in his tentative gropings toward a seventeen-year-old Sunday School teacher [Elisha]” (1952; Eckman 30).³⁰³ Still, they concede that “most conclude that his true **metier** was not the novel,” no doubt because his essays only rarely “dramatize” homosexuality (1952). So, for their Baldwin selections in The Norton Anthology, they stick to four essays and the short story “Sonny’s Blues,” which they do not mention (rather conveniently) was inspired by

³⁰³ This perception persists despite Mountain’s focus on young John Grimes’ “sin” in Parts One and Three. To not include Mountain in the mantra of Baldwin’s queer Giovanni’s Room and Another Country is to overlook the following passage early in Mountain: “He had sinned. In spite of the saints, his mother and his father, the warnings he had heard from his earliest beginnings, he had sinned with his hands a sin that was hard to forgive. In the school lavatory, alone, thinking of boys, older, bigger, braver, who made bets with each other as to whose urine could arch higher, he had watched in himself a transformation of which he would never dare speak” (18-19). Eckman, too, just about overlooks Baldwin’s comments, slicing them to eight words (“implicit in the boy’s situation”; “made almost explicit”) just before she includes two pages of Baldwin’s increasingly animated discussion of homosexuality as “an **American phenomenon**” (31). Eckman’s editing decision here is curious, reflecting the aesthetics of the unlikely pair of Alain Locke and Eldridge Cleaver. Baldwin **talking** about homosexuality; but analyzing Baldwin’s **writing which depicts homosexuality** is too threatening.

Arnold, a lover of Baldwin's when he wrote it. This way they can safely contain Baldwin's homosexuality to two mentions in their introductory note about his work.³⁰⁴

I open this chapter with the emulation and attempted containment of Baldwin's black queer vernacular because Baldwin still serves as the popular model for the black queer "outsider"-intellectual type.³⁰⁵ Here, I read Baldwin's use of this type in his counter-narrative to Fern Marja Eckman's in her Furious Passage, and two early, often overlooked texts, his 1949 essay on homosexuality, "Preservation of Innocence," and his 1951 short story, "The Outing." I then read this type back into the 1920s to the work of Claude McKay as well as concurrently with Baldwin, in the work of LeRoi Jones. Scholars neglect the connections between these black queer characters and Baldwin, a bond that points toward the fabric of characters and authors I have explored throughout this dissertation, in service to Black Arts' influence on African

³⁰⁴ They include the essays "Everybody's Protest Novel," "Many Thousands Gone," "Stranger in the Village," and "Notes of a Native Son." Their second mention of homosexuality comes with a brief mention of his 1954 essay "Gide as Husband and Homosexual," which they do not name: "Almost nothing pertaining to race relations and social turbulence escaped Baldwin's pen during this period, although he addressed a range of other subjects, including homosexuality in Andre Gide's novel Madeleine" (1653).

³⁰⁵ The persistent image of Baldwin as the preeminent black queer outsider resounds in Shirley Clarke's 1967 documentary Portrait of Jason. Its black queer subject, Jason Holliday looks remarkably like Baldwin, and the only "action" in the one-room talking-head piece is Jason becoming increasingly drunk and high. Of course, Jason's appearance and behavior are his own choice; but Clarke's decision to film a documentary about Jason reflects the degree to which he "fit" a Baldwin-esque "type." And Clarke's Jason establishes him as an outsider figure even as it works to undercut him through an increasingly hostile interview which "exposes" him as a petty hustler. As Phillip Brian Harper explains, the documentary's "implied challenge to societal norms derives not only from subject Jason Holliday's acknowledged gay identity, but from his clearly having come of age in a **context of hip outsidership** (as a friend of sundry musicians, stage performers, and would-be entertainers) that tenuously linked the late fifties Beat scene and the cultural-political tumult of the 1960s" ("Walk-On Parts" 142, emphasis mine).

American studies scholarship. As I argue in my Introduction, because the Black Arts movement helped spark universities and colleges to add black studies programs to their curriculum, its core myth of the machismo “race man” continues to influence African American studies mandates to overlook or to derogate black queer representations in black literatures. After all, such queerness does not “uplift” the race. At the very least, it provides an unnecessary distraction.³⁰⁶

A similar concern over this kind of “distraction” has come from Alfred A. Knopf Publishers over the years. In 1961, Baldwin heard this concern over the Another Country manuscript he submitted. Much like Eldridge Cleaver argues in Soul in Ice, arguments I detail in my first chapter, they felt Another Country would forever change how the public would read Baldwin’s work. As Baldwin explains, they recommended that Another Country not be published:

“Once, after I published Go Tell It on the Mountain and Giovanni’s Room, my publisher, Knopf, told me I was a ‘Negro writer’ and that I ‘reached a certain audience.’ So, they told me, ‘you cannot afford to alienate that audience. This new book will ruin your career because you’re not writing about the same things and in the same manner as you

³⁰⁶ I experienced the power of Black Arts’ race discourse in the most unlikely of places when I presented a paper analyzing queer Lewis in the “Kabnis” section of Jean Toomer’s Cane (1923) at the Thirtieth Annual Conference of the Russian Society for American Cultural Studies in Moscow, at Moscow State University, on 5 December 1999. A Russian professor approached me after my panel to ask if she could read the paper I just delivered. The next day, she returned my text, and told me that she agreed with everything in my paper, and thought it was well argued. But, she asked, why should I bring it up at all? How could this argument possibly help studies of the Harlem Renaissance?

were before and we won't publish this book as a favor to you.' ... So I told them fuck you." (qtd. in Troupe 204)

As upset but less successful was Claude McKay in 1925 when Knopf refused his first novel Color Scheme because "its literary quality was 'uneven'" (Cooper 221). More importantly, they feared that "should it ever appear in print its explicit sexual references would almost certainly be judged obscene by the courts" (221). In a 17 July 1925 letter to Schomburg, McKay defends his Color: "I make my Negro characters yarn and backbite and fuck like people the world over" (qtd. in Cooper 217-218).³⁰⁷ But like his letter, Color has "certain phrases [which] might still be too raw for the American public," as McKay concedes to H. L. Mencken (qtd. in Cooper 221). Despite his attempts "to restrain his language and to mask certain sexual references in French phrases," Color was never published.

Color's "French" phrasing did make it into McKay's first two published novels Home to Harlem, and Banjo: A Story without a Plot. In Harlem, McKay tempers queer protagonist Ray from Color Scheme with "straight man" Jake. McKay fashions "French" Haitian Ray into an educated, queer writer whose first entrance in the novel is reading French writer Alphonse Daudet's novel Sapho, whose title comes from the infamous Greek poet Sappho. Ray embodies the effete and bookish queer qualities that Locke worries about in Chapter Two and Du Bois creates in Chapter Three; yet he is

³⁰⁷ When defending himself to NAACP officer Walter White, McKay insisted that "the novel itself is a realistic comedy of life as I saw it among Negroes on the railroad and in Harlem. . . . I know the stuff is uneven . . . but it is a first novel on which I've worked hard indeed under unpleasant (to say the least) conditions and I should like to have it published so I may have the chance to continue writing" (qtd. in Cooper 221-222).

decidedly more of and blends better with “the folk.” McKay’s Ray is what Gina Marchetti calls a “‘diasporic’ intellectual [who] moves between nations, cultures, languages, and ... works from the perspective of exile and/or immigration, from the pain as well as the freedom of displacement” (“From Organic to Diasporic Intellectual”).³⁰⁸ Such a “revolutionary” black queer vernacular offended some.

Harlem’s sequel Banjo inspired more French-speaking black writers than it did English-speaking ones in the States.³⁰⁹ McKay’s Ray presciently portrays the black queer “outsider”-intellectual Baldwin became when he took a job as a waiter-busboy-dishwasher at the Calypso, a small restaurant run in Greenwich Village, after his stepfather died in July 1943. When McKay met Baldwin there, perhaps he saw his Ray in the flesh.

³⁰⁸ Marchetti draws from Antonio Gramsci’s “organic intellectual,” whom she sees rising “up from the ranks of the subaltern class in order to act as a mouthpiece for their concerns and empower them with a voice in the larger body politic.”

³⁰⁹ Banjo alienated some of the white communist colleagues McKay worked with while at The Liberator in New York in the early 1920s. For communist hard-liner and one-time co-editor of The Liberator with McKay, Michael Gold, Harlem bastardizes the form of the proletarian novel that “‘genuine’ worker-writers” like McKay should adhere to (Foley 95). Gold felt that McKay’s “bohemian” tendencies contradicted the class politics that should inform any proletarian novel, what Barbara Foley defines in Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941 as a genre that “represents the dialectical interconnectedness between classes, as well as within classes” in order to educate the reader, to contribute to “the arousal of class consciousness” (364, vii). In fact, Gold and McKay’s clash over bohemianism and aesthetics led to McKay leaving The Liberator.

As James R. Giles reports, McKay crafted another Ray-like expatriate intellectual in a second, unpublished Marseilles novel that McKay called Enigmatic Expatriate. According to McKay, “Its [sic] about a strange little old man moving in the circle of intellectual bohemians abroad, although he is not one of them & cannot be. [sic] of his going from place to place following the bohemian caravan and his being sensitive ... and he does not want to return home. ... He had managed to get out and go abroad where he could live eccentrically” (qtd. in Giles 153-154).

Ray's "flesh values" come alive again in the work of LeRoi Jones. I close this chapter with a discussion of the black queer Ray characters in Jones' short story "The Alternative," from the collection Tales (1967), and his play The Toilet (1963). Produced during what Houston A. Baker Jr. calls Jones' "transitional years" after a 1960 trip to Cuba inspired him to "forsake his literary bohemianism and embrace black nationalism," these texts show their debt to Baldwin, as well as to McKay. Baker and others' attempts to override Jones' pre-Baraka work in the 1960's with blanket Black Arts analyses only feebly cover Jones' resolve. Hardly "transitional," The Toilet and "The Alternative" present empathetically their queer characters through exposing the ignorant violence and hatred against them that has since become associated with Black Arts discourse. Jones' work foreshadows Huey P. Newton's insight in a 1970 Black Panther manifesto urging black people to unite "with [homosexuals] in a revolutionary fashion" and black heterosexual men to confront their own unfounded "fear that [homosexuals are] some kind of threat to our manhood" (207, 208).

Jones' Ray characters offer telling references to McKay and Baldwin. Such signifying on their black queer vernacular illuminates how to read Jones' narratives. In two different stories in Tales, "New-Sense" and "Answers in Progress," Jones references McKay and Home to Harlem. The writer-protagonist of "New-Sense" admits that he had once identified with "Ray in my man's book" but professes that he no longer does because of Ray's queer behavior, "masturbat[ing] among pirates [and] dying from his education" (96). Still, McKay returns in Tales' last story ("Answers in Progress"), and his queer influence persists in others. For example, in the story after

“New-Sense,” “Unfinished,” Jones presents an easily-recognizable queer presence in Harlem much like McKay does in Home to Harlem. Of course, the protagonist of “Unfinished” remarks on Harlem’s “faggots” with the requisite sarcasm: “Coming into Jocks in Harlem, with friends and the inside redlit up middle-class faggots (no, homosexuals) scattered discreetly around, sharp in their new shit” (99). This mordant, insincere nod to “respectful” naming nonetheless includes a compliment on their “sharp” new clothes. Their presence at all is noteworthy in one of the last seven Harlem-set stories of Tales that scholars like Robert Bone read as part of the “lyrical and even mystical . . . return to Harlem and his négritude,” as Jones self-consciously abandoning his former “queer” Beat poet self for the Black Arts ideology that informed his new identity as Amiri Baraka (36).

With the Ray in Tales, Jones also signifies on Ray Foots in The Toilet, which also coyly references Baldwin. The play’s Ray has a “secret” lover named Jimmy Karolis. Like the Ray of “The Alternative,” this dramatic Ray is the intellectual leader of a group of rowdy guys who beat up the identifiably queer characters of the texts. Both Ray characters have a tenuous hold of their leadership, relying on the verbal wit that comes from their reading to shore up their physical weakness. The delicate power from the wit of these Ray characters is supported by both text’s setting on the periphery of educational classrooms where each Ray would excel: “The Alternative” takes place in a college dormitory, while The Toilet takes place in a high school bathroom. “The Alternative” Ray is still scarred from the trauma that the The Toilet Ray endures, and hides his queer feelings behind the figurative “wall” that emerges several times in the Ray-led narration of “The Alternative.” While “The Alternative”

Ray still defends queer Bobby Hutchens and his lover Lyle against his peers' violence, The Toilet Ray has to maintain his indifference in front of his guys who have already beaten Jimmy Karolis bloody.

In my analysis of Jones' Tales and Toilet, I revisit the site of "The Alternative," the Howard University campus of May 1955 when Baldwin came to assist black queer writer and professor Owen Dodson's production of The Amen Corner for the Howard University Players, when Jones showed poems to and sought advice from Baldwin. Perhaps not surprisingly, Jones-now-Baraka does not mention this meeting in his Autobiography of LeRoi Jones (1984)—he admits only to becoming more interested in writing after dropping out of Howard. Admitting that he met Baldwin at Howard might reveal the Jimmy character in "The Alternative" and The Toilet a bit too much. But Baldwin remembers their May 1955 meeting; and Jones' Tales reflects it.

Section A: Jimmy's "Preservation of [black queer] Innocence"

"I think that if one—I don't know how to put this: if you don't manage to strike some kind of connecting—real connection with yourself, which is always a connection with everybody else, then you perish. I really think that this is the way that goes."

—James Baldwin, from Fern Marja Eckman's The Furious Passage of James Baldwin (1968)

Despite Fern Marja Eckman's attempts to shape Baldwin's life into a neat movement from misfit child to international queer legend, Baldwin's rebuttal fills her Furious Passage. Unwittingly, she includes and misunderstands Baldwin's

assessments of his life, career, and stepfather, the supposed ogre. Certainly, Baldwin names his stepfather as the source of a significant trauma from his childhood. But Baldwin also reveals the inspiration for his creativity and his understanding of the community of black queer writers he would be joining by becoming a writer. For Baldwin, his life's work is a creative enterprise inspired by other writers. As Baldwin argues in his 1954 essay "Gide as Husband and Homosexual,"³¹⁰ literature provides a means to fulfill the human desire to transcend our "natural" or corporeal state. Great literature enables the reader to look back critically at societal constructions like homosexuality or masculinity.³¹¹ The transcendence that this fiction offers is not merely an escape from what Eckman sees as the lonely, terrified young Baldwin hiding from his stepfather while reading Uncle Tom's Cabin.³¹² In Baldwin's

³¹⁰ When Baldwin included this essay in his 1961 collection, Nobody Knows My Name, he re-titled it "The Male Prison."

³¹¹ Using André Gide's novel Madeleine (1952) as a starting point, Baldwin examines how societal prejudice against homosexuality as "not natural" and male homosexuality as "not masculine" obscures the human—and literary—impulse to transcend our "natural" or corporeal state. He reasons that asking "whether or not homosexuality is natural is really like asking whether or not it was natural for Socrates to swallow hemlock, whether or not it was natural for Saint Paul to suffer for the Gospel, whether or not it was natural for the Germans to send upwards of six million people to an extremely twentieth-century death. It does not seem to me that nature helps us very much when we need illumination in human affairs. I am certainly convinced that it is one of the greatest impulses of mankind to arrive at something higher than a natural state. How to be natural does not seem to me to be a problem—quite the contrary. The great problem is how to be—in the best sense of that kaleidoscopic word—a man" (102-103).

³¹² Like Caryl Phillips, Eckman finds this lonely troubled and "illogical" Baldwin (as Phillips finds his questions and thoughts in the epigraph) more fascinating. For example, Eckman's following comment about Baldwin being late for scheduled interviews both reinforces the "erratic," "unnatural" Baldwin legend and "justifies" Eckman's license with the details and meaning of his life: "Jimmy Baldwin's time sense didn't correspond to any known calendar or clock. Highly subjective and internal, it operates entirely on his own theory of relativity, whose laws are

recollection of his first introduction to the possibilities of literature as a writer, he also reveals how writing seemed to “prove” his effeminacy and his queerness for his peers. Unlike his editors at Knopf or scholars like Deborah McDowell and Hortense Spillers who want to differentiate homosexuality from race, Baldwin illustrates how queerness was always inscribed in his process of writing and his identity as a black writer.

For Eckman, Baldwin’s recollection of his childhood love of reading Uncle Tom’s Cabin inspired Baldwin to go to “the library on 135th Street three and four times a week, reading ‘everything there,’ devouring books as though they were ‘some weird kind of food.’ And, for him, they were. He had thought his pain and heartbreak unprecedented. Now he began to realize, however dimly, that his lacerations were the stigmata of mankind” (42). Reading provided Baldwin with a defense against others at school: “‘I can’t say it gave me confidence,’ he says. ‘But it gave me a weapon. I knew I was smart’” (42). When Baldwin went to Frederick Douglass Junior High School, his reading and his intelligence earned him the post of editor of the school’s Douglass Pilot. But this position and his difference from others promoted queer baiting from his peers, and similar misgivings from his stepfather:

considerably more erratic than Einstein’s. Baldwin may be several hours late for an appointment or fail to appear at all. Once he arrived at the most unnatural punctiliousness at the exact hour and day set for a business conference—but a week behind schedule. Not unexpectedly, then, his memory of the past is inclined to be impressionistic. Events are often compressed or expanded by the significance and the emotional tinge with which he imbues them. Referring on several occasions to the same phase of his life, he may date it in different years, even indifferent seasons. But, if the sequence is variable, the nuance is constant” (130-131).

Phillips likewise emphasizes the disconnected nature of Baldwin’s conversations with him—or with anyone: “I was in no position to comment but Jimmy did not require any response. I was not an audience; as far as he was concerned I was merely present” (40).

“With whom could I **share** it [the editorship]?” he inquires. “You can’t share **those** things with your teacher. And I didn’t have a very strong sense of myself. When I told my mother, she was **frightened** because my **father** didn’t like it. I simply exposed myself more.”

He rarely mingled with his classmates. “He was small and funny-looking,” sums up a fellow student at Douglass, “and the kids picked on him cruelly.” They screeched “Bug eyes!” at him, jeered him as a sissy, sneered at the praise heaped on him by English teachers. (44)

In “Notes of a Native Son,” Baldwin explains how his stepfather came to similar “sissy” conclusions when one of young Baldwin’s English teachers, Orilla Miller, took a special interest in him:

When I was around nine or ten I wrote a play which was directed by a young, white schoolteacher, a woman, who then took an interest in me, and gave me books to read and, in order **to corroborate my theatrical bent**, decided to take me to see what she somewhat tactlessly referred to as “real” plays. Theater-going was forbidden in our house, but, with the cruel intuitiveness of a child, I suspected that the color of this woman’s skin would carry the day for me. ... Also, since it was a school teacher [taking me], I imagine my mother countered the idea of sin with the idea of “education,” which word, even with my father, carried a kind of bitterweight. (Nobody 131, emphasis mine)

Baldwin's stepfather allowed young Baldwin to pursue his education—even at the behest of a white person, and even though his “sinful” “theatrical bent” would be nurtured. His stepfather later warned that “this ‘education’ of mine was going to lead me to perdition” (132).

The praise for young Baldwin's “bent” for writing came from black people as well, including the person in charge of Douglass' literary club, Countée Cullen. About Cullen, Baldwin's classmate Edward F. Carpenter gushes:

We were very proud of Cullen. . . . We knew he was a poet and that he'd been to France. . . . We kind of looked up to this man, who had published books and who laughed easily and talked without an accent. He introduced us to the works of Negro authors I'd never heard of before. **And he wasn't afraid to touch a boy. He'd put an arm around a boy's shoulders—boys like that.** (qtd. in Eckman 49-50, emphasis mine)

Such a “hands-on” approach was not lost on Baldwin either, though Eckman fails to read Baldwin's discussion of Cullen carefully.³¹³ Of Cullen, Baldwin explains coyly, “He taughtme French” (qtd. in Eckman 49). For Eckman, Baldwin's answer provides an incredulous slip: “Baldwin's memory plays tricks on him. It is oddly selective, almost evasive” (49). Eckman seeks out Carpenter for more information—at

³¹³ She even notes how Baldwin emulated and modified Cullen's “hands-on” approach: “In an effusive mood, he hugs his followers, kisses them or merely touches them lightly with tips of his long, narrow fingers. “The laying-on of hands,” says a former associate, nodding. “Sometimes it's an act of affection and sometimes an act of hostility. Sometimes he's pushing people **away**, actually. Sometimes it's an effort to get in touch emotionally through physical contact.” (13)

Eckman's prompting Carpenter agrees that Baldwin's recollection of Cullen is "rather peculiar" (qtd. in Eckman 49). Also "peculiar" is Baldwin's lackluster confirmation of Carpenter's assessments: "'If he says so, it must be so,' [Baldwin] says of Carpenter's recollection. 'Carpenter,' he repeats thoughtfully. 'Carpenter . . . ' He shakes his head and says without conviction, 'That name sounds familiar . . .'" (50). Baldwin's purposeful "evasiveness" points toward the larger associations he offers—Cullen and "French"—rather than the obvious effect one-time French resident Cullen must have had developing a strong sense of himself as a writer and reader of black queer vernacular. Baldwin's associational referencing illustrates how black queer vernacular's "networks of affiliation," like those in all black vernacular, "maybe seen to be governed by hidden semantic constructions" so that it can offer protective expression or in-group communication indistinguishable by "outside" readers (Sundquist 60).³¹⁴ For Eckman, Baldwin's "evasiveness" just confounds: "it is inconceivable that Baldwin . . . could have failed to have identified himself with this poet who was, like himself, a Negro and the son of a minister, yet had carved out a reputation as a man of letters" (50).

Despite Eckman's analytical lapse, she still includes Baldwin's assessment of the event he felt truly affected his writing: living in France where, as an expatriate "outsider," he rediscovered himself. Freed from the "claustrophobia that had overwhelmed him in Harlem and Greenwich Village," Baldwin could embrace the inter-relatedness of race and sexuality in his life experiences (Eckman 122). Two early

³¹⁴ See Chapter One for a discussion of black queer vernacular's strategic, associational intent.

examples of writing informed by his self-rediscovery are “Preservation of Innocence,” a rarely-reprinted essay first published months after “Everybody’s Protest Novel,” and “The Outing” (1951), his second published short story,³¹⁵ a study from a manuscript then called Crying Holy which eventually became Go Tell It on the Mountain (1953). With “The Outing,” Baldwin began to shape his “outsider” insight into black queer characters who maintain kinship with and express themselves within the black community, members of which acknowledge his queerness. Within Eckman’s Furious Passage, Baldwin finds precursors of his French revelations at Frederick Douglass Junior High School. He acknowledges the popular assumptions about literary queerness he found from Douglass peers. And he implies playfully that one-time resident of France Countée Cullen taught him “some French.”

For Baldwin, France symbolizes freedom: “I didn’t have to walk around, you know, with one half of my brain trying to—to **please** Mr. Charlie and the other half trying to **kill** him. Fuck Mr. Charlie! It’s his problem. It’s not my problem. I felt that I was left alone in Paris—to become whatever I **wanted** to become. That it was up to me, y’know” (qtd. in Eckman 120). Like Richard Wright, Chester Himes, and other black American writers, Baldwin felt compelled to escape from the US: “since I was not **stupid**, I realized that there was no point in my staying in the country **at all**. . . . You have to go **out**. **Out** of the country. And I went out of the country and I never intended to come back here. Ever. **Ever**” (qtd. in Eckman 115). As Eckman relates, Baldwin “promised himself nothing worse could happen on another continent than was bound to have happened to him in the United States. ‘Even if I go there and drop

³¹⁵ His first, “Previous Condition,” was published in the October 1948 Commentary.

dead,' he told himself darkly. 'Catch syphilis and go **mad**'" (116). In France Baldwin discovered himself as a person apart from US racial baggage. He did not catch syphilis in France but developed a newfound appreciation of sexuality there that greatly influenced him and his work. Melvin Dixon reasons that this "period is important in Baldwin's life [because] it was . . . in France where he would spend the greater part of his professional writing life" ("This Light" 27). In France, with the freedom "to become whatever I **wanted** to become," he wrote "The Outing"; in Switzerland's French-speaking Loeche-les-Bains, Go Tell It on the Mountain cohered after ten years of drafts—so suddenly that Baldwin explains it was like being "hit by a hammer" (qtd. in Eckman 127).

Baldwin's French revelations also inspired his essay "Preservation of Innocence," published in the summer 1949 edition of Zero magazine, the edition after the one in which "Everybody's Protest Novel" was first published.³¹⁶ In "Preservation," Baldwin finds that "the problem of the homosexual . . . corresponds to the debasement of the relationship between the sexes; and that [the homosexual's] ambiguous and terrible position in our society reflects the ambiguities and terrors

³¹⁶ Interestingly, Baldwin does not include "Preservation" in The Price of the Ticket: Collected Nonfiction, 1948-1985. Did he or the editors at St. Martin's Press decide this? If it was Baldwin's decision, did he do so in response to the critical and popular response to his queer fiction? Did he not want sexuality to "complicate" his "racial" essays as it did the reception of his first three novels? Whatever the reason, The Price of the Ticket is intent on erasing Zero magazine from Baldwin's publication history; the edition cites that "Everybody's Protest Novel" was first published in the June 1949 Partisan Review—which it was, **after** appearing in Zero. Baldwin mentions "Everybody's Protest Novel" being published in Zero—not the Partisan Review—in "Alas, Poor Richard." Baldwin does include his essay "Gide as Husband and Homosexual" in The Price of the Ticket with its Nobody Knows My Name title, "The Male Prison," which defers its discussion of homosexuality beyond The Price's table of contents.

which time has deposited on that relationship as the sea piles seaweed and wreckage along the shore” (26-27). Seeing the societal “problem” with homosexuality in the center of the post-war gender crisis³¹⁷ and its “wreckage” was inspired by being away

³¹⁷ Baldwin does not mention World War II in “Preservation,” but he was certainly conscious of the growing post-War discourse later led by Senator McCarthy. Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy and Clyde E. Martin’s 1948 study Sexual Behavior in the Human Male contributed unwittingly to the post-War “male homosexual panic” in the US. Like Freud, Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin have no interest in pathologizing homosexuality. In fact, they lament that it is “peculiarly difficult to secure factual data concerning the nature and the extent of the homosexual in Western European or American cultures, and even more difficult to find strictly objective presentations of such data [because of] the fact that both Jewish and Christian churches have considered this aspect of human sexuality to be abnormal and immoral” (610).

Their refusal to judge combined with the “shocking” statistics that 27.3% of adolescent males (up to age 15) have had “some homosexual activity to the point of orgasm” and that 38.7% of men between the ages of 36 and 40 have had “some homosexual activity to the point of orgasm” manage to elicit misinformation about the study’s findings—even today (285). An example of the misinformation about the study is the supposed “10 percent” of the population that the study finds to be homosexual. Yet nowhere in Sexual Behavior Kinsey, Pomeroy, and Martin differentiate definitively between “homosexual activity” and “homosexual identity.” They warn against hasty assumptions about sexual activity without thorough, objective investigation: “Until the extent of any type of human behavior is adequately known, it is difficult to assess its significance, either to the individuals who are involved or to society as a whole; and **until the extent of the homosexual is known, it is practically impossible to understand its biological or social origins**” (610-611, emphasis mine).

Still, the study made Kinsey a celebrity of sorts, and prompted a swift and vocal backlash, particularly from religious figures, which eventually forced the Rockefeller Foundation who had funded the study, to withdraw future financial support. As Neil Miller documents, some in the media made Kinsey “a subject of controversy. The New York Times, at first, refused to review Sexual Behavior in the Human Male or take advertising for it. Clergymen of all stripes condemned it. ‘It is impossible to estimate the damage this book will do to the already deteriorating morals of America,’ said evangelist Billy Graham. To Henry Pitney Van Dusen, head of Union Theological Seminary, Kinsey’s findings revealed ‘a prevailing degradation in American morality approximating the worst decadence of the Roman Empire. The most disturbing thing is the absence of a spontaneous ethical revulsion from the premises of the study and the inability on the part of the readers to put their fingers on the falsity of its premises’” (251). There is no doubt that Baldwin was familiar with arguments about “deteriorating morals” and homosexuality among clergymen.

from the “**American** phenomenon” of homosexuality: “in this country [the US], what we call homosexuality is a grotesque kind of—of **waxworks**. You know? Which is the other side of what we call **heterosexuality** here. . . . **Nobody** makes any connections!” (qtd. in Eckman 31-32). While in France, Baldwin realized how much home and father’s sense of morality defined him. Finding the depths of what Baldwin calls his Puritanism while experiencing French bohemianism was central to his new sexual and racial revelations. Baldwin explains that his expatriate experiences on the streets of Paris enabled him both to admit his Puritan upbringing and to question it:

“Something **struck** me in Paris. . . . I didn’t realize what a **Puritan** I was—until I got to Paris. I **know** now I am a Puritan. But then I didn’t. It was—it was really kind of—**humiliating** to **discover** it. Because I never thought of myself that way at **all**. Until I found myself dealing with people—you know, whose morality was entirely different from my **father’s**, which was the morality with which I—carried **around** with me, really.”

“And I watched **myself**, you know. Just like any other little American, I was doing my best to avoid all the things which I thought of—that I’d been **brought** up to believe—were amoral. But I couldn’t—I couldn’t on the other hand avoid realizing—because I was dealing with the streets of Paris—with Arabs and Africans and French whores and pimps and **street** boys, you know—that there was something very beautiful, no matter how **horrible**.” (qtd. in Eckman 122)

The public display of sexuality and prostitution—“something very beautiful, no matter how **horrible**”—could not have been so different from prostitution in New York City. Baldwin’s **perspective on it** was different “while he was growing thinner and shabbier on the streets of Paris (and sometimes in its gutters) and recognizing his leftover Puritanism and relishing his freedom and selling an occasional article and revising (again) his novel” (Eckman 126). The irresistible freedom that he “couldn’t . . . avoid realizing” enabled him to see “something very beautiful” in those Parisian streets as well as in his upbringing in the church as the stepson of “a dour clergyman [who] tyrannized his family [with his rage and passed it along] only intellectually diluted” to Baldwin (Eckman 27).

Baldwin was able to apply this bohemian sense of freedom within “The Outing.” The story’s title is a double entendre which refers to both a Fourth of July church outing organized by the Mount of Olives Pentecostal Assembly and the truth about the affection between the story’s main characters, Johnnie and his friend David Jackson.³¹⁸ “The Outing” establishes the importance of this day by emphasizing that the church boat trip up the Hudson River to Bear Mountain is a special event: “on

³¹⁸ Their character names allude to the Biblical love story between Jonathan and David in 1 Samuel that Augustus Granville Dill references in a 21 January 1951 letter to Langston Hughes. Richard Bruce Nugent and sculptor Richmond Barthé also reference this story in love letters to each other as Jonathan (Nugent) and David (Barthé) after they met in Chicago, when Nugent was touring with *Porgy*. Edward Perry makes reference to Nugent’s letter writing in the 18 July 1930 issue of *The Interstate Tattler* and praises him “because he used to write letters to great men, telling them how wonderful he was and how well they could get along together spiritually” (qtd. in Wirth, Introduction 19). Baldwin’s use of the names in “The Outing” illustrates how Johnnie and David fit naturally into the doctrine that guides the Assembly.

other outings they had merely taken a subway ride as far as Pelham Bay or Van Cortlandt Park” (25). The entire congregation was going:

for weeks in advance they talked of nothing else. . . . The outing, Father James declared from his pulpit a week before the event, was for the purpose of giving the children of God a day of relaxation; to breath a purer air and to worship God joyfully beneath the roof of heaven; and there was nothing frivolous about **that**. And, rather to the alarm of the captain, they planned to hold church services aboard the ship. (25-26)

Even though Johnnie, his brother Roy, and David were “reluctantly thrilled” to be on a church outing since they “consider themselves sophisticates, no longer, like the old folks, at the mercy of the love or the wrath of God,” Johnnie “was looking forward to the day with David and . . . had not the remotest desire to stay home for any reason” (25, 27).

At first, “The Outing” conveys a playful, boastful sexuality between “sophisticated” Johnnie and David that seems typical for adolescent boys adjusting to puberty’s hormonal changes:

This was the summer in which they [David, Johnnie, and Johnnie’s brother Roy] all abruptly began to grow older, their bodies becoming troublesome and awkward and even dangerous and their voices not to be trusted. David perpetually boasted of the increase of down on his chin and professed to have hair on his chest—“and somewhere else, too,” he added slyly, whereat they all laughed. “You ain’t the only one,” Roy said. “No,” Johnnie said, “I’m almost as old as you are.”

“Almost ain’t got it,” David said. “Now ain’t this a hell of a conversation for church boys?” Roy wanted to know. (27)

But Roy is just there, almost eavesdropping on the “hell of a conversation” between Johnnie and David’s “dangerous” bodies with hair “somewhere else.” David confirms Roy’s insignificance when he has to recover “from his amazement at hearing Roy mentioned as his especial pal [by his mother] (for he was Johnnie’s friend, it was to be with Johnnie that he came to church!)” (30).

Later, Baldwin provides scenes between David and “his especial pal” to illustrate and undercut that exclamation point. Both take place on the deck of the boat, away from the congregation. During the first, before the services and before they reach Bear Mountain, David shows his feelings for Johnnie:

They mounted to the topmost deck and leaned over the railing in the deserted stern. Up here the air was sharp and clean. They faced the water, their arms around each other.

“Your old man was kind of rough this morning,” David said carefully, watching the mountains pass.

“Yes,” Johnnie said. He looked at David’s face against the sky. He shivered suddenly in the sharp, cold air and buried his face in David’s shoulder. David looked down at him and tightened his hold.

“Who do you love?” he whispered. “Who’s your boy?”

“You,” he muttered fiercely, “I love you.” (39)

Apart from the others in the “sharp and clean” air—just like the “purer air” Father James promises on the outing—both are free to declare their fierce love for and hold

each other. But this moment is temporary. Even before it ends, Baldwin reminds the reader of what awaits them when they return through Gabriel, Johnnie's father who is also Deacon of the Assembly. Gabriel is distracted during the service looking "impatiently for ... Johnnie, who, [is] engaged no doubt in sinful conversation with David" (40).³¹⁹

After they do attend the service, and once the boat docks at Bear Mountain, David becomes suddenly more interested in devising a way to give their friend Sylvia the birthday present he, Johnnie and Roy bought together. David wants to give her the present away from "the constricting presence of the saints," much like he was with Johnnie (48). Johnnie sees David's shift in attention and "swallowed his jealousy" (49). Then, Johnnie leaves David and wanders off alone, "away from the saints and the voices of the children, his hands in his pockets, struggling to ignore the question which now screamed and screamed in his mind's bright haunted house" (50). Their second scene together on the deck answers that question and reflects David's change:

David seemed preoccupied. When he finally sought out Johnnie he found him sitting by himself on the top deck, shivering a little in the

³¹⁹ When Johnnie and David do go finally to the boat's main hall, "they were isolated from the joy that moved everything beside them. Yet this same isolation served only to make the glory of the saints more real, the pulse of conviction, however faint, beat in and the glory of God then held an undertone of abject terror" (45). For Johnnie, the glory of the saints manifests as his spiritual love for David: "Johnnie felt suddenly, not the presence of the Lord, but the presence of David; which seemed to reach out to him, hand reaching out to hand in the fury of flood-time, to drag him to the bottom of the water or to carry him safe to shore. From the corner of his eye he watched his friend, who held him with such power; and felt, for that moment, such a depth of love, such nameless and terrible joy and pain, that he might have fallen, in the face of that company, weeping at David's feet" (47-48). For David, there is no "such power" or "depth of love" from "the pulse of conviction."

night air. He sat down beside him. After a moment Johnnie moved and put his head on David's shoulder. David put his arms around him. But now where there had been peace there was only panic and where there had been safety, danger, like a flower, opened. (54)

Along with David's affection, the "sharp and clean" air grew cold on the way home. While they are physically alone again, their "especial" love has been affected by David's return to the congregation.

"The Outing" does not provide the ending Johnnie would like. But it does offer a social critique that will eventually make him stronger. Or, as Baldwin explains his own strength through insight: "I can't say it gave me confidence. . . . But it gave me a weapon" (qtd. in Eckman 42). The "dangerous" flower that opens in "The Outing"'s last sentence represents Johnnie's new understanding of sexuality hampered by society. Alone, boys like David are bold, passionate—David not Johnnie asks "Who's your boy?" and "Who do you love?" But back among the congregation, boys like David easily resume the heterosexual role they presume that society expects. So prevailing is this expectation, "The Outing" never explains David's sudden, flirtatious, and unforeseen interest in Sylvia.³²⁰ Thus, "The Outing" implies that David cannot act

³²⁰ The beginning of the story mentions passingly Sylvia and the birthday gift, without any foreshadowing of David's interest in Sylvia. After presenting Sylvia with her gift, David is "suddenly robbed of speech" and stands until Sylvia teases, "You must want to grow real tall" (51). Then David regains his bearings and flirts with her: "David grinned and sat down cross-legged next to Sylvia. 'Well, the ladies like 'em tall.' He lay on his back and stared up at the sky. 'It's a fine day,' he said" (51). Perhaps this shift seems sudden because the third-person narration closely resembles Johnnie's perspective of the events on the church outing. Still, David's sudden shift and lingering affection for Johnnie does illustrate the messiness of desire in contrast to the neat categories of sexual identity.

ultimately upon his “especial” desires. But he still has them: David still puts his arms around shivering Johnnie. Through narrating the truth of their “especial” (albeit unconsummated) love, the story complicates fixed sexual boundaries, much like Alfred C. Kinsey, Wardell B. Pomeroy and Clyde E. Martin do in their 1948 study Sexual Behavior in the Human Male, and shows Johnnie and David within the fabric of the Assembly congregation.

With “The Outing,” Baldwin started to figure in print a black and queer sexuality drawn from and transforming experiences he confesses indirectly to Fern Marja Eckman, almost with stage directions:

“If you’re a Negro, you’re in the centre of that **peculiar** affliction because **anybody** can touch **you**—when the sun goes down.”

...

Baldwin’s posture is rigid. Only his eyes and his mouth are alive. “And if you’re a **black boy**,” he says, hate, deadly, undisguised, seething in his voice, “you wouldn’t be-**lieve** the holocaust that opens over your head—with all these despicable —**males**—looking for somebody to act out their fantasies on. And it happens in this case—if you’re sixteen years old—to be **you!**” (32-33)

With a similar attention to syntax, Baldwin finds himself at the “centre of [another] **peculiar** affliction” when arguing to his Knopf editor about Another Country. As he explains to Quincy Troupe in his last interview, after he responds to his editor’s less-than enthusiastic response to the novel with a “fuck you,”

“I took a boat to England with my book and I sold it in England before I sold it in America. You see whites want black writers to mostly deliver something as if it were an official version of the black experience. But the vocabulary won’t hold it, simply. No true account really of black life can be held, can be contained in the American vocabulary. As it is, the only way that you can deal with it is by doing great violence to the assumptions on which the vocabulary is based. But they won’t let you do that. And when you go along, you find yourself quickly painted into a corner; you’ve written yourself into a corner. Because you can’t compromise as a writer. By the time I left America in 1948 I had written myself into a corner as I perceived it. The book reviews and little short essays had led me to a place where I was on a collision course totally with the truth.” (Troupe 204)

This kind of collision course directed him to France, away from the confining “American vocabulary” of race and the publishing houses protecting it, and toward “Preservation of Innocence” and “The Outing,” toward his printed black queer vernacular.

Section B: Claude McKay’s Ray

“I am not an exotic rarity,” [Baldwin] reminds [his audience]. “I am not a stranger. I am none of these things. On the contrary: for all you know, I maybe your uncle, your brother”—his possible nieces, nephews, brothers and sisters cheer this kinship vociferously—“among other

things!” For the first time he smiles, his cheeks creasing into multiple folds. The audience roars its appreciation.

—Fern Marja Eckman, The Furious Passage of James Baldwin

McKay’s relationship to everyone and everything connected with the Harlem Renaissance was very tentative. He was not really at home in the United States or with Negro movements. Always apparent was a vague, undefined barrier between him—as a West Indian—and the American Negroes. . . . Thus he remained, at all times, the critical outsider looking in, the objective traveler passing through on his way to the next adventure or attraction.

—Harold Cruse, The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual: From its Origins to the Present (1967)

In the 1930s, a number of male intellectuals, both black and white, created historical discourses of black manhood in the service of a revolutionary politics which argued for the violent overthrow of all racialized social formations. The figure of Toussaint L’Ouverture emerged in this period as a popular model for creating contemporary images of a revolutionary black male consciousness.

—Hazel Carby, Race Men (1998)

James Baldwin declares “I am not an exotic rarity” at the non-sectarian Community Church of New York and evokes the trope of the black family—“I may be your uncle, your brother”—while Fern Marja Eckman sits in the audience she describes as “intent, solemn, almost all of college age, predominantly Caucasian, dressed for the most part in the elaborately sloppy fashion endorsed by their generation, [with] their expectant gaze upon [Baldwin], as though hoping to catch some glimmer of his fire” (20). But no matter what the racial makeup of his family-audience, “his possible nieces, nephews, brothers and sisters,” he imparts his “outsider” knowledge. He impresses upon them to recognize their common American character as well as their common complicity with systemic racism: “Baldwin, swayed by emotion, is apt to belabor a Negro audience as though it were white, exhort a white

group as though it were Negro. 'No one of you who are white can go back to Poland or Ireland or England, any more than I can go back to Africa,' he says" (25).

Baldwin first found this interracial family-audience at the Calypso, a small restaurant run by Trinidadian Connie Williams on MacDougal Street in Greenwich Village "where blacks and whites mixed easily" (Leeming 44). Baldwin started there as a waiter-busboy-dishwasher after his stepfather died in July 1943, before his nineteenth birthday in August, when "he decided to leave home definitively for Greenwich Village, whatever the consequences" (43). Under the guidance of Williams, who "quickly became a surrogate mother" to Baldwin and "offered [him] love and support," the Calypso "provided the ideal atmosphere for a young man desperate for ideas and for an entrée into the world of the arts" (43, 44). Baldwin went at the urging of good friend and painter Beauford Delaney, in whom Leeming suggests that Baldwin saw his future self: Delaney was fifteen years older and "himself a homosexual, a minister's son, and an artist" (33). Because of Delaney's counsel, Baldwin became part of "an interracial community of 'struggling' bohemians of varied sexual orientation [including] seamen, temporarily out of work" (43). Much like the sailors Langston Hughes traveled with, or the ones he and Zora Neale Hurston write about in stories I analyze in Chapter One, these men symbolized real freedom among the "would-be artists and writers, and some middle-class exiles and runaways who were simply experimenting with 'radical' lifestyles" (43). Plus, Baldwin had "what must have been **stimulating conversations** for would-be writers" with Stan Weir, a merchant seaman who took a temporary dishwashing job there, (44, emphasis mine). Baldwin continued these conversations after the Calypso closed with Delaney and

writer Smith Oliver. They “formed a black triumvirate that ‘held court’ at the Calypso after hours” (44).³²¹ During business hours, the Calypso’s regulars, including “C. L. R. James and his ‘Pan-Africanist’ friends [as well as] Claude McKay, Alain Locke, and Paul Robeson,” took a great interest in Baldwin: “People were amazed at his gift for language and at the power of his arguments. Customers would call ahead to see if ‘Jimmy’ would be there on a given evening” (44).

One of those customers was Claude McKay. He must have been amazed by the Calypso, where the “community of ‘struggling’ bohemians of varied sexual orientation[including] seamen, temporarily out of work” would have reminded him not only of the vieux port, the oldest waterfront section in Marseilles which inspired Banjo, but also of the intellectual, literary, and political debates McKay took part in at M’Baye’s bar in Marseilles, which Brent Hayes Edwards sees clearly in Banjo’s fictive Café Africain.³²² McKay was fascinated, as Wayne F. Cooper explains, with the vieux port’s residents, “an ugly yet bewitching mélange of foreign sailors, international drifters, prostitutes, criminals, and petit bourgeois merchants” fascinated

³²¹ Eckman sees Baldwin’s time working at Calypso more ominously: “His shifts at the Calypso, which usually extended a couple hours beyond midnight, the official closing time, were enervating. After the last patron had departed and the tables had been cleared, Connie would call it a night. Baldwin couldn’t. Too wound up to rest, he would have a few drinks with friends, gradually—and strenuously—decompressing. He was acquiring a taste for Scotch as well as a phenomenal capacity” (108). Here, suffering Baldwin develops into part of the larger-than-life persona of Baldwin-as-alcoholic.

³²² While I caution against reading fiction as transparent documentation—Edwards asserts in his landmark study, The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism, that Banjo provides “a historical record that touches on some of the most important black intellectuals and activists in the metropole” when McKay wrote it—Edwards attends carefully to the novel’s political dynamic and finds affinity, in particular, in the work and ideas of Lamine Senghor, the original editor of the journal La Race nègre, which appears in Banjo.

McKay (211). Their “warmth, color and laughter” was the kind of “realistic . . . Negro life that did not safely advance the cause of racial justice,” the kind he felt rightly that “the sensitive and pompous . . . black intelligentsia” in the US feared (qtd. in Cooper 212). McKay’s difficulties finding a publisher for Color Scheme and some of the negative reaction to Home to Harlem only confirmed the “undefined barrier between him—as a West Indian—and the American Negroes,” as Harold Cruse explains in the epigraph. So, the community of outsiders McKay found in Marseilles comforted him. To cohere the narrative of Banjo’s mélange of seamen and to highlight the novel’s affront to those “sensitive and pompous,” McKay brought back the “critical outsider” from Home to Harlem, Ray, the Haitian intellectual and would-be writer whose insight and “education had instilled in him an awareness of the larger structure of society” (McKay, qtd. in Cooper 212; Cooper 235).

In young Baldwin, McKay might have recognized his Ray, whose first appearance in Harlem is (even more) ironically as a waiter. McKay’s descriptions of Ray in Harlem evoke the poetic portrait of the passionate, erratic Baldwin that Eckman, Caryl Phillips, and so many others are fond of:

Life burned in Ray perhaps more intensely than in Jake. Ray felt more and his range was wider and he could not be satisfied with the easy, simple things that sufficed for Jake. Sometimes he felt like a tree with roots in the soil and sap flowing out and whispering leaves drinking in the air. But he drank in more of life than he could distill into active animal living. Maybe that was why he felt he had to write.

He was a reservoir of that intense emotional energy so peculiar to his race. . . . He remembered once the melancholy-comic notes of a “Blues” rising out of a Harlem basement before dawn. He was going to catch an early train and all trip he was sweetly, deliciously happy humming the refrain and imagining what the interior of the little dark den he heard it in was like. “Blues” . . . melancholy-comic. That was the key to himself and to his race. (265-266)

Eckman finds Baldwin melancholy-comic throughout Furious Passage: “Burdened only by his periodic bouts of melancholy, yet buoyed up by his infinite capacity for gaiety, he swings around the globe, from Rome to Monrovia to Berlin to San Juan to Corsica to Tel Aviv to Cannes, governed only by his own restless impulses” (13). Or, as Norman Mailer implies, “mercurial” Baldwin had to write because “he’s sensitive, like an exposed nerve” (qtd. in Eckman 12-13).

McKay’s Ray has a Baldwin-esque understanding of the knowledge he has gained from his artistic sensitivity (his writing and his reading), which makes him different from others. Like Baldwin, he is a misfit:

“The fact is, Jake,” Ray said, “I don’t know what I’ll do with my little education. I wonder sometimes if I could get rid of it and go and lose myself in some savage culture in the jungles of Africa. **I am a misfit**—as the doctors who dole out newspaper advice to the well-fit might say—**a misfit with my little education and constant dreaming.** (274, emphasis mine)

This misfit Ray bonds with Jake and finds a kinship in Harlem despite Ray's national, cultural, and sexual differences. Ray impresses Jake and convinces him to keep working on the train when he wants to quit: "Jake stayed because he liked Ray. A big friendship had sprung up between them and Jake hated to hear the [train's] chef abusing his friend along with the other waiters" (163). Jake distinguishes his "big friendship" with Ray by the nickname he uses for Ray: "The other cooks and waiters called Ray 'Professor.' Jake had never called him that. Nor did he call him 'buddy,' as he did Zeddy and his longshoremen friends. He called him 'chappie' in a genial, semi-paternal way" (163-164).

At the same time, Jake recognizes what Ray's difference from him means. When Jake drags Ray to a brothel in Philadelphia after work one night, Jake informs Madame Laura, "Mah friend's just keeping me company. . . . He ain't regular—you get me?" (191). After Jake goes off, "Ray felt alone and a little sorry for himself. Now that he was there, he would like to be touched in the spirit of that atmosphere and, like, Jake, fall naturally into its rhythm. He also envied Jake. Just for this night only he would like to be like him. . . ." (194). Ray feels so out of place, he literally falls out of the narrative when

the carnal sympathy of [one of the ladies'] full, tinted mouth, touched Ray. But something was between them. . . .

The piano-player had wandered off into some dim, far-away, ancestral source of music. Far, far way from music-hall syncopation and jazz, he was lost in some sensual dream of his own. (196)

Without explanation, Ray returns three pages later “sleeping quietly” in the quarters he shares with Jake when Jake returns from the brothel. The next morning, Ray tells Jake he did not have sex because one of the ladies “had some nasty perfume on her that turned mah stomach,” Jake replies, “Youse awful queer, chappie” (200).

But Ray is not the first black queer man Jake encounters in Harlem. Well before Ray’s entrance in the “Second Part” of the novel,³²³ Jake acknowledges nonchalantly the inclusion of black queer men in Harlem’s night life, so much so he implies their regular inclusion in the Harlem community. On the day after his return to Harlem from London, when Jake goes to the Baltimore cabaret to look for the prostitute he spent his first evening in Harlem with, he finds a club full of black queer men fondling each other: “All around the den, luxuriating under the little colored lights, the dark dandies were loving up their pansies.³²⁴ Feet tickling feet under tables, tantalizing liquor-rich giggling, hands busy above” (30-31). Jake is hardly anxious about the Baltimore’s black queer crowd, who are quite animated by the evening’s singer: “Dandies and pansies, chocolate, chestnut, coffee, ebony, cream, yellow, everybody was teased up to the high point of excitement. . . .” (32). In fact, when the performer “stopped more than usual at Jake’s table,” Jake has no reaction when the

³²³ Harlem’s chapters are collected into the “First Part,” the “Second Part,” and the “Third Part.”

³²⁴ In Gay New York, George Chauncey explains that **pansy** as well as other flowers were commonly used in the 1920s and 1930s to describe effeminate men who slept with men, both by queers and non-queers alike: “Most of the vernacular terms used by ‘normal’ observers for fairies, such as **she-man**, **nance**, and **sissy**, as well as **fairy** itself, emphasized the centrality of effeminacy to their character. In the 1920s and 1930s, especially, such men were also often called **pansies**, and the names of other flowers such as daisy and buttercup were applied so commonly to gay men that they were sometimes simply called ‘horticultural lads.’ (‘Ship me home,’ said a ‘nance’ to a florist in a joke told in 1932. ‘I’m a pansy.’)” (15).

dandies and pansies “looked the favored Jake up and down” (32). Nor does he react negatively to Bill Biasse “or Billy, the Wolf, as he was nicknamed [who] boasted frankly that he had no time for women. Black women, or the whole diversified world of sex were all the same to him” (87-88). Biasse does “have time” for a “straw-colored boy who was a striking advertisement of the Ambrozone Palace of Beauty,” as Jake and Zeddy discover one Saturday night at Harlem’s Congo cabaret, “a real throbbing little Africa in New York” (91, 29). Biasse’s companion “was made up with high-brown powder, his eyebrows were elongated and blackened up, his lips streaked with the dark rouge so popular in Harlem, and his carefully-straightened hair lay plastered and glossy” (91). Neither Billy (his “straw-colored boy”) nor any dandy or pansy is “an exotic rarity” North of 125th Street.

As Wayne F. Cooper acknowledges, Harlem’s casual queer representation exposes “the existence of such types in black communities, [who] though privately acknowledged, [were] not publicly advertised in respectable Negro publications” (242). Moreover, Harlem teases that not only the dandies and pansies “tickl[e] feet under tables” at night in Harlem when liquor is involved. At the novel’s end when Jake has drinks with Ray the night before he leaves Harlem to work as a mess boy on a ship, he holds Ray’s shoulder and looks longingly into his eyes:

Jake gripped Ray’s shoulder: “Chappie, I wish I was educated mahself.”

“Christ! What for?” demanded Ray.

“Becaz I likes you.” Like a black Pan out of the woods Jake looked into Ray’s eyes with frank savage affection and Billy Biasse exclaimed:

“Lawdy in heaben! A li’l’ foreign booze gwine turn you all soft?” (272)

Jake does not act on his “frank savage affection” for Ray and his “education.” But the example of Jake’s close bond with and affection for Ray as well as Jake’s respect for Billy throughout Harlem implies that black queer men in Harlem were not as separate, hidden, or contested as some have suggested. About Jake and Billy’s friendship, Harlem resolves, “their intimate interests never clashed” (268).

For many, Harlem confirmed what they already knew, that some of the novel’s dandies and pansies “types” were not just part of the Harlem community. They were celebrated stars of the Renaissance or key figures behind the scenes, as well. By the time Herschel Brickell praises Harlem for “its absolute candor, its complete freedom from an attempt to apologize or explain or gloss over” black life in a review in the May 1928 Opportunity, W. E. B. Du Bois had fired Augustus Granville Dill as business manager of the Crisis because he was arrested for having sex with a man in a public restroom, and Countée Cullen’s spectacle of a wedding to Yolande Du Bois had taken place. A month after Brickell’s review, Cullen sailed off to Europe with lover Harold Jackman with the newspaper headline “GROOM SAILS WITH BEST MAN” documenting their “honey moon” (qtd. in Ramperad, Volume I 162). Of course, McKay wrote Harlem before these events took place; but the coincidental timing of the novel’s publication must have helped provoke Du Bois’ infamous review of

Harlem in the Crisis, where he writes that the novel “nauseated” him and made him feel “distinctly like taking a bath” (qtd. in Rampersad, Du Bois 214).³²⁵

Du Bois’ reaction also responded to McKay’s heightened equation of “bookishness” and queerness as well as the effect those could have on common-man Jake. While Ray’s own writing only appears twice in Banjo, once ironically when it is stolen,³²⁶ Ray’s presence as a writer (as well as his reading and references to other

³²⁵ Du Bois’ assertion that Harlem caters “to prurient interests in whitefolk” echoes his concern in the January 1926 Crisis that Alain Locke’s queer leadership might “turn the Negro renaissance into decadence” with writers publishing “pretty things . . . to catch the passing fancy of the really unimportant critics and publishers” (qtd. in Bassett 25; qtd. in Du Bois 163). Du Bois’ reaction to queer Harlem comes with the usual dose of “professed ignorance” of “the tragedy of an Oscar Wilde.” This reaction, as I argue at the end of Chapter Two when analyzing his relationship with Augustus Granville Dill, was more motivated by issues of class status and the rapidly dissolving marriage of his daughter to the equally “prurient” Cullen than queer sexuality in and of itself. For Du Bois, the tenuous role of the black middle-class writer addressing the public needed a balance not in Harlem. Its “prurient” content took the brunt of Du Bois’ published criticism even though Du Bois creates a “more balanced” black queer erudition of John Jones in The Souls of Black Folk, as I argue in my second chapter.

As Rampersad summarizes Du Bois’ 19 January 1928 letter to Amy Spingarn, Du Bois outlines the following paradox for black writers: “If they wrote honestly about their own inner lives and environments, white publishers claimed there was no market for the material. But if they caricatured their experiences, spicing them up with low comedy, sex, and violence (“follow[ing] the lead of Carl Van Vechten and Knopf and Boni and Liveright”), then publishers were only too happy to give white America “what it thinks that it wants to hear from Negroes” (214). But Du Bois’ determination to “‘build up a counterpoise’ to the Van Vechtens and the McKays” was surely informed by the disappointment he must have felt by watching Dill’s life fall “apart in a homosexual encounter and arrest in a public lavatory. Du Bois’s reaction was one of formal Victorian displeasure masked by genuine compassion” (214, 205).

³²⁶ When Ray prepares to leave “the Ditch,” he boxes up “some books and manuscripts . . . and left [them] in care of the manager at the Seamen’s Mission. He thought that that was the safest procedure. But when he returned from the vintage the box could not be found and the cock-eyed manager could not account for it. White beach-combers had stolen it with the books and the manuscripts, which included all the new things that Ray had done and was trying to do” (235-236).

The other time Ray’s writing appears in Banjo, it is likewise avoided. Shortly after Banjo meets Ray, “Banjo wanted to see what Ray’s work was like and Ray took

novels³²⁷) in both calls attention to the influential role representation can have. In this way, McKay is part of the group of “1920s and 1930s intellectuals of the left in general, and black American and colonial intellectuals in particular” that Hazel Carby mentions in her chapter on C.L.R. James in Race Men (113). They

became increasingly concerned about their intellectual, political, and moral responsibility to voice the need for radical social change. Those intellectuals who were also cultural producers envisioned this dilemma as an issue of representation—how to represent the “people,” the “folk,” or the “masses” and how to imagine the relation between the intellectual and the people, or the leader and the masses. (Carby, Race Men 113)

In Harlem and Banjo, McKay asserts boldly that Ray’s task as the black middle class writer-intellectual³²⁸ is not to change or “uplift” the “folk” types of his novels.

Without changing the verve that Ray admires in Jake and Banjo (among others), Ray wants to make them more aware of and resistant to the class and race oppression they

him up to his place. . . . Banjo had been interested in Ray’s talking about his work, but when he saw the sheets of ordinary composition paper, a little soiled, and the shabby collection of books, he quickly lost interest and changed the conversation to the hazards of the vagabond panhandling life” (69).

³²⁷ Harlem demonstrates Ray’s desire to be a writer through references to the novels that inspired him as a child—including Baldwin’s childhood favorite, Uncle Tom’s Cabin—and writers he later found. He ends his “literary” list with World War I and the Russian Revolution, implying that literature and history mutually inspire each other as well as him: “Ray had always dreamed of writing words some day. Weaving words to make romance, ah! There were the great books that dominated the bright dreaming and dark brooding dans when he was a boy. Les Misérables, Nana, Uncle Tom’s Cabin, David Copperfield, Nicholas Nickleby, Oliver Twist” (225-226).

³²⁸ As Wayne F. Cooper explains, “with the exception of Ray, the sensitive and frustrated Haitian intellectual, there were no representatives of the black middle class” (241).

experience. As Wayne F. Cooper concludes, Ray's approach to these "folk" types disregards completely Du Bois-like black middle class leaders endorsing "appropriate" (class-based) etiquette for all black people and representations. Through Ray, McKay "endorsed the notion that ordinary, unlettered black folk enjoyed a more direct, vital, and realistic relationship to life than the educated of their race whose preoccupation with social advancement robbed them of spontaneity, happiness, and the direct appreciation of the world as it actually existed" (Cooper 254).

Instead of changing Jake, Banjo, or the others at "the Ditch," Ray's middle-class erudition and insight inspires them. Because of the cross-class connection Ray inspires, both Harlem and Banjo work as proletarian novels, what Barbara Foley defines in Radical Representations: Politics and Form in U.S. Proletarian Fiction, 1929-1941 as a genre that "represents the dialectical interconnectedness between classes, as well as within classes" in order to educate the reader, to contribute to "the arousal of class consciousness" (364, vii). McKay himself was aware of this class-attuned prose, as he explains to James Weldon Johnson in a 30 April 1928 letter, in which he complains that both the black intelligentsia and so-called class radicals³²⁹ will overlook Harlem's proletarian foundation in favor of their own representational directives:

I consider Home to Harlem a real proletarian novel, but I don't expect the nice radicals to see that it is, because they know very little about

³²⁹ Later, in response to an attack on him in the New Masses "for the alleged lack of class consciousness and class action in his poetry or novels," McKay defended that he "unlike most communists, [had] written of the black proletariat from an intimate knowledge of their 'inner lives'" (Cooper 318).

proletarian life and what they want of proletarian art is not proletarian life truthfully, realistically and artistically portrayed, but their own fake, soft-headed and wine-watered notions of the proletariat. With the Negro intelligentsia it is a different matter, but between the devil of Cracker prejudice and the deep sea of respectable white condescension I can certainly sympathize, though I cannot agree, with their dislike of the artistic exploitation of low-class Negro life. We must leave the appreciation of what we are doing to the emancipated Negro intelligentsia of the future, while we are sardonically aware now that only the intelligentsia of the superior race is developed enough to afford artistic truth. (qtd. in Cooper 247)³³⁰

Certainly, McKay's proletarian novel as well as his sardonic defense and definition of it do not display the kind of middle-class anxiety or "neurotic self-abnegation on the part of the middle-class writer or critic" that Michael Gold and the Marxist journal New Masses inspired from the late 20s to the mid 30s (Foley 94). For Gold, the "revolutionary élan" that proletarian writing had to exude could only come from "'genuine' worker-writers," a group McKay never claimed to be a member of (95). Plus, black writers' "revolutionary élan" had to include "explicit advocacy of black/white class unity if they were to qualify as 'proletarian'" (187).

In part because McKay never displayed proletariat envy, expressed regret for being born middle-class,³³¹ or depicted black/white class unity, Gold complains that

³³⁰ Cooper cites that he uses this letter with the permission of Hope McKay Virtue.

³³¹ In his article "The Making of a Writer" from the New Masses, middle-class and

Banjo portrays “too much ‘racial patriotism’ and dwel[ls] too little on proletarian themes” in a New Masses review while praising it “for its gritty depiction of Marseilles street life and its repudiation of the culture of the ‘educated fringe’” (187). But these reasons alone do not explain fully his review.³³² As Barbara Foley demonstrates, Gold’s criticism of McKay is uncharacteristically compared with other contemporaneous reviews from New Masses:³³³ “Marxist critics could be rigorous in their demand for accuracy in writers’ representations of locales and work processes. Their stipulations regarding subject matter rarely extended, however, to requests that writers construct certain types of plots or portray specific political subjects” (112). For example, Marxist critic and literary editor of The Liberator Joseph Freeman explains that proletarian fiction has “no formulas. The range is unlimited” (qtd. in Foley 112).

Harvard-graduate novelist Jon Dos Passos notes enviously that Gold was “lucky to have been born on a real garbage-heap, instead of on the garbage dumps of dead ideas the colleges are, to have started life as a worker instead of as an unclassed bourgeois” (qtd. in Foley 93).

³³² For example, Gold does not argue that middle-class intellectual Ray ruins the “gritty depiction of Marseilles street life.” Such middle-class “tampering” with or distraction from “real” proletarian lives was a common criticism in New Masses reviews. Barbara Foley offers three examples of novels criticized for this: Waldo Frank’s The Death and Birth of David Markand, Lauren Gilfillan’s I Went to Pit College, and André Malraux’s Man’s Fate (110).

³³³ Foley herself does not comment on Gold anomalous review, except to cite how it (along with other reviews by other writers) illustrates how class—not race—politics were praised in books by black authors despite the Communist Party’s warm public efforts to court black writers and intellectuals by flirting with black nationalism in 1928, when the Sixth World Congress of the Comintern passed a resolution “asserting that African Americans in the black belt countries of the American South constituted an oppressed nation and therefore possessed an inherent right to self-determination” (Kelley 109). But as Foley explains, “Despite the clearly nationalist implications of the Black Belt [resolution] that was being urged in party theory and practice, when it came to literary matters Third-Period commentators [like Gold and others] unequivocally urged proletarian writers to advocate class-based multiracial unity” (187). For an extended discussion of these issues, see Foley, pages 170-212, and Kelley, pages 103-121.

Even mention of the Communist Party was not a requirement. New Masses writers did not

routinely object to fictional representations that curtailed the expression of revolutionary ideas. ... Indeed, they often reserved their warmest praise for novels ... in which the party is in fact not explicitly present at all. ... A careful scrutiny of both proletarian novels and what was said about them reveals that reformism and spontaneism [as opposed to strict adherence to so-called “proletarian themes”] were widely articulated and tolerated—even to a degree promoted—by the 1930s literary left. (113)

Gold did not give McKay license to be “spontaneous” or “reformist” in Banjo because of its unashamed representations of race and homosexuality. Gold’s review also allowed him to continue his quarrel with McKay that had started eight years earlier when both Gold and McKay worked on the editorial board at The Liberator.

McKay joined The Liberator in 1921 when his poem “If We Must Die” was hailed as the anthem of the New Negro radical movement. Robin D. G. Kelley attests to the poem’s influence on others because of its “dignity [which] is embodied in the masculine act of resistance” (104). This kind of masculine imagery was attractive to those promoting Communist Party politics: “The language of masculinity, in fact, dominated representations of grass-roots organizing and Party propaganda, especially during the 1930s” (Kelley 114). But the racialized queer masculinity McKay pursued in subsequent poems and his first two novels was off-putting to Gold and the other “politicians” at The Liberator, as McKay called them. And his scathing rebuke of

white editors' blindness to complexity of the "race question" in his essay "Birthright"³³⁴ did not hurt. As McKay explains to Langston Hughes in a 24 April 1926 letter, "While I was on The Liberator I was never in with the very political set. I always preferred the Bohemian diletanti and the more decadent they were the better I liked them" (qtd. in Hutchinson 268).³³⁵ McKay preferred "the Bohemian diletanti" because of their **aesthetic** approach to the politics of literature, an approach Gold actively disliked.³³⁶ As McKay presents in his autobiography A Long Way from Home (1937), Gold wanted The Liberator to "express ... the punch and the raw stuff of life and labor" and attacked Max Eastman for being "too much of an esthete, too

³³⁴ First published in the The Liberator 5 (1922).

³³⁵ Hutchinson denies that McKay's use of decadent could reflect "current usage" because it "could not describe [fellow Liberator editors Max] Eastman and [Floyd] Dell" (268). Hutchinson then argues that McKay "was adopting the late-1920s Marxist usage typical of The Workers Monthly and The New Masses. Dell himself objected to the decadence, self-consciousness, and theatricality that afflicted Greenwich Village after the war, blaming it on newcomers from uptown catching on to a fad—a complaint that would also arise in Harlem in the late 1920s" (268). Hutchinson's faulty history ignores the public recognition of the queer Village **before** and after World War I. As George Chauncey makes clear, such knowledge of the queer Village was often written about in a black newspaper: "[T]he most visible gay world of the early twentieth century, as the headlines in the Baltimore Afro-American suggest, was a working-class world, centered in African-American and Irish and Italian immigrant neighborhoods and along the city's busy waterfront, and drawing on the social forms of working-class culture. Even the gay and lesbian enclave that developed in Greenwich Village in the 1910s and 1920s, which constituted the first visible middle-class gay subculture in the city, sprang up in the midst of a working-class Italian immigrant neighborhood and was populated largely by poorer youths from the outer boroughs, even though its middle-class and bohemian members are better remembered" (Gay New York 10). And Hutchinson's insistence that neither Eastman nor Dell could be "decadent" overlooks the fact that McKay never specifies **where** "the Bohemian diletanti and the more decadent" people he liked to be with were. He never implies that other editors at The Liberator fit this description.

³³⁶ After Gold's review of Banjo, he continues to denigrate other texts that celebrate the queer "debauchery" of Harlem instead of the class struggle in editorials for New Masses (3). In one, he lectured black writers to stop "wasting their time on the gutter side of Harlem" (3).

Baudelaire-like in his poetic expression” (qtd. in Cooper 161). Gold’s condescension toward “Baudelaire-like” poetry must be informed by Baudelaire’s fascination with lesbianism since many of Baudelaire’s poems “target the middle class with its fatuous love of respectability” (Pobo 82).³³⁷ Not only did McKay not like Gold’s politics, he was not too fond of Gold’s “affected” dress and behavior which he found “childish” (Cooper 160, 161). After several tense months of working together on The Liberator, Gold, a former amateur boxer, approached “McKay one evening at John’s Italian Restaurant and challenged him to box. McKay shrugged and said he would, but he explained that their differences were actually intellectual and could not be settled by fighting” (Cooper 161).

Queer Ray threatened Gold and others because they knew McKay drew from the same proletarian themes they praised in work by others to create an intelligent, queer, and “unmasculine” male writer. They knew Harlem was a literary continuation of the stalwart support for the ideals of communism with his address to the Comintern’s Fourth Congress in Moscow in November 1922, his support of the African Blood Brotherhood, and The Negroes in America (1923).³³⁸ They knew

³³⁷ Speculation continues about the personal life of nineteenth-century French poet Charles Baudelaire. But Baudelaire’s fascination with lesbianism is well known. According to Kenneth Pobo, Baudelaire “even considered naming his first book Les lesbiennes. ‘Lesbos,’ from Les Fleurs Du Mal, celebrates lesbian love and evokes Sappho, who is described as both ‘mannish’ and ‘beautiful’” (82). Baudelaire also invented the “prose poem,” a form Oscar Wilde notoriously wrote in. His work was studied and admired by French queer poets Arthur Rimbaud and Paul Verlaine.

³³⁸ Before McKay came to New York and took his place on the editorial board of The Liberator in 1921, he lived in London. There, he was part of the International Socialist Club and wrote for Sylvia Pankhurst’s weekly Worker’s Dreadnought. (Even before he started to write for Pankhurst, she reprinted poems of his from The Liberator and a letter to the editor he had sent to London’s socialist paper, the Daily Herald). From the

Harlem contributed to what Hazel Carby identifies in the epigraph for this section as “historical discourses of black manhood in the service of a revolutionary politics which argued for the violent overthrow of all racialized social formations [in which] Toussaint L’Ouverture emerged . . . as a popular model for creating contemporary images of a revolutionary black male consciousness.” Even the Communist Party’s “advocacy of black self-determination [after 1928] conjured up masculine historical figures such as Toussaint L’Ouverture, Denmark Vesey, and Nat Turner. Writers such as Eugene Gordon and V. J. Jerome portrayed the movement as a struggle for ‘manhood’” (Kelley 114).

McKay identifies Ray with l’Ouverture shortly after Ray first appears in Harlem. Before Jake knows Ray’s name, Jake discovers Ray can speak French. Then, Ray offersthe following response: “‘Of course I’m Negro,’ the waiter said, ‘but I was born in Haytiand the language down there is French’” (131). Ray explains Haiti’s political history, and tells Jake about how L’Ouverture was just and rational, traits Jake would soon associate with Ray, during which

Dreadnought’s inception in October 1917, “Pankhurst had actively defended the Bolshevik seizure of power in Russia. [And] in July, 1918, [she] founded the Russian People’s Information Bureau to disseminate the truth about the course of the Russian Revolution and to help combat the reactionary forces arrayed against it in Britain” (Cooper 114-115). As Wayne F. Cooper relates, McKay’s “involvement in [Pankhurst’s] newspaper and part activities placed him squarely in the middle of Britain’s revolutionary left” (114). Robert A. Hill explains that McKay’s involvement with the African Blood Brotherhood came from an affinity he felt for “the underground wing of the Communist party [that he found in the Brotherhoods’] self-styled band of black revolutionaries” (xxxix). No doubt, the fact that its founder Cyril Valentines Briggs was West Indian, born on St. Kitts-Nevis, contributed to this feeling of affinity. McKay declared himself a delegate of the Brotherhood when address the Comintern’s Fourth Congress in Moscow; and after his address, he was instrumental in “arranging meetings between Robert Minor, representing the Communist underground, and ‘the advanced Negro radicals’” (xl).

Jake sat like a big eager boy. . . . He learned that the universal spirit of the French Revolution had reached and lifted up the slaves far away in that remote island; that Black Hayti's independence was more dramatic and picturesque than the United States' independence and that it was a strange, almost unimaginable eruption of the beautiful ideas of the "Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité" of Mankind, that shook the foundations of that romantic era.

For the first time he heard the name Toussaint L'Ouverture, the black slave and leader of the Haytian slaves. Heard how he fought and conquered the slave-owners then protected them; decreed laws for Hayti that held more of human wisdom and nobility than the Code Napoleon. (131-132)

As Ray tells Jake that the world does not know "how great Toussaint L'Ouverture really was," he awakens new sensations and Pan-African unity in Jake:

Jake felt like one passing through a dream vivid in rich, varied colors. It was revelation beautiful in his mind. . . . Jake was very American in spirit and shared a little of that comfortable Yankee contempt for poor foreigners. And as an American Negro he looked askew at foreign niggers. Africa was a jungle, and Africans bush niggers, cannibals. And West Indians were monkey-chasers. But now he felt like a boy who stands with the map of the world in colors before him, and feels the wonder of the world. (133, 134)

But just before this wonder and sense of brotherhood takes hold, Jake recognizes that Ray speaks “French” in much the same way that Countée Cullen does for James Baldwin. McKay ensures the Harlem reader will recognize queer Ray as well by signaling this queer “French”-man both racially and sexually through references to a famous Greek poet and a popular song by Bessie Smith, “Foolish Man Blues.”

Jake finds Ray reading “alone at a small table” while the other waiters are playing cards (127). Jake has no money to play and asks Ray if he can borrow two dollars, which Ray gives him. When Jake leaves the table with five dollars, he repays Ray his two dollars and notices that Ray “was very friendly” (127). Then, Jake asks what Ray is reading: “‘Wha’s this hear stuff you reading? Looks lak Greek to me.’ He spelled out the title, ‘S-A-P-H-O, Sapho’” (127). When Jake asks Ray to explain “What’s it all about?” Ray “was reading the scene between Fanny and Jean when the lover discovers the letters of his mistress’s former woman friend and exclaims: ‘Ah, Oui . . . Sapho . . . toute la lyre . . .’” (127, 128). Ray explains to Jake, “It’s a story by a French writer named Alphonse Daudet. It’s about a sporting woman who was beautiful like a rose and had the soul of a wandering cat. Her lovers called her Sapho. I like the story, but I hate the use of Sapho for its title . . . because Sappho was a real person” (128). Ray might not like Daudet’s borrowing and misspelling Sappho’s name. But McKay’s use of Daudet’s Sapho, mœurs Parisiennes [Sapho, Parisian Morals] (1884), one of many French novels and poems in the mid-to-late nineteenth

century that shaped “the sapphic literary craze,” continues cleverly the “French” queer references in Color Scheme (Schultz 295).³³⁹

The following conversation that Ray and Jake have about the significance of the story of Sappho racializes the “French” reference to the Greek poet:

“Her story gave two lovely words to modern language,” said the waiter [Ray].

“Which one them?” asked Jake.

“Sapphic and Lesbian . . . beautiful words.”

“What is that there Leshbian?”

“. . . Lovely word, eh?”

“Tha’s what we calls bulldyker in Harlem,” drawled Jake.

“Them’s all ugly womens.”

“Not all. And that’s a damned ugly name,” the waiter said.

“Harlem is too savage about some things. Bulldyker,” the waiter stressed with a sneer.

Jake grinned. “But that’s what they is, ain’t it?”

He began humming:

“And there is two things in Harlem I don’t understan’

It is a bulldyking woman and a faggoty man. . . .” (129)³⁴⁰

³³⁹ Gretchen Schultz does not cite Daudet in her survey, but does mention the poetry of Charles Baudelaire, Théodore de Banville, and Paul Verlaine, as well as novels by Adolphe Bêlot, Émile Zola, Guy de Maupassant, and Catulle Mendès. Bêlot and Daudet’s wife wrote a play based on Daudet’s Sappho, which was first produced at the Gymnase in Parison 18 December 1885.

³⁴⁰ Interestingly, Barbara J. Griffin reads this scene as Jake’s retaining some aspect of

McKay echoes the disclosure of love letters that “Sapho” names in Daudet’s novel with the “local” disclosure that Ray humming “Foolish Man Blues” reveals to Jake. This is the second time the song is sung in Harlem. The first time is at the Congo cabaret, a place racially set as “a real throbbing little Africa in New York” (29). When “Foolish Man Blues” is first performed, the “drum and saxophone were fighting out the wonderful drag ‘blues’ that was the favorite of all the low-down dance halls. In all the better places it was banned. Rumor said it was a police ban. It was an old tune, so far as popular tunes go. But at the Congo it lived fresh and green as grass. Everybody there was giggling and wriggling to it” (36). Again, McKay asserts that queer Harlem was known by everybody “giggling and wriggling [in] it”; “Foolish Man Blues” “was an old tune, so far as popular tunes go.” Elsewhere, Ray confirms the “popularity” or acceptance of queer Harlem when he considers how leaving

his “manhood” despite becoming a child, despite “shuffl[ing] up” to Ray “in the face of Ray’s intimidating education” (232): “‘When Jake hears the word ‘lesbian,’ he cries, ‘That’s what we calls bulldyker in Harlem. Them’s all ugly womens.’ A now impatient Ray tells Jake that ‘bulldyker’ is ‘a damned ugly name’ and he angrily takes Harlem (and Jake) to task for insensitivity. But undaunted by Ray’s scolding, Jake ‘[c]harmingly, like a child that does not know its letters,’ turns the pages of the book and begins to read. Up to this time, Jake has not yielded his knowledge or perception of life to any man” (233). Yet for Jake, their ensuing friendship is not a matter of yielding but of mutual, or reflected admiring. Ray and his education are important to Jake—Jake ends the novel’s second section before Ray leaves wishing that he could be educated like Ray so that he “could understand things better and be proper-speaking like you is” (273). Ray’s knowledge of Haiti’s slave revolted by Toussaint L’Ouverture, and of independent African nations, inspires race pride in Jake. In exchange for this inspiration Jake tries to show Ray what he knows when the train stops in Philadelphia; but in Jake’s world Ray “doesn’t fit.” Because of Ray’s ‘awkwardness,’ “Ray admires Jake’s (hetero)sexual ‘freedom,’ Jake’s abilities to ‘fit in’ with ‘normal’ society. In Pittsburgh Ray defers going out with Jake, who already has a date, pondering later that night while trying to go to sleep: “Perhaps love would appease this unwavering angel of wakefulness. Oh, but he could not pick up love easily on the street as Jake. ...” (152).

his home country had landed him into the quivering heart of a naked world whose reality was hitherto unimaginable. It was what they called in print and polite conversation “the underworld.” The compound word baffled him, as some English words did sometimes. Why under-world he could never understand. It was very much upon the surface as were the other divisions of human life. Having its heights and middle and depths and secret places even as they. And the people of this world, waiters, cooks, chauffeurs, sailors, porters, guides, ushers, hod-carriers, factory hands—all touched in a thousand ways the people of other divisions. They worked over there and slept over here, divided by a street. (224-225)

Through Ray, McKay asserts that divisions of the “underworld,” or what some might call the queer “sub”-culture in Harlem, based on sexuality are false divisions since those in the underworld are “touched in a thousand ways [by] the people of other divisions.”

The subtle implication that Jake has at least some recognition of “Sappho”—Jake says the book’s title “Looks lak Greek to me”—suggests the degree to which Sappho and discussions of her racial heritage might have been known throughout the black community in Harlem.³⁴¹ As Siobhan Somerville cites, Sappho’s African

³⁴¹ Throughout *Harlem*, McKay presents Jake as uneducated in books like Ray, but knowledgeable about, and a representative of, Harlem. Jake’s glimmer of recognition might reflect the growing public use of “Sappho” to denote lesbianism. As Jonathan Katz notes in his *Gay/Lesbian Almanac*, which culminates references to male and female homosexuality in the media and in medical discourse, “the name ‘Sappho’ and the adjective ‘Sapphic,’ which first connoted female-female eroticism in medical

heritage was raised as early as 1905, when the Voice of the Negro published “Some Famous Negroes” by John E. Bruce:

The first to be listed was “Sappho the colored poetess of Mitylene, isle of Lesbos.” Bruce’s evidence for Sappho’s racial identity was both historical and mythological, and, at best, twice removed, since he cited Alexander Pope’s English translation of Ovid’s Latin poem, in which Sappho is indeed described as “brown,” even “glossy jet” like the “Ethiopian dame.” . . . If Sappho’s identity presented an epistemological gap, Bruce’s attempt to claim her as African was no more problematic than assuming, as critics had, that she was “white.” (86)

Somerville sees Bruce’s article as contributing to the “flurry of scholarly activity [that] surrounded Sappho after new papyrus manuscripts of some of her poems were discovered in 1879 and 1898.³⁴² These texts, surviving on remnants of mummy wrappings, were excavated from ancient remains in Egypt, “which may have

discourse, were by the late 1920s being used in the same sense in The New York Times Book Review” (141). Katz explains that “by September 16, 1928, references in The Times Book Review to female inverts had grown so common that a critic could claim the subject of ‘Sapphic women’ had ‘grown hackneyed in recent years’” (138). Katz also includes excerpts from an 8 January 1928 review of Marcel Proust’s Cities of the Plain, which had the knowing title “Proust’s Harvest of Dead Sea Fruit,” which includes “the earliest explicit naming of . . . female-female eroticism [through Sappho] to be found in The Times” (440). The reviewer finds characters in Proust’s Cities “more or less tainted with the vice of Sappho” (qtd. in Katz 440).

³⁴² Even Daudet’s 1884 novel contributed to this fury in New York. Clyde Fitch wrote a play based on Bêlot and Mme. Daudet’s play based on Sapho; and Fitch’s play was first performed in 1895. When a revival of Fitch’s Sapho was brought to Wallack’s Theatre on Broadway in February 1900, the play was publicly condemned as immoral. By order of the police, the Theatre was closed 5 March 1900. The trial for the play started 3 April 1900; and producer Olga Nethersole was acquitted. Sapho reopened on 7 April 1900 for 55 more performances.

contributed to discussions of the probability that she had at least some African blood” (86). Also included in this flurry is Pauline Hopkins’ novel Contending Forces (1900). Hopkins names one of Forces’ characters Sappho. Somerville theorizes that “it is possible that Hopkins, like Bruce [both contributed to Voice of the Negro], may have discussed or read about the speculation that Sappho had African origins” (86-87).

McKay speculates similarly with Ray’s “French” entrance in Banjo. McKay assumes that Banjo readers will “have discussed or read” his Harlem. Structurally, Banjo mimics Harlem. Banjo’s “First Part” follows “straight man” Banjo, like Harlem’s “First Part” follows Jake. Also, like Harlem, when Ray appears “anonymously” at the beginning of the “Second Part” of Banjo, French is involved—this time pragmatically. Banjo had just finished a meal at a busy restaurant where “on a slate was chalked: Repas, prix fixe: fs. 4vin compris [Translation: Fixed price meal, 4 francs, wine included]” (62). Only, after being served “half-pint of red wine, a length of bread, and a plate of soup [and] a large plate of chittlings with a good mess of potatoes [with] a tiny triangular cut of Holland cheese,” Banjo is still hungry: “It was a remarkably good meal indeed for the price charged, and quite sufficient for an ordinary stomach. But Banjo’s stomach was not in an ordinary state” (62-63). After Banjo finishes his second helping of chittlings, Banjo takes out a ten-franc note to pay. Instead, the waitress presents him with a bill for twelve and a half francs. Banjo is ill-equipped for the verbal battle that ensues, since he does not speak much French. His response to the waitress includes a plea for help to the other patrons: “God-damned frog robbers. I eat prix fixe. I pay moh’n enough. Moi paye rien plus. Hey! Ain’t nobody in this tripe-stinking dump can help a man with this heah dawggone lingo?”

(63). At first called “the intermediary,” Ray helps Banjo and manages to negotiate the price of Banjo’s meal down to eight francs. Even though Ray does so speaking perfect French, the waitress insults him as an “outsider” when he and Banjo leave the restaurant: “As they departed the woman vehemently bade them good-by, **à la Provençale**, with a swishing stream of saliva sent sharply after them, crying, ‘**Je suis français, moi**’” (64).

McKay further elicits Harlem with a direct reference to it, as the third-person narration quickly shifts to reflect Ray’s—not the supposed protagonist Banjo’s—thoughts: “Banjo’s rich Dixie accent went to his head like old wine and reminded him happily of Jake. He had seen Banjo before with Malty and company on the breakwater, but had not yet made contact with any of them” (64). Over the next four pages, Banjo drops its namesake and explains how Ray found his way from Home to Harlem to Banjo’s Marseilles. These pages also emphasize Ray’s desire to write: “He had not renounced his dream of self-expression” (64). Included in this narration is an erotic description of the black men working on the docks that employs nostalgic, pastoral images of “Mother Africa”:

Sweat-dripping bodies of black men naked under the equatorial sun, threading a caravan way through the time-old jungles, carrying load ssteadied and unsupported on kink-thick heads hardened and trained to bear their burdens. Brown men half-clothed, with baskets on their backs, bending low down to the ancient tilled fields under the tropical sun. (67)

Ray's sexual difference is emphasized again when he goes to an African café near the end of the novel, where the party he ends up talking with suggests going to see the "Blue Cinema" after they have dinner. Ray goes begrudgingly to the cinema but does not have the expected erotic reaction to the images:

Ray wondered if the men who made it had a moral purpose in mind: to terrify and frighten away all who saw it from that phase of life. Or was it possible that there were human beings whose instincts were so brutalized and blunted in the unsparing struggle of modern living that they needed that special stimulating scourge of ugliness. Perhaps. The "Blue Cinema," he had heard, was a very flourishing business. (214)

Ray's feminist, queer reaction³⁴³ to heterosexual sex likewise inspires him to see its "fundamentally cruel" nature when discussing the Marseilles brothels with Banjo: "[Ray] felt that there was something fundamentally cruel about sex which, **being alien to his nature**, was somehow incomprehensible, and that the more civilized humanity became the more cruel was sex. It really seemed sometimes as if there were a war joined between civilization and sex" (252, emphasis mine). Ray continues his

³⁴³ Often in *Banjo*, Ray empathizes with women who are the targets of lascivious men. Just before he goes to the "Blue Cinema," he identifies with a woman who is a target of "a Senegalese in a baboon attitude [who] was flicking his tongue at everything and everybody that passed by. . . . Ray, turning his head, saw in the face of the woman the same disgust he felt. Those monkey tricks were the special trade-marks of the great fraternity of civilized touts and gigolos, born and trained to prey on the carnal passions of humanity" (211). By themselves, Ray's moments of empathy would reflect a concern for the sexist treatment of women. In combination with Ray's "surprising and warm contacts with the men" of "the Ditch," they further symbolize his queer difference from the other (heterosexual) men (235).

discussion of civilization's sex cruelty with the following assertion about "Negro sex life" that contradicts some of the minor characters in the novel:

from his perspective and close observation of Negro sex life in its simplicity in the West Indies and in its more complex forms in American and European cities, Ray had never felt that Negroes were over-sexed in an offensive way and he was peculiarly sensitive to that. What he inferred was that white people had developed sex complexes that Negroes had not. Negroes were freer and simpler in their sex urge, and, as white people on the whole were not, they naturally attributed over-sexed emotions to Negroes. . . . Even among the rough proletarians Ray never noticed in black men those expressions of vicious contempt for sex that generally came from the mouths of white workers. It was as if the white man considered sex a nasty, irritating thing, while a Negro accepted it with primitive joy. (252)

While some reviewers and scholars have noted how both Banjo and Home to Harlem show black men "over-sexed in an offensive way"—certainly, Du Bois attests to this—Ray's cultural assessment of sex attitudes does reflect the novels' unflustered inclusion of queer protagonist Ray. Never is Ray ostracized from the black community because of any "sex complexes," even while members of that community acknowledge his difference from them because of his "nature."

One demonstration of the political and casual affinity between Ray and his Ditch compatriots comes lexically, with the recurrent use of the word **vagabond**. While Brent Hayes Edwards asserts readily the politically radical insight represented

by the term—he asserts its vigor as “the vibrant resistance of the black boys to the forces that would contain them, to the civilization that Ray knows would ‘take the love of color, joy, beauty, vitality, and nobility out of **his** life and make him like one of the poor mass of its pale creatures’”—Edwards does not find within that passion Ray’s queerly vernacular take on male political bonding (206). With the role that McKay himself adopted while in France and declares in his autobiography A Long Way from Home as being “a vagabond with a purpose,” McKay creates in Ray the purposive connections grounded in **difference** that Saidiya Hartman’s “networks of affiliation” articulates (qtd. in Edwards 206). Ray’s sexuality can hardly be disconnected from his political investments, particularly when his sexual difference from clearly heterosexual men in both Banjo and Home to Harlem pronounces itself so determinedly. McKay emphasizes this connection through difference in Banjo in a scene Edwards references to illustrate the humbling effects of belonging “predicated on privation, on Ray hearing languages he can’t speak or understand” (222). Those languages, like the music that signals “the ways community is performed and [exemplifies] a particularly ‘African rhythm of life,’” demonstrates an important hermeneutic through the understanding of the black queer Haitian intellectual leading McKay’s first two novels (221). They even circumvent Ray’s ego:

Ray was not of the humble tribe of humanity. But he always felt humble when he heard the Senegalese and other West African tribes speaking their own languages with native warmth and feeling.

The Africans gave him a positive feeling of wholesome contact with racial roots. They made him feel that he was not an unfortunate

accident of birth, but that he belonged definitely to a race weighed, tested, and poised in the universal scheme. (qtd. in Edwards 222)

Section C: LeRoi Jones' Ray and Jimmy

I remember the first time I met Amiri Baraka, who was then LeRoi Jones. I was doing The Amen Corner and he was a student at Howard University. I liked him right away. He was a pop-eyed little boy, a poet. He showed me a couple of his poems. I liked them very much. And then he came to New York a couple of years later. He came to New York when I came back to New York from Paris. And by this time I knew the business. I'd been through the fucking business by that time. I was a survivor. And I remember telling him that his agent wanted him to become the young James Baldwin. But I told him, "You're not the young James Baldwin. There's only one James Baldwin and you are LeRoi Jones and there's only one LeRoi Jones. Don't let them run this game on us, you know? You're LeRoi Jones, I'm James Baldwin. And we're going to need each other." That's all I said. He didn't believe it then but time took care of that.

—James Baldwin, from Quincy Troupe's "The Last Interview" (1987)

The Negro, as he exists in America now, and has always existed in this place (certainly after formal slavery), is a natural nonconformist. Being black in a society where such a state is an extreme liability is the most extreme form of nonconformity available. The point is, of course, that this nonconformity should be put to use. The vantage point is classically perfect—outside and inside at the same time.

—LeRoi Jones, "Black Writing," Home: Social Essays (1963)

Thirty-year-old James Baldwin came to Washington DC in May 1955 at the invitation of writer and professor Owen Dodson. Then the director of the Howard University Players, Dodson was looking to produce a play by a black playwright. He heard about Baldwin's Amen Corner (1954) from a friend and contacted Baldwin,

who was working on Notes of a Native Son at Yaddo, a writer's colony in Saratoga Springs, New York. Baldwin rushed to Howard to help with rehearsals.

The Amen Corner³⁴⁴ had been a pet project of Baldwin's since he completed Go Tell It on the Mountain.³⁴⁵ So, Dodson's call energized Baldwin. Howard University was not Broadway but "the Howard Players had a professional reputation, and Baldwin liked what he heard about Dodson. . . . Now at least there would be an opportunity for the play to be performed" (Leeming 106).³⁴⁶ Baldwin was further heartened that Dodson's production was a success, even though many complained about the play's heavy vernacular: "Baldwin overheard one person suggest, 'This play will set back the Speech Department for thirty years'" (110). Equally successful was Baldwin's

first taste of academic life. Howard was, in fact, the first American university Baldwin had ever visited, and as a child of the ghetto and a habitué of bohemia, he was surprised at how much he enjoyed the

³⁴⁴ The Amen Corner was first published in Zero's second issue (July 1954). Their first contains Baldwin's essay about homosexuality, "The Preservation of Innocence." Another version of Amen Corner was published in 1968.

³⁴⁵ He wanted to return to his "theatrical bent" he had discovered years earlier at Douglass Junior High School. But Baldwin's editors at Knopf were less than enthusiastic about a drama, even after critics widely praised Mountain. As David Leeming relays, they "urged him to write another novel, preferably a sequel to Mountain, or at least another Harlem novel. There was no future in a play" (90). Then penniless in Paris, Baldwin persevered and completed it anyway. Baldwin then tried "without success to sell the idea of [its] professional production" (106). Knopf's editors proved right: "there was 'no market' for a play about a store front church in Harlem" (106).

³⁴⁶ According to Fern Marja Eckman, Baldwin played "casual about it. Then he saw his first rehearsal—and almost died.' His dialogue was too verbose for the stage, he decided. He felt bombarded by his own literature ('an unbearable experience')" (139). Baldwin revised furiously: "when the final curtain descended, he was proud of the play" (139).

experience. He especially liked the people he encountered in Washington, among them LeRoi Jones (later Amiri Baraka), a student at Howard. (110)

At some point during Amen Corner's five-day run at Howard's Spaulding Hall from 11 May to 14 May, LeRoi Jones approached Baldwin and showed him poems. And as Baldwin recalls in his last interview, he liked this "pop-eyed little boy, a poet" right away: "I liked [his poems] very much."

Curiously, Jones-now-Baraka does not mention this meeting in his account of Howard in Autobiography of LeRoi Jones. Nor do most of the often-contradictory accounts of Jones' life even place him in DC at the time of the Amen Corner production. (Even Jones is circumspect about specific dates in his Autobiography). Most agree that Jones stopped attending classes at Howard after the fall 1954 semester—Jones dropped out after this semester, with some biographies claiming Jones graduated or flunked out—and that he joined the US Air Force, serving in Puerto Rico, before leaving the Force (again under questionable circumstances) for Greenwich Village in 1957.³⁴⁷ But Jones must have left after the production because in his essay "The Myth of 'Negro Literature'" he remarks that "James Baldwin's play, The Amen Corner, when it appeared at the Howard Players theatre, 'set the speech department back ten years,' an English professor groaned to me" (Home 109). And

³⁴⁷ Most biographies of Jones place him in the Force for three years, but in a 1996 interview and article published after Baraka appeared in the PBS documentary series The United States of Poetry, Calvin Wilson offers the following: "Baraka earned a bachelor's degree in English from Howard University. Upon graduation, he joined the U.S. Air Force, serving as a weatherman and gunner in Puerto Rico. But he spent much of the two years composing poetry" (K1).

Jones inserts a reference to Amen Corner in “The Alternative,” set in a DC college dormitory and based on his experiences at Howard.³⁴⁸

I do not point out biographic detail and indirection because I want to expose some hidden “truth” to be found beyond the syntagmatic chain of events in either “The Alternative” or The Toilet. Whatever happened in DC between these two “pop-eyed” poets matters less than the style with which Jones signifies upon it with events and characters in his short story and play. I want to pursue, as Fred Moten asserts about Jones in a different context, how this coy discontinuity contributes to a network of black queer vernacular and facilitates a hermeneutic of sensual cognition that supersedes any professed anxiety Jones-now-Baraka provides to undercut the textual homoeroticism I study.³⁴⁹ Another strategy to defer attention to Jones’ published words involves interpreting them through a story of Jones’ transition to Baraka, a progressive move from bohemianism to black nationalism. When scholars apply this strategy to their evaluations of Tales, in which “The Alternative” appears early on, whatever unavoidable queer lexicon can acquiesce with the collection’s more important ending, or purportedly more “black” and less “queer.” Again, such a reading must ignore how the collection as a whole employs black queer vernacular strategies. To elucidate them, I read “The Alternative” within Tales’s so-called “progression” as well as

³⁴⁸ Howard is never named. But, then, Howard does not need to be named since it is the only black university in DC. In Autobiography of LeRoi Jones, Jones-now-Baraka makes clear the autobiographical elements in “The Alternative.” For example, he refers to his dorm room as “13 Rue Madeleine” (taken from the 1946 war movie of the same name starring James Cagney) and “The Boys Club,” what protagonist Ray McGhee calls his room.

³⁴⁹ See Moten’s In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition (2003).

alongside The Toilet. I foreground the connections between characters named Jimmy (referring to Baldwin) and Ray (referring to McKay).

In “The Alternative,” Lyle, forty-year-old bald lover of nineteen-year-old Bobby Hutchens, a student living in the dorm who wants to be an actor, praises Bobby for his intuitive performance in “Jimmy’s play”: “You know I loved you in Jimmy’s play, but the rest of those people are really just kids. You were the only person who really understood what was going on” (25). Based on “The Alternative”’s narrative, in which protagonist Ray finding his identity as a poet and “leader” of a group of increasingly-rowdy guys who consider him queer, Jones “really understood what was going on” in The Amen Corner as well. While the play’s protagonist David exiles himself to Paris so that he can find and accept his life as an “artist,” Jones’ Ray exiles himself from the others in the dorm inside his mind, or behind the binding of books. Ray knows he is different and feels conflicted about the ways his educated reading has enabled him to express that difference. More importantly, Ray worries that he is lying to the guys about his queer feelings by hiding behind a “Wall. Even to move, impossible. I sit, now, forever where I am. No further. No farther. Father, who am I to hide myself? And brew a world of soft lies” (21). Like Ray, Jones-now-Baraka is conflicted. But not about lying—at least, not about his supposed excuse for the queer content of “The Alternative.” He pathologizes Howard University: “[it] shocked me into realizing how desperately sick the Negro could be” (qtd. in Wakefield 189). But within the story, Ray and his empathy for Bobby are not “desperately sick.” Sure, Ray struggles with fully expressing himself; but in so doing, he uses the very educated thinking that separates him from his peers to defend himself from them. The story may

end with Ray knocked to the floor by Rick outside of Bobby's room; but Ray is the narrator of "The Alternative." His telling of the tale, along with his insight into Rick and others' shortcomings, acts as a kind of revenge. Like the other "outsider"-intellectual characters in this chapter, Ray's storytelling abilities come from his queerness. He directs the reader how to interpret what happens.

In making Bobby Hutchens an actor, Jones evokes the common assumption that the stage draws in queer men of all kinds with a "theatrical bent." Even one of Ray's peers uses actor to identify Lyle as "a real D.C. queer . . . a real way-type sissy": "Huh, man he's just another actor . . . hooo" (19). But Howard's Owen Dodson did cultivate the kind of bohemian atmosphere on campus and at his 1813 16th Street, NW, apartment that would inspire such vernacular. And like Lyle, Dodson was known to have "mentoring" relationships with younger men.³⁵⁰ Bohemian Dodson was in part why Baldwin "was surprised at how much he enjoyed [Howard and] the people heen countered [there]," according to Leeming. Dodson's choice to produce Baldwin's play, which continued the exploration of a black queer "outsider" character Baldwin started in "The Outing" and Go Tell It on the Mountain, indicates the reading, writing,

³⁵⁰ Again, Jones-now-Baraka does not mention Dodson in the Autobiography. But then, he reveals relatively little about curricular or University interests. Not mentioning Dodson in the Autobiography does not mean that Jones-now-Baraka did not take notice. Of Howard's faculty, he only mentions Sterling Brown and literature professor Nathan Scott who showed him "an **intellectual** love of literature" (Home 110). Jones-now-Baraka explains that he did not always enjoy the material of the course, but Scott's passion for literature influenced him: "It was like some minister pushing us toward Christ, but Scott was pushing us toward Dante Alighieri" (110). He even went back to some of the texts Scott taught, like Dante's Inferno, as the title of the first story in Tales illustrates: "A Chase (Alighieri's Dream)."

and producing texts that still connected and maintained a tight-knit, if sometimes contemptuous, community of black queer men.³⁵¹

For example, Dodson's admiration for Baldwin waned after the Amen production. Baldwin had not come to DC alone, but with his new black lover Arnold³⁵² in tow. When Dodson invited Baldwin and Arnold to stay on with him at his apartment so Baldwin could continue to revise the play, make changes to his Notes of a Native Son manuscript, and work on a new short story "Sonny's Blues," inspired by Arnold. As David Leeming explains, "Dodson agreed to put both men up temporarily,

³⁵¹ As Hilton Als retorts about Dodson's heyday, the 1940s, "the fag circuit [then] was very small" (Women 141). Local members of Dodson's small "family" came to support and socialize around the Howard production. David Leeming notes that members of the Howard family included "Sterling Brown, and Alain Locke," whom Baldwin knew from working at the Calypso in Greenwich Village twelve years earlier (107). To Brown, Baldwin "reacted well . . . because, like Beauford Delaney, [the black queer man in whom Baldwin saw his future self when he first left home, Brown] gave him moral support" (110). More importantly, Baldwin "felt a special connection with [Brown]" (110). For Brown, "Baldwin had an almost adulatory admiration. He remembered long sessions in Brown's office at Howard: Brown, professorial, pipe in mouth, surrounded by books, lecturing the younger man, who sat sometimes on the floor—literally at his feet" (110-111).

³⁵² David Leeming explains that Arnold was a drinking buddy of Lucien Happersberger's, and that Baldwin met him when returning to New York City from Yaddo, the writer's colony in Saratoga Springs, New York. As Leeming describes, Lucien "was a Swiss who had left home in search of excitement and success in Paris. In Lucien, Jimmy found the 'love of my life.' He was a street boy, motivated at first more by the drive to survive in a hostile environment than by any homosexual cravings, but he came to love Jimmy with genuine depth. Apparently oblivious to what people thought of their relationship, he did not mind being called Jimmy's lover even though, during the greater part of their friendship over the next thirty-nine years, he technically was not" (74-75). New York in 1955 was one of those times they were not; and by the time Baldwin returned from Yaddo "Lucien now had a life of his own . . . and he was decidedly not interested in playing the role of lover to Jimmy. One day he brought home a drinking buddy, an African-American musician named Arnold. Arnold and Jimmy immediately related on a level that excluded Lucien, and before long they became lovers. Anger at Lucien and desperation as well as physical attraction motivated Baldwin" (106).

but was surprised when Arnold arrived with a guitar and two footlockers and announced, ‘I’m here to stay’” (111). At first, Baldwin reading new work and Arnold playing guitar was entertaining to Dodson and his friends; but their presence quickly grated the “very private and somewhat fastidious” Dodson (111). Their extended stay was also

placing a strain on [Dodson’s] own pocketbook. In addition to food, Arnold drank two quarts of milk a day, and Baldwin required a daily fifth of vodka. After a particularly unpleasant scene in which Dodson shouted at the top of his lungs, “Get out! You niggers leave my house. I don’t care whether you are going to be the greatest writer in the world, I am finished.” (111-112)³⁵³

A similar kind of loving contempt for Claude McKay fuels LeRoi Jones’ “New-Sense,” from Tales. Its unnamed writer-protagonist speaks through the words of the narrative, lamenting “I could go make love to somebody right now, instead of hacking at this machine. Right now, lost second, I could. And pull them close to me, and be said to find and be in, LOVE. . . . That close thing is always valuable” (96). He

³⁵³ Hilton Als relates the same story while coloring it with Dodson’s quiet resentment, of course: “Baldwin arrived in Washington for the premiere and quickly encamped himself in Owen’s home, followed by his lover, and his enormous family, who proceeded to eat Owen out of house and home. ‘Niggers!’ Owen exclaimed at the end of this story, which was meant to illustrate his own character, his tale of kindness unpaid, debts tallied” (Women 124). Als continues: “Owen was less popular than his *bête noire*, James Baldwin. . . . It was galling for Owen to know that Baldwin began writing one of his most widely anthologized essays, Notes of a Native Son, in Owen’s home, fortified by Owen’s liquor and attention” (129, 130). Als’ awesome command of syntax and twenty-year-old memories does not always accord history. Baldwin worked on the bulk of Notes at Yaddo. Als also erroneously notes that “Countee Cullen had been an instructor of Baldwin’s at DeWitt Clinton High School” instead of Douglass Junior High School (130).

explains that being close rather than writing or thinking about being close is better because “only sick people want to speculate about it. Want to see it. When you can’t see it. Nothing to see, except the voyeur bullshit, a kind of distorted diseased intellectualism” (96). For the unnamed writer-protagonist, this introductory lesson on “LOVE” and “voyeur bullshit” sets up McKay’s Home to Harlem, which reveals its “distorted diseased intellectualism”:

Wanting to understand what’s going on, rather than just getting in it moving. Like Jake and Ray in my man’s book. Jake moved straight and hard and survived with a fox in Chicago, probably, where he’d come home tired and drunk at nights after work and work this happiness over (her name was Felice). And Ray, a name I’d already saved for my self, sailing around the stupid seas with a “wistful” little brown girl waiting for him while he masturbated among pirates . . . dying from his education. Shit. It’s too stupid to go into. (96)

The writer-protagonist acknowledges yet distances himself from a previous connection he had had with “Jake and Ray in my man’s book,” maintaining that he no longer identifies with Ray “masturbat[ing] with pirates [and] dying from his education.” Still, Ray is “a name I’d already saved for my self.” This “Ray” suggests thinly that McKay’s Ray and Jake now signify for him the conflict that he identifies between white (“diseased”) reflection and black (“straight and hard”) expression, respectively, or “wanting to understand what’s going on, rather than just getting in it moving.” He protests that the battle between the two is uneven: “The reflective vs. the expressive. Mahler vs. Martha and The Vandellas. It’s not even an interesting battle” (96).

“New-Sense” is the second of the last seven “Harlem stories” that close Tales, a collection of seemingly related short stories with different protagonists and characters that allude to each other, or to themes and characters from other Jones texts. The Ray of “New-Sense” references the Ray McGhee of “The Alternative,” the Ray Fouts of Jones’ play The Toilet, and the “Little McGhee” of “Uncle Tom’s Cabin: Alternative Ending,” from Tales. As scholars like Robert Bone instruct, Tales reflects the intellectual journey that Jones had himself undergone during the 1960s, a “lyrical and even mystical . . . return to Harlem and his négritude” (36). At best, this surface assessment means to organize stories that are “difficult . . . to read,” as John Wakefield confesses in “Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones): ‘The Alternative’” (191). But scholarly concern shaping Tales into a clear development towards “accepting blackness” has little to do with any close reading of the text.

Finding in Tales a smooth progression in his prose “moving from [the first story] ‘A Chase (Alighieri’s Dream),’ which was first published in Pa’lante in 1962 and reads like a section of [Jones’] The System of Dante’s Hell, toward a less white-literary and more locally black vernacular style in [the last story] ‘Answers in Progress’” polishes over the contradictions to that progression littered about Tales (Wakefield 110). For example, if “New-Sense” is supposed to reflect clearly the writer-protagonist’s embrace of black expression, of “just getting in it moving” rather than “masturbating” while reflecting like McKay’s Ray, why does he reference and “translate” the following theory by white modernist poet T(homas) E(rnest) Hulme?: “Hulme spoke of ‘Canons of Satisfaction.’ He meant a hierarchy of what grooves you” (96). How does Hulme and his abstract “Canons of Satisfaction” fit into the story’s

Harlem-set directive to “we black people caught up in Western values [to] Express. NOW NOW NOW NOW NOW NOW” (96-97)? How, too, does Tales’ “smooth progression” account for Ray McGhee’s command and understanding of black vernacular in “The Alternative”’s Howard University where, as the writer-narrator of “New-Sense” would explain, the University is teaching him to appreciate “white bullshit, to always be weighing and measuring and analyzing, and reflecting” (96)? Even Mottram cannot sustain his own polemic: when praising the satire of “Now and Then,” the second to last story, he explains how Jones’ “style takes Kerouac’s rush of detailed impressions and Burroughs’ montage and place them within a local vitality” (115). Again, how do Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs contribute to a “development towards accepting blackness”?

Creating this kind of black/white, heterosexual/queer polemic has certainly been encouraged by Jones-now-Baraka’s recent take on the work he produced as LeRoi Jones. But as Jones, he bridges the two in his essay “Black Writing,” which illustrates how “black” and “queer” perspectives are not that different. As Jones explains in the last epigraph for this section, black people are “natural nonconformist[s]”; their “vantage point is classically perfect—outside and inside at the same time.” This “difference” should be celebrated in black writing: “Let no one convince any black man that he is an American like anybody else. The black writer should be deaf to such misinformation, especially since he can prove ... that something quite different is the case” through expressive literature (Home 165). Like “the great Irish writers,” Jones urges, black writers should demonstrate “their clear and powerful understanding (social, as well as aesthetic) of where they were and how best

they could function inside and outside” America nsociety (164-165). Jones does not explicitly mention sexuality, though his “classically perfect” vantage point describes that articulated by recent queer theory; but one “proven” example of black literature showing this “difference” that Jones offers is Go Tell It on the Mountain.³⁵⁴

Despite Jones’ own theorizing, most assessments of his work—particularly Tales—convey what scholars would call a “classically perfect” Black Arts vantage point. Typically, scholars read all of Jones work from a post-1965 vantage point, after Jones moved to Harlem. For example, Eric Mottram foregrounds his article “Towards the Alternative” with Jones’ entrance “into public life as a figure newly emerged into visible politics” during an October 1965 “demonstration against Livingstone L. Wingate and the administration of Haryou-Act finances,” which supported the Black Arts Repertory Theatre School that Jones directed (Mottram 110). During the demonstration, with a School banner in hand, Jones “exhorted to the crowd to ‘lock arms against these white beasts, according to the New York Times of 15 October” (97). The allegations of censorship made around the protest—including founder and former director of Haryou-Act Kenneth B. Clark calling Wingate “a black McCarthy”—had little to do with the day-to-day activities at the School (97). Two weeks later, “Jones and five of his staff were still on the payroll for undisclosed amounts” and the School produced Jones’ play Experimental Death Unit (97). Mottram concludes that Jones’ first foray into public demonstrating had more to do

³⁵⁴ As if directly responding to the possibility that queer nonconformity and black nonconformity could overlap, Werner Sollors attempts to explain away the Beat influence in Jones work. According to Sollors, only for the sake of the Beats, did Jones view “the outcasts of society (in the familiar catalogue from Blacks to junkies and homosexuals) as **heroes** [in] characteristically Bohemian inversion” (25).

finds in his work. This narrative of Jones tracing his own “specific and personal espousal of ‘Blackness’” after his 1960 trip to Cuba cannot even be applied legitimately, according to Harold Cruse (Sollors 74). Cruse was on the trip to Cuba with Jones³⁵⁷ and asserts that Jones’ meeting the revolutionary intelligentsia of the Castro regime was not exactly the genesis of the “revolutionary blackness” Sollors and others are so eager to find. Nor was it the spark that pushed him “toward the thing I had coming into the world, with no sweat: my blackness,” as Jones insists in his essay “Home” (10). As Cruse reports,

In Havana it was noted that Jones made a very favorable impression on the revolutionary intelligentsia of the Castro regime. Although they were all white Cubans, it was remarkable to see how much they and Jones had in common—they actually talked the same “language.” (356)

Instead of ascribing a “revolutionary blackness” to Jones’ “language” that he had in common with the white Cubans of Castro’s regime, Cruse suggests, readers should appreciate the ambivalence in Jones’ work:

Jones has come so far and so fast since 1961, and in the meantime has been so contradictory, that it is difficult to place him. . . . As it turns out these Jonesian posturings have not been all upstage antics, but rather the ambivalence of the supreme actor brazenly in search of just the right “role” that would best suit the purposes in life of the real man inside Jones. (538)

³⁵⁷ Others on this trip included Robert Williams, Julian Mayfield, and John Henrik Clarke.

The character in Tales that best represents this ambivalence is Ray McGhee, “the leader [of ‘The Alternative’ who is] stuck with 130 lbs. black meat sewed to failing bone,” and who can only listens in as the guys crammed into his dorm room drink, play cards, wrestle, sling insults, and brag about sexual conquests (5). Ray has little in common with them. According to Wakefield, “the main difference between [Ray] and his peers is that they inhabit different perceptual worlds” (192). Of course, Ray is aware of this difference: “They don’t dig completely where I’m at” (8). Ray is also aware that he maintains his leadership merely because of his verbal agility. When the floor proctor Mr. Bush calls on Ray to complain about the noise coming from his room and tries unsuccessfully to break up the “boys club,” Ray shoos him away before he can discover what they are hiding from him, the alcohol (including “a box of fifths [that Hamburg] had purchased with the wealth of his father’s six shrimp shops”) and hot plate on which Ray had cooked a pork chop (12). Everyone cheers Ray’s performance after Bush leaves: “The talk is to that. That elegance of performance” (17). Ray’s verbal dexterity also saves him earlier from losing completely a wrestling match for two big bottles of wine and “for ownership of this here country!”: “The leader loses . . . but is still the leader because he said some words no one had heard of before. (That was after the loss.)” (9).

Still, these victories do not assuage Ray’s fear that his words and wit may not always save him from the guys who know he is not like them. Despite his “victories,”

Tonight the leader is faced with decision. Brown had found him drunk and weeping among the dirty clothes. Some guy with a crippled arm had reported to the farmers (a boppin’ gang gone social. Sociologists,

artistic arbiters of our times). This one an athlete of mouse like proportions. “You know,” he said, his withered arm hung stupidly in the rayon suit, “That cat’s nuts. He was sittin’ up in that room last night with dark glasses on . . . with a yellow bulb . . . pretendin’ to read some abstract shit.” (9)

Ray’s “sensitivity” (crying, reading “some abstract shit”) distinguishes him from the other guys. In fact, as Ray’s attention to Brown’s crippled “mouselike proportion” and “withered arm” attests, Ray is worried that he is not as masculine as the others. His sarcastic, self-deprecating response to Brown’s report belabors this “sin” of his: “(Damn, even the color wrong. Where are you now, hippy, under this abstract shit. Not even defense. That you remain forever in that world. No light. Under my fingers. That you exist alone, as I make you. Your sin, a final ugliness to you. For the leopards, all thumbs jerked toward the sand.)” (9). Ray’s fears are confirmed when one of the guys sees “that ol’ fagit Bobby Hutchens down in the lobby with a real D.C. queer” and makes fun of Bobby’s “funny looking pants . . . and orange glasses” (19). The dialogue between them and Ray demonstrate his peers playing the dozens, but the way they connect queerness to “this abstract shit” that Ray reads indicates the knowledge that lies at the surface of their understanding of Ray:

“Hey, man you cats better cool it . . . you talkin’ about Ray’s main man. You dig?”

“Yeah. I see this cat easin’ around corners with the cat all the time. I mean, talkin’ some off the wall shit, too, baby.”

“Yeah. Yeah. Why don’t you cats go fuck yourselves or something hip like that, huh?”

“O.K., ugly Tom, you better quit inferring that shit about Ray. What you trying to say, ol’ pointy head is funny or something?”

“Funny . . . how the sound of your voice . . . thri-ills me. Strange . . .” (the last à la Nat King Cole.)

“Fuck you cats and your funny looking families.” (19)

The fact that they conclude that Bobby Hutchens would understand “some off the wall shit” in a way that they do not shows the assumptive queerness of “abstract” book knowledge.

Ray’s continued defense of Bobby does not help. In fact, the very delivery of Ray’s words that they had just praised when Ray saved them from Mr. Bush further separates him from the group. Now, the guys connect his verbal acuity to Bobby. The following *mêlée* alerts Rick who joins in with Tom and the others, and later challenges Ray’s leadership:

Rick moves to the offensive. The leader in his book, or laughs, “Aww, man, that cat ain’t my boy. I just don’t think you cats ought to talk about people you don’t know anything about! Plus, that cat probably gets more ass than any of you silly-ass mother fuckers.”

“Hee. That Ray sure can pronounce that word. I mean he don’t say mutha’ like most folks . . . he always pronounces the mother and the fucker, so proper. And it sure makes it sound nasty.” (A Texas millionaire talking.)

“Hutchens teachin’ the cat how to talk . . . that’s what’s happening. Ha. In exchange for services rendered!”

“Wait, Tom. Is it you saying that Hutchens and my man here are into some funny shit?”

“No, man. It’s you saying that. It was me just inferring, you dig?” (20-21)

One of the guys “just inferring” that Ray is “into some funny shit” also signals the way that Tales’ stories signify a vernacular.

Queerer yet, when Tom and Rick decide to go to Bobby Hutchens’ room to peek through the key hole and eavesdrop on the conversation, “The Alternative”’s narration assumes Bobby and Lyle’s perspective. It offers their dialogue, without the commentary from Tom and Rick that they must be making to each other, or without Ray’s narrative voice. Such a move reflects Ray’s empathy for Bobby—no one else assumes the narrative helm in the story—and it blocks Ray’s command of words when he resumes the narration while newly alone in his room: “The wind moves thru the leader’s room, and he sits alone, under the drooping velvet, repeating words he does not understand. The yellow light burns. He turns it off. Smokes. Masturbates. Turns it on” (25). In the darkness of his room “words are anything” (26). Then, Ray says the following line to himself, suggesting that his sensitivity infers something else: “If it is true that the only paradise is that which one has lost, I know what name to give that something tender and inhuman which dwells within me today” (26).

When Ray opens his door, “the hall above is screams. Screams” (26). He goes upstairs and finds Rick trying to break down Bobby’s door. The same “wall” that Ray

finds earlier returns: “A wall. Against it, from where you stand, the sea stretches smooth for miles out. Their voices distant thuds of meat against the sand” (28). When Ray tells Rick to “get the hell outtahere,” “Rick hits the leader full in the face, and he falls backwards across the hall” (29). The guys are worried that Rick will hurt weakling Ray and try to stop Rick. Then, Bobby comes out of his room with a broom in hand. The guys’ attention shifts to Bobby. But the ending narration of “The Alternative” points further toward a “name to give that something tender and inhuman which dwells within [Ray] today”:

More noise. More lies. More prints in the sand, away, or toward some name. I am a poet. I am a rich famous butcher. I am the man who paints the gold balls on the tops of flagpoles. I am, no matter, more beautiful than anyone else. And I have come a long way to say this. Here. In the long hall, shadows across my hands. My face pushed hard against the floor. And the wood, old, and protestant. And their voices, all these other selves screaming for blood. For blood, or whatever it is fills their noble lives. (29)

In the wake of the guys “screaming for blood” Ray has “come a long way to say this”—a “this” never articulated but rendered again through reference to an earlier Ray in Jones’ work, the Ray who is the correspondingly frail leader of the high school group of guys in The Toilet, which has a similarly violent ending also incited by queer-bashing.

Like “The Alternative,” The Toilet features a queer couple and a leader named Ray. The guys of The Toilet call this Ray by his last name, Foots. As his “double”

name suggests in the play, Ray does not completely reveal himself to his guys. Like the Ray of “The Alternative,” this Ray is comparably feeble and his leadership is wit-based. As Ray makes his entrance into the toilet where his guys are waiting for him, “He is nervous but keeps it hidden by a natural glibness and a sharp sense of what each boy in the room expects, singularly, from him. He is the weakest physically and smallest of the bunch, but he is undoubtedly their leader” (51). Unbeknown to the guys and even the audience until the last wordless moments of The Toilet, Ray is part of the play’s queer couple. Ray’s guys do know about a letter that James Karolis, or “Jimmy” as the one white character Donald Farrell (described as “tall, thin, blonde, awkward, soft”) calls him, wrote Ray. In fact, the letter, in which, as Perry explains, Jimmy tells Foots that “he thought he was ‘beautiful’ ... and that he wanted to blow him,” motivates the action of the play (56). The guys plan to meet in the toilet at 3:00 to beat up Jimmy.

Ray is the last to arrive. By the time he does, the “impersonal ugliness of a school toilet or a latrine of some institution,” as the stage directions suggest, has been marked literally by the guys, as if they were dogs (37). First-to-enter Ora “looks around the bleak place, walks around, then with one hand on his hip takes out his joint and pees, still grinning, into one of the commodes, spraying urine over the seat” (37). Love, Holmes, Hines follow—Love pees twice—as they brag about their plan to beat up James Karolis; or, as Ora boasts: “We gonna kick that little frail bastid’s ass” (43). But Jimmy has already been beat by Skippy and Knowles when they “come in holding Karolis by the arms”: “Karolis’ head is hanging, and he is crying softly and blood is

on his shirt and face” (49). Knowles flaunts that they “broke this muthafucka’s jaw” (49).

Ray is horrified when he first sees Jimmy: “His first reaction is horror and disgust ... but he keeps it controlled as is his style, and merely half-whistles” (52). Instead, he tries to convince the guys that there is nothing left to do: “Well, what the hell am I gonna do, beat on the guy while he’s sprawled on the floor. Damn, Ora, you’re a pretty lousy sonofabitch” (54). But Jimmy feels betrayed by Ray’s hidden “style,” pushes himself up off the floor, and challenges Ray to fight. Before Jimmy lunges onto Ray and chokes him so severely that Ora has to pull him off Ray, Jimmy calls out Ray and explains how appropriate it is that this confrontation takes place in the toilet:

KAROLIS (as if he didn’t hear [Ray warning him that he is “just gonna get your head blocked”]): No. You have to fight me. I sent you a note, remember. That note saying I loved you. (The others howl at this.) The note saying you were beautiful. (Tries to smile.) You remember that note, Ray?

FOOTS: Goddamn it, if you’re going to fight, fight you cocksucker!

KAROLIS: Yeh. That’s what I’m going to do Ray. I’m going to fight you. We’re here to fight. About that note, right? The one that said I wanted to take you into my mouth.

FOOTS lunges at KAROLIS and misses.

Did I call you Ray in that letter . . . or Foots? (Trying to laugh.) Foots!
(Shouts.) I'm going to break your fucking neck. That's right. That's
who I want to kill. Foots!

[. . .]

KAROLIS: Yeh! That's why we're here, huh? I'll fight you, Foots!
(Spits the name.) I'll fight you. Right here in this same place where you
said your name was Ray. (Screaming. He lunges at FOOTS and
manages to grab him in a choke hold.) Ray, you said your name was.
You said Ray. Right here in this filthy toilet. You said Ray. (He is
choking FOOTS and screaming. FOOTS struggles and is punching
KAROLIS in the back and stomach, but he cannot get out of the hold.)
You put your hand on me and said Ray! (58-60)

Jimmy claims "this filthy toilet" back from its "impersonal ugliness" and back from Ora, Love, Holmes, and Hines, who have marked it as their territory. In the process, Jimmy silences Ray physically with a choke hold much the way Bobby Hutchens and Lyle's queer conversation in "The Alternative" figuratively stymies that Ray's verbal abilities. After Ora pulls Jimmy off Ray, "the whole crowd surges into the center punching the fallen KAROLIS in the face" (60). Still, Jimmy persists in proclaiming Ray's duplicity, as well as his love for him. Jimmy's last line before being left "spread in the center of the floor and is unmoving" shows his love despite the contempt he has for Ray allowing them to pummel him: "No, no, his name is Ray, not Foots. You stupid bastards. I love somebody you don't even know" (61, 60). Only at the end of the play, after Jimmy almost strangles Ray with the rage of betrayal, and when

everyone leaves Jimmy motionless on the bathroom floor can Ray come back and be the person Jimmy knows: Ray “runs and kneels before the body, weeping and cradling the head in his arms” (62).

So intense and tender is this ending, during which the audience must confront any indifference they might have had toward Jimmy’s plight, Jones himself tries to distance himself from the play when looking back after he changed his name. Jones-now-Baraka rationalizes The Toilet’s ending as socially-dictated, not aesthetically-consistent with the “pure spirit of the play,” in a 27 June 1971 New York Times interview:

I was working my way through things that I didn’t really understand—for instance, the ending of “The Toilet,” where there is sort of a coming together of the black boy and the white boy ... the kind of social milieu that I was in dictated that kind of rapprochement. It actually didn’t evolve from the pure spirit of the play. (qtd. in Mottram 116)

Like Baldwin’s turnabout towards Uncle Tom’s Cabin and his former mentor’s Native Son, Jones-now-Baraka distances himself from the poignant queerness of The Toilet in order to maintain his identity as the Black Arts-defined “versatile militant” poet that the Crisis had dubbed him in 1968. He also tries to distance The Toilet’s queerness from blackness by calling Jimmy Karolis “the white boy.” Nothing in the play’s dialogue or stage directions implies Jimmy’s race. Only white character Donald Farrell is racially marked as “Tall, thin, blonde, awkward, soft” (35). Like the black characters of the play, Jones describes Jimmy without inferring race: “Medium height. Very skinny and not essentially attractive except when he speaks” (35). Moreover, in

the first production of The Toilet at the St. Marks Playhouse in New York, beginning on 16 December 1964, Jimmy Karolis is played by latino actor Jaime Sánchez.

Jones-now-Baraka has no more affection for the Howard Experiences that inspired “The Alternative.” Looking back at his stay at Howard, he claims that the University “shocked me into realizing how desperately sick the Negro could be” (qtd. in Wakefield 189). Yet like the narrators of the last stories in Tales who profess to distance themselves from the queerness around them or in their head (through literary allusion), any number of disapproving comments from Jones-now-Baraka after the fact will not erase the complicated queer resonance in his work,³⁵⁸ or its nods to the fabric of black queer vernacular it contributes to. Scholars like Werner Sollors are only too happy to support Jones-now-Baraka’s need to give prominence to Black Arts ideology in Jones’ work. Coating it with thick biography, Sollors paints it as a clear

³⁵⁸ In fact, Jones-now-Baraka’s Black Arts posing does not even conceal a queer eroticism in his poem “CIVILRIGHTS POEM” (1967), published under the name Amiri Baraka. The poem viscerally condemns a kind of “stunted manhood” in typical Black Arts style that supports the myth of the machismo “race man.” As it asserts that not being “black enough” means not being man enough, which also means being faggot enough, Baraka attacks the too-moderate NAACP and its leader Roy Wilkins not only because of, but perhaps in part from, Wilkins’ association with Carl Van Vechten, prominent white gay patron of Harlem’s Renaissance. The speaker’s violent reaction to Wilkins and rendition of him “an eternal faggot” as involves penetrating him anally: “if I ever see roywilkins / on the sidewalks / imonna / stick half my sandal / up his / ass.” Phillip Brian Harper and others have used Baraka’s “POEM”—as well as selfsame writings which further Baraka’s definition of blackness—to show the homophobic anxieties of “Black Arts judgments [where] insufficient racial identification [was] figured specifically in terms of a failed manhood for which homosexuality, as always, was the primary signifier” (50). Far more interesting in Baraka’s “POEM,” however, is the penetrating image of Baraka-as-speaker’s sandal half-way “up [Wilkins’]/ ass.” The rape he threatens only barely conceals the “POEM”’s erotic visualization of anal sex. The exposed emphasis of “POEM”’s last lines “up his/ass” project brief, syntactic thrusts. Baraka-as-speaker’s threat is no less violent but it bespeaks a titillation. And Wilkins’ ready, bare ass is “POEM”’s final image, two lines away from any threat “half my sandal” may pose.

movement from expressive bohemianism to pragmatic cultural nationalism, and later Marxism. Sollors argues that as Jones he emulates the Beats only because he thinks his “ideal audience and target in this period is white,” and that as Baraka he writes “ethnically,” tracing his own “specific and personal espousal of ‘Blackness’” (71, 74). Thus, only for the sake of the Beats, he viewed “the outcasts of society (in the familiar catalogue from Blacks to junkies and homosexuals) as heroes [in] characteristically Bohemian inversion” (25). Even so, Sollors can find Baraka’s “revolutionary blackness” in The Toilet as well.

The Toilet’s tender ending reveals finally the heroism inspired by watching Ray “kneel[ing] before the body, weeping and cradling the head in his arms” (62). Ray never admits his love for Jimmy in front of his guys, but he does not have to. Their tender embrace shows the deep if sometimes violent bond that black queer men must forge amidst the “other selves screaming for blood” at the end of “The Alternative.” This bond remains when Ray leaves Jake in Home to Harlem. It persists at the end of Banjo, when Ray and Banjo happen upon Jake in a bar:

The boys went into the Seamen’s Bar and there was Home to Harlem Jake drinking with a seaman pal at the bar. He and Ray embraced and kissed.

“The fust time I evah French-kiss a he, chappie, but Ise so tearing mad and glad and crazy to meet you this-away again.” (292)

These “tearing mad and glad and crazy” embraces connect the black queer vernacular writers use across decades. Race ideology or Black Arts discourse may inspire (perhaps unconsciously) scholars of black literature to try to ignore these French-

kisses, but their traces remain for the discerning reader. This reader identifies these traces and finds with them queer networks of affiliation, communities of black queer writers, readers, and texts. Adapting to black queer vernacular's signifying practices comes easily. As Ray comforts Jake after Jake defends his kiss, "That's all right, Jakie, he-men and all. Stay long enough in any country and you'll get on to the ways and find them natural" (292).

Conclusion: Regarding black queer vernacular as a conversation point

“He was a tiny, little fellow. He’d sit on the couch that used to be right there”—[Herman W.] Porter gestures to the exact spot in the scrupulously tidy apartment he and his wife have occupied since 1930—“and his feet didn’t touch the floor. Maybe they still wouldn’t!

“He was writing short stories that he wanted me to see. They were lurid, I must say. And I guess I told him so. He’d come here, bringing all his material up to me to correct. He could write better than anyone in the school—from the principal on down, in my opinion. He was very shy. And apparently he lived for one thing: to write. Yah. To write.”

—Herman W. Porter remembering James Baldwin in Fern Matja Eckman’s The Furious Passage of James Baldwin (1968)

Baldwin’s former mathematics teacher at Frederick Douglass Junior High School recalls Baldwin’s petite body with a memory “undimmed,” as Eckman relates (51). She demonstrates Porter’s certain historic disposition by situating him with racial signposts: his Harvard education that could not transcend his “glowing bronze skin Caucasians pride themselves on acquiring after judicious exposure to the sun”; his service as a second lieutenant in the all-black Ninety-Second Division during World War I that netted no post-war position because, as he explains, “they didn’t know what to do with coloured officers”; and his grandparents’ birth into slavery (50, 51). That history lingers. Porter and his wife lived still in the same apartment to which the young Baldwin paid visits. It seems Porter’s couch retains Baldwin’s young impression decades later.³⁵⁹ For Baldwin, meeting Porter had an equally lasting affect on his life. At Douglass Junior High and through Porter, advisor for The Douglass Pilot, the school magazine, a young “James Baldwin had found his ‘profession,’” as

³⁵⁹ Baldwin first met Porter when he started at Douglass in the fall of 1935.

David Leeming explains. For Porter, Baldwin made it more than possible for him to run the Pilot: “I remember it as one of the finest experiences I had—because I had Jimmy Baldwin as my editor-in-chief” (51).

I start with this remembered pedagogic and literary moment in my manuscript’s conclusion to take a final, instructive look at Baldwin, the man and metonym for black queer studies with whom I begin—and the boy who, in Porter’s eyes, dangles his eleven-year-old Baldwin feet and writes “lurid” short stories. I want to look at those Douglass Junior High years from Baldwin’s perspective in Eckman’s Furious Passage. His sparse recollection coupled with former classmate Edward Carpenter’s far more evocative one reveals why those of us working in black queer studies should regard any professed biographic detail with the kind of poststructuralist skepticism that Zora Neale Hurston extols as the hieroglyphic style of black vernacular.³⁶⁰ I use Baldwin’s conspicuous refusal to elaborate in a biography throughout which he seems to have little problem doing so otherwise to comment on the assumptions made about Baldwin’s iconic, singular presence in the field. I close by thinking further about Richard Bruce Nugent’s first published poem, “Shadow” (1925) to challenge the co-called “conundrum” of rendering simultaneously racial blackness and homosexual masculinity in print. I close with Nugent’s casual publication—Langston Hughes found the poem and submitted it to Opportunity magazine for him—to demonstrate how the field of black queer studies should regard material signifying racial blackness, masculinity, and homoeroticism.

³⁶⁰ See Hurston’s “Characteristics of Negro Expression.”

Equally important to these methodologic concerns are Baldwin's scant words about Douglass Junior High, the birth of his career as a writer, and his mentoring by Porter and by New Negro poet Countée Cullen. Eckman herself complains about Baldwin's reticence with the following while articulating nonetheless the kind of black queer vernacular connections I survey and perform throughout my dissertation:

Baldwin's memory plays tricks on him. It is oddly selective, almost evasive. Of the late Countee Cullen he says, "He taught me French." And of Herman W. Porter, Baldwin observes, "He tried to teach me maths—he didn't succeed, but I thought he was a very nice man." ... Years later, in Paris, he was to acknowledge his debt to Cullen in a message to his widow. And at fourteen Baldwin voluntarily expressed his appreciation of the assistance Porter had rendered. That Jimmy Baldwin now overlook[ing] the connection of these two men with his writing, linking them only with French and the maths in which he displayed neither interest nor competence, has impressed a former classmate as "rather peculiar." (49)

Connecting young Baldwin's "French" lessons with an older Baldwin's travels to Paris where he, according to David Leeming, "settled into the bohemian life with little difficulty" provides the kind of vernacular logic that Baldwin's former classmate, Edward Carpenter, provides with a mentoring image that might seem as "peculiar" as Baldwin's fuzzy memory (59):

"We kind of looked up to this man, who had published books and who laughed easily and talked without an accent. He introduced us to the

works of Negro authors I'd never heard of before. And he wasn't afraid to touch a boy. **He'd put an arm around a boy's shoulders—boys like that**; I've learned to do the same thing myself now, as a teacher.” (50, emphasis mine)

This sort of “hands-on approach”—both Carpenter’s perhaps unconscious revelation of being “touched” by instruction and Baldwin’s refusal to acknowledge any—I have tried to emphasize throughout my manuscript. Throughout my tactile appreciation of the lexical politics of black queer vernacular I wanted to balance both the perceived availability of evidentiary experience (Carpenter’s) and the figuration of that life as a narrative to be interpreted as text (Baldwin’s). I know how difficult phrasing lives poststructurally can be in work indebted to black as well as lesbian and gay studies projects so wrought with political recognition and social respectability. To explain that conundrum, I consider Baldwin’s presence as a subject, not as an entry point for discussing casually vernacular representations of black male homoeroticism in Dwight McBride’s Baldwin thinking in his just published Why I Hate Abercrombie & Fitch: Essays on Race and Sexuality (2005).

I know that re-inscribing Baldwin’s value as a conversation point instead of as an individual can be difficult. I understand the resistance to the poststructuralist thinking that facilitates my move as much as it did the reconsideration in feminist theory that set the stage for queer theory’s suspicion of sexual identities produced by marginal or “minority” tropes. Too threatening is the concept of subjectivity over identity in a contemporary political environment discriminating still by visible somatic differences. When poststructuralist thinking evacuates the assumed self-evident of

“race,” “gender,” “sexuality,” “ethnicity,” “class,” or “nation,” among others, politically savvy writers who consider the ongoing history of material racism in the US, for example, cry foul. However befitting a rebuttal, as bell hooks explains in Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics (1990), such consternation reflects more the fear produced by “a misunderstanding of the postmodernist political project” than it does any revolutionary efficaciousness:

It never surprises me when black folks respond to the critique of essentialism, especially when it denies the validity of identity politics by saying, “Yeah, it’s easy to give up identity, when you got one.” Should we not be suspicious of postmodern critiques of the “subject” when they surface at a historical moment when many subjugated people feel themselves coming to voice for the first time. Though an apt and oftentimes appropriate comeback, it does not really intervene in the discourse in a way that alters and transforms. (28)

Such an altering intervention must tussle with an expansive and omnipotent conditioning to identify flesh categorically, however that impulse manifests itself through the ongoing project to individuate sexuality, or to characterize libidinal desire as a personal identity, whether natural or aberrantly pathological. It has been the dominant impulse of sex studies since late-nineteenth-century sexologists inaugurated, as Jeffrey Weeks explains, “the eruption into print of the speaking pervert, the individual marked, or marred, by his (or her) sexual impulses” (67). Because so many continue to vocalize sexuality in this way, a similarly speaking Baldwin seduces fantastic appreciations of his individualized experience through and beyond

publication. Embracing Baldwin as a subject, following hooks, can seem just in the face of insights from new scholarship refiguring conspicuous authors like him as texts among and alongside others by a collective of published, similarly minded wordsmiths.

For example, an extraordinary Baldwin shapes the first chapter of Dwight McBride's Why I Hate Abercrombie & Fitch and demonstrates the pitfalls of exceptionalism. In it, McBride praises "Baldwin as a kind of transition figure from that earlier generation of writers" trapped by a black respectability that disavows homosexuality in public (39-40). Because Baldwin becomes that bridge, he can provide a "usable past" for McBride to imply a genealogy for the new "critical sensibility called black queer studies" (39). For McBride, Baldwin's bounded body, his "relationship to questions of identity (both his own and his representations of it)," provides the paramount enlightenment needed to expose the "long-silent but real complexities" that Baldwin's second novel Giovanni's Room (1957) represents (41). McBride reads Giovanni's Room as a fleshly extension of Baldwin himself to retort both what he calls the "heterosexist strain" of black studies discourse that has shaped it "for as long as the study of African Americans has been of any public and institutional significance" as well as black studies' monological sense of racial literary identification (35).

In order for such a critical move to work, McBride must extract Baldwin from McBride asserts that the racial and homosexual make-up of the white male couple at the center of Giovanni's Room demonstrates Baldwin's "forward-looking, prophetic project" by frustrating the design of "protest literature" that Baldwin contested

elsewhere so famously in the work of Richard Wright (44).³⁶¹ Circumventing the conventional reflection expected in black literature undercuts the simplistic and heterosexually mimetic project facilitated by “respectability” work in black studies. So, with Giovanni’s Room as a prescient model, black queer studies’ methodological sensibility rises from a poised redress of black racial heterosexism, or “the insufficiency of a traditional African American studies”; and only with black queer studies’ “critical vogue” has the academic worth of Baldwin’s outstanding interventions come into focus (58). Tautologically, Baldwin and black queer studies triumph.

Hardly do I contest the wealth that Baldwin’s words can provide black queer studies’ pursuits. But Baldwin’s aesthetic awareness was not just his own. It interweaves his contact with others’ renditions of the panorama that the “complex fate” of US American-ness facilitates.³⁶² Baldwin himself admits he could not see “the light contained in every thing, in every surface, in every face” until he met painter Beauford Delaney (“On the painter” 45). Learning to apprehend significantly Baldwin’s place within his references requires a blind eye to the habitual story, as McBride reproduces, of Baldwin’s “exceptionalism, aberrance, difference from other black writers” (42).³⁶³ At the same time, I do not blame McBride singularly for his

³⁶¹ See Baldwin’s “Everybody’s Protest Novel” and “Alas, Poor Richard,” the latter of which collected in Nobody Knows My Name.

³⁶² See the first essay of Baldwin’s Nobody Knows My Name, “Discovery of What It Means To Be An American,” which begins with a Henry James quote about the “complex fate [it is] to be an American.”

³⁶³ McBride writes this in response to Trudier Harris’ Black Women in the Fiction of James Baldwin (1985). He finds it “interesting to observe that Harris could still note with authority ... that many read Baldwin for the ‘sensationalism’ he and his work

Baldwin thinking in Why I Hate Abercrombie & Fitch. It repeats merely a persistent argument that laments a prior silence or violence in black writing as it celebrates voices and “critical sensibilities” that can express themselves freely in print, now with scholarly help or a “critical vogue,” and apart from a backwards black studies. Isolating interventions from the knowledge project of black studies does little more than reinforce the splintering so-called heterosexists need. For example, McBride finding Baldwin so aberrant differs only in political intent from the move that *Time* magazine makes in a 17 May 1963 cover story on black-white race relations and Martin Luther King. A separate two-page insert contradistinguishes Baldwin, who is “not, by any stretch of the imagination, a Negro leader,” from King because of the former’s somatic, if erudite, homosexuality: “He is a nervous slight, almost fragile figure, filled with frets and fears. He is effeminate in manner, drinks considerably, smokes cigarettes in chains, and he often loses his audience with overblown arguments” (26). *Time* relies on and praises Baldwin’s experiential homosexuality on the page much like McBride does: “Nevertheless, in the U.S. today there is not another writer—white or black—who expresses with such poignancy and abrasiveness the dark realities of the racial ferment in North and South” (26). I include and continue to pursue McBride’s Baldwin thinking in my next paragraph only to illustrate how attractive yet distracting such Baldwin-led “progress” can be. Here, as I establish the frame for my own manuscript with this Preface, I want to consider how defining a knowledge project like black queer studies as a response to a problem or lack or

represented” (42). Yet McBride relies on the same kind of sensational Baldwin.

silence limits the kind of **openness**, if I can borrow again from Baldwin, that we working within the field should demand and find in prose and verse.

To search for black queer studies' "usable past" like McBride implies that historic renditions of a racial blackness (or Negro-ness) were not vibrantly sexual, gendered, classed, regional, or national, on their own. Praising Baldwin as he does, as proof of "the status of racial 'experience' (as an essentialist ground for knowledge) in poststructuralist discourse" announces the resistance to anti-identity thinking that characterizes so much of Why I Hate Abercrombie & Fitch (165).³⁶⁴ To build from bell hooks, "Yeah, it's hard to give up essentialized identities, even when you got the critique down." It can be so challenging that McBride refigures his editorial experiences with Black like Us: A Century of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual African American Fiction (2002). In Why I Hate Abercrombie & Fitch, he thinks back to when he and co-editors Devon Carbado and Donald Weise decided to claim "Baldwin as the first 'openly gay' black writer. That is, he was the first to talk publicly about his homosexuality and purposefully to make use of it in his fiction" (40). Not only is such a claim false, as I demonstrate throughout my manuscript; McBride's epiphanic Baldwin stands asunder from his supporting role in the explicitly intersectional approach to black queer literature presented in the introduction to Black like Us. There, Carbado, McBride, and Weise insist that their collection does not reinforce "the same disaggregated way" that scholars of black race literature appreciate it apart from the gender and sexuality discourses it shapes nonetheless (xvii). Nor do they want the

³⁶⁴ I pull this quote from McBride's chapter on Toni Morrison's essay "Unspeakable Things Unspoken," in which he rehearses the same anxiety towards poststructuralist conceptions of a racial blackness that inspires him nonetheless.

book to differentiate the same group of “great” authors over “a larger, politicized literary tradition. Almost certainly, none of these landmark authors would have wished to see their writing set above or apart from other black queer artists” (xvii).

Baldwin did not. Neither did Richard Bruce Nugent. Still, like Baldwin, Nugent serves too often as an exceptional figure in black Letters. Nugent never understood “what the fuss was about. Even today some ask him: ‘How could you write anything gay in 1926?’ His reply is “I didn’t know it was gay when I wrote it”” (Smith 214). As Charles Michael Smith explains, Nugent “wore his bohemianism and homosexuality like a badge of honor”; he felt that “everybody he met was ‘in the life,’ especially if he found them physically attractive. He [had] the belief that ‘if you can’t take me the way I am, it’s your problem. It’s certainly not mine”” (209). Far from singular, Nugent’s attitude reflects those of many black women and men “in the life.” One of whom, Nugent reveals, was the “truly named” Philander Thomas, a fellow actor Nugent met during his stint as an extra on the 1927 Broadway production of Porgy. Thomas embodied the free attitude toward sexuality, including homosexuality, found throughout Harlem’s night life. Thomas’ talent was finding “bedmates”: “People who came to Harlem did so to vent their pleasures. Everybody thought that they could and Philander saw to it that they did. ... He was much more outgoing than I. I liked his random freedom” (216).

Over the years I have worked with the “random freedom” and of philandering Thomas and Nugent in black writing, it became clearer to me that their contributions were but two made to a language and network of institutions sustaining a community “in the life.” And this community, as Nugent relates, was recognized even outside the

usual contexts: “After having sex with a sailor, [Nugent and the sailor] got into an argument in the street. ‘It was a lover’s quarrel and the policeman recognized it [as such]. The policeman arrested us both for disturbing the peace.’ He also accused them of sexual misconduct” (219). Their language, what Iceberg Slim calls “the gut idiom of the queer—the black ghetto—the deep South—the underworld” in Mama Black Widow, resounds across and beyond black literary discourse, sometimes in texts not otherwise an organic part of a black queer community (13). Nugent’s refusal to codify that “gut idiom” assures that “Smoke, Liles and Jade”—the story he discusses in the following explanation of the night he and Langston Hughes sparked the journal Fire!! in which “Smoke” smoulders—was far from marginal from the vernacular aesthetic of Harlem life:

I’ve been asked how I was able to write so openly about homosexuality in 1926, and I’ve never been able to make anybody understand that Langston and I said there should be a magazine where we could say whatever we wanted to. Harlem was very much like [Greenwich] Village. People did what they wanted to do with whom they wanted to do it. You didn’t get on the rooftops and shout, “I fucked my wife last night.” So why would you get on the roof and say, “I loved prick.” You didn’t. You just did what you wanted to do. Nobody was in the closet. There wasn’t any closet. (Kisseloff 288-289)

By professing that there was no “closet” in Harlem’s 1920s, however representative that assessment might be, Nugent illustrates that perspectives of and about homosexuality then were different than they are now, a shift that came with “the

gay activism of the late sixties and early seventies” according to black gay writer Samuel Delany (“Possibility” 204). Delany explains away Nugent’s reticence at being reclaimed as the first black gay writer:

A number of times I heard Bruce say, in passing, “I just don’t see why everyone has to be labeled. I just don’t think words like homosexual—or gay—do anything for anybody.” And I would hold my counsel and rack it up to age. But later, when young historians, like David [Levering] Lewis, Robert Hemingway, Eric Garber and half a dozen others discovered what a treasure of information and insight Bruce was (you run into his name today as a research source in practically every work on the Harlem Renaissance that gets published), it was astonishing—and warming—to watch him catch up; and indeed, to be able to provide first-hand historical insight into what is going on today thanks to his astute observations on what was going on thirty to fifty and sixty years back. (204)

Yet Nugent’s reluctance to become the black gay literary forefather comes from what he has “never been able to make anybody understand,” that homosexuality within black communities was configured differently “thirty to fifty and sixty years back.” As Jeanne Flash Gray, another resident of Harlem in the 1930s concurs, “There were many places in Harlem run by and for Black Lesbians and Gay Men, when we were still Bull Daggers and Faggots and only whites were lesbians and homosexuals” (Garber 331).

The different epistemology that black queer vernacular like “bull dagger” or “faggot” signals indicates an established dialogue that de Lauretis found nascent in 1991 when envisioning a queer theory re-assessing “male and female homosexualities—in their current sexual-political articulations of gay and lesbian sexualities, in North America” (iii). Black queer vernacular like Gray and Nugent’s during the Harlem Renaissance works like de Lauretis’ emergent queer, which “acts as an agency of social process whose mode of functioning is both interactive and yet resistant, both participatory and yet distinct, claiming at once equality and difference, demanding political representation while insisting on its material and historical specificity” (iii). De Lauretis’ interdependent-yet-distinct model provided a framework for me to recognize the body of literature I was finding. It helped me define black vernacular tropes and strategies working within, and as a part of, the larger black literary tradition. Her term “queer,” “intended to mark a certain critical distance from [‘lesbian and gay’], by now [an] established and often convenient, formula,” was often the exact term used by black writers, a word not invented by them but one in common parlance in New York City (iv). As George Chauncey explains in Gay New York, “by the 1910s and 1920s, the men who identified themselves as part of a distinct category of men primarily on the basis of their homosexual interest rather than their woman like gender status usually called themselves queer. . . . **Queer** did not presume that the men it denoted were effeminate, for many queers were repelled by the style of the fairy and his loss of manly status, and almost all were careful to distinguish themselves from such men” (15-16). “Queer” was also classed: effeminate fairies were working-class, and queers were middle class (106-108). Men used the word “queer” “because they

regarded themselves as self-evidently different from the men they usually called ‘normal.’ Some of them were unhappy with this state of affairs, but others saw themselves as ‘special’—more sophisticated, more knowing—and took pleasure in being different from the mass” (19). According to Bruce Kellner in the “Glossary of Harlem Slang” appendix to The Harlem Renaissance: A Historical Dictionary for the Era, queer has “no derogatory implication in the term during the Harlem Renaissance” (433).

The “more sophisticated, more knowing” queer argot in black writing is rooted in a black vernacular tradition already favored and “queer.” According to an anonymous essay in the January 1891 Atlantic Monthly, the “word-shadows” of black vernacular can transform into “**something queer, fanciful, and awkward**”—a move expected and celebrated (“Word Shadows” 254, emphasis mine). The essayist resolves that black vernacular bears “resemblance to the fair formation it shadows, gives to dialect writing and to dialect speech that piquant flavor that all the world favors” (254-255). An example of that “piquant flavor” is Richard Bruce Nugent’s poem “Shadow” (1925), which “Langston [Hughes] had retrieved from [my] wastebasket and [had] given to Charles S. Johnson” who published it in the May 1925 Opportunity (“You See” 268).³⁶⁵ As Nugent explains, the poem

³⁶⁵ The following is a reproduction of the poem’s original typesetting in the May 1925 Opportunity, not reproduced when “Shadow” was including in Countee Cullen’s anthology Caroling Dusk (1927), or in the recent collection of Nugent’s work, Gay Rebel of the Harlem Renaissance where “Shadow” is reproduced as a single column. In Caroling Dusk, there are stanza breaks after the bottom lines of the first two columns below. In Gay Rebel, there are no breaks.

With its original columnar typesetting, “Shadow” stanzas beg to be read in unison, with each moving from singular silhouette/shadow to contextual “shadow in the light”:

created kind of a sensation at the time. It was considered to be a race poem, although I hadn't meant it to be [. . .] I mean, here was a poem that the newspapers picked up and would . . . print it when it was necessary to say something about blacks—something good about blacks—and art and etcetera. And it got quite a bit of unwarranted acclaim. It appeared in almost every anthology of Negro poetry at the time. (268)

But Nugent intended “Shadow”’s three (un)connected, parallel stanzas of different line lengths and spacing to be “a soul-searching poem of another kind of lonesomeness, not the lonesomeness of being racially stigmatized, but otherwise stigmatized. You see, I am a homosexual” (268). Nugent’s self-effacing and his self-naming as homosexual aside,³⁶⁶ the term shadow was already a well-known racial metaphor. Du

| | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Silhouette | A silhouette am I | A shadow am I |
| | On the face of the moon | Growing in the light, |
| On the face of the moon | Lacking color | Not understood |
| | Or vivid brightness | As is the day, |
| | But defined all the clearer | But more easily seen |
| Am I. | Because | Because |
| | I am dark, | I am a shadow in the light. |
| A dark shadow in the light. | Black on the face of the moon. | |

³⁶⁶ In a 2 May 2003 conversation, Thomas H. Wirth assured me that Nugent and Locke used **homosexual** to refer to themselves. Certainly Nugent does in 1983 interviews with Wirth, one of which is published in Wirth’s Gay Rebel of the Harlem Renaissance as “You See I’m a Homosexual.” But Nugent and Locke did not use **homosexual** in letter to each other in 1928. In a letter to Locke dated “Jan 4th or 5th 1928,” Nugent inquires, “Have you read ‘The Well of Loneliness’ yet. It is a superbly written and conceived work. Almost biblical in its beauty and simplicity. Like most great things it does not preach a sermon. It merely tells its own story and in its telling

Bois uses shadows as a symbol of lingering racism and discrimination in The Souls of Black Folk; and Langston Hughes had published a poem himself called “Shadows” (1923), in which the speaker serves as a synecdochic racial representative and aspires that “We may break through the shadows, / We must find the sun.”³⁶⁷

Nugent’s use of shadow to represent both racial and sexual difference reflects Du Bois and Hughes’ racial and queer signifying, as I show in my first chapter. Their shadows illustrate the resonance of black queer vernacular not always acknowledged, but present in many contributions to black literary discourse during the 20s and 30s.

lives. So very different from most novels on **inversion**, there is nothing sensational. Merely a story of an **invert** told psychologically and incidentally with beauty and strength” (Alain Locke Papers, Box 164-75 Folder 18, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University). Nugent’s use of **invert** and **inversion** to characterize Radclyffe Hall’s classic “lesbian” novel fourteen months after his “Smoke, Lilies and Jade” was published—in which Nugent uses nothing close to **homosexual** to describe protagonist Alex or love interest Beauty—demonstrates that Nugent and Locke were knowledgeable of sexology research and terminology yet chose not to use **homosexual**. Interestingly, he also did not use **queer**, a term Hall uses in Well. Seven-year-old female protagonist Stephen Gordon falls in love with Collins, one of the housemaids, who “could not but feel a new interest in the child whom she and the cook now labeled as ‘queer,’ and Stephen basked I much surreptitious petting, and her love for Collins grew daily” (24).

A 24 January 1929 letter from Nugent to Locke further illustrates Nugent’s reticence to use **homosexual** to name his “identity.” In the letter, he discusses analyzing his life “either from the angle of a homo- or duosexual’s juxtaposition to life or an artist’s. Doubly hard and fascinating when regarded from the angle of both rolled into one. Not ego I hope to declare a definite knowledge that I **am** an artist” (Alain Locke Papers, Box 164-75 Folder 18, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University). Again, Nugent undercuts **homosexual** by using **duosexual** and asserting himself as **artist**, still another category, but one based on action (artistry) than being.

Nugent’s use of **homosexual** in 1983 and his use of homosexuality in interviews for Jeff Kisseloff’s You Must Remember This: An Oral History of Manhattan from the 1890s to World War II a few years later—almost six decades after the height of the New Negro Movement—signals but the changing times. Even so, Nugent uses **homosexual**, an antiquated term by 1983 to denote a same-sexual identity, not the word **gay** for which he had no use. Yet again, Nugent affronts identity politics organized exclusively around sexuality.

³⁶⁷ Hughes’ “Shadows” was first published in the August 1923 Crisis.

Similarly, Countée Cullen remarks rhetorically in a 30 April 1923 letter to Alain Locke that his “racial heart” is torn between two men and scared “to bend the twig the way I would have it go” with one of them.³⁶⁸ By no means do I intend Nugent’s presence at the end of this introduction to reify him as the “first” or most important black queer male writer. (In fact, “Shadow” contradicts the image so many paint of Nugent almost exploding with revelations about his homosexuality; his letters to Alain Locke show a different face to the man most described as brassy.) Nugent was not “a singular figure during the Harlem Renaissance”; he was not alone, or “the ultimate bohemian, thumbing his nose at social, political, and sexual conventions” (Garber, “Richard Bruce Nugent” 213).³⁶⁹ He was one in a “fabric of relations,” to borrow from Hortense Spillers—one often pushed to the fore by his black queer peers. “Shadow” articulates that difference with its word-shadows developing through contrast, both figuratively and literally in its competing three columns. As Nugent explains in the last column, he is “Not understood / As is the day, / But more easily seen / Because / I am a shadow in the light.”

³⁶⁸ Alain Locke Papers, Box 164-22 Folder 36, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University. In the letter, Cullen frets that “R.”—the true object of his affections—does not have the same kind of “**racial heart**”: “By all means keep a racial heart if you can do so without injury to yourself but this cannot always bedone. Do I not know it? I who wrote to you with such surety last time about R. and who are no compelled to relinquish all hope in that direction for several reasons. The first being that I am afraid to attempt to bend the twig the way I would have it go, lest **my way** be the wrong way for it. And that would be terrible. So I am going to allow it to grow at will. But there is always **D**.—You see where my racial heart has gone. You two must meet sometime.

³⁶⁹ I cite Garber here, but he is not alone in his celebration of Nugent’s “unique personal style [over] his modest literary output” (“Richard Bruce Nugent” 213).

Nugent was weary of this spotlight continually cast upon him as early as 1928, as he admits in a letter to Alain Locke postmarked 28 November:

With me they all either use without reciprocation or depend on me to create something in me for them to lean on. And it's sapping all of me away, that's all. I know I should feel it makes me stronger and I do but I want some—need something still. After all, I'm not full grown. Don't they ever realize that a prop (of nothing more than honest affection) might help me, too?³⁷⁰

Nugent's weariness continued and contributed to his suspicion at being celebrated in the 1980s. Nugent had long been lauded as a maverick who “clung so fervently, with so little pride, to Life,” as Nugent describes Ecurb Y. Drahcir—Richard Y. Bruce spelled backwards—the protagonist of “Scheme” (1936) (30).³⁷¹ Like Ecurb, Nugent was well known for “upsetting the preconceived plan of things as they should be and that was annoying, for the Plan was orderly and largely the creation of Habit” (31). In the story, Ecurb is so unconventional—even after he dies—that Death personified “relinquished him” from his breathless state, a return to life that “seized [him] with a great queerness”(31). Ecurb and Nugent's queerness was no greater than anyone else's during Harlem's New Negro movement, but Nugent's “freedom” quickly became confining, as he relates in “Who asks this thing?”: “But that I wear my heart for all to

³⁷⁰ Alain Locke Papers, Box 164-75 Folder 18, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

³⁷¹ “Scheme” was first published in the January 1936 *Challenge* under the name **Gary George—Gary and George** are the maiden names of Nugent's grandmothers. (Gary is also the first name of his brother). The story begins with a preface from the narrator who surmises that the name Ecurb Y. Drahcir is “a literary device I'm sure, for he told me that I might repeat any of his tiny tales if I did so after his manner” (30).

see / Means I am bound while he is sadly, free.”³⁷² Scholars’ continued assertions that Nugent was so different than the other black men and women “in the life” in Harlem disregards the “everyday language” of black queer vernacular, working within the oral tradition’s “fluidity and capacity for improvisation” as well as its “strategies of indirection [through its] elaborate metaphoricity” (Sundquist, Hammers 60, 62, 61).

Keeping Nugent in a queer spotlight hampers a black queer skill of reading with a fixed identity politic. “Layered, invented trust” or a “cultural style” submits to the expedience of race as a singular category and object of knowledge for black studies. It creates black queer literary historiographies of chaos and silence, like the one in Essex Hemphill’s otherwise eloquent introduction to Brother to Brother: New Writings by Black Gay Men, in which he

search[es] for evidence of things not seen, evidence of black gay experiences on record, evidence of “being” to contradict the pervasive invisibility of black gay men, [which] at times proved futile. I was often frustrated by codes of secrecy, obstructed by pretenses of discretion, or led astray by constructions of silence, constructions fabricated of illusions and perhaps cowardice. But I persevered. I continued to seek affirmation, reflection, and identity. I continued seeking the necessary historical references for my desires. (xxi)

Hemphill’s need to find that “gay men of African descent existed in literature at all” was distorted by the black queer spotlight that informs the purview of his search,

³⁷² The previously unpublished and undated poem is included in Thomas Wirth’s Gay Rebel of the Harlem Renaissance. Wirth approximates that “Who asks this thing?” was written in the late 20s to mid 30s.

“beyond the works of Baldwin and Bruce Nugent, or the closeted works of writers of the Harlem Renaissance, such as Countée Cullen, Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Alain Locke, and Wallace Thurman” (xxi). The methodological liabilities I trace in this introduction hinder the skill of reading that Hemphill’s poetry and nonfiction wield so fiercely. These liabilities render black queer vernacular “closeted” simply because it “speaks” differently.

For example, Cullen’s unrequited wish for the evening of his twentieth birthday in 1923 that he shares with Alain Locke in a letter dated the next day, 31 May, is not “silent” or “quiet” despite Cullen’s word choice: “How I wish I could have spent part of it with you and Langston in some quiet place suited for quiet talk and the silent communication of kindred spirits.”³⁷³ When Cullen did spend an evening with “kindred spirit” Hughes just over eight months later to celebrate Hughes’ twenty-second birthday, the evening inspired the following letter dated three days later, on 4 February 1924, one of many flirtatious notes Hughes sent to Locke since Cullen urged Locke to contact him: “I had been reading all your letters . . . and a sudden desire came over me to come to you then, right then, to stay with you and know you. I need to know you. But I am so stupid sometimes” (emphasis mine).³⁷⁴ Without an attuned skill of reading, however, these letters and their work fade into Harlem’s race rhetoric instead of contribute to the city’s black queer vernacular. Arnold Rampersad reads Hughes letter only as a reflection of Hughes indecision about whether he should come

³⁷³ Alain Locke Papers, Box 164-22 Folder 36, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

³⁷⁴ Alain Locke Papers, Box 164-38 Folder 5, Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, Howard University.

to Washington or return to the SS McKeesport for its next journey to Rotterdam, Holland—even though he reveals that the letter was written when Hughes “saw a fair amount of Countee Cullen,” who was “clearly interested in having an affair” with him, and when Hughes saw “Salome, controversially produced by the black Ethiopian Art Players” (Volume I 83, 66, 83).³⁷⁵

Analyses like Rampersad’s disregard the spirited syntax of black queer vernacular’s “high-faggot style,” however unintentionally, as well as the conversations held in and between black queer reading communities. Texts like Wallace Thurman’s roman-à-clef satire of Harlem’s movement, Infants of the Spring are often buried, along with the concurrent vernacular discussion of them. For example, Hemphill did not know of the novel until I had the pleasure of taking a class with him on black gay male literature in the spring of 1991 at the independently-run Washington School in Washington DC, just before Alyson published Brother to Brother. I myself had only recently discovered the roman-à-clef novel through research for my paper on Nugent, Thurman’s roommate at their notorious 267 House on West 136th Street, and later, briefly at a rooming house at 128th Street between Lenox and Fifth Avenues. I had just finished reading the cloth copy I ordered directly from AMS Press—then Infants was still out of print—which I brought for Hemphill to photocopy for the class.

Like most interested in black literary discourse, he knew Thurman as a figure of the New Negro Movement. But how would Hemphill’s introduction have changed

³⁷⁵ See Ellen McBreen’s “Biblical Gender Bending in Harlem: The Queer Performance of Nugent’s Salome” for her discussion of Nugent’s Salome series—seven plates are included in Gay Rebel of the Harlem Renaissance—inspired by “a widespread gay understanding of Oscar Wilde’s 1893 theatrical version of Salome and his characterization of her as a potent symbol for sexual transgression” (24).

if he knew about Infants, a hardly “closeted” novel as much about the racial politics informing Harlem’s renaissance as it is about its sexual politics? If he knew of Infants—with its Nugent-inspired character Paul Arbian proclaiming he did “indulge in homosexuality” and its Thurman-inspired character Raymond Taylor who admits “The girls [at school] used to shun me. The matrons were mean. **They said I was kinda queer.** I guess I was. My only recreation was to go off into the woods and read”—would Hemphill still have been “frustrated by codes of secrecy” (Thurman 47, emphasis mine; Hemphill xxi)? Or would Infants broaden his discovery of “the evidence of things [found], evidence of black gay experiences on record, [evidence of black queer reading practices,] evidence of ‘being’ to contradict the [supposed] pervasive invisibility of black gay men”? And if he were still with us today, would he not be encouraging and teaching these reading skills? Would he not tell us how to read texts the way the speaker of “Instructions for an Old Black Faggot” (1992)³⁷⁶ reads his friend: “Long ago I told you / if I were blind in both eyes /and able to hear in one ear only, / I would lay that good ear against the ground, / listen to you walking a mile away / and know by your footsteps that you’re a faggot”?

³⁷⁶ Published in Ceremonies (1992).

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