An Embarrassment of Queer Possibility:
The Black Dandy in the Harlem Renaissance Fictions of Langston Hughes, Richard Bruce Nugent, and Nella Larsen

By

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Abstract

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Dandyism is not only a praxis of representational conflict waged through sartorial aesthetics, fashion, and clothing; it is also a practice of stylistic refusal. In this dissertation, I examine the Harlem Renaissance as a site of conflict and resistance where a diverse array of collective actions produced meanings and narratives of a syncretic cultural style in direct conflict with the distortions and myths of Western racial production. In each author's readings I locate how the Black dandy indexes the notion that Black modern life was structured in and around the circulation of *affective embarrassment* and the *violence* that disciplines transgressive subjects. Consequently, I read Black dandyism as a practice of cultural syncretism that transforms into a practice that makes space for stylistic refusal and an expression of freedom.

Aside from the conflict between Harlem's subculture and a regime of anti-Black racist production, Harlem's artists were keenly aware of the tension amongst Black leaders and artists as they battled over the politics of Black representation. Harlem's Black dandies embodies both conflicts. Their extravagant style, defiant demeanor, and radical gender identities and sexual practices queer Blackness, race, gender, sexuality, and modern notions of citizenship and national belonging.

In the first chapter, I read Langston Hughes's short story "Home" as an adaptation of the tragic ending familiar to nineteenth century tragic mulatto/a narratives. In the second chapter I explore the overt expression of queer Blackness in Richard Bruce Nugent's posthumous novel, *Gentleman Jigger*. Nugent, as one of the few openly queer artists of the period, straddles a Black cultural and European decadent tradition in a thoroughly modern novel that includes a critique of the limiting forms of Blackness within the Renaissance and a critique of the violence that structures early twentieth century "white" American culture. In the third chapter's reading of Nella Larsen's *Passing,* I argue that the novel contains a rich merging of the Black dandy with the tragic mulatta, mixed race subject, and sex worker, four figures that deeply implicated and distorted conceptions of Black womanhood.

DEDICATION

To queer readers (of color)
who search archives
resurrecting (un)holy ghosts

TABLE OF CONTENTS

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Introduction: The Genealogy of the Black Dandy

In *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning: Blacks & the Regimes of Race in American Theater & Film Before World War II*, Cedric Robinson teases out the problem that surrounds representations of Black subjects in the West. Faced with a Foucaultian notion of totalizing power and its regime of truth, Robinson distinguishes between a regime's production of racial myth (e.g., the myth of the Negro) from the yet "unimagined" "historical and cultural African subject" whose virtual erasure reveals the extent and limits of a regime's efforts to maintain power and justify violence (Robinson xi). Racial regimes construct distortions of truth, racial myths, and seductive archaeologies whose appeal towards a "kind of unitarianism where *all* the relations of power collaborate in and cohabit a particular discursive or disciplinary regime" distract from locating the genealogies of resistance or the "coexistence of alternative, oppositional, or simply different relations of power" (Robinson xii). With an eye towards a materialist history, Robinson's historiography pits racial production against a genealogy of resistance that unfolds as a narrative of conflict.

Within this narrative of conflict, I aim to look at the Harlem Renaissance, not as a success or failure, but within a longer genealogy of resistance to anti-Black racial production. If the Negro, as Robinson lays out in the first chapter of *Forgeries*, is a Western invention that asserts Black inferiorization, I locate the Black dandy as an icon and emblem of Black stylistic refusal.

Dandyism is a praxis of representational conflict waged not solely through sartorial aesthetics, fashion, and clothing, but a practice which encompasses a whole range of performative "gestures…smiles and sneers," the stylistic performances that Dick Hebdige, in *Subculture: the Meaning of Style*, identifies as a subculture's appropriation of signs, performances, objects, and gestures from the dominant culture and, as in Black dandyism, are given a new meaning and performed in opposition to the dominant culture. "The meaning of subculture is, then, always in dispute, and *style* is the area in which the opposing definitions clash with dramatic force" (Hebdige 3; my emphasis). Akin to post-war Britain's youth subcultural traditions (punk and reggae) or even contemporary US hip hop culture, I define style as a discursive and aesthetic practice of resistance. Subsequently, I examine the Harlem Renaissance as a site of conflict and resistance where a diverse array of collective actions produced meanings and narratives of Black style in direct conflict with the distortions and myths of Western racial production.

The Harlem Renaissance & "Stylized Elegance"

. Centered primarily in New York, but reliant upon a network of black elite in Chicago, Philadelphia, and Washington, DC, the Harlem Renaissance was a national project that brought together several vested interests. In *When Harlem Was in Vogue*, David Levering Lewis carefully examines the period's cultural civic leaders: Charles Johnson, Casper Holstein, James Weldon Johnson, Alaine Locke, Jessie Fauset, and Walter White, who as heads of various Black civic organizations, apart from Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA-ACL), enjoyed favorable relationships with White-

American and Jewish-American philanthropists (Lewis 121). In a bid to expand their influence beyond legal decisions, political campaigns, and lobbying, Harlem's leaders leveraged their relationships to develop funds that encouraged the recruitment and promotion of a cadre of Black artists (i.e., an artistic Talented Tenth) from across the country. In "Parallels and Divergences: Assimilationist Strategies of Afro-American and Jewish Elites from 1910 to the early 1930s," makes mention of this two-part shift in strategy, one which included a "redoubled advocacy of elemental civil rights before the courts and in Congress" and a second that "harness[ed] art and literatures for civil rights" (558). However, Lewis's historiography tends to overshadow what more recent scholars such Shane Vogel in *The Scene of Harlem Cabaret: Race, Sexuality, and Performance* and Jayna Brown in "Harlem Nights: Expressive Culture, Popular Performance, and the New Negro" have identified as several Renaissances or fields of cultural production at play in Harlem, fields with contrasting strategies that exposed sometimes contrastingly different views on cultural assimilation, the ethics (or lack of) within capitalist economies' racial production, and how a troubling history of racialized sexuality permeated US American culture.

Whether one attributes the shift to Alain Locke's *The New Negro: An Interpretation* in a 1925 edition of *Survey Graphic* or Charles S. Johnson's coordinated effort to attract a cadre of younger Black through the *Opportunity* prizes, a strategy adopted by other journals and institutions, this coordinate strategy helped to usher in what Shane Vogel refers to as the Cabaret School of younger Harlem artists whose outspoken skepticism to the heteronormative dimensions of bourgeois cultural uplift and affiliation with Carl Van Vechten was characterized as a wave of decadence made possible, in W. E. B. Dubois's harsh estimation, by a renewed exploitation of Black representation or the elements of primitivism and exoticism Du Bois espied in the "Negro vogue" (Vogel 2).

But, as George Hutchinson examines in his detailed historiography *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White,* Harlem leaders like Alain Locke and Charles S. Johnson were keenly aware of the politics involved in Harlem's cultural representation. Instead, Hutchinson identifies evolving notions of cultural assimilation, influenced chiefly by anthropologist Franz Boas, that saw Black leaders across the nation shift their thinking about the role of Black cultural within American national identity. Thus, while Du Bois, as editor of the NAACP's *The Crisis* magazine called for art to serve as propaganda for a Black nationalist agenda, Charles S. Johnson as editor of the National Urban League's magazine, *Opportunity,* "regarded the aims of the Negro renaissance to be integration, even 'assimilation,' which should assure the just operation of democratic government" where assimilation is defined as "an assimilation of separate groups to one another, rather than black culture being 'assimilated' to an Anglo norm" (Hutchinson 179). Accordingly, Johnson "was not only seeking integration through art but also seeking to create a national New Negro community" (Hutchinson 180). It's here where I locate the cultural syncretism, a term I borrow from Monica Miller's *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity*, to describe the Cabaret School's approach, who would find a warmer under reception Charles S. Johnson's and Alain Locke's editorships. In his explication of how this segment of Renaissance leaders, editors, and artists navigated the perils of exploitation associated with primitivism, Hutchinson writes:

> *Opportunity* criticism drew a distinction between respecting black folklore as a basis of American art and extolling the exotically 'primitive.' This distinction corresponded to the distinction between Franz Boas' interests in classical African civilizations, on the one hand, and the ecstatic, Bergson- and Freud-inspired

> fantasies of de Zayas and other 'high modernists.' Here, in fact, is one of the most significant homologies of the Harlem Renaissance; for the interest in a particularized and historicized yet respectful revaluation of African cultures went along with an attitude towards the African American 'folk' that resisted their enshrinement as exotic 'others,' drawing attention to historical experience in America as determinant of a specially 'native' American/Negro cultural matrix. In tension with the exotic primitivism that conflated African American with African identity was a more carefully contextualized, historical understanding of both the 'folk' and of African peoples. Those who approached the relationship between African and African American cultures from this standpoint argued for study of the African past and engagement with current African struggles as part of a program for the modernist reconstitution of sundered identity and for political solidarity against racist oppression.
>
> (Hutchison 183)

Hutchinson's careful delineation of the forms of cultural assimilation practiced by more liberal wings of the Renaissance, and even the more conservative, anti-decadent campaign waged by Du Bois in *The Crisis*, were partially in response to a wave of anti-immigrant, anti-Semitic, and anti-Black racism that had culminated in the passage of the Immigration Act of 1924 (the Johnson-reed Act), a victory for nativist and white supremacist lobbyists, including the Ku Klux Klan.

Amidst this climate, the Cabaret School's battle over Black representation was doubly burdened by several contemporary tensions and historical burdens. As Harlem became a site of fine art and performance, Black members of the diaspora were keenly aware that their bodies and deportment were always already surveilled through the same logics of white supremacy that had long invented the Negro.

As I will argue in the remainder of this introduction, Black identity was continually articulated through the same problematic frame throughout West: (1) as poorly imitative of European styles rather than as culturally syncretic of African and European styles; (2) through a white policing gaze and violence that gendered Black sartorial expression, and specifically Black dandies, as sexually depraved and socially disruptive, particularly in the antebellum South and Jacksonian era race riots in Northern cities; and (3) through the distorted framing of blackface minstrelsy which competed for authorship over authentic expressions of indigenous Black style.

The History of the Dandy and its Relationship to Racial Production

Modern scholarship on the dandy generally agrees that the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries inaugurated a turning point in Western fashion, a shift that coincided with a wave of democratic revolutions that privileged the West's middle class with inalienable rights. A subculture of Western European male fashionistas emerged who adopted the sartorial fashions of the aristocratic class, both in defiance of the *ancien regime* and the increasing mechanization and commodification of middle-class life. Consequently, fashion served as both *expressive* of this universal right and *formative* of middle-class aspiration.

However, scholars disagree on (1) the subversive potential of the dandy's stylistic refusal and (2) the location of the dandy's origin. Did the figure emerge solely in Western Europe or is dandyism a universal practice present in both the empire's home countries and its colonies? Considering the expansion of European imperialism and the contradictions of representational democracy, how did the dandy signify on these contradictions? How did the cult of literary dandyism, in which writers and artists depicted or were creatively inspired by the lives of (in)famous dandies and dandyish practices, further inspire a subculture of resistance expressed through style?

Ellen Moir's seminal 1960 study, *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm* acknowledges the dandy's ambivalent reception: the dandy's extravagance nostalgically appealed to a threatened aristocratic class while the dandy's penchant for self-fashioning and individualism appealed to an increasingly emboldened middle class. Additionally, as Rhonda Garelick argues in a study of the dandy's relationship to *fin de siecle* celebrity culture, "the crucial and irresolvable complexity at the root of dandyism is that dandies are both real historic people and literary heroes" (Garelick 6). Regency era aesthete and dandy-par-excellence, George "Beau" Brummell, traditionally considered the first dandy, would inspire two quasi-non-fictional monographs (Captain William Jesse's 1843 biography which would further inspire Barbey d'Aurevilly's essay published the same year *Du Dandysme et de George Brummell)*; both of which, in turn, inspired a wave of "dandyist novelists, continuing the cyclical merging of life and literature" (Garelick 6). However, Moer's textual evidence solely centers the nineteenth century English and French dandiacal and anti-dandiacal literature.

By opening a line of historiography that finds dandyism in non-Western locales or in Europe's subcultures, a second wave of dandyism scholarship eschews the dandy's ambivalent reception in favor of reading for the figure's radical potential for women, queer subjects, and/or people of color. In scholarship as wide-ranging as Monica Miller's *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity*, Ellen Crowell's *The Dandy in Irish and American Southern Fiction,* Jessica Feldman's *Gender on the Divide: The Dandy in Modernist Literature*, Elisa Glick's *Materializing Queer Desire: Oscar Wilde to Andy Warhol*, Rhonda K. Garelick's *Rising Star: Dandyism, Gender, and Performance in the Fin de Siecle,* and Susan Fillin-Yeh's anthology *Dandies: Fashion and Finesse in Art and Culture*, the "de-centralized" dandy becomes "less a product of a particular time or place" and "ultimately identifiable, for Feldman, as 'neither spirit nor flesh, nature nor artifice, ethical nor aesthetic, active nor passive, male nor female. He is the figure who casts into doubt, even while he underscores, the very binary oppositions by which his cultures lives" (Crowell 24 quoting Feldman 4). While Ellen Crowell notes that Jessica Feldman's "all-encompassing negation" of definition "risks meaninglessness," the clarification proves helpful in articulating culturally specific research on the dandy's significance, inside and outside of Western European. For Crowell that includes the dandy's performance of "aristocratic drag" in the "transatlantic dialogue between Ireland and the South coalescing around questions of power, supremacy, and gentility" (3).

Additionally, and much to the dismay of Elisa Glick, while scholars of decentralized dandyism use this critical break to examine culturally specific genealogies of colonialism's subcultures, in so doing, they tend to oversimplify the efficacy of transformative politics and the relationship between regimes of power and resistance. As Sara Ahmed questions in a deft reading of Nella Larsen's *Passing*:

> I do think there is a failure to theorize, not the potential for any system to become destabilized, but the means by which relations of power are secured, paradoxically, *through this very process of destabilization* (we all know, I think, how the language of crisis is managed by a conservative politics). How are differences that threaten the system recuperated? How do ambiguous bodies get read in a way which further supports the enunciative power of those who are telling the difference? In what ways is 'passing' implicated in the very discourse around tellable differences? How are social identities fixed and secured?
>
> (Ahmed 88-89)

Does the dandy's singularly, extravagant style reinforce the *ancien regime*'s hierarchy or subvert it? Scholars of the decentralized dandy tend to read it as a figure of contradiction and subsequently fail to theorize about its transformative politics. For example, in *Materializing Queer Desire*, Glick bemoans the "simultaneous positioning of the queer subject as a privileged emblem of the modern and as a dissident in revolt against modern society" within recent gay and lesbian studies. Instead of resolving this ambivalence, Glick claims "the queer dandy becomes a privileged emblem of the modern by incorporating contradictions that are specific to the internal relations of both capitalism and modernity" where "the lesbian and the male homosexual are depicted as, on the one hand, distinctly modern subversions of sex and gender norms and, on the other, as subjects who stand in opposition to the industrialization and commodification of modern life" (Glick 5-6). Whereas, in *Slaves to Fashion*, Monica Miller reads the Black dandy's stylistic refusal as an ontological performance of Black diasporic identity. Miller's genealogy of the Black dandy reveals a process of re-appropriation in which diasporic Black subjects in the West have sought to reassert control over their representation by contesting the racial regime's myths of Black inferiority. Although, to maintain the argument's position, Miller, too, demands that dandyism shoulder several responsibilities:

> The dandyism practiced is both personal and political, about individual image and group regard, and begs to be read from both an intraracial and interracial perspective. Stylin' out, like any performative act, needs an actor and an audience; the audience can be anything from oneself in a mirror to fellow strollers on Harlem's 125th Street to the international media. The messages sent out by the black well-dressed must be interpreted by their viewers; black dandyism takes on meaning as black style communicates moments of mobility and fixity, depending on who is looking.
>
> (Miller 3)

Under Miller's formulation, Black subjects are always dandies, living a DuBoisian double consciousness. To substantiate the thesis, Miller's genealogy is not a narrative of conflict between a racial regime and a Black radical aesthetic tradition, rather *Slaves to Fashion*, for the most part, reconstructs a narrative of Black male resistance. Consequently, Miller engages with the problem of an unimagined, erased, or distorted history, "the history of black dandyism is less well known. The history begins in part with the contact between Africans and Europeans that initiated the trade in slaves" (Miller 3).

I do not want to diminish the importance of genealogical studies which aim to recover decentralized dandyism, particularly Black dandyism, as these scholars' s works lay bare "the memory of hostile encounters which even up to this day have been confined to the margins of knowledge," as Foucault articulates in his definition and defense of *genealogy* (Foucault 83). However, if style is a site of conflict, how do forms of stylistic refusal evolve within a longer history of contestation? Is style produced before conflict and/or in reaction to conflict? How does a genealogy of Black dandyism reveal measure the broad reaches of regime power and its claims towards truth?

Cedric Robinson's Genealogy: "the [English] Invention of the Negro" and *Othello*

Within the genealogy of diasporic African culture in the West, Cedric Robinson acknowledges that historians tend to focus on the African slave trade as the "singular historical event" within a narrative of racial production in which race is narrowly defined as "phenotypic" difference. For Robinson, the encounter between Africans and Europeans is not limited to the Atlantic slave trade, rather, a materialist and historicist reading of English history reveals that the "cultural manufacture of the Negro from the commercial materialities of slavery trumped the earlier and more diverse signification of blackness" in Europe, particularly the depiction of Moors (Robinson 6-7):

> Moreover, the treatment of the Moor was merely an aspect of an Elizabethan racial kaleidoscope, which, as G. K. Hunter states, was an "England-centered, intellectual pattern of European races." In other words, according to the propagandists of the sixteenth century, English national identity could most effectively be gauged by *stereotypic difference*—what present-day scholars sometimes refer to as "the Other." The Irish, the Scots, the Welsh, the inhabitants of the Low Countries, the French, and the Italians "were normally seen as absurd deviations from an English norm." And with respect to the Moors, the Turks, and the Jews, drawing on medieval legend and theology which informed a division between Christian, pagan, and satanic, the point of critical differentiation was not generally who was human but who was evil. While the Europeans were "failed Englishmen" to the nationalist scholars of the Henrician and Elizabethan eras, the Moors, the Jews, and the Turks were enemies of Christ.
>
> (Robinson 12-13; my emphasis)

To reiterate, while both Miller and Robinson's projects rely on historical revisionism, Robinson does not restrict self-fashioning to a radical figure like the dandy. Self-fashioning is a national project that regimes employ as a form of racial production that creates *myths* about their own histories and *myths* about the other, as well. In a reading of Shakespeare's *Othello*, Robinson finds a chaotic history of racial production in which the Moor is transformed into the invented Negro and where this stereotypic invention serves to counter distinguish a newly created white English national identity from the identity of racial capitalism's exploited Black other. Allow me to briefly rehearse Robinson's genealogy of Elizabethan and imperial racial production, as it

demonstrates three significant stages in the racial regime's project: (1) the regime's deployment of ***racial production*** that transforms real historical identities into mythic racial distortions or "fragments of the real," a process that "masquerad[es] as memory and the immutable," (2) the inevitable ***resistance*** to racial regimes which reveal the regime's "discoverable history" and the true nature of its "social relations," and (3) the resulting effort towards ***regime maintenance*** in the wake of regime collapse, where the technologies and sciences of the regime evolve and are employed to reassert domination under new rationales.

In a chapter entitled "The Invention of the Negro" Robinson reads Shakespeare's *Othello* and discourse about the Moor as the catalyst of English imperial racial production. However, as I previously stated, Robinson argues that the Atlantic slave trade was not a singular historical event, for England, like other cultures, had long incorporated enslavement:

> Elizabethan England hosted an emporium of postmedieval cultures embedded with the factors of enslavement. The Romans had taken slaves among the Britons; later the Vikings and Anglo-Saxons had initiated a slave trade of Celts (the Welsh and the Irish). The Vikings had similarly victimized the Anglo-Saxons, and the Danes colonized much of the north and east of Old England, establishing Danelaw…. And then in the mid-eleventh century the Norman ferment (Flemish, Breton, Poitevin, Dane, etc.) did the same. And while slavery declined among the English, the Welsh, and the Scots, it was not eliminated. Not much later, the Irish were colonized and submitted to forced labor by the Anglo-Normans, and so on…. The slaves from Africa who appeared in England in the sixteenth century, then, were hardly a phenomenon divorced from the social history of the British Isles. As it were, they were unusual neither in form nor in substance…. All of them had been appropriated as labor power, and many of them had been relocated great distances in order to plug labor shortages in the hinterland of the European peninsula or in some colony or other of enterprising merchants or ruling classes.
>
> (Robinson 8)

Instead, Robinson finds "African mercenaries had served with the Roman army at the beginning of the Christian era, and as late as the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Black mercenaries were serving in Scotland and England along with African court musicians, entertainers, and domestic servants. And the Moor was familiar enough as a cultural code to inhabit the imaginary and nightmares (and dreams?) of Elizabeth men and women" (Robinson 9).

But beginning with Queen Elizabeth, Robinson notes a shift in the regime's treatment of Black subjects, although an ambivalent one. While Elizabethan and her father had "brought Blacks into court for entertainment and service," as a "supporter of the English slave trade, she was more directly responsible for the too numerous Blacks 'firmly ensconced in Britain's houses, streets, and ports and portrayed on its stages' during her reign," a dissatisfaction that resulted in edicts in 1596 and 1601 that demanded the expulsion of Black subjects (Robinson 10). How do we make sense of Elizabeth's reversal in light of the state's celebration of Moorish mercenaries such as Peter Negro, a mercenary who "had fought with the English against the Scots in the mid-sixteenth century" and who, "during the reign of her half-brother, Edward VI (b. 1537, r. 1547-53)...the actual ruler, Edward Seymour (Duke of Somerset), [was] awarded a knighthood and a pension" (Robinson 11).

I find Robinson's mention of Peter Negro's exceptionalism noteworthy for our discussion of Black dandyism. Whether Peter Negro is the same as Peter Moryen who also served "in the court of James IV," according to Imtiaz Habib's essay "*Othello,* Sir Peter Negro, and the Blacks of Early Modern England," his resemblance to *Othello* is remarkable. By employing the figure of a celebrated Moorish mercenary, *Othello* the play and Othello the Moor "mirro[r] the changing signification of Blacks" (Robinson 15-16). If, as Baudelaire famously argues, the dandy appears during times of political instability, the tale of a decorated Moorish mercenary, a prototypical foreign military dandy, problematizes how race functions to demarcate privilege, rights, and freedom. How do we make sense of this second ambivalence? How does *Othello* provide evidence of the chaotic production of race?

The Moor served a particular function in Elizabethan drama, as "allegorical morality plays were gradually displaced by secular, mimetic plays" such that

> Vice (representing lust, greed, lasciviousness, etc.) of the prior venue was supplanted by the villain, a human character who embodied the evil designs and deceitful maneuvers and machinations of its predecessor. It appears entirely predictable that alongside the Jew, the "Negro Moor," whose physical blackness reinscribed medieval Manichaean color aesthetics, would occur to some playwrights as a perfect stage villain.
>
> (Robinson 16)

Shakespeare, "one of those Englishmen who took the task of the 'writing of England,'" and for whom the "history play, a new form barely off the ground when Shakespeare raised it to classical heights…mimicked the civil attitudes of the monarchy and the middling bureaucracy," including the shift in attitudes towards Black subjects in the West (Robinson 15-16). As such, *Othello* is a strange exception which Robinson contextualizes within a changing racial regime:

> *Othello* (1604) coincides with a very different political and cultural era: in 1603 James VI of Scotland became James I (1603–25), and his wife, Princess Anne of Denmark, reigned as his queen. The old queen's [Elizabeth's] death had occasioned an official ban on stage plays, and the new king, in a concession to the City of London authorities and the onset of the plague, had abolished all troupes of players…[But] on May 17, 1603, the king ordered two warrants for the appointment of Shakespeare's company as the King's Men.
>
> (Robinson 17-18)

Robinson further contextualizes *Othello* as a product Queen Anne's fascination with blackness as the play appears within a triptych of court performances from November 1, 1604 to January 6, 1605 alongside *Measure for Measure* on December 26, 1604 and a masque entitled the *Masque of Blacknesse*, a commission and collaboration "with Ben Johnson (scriptwriter) and Inigo Jones (set designer)...in which she and her ladies-in-waiting appeared as actors in blackface" (Robinson 20). Noting the "scandalness of the affair," Robinson, quoting F.G. Butler's commentary, notes:

> For Butler, the provocation against and subversion of such notions of blackness was the exact purpose of the work: "that the Court itself—in the person of the

> Queen (who inspired the theme) and who, with her ladies, acted the black parts, is challenging the rigid conventional equation of blackness and ugliness, of light and beauty, and not only by their black disguise, but by certain very cogent arguments advanced in the course of Jonson's fable."
>
> (Robinson 21)

Shakespeare also, Robinson argues "wove oppositional racial discourses into the fabric of *Othello*" and the "subversive placement of these discourses raised questions about the emergent racial conceits of the post-Elizabethan era, questions which were progressively obliterated as the century unfolded" (Robinson 22-23). *Othello* not only exemplifies how the history of the Moor is transformed into the myth of the Negro (or how the English elite invented the Negro to justify their involvement in the Atlantic slave trade), but with Iago's antagonisms placed front and center, the play also lays bare the psychic disturbances of white racism, whether English, Italian, or otherwise. As racial production works to obscure, distort, and erase the real history of social relations, *Othello* functioned to challenge this erasure by highlighting European debt to Moorish influence:

> Moorish armies, Moorish governors, Moorish scientists, mathematicians, poets, historians, inventors, philosophers, architects, and academics had achieved the most profound impacts on European societies and cultures for nearly a millennium between the European Dark Ages and the Late Middle Ages. The Moors had conquered Spain in the eighth century.
>
> (Robinson 25)

Or, quoting José Pimienta-Bey, Robinson adds that few of "European historians of the modern period and their readers… 'ha[d] ever heard of the scientific Renaissance in Europe which took place during the 'medieval' era, in the 12th and 13th centuries. In my opinion, this is intentional. Behind Europe's 'Scientific Enlightenment,' we find many African Muslims. In fact, we find that the very foundation and structure of 'Western' Science and Academe is built upon the erudition of these people known as the Moors" (Robinson 25-26).

If this prolonged explication of Robinson's argument is not convincing enough, his reading of Iago's "manipulations" and "two lies, both of which he knows are false…Desdemona's adultery…Othello's subhumanity" grounds the play's opening act. Desdemona's father succumbs to racial paranoia (read: fear of miscegenation) "imagining, 'seeing' a horrifying rape," a familiar form of white sexual anxiety which Robinson claims, "anticipat[es]" the "political fear which would ravage Reconstruction America" (Robinson 27). I argue further that Shakespeare's use of a Black dandy indexes the anxieties of white racism, as both historical distortions and racialized, sexual anxieties about the privileges and freedoms of white manhood and English national identity within an emergent imperial project.

Two important points remain to be articulated. While Shakespeare's *Othello* served as a challenge to the regime's racial production and its invention of the Negro, in a form of *regime maintenance*, English critics would continue to dismiss the play's efforts to depict the anti-black racism upon which imperial social relations depended. Highlighting noted English critic Thomas Rymer's absurd disavowal of the presence and contributions of Moorish culture, "a racial arrogance which by the late seventeenth century had become epidemic in English legal, social, and cultural affairs," Robinson argues that Rhymer's writing coincides with "substantial slave

trading and slave exploitation by [the] English…in the Caribbean at Santa Catarina and Barbados" (Robinson 31). British "agents of capitalist agriculture…experimented with labor recruits from Britain, Europe, the Americas, and Africa" which would eventually lead to "extensive trading of African slaves and dependence on slave production" (Robinson 32). To justify an English expansion of slavery, colonial laws emerged to govern its laborers, "entire legal codes were being altered to accommodate the new organism, the white race":

> After 1660, a number of laws were passed that provided a window into the colony's troubling relationship with slavery and slaves. In 1662, a law was passed preventing a child from inheriting the father's status if the mother was a "negro woman"; in 1667, another law prevented baptism from freeing "slaves by birth"; in 1680, a law was passed "for preventing Negroes Insurrections"; in 1692, another to aid "the more speedy prosecution of slaves committing Capitall Crimes" established special courts for slave trials. Each of these laws, as well as those passed to regulate the civil rights of free Blacks (in 1668, a new law made free Black women but not other women subject to poll tax; in 1670, another forbid Christian Blacks from purchasing Christian servants; in 1691, another banished from the colony anyone involved in interracial marriage) marked a crossroads.
>
> (Robinson 33 quoting Robinson's *Black Movement in America*)

Significantly, the criteria for freedom/unfreedom evolved, ignoring religious or class status to rely upon skin color as the sole marker of difference. Furthermore, in a move that resonates with the fears of miscegenation in *Othello*, Robinson draws reader's attention to the language in colonial Maryland's General Assembly, quoted from Alex Lubin's *Romance and Rights: The Politics of Interracial Intimacy, 1945-1954*:

> And forasmuch as divers freeborn English women, forgetful of their free condition, and to the disgrace of our nation, do intermarry with Negro slaves, by which also divers suits may arise, touching the issue of such women, and a great damage doth befall the master of such Negroes, for preservation wherof for deterring such freeborn women from such shameful matches, be it enacted: That whatsoever free-born women shall intermarry with any slave, from and after the last day of the present assembly, shall serve the master of such slave during the life of her husband; and that all the issues of such free-born women, so married, shall be slaves as their father were . . . And be it further enacted: That all the issues of English, or other free-born women that have already married Negroes, shall serve the master of their parents, till they be thirty years of age and no longer.
>
> (Robinson 34)

Both Rymer's disavowal and English colonial law, taken together, serve as forms of regime maintenance or ideological responses to the type of challenges to racial production that Shakespeare's *Othello* dramatizes. Not content to simply expel Black subjects from the mother country, England's production of racial demarcations through white (wo)manhood, regardless of their class or religious status, exhibits the extent to which the regime will go to maintain power.

This preoccupation with racialized sexuality, articulated as anxieties about miscegenation as evident in both *Othello* and the colonial legal language, will, as I shall argue, reoccur throughout US American history. In readings of Harlem Renaissance literature, the Black dandy's presence, indexes this often-disavowed genealogy and distorted history of racialized sexuality.

The Anti-Slavery Resistance Movement & the Semiotic Dialectic of the Negro

Secondly, Robinson's historiography continues to chronicle the resistance to slavery and the slave trade, noting (1) the resistance or "rebellions by servants, Blacks, and Indian slaves" in the colonies during the seventeenth eighteenth centuries, (2) the anti-slavery and abolition movements in Britain and the United States, and (3) the "semiotic dialectic of the Negro" (Robinson 37). It is this last point which I find apropos to this investigation of the Black dandy since Robinson's historiography draws from similar source material and/or historical events as Monica Miller's project in *Slaves to Fashion*, Shane and Graham White's history of Black style, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit*, and Eric Lott's study of early blackface minstrelsy and the evolution of its many types, including the Zip Coon, in *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class.* Chiefly, I am concerned with foregrounding the methods and terms of this "semiotic dialectic of the Negro" or representational conflict that diasporic Africans in the West, particularly African Americans, engaged through self-fashioning and stylistic refusal, or, to articulate this question in Robinson's terms, how Black diasporic people in the West counter and resist distortions of the regime's racial production.

This is precisely where the historical record, including Robinson's historiography, is unclear about the Black dandy's origins. But, as I surmise from the scholars, the image of the Black dandy (i.e., the free Black subject/the fugitive/the Black rebel leader) is intimately tied to the image of the enslaved. In discussing the eighteenth century "semiotic dialectic of the Negro," a discourse that lives in the shadow of the contradictions between the Enlightenment, French Revolution, and slave rebellions in the colonies, Robinson draws readers' attention to the power of the British anti-slavery's propaganda machine, specifically the seal created by Josiah Wedgwood, member of the Committee for the Abolition of the Slave Trade [also known as the London Committee] (Robinson 41). Quoting from J.R. Oldenfield's *Popular Politics and the British Anti-Slavery*, the seal "depict[ed] a kneeling slave together with the motto 'Am I not a Man and a Brother?'" (Robinson 41):

> The seal was then reproduced, in the hundreds of thousands, in the forms of medallions, pendants, cameras, token, pennies, halfpennies, and prints. And the following year, this image as powerfully complemented by a second image in the form of the plan and sections of a slave ship…. These *representations of Blacks, either in naturalist or allegorical style,* would migrate across the Atlantic and become two of the dominant images of abolitionism in the United States. And in England, as Oldfield recounts, these depictions were augmented by paintings and engravings (for instance, George Morland's *Execrable Human Traffic,* 1788, and *African Hospitality*, 1791), which were reproduced in prints, books, children's literature, and a host of artifacts ranging from ceramics and rally banners to satirical cartoons.

(Robinson 41-42, my emphasis)

The seal, Robinson argues, circulates within "the moral, political, and popular arenas" of the transatlantic along with "example after example of Black nobility" which posed "questions of slavery and humanity of Africans" that were instigated by the "rebellions of slaves in St. Domingue in 1791, and then the sweep of Caribbean revolts associated with French republicanism after 1796" (Robinson 42). In a further example of the power of the representational force of these images juxtaposed to the lived reality, British forces in the West Indies, whose "mission was to safeguard" slaveholding interests (and the "715,000 slaves in the British Caribbean") would encounter "several Black rebels…on islands like Guadeloupe, St. Vincent, St. Lucia, and Grenada" although "there was no more heroic figure than that of St. Domingue's Toussaint L'Ouverture" (Robinson 42). If the British elite had been fed Rymer's denial of Black humanity through a renunciation of Othello's heroic service to the state, then the ghost of Othello emerged in the real Toussaint L'Ouverture, a proto-military dandy, threatening to wreak havoc on Western Europe's colonial empires and expose Western democracy's contradictions.

It is the goal of this study to speculate on the semiotic force of the style adopted by figures such as L'Ouverture, the spectacularity and extravagance which provided a strong counter to the efforts of the racial regime to construct various distortions or myths of the Negro. In *Slaves to Fashion*, Monica Miller offers a parallel genealogy of this "semiotic dialectic of the Negro," a genealogy that accounts for the power of the black dandy's stylistic refusal. I aim to use Miller and Robinson's historiography to recuperate a broader origin of the dandy and its style, where stylistic refusal emerges as a quotidian form available for all Black subjects to enter the public arena and engage in overt and covert forms of resistance to a racial regime.

The Case of the Louis Soubise (the Black Swell of London) vs. Mungo Macaroni

Slaves to Fashion identifies the *black swell* as the English black dandy's predecessor. Displayed alongside objects of wealth in public royal pageants and private homes, the swell or "[enslaved] black boys and black men," were outfitted in costume, considered "luxury items," and "collected like any other signifier of wealth and status…evidencing the fact of their status as commodities subject to the whims of fashion" (Miller 48). The black swells proximity to the "real material" of prestige and luxury, Miller argues, made Black self-fashioning and re-invention possible, as was the case of England's most famous black" fop," Julius Soubise, the "constant companion" of Catherine Hyde Douglas, duchess of Queensbury (Miller 58). Miller's example of the *black swell* and case study of Julius Soubise transforms the contradiction of property wearing its own property, reifying its owner doubly over, into a narrative of Black self-fashioning where the duchess of Queensbury bucked the trend of sending aged-out black men back to the colonies. Instead, considering Soubise as a quasi-adopted son, she manumitted him, had him "educated,", and had him "outfitted in the latest fashions of dress" (Miller 61). Julius comes of age in London in the guise of a gentleman. I say guise because Soubise, "never really a servant but not literally or properly entitled to the life of the leisure class," lived in the shadow of

a contradiction (Miller 61). If his blackness did not tokenize him as uniquely visible, his luxurious fashion and training as a gentleman made him hyper-visible.

But, as Miller chronicles, Soubise faced another more daunting problem. In a print from 1772, he was mockingly depicted as "*the* 'Mungo Macaroni," a reference to the comic blackface servant, Mungo, from the wildly popular 1768 play *The Padlock,* "a comic opera written by Isaac Bickstaffe with a libretto by Charles Dibdin" (Miller 28-30). *The Padlock,* which by the following year crossed the Atlantic where it "opened in nearly all of the major colonial cities," had the effect of inventing the Negro, or as Miller writes, "[t]he black image precedes the black man in England, as the stage actually introduced black people to English audiences long before they met them in person" (41).

However, Cedric Robinson's historiography should invite us to take issue with Miller's claim. Black representation—whether authentic or distorted—was continually contested, and racial regimes work to obscure their own histories of social relations. However, Miller's claim, supported by a reading of Anthony Gerard Barthelemey's *The Representation of Blacks in English Drama from Shakespeare to Southerne*, reminds us of the vast power and chaotic dissemination of racial production. Whether initiated by the ruling classes or adopted by the ideological apparatuses that supported the slave trade, Black inferiorization was of chief importance to the creation of a Western white national identity. Consequently, Soubise's attire as a gentleman, including his education and occupation as a fencing instructor, served as a stark contradiction to this myth.

Despite the over-reaching claim, Miller juxtaposes the success of *The Padlock* in both Britain and colonial America to other forms of Black self-fashioning, suggesting that Black diasporic communities in Western Europe and its colonies had long developed covert and overt means to create a subcultural identity in defiance of the forms of inferiorization that slavery and the slave trade compelled.

I have twice now used the terms covert/overt to distinguish Black agency and presencing, terms which, in my estimation, acknowledge how Black subjects in the West, whether free, fugitive, or enslaved, were continually denied a privacy or a public. As the case of Soubise illustrates, even the private construction of his own identity (i.e., his self-fashioning) was circumscribed by the duchess of Queensbury's decision to free him/adopt him. Furthermore, as the public comparison ridiculing Soubise as the "Mungo Macaroni" illustrates, his self-fashioning mattered little and became a point of contestation, since the stereotype of Blackness had far greater semiotic power and necessitated further efforts by Soubise.

Miller finds the same dynamics at work in colonial America and its subsequent shift into an independent nation. While readers are familiar with the power of blackface minstrelsy to serve as an ideological and cultural engine for the construction of myth and distortions of Black subjectivity, Miller points to recent historiographies that reveal the influence of *festivals of misrule* in colonial America, historiographies that help us further understand how Black subjectivity would later be framed by white anxiety in the Northern antebellum stage (i.e. early blackface minstrelsy), the violent attacks on free Black communities in the North during the same period, and depictions of Black style and fugitivity in runaway advertisements, and depictions of African diasporic cultural practices in the South. I want to further contextualize this history with Michael Zakim's *Ready-Made Democracy: A History of Men's Dress in the American Republic, 1760-1860* which gives us a sense of the contradictions within the sartorial value system that emerged as the United States transitioned from a colony to a nation, a value system that gendered and racialized fashion. Consequently, Black subjects were placed "at the

center of a debate about Americanness and its intersection with race and class identity, styles of masculinity and sexuality" (Miller 81). (Additionally, although Miller focuses solely on definitions of black dandyism as a performance of masculinity, Black women, femininity, and queerness has a significant place in this history, a significance I will elucidate in the next section of this introduction.)

Racial Regime Maintenance: Policing the Boundaries of Nationhood with Social Embarrassment & Violence

In colonial American, the stage version of the black dandy was depicted as a comic manservant or buffoonish Negro. Its arrival was concurrent with the enslaved Black's appropriation of public festivals which often included extravagant displays of syncretic culture—blending West African rituals within the framework of European-inspired colonial holidays. Citing "Pinkster and Negro Election Day, [which] featured Northern parades and dances of [en]slave[d] [subjects] dressed to the nines in clothing normally reserved for their social and racial betters,' "Jonkonnu (John Canoe) festivals in the South and Caribbean," and "festivities associated with Afro-Cuban Kings in Cuba and Kings of Congo in Brazil," these *festivals of misrule* were notable for the temporary role reversal of social status (Miller 82). Thus, when plays such as *The Padlock* transferred to the colonies, the success of its depiction of Mungo was already linked to a fascination with the syncretic blending of West African and European cultural expression. Furthermore, the presence of an extravagantly attired Black male was the center of these carnivalesque celebrations.

In a footnote in which Miller lists a number of sources used to provide "excellent archival research and cogent arguments concerning the cultural context in which these festivals took place" Miller defends the distinct importance of *Slaves to Fashion'*s argument: "none of these historians have yet to understand how this process of play with clothing, in the days before minstrelsy, might have influenced the representation of dandies and the black middle class in later nineteenth-century literature" (Miller 31; footnote no. 26). While I generally find no fault in most of Miller's argument, I am also interested in Sara Ahmed's call to theorize the "relations of power" and the "process of destabilization," especially in light of the well documented history of nineteenth century blackface minstrelsy and the appearance of the Black dandy (Zip Coon/Jim Dandy/Long Tail Blue) on its stages. If Miller's historiography of black dandyism reads blackface minstrelsy as a form of regime maintenance, to re-appropriate Black style from its own spaces of syncretic style and resistance, then what ruptures and destabilization had Africans and African Americans created through their reappropriation of these once European-inspired celebrations? When and why was the incorporation of this cultural syncretism deemed a threat to the regime's racial production considering the colony's shift to an independent nation? And, with a nod toward Ahmed's question, how were Black identities fixed, secured, and contested through these social activities?

Miller's claims inspired me to review a few of her sources, including Shane White and Graham White's *Stylin',* specifically its readings of Black style and fashion within the framework of white anxiety and Shane White's essays that chronicle these New England festivals of misrule (Election Day, Pinkster, and General Training) with a mind towards contextualizing the festivals within an early American history of fashion and its racial and

gendered signification. Zakim's historiography provides further elucidation on the racial and gendered signification of fashion in the early decades of the republic and how ridiculing Black sartorial style and public performances became a cultural phenomenon in service of the regime's ideological conception of race. Lastly, I return to an investigation of two accounts of race riots in Emma Jones Lapsansky's essay "'Since They Got Those Separate Churches': Afro-Americans and Racism in Jacksonian Philadelphia" and Eric Lott's analysis of the 1834 Bowery race riots, both of which scapegoated and violently attacked Black dandies, with an eye towards the forms of discourse around miscegenation and racialized sexuality that were used to rationalize the antebellum wave of anti-black violence.

In "'It Was a Proud Day': African Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1741-1834," Shane White acknowledges that his research was instigated (and "haunted") by the stories of the violent death of the black sailor, William Read, who, in retaliation for being refused permission "to go ashore" and celebrate Election Day in Boston harbor on Monday June 2, 1817, "fired a shot point-blank into several tightly packed barrels of gunpowder wrapped in woolen cloth" resulting in an explosion that "lifted the quarterdeck to a great height in the air, drove out the ship's quarters and stern, threw the mizzenmast against the main yard, and set the *Canton-Packet* on fire." Summarizing the various sources, White reports that "most of the crew…sustained only minor injuries" but Read "died in the explosion" (White 13).

Shortly thereafter, Read's act was infamously memorialized in a denigrating ditty, a piece of doggerel poetry that is but one of several "*surviving* stories" about the Black presence in these festivals. I am interested in how these "*surviving* stories" worked to distort the memories of Black stylistic refusal, embarrassingly portraying Black appropriation of the festivals of misrule as precursors to the violent discipline of Black freedoms and cultural agency. William Read was not the only Black festival participant remembered and associated with the festivals. While Miller excellently recalls that the colonial-era festivals "were presided over by a governor or king who was often himself ''African-born or of verifiable African lineage,'" such as "the most famous Pinkster king, Old King Charles or Charley, an African from Angola, at Pinkster celebrations in Albany in the early 1800s," (85) Shane White detects a different framing of these memories. Note the juxtaposition in their respective historiographies.

In *Slaves to Fashion,* we are invited to imagine the extravagance and syncretic creativity of Black style through the rich detail of King Charley's attire, which

> consisted of a British brigadier's broadcloth scarlet jacket, covered in bright gold lace and reaching almost to his heels, fresh and new yellow buckskin smallclothes, blue stockings, highly burnished silver buckles on well-blackened shoes, and a three-cornered cocked hat trimmed with gold lace. His carefully constructed, and to whites outrageous, appearance was an act of cultural bricolage, the imaginative mediation of an African-born slave in a new, European-dominated environment. As such, it aptly captured the timbre of these northern festivals.
>
> (White 22)

King Charley's attire, a form of "cultural *bricolage*," as Shane White and Graham White speculate in *Stylin'*, may have had its roots in the "'visual aliveness and vibrancy" adopted by the Mande culture of West Africa whose "deliberate clash not only between colors but also between the variously patterned and unpatterned narrow strips" of cloth was "distinguishable by

deliberate clashing of high affect colors." Indeed, the "juxtaposition of colors…was not accidental" (23). Or, as they offer in another possible theory, enslaved Africans were known to wear "clothing in the context of another set of values…as the African elite happily appropriate[d] items of European clothing" (17). What had been framed as "outrageous" by white observers was simply a long tradition of cultural syncretism or dandyism, Miller argues.

However, as a testament to the chaotic production of race, two opposing memories of King Charley emerge in the archives. *Slaves to Fashion* and Shane White's "'It Was a Proud Day'" include an illustration entitled "An Election Parade of a Negro Governor," by H.P. Arms from the June 1899 issue of *Connecticut Magazine,* in which three Black men parade down a colonial street, riding horses, dress in European attire including top hats, while a racially mixed group of onlookers stands to the side. It's an incredible image from a much later period in the nation's history that purports with Miller's project. However, White is far more skeptical and contextualizes the image within a different memory of King Charles, one in which the festival's Black king is ridiculed, denigrated, and embarrassed as a fearful drunk. "Similar stories about New England kings and governors abounded," White adds:

> The selection of such stories that has survived…reveals a white discomfort with the idea of African Americans as leaders, even of their own people, an inability to take black aspirations seriously. It also demonstrates how such attitudes had become inextricably tied up with the minstrel show, one of the most important cultural developments of the nineteenth century. The intermingling happened in two ways. First, many of the constitutive elements of the minstrel show may have had their origins in white observations of northern black culture, particularly as displayed in the slave festivals and, later in the nineteenth century, in the cities. Consider, for example, the minstrel show's stump speech, one of the genre's central attractions and distinguishing characteristics, in which the star performer gave a disquisition, loaded with malapropisms and ludicrous verbosity, often on some contemporary issue…these goings-on were not entirely serious; they were tinged with burlesque, as blacks lampooned whites. Minstrel's stump speech may have been a white parody of blacks who were already parodying whites, a pattern replicated in other cultural crossovers [like the cakewalk as Stephen Best argues in *The Fugitive's Properties: Law and the Poetics of Possession*].
>
> Second, even if the speculation is not correct, the minstrel show was such a ubiquitous and important institution that it shaped the way whites looked at blacks. That shaping was particularly important in the present case because most testimony used in this analysis of the northern black festivals was written long after the event…. Moreover, some stories told about the festivals could have come straight from a minstrel show script.
>
> (White 25-27)

The importance of Miller's reading should not be understated. By reading between the lines of these stories, framed by white anxiety about not only Black leadership but Black freedoms, *Slaves to Fashion* reconstructs how Black agency and stylistic refusal signifies. But White is haunted by the relationship between the memories of Black stylistic refusal and an anxious archive, since, in one sense, the image of Black defiance is distorted and transformed into one of

cowardice. Arguably, these festivals contained an air of ambivalence that, as is the custom of the European festival of misrule, was eventually resolved. The effect is to uphold and re-affirm power since the *festivals of misrule* were not construed solely as occasions for the underclass to enjoy license but also occasions for a return to normalcy. As Shane White notes in "Pinkster: Afro-Dutch Syncretization in New York City and the Hudson Valley,"

> There can be little doubt that such activities were New World descendants of the rituals associated with the festivals of misrule, or the world turned upside down, analyzed so ably by historians of Early Modern Europe such as Natalie Zemon Davis (1975), Peter Burke (1978) and Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie (1981). For a short period, those at the bottom of the social hierarchy—the young, women, apprentices and in the case of Albany, the slaves—reversed their lowly status and lack of power. On Pinkster Hill, and, immediately preceding and after the festival, on the streets of Albany, an African-born slave assumed the position and the authority normally accorded only to the local patroon. Temporarily, the constrictions of an ordered society were loosened, a transformation all the more striking when the most important divisions in the social structure were racial.
>
> (White, 70)

Miller and White ask that we contend with two different historical transformations. In *Slaves to Fashion,* that shift pertains to the distortions that transform the syncretic culture and stylistic refusals of Black participation in colonial era festivals into the denigrating depiction of Black culture into the embarrassing and violent characterizations in blackface minstrelsy. To substantiate the claim, Miller points to a number of stage plays, novels, and caricatures from the early half of the nineteenth century that employ the black dandy as a means to ridicule Black freedom, such as Edward Clay's *Life in Philadelphia* series that ridicule Black cultural life, such as Black balls, civic organizing, and leisure activities like shopping; minstrel songs like Barney Burns's "Long Tail Blue" or George Dixon's "Zip Coon"; and Bostonian broadsides ("Bobalition") which adopted buffoonish language to ridicule African American parades and speeches commemorating emancipation; or fictional servants and tragicomic slaves such as Babo in Herman Melville's "Benito Cereno," Adolph in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, or Sandy in Charles Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition*.

But, as I argue, we should also appreciate Shane White's skepticism because the archive also contains those forgeries of memory and meaning which evidence a white anxiety that transformed into social embarrassment, violence, and the distortions that have come to signify Western regimes' racial production. Consequently, regime maintenance, as it adapts to new technologies and cultural forms is also defined by a social embarrassment and violence that disciplines the disruptions and contestations of its power.

The Black Dandy's Contradictions and the Racialized Sexual Economy

While I have carefully laid out a brief history of Black syncretic culture and the subsequent reactions and pushbacks, the forgeries of memory and meaning that distort the

history of Black culture that preceded blackface minstrelsy, I want to briefly turn to the history of fashion and how it signified as racialized and gendered code, for as the history attests, race and gender became interwoven in the national vernacular of sartorial signification.

Fashion historian Michael Zakim documents the colonial era's predilection for a "home-spun" clothing aesthetic in *Ready-Made Democracy.* Born out of dissatisfaction with the exploitative economic nature endemic to colonial relationships (which often included legal prohibitions that stifled colonial manufacturing industries to encourage the colony's consumption of refined European goods), colonial leaders encouraged homespun industries centered around the patriarchal family unit. Family farms were encouraged to grow their own materials in a lengthy, eighteen-month, vertically integrated process that included cultivating flax and cotton, refining the raw materials, and manufacturing clothes. The home-spun clothing movement produced aesthetically modest fashion which was tied to civic virtue. This practice did not work as neatly as intended. While it encouraged a nascent colonial textile industry, centered, and symbolized by modesty and the home, it also freed up funds for continued importation of British fine textiles and goods. Regardless of the contradiction, American colonial style was defined by a modest aesthetic that symbolized civic mindedness. (Zakim 1-6; 11-17).

While Zakim makes little mention of how this modest, civic-minded aesthetic enslaved peoples, both White and White's and Zakim's texts reveal the extent to which sumptuary laws signaled a hierarchy of status in which the enslaved was expected to dress in clothing suitable to its station. Consequently, when enslaved, fugitive, or free black subjects were found to adorn themselves in extravagant fashion, the remarkable reversal rarely escaped notice and provoked anxiety, if not outright violence.

That anxiety extends into many of the runaway slave advertisements which inform portions of White and White's *Stylin'*. Aside from advertisements that note a fugitive's penchant for fancy clothes or even clothing theft, these descriptions also reveal the adoption of clothing reward systems to "create a clear-cut slave hierarchy. Favorite slaves, black slave drivers, domestic slaves, and those who have been particularly productive picking cotton for example [were] encouraged by a system of rewards that often-included items of clothing, both hand-me-downs and the garments" (White and White 27). Aside from this reward system, White and White also document anxious white observations that denigrate enslaved African Americans' participation in fancy dress balls, complete with clothing and carriages, as a form of mimicry which could "provoke...feelings of bemusement and contempt" (White and White 28).

As one would expect in a slavocracy, the clothing reward system would run afoul of efforts to enforce sumptuary laws that dictated the type of clothing and fabric that enslaved peoples should wear. The contradiction reveals the extent to which anxieties about Black subjects who exercised forms of autonomy, particularly the adoption of luxurious clothing, was simply the cover for a racialized sexual economy.

In Charlestown alone, White and White note mid- and late-eighteenth century anxiety about the reversal of expectations concerning Black and white fashion, with the colony going so far as to dictate, in the Negro Act of 1734, further stipulations about race and fashion. Furthermore, in a 1744 Grand Jury complaint, the archives note that "clothing restrictions were being ignored," with attention paid to the suspicion that "'Negro Women in particular [did] not restrain themselves in the Cloathing as the Law requires, but dress[ed] in Apparel quite gay and beyond their condition'" (White and White 16). Additional commentary from "a quarter of a century later," the historians add, reveals the target of the law, with a "'Stranger' lament[ing] that 'many of the *Female* Slaves [are] by far more *elegantly* dressed, than the Generality of *White*

Women below Affluence,' a state of affairs which he attributed to 'scandalous *Intimacy*' between the 'Sexes of different Colours.'" (White and White 16)

By the nineteenth century these coded references to sex work, sexual assault, and rape, all of which comprise the racialized sexual economy, contrast the more overt discussions and rationale for violence in Northern anti-abolitionist riots in which both black male dandies and white urban factory owners, who tended to champion the abolitionist cause, became the targets of ridicule and violence.

In fact, the terms "dandy" and "dandizette" appear as pejoratives in at least one account to denote Black sartorial transgression in Northern free African American communities, especially in the rationale for anti-black violence. Eric Lott provides an insightful reading of New York's 1834 Bowery race riot—a riot that actually encompassed three separate disturbances that coalesced and culminated in the Bowery Theater with a rendition of "Zip Coon" (Lott 135-137). Emma Jones Lapsansky provides a historical revision of the anti-black race riots of 1830's and 1840's Philadelphia. In both cities, the dandy and black middle class sartorial expression became a prime target for white ridicule and violence (Lott 135; Lapsansky 62).

While blackface minstrelsy relied upon sketches and songs about hypersexualized Black male dandies whose desires for Black women could potentially spill over the racial lines and, consequently, must be violently disciplined and contained, Lapsansky and Lott note that amalgamation fears combine "portions of a larger issue, that of blacks' rising aspiration and designs for upward mobility that threatened to jostle the established social order" (Lapsansky 62). Supporting the claim, Lapsansky provides an excerpt from an 1830's white Philadelphia historian, who writes:

> In the olden time, dressy blacks and dandy coloured beaux and belles, as we now see them issuing from their proper churches, were quite unknown. Their aspirations and little vanities have been growing since they got those separate churches. Once they submitted to the appellation of servants, blacks, or negroes, but now they require to be called coloured people, and among themselves, their common call of salutation is--gentleman and ladies.
>
> (Lapsansky 62)

But, perhaps, there are two separate but interrelated discourses in the archives—one which pertains to a general white anxiety about the overt performance of Black freedom in public spaces, which comes with its own sense of embarrassment and ridicule for the apparent disregard for the social codes that increasingly governed racial relations during the early decades of the nation, and another which pertains to the often disavowed racialized, sexual economy. In both instances, the Black dandy, a Black body adorned in the trappings of a wealthy white (or even European) fashion—whether male or female—points to an ambivalence and contradiction in a democratic society. (It's worth noting that the discourse over the tragic mulatto/a figure, often feminized, according to Philip Brian Harper, indexes a past violation, an often disavowed or covert history of sexual assault in which Black women have been victimized.)

The scapegoating of a hypersexualized Black male dandy evinces a psychic ambivalence often on display in homoerotic, cross-racial performances of the blackface minstrel stage, where white working-class men can both inhabit the Black dandy's hypersexualized body (a distortion, of course) and simultaneously violently discipline that hypersexualized body. (Such an analysis

would be in line with the forms of psychic ambivalence Eric Lott reads in several early blackface minstrel songs and playlets in *Love and Theft*.)

However, I suspect that the discourse on the Black racial passing subject has absorbed both discourses into one body. Tracking all three of these figures (the Black dandy, the tragic mulatto/a, and the racial passing subject) is beyond the scope of this project, but I want to briefly touch on the history of these figures in nineteenth century US American culture with the hopes that the discussion forefronts the concerns taken up by Harlem Renaissance artists who employ and queer the Black dandy in their early twentieth century works.

The Tragic Mulatto/a and the Black Dandy in the 19th Century Racialized Sexual Economy

In Cedric Robinson's discussion of the "narrative of the imaging of Blacks in film," he challenges Donald Bogle's claims in *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies & Buck*. Noting an inaccuracy in Bogle's historiography, Robinson claims "the images he identified have different histories: for example, the buck long antedates the Atlantic slave trade (recall Shakespeare's Othello); and the mulatto, or more precisely, the mulatto would make her appearance in American popular culture in the first quarter of the nineteenth century" (Robinson 86). Citing Joseph R. Roach's performance analysis of the New Orleans' slave auction in "Slave Spectacles and Tragic Octoroons: A Cultural Genealogy of Antebellum Performance," Robinson directs readers towards the distortions of racial production that have proliferated and evolved through US American history. While Roach describes the New Orleans "slave auction" as a performative arena complete with "music, dance, and semi-nudity…a performance genre, [it] might be said to have anticipated the development of the American music comedy…certainly…the black-faced Minstrel show," it was the "'fancy-girl' auctions [with] their sale of Quadroons (one-quarter African descended females), and Octoroons (one-eighth African) [which] proved an exceptionally popular New Orleans speciality" (Roach 174).

Having already pointed to (1) evidence of mid-eighteenth century white citizens' anxiety-ridden reports of "elegantly dressed" "Female Slaves" in Charlestown, South Carolina whose sartorial style exceeded that of "the Generality of White Women below Affluence," (2) the colonial South Carolina's Negro Act of 1734, that had sought to delineate colonial sumptuary laws, (3) the continued contradictions between other colonial sumptuary laws and illicit clothing reward systems, I surmise that—in these instances—clothing indicates the existence of an overlapping racialized sexual economy that was always integrated into slavocracies. New Orleans was not a special case nor an exception.

Within the West, the mixed-race Black enslaved subject came to evidence this economy; however, the gendering of the mixed-race enslaved subject became a point of contestation within abolitionist, anti-abolitionist, and pro-slavery camps. Earlier, Robinson's insightful historiography noted how nineteenth century abolitionists first deployed the mulatto/a in its propaganda:

> But eighty years earlier, when the icon was a piece of the abolitionist insurgency, the mulatto, more specifically the mulatta, had constituted an attempt to signify the humanity of the slave. And through the artifice of the mulatta's resemblance

> to a white woman, the icon also raised the moral stock of the Black woman. The mulatta displaced the Jezebel, the Black, amoral seductress already present in Southern white consciousness, marketing a mixture of tragedy, white aesthetics, and romance in lieu of the image of Black female depravity, adultery, and social ostracism. Defending this mechanism against 'modern Pro-Negro commentators,' Jules Zanger referred to the propaganda value embedded in the construct of the 'tragic octoroon' (or quadroon, or mulatta), which condemned the slaveholders for the prostitution of Black women and the marketing of their own children.
>
> (Robinson 54)

In response, the mulatto/a was re-appropriated by anti-abolitionists and pro-slavery defenders' (e.g., the "Copperheads of the Northern and loyal slave states") whose Civil War era "racist propaganda" included several "grotesque Black caricatures," (Robinson 55). However, the scapegoating of well-dressed middle class Black subjects (dandies) and the violence attended on antebellum Black communities in Northern cities (New York, Philadelphia, and Boston) identified by both Lapsansky and Lott, indicates how the disavowal of slavery's racialized sexual economy sought to configure the Black subject as the sexual perpetrator that must be violently disciplined, whether in the North or the South. Within this chaotic racial production, the mixed-race Black subject (mulatto/a) began to merge with the Black dandy/dandizette, as charges of "amalgamation" and "miscegenation" were levied against both icons.

Furthermore, within this merging, as Monica Miller argues in a reading of James Weldon Johnson's early twentieth century novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (published anonymously in 1912 and re-issued in 1927 with Johnson's name), we find the "dynamism between dandyism and the deconstruction of race," represented as a form of dandyism and racial passing by a mixed-race subject that can potentially destabilize or, at the very least, queer the violently guarded boundaries of identity—racial, gendered, sexual, among others.

Thus, if the mulatto/a is the child of and index to slavery's sexual violence between white men and enslaved Black women, a paradox or contradiction to slavery's desire for clearly demarcated racial boundaries, how does the Black dandy's cultural syncretism signify in the same cultural milieu? To answer that question, several Harlem Renaissance artists seized upon the (Black) dandy, and at times merged this culturally ambiguous icon with the mulatto/a and racial passing subject, to disentangle the distortions from the real.

Reading Black Dandyism in Harlem Renaissance Literature

I locate the black dandy in the literature of three authors from the Harlem Renaissance. In the first chapter, I read two short stories ("Passing" and "Home) from Langston Hughes's short story collection *The Ways of White Folk*, published in 1934, with a particular focus on "Home" as an adaptation of the tragic ending familiar to nineteenth century tragic mulatto/a narratives. As a touring jazz musician familiar with European classical music, Roy's cultural knowledge is read as curiously suspicious by white residents of his hometown in Hopkinsville, Missouri. When combined with the trope of hypersexuality, Roy's cultural knowledge, a form of decadence, becomes evidence of a larger problem that must be violently excised from the national fabric.

With the aid of Sara Ahmed's essay on passing, "'She'll Wake Up One of These Days and Find She's Turned into a Nigger' Passing through Hybridity," I argue that the Cabaret School of Harlem Renaissance artists were eager to defamiliarize their readers from traditional tropes of black fiction in which racial passing was conceived through a racial binarism. In this queering of black identity, the black dandy becomes a much more flexible figure for portraying the intersectional nature of identity. However, in Hughes's short story, the Black dandy is not the only figure that's queered. As we shall see in the other texts I examine, black dandyism has a relationship to sex work, as well. The result produces a sense of estrangement and defamiliarization, as the scenes of interracial desire confirm the violence that regulate Black lives but also the affective embarrassment that structures interracial relations, as well.

This queering of the black dandy finds its fullest, overt expression in Richard Bruce Nugent's posthumous novel, *Gentleman Jigger*. Nugent, as one of the few openly queer artists of the period, straddles a black cultural and European decadent tradition in a thoroughly modern novel that includes a critique of the limiting forms of Blackness within the Renaissance and a critique of the violence that structures early twentieth century "white" American culture. As the novel's main character, Stuartt Brennan, moves from Harlem to Greenwich Village to Chicago and back again to Harlem, passing becomes a means towards understanding the forms of identity projection that others attach to Stuartt, whereas the decadent-dandy tradition gives Stuartt a means in which to disidentify with the forms of racialized sexuality that pervade the urban milieu.

As I also noticed in Hughes's work, Nugent is also concerned with sex work and black/white sexual relations such that desire becomes queered whenever subjects cross racial boundaries. As a result, the novel fleshes out how the boundaries of race, gender, sex, and class collapses onto each other in uncomfortable and unsettling ways for twentieth-century readers. As a posthumous novel published in 2002 but written in the 1930s, Nugent's work anticipates an on-going discourse around racialized sexuality that has not been thoroughly investigated nor understood by scholars and lay readers. While the passing subject works to obscure its own pre-passing identity and, consequently, its history, Nugent's Black dandy embodies a multitude of positions and produces a discursive field that is managed by our internalized notions of racial embarrassment, sexual shame, and regards for the violence that structures power relations.

Lastly, in a reading of Nella Larsen's *Passing* I argue that the novel contains a rich merging of the Black dandy with the tragic mulatta, mixed race subject, and sex worker, four figures that deeply implicated and distorted conceptions of Black womanhood. Instead of taking a position in the debates about the efficacy of racial passing to dismantle these racialized identity categories, I look to the gendered and racialized history of US American fashion and the rise of the department store as a space for female identification and desire—two histories that complicate our understanding of how black people used the contradictions in clothing and commodity fetishism to queer racial identification and desire.

In each author's readings I locate how the Black dandy indexes the notion that Black modern life was structured in and around the circulation of affective embarrassment, as black people navigated the strange contradictions of a disavowed presence. The dandy, tending towards stylized elegance as a means of refusal, becomes a figure that brings this contradiction to the forefront. And while dandyism as a practice is not wholly dissimilar to racial passing, it cannot always dismantle or unfix the boundaries and binarisms that structure race, which is also to say that violence is a product of the power that regulates subjects within a racial regime. But within this literature, it can produce an instability that allows readers to imagine race differently

and reveal a history of social relations that have long included Black style as a means of resistance and agency.

Chapter One: Langston Hughes's Tragic Black Dandy

By tracing four hundred years of conflict over the invention of the "Negro," I have argued that an African presence predated the distortion or myth of Blackness. Nevertheless, US American and English transatlantic racial regimes, among others, were keen to create and distinguish their own racial identities (whiteness) from the exploited other to justify their fiduciary reliance on slavery. Before the invention of the Negro, the African, specifically a Moorish presence, influenced Europe. While slavery may have brought Africans to Europe and its colonies, those enslaved peoples brought with them syncretic cultural practices or adopted cultural syncretism which, when contested by racial regimes, occasioned the transformation of those syncretic practices into expressions of freedom and stylistic resistance. This history of Black dandyism has been erased or hidden by the regime's chaotic racial production, which makes the deployment of Black dandy characters in Harlem Renaissance texts evidence of a tradition of Black resistance.

By the 1920s the "late" Harlem Renaissance artists of the Cabaret School found themselves caught between competing strategies of cultural assimilationism that dictated how race functioned within a larger national identity made more difficult by a resurgence of white supremacy that espoused anti-immigrant sentiment, anti-black racism, and anti-Semitism. In fiction that centered Black dandy characters whose stylistic refusal referenced elements of European decadence, the Cabaret School positioned themselves in opposition to a DuBoisian camp of criticism that faulted their capitulations to the exploitative elements of the Negro vogue. In fact, while Du Bois was truly worried about the economic and political position of the Negro, so too were the Cabaret School. Their work never shied away from centering working-class African diasporic cultural traditions which resulted in further distinguishing the cultural origins of African diasporic identity and its fundamental place within indigenous or "native" US American cultural historiography.

In "Home," the third story in T*he Ways of White Folks*, Langston Hughes deepens the stakes of the cultural debate by merging African American jazz tradition with the French *flaneur* in Roy, the story's main character, who returns home from a European tour with a mysterious illness. Instead of distancing African American and US-American cultural traditions from Western European traditions, which would amount to a capitulation to Du Bois's attacks on the Cabaret School's turn to decadence, Hughes's Black dandy probes the cultural ties that bind:

> Roy was passing lots of people now in the brightness of the main street…. Some of the people stopped to stare and grin at the flare of the European coat on his slender brown body. Spats and a cane on a young nigger in Hopkinsville, Missouri!
>
> (Hughes 46)

Here "nigger" stings, and I want to spend a considerable amount of time unpacking how these *scenes of embarrassment* circulate *affect* throughout both of Hughes's texts. But in this brief example we find a pattern in Hughes's storytelling in "Home"—tension builds whenever

Hopkinsville's white onlookers disparage Roy's syncretic blending of modern cultures (i.e., cosmopolitan dandyism): when Roy initially arrives home, during two musical performances, and in this final scene as he partakes in an evening stroll. The text's depiction of Roy's dandyism, juxtaposing "the European coat" against "his slender brown body," helps us precisely register the terms of white anxiety as ethno-nationalist, historical, and racial. How can an African American jazz musician from a rural US American town become the heir of a (white) European cultural tradition? The denigration that follows is not simply a knee-jerk reaction but part and parcel of a larger programmatic regime maintenance: one that upholds anti-black violence (social affective embarrassment and lynching) to discipline wayward subjects. Consequently, in the text's depiction of the Black dandy's cultural syncretism as modern and cosmopolitan, Hughes casts US American anti-black racism as uncivilized and anti-modern and as a form of violence that stands in the way of democratic progress.

In the readings that follow I argue that the intersectional nature of the Black dandy's cultural syncretism proves a much more compelling and complicated figure, in its intersectionality, on which to index the debates within the Harlem Renaissance concerning cultural assimilationism. Furthermore, by juxtaposing a narrative of racial passing (in "Passing") against a tragic narrative of Black dandyism ("in "Home"), Hughes's challenges readers to witness the mechanisms of cultural negotiation that African diasporic subjects navigate amidst forms of retaliatory social embarrassment and state-sanctioned anti-Black violence.

The Limits of "Passing"

I was initially drawn to "Home," and the short story that follows, "Passing," because of the remarkable difference in how each story juxtaposes secrecy, silence, and omission ("Home") against the confessional mode ("Passing"). In "Home" Roy returns to the US to succumb to an illness whose affect is registered as a "sadness" and whose symptoms include a nagging, hemorrhaging cough that lasts for two to three years, slowly draining Roy of his vitality. Without the means to name the infection, the text provides a number of clues as possible sites of contagion but more broadly holds out the possibility that his sojourn in Europe and proximity to European culture (i.e., decadence) is the true source of contagion. For the reader, the text's refusal to name the illness reads as a narratorial secret, a mystery that naggingly pulls at our consciousness and invites our speculation.

But in "Passing" Hughes's pulls back the veil of mystery on the racial passing subject/tragic mulatto, and, like other Renaissance writers, upends the nineteenth century *tragic mulatto* tradition. Much like the confessional mode in James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*, "Passing" reads as a confessional tale but told in an epistolary form. From the beginning of the text, the effect invites the reader to witness Jack's secret shame and the *raison d'etre* for the letter:

> Dear Ma,
>
> I felt like a dog, passing you downtown last night and not speaking to you. You were great, though. Didn't give a sign that you even knew me, let alone I was your son. If I hadn't had the girl with me, Ma, we might have talked. I'm not as scared as I used to be about somebody taking me for colored anymore just

> because I'm seen talking on the street to a Negro. I guess in looks I'm sort of suspect-proof, anyway.
>
> (Hughes 51)

Jack's recent public encounter with his non-passing mother, an encounter which resulted in feigning complete ignorance of their relationship, catalyzes a narrative in which *embarrassment* and the *fear of embarrassment* circulate between the letter's author (Jack) and reader (his Ma) and between the text and the reader. Jack's confession works as an apology, but in the ambiguous and contradictory sense of the word—an admission of guilt filled with regret *and* a rhetorical justification. But, since the narrative is limited by the epistolary form, readers can only imagine through Jack's anticipation his Ma's response. As a result, I argue, the narrative structures the reader in Jack's mother's place, and, in our capacity as passive bearers of his confession, we must sit uneasily with the embarrassment, shame, and guilt that he wishes to unburden. Additionally, for Hughes, the tragedy may lie in Jack's final admission. Now that he's decided to permanently pass for white, "why think about race any more?" (53). Ironically, his letter is evidence to the contrary.

In this context, Jack's decision to permanently pass and move to the "North side" of Chicago also works as a form of double embarrassment. While doing so may help him to avoid the sort of embarrassingly awkward encounters that have structured his childhood, his relationship with his darker skinned siblings, and the sort of awkwardly embarrassing encounters that prompted his letter (i.e., fear of *racial embarrassment*), he unwittingly must live with the ever-present threat of detection (i.e., fear of *racialized violence*).

The result awkwardly positions readers as empathetic to a racial passing subject whose life has been marred by a series of racial (mis)readings: "You remember what a hard time I use to have in school trying to convince teachers I was really colored. Sometimes, even after they met you, my mother, they wouldn't believe it. They just thought I had a mulatto mammy, I guess" (Hughes 51). Ironically, Jack continues to rely upon misreadings to purchase his own safety at the expense of his family ties.

In *Bad Form: Social Mistakes and the Nineteenth-Century Novel,* Kent Puckett argues for the "relationship between the social mistake, the omnisciently narrated-nineteenth century novel, and [it]s bourgeois social order," where the novel functions to reveal how "mistakes make us embarrassed, and embarrassment, it seems can make us talk" (3). Surprisingly, in "Passing" the absence of an omniscient narrator works to foster and circulate embarrassment because US American readers will have already been accustomed to the vectors of power that target wayward and transgressive subjects and discipline them through violence. In which case, the evacuation of Hughes's narratorial voice in "Passing" and Jack's fear of embarrassment invites readers to feel differently, or even ambivalently, about how racial production structures our empathetic response to the reading.

Consequently, readers may be left to shuffle between *empathy* and sympathy, empathic responses which Rowland S. Miller distinguishes in his research on embarrassment:

> Gruen and Mendelsohn (1986) have recently distinguished between empathy, an emotional response in which an observer shares another person's affect, and sympathy, wherein an observer responds with compassion and concern for another's plight. The two are often correlated, and both are likely affected by

> situational and personality influences. For instance, a series of studies by Stotland (1969) has shown that observers are more affected by others' experiences, physiologically and subjectively, when they are asked to *concentrate on the others' feelings* than when they are simply asked to watch the others' behavior. Similarly, Krebs (1975) showed that observers were more influenced by an actor's pain or pleasure *the more similar they were to the actor*. Thus, emotional responses to others' experiences are clearly *affected by the observer's perspective toward, cognitive appraisal of, and identification with those others, and all of these are manipulabl*e (e.g., Coke, Batson, & McDavis, 1978).
>
> …
>
> In any case, whatever the source of a particular empathic response, these studies show that it is possible for observers to be emotionally affected by exposure to the emotions of others. And Gruen and Mendelsohn's (1986) distinction between sympathy and empathy suggests that those who witness another's embarrassment may not only feel sorry for the abashed other person but may be embarrassed by the other's predicament as well.
>
> (Miller, "Empathic Embarrassment: Situational and Personal Determinants of Reactions to the Embarrassment of Another," 1062)

I am convinced that Hughes has created the means for an empathic reader response and identification with both Jack and his Ma; although, I read Jack's ironic missteps towards understanding how race operates within the racial pass as a dangerous naivete that may have more to do with the trauma of his youth rather than wisdom gain from experience.

Nevertheless, noting the differences between he and his sibling's skin color, Jack's skin color places him squarely in the path of the ethnically ambiguous racial subject and tragic mulatto—unfairly caught between two seemingly disparate racial communities. And, as a result, readers, too, are caught with Jack, unable to resolve the tension between his earnest desire for safety and love and the price he must pay for it. Such is the limit of the racial passing narrative.

Harlem Renaissance literature, not unlike other periods of US American nineteenth century literature, employed the tragic mulatto as a fetishized and oft disavowed figure whose *passing performance* reveals the ambivalence, instability, and indeterminacy within the myth of racial purity. But scholars remain divided on the transgressive power of the racial passing event leading some to argue that passing "reinforces identity categories by suggesting that there are meaningfully racialized states of being to pass *between* and thus, that passing is 'implicated in the very discourse' it critiques" (Kaplan quoting Ahmed, xxv).

In "'She'll Wake Up One of These Days and Find She's Turned into a Nigger' Passing through Hybridity" Sara Ahmed redirects our focus away from "focus[ing] on strategies or tactics of destabilization, transgression, mimicry, rupture, hybridity, breakage, travesty, masquerade, iterability, performativity, citationality, camouflage (one most note the proliferation of such terms which celebrate and affirm the structural possibility of a displacement of social norms)" towards an "analysis of the complex social and psychic mechanisms for dealing with such tactics" (Ahmed 88).

What then is passing? According to Ahmed, "passing is not identifiable as a discrete practice that has discernible political effects" rather "passing is intelligible only in relation to a complex set of social antagonisms" as it presents a crisis of reading which calls into question the "act of assuming an image" that characterize normative acts of *identification*. As such, Jack's decision to disavow race is particularly embarrassing and galling, for it exhibits his ignorance of how racial identification produces the political structure and structures of feeling within US American society.

While identification, as Lacan defines it, is "the transformation that takes place in the subject when [it] assumes an image," narratives of passing involve the fear of or moments of *misrecognition* where the passing subject cannot assume the passing image but rather occupies two images simultaneously (Ahmed 92). Consequently, passing does not destabilize and dissolve the structures of identity formation but rather passing is an event that temporarily fixes instability through a potentially productive ambivalence. Again, much like Hughes's epistolary tale is both an apology laced with regret and a rationale, scholars like Juda Bennett read passing tales for the power of their ambivalence to queer racial fixity.

Although, as an act that produces ambivalence, passing can fail while simultaneously "be seen as threatening" because, by its very nature as a transgressive act, it "mak[es] visible" a concealed and violent history: "a history of identification which violate[s] and fix[es] subjects" (95). As Ahmed warns us, when racial passing functions as the "dis-organizing of social identities" it "can become a mechanism for the re-organizing of social life through an expansion of the terms of surveillance" (92). In this "economy of desire," the in-group member's power lies in its ability to "tell the difference." And in this "accumulation of knowledge" or will-to-know transgressive subjects are re-organized and disciplined through *violence* (Ahmed 92).

If passing is the assumption of an image-for-the-other that precipitates a "crisis of reading, a crisis that hesitates over the gap between an image that is already assumed and an image that is yet to be assumed," I argue that the Black dandy's performance overdetermines the fear of misrecognition by drawing attention to incongruencies in race's reliance on a stable and fixed visual code (94). Instead of operating through the mechanisms of passing (disguise, concealment, or other covert means) the Black dandy's fashion works to queer passing and hybridity as a visually conspicuous and culturally syncretic style that directs attention to a history of "social conflicts which structure intersubjectivity" (Ahmed 94).

Consequently, I am concerned with narratives that employ the Black dandy to compensate for racial passing's failures, where subjects, when faced with the opportunity to pass (and thus conceal a pre-passing identity) instead make their identity conspicuous and visible through stylistic refusal.

It is my contention that Hughes, Nugent, and Larsen intentionally set out to find the limits of the racial passing narrative, a limit that exists because "passing demonstrates…that the subject is the effect rather than the origin of a phantasy of being" (Ahmed 92). As a performance of contradiction, the failure of the passing narrative becomes the "point of entry" that Ahmed calls for in her "discussion of identification and hybridity" (Ahmed 92).

The Violence at "Home" & the Trauma of Lynching

If the epistolary form of "Passing" gave way to a confessional mode, a mode that allowed Jack to unburden the tension inherent in a life lived on the threshold of *affective embarrassment*

and racial (mis)recognition, in "Home" Hughes's Black dandy, Roy, navigates a world that requires his silence in the face of racial embarrassment:

> Roy picked up his bags, since there were no porters, and carried them toward a rusty old Ford that seemed to be a taxi. He felt dizzy and weak. The smoke and dust of travel had made him cough a lot. The eyes of the white men about the station were not kind. He heard some one mutter, "Nigger." *His skin burned. For the first time in half a dozen years he felt his color. He was home.*
>
> (Hughes 37; my emphasis)

I want to linger with this excerpt to discuss *affective embarrassment*. My choice of the term is born from a desire to identify a lack within the available scientific literature concerning embarrassment and shame and a desire to provide evidence that could strengthen our understanding of how hegemonic racial production works to socially discipline subjects in ways that are not always redolent of physical threats but rather work through psycho-social mechanisms. Registering how Black subjects in these texts responds to these mechanisms, particularly as Black dandies work to resist and refuse embarrassment, evacuates space for recognizing how stylistic refusal is *also* a performance of agency.

In Rowland S. Miller's work, he and his researchers distinguish between Erving Goffman's definition of embarrassment, as "that uncomfortable state of mortification, awkwardness, and chagrin that can result whenever undesired events publicly threaten one's social identity"; Buck, Parke, and Buck's definition "an aversive state of psychological and physiological arousal," noting the distinction between *embarrassment* and the *fear of embarrassment;* Brown's additional addendum noting that "people avoid embarrassment whenever possible (even at cost to themselves), and Apsler and Modigliani's separate reports of how subjects "quickly try to repair it [embarrassment's] damage whenever it does occur," to argue that "analyses of embarrassment all assumed that its roots lay in a person's concern for his or her own social identity" (Miller, "Empathetic Embarrassment: Situation and Personal Determinants of Reactions to the Embarrassment of Another," 1061). Miller's additional experiments test for both *empathic embarrassment*, "epitomized by observers sharing the embarrassment" of others and a differentiation between embarrassment and shame, often used synonymously. Of note, in "Differentiating Embarrassment and Shame," Miller and June Price Tangney note that while "both emotions may involve exposure to public scrutiny," shame is a stronger emotion that is "more often experienced when one is alone." Test subjects "often remembered" embarrassing situations as a "funny accident" that threatened "one's self-*presentation*," whereas shame threatened "one's self-*concept*" as evidence of "deep-seated flaws, rather than momentary mistakes" (283-284). (While it is beyond the scope of this project, at the level of racial production, both embarrassment and shame may be related.)

The response to embarrassment "occurs automatically and involuntarily, lasting moments instead of hours, and it is accompanied by a coherent, obvious sequence of nonverbal behavior that clearly distinguishes it from related states such as amusement or shame," including "unique physiological changes, such as (in many cases) blushing, the visible reddening of the face and neck that signals one's chagrin" (Miller, "On the Primacy of Embarrassment in Social Life," 31).

Outside of a brief mention of blushing, I have yet to find any attention to race or skin color in Miller's work on *embarrassment.* Nevertheless, I am reminded of Eric Lott's description

of early blackface minstrelsy and its reliance on humor, malapropisms, and gross distortions of Black bodies to achieve its effects and affects. (How did blackface minstrelsy work to *embarrass* and/or *shame* Black subjects, especially if the history of antebellum theater was a segregated space?) Putting aside minstrelsy's work to produce racial inferiorization, even the etymology of *chagrin* alludes to skin color—from the French "chagrin" meaning "rough skin, shagreen" and "displeasure, ill-humour" (OED).

However, in "Empathic Embarrassment: Situation and Personal Determinants of Reactions to the Embarrassment of Another," Miller used both "observers' self-reports and measures of their skin potentials" to build a data set. Defined as a method to measure electrodermal activity on the skin surface, "in the same way [that] the sweat glands are under autonomous nerve control from the hypothalamus in the brain," the skin conducts measurable signals of activity, which, in Miller's experiment, is useful in gathering quantifiable measurements of physiological responses to an embarrassing situation.

As Kent Puckett discusses in a reading of Flaubert's opening chapter of *Madame Bovary*, one that describes an embarrassing situation but also contains an embarrassing evacuation of the first-person narration shifting into omniscient narration, embarrassment circulates, not only like a "fluid, flowing from one person to another," or from the narrator to the reader, but as a mark on an individual's ego and an empathic other, "between the social and the individual, between aggressor and aggressed" (59). Embarrassment shapes sociality as does the novel.

> *His skin burned. For the first time in half a dozen years he felt his color. He was home.*
>
> (Hughes 37; my emphasis)

But is Hughes also foreshadowing Roy's eventual lynching? Although Roy's body is not burned, Hughes's description of the text's affect, "the skin burned" which allowed Roy to "[feel] his color" carries an anxiety or an anticipation of affect. In their discussion of the story, Donnie McMahand and Kevin Murphy provide evidence of what I call Hughes's childhood primal scene of racial anxiety concerning anti-black violence:

> Speaking at the Windy City Press Club Banquet in 1957, Hughes presented a clear picture of his childhood fear of lynching, commenting how 'headlines in the Negro press used to scare me to death. I grew up in Kansas, and for years I was afraid to get down South, thinking…I might be lynched the minute I got off the train.
>
> (Hughes 44)

In the minutes it takes for readers to traverse the distance from Roy's arrival home to his tragic death, Hughes's narrative tension builds. In that intervening time, the "minute[s]" we get off the train with Roy, readers must manage their expectations, as we witness Roy, because of his illness, ignore this affective response, registered on the skin, and refuse to be hampered, hindered, obstructed, or literally embarrassed. Here, Roy's illness, contracted in Europe, is rendered into a dandy's decadence, as Roy traverses his hometown's streets at night dressed as a French flaneur and performs his repertoire of European classical music both at a local church for a segregated audience and at the local whites-only high school. In each of these moments, the symptoms of Roy's illness emerge either as delirium or a waning energy, but he soldiers on,

leaving the reader to register the same anxiety that Hughes once felt "the minute [he] got off the train" in the South. That anxiety is the circulation of *affective embarrassment* in the text, that sentiment that circulates like a "fluid, flowing" from the text to the reader, as Kent Puckett argues in his reading of Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*.

The differences between Hughes "Home" and "Passing" extend beyond a difference in how embarrassment is portrayed. "Home" narrates the tale of a Black dandy whose performance of cultural syncretism marks him as a target of white ridicule, but in "Home" something gets in the way of embarrassment landing to do its disciplinary work on the story's main character, Roy. As I shall argue in my reading of the story, when *embarrassment* fails, *violence* ensues.

The Limits of Silence, Performance Anxiety, and Queering the (Black) Dandy

In a deft counter to Homi Bhabha's argument on the power of mimesis, mimicry, and mockery in the colonial demand for imitation ("not quite, not white"), a demand that ironically depends on an ambivalence that produces a hybridized colonial subject who will always fail to successfully resemble the colonizer's image lest the colonizing mission come to end, Ahmed notes that "hybridity does not 'belong' to the mixed-race subject. Rather, hybridity is determined by the very structure of the colonial address which demands both the disavowal and affirmation of difference" (97).

While Bhabha's formulation does not solely privilege the mixed-raced subject, it also overlooks a history of racialized sexuality, particularly the "phantasies of interracial sex" that recuperate hybridity's potential for mockery into the "term of a master discourse, as constituting the necessity of new forms of policing and surveillance" (97). Robert Bernasconi's "Crossed Lines in the Radicalization Process: Race as a Border Concept" investigates a history of legal, scientific, and philosophical arguments that are produced at the racial border where the desire to see "people in terms of race" produces the racialization process.

There are several figures who exist or perform identity at the border. While "passing and hybridization merge in their use and abuse of mimesis," hybridization, particularly the conspicuousness of the black dandy's performance is a spectacularly unique form of mimesis and

> in this process of miming and approximating the identity of an-other, 'identity' itself becomes decontextualized….in miming the identity of an-other, identity itself becomes an object of exchange that resists the realms of the proper and property…it also reproduces identity as fetish, by rendering it an object that can be known, seen and approximated…The contradictions embedded in passing through the hybrid space suggest the impossibility of placing passing on one side or the other of identity politics. While identity may be dislodged through the act of theft, and hence become subject to reiteration, it also determines the economics of passing, that which it takes for granted as the measure of desire.
>
> (Ahmed 98)

Dandyism, as a form of hybridity, is erroneously portrayed as an act of cultural theft (Black subjects parodying white style), but in an economy of racialized and sexualized desire, the Black dandy's performance of cultural theft is anxiously read as sexually threatening action that can potentially destabilize the intersubjective social bonds of white male sexual hegemonic privilege over all female bodies. When read as mixed-race, the Black dandy's presence is sign of miscegenation, thus making visible an illicit and taboo sexual practice. When read as mimetic, the black dandy's assumption of whiteness (through style) is *also* read as the assumption of while male sexual hegemonic privilege. But when read as queer, the black dandy's presence confuses the reading of vectors of power that normally position white over black and male over female. In the economy of desire, a queerly anxious reading not only potentially destabilizes the Manichean binarisms of race, binarisms that are also produced through gender and sexuality, but it also confounds the logics of identification and desire.

In my readings of Richard Bruce Nugent's *Gentleman Jigger* and Nella Larsen's *Passing*, novels that involve racial passing, dandified subjects push against the limits of the economy of desire and the history of racialized sexuality to destabilize the violent structures of power/knowledge by signifying on queerness. These novels doubly queer racial knowledge, where *queer* in its verb-form, as Judith Butler notes in her reading of Larsen's *Passing*, "has a history of meaning: to quiz or ridicule, to puzzle, but also, to swindle and to cheat" (176). However, Larsen also "links queerness with a potentially problematic eruption of sexuality" as in the "queer ideas" about sex that her sons here at school.

> As a term for betraying what ought to remain concealed, "queering" works as the exposure within language—an exposure that disrupts the repressive surface of language—-of both sexuality and race.
>
> (Butler 176)

Butler's reading of *Passing* centers on these moments of silencing, queer moments in which Irene fails to speak, queer moments in which "Irene finds speaking to be impossible" (168).

> The question of what can and cannot be spoken, what can and cannot be publicly exposed, is raised throughout the text, and it is linked with the larger question of the dangers of public exposure of both color and desire.
>
> (Butler 169)

I read Houston Baker's reading of Booker T. Washington's performance anxiety in *Up From Slavery*, where the oratorically gifted race leader acknowledges that he "suffer[ed] intensely from nervousness before speaking," a feeling "so great that [he] [had] resolved never again to speak in public" as a type of queerness (148). In Baker's psychoanalytic reading, Washington identifies with a surrogate white male father figure (Samuel Chapman Armstrong), but Baker detects sexual tension between a teenager Washington learning forms of dandified cleanliness from Armstrong's younger wife. Although Washington never acts on these desires, the effect of Baker's reading, is to queer the relationship between the normal Freudian model of sexual/gender identification with race.

Rather than dismiss Washington's anxiety as a commonly felt experience of stage fright, Baker uses this public confession as evidence of a larger psychological problem endemic to the forms of identification that structure blackness. Quoting from the fourth edition of the Diagnostic

and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Baker reads a "marked and persistent fear of social performance situations in which *embarrassment* may occur" as evidence of a larger psychological phobia that structures black life under white control. Often repeated after each of Baker's chapters is a further elucidation of the "tight place" which all black subjects, presumably, must maneuver, even down to "the suit" (75). For Baker, Washington "as *the black dandy* (kid-gloved ghost of the 'educated black man' in the white imaginary) … all dressed up without any fully modern, urban place to go" is also a failure in performance, not a failure of racial passing, but, as a form of *mulatto modernism*. Washington's Black identity, as a leader, was all appearance but no substance or essence—a contradiction on the order of capitalism's commodity. Note, in the lengthy quote below, where Baker explicates the term, the recourse to a history of racialized sexuality that Washington's failed mimetic performance indexes:

> For me, "mulatto modernism" is race- and class-inflected along a distinctive axis of representation. Bourgeois, middle-class individualism, vestimentary and hygienic impeccability, oratorical and double-conscious "race pride," and protonationalism are defining characteristics of mulatto modernism." Like the term "mulatto" itself, the modernism it suggests is a project in ambivalence. For example, claims to possibilities of superior representational and racial-stock capabilities of the hue black are predicated on endless rhetorical rehearsals (in ambivalence) of how progressively "lighter and lighter" the "race" is becoming. A certain heroic and ironic absurdity, thus, marks "mulatto modernism" such as Frederick Douglass's claim in his 1845 *Narrative* that illicit white male sexual intercourse with black women slaves in the South is threatening to transform the "sons of Ham" into a new and unenslaved southern "nation." Such irony not only implies ambivalence but also gestures toward a certain species of "favored nation" eugenics that is more intriguing and problematic than, say, assimilation. A chief tenet of "mulatto modernism" is "uplift," the translation of individual, bourgeois, class achievement into doctrinal and pedagogical imperatives for the black masses. However, given the odd eugenic "doublings" of this secondary modernism, rather than being uplifting for the black majority the process often deploys precisely the "darkness" of the majority as the necessary, preeminent, and sufficient representational sign of its own modernity.
>
> Du Bois's "Talented Tenth," even in biblical significations of the "talent," entails, without seeming equivocation, an "untalented," infertile, bereft nine-tenths—that is to say, the black majority. Nevertheless, without such precursor modernisms as the mulatto, a deathly silence may well have doomed ten-tenths of blackness to American extinction, a shrouded and veiled termination of "the race," as it were.
>
> (Baker 34-35)

In registering performance anxiety as a psychologically produced signifier of affective *racial* embarrassment and joining it to a history of racialized sexuality that produces a metaphoric and genic failure ("infertility"), Baker's suggestion resembles Ahmed's concern: these performances, whether of racial passing or of colonial mimicry, often fail.

In "Sexuality on/off the Racial Border: Foucault, Wright, and the Articulation of 'Racialized Sexuality," Abdul R. JanMohamed attributes the failure of black speech as indicative

of juridical prohibitions "codified in the statutes that prevented blacks from bearing witness against whites: since blacks were not legal subjects, their testimony had no legal standing," but "this was [also] coupled with the legal interdiction of black education and the systemic impoverishment of that education, which was also designed to induce silence" (103). But, Baker, in his indictment of Washington's failure as the founder of a black educational institution (Tuskegee University) to produce the forms of freedoms necessary for black enfranchisement, "public sphere mobility" and "the economic solvency of the black majority," claims, through a psychoanalytic of a Black modern's performance anxiety and failure, that silence has also been internalized as a means to counter a perceived racial embarrassment.

If, according to Baker, Washington failed to speak, how should we register the "will to knowledge…manifested in a literary register, not in the medical, psychiatric, and confessional textuality that Foucault describes" in *The History of Sexuality,* as a desire to speak beyond subalternity? To answer the question, JanMohamed turns to a reading of Richard Wright's *Native Son*, where Bigger Thomas "cross[es] the racial-sexual border in the reverse direction, provid[ing] a glimpse of" the economy of racialized sexuality. In a similar spirit, I turn to the Black dandy as a figure of queering that reproduces a will-to-knowledge and reveals the mechanisms of this racialized sexual economy.

"Home"'s Open Secrets: The Queer Black Dandy

Staged as a contradiction akin to the commodity, the repeated description of Roy's appearance "very well dressed" is always undermined by a description of his "think" body (Hughes 33, 37, 44). The contradiction serves as the analogy for the European body politic, as well. As Roy traces the origins of his unspecified illness, he recounts the contradiction "in Vienna, that gay but dying city in Central Europe," Prague, and in Berlin, where his jazz orchestra performed for a clientele of decadently wealthy night-club patrons while impoverished men, women, and children visibly lingered outside the venues: "Behind the apparent solidity of that great city, behind doors where tourists never passed, hunger and pain were beyond understanding" (34). Europe stages its own production of contradictions where the appearance of luxury in private cabarets that cater to wealthy citizens and tourists overshadows the poverty and violence that the impoverished classes experience in the street. The strange confusion materializes as a bout of "sadness" that develops into something of a psychosomatic tuberculosis, "the cough stayed, and the sadness" (35).

Several scholars have queried the queer signs of non-normativity in Hughes's texts—from Shane Vogel's readings of Hughes's cabaret poems in *The Scene of Harlem Cabaret: Race, Sexuality, Performance* to Juda Bennett's monograph *The Passing Figure: Racial Confusion in Modern American Literature*. In "'Whose Music Was It?: Unaccountable Art and Uncontainable Sex in Langston Hughes's 'Home' and Eudora Welty's 'June Recital'", Donnie McMahand and Kevin Murphy deftly provide several signs that point to the queerness that permeate this tragic narrative of a Black dandy. But none have accounted for the gothic decadence that pervades the text of "Home" owing, as I surmise, to the strange ways decadence is appropriated in early twentieth century US American literature.

In *Decadent Culture in the United States*, David Weir confidently argues that the features that defined decadence "as cultural decline, physical degeneration, aesthetic imbalance, moral transgression, hedonistic excess, pathological sexuality…[seem] incompatible with the Puritan,

progressive, capitalist values of America…[For] in America, the cultural conditions that produced the possibility of decadence in Europe simply did not exist" (1). And yet, Hughes' short story would indicate otherwise. Although Roy recalls remarking that "folks catch hell in Europe…I never saw people as hungry as this, not even Negroes at home," the narrative's tragic ending—Roy's lynching—suggests that the conditions of inequality (US American racism) have been entrenched always already into the national body. As Roy spends his final days in Hopkinsville, he repeatedly tries to conceal the fact of his degenerating condition, his body becoming "thinner and thinner," but try as he might, death catches up with him in ways that Hughes knows continually haunt Black subjects in the United States.

Like Vogel argues in readings of Hughes's cabaret poems, Hughes possesses a knowledge of queerness and a queered form of knowledge, for his texts "are populated with spaces, figures, values, and social relationships at odds with the normalizing impulses of racial uplift" (108). In "Home" Hughes also produces a black-dandy-as-jazz musician figure whose knowledge of "cabaret performance and sexual nightlife" evinces a knowledge born of spaces containing "laboring subjects who find existence in the afterhours club — the musician, the waiter, the sex worker, the drug dealer, the bartender, the bootlegger," subjects who "are typically represented as the lumpen excess of the proletariat" (117). However, in "Home" Roy's dandiacal figure seems to wander the world alone until he meets kindred spirits for whom a devotion to music bespeaks a form of knowledge about worlds beyond segregated spaces. In Europe there's a quick mention of a girlfriend, an unnamed woman who was but one of many "young white women, [who] trailing behind him when he came home from work late at night, offer[ed] their bodies for a little money to buy something to eat" (34). While McMahand and Murphy's desire to rescue a queer reading from the text results in a dismissal of this recollection as insignificant, Hughes's text suggests that, although Roy was saddened by the state of impoverished working class white women in Europe, "it was hard to keep beautiful and hungry women out of his solace, who wanted to give themselves to a man who had a job because in turn the man might let them sleep in his room, or toss them a few bills to take home to their starving parents" (34).

I do not offer this reading to counter their queer reading of the text but rather to broaden our conception of queerness. As stated in the excerpt from Vogel, a broad class-inflected definition of queerness that Jack Halberstam also employs in *A Queer Time and Place*, Roy's relationship to spaces of illicit activities and excess gives him a queer knowledge that places his life in proximity to several subcultural figures. I want to stay with this configuration of the sex worker in "Home" and its proximity to the Black dandy, particularly since the text describes Roy as a European flaneur or street walker whose nightlife occupations have put him into contact with sex work. In my estimation, a queer reading of the text reveals the Black dandy's proximity to sex work, while, at the same time, the narratives work to recuperate Roy's queer knowledge within European culture. Unfortunately, within a US American context, where European high culture comes to symbolize excess, a Black dandy's decadence is a double form of gothic decay, a visible contradiction whose transgressive identity is constantly surveilled and eventually met with violence.

"Home"'s Open Secrets: Sex Work

The image of the white female sex worker frames the narrative in "Home" but, aside from Roy's illness—a reaction to Europe's contradictions or an intimate of a sexually transmitted disease—there's another open secret during the story, as well. As previously mentioned, Roy associates forms of gothic decay and decadence in Europe with the contradictory memories of white female prostitutes who "offer[ed] their bodies for a little money to buy something to eat" (34). Later in the narrative, the ironic femme fatale, the unwed local white high school's music teacher, Miss Reese, confusingly appears before Roy during a moment of delirium brought on by his "illness". Presented in a stream of consciousness, the text suggests that Roy likes the image of Miss Reese a multi-racial muse "with black hands and brown limbs and white breasts and a golden face with lips like a violin bowed for singing" while he plays *Meditation from Thais*, an opera that recounts a monk's infatuation with a female sex worker (Hughes 34, 40-44).

We can read *Thais* as a tale of tragedy, irony, and stark contradiction, as well. Set in Egypt during an era of Roman imperial rule, the story centers around a Cenobite monk, Athanael, and his attempts to convert Thais, an Alexandrian courtesan and devotee of Venus, to Christianity only to be converted himself to a life of erotic devotion. Tragically, Thais dies, delirious in her own bed, as the monk rushes to her side, renouncing his ascetic life for a life lived in devotion to love. In Hughes' literary allusion, the text analogizes Roy to Athaneal and "a street walker named Music" to Thais, who magically appears before him as Miss Reese. As Roy finishes his recital, Miss Reese makes her introduction, and the scene is set for Roy's tragic ending. But the specter of Roy's death is not the open secret to which I refer.

Rather, amid Roy's delirium, experienced while he's playing *Meditation*, he recalls his initial infatuation with music:

> You remember, Ma (even to hear me play, you've got your seat in the amen corner tonight like on Sunday mornings when you come to talk to God), you remember that Kreisler record we had on the phonograph with the big horn when I was a kid? Nobody liked it but me, but you didn't care how many times I played it, over and over…. Where'd you get my violin? Half the time you didn't have the money to pay old man Miller for my lesson every week…. God rest his unpaid soul, as the Catholics say?
>
> (Hughes 41)

I want to suggest that those ellipses both work to conceal and reveal far more than we may be willing to admit. But, for readers unafraid to familiarize themselves with the history of racialized sexuality, a history that JanMohamed identifies as the "'open secret' [that] can be traced to the white master's sexual desire for a slave," those ellipses suggest that Roy's mother also participated in an economy of desire to purchase her son's ticket out of Hopkinsville, Missouri.

In *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique*, Roderick A. Ferguson positions African American sexuality within a matrix of anxiety where bourgeois uplift worked to contain working-class sexual deviancy for the benefit of national economic production. Within this matrix, "the prostitute symbolized poor and working-class communities' potential threat to gender stability and sexual normativity" (8). In a strange and troubling alignment with liberal

reform politics, “Marx’s use of the prostitute as the apocalyptic symbol of capital’s emergence points to his affinity with the bourgeois discourses of the day” where “pundits understood” the prostitute as symbolic of a “gender and sexual chaos” that was “an explicitly racial phenomenon” (9):

> Indeed, in nineteenth-century Britain, the prostitute was a racial metaphor for the gender and sexual confusions unleashed by capital, disruptions that destabilized heteropatriarchal conformity and authority. In fact, the nineteenth-century iconography used the image of Sarah Bartmann, popularly known as the Hottentot Venus, who was exhibited in freak shows throughout London, to link the figure of the prostitute to the alleged sexual savagery of black women and to install nonwhite sexuality as the axis upon which various notions of womanhood turned. As industrial capital developed and provided working-class white women with limited income and mobility, the prostitute became the racialized figure that could enunciate anxieties about such changes. Conflating the prostitute with the British working class inspired racial mythologies about the supposedly abnormal reproductive capacities and outcomes of that class.
>
> (Ferguson 9)

As a black dandy, complete with signs of foreign excess (European decadence), Roy indexes a racialized sexual transgression and threatens further contagion in his cross-racial dealings with white women. Within this racialized sexual economy, Miss Reese’s womanhood must be surveilled and guarded against the threat of black sexual excess, an illness and contagion that can pollute the white body politic.

Despite the comfort Roy takes in speaking a language of music, a knowledge of otherness that he and Miss Reese share, we, as readers, must sit with a growing anxiety as the narrative ushers him quickly towards a violent death. But I am left wondering which sign was evidence of his transgression.

> But everything might have been all right, folks might only have laughed or commented and cussed, had not a rather faded woman in a cheap coat and a red hat, a white woman, stepping out of the drug store just as Roy passed, bowed pleasantly to him, “Good evening.”
>
> Roy started, bowed, nodded, “Good evening, Miss Reese,” and was glad to see her. Forgetting he wasn’t in Europe, he took off his hat and his gloves, and held out his hand to his lady who understood music. They smiled at each other, the sick young colored man and the aging music teacher in the light of the main street. Then she asked him if he was still working on the Sarasate.
>
> “Yes,” Roy said. “It’s lovely.”
>
> “And have you heard that marvelous Heifetz record of it?” Miss Reese inquired.
>
> Roy opened his mouth to reply when he saw the woman’s face suddenly grow pale with horror.
>
> (Hughes 47)

Here, white womanhood, even with allusions to his sexual deviance, could be recuperated if the black dandy, a figure of sexual depravity and excess, can be contained.

We know how the story ends, with a denuded black body hanging from a tree "all night, like a violin for the wind to play" (49). But how did the story begin? Was it his hidden illness or his highly visible love of European decadent high culture? Was it his association and possible infection by Europe's white female sex workers or his highly surveilled association with an American white woman at night, while elegantly dressed, a black dandy posing as a European flaneur appropriating the old world's gentlemanly class in "his hat and cane and gloves"?

Perhaps it's all these signs, the excessive accumulation prevents us from naming one single cause or catalyst. Rather, the black dandy's many contradictions add up, excessively, highly visible, unable to be ignored, demanding from the racial regime a violent reprisal that re-orders society.

Chapter Two: Richard Bruce Nugent's Modern Black Dandy

There are three ontological questions I would like to answer in this chapter: (1) Why does Bruce Nugent deploy a modern Black dandy figure in his novel? (2) What are the features of Nugent's modern Black dandy? And (3) what is Nugent's modern Black dandy asking of the novel's readers?

Richard Bruce Nugent came to prominence and notoriety with the publication of his avant-garde short story (or prose-poem, if you will), "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" in the unfortunately short-lived literary journal, *FIRE!!*, which he co-edited with Wallace Thurman. In the following chapter I offer a reading of his posthumous novel, *Gentleman Jigger*, published in 2002 but written in the 1930s, which, I argue, functions as a response to a culture of containment that sought to disentangle Harlem, Black arts, and Blackness from white cultural influence in a demand for respectable Black representation.

In *Gentleman Jigger* Nugent works to close the divide between Blackness and queerness, depicting a twentieth-century dandy with a decadent-aesthetic practice which eagerly engages and challenges internal and external proscriptions on modern Black identity. Consequently, the novel stages scenes of affective embarrassment that work against a repressive tendency to disavow racial feeling and stages scenes of violence that reference the history of racialized sexuality that grounds modern conceptions of US American identity.

Why does Nugent deploy a modern Black dandy?

In 2002 literary executor Thomas H. Wirth brought *Gentleman Jigger* to publication and during the same year Wirth published *Gay Rebel of the Harlem Renaissance: Selections from the Work of Richard Bruce Nugent*. In his introduction to *Selections*, Wirth locates Nugent's literary work "at the intersection of two separate literary traditions--Black and gay" (Wirth 40). Even today, Nugent is most remembered for his short story, "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade," which exists within a tradition of other queer modern fiction whose "explicit, sympathetic treatment of same-sex desire was not yet acceptable to mainstream publishers," including Henry Blake Fuller's *Bertram Cope's Year* (1919), Robert McAlmon's *Distinguished Air* (1925), E. M. Forster's *Maurice* ("written in 1913-14…[but] not published until 1971"), and Blair Nile's *Strange Brother* (1931) [Nugent, *Gay Rebel*, 44-45]. Furthermore, these twentieth century homoerotic novels owe much to a late nineteenth century decadent tradition, as Wirth further testifies to Nugent's familiarity with Joris-Karl Huysman's *A Rebours* (1884) and Oscar Wilde's plays and novels, particularly *Salome* which enjoyed a revival in the early twentieth century (Wirth 40-41).

This categorization positions Nugent in a liminal space, juxtaposing his familiarity with an overwhelmingly gay white male literary tradition against several the Harlem Renaissance's Black male writers who, while we know "were sexually attracted to other men" tended to write from beyond the veil or "skate very close to the edge of self-revelation":

> They included male characters who had sex with men in their books; they portrayed intense male-male emotional ties; they wrote poetry that on close reading expresses the joy and anguish of same-sex love; and they wrote poems that are ostensibly about race but that actually, or simultaneously, address sexual orientation—but the narrative voice in their work either kept its distance or wore the mask of ambiguity.
>
> (Wirth 50)

Those texts include Wallace Thurman's novels, *The Blacker the Berry* and *Infants of the Spring*; Claude McKay's first two novels, *Home to Harlem* and *Banjo*; and a number of Countee Cullen's poems (Wirth 50-56).

In a brief foreword to *Selections*, Henry Louis Gates Jr. reminds readers that "[t]he homosexuality of several of the Harlem Renaissance writers is now generally known and is even occasionally mentioned in scholarly studies, but rarely has it been examined in depth" (xi). Noting a tension between Harlem's sexual heterogeneity and the era's homophobia, almost three decades would past between the publication of Nugent's "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" and James Baldwin's openly queer (but racially closeted) novel, *Giovanni's Room*. Regrettably, homophobia, Gates and Wirth contend, "remained a fundamental aspect of Black culture" (Wirth xii).

While early twentieth century Harlem and Greenwich Village were known as queer sites within Manhattan, notably for their well-attended drag balls, A.B. Christa Schwarz and George Chauncey remind readers that not everyone in Harlem was content with its queer community: "the visibility of bulldaggers and faggots in the streets and clubs of Harlem during the late 1920s and the early 1930s does not mean they enjoyed unqualified toleration throughout Harlem society….they were excoriated by the district's moral guardians" (Chauncey 253). Chauncey and Schwarz single out Adam Clayton Powell, the pastor of Abyssinian Baptist Church, as the most vocal crusader in a campaign to purge homosexuality from Harlem's Black community (Schwarz 18). But Payton's net cast a wide range, equating "[heterosexual] women's refusal to marry" as a "threat to the Black family" influenced by a visible queer community's sexually liberal attitudes (Chauncey 253). Additionally, the African American press carried the crusade in newspaper scandal and gossip sections. If the Renaissance's rising talent were linked to sexual deviance, a concern voiced by Wallace Thurman's fictional Dr. Parks (an amalgamation of Alain Locke and WEB DuBois) in *Infants of the Spring*, the ensuing negative attention would complicate and distract from middle class reform efforts to rid the Black community, and by extension Black identity, with its association with various forms of sexual deviance and criminality (Schwarz 18-24; Thurman 232).

Even Harlem's famous Hamilton Lodge ball, the city's most popular drag event, could not escape excoriation, as the African American press, duly influenced by Powell's crusade, regularly included homophobic coverage, and in some instances published the birth names, street addresses, age, and racial identity of ball winners. In one instance in 1938, *The New York Age* published the age and addresses of individuals arrested at the ball for "offering to commit lewd acts," associating ball participants with whiteness and sex work. Chauncey's claims suggest that

Harlem's middle-class reformers were eager to not only disassociate Blackness with sexual deviance but were eager to scapegoat whiteness as the source of all forms of sexual deviance, queer and/or interracial.

In "'To Work Black Magic:' Richard Bruce Nugents' Queer Transnational Insurrection" Ryan Tracy argues that the New Negro movement's adoption of European models of cultural renaissance included an incorporation and adaptation of anti-decadence, defined as a "phobic, culturally Western European nationalist discourse on the body that began in the late 18th century" whose rhetoric "rel[ies] on exaggerated claims of cultural decay—often through racist, misogynistic, homophobic, and xenophobic tropes—to stir up populist sentiment for new projects of nation and empire building" (155). Decadence, in which the dandy was often the emblematic character, figures as an adaptable attack on "a number of 'modern' political projects, including 'Marxist, Nazi, and liberal capitalist ideologies' (Tracy 155 quoting Sedgwick 1990, 128).

Within the New Negro movement, which included an importation of "the white European critique of decadence," homophobic anxiety was maintained but inverted and coded as whiteness (Tracy 156). Under this rubric, decadence, standing in for a recklessly and sexually impotent queerness registers as a threat to a proteant, muscular nationalism, and is racialized as white and foreign to Harlem. Harlem's middle class believed that to construct a Black identity, where identity is constitutive of a racialized civic class, they must eschew the queer/white strains of decadence long associated with profligacy. Under this anti-decadent strain, *cultural uplift* becomes *cultural work*. Whereas decadence, long associated with a disdain for industrial capitalism's drive towards profit, production, and inhuman mechanization, continues to register as a misplaced aesthetic resistance to productivity but is also associated with a foreign whiteness that must be eliminated or excised from Harlem's project of cultural production. Thus, within the New Negro movement, art as propaganda is rendered serviceable to a cultural economy of racialized production.

This conceptualization of race and sexuality as two distinct identities put considerable pressure on Harlem's queer Black artists. That division may have proved incredibly burdensome since Harlem was a geographic site in which those two worlds often converged. As Jayna Brown indicates, Harlem was home to an expressive vernacular renaissance, populated by dance and song, theater and stage work, Black and Tan clubs, cabarets, and speakeasies, the nightlife of Harlem, where performances of queerness were visible especially when audiences were eager to take a long, studied look. Furthermore, Nugent had long maintained a fascination with blurring the lines between dichotomous representations of race and gender inspired by Harlem's cabaret and drag culture.

Implicitly, Wirth's language and Gates' explicit clarification point to the mutually exclusive oppositional force of Harlem's anti-decadence; it was impossible to be both queer and Black. Moreover, the political demands of a politics of respectability prioritized *group* racial representation over *individual* sexuality. As I shall argue in my reading of *Gentleman Jigger*, Nugent's Black dandy eagerly anticipates this binaristic opposition by challenging readers' notions of shifting racial and sexual categories to make conceptual space for an intersectional identity unburdened by myths of racial fixity.

Nugent's unapologetically queer art presents a conundrum. In light of the antipathy between Renaissance's leaders demands for Black cultural production and Harlem's queer subcultures, Nugent invites readers to read his Black dandy a modern, mobile, and boundary-crossing subjects, distinct but sometimes overlapping with the racial passing subject. As such,

the Black dandy's performance, too, is a type of labor and cultural work, although one overshadowed by a misunderstanding and misrecognition of queerness and intersectionality.

I detect this misrecognition and misunderstanding in Arnold Rampersad's foreword to *Gentleman Jigger*. During interviews for his definitive two-volume biography, *The Life of Langston Hughes* published in 1986, Rampersad was astonished by and grateful for Nugent's excellent memory. After all, Nugent, who would have been nineteen years of age during the height of the Renaissance, was a young artist in his formative years, which make his frank literary depictions of queer sexuality, amidst a climate of bourgeois sexual repression, remarkable.

Rampersad laments that upon Nugent's death, "he had left behind a relatively small body of such work for someone who lived as long as he did…relatively few published pages" (viii). While acknowledging Nugent's "occasional" work as a stage actor, his "Italianate good looks," and his "gifts as an artist, especially in drawing idealized, erotic images of the male body," Rampersad argues that Nugent "embraced...the role of the skilled amateur. One might even reasonably call him a dilettante…[who] did only what he wanted to do — no more or no less. I believe that he saw his own life as his finest possible work of art" (Rampersad viii).

Rampersad's comments unwittingly re-stage the antipathy between Blackness/queerness and whiteness/decadence. But even more troubling, Rampersad's description of Nugent's "Italianate good looks" elides Nugent's queerness with an identification with whiteness, suggesting that Nugent either *desired-to-be* or *identified-as* white, eliding Nugent's "erotic images of the male body" as an exclusive fascination with European forms of beauty. As a result, or maybe because of this classification scheme, Wirth anticipates and defends Nugent, claiming "he was not trying to 'be white.' Rather, he was struggling to expand his contemporaries' conception of Blackness" (Wirth 45).

These two concerns, (1) the racialization of cultural work that overlooks the problem of queer identification within the Harlem Renaissance's homophobic landscape and (2) the merging or confusion of queer-identification and queer-desire within queer Black/white sexual relations surfaces in strange ways within critical evaluations of Nugent's life and work. While renewed interest in Nugent's Harlem Renaissance-era oeuvre resurfaced in the 1990s, particularly amongst gay cultural historians who found in Nugent's open queerness an icon who practiced the same liberatory politics necessary for battling various forms of state repression and the silence amidst the harrowing AIDS epidemic, the scholarship that followed Wirth's herculean recovery project, found in Nugent a much more complicated figure (St. Clair 274). While more recent scholars have revised their readings of "Smoke" and Nugent's biography to understand how Nugent's queerness extends beyond homosexuality, there remains a steadied ambivalence, suspicion, and even embarrassment for Nugent's frank affinity for "Latin" men, often misread as a desire for whiteness.

Contemporary Nugent scholarship is plagued by an anachronistic critical response that overlooks the cultural shifts in how we think about sexuality and race. Since the publication of *Selections* and the archiving of Nugent's unpublished and published works, scholars realize the depth and breadth of taboos (biblical, racial, sexual, gendered) which Nugent depicted to problematize early twentieth century narrow notions of identity. Additionally, it would be too easy to paint Nugent's work with the same broad strokes of failure that earlier Renaissance critics have done (David Levering Lewis, Nathan Huggins, and Houston A. Baker). Nugent may have lived on the margins of various discourses, but his work gravitated towards their intersections.

To read Nugent, as I am suggesting, requires that we lean into these antipathies and oppositions to tease out their interrelatedness. Rather than unfairly dismiss aspects of Nugent's work that fail to comport to our vision of what Black cultural production should be, as DuBois reportedly dismissed "Smoke" with the rhetorical slight, "Who cares about homosexuality?" literary Black dandyism configures not only an aesthetic of Black high style but also a critical tool that invites intersectional analysis. Cody St. Clair makes a similar move in "A Dilettante Unto Death: Richard Bruce Nugent's Dilettante Aesthetic and Unambitious Failure" mobilizing Jose Muñoz's notion of *queer failure* to contest Rampersad's mourning or sense of Black cultural loss in Nugent's work. For St. Clair, Nugent's dilettantism is not a lack of ambition, a critique which had been lobbed against Nugent and his Renaissance-era peers, a critique which Nugent anticipates in both "Smoke" and *Gentleman Jigger*, but rather, dilettantism is a rejection of the "normative, capitalist logics of bourgeois professionalism, maturation, and wealth accumulation" (277). I want to build on this queer of color analysis to suggest that Nugent's deployment of the Black dandy in *Gentleman Jigger* is in aid of a careful response to the demands of Black cultural work, demands that merge the political and personal in strange, unforgiving ways.

What are the features of Nugent's modern Black Dandy?

In this section I want to explore critics who have identified how Nugent's life and work merged a tradition of the decadent-aesthete dandy tradition with modern queer Black identity. Previously, I have argued that Nugent's Black dandy works to destabilize binary oppositions within the Harlem Renaissance's politics of respectability and how those demands proscribed the limits of discourses on Black sexuality, an argument that Elisa Glick originally introduced in *Materializing Queer Desire*. In addition to her argument, I want to introduce Michelle Mendelsson's excellent reading of the various allusions to decadence found in Wallace Thurman's deployment of a Black dandy figure in his autobiografictive novel, *Infants of the Spring*, a Black dandy figure, which Mendelsson argued, and critics resoundingly agree, is based on Nugent. Consequently, *autobiografiction* expands our notions of *literary dandyism*, an aspect of dandyism which points to the relationship between real life dandies, authors who write about dandies, and how writing turns these authors into dandies, as well. Consequently, dandiacal writing is a performance that doubly produces material work. In the second half, I mobilize Sandra Siegel and Patricia Behrendt's readings of Oscar Wilde, specifically the racially transgressive power of the Wildean aphorism, a defamiliarizing literary technique, and the shocking power of the Wildean dandy to confound Victorian sexual mores.

Reading Black Dandyism in the Cabaret School

Most Nugent scholars construct their appraisal of Nugent's literary dandyism by relying on "Smoke" and Wallace Thurman's veiled depiction of Nugent in his 1932 novel, *Infants of the Spring*. In fact, the first half of *Gentleman*, fictionalized events that both Thurman and Nugent shared while living and working together in Harlem, including Harlem's first all-Black art exhibit at their shared residence, infamously entitled "Niggerati Manor'; the publication of their literary journal, *FIRE!!*; and the scandal, condemnation, and notoriety that followed them. In

addition, both novels chronicle their friendship with white ally, Leland Petit (Samuel Carter in *Infants* and Leslie in *Gentleman*), "the prim, mild-mannered organist of Grace Church, who appears remarkably enough, in yet a third novel of the period as Mark Thornton, the homosexual protagonist of Blair Niles's *Strange Brother* (1931)" (Wirth, *Gentleman,* xiii;) and Swedish graduate student, Harold Jan Steffanson (Steven in *Infants* and Bum in *Gentleman*) whose love affair with Thurman is an open-secret handled differently by each novelist (Ganter 96). As *roman-a-clefs,* both novels are populated with figures that closely resemble a litany of peers and contacts, including Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Alain Locke, W.E.B. DuBois, and Carl Van Vechten.

But of greater importance for my argument, both novels deploy decadent dandies to stage the "complexities and contradictions" inherent in bourgeois notions of Black cultural work. In so doing, as Elisa Glick argues, Black dandies "make legible not simply the bifurcation of race and sexuality but rather their interrelation" through a "revision of nineteenth-century European models of dandyism and decadence" (Glick 84). For example, in *Infants* the dandy Paul Arbian (whose last name is the sound of Richard Bruce Nugent's initials, RBN), explains his aesthete-decadent tradition by declaring

> "I think that Oscar Wilde is the greatest man that ever lived. Huysmans' Des Esseintes is the greatest character in literature, and Baudelaire is the greatest poet. I also like Blake, Dowson, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Poe and Whitman. And of course Whistler, Gauguin, Picasso and Zuloaga."
> …
> "Unless you're dumber than I think, I've told you all you need to know."
> (Thurman 24)

And, if readers need further clues, by the end of *Infants* we learn that Paul's own novel includes this dedication, further evidence of his decadence:

> "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"
>
> (Thurman 284)

Thurman's coded narrativizing forges a careful distance between his implied authorship and his sexually charged decadent characters, including Paul/Nugent. Thomas H. Wirth notes that "only Nugent broke the [Renaissance] taboo" on open depictions of homosexual content by "publish[ing] work that would lead his readers to identify him unmistakably as 'queer'" (Nugent, *Selections,* 50). Caught within Harlem's cultural contradictions, *Infants* throws the decadent Black dandy under the proverbial bus, depicting the gothic strain within decadence as a moral decay that merges interracial sexual license with artistic unproductivity or dilettantism.

In "A Decadent Dream Deferred: Bruce Nugent and the Harlem Renaissance's Queer Modernity" Michelle Mendelsson claims "Thurman was never as comfortable about his sexuality

as Nugent was. It was convenient (and maybe even psychologically necessary) for him to pin his erotic dreams on a barely veiled version of Nugent, a roommate whose decadent sympathies were so close to his that he felt entitled to appropriate them" (Mendelsson 262). We can read both quotations from *Infants* as depictions of excess, from Paul's excessive list of dandy authors to the "golden spores of decadent pollen" that ironically come to symbolize Paul's literary infertility. Coded as queer, the decadent-dandy must be excised from the Renaissance for cultural uplift-work to succeed. Thus, in *Infants'* final scene, Paul's tragic and gothic suicide turns ironic and almost comic, as the water from his bathtub overflows and erases the pages of his novel left scattered on the floor only leaving visible the dedication. His "golden spores of decadenc[e]" never take root.

By reading Wallace Thurman's *Infants* as a companion text to Nugent's *Gentleman*, Mendelssohn detects several literary allusions to decadent works. Additionally, by linking both novels, Mendelssohn is able to avoid the fallacious pitfalls of authorial intention, and instead, engages in a cross-textual discussion of the importance of decadent literature for two of Harlem's queer Black writers. Consequently, Alex, the young narcissist-dilettante in "Smoke" matures into the bohemian aesthete-turned-Black dandy in *Gentleman Jigger*. Referencing Max Saunder's concept of *autobiografiction*, Mendelsson argues:

> Fiction and criticism gave queer decadents alternative lives and enabled them to reshape realities to suit them…. Queer Black modernist writers, such as Nugent and Thurman, linked their stories together with the lives of their precursors because it gave their identities a place in the literary world that the real world did not afford them. I mention this to highlight the importance of paying attention to these overlooked intergenerational and intercultural decadent legacies. 'Just as life-writing has been the missing person of modernism, so *autobiografiction* has been missed by historians of sexuality or queer theorists,' the critic Max Saunders explains. The genre known as autobiografiction crops up when 'auto/biography itself cannot be kept entirely apart from fiction.'
>
> (Mendelsson 265; my emphasis)

Mendelssohn's theorizing on *autobiografiction* is born out of a comparison between an embarrassing moment of plagiarism depicted in both Nugent and Thurman's novels to an accusation of plagiarism between painter James McNeill Whistler and Oscar Wilde. This "literary kleptomania," as Mendelssohn calls it, is "a clue to [the authors'] preoccupations" with history (Mendelsson 265). Suffice it to say, queer artists, writing and creating from the margins of history or from behind the veil, rely upon other forms of historiography aside from (auto)biography; in fact, they rely on each other.

Dandyism has long maintained a vitally complex and textually interwoven relationship between the dandiacal-author and the dandy-character, what scholars refer to as a relationship between dandyism and literary dandyism. What St. Clair detects in "Smoke" is not a defense of dilettantism as a mode of anti-work and disidentification, performed solely as a resistance to racial capitalism's modes of production, but rather an anxiety about the spaces afforded Black and queer cultural production. And Rampersad's nostalgic yearning for Nugent's meager oeuvre can be read as a burden for the larger field of modern Black cultural production as it wrestled with intersectional discourses, especially Blackness and queerness. Nugent not only stood at the

intersection of two discourses, but he deployed Black dandy literary figures to stage what life in the intersection or interzones may have looked like.

Thurman and his implied author in *Infants* are embroiled in the Renaissance's conundrum over how to depict notions of sexuality that do not undermine race. On the one hand, Thurman's novel fictionalizes documented concerns by Alain Locke and WEB DuBois about the "decadent strain" in the Cabaret School's literary output, not only Nugent's homosexually charged short story "Smoke" but the entire single edition of *FIRE!!*; Langston Hughes's turn towards a working-class blues lyric tradition in his second collection of poetry, *Fine Clothes to the Jew*; and, Van Vechten's infamous novel, *Nigger Heaven*. Nevertheless, *Infants*'s haphazardly written plot structure reads more like a series of polemics and watershed moments for the New Negro Movement's younger devotees, many of whom are waking from a fantasy to find that Harlem's cultural politics are not the liberatory cultural space they had imagined. Instead, I want to examine some of the formal qualities of Nugent's literary dandyism and the dandy's disruptive force.

Oscar Wilde, Aphorisms, and the Racialized Dandy

> "Let us not overstep our bounds and make anyone think. It might be uncomfortable."
> (Nugent 59)

While in Nugent's "Smoke" and Thurman's *Infants* readers found anxious queer and closeted Black figures voicing criticism of the Renaissance's demand for bourgeois and heteronormative cultural work yet yearning to escape its prohibitions; in *Gentleman Jigger* readers find a Black dandy unashamedly overstepping those boundaries.

In "Wilde's Use and Abuse of Aphorisms" Sandra Siegel defines Wilde's radical reversal of the British aphorism as a form of nineteenth-century racial transgression. Whereas Patricia Flanagan Behrendt's book-length study, *Oscar Wilde: Eros and Aesthetics* reads the dandy's use of paradox to reveal Wilde's critique of Victorian sexual mores. While whiteness, and even homosexuality (as Behrendt notes) is often unnamed in Wilde, Nugent adapts the decadent dandy tradition, as Glick argues, to "make legible" the interrelation of transgressive racial and sexual categories.

In a formulation that resembles Baudelaire's famous comments on the historical significance of dandyism, as that subculture which "appears especially in those periods of transition when democracy has not yet become all-powerful, and when aristocracy is only partially weakened and discredited," literary critic Sandra Siegel argues that the traditional aphorism also appeared "during liminal periods, when guidelines and expectations are precarious" and functioned as "brief statements of a truth or a principle, statements which mark off or define a boundary, provide rules according to which the good from the bad, the true from the false, and the right from the wrong can be readily recognized" (Siegel 17). Aphorisms are

> Statements that represent a closed form, a formulaic paradigm, a concentrate of truth that does not admit of ambiguity; ever waver in the face of experience; represent a voice detached from all that is personal; convey a message that has neither a beginning, middle, or end yet are authoritative beyond all doubt. About

> an aphorism there is nothing precarious. As one would expect, precisely when ambiguity hovers in the air, when boundaries are blurred and uncertain, and when indeterminacy becomes intolerable, the aphorism commands attention.
>
> (Siegel 18)

However, by the late nineteenth century the aphoristic tradition "turn[s] upon itself, to consume itself at precisely that moment in British literary culture when the need for the aphorism was at its greatest. It is even more surprising, then, that we associate aphorisms with Oscar Wilde. Surprising because while aphorisms are conservative, Wilde, more than any of his contemporaries, was marginal, liminal, and transgressive" (Seigel 18-19).

Aside from the formal qualities of the Wildean aphorism, a statement of contradiction whose second half usually destabilizes the purported truth of the first half, a statement that intends to "unsettle, shock, and surprise the listener," Siegel historically situates Wilde's power to shock within nineteenth century British preoccupations with racial categories. Specifically, Siegel claims, English culture had long bore an ambiguous racialized relationship to Celtic culture—praised for its primitive aspects but also deplored for its self-destructive qualities and its incapacity for reason:

> The Celts represented that savage side of the English the English feared might erupt if it were not controlled by higher reason. If civilization, and its continued progress, represented the triumph of the Anglo-Saxon reason over the buried savage self, the Celts represented all that rationality had overcome. And if aphorisms represented the distillation of the best that civilization had produced, a Celt [such as Wilde] who appropriated the aphorism was transgressive.
>
> (Siegel 24)

Here, one can almost hear Cedric Robinson's formulations on the racial regime and his reminder that the British Isles had long incorporated slavery. Consequently, racial production is not limited to Black subjects nor skin color, rather, racialism, as Robinson defines it in *Black Marxism*, as "the legitimation and corroboration of social organization as natural by reference to the 'racial' components of its elements Though hardly unique to European peoples, its appearance and codification, during the feudal period, into Western conception of society was to have important and enduring consequences" (Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 2).

Wilde, the son of Irish nationalists with a strong sense of Celtic cultural traditions, travels to Britain to study and becomes a "social 'outsider' who comments upon and criticizes a society from which he has become alienated" (Behrendt 119). While the dandy tradition has long been linked to fastidious dress and a coldness towards women associated with homosexuality, Wilde's literary dandies rely upon "deliberately paradoxical statements" thereby:

> exploit[ing] the nature of the paradox as a type of intellectual game, a mental slight of hand, which makes it impossible for the perceiver to know in which half of the paradox truth resides for the dandy. Since each half of the statement exists to undermine the credibility of the other, the perceiver is entrapped in the impossible task of attempting to reconcile one with the other. And since the parts cannot be reconciled, the perceiver is engaged in a fruitless process of shifting his

> or her attention back and forth from one half of the paradox to the other, wondering which represents the 'real' or the 'most' truth to the speaker. In actuality, the meaning lies in the instability of the activity itself. Therefore meaning can be understood to reside not in one truth or the other but in the 'instability' created by the juxtaposition of seemingly incompatible ideas.
>
> (Behrendt 122)

If the traditional aphorism worked to provide a sense of stability through claims to a universal maxim, bringing comfort to an anxious reader, Wilde's aphorisms work in the opposite direction, unsettling readers from his comfortable moral high ground.

Contemporary readers now recognize the force of queerness in Wilde's literature and his decadent-dandy's power to shock Victorian sexual mores, even though, as Behrendt reminds us, Wilde never explicitly names homosexuality. Implicitly, Siegel argues that by merging the character of the dandy, it's shocking language and reliance on aphorisms, readers and audiences associated the dandy with Wilde, depicting him as a racialized transgressive other who appropriated the master's tools and language. As Siegel states, "the Wildean aphorism was bound to antagonize to the extent that it represented the eruption and animation of the Celtic self that aphorisms were meant to control" (Siegel 25). But Wilde's racial transgression also obscures and is made possible by a queer critique.

What does Nugent's modern Black dandy ask of readers?

Nugent uses the term "embarrassment" throughout the novel, although, in Book I [Harlem], his main character, Stuartt, provokes *affective embarrassment* in others. I use the term "affective" to qualify embarrassment because the feeling of humiliation is a feeling located in the split between the body and mind of two characters—Rusty and Myra. The narrator privileges the reader to the contradiction between Rusty and Myra's deportment and their psychic turmoil, such that *embarrassment* often indexes a heightened sense of the forms of alienation that other Black characters navigate when amid white characters.

Consequently, I marshal Homi Bhabha's psychoanalytic readings in *The Location of Culture* and Lewis Gordon's readings of Fanon to elucidate the myriad ways a racialized *affective embarrassment* functions in the novel. For Bhabha, the colonial scene of representation is one of splitting for both the colonizer and the colonized. For, as the novel transitions from Harlem to outside of Harlem, Stuartt encounters several "not quite, not white" (i.e., non-Nordic white/Italian/Greek) characters who also negotiate the boundaries of US American racial production.

Through these relationships, scenes of *affective embarrassment* eventually give way to scenes of deep gazing, where the novel queerly racializes the relationship between *desire* and *identification*. I am specifically thinking of the bell hooks's essay, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators" and how it provides a space to theorize the position of Black spectators as a form of disidentification that complicates the vectors of *identification* and *desire* that Laura Mulvey originally introduced in "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema." Many of the novel's scenes of deep *gazing* and *looking* foreground Stuartt's relationship as a visual artist, where deep looking is not a form of identification but a means to queer the reader's relationship with the object under Stuartt's gaze. The novel becomes invested in Stuartt as a queer spectator

whose Black identity is not visible, much like the cinematic spectator whose subjectivity is inaccessible. Furthermore, the novel suggests that aesthetics and art practice become a powerful mechanism in which to gaze or look deeply at the racial and gender identity formations that structure society.

What remains untheorized is a form of defamiliarization that Nugent's Black dandy offers to his readers. As a revisionist act, the novel and its Black dandy *embarrassingly* put pressure on its characters' and our notions of fixity, suggesting that race, sexuality, and gender are not stable terms but always shifting, especially through the intersubjective nature of the various relationships that we engage in.

Part I: Affective Embarrassment

Affective Embarrassment & Feelings of Difference

In a scene partly based on Nugent and Thurman's true-to-life plans to publish their literary journal, *FIRE!!*, Stuartt hits upon the contradictions they will inevitably face in their efforts to contribute to the Renaissance with an independently financed Black cultural work. Without money or financial resources of their own, any attempt at creating radical art relies upon a subscriber base, which, functioning within a cultural marketplace, may be inclined to dictate the terms upon which Blackness is made visible.

Stuartt's cynical aphorism points to their conundrum: "The Negro is used to being sold. It's practically a painless procedure. And painlessly practical. And we're 'New Negroes'" (Nugent 31). Formally, Nugent deploys the bewildering Wildean paradoxical aphorism which turns on itself through the absurd notion that chattel slavery desensitized Black subjects to the point of painlessness, or, paradoxically proposing that the New Negro, involved in a process of rejuvenation and distancing from the history of that pain, cannot truly escape it.

Stuartt's aphorism reveals the instability of the Black subject's social position within modernity, an instability explicitly made manifest throughout the novel's first half. Indeed, Nugent was not the only member of the Cabaret School to make the uncomfortable suggestion that the modern technologies of racial capitalism bear some resemblance to chattel slavery; although, in this instance, the overt target of Stuartt's satirical remark is the notion that Harlem's field of Black cultural production, both the bourgeois New Negro movement and Harlem's array of cabarets, clubs, and other performance venues, relied upon white philanthropy and white consumer capital.

I mention this scene to draw our attention to the novel's depiction of Rusty's reaction:

> Rusty could never quite be sure that he liked Stuartt's tart remarks about Negroes. It was almost as though he didn't consider himself one. They tended somehow to point out Rusty's Blackness to himself--and Stuartt's extremely light complexion. Rusty went on with the planning almost as though he mustn't hear, or at any rate think, some of the thoughts he had when Stuartt spoke in that casual, cynical fashion that was so much a part of him.
>
> (Nugent 31)

Behrendt explains that critics of *The Importance of Being Earnest* believed that "Wilde's characteristic and elaborate use of paradoxical statements…. distracts us from the action of the plot and focuses attention upon the language itself. In forcing the listener to attend to language in search of meaning, Wilde anticipates the absurdist playwrights of the early twentieth century whose concern is to explore the problems which language poses in finding meaning in events" (Behrendt 124). Ironically, Wilde's contemporary British audiences were often manipulated into laughing with the queer dandy as it launched critiques of the stifling forms of Victorian heteronormativity, critiques that undermined their own social mores.

In *Gentleman,* however, the distraction is performed when the narrator registers Rusty's embarrassing discomfort as a psychic disavowal. Rusty's refusal to "hear, or at any rate think" about Stuartt's criticism evinces an effort to stave off embarrassment, defined by the OED as both "humiliation" (as in the transitive form of *embarrass*) and the more rarely used denotation "to hamper or impede (a person, action, or process)." What is it about the differences between Rusty and Stuartt's skin tone, a difference in their *epidermic racial schema,* as Fanon would call it, that must be disavowed? If Stuartt is offering a different way to think through Blackness and race, how does this critique have any bearing on their position as cultural producers whose radical works aim to put pressure on definitions and depictions of Blackness? In light of *FIRE!!*'s short tenure, what does the narrator's revelation of Rusty's *affective embarrassment* reveal?

To answer these questions, Nugent's Black dandy turns trickster, much like Wilde's dandies, intentionally committing several social faux pas regarding how characters repress or disavow difference. In the same chapter, the strategy is made explicit for the reader and inescapable for Rusty. In a verbal tet-a-tet reminiscent of Bert Williams and George Walker, Rusty and Stuartt serve up an intellectually engaging parody of the Black minstrel tradition as they hold audience for two visiting white friends—Leslie Prentiss and his out-of-town Scandinavian visitor, Sieg "Bum" Borjolfsen. Bum's presence, as a foreign white European ("Nordic") male, unfamiliar with the US American diet of anti-Black racism, affords a rare moment of frank cross-cultural exchange and critical examination encapsulated in Stuartt's question, "Why only here in America…are Negroes expected to be so goddamn different?" (Nugent 39)

To answer his own rhetorical question, Stuartt toys with a Freudian slip or parapraxis, a form of linguistic substitution in which the unintentional deployment of one signifier for another reveals their relationship. Stuartt proposes that potentially behind every use of the racial taxonomy "Negro" is the racial epithet "nigger." The circulation of these terms, specifically the *affective embarrassment* evident in both white and Black audiences, speaks to the disavowed power of racism's reliance on a superiority/inferiority complex and the extent to which Blackness and whiteness depend upon embarrassing forms of regulatory discipline:

> "We just have to admit that we are an embarrassing and embarrassed minority. Suppose I were to say 'nigger' while I'm talking instead of 'Negro' (with a capital 'N'). You'd be worried to death over what Bum and Leslie would think. No, I mustn't forget for a moment that they are white. I mustn't be a bad example by saying 'nigger' because I'd be furious if either of them used the term either to me or about me. Silly I suppose, but you can't help it. O'fays say 'nigger' and mean an inferior person, so you don't want to be a nigger. It's your Nordic culture. But

> you'll follow their lead and call some less educated or more stupid nigger--pardon me, 'Negro'--a 'nigger' and think it is all right.
>
> (Nugent 40)

In his illuminating study *What Fanon Said,* Lewis R. Gordon makes a similar linguistic observation when noting the ambiguity in the French word *negre*: "In a way, the subtext of 'Negro' is always the 'nigger,' who awaits his or her appearance" (Gordon 22). Or, as Fanon famously attests as the fact of Blackness, the moment that opens his fifth chapter in *Black Skin, White Masks* in which he accounts for his own instance of public humiliation: "'Dirty nigger!' or simply, 'Look, a Negro!'" (Fanon 109).

Embarrassment functions as a psychic state that makes the other self-conscious to the extent that embarrassment results in bodily action or inaction. Embarrassment does *work.* Most of our uses of *embarrass* derive from the previously mentioned denotations. To embarrass someone is akin to humiliating someone, (1) to "cause them to feel uncertain," (2) "to make (a person) feel awkward or self-conscious" as in "to cause to feel embarrassment," in the rare occasion (3) "to hamper or impede," or (4) "to compel (a person, organization, government, etc.) *into* a particular course of action by (fear of) embarrassment."

The OED traces these definitions from two etymological origins, the first more certain than the second. The first, *embarrasser* in Middle French denotes "to put (a person) in a difficult or awkward situation," "to confuse, perplex (a person)," or "to impede (a process, especially the normal use of something." However, the second *embarazar* from the Spanish also has roots in 15th century Portuguese, where the prefix "em" combines with "baraco" or the 12th century term "baraza" which means cord, "apparently originally with reference to animals being restrained by a cord or leash."

What makes the novel's Black characters self-conscious, awkward, perplexed, confused, uncertain, hampered, impeded, or compelled into a particular course of action for fear of further embarrassment by the yoking or association of its subject and body (read: enslavement) to inferiority? For the New Negro, as Stuartt's earlier aphorism attests, the haunting of enslavement, the trauma and not-so-distant memory of enslavement, is bound up, even in the Negro's "New" condition, which is to say, the circulation of "nigger" either at the level of the conscious or subconscious, attests to the continued yoking of the New Negro's body to this racial epidermal schema, a verbal cord, a signifier that binds itself to the Black body in the symbolic order and the real.

If Stuartt calls this Rusty's "slight inferiority complex where whites are concerned," then perhaps there is something we, as readers, should ask ourselves about Stuartt (Nugent 40). Does he not also consider himself a Negro? Or does he define Blackness and/or race differently? How does he evade the embarrassment of a racial inferiority complex when whites are concerned?

Employing the parapraxis again, Stuartt continues:

> "I can get a lot of fun out of going to dinner with both Nordics and Negroes, all of whom have forgotten that they belong to different races, and let drop the word 'nigger' rather casually, and then watch. All of the Nordics blush and feel uncomfortable at our discomfort, and all of the Negroes become self conscious and find speech difficult, talk fast to cover my hideous mistake and try to recover that feeling of equality that they were so consciously and falsely enjoying. Then they all steal glances at me to see whether I appreciate what they have done for

> me. If I seem embarrassed and contrite enough, the Nordics courageously feel their standing firm again. But if I haven't noticed their kind efforts to cover my embarrassment? If I should take it for granted that 'nigger' is an ordinary word--one that can be used just like 'peckerwood' or 'cracker'--I immediately become a bad fellow. No delicacy. An enemy to better relations between the races."
>
> (Nugent 40)

In this second instance of thwarted post-racial sociality, the transference of embarrassment prompts several questions. When a "feeling of equality" can only come at the expense of "consciously" false enjoyment, the Black subject's cognitive dissonance alienates itself from itself—a DuBoisian double consciousness. Gordon, summarizing Fanon, would frame this pseudo post-racial moment as indicative of failure. For, what prompts Fanon's psychoanalytic work are the inevitable failures that result from Black subjects' efforts "to live otherwise as a form of social being that is not Black and is not any racial form of designation" (Gordon 24).

When Stuartt lets slip the racial epithet, why would his Black audience's racial self-awareness transform into anxiety expressed as difficult speech, fast talking, and stolen glances? Is this not evidence of *affective embarrassment*? While Stuartt does not specify this moment of willful forgetfulness as an effort to live as white or to be white, as Fanon explicitly specifies in his analysis, why is so much energy expended in "efforts to cover [Stuartt's] embarrassment" and sublimate the racial inferiority complex (for his Black peers in attendance) and the racial superiority complex (for his white peers in attendance)?

In so much as the Wildean decadent dandy is concerned, I would argue that Stuartt's work resembles Fanon's: "my objective will not be that of dissuading him from it by advising him to 'keep his place'; on the contrary, my objective, once his motivations have been brought into consciousness, will be to put him in a position to *choose* action (or passivity) with respect to the real source of the conflict—that is, toward the social structures" (Fanon 100).

Sublimating Affective Embarrassment

In the novel's sixth chapter, Nugent provides another example of a doubled consciousness negotiating *affective embarrassment*. In a detour in the novel's narrative, the Myra/Aeon subplot introduces readers to one of Rusty and Stuartt's peers, Myra, who falls in love and is duped by a white-passing Black poet, Aeon, who is secretly Stuartt's brother. During the "Christmas week" of 1926 Myra, Rusty, and Stuartt (and Aeon?) are the only Black guests at one of Serge Von Vertner's (in)famous interracial parties, another autobiografictive scene loosely based on Carl Van Vechten's penchant for hosting parties that brought several New York's various artist subcultures into contact.

Moments made strange by bouts of disidentification, and alienation oscillate the focus of the scene: Myra "tabulate[s]. She was the only Negro woman present. Of course, she did not feel out of place, but she was certain that she *was* considered unusual—to be kind about it" (Nugent 56-57). Over the course of the party, Myra's racial discomfort increases from a self-conscious nonchalance to a disturbed embarrassment, partly triggered by Stuartt's "casualness" and flippant remarks regarding his own tokenized racial position. Myra's affective embarrassment resembles Rusty's previously unvoiced anxieties. If previously Rusty "mustn't hear, or at any rate think" about the implications of Stuartt's "tart remarks," at the Christmas party, the narrator privileges

the reader to several Myra's free indirect thoughts. Consequently, we witness a Black psyche become unhinged through a doubling of consciousness.

Myra's point of view frames Stuartt's comic antics, flippant remarks, and Wildean turns-of-phrase; while the narrator, over the course of the chapter, increasingly criticizes the limits of Myra's epistemological framework regarding anti-Black racism and the fraught position of Black artists in Harlem's cultural marketplace.

In *Resistance, Parody, and Double Consciousness in African American Theater, 1895-1910,* David Krasner notes that double consciousness has saliency for turn of the twentieth century Black performers, whose work, along with "artisans, ministers, doctors, intellectuals, and artists" necessitated a degree of bourgeois socialization that made them subject to an objectifying white gaze and "created a sense of self-conscious duality" (53). Initially, Myra presents as self-consciously "sophisticated" and comfortable with her position as a fly-on-the-wall or "objective impersonal observer," ironically, a position one would expect from a limited or omniscient narrator. But Myra's framing of the party's events, especially Stuartt and Rusty's entrance, evinces her increasing embarrassment at the objectification she must endure:

> Automatically, like a tropical fish in a show tank, she sought Rusty and Stuartt. They were Negroes too. She could not believe the casualness they exhibited. True, they were the Mumbo and Jumbo of the New Negro Movement, and true, the New Negro Movement was the smart, chic happening (fad, perhaps) of the moment.
>
> Rusty and Stuartt were the Black and white of it. Myra smiled a little at her feeble well-placed pun. Rusty was like some ebony satyr come to life, and Stuartt was a rather decadent, blondishly saintly-looking pale-faced young man. They claimed to be amused by the 'antics' of their white brethren. But Myra had heard such defensive assertions before. She knew her Negro too well to be taken in by the things they said.
>
> (Nugent 57)

The vehicle of the narrator's simile ("like a tropical fish in a show tank") holds weight when we consider that the demands of turn-of-the-century Black performers resembled that of Harlem's New Negro Movement artists—both depended on white audiences for financial success. Krasner reminds us that "Black performers were thus caught between conflicting impulses: a desire for success in the white community, and a felt sense of loyalty to the Black community" (50). Initially, when we find Myra alone, her strategy to remain "outside herself" as "the objective impersonal observer" to provide a "sense of detachment" appears as a reasonable strategy in occupying an unfamiliar social space (Nugent 56); although Fanon would regard this as an effort to transcend race by eradicating Blackness.

But with Rusty and Stuartt's entrance and her automatic desire to seek them out, the narrator suggests that, at the level of the subconscious, Myra is not fully aware nor in control of her self-presentation. Her puns and similes ("like a tropical fish in a *show tank*," "Mumbo and Jumbo," "fad," "the Black and white of it," "ebony satyr," "decadent, blondishly saintly-looking pale-faced") betray the construction of an internalized white gaze. Furthermore, if Rusty and Stuartt are "the Black and white" of the movement, which position does she occupy in this racial epidermal schema?

Stuartt, figured as the decadent Black dandy, offers a strategy in contradistinction to Myra's:

> "We all either ride an inferiority complex, bowing and scraping like some latter-day Uncle Tom, or loudly wear superiority trappings and talk too much. And too loudly," Stuartt had said.
>
> "Oh, I always sprawl—sprawling is a Negro art. Else you might never know I was one. Appearances are so deceitful, and that would never do. So I merely flaunt a trademark."
>
> (Nugent 57)

Unlike Fanon who, in his infamous moment of misrecognition and racial interpellation is momentarily frozen in fear, lost in "that crushing objecthood," Nugent's Black dandy anticipates the white audience that constructs the Black subject (as being-through-the-other) in its cry of "Dirty nigger!" and "Look, a Negro!" In such an embarrassingly hostile encounter, how do Black people articulate and understand self-presentation and reception while negotiating the crushing objecthood of non-being? In an ironic reversal, the Black dandy seems to say "Well, go ahead: look!"

Stuartt presents divergent strategies—between inferiority or superiority, between awkward and embarrassing obeisance ("bowing and scraping") and over-compensation and excess ("too much" and "too loudly"), between "some latter-day Uncle Tom" or an unnamed dandy. Nugent's omission suggests that early twentieth century readers were familiar with Uncle Tom but unfamiliar with Adolph, St. Clare's dandified, comic manservant whose "humor rests not in what his body does literally but in what it says metaphorically about minority identity" (Borgstrom 1292).

Given the previous example of Rusty's racial inferiority complex, Stuartt offers superiority through unembarrassed excess: the sartorial ("wear…trappings"), the linguistic ("talk too much"), and the sonic ("too loudly"). How else can the oppressed (or subaltern) speak back, be witnessed, and be heard from the crushing objecthood of non-being?

Stuartt's second aphorism ironically signifies on the first, queering the Black dandy's mask and symbolic power. If the first aphorism proposes that Black subjects hover between the docile quasi-invisibility of Uncle Tom or the hypervisibility of Adolph, Stuartt chooses the latter. As Eric Lott argues, blackface minstrelsy proposes the *performance* of Blackness as the *fact* of Blackness, an anxious performance born out of fear of the "Black body's dangerous power" and a desire to violently regulate that power. Before the genre morphed from short sketches into long form playlets, earlier performances included "grotesquely contorted" dancers whose bodies propensity for excess alluded to capital's "magical power" of multiplication in a slave economy where human labor "must reproduce itself as well as create surplus value" (Lott 117 quoting Richard Dyer).

Instead, Stuartt's reappropriation of the Black dandy from the legacy of blackface minstrelsy threatens a return of the "look" to the white anxious viewer, reminding his white audiences that Blackness *is* dangerous and threatening. Sprawling denotes the "convulsive effort" of the body's limbs to stretch "in an ungainly and awkward manner" conjuring the image of capitalism's zombie, modernity's ambiguously alive but dead figure "crawl[ing] from one place to another in a struggling or ungraceful manner" or "to spread out, extend, climb, etc., in a straggling fashion" (OED, *sprawl,* verb Accessed 12/14/2021). If minstrelsy had long made the

association of an excessive and seemingly uncontainable body a popular "trademark" of Blackness, Stuartt's aphorism points to minstrelsy's anxiety about racial instability, particularly concerning miscegenation. The Black dandy became a potent symbol and scapegoat for white male fears of an uncontainable Black male sexuality that infringed upon white males' presumed domination over all female bodies, white or Black, free, or enslaved. In fact, Myra's initial framing of both Rusty and Stuartt—one as the "ebony satyr" (a figure of uncontainable sexuality within Greek and Roman mythology) and the other as the "decadent, blondishly saintly-looking, placed faced young man"—indicates the predominance of the Black dandy's configuration for *all* middle-class Black males. With the continued migration of African Americans out of the South, the docile Uncle Tom and bumbling Jim Crow were replaced with Black men who multiply and pollute social spaces, hypersexual bucks, decadent dandies, or just "niggers": "Myra's sip from her drink molded an epithet" (Nugent 57).

Part II: The Queer Gaze

While few of Nugent's scholars have analyzed *Gentleman Jigger*, fewer have ventured far into the novel's second half. I attribute the scholarly hesitation to rarely acknowledged apprehension to read the taboo nature of Black/white sexual relations as they are haunted by what one scholar refers to as racial melancholy or even scenes of colonial domination. Instead, scholars frequently make mention of Nugent's confessed attraction to Latin men, but, as I mentioned earlier, these men are almost always coded as white. Indeed, Nugent's novel anticipates this suspicion and dismissal, offering a series of defamiliarizing gazes that trouble notions of desire/identification and the fixity of gender, racial, and sexual categories. In the following chapter I read the novel's second book for these moments of deep gazing, when the text, in a moment of defamiliarization, asks us to look again at the forms of disidentification the Black dandy mobilizes. These moments do not always present a unified subject, one for whom desire, interest, and intent align, rather, they present moments of conceptual confusion for Stuartt and the reader to untangle. Unfortunately, scholars have shown a hesitation to follow the path Nugent has set forth, which I attribute to the continued prevalence of a politics of suspicion towards Black/white sexual relations. Is it any wonder that Stuartt grows tired of Harlem and moves to Greenwich Village, not because it offers a more liberal sexual climate, but in a new milieu, Stuartt can develop into the model of decadent-aesthete he always imagined but never actualized. Consequently, Stuartt passes. But, as I have argued earlier, passing is a movement through and across. As Stuartt, the Black dandy, moves through Greenwich Village and Chicago, racial and sexual identities (for Stuartt unintentionally passes as white and intentionally passes as straight) simply become practices born out of "encounters with others in which there is a crisis of reading," often one framed by *embarrassment* (Ahmed 94).

Racial Melancholia

In Samuel Park's essay, "All the Sad Young Men: Whiteness as Melancholic Haunting in Black Queer Independent Film," he reads three significant Black queer independent films for their sense of what Ann Anlin Cheng calls the "racially melancholic," a dynamic "in which the white liberal subject excludes-yet-retains the racialized Other" (64) Park argues that the queer

man of color's subjectivity is constituted by his confused and ambivalent relationship to white male subjectivity, which, consequently, produces an "internalized… traumatic wounding" (64). But, as this trauma is internalized, often leaving an affect without a clear trace of its rooted memory, queer men of color's relationship to whiteness is often disavowed.

In *Looking for Langston: A Meditation on Langston Hughes*, Park finds a mélange of cinematic choices regarding race. Film director Isaac Julien describes his film as a "lyrical exploration—and recreation—of the private world" of Hughes which openly relies upon Nugent's "Smoke" (Isaacjulien.com; Park 64). In Park's estimation, "Smoke"'s power is in its ambiguous depictions of multi-layered identities, racial and sexual. Beauty, Alex's Latin love interest, is described as possessing "two strong white legs…dancer's legs" while Alex is never explicitly coded through racial taxonomic terms, although there are several cultural references to his Black identity. But in *Looking for Langston*, Julien casts "Beauty" as "unambiguously Black" to center two Black males' queer relationship. Ironically, the film mobilizes quick glances between Black and white men throughout which Park reads as signs of the haunting racial melancholia. In one scene a "Black man tries to catch the eye of [an] white man, who looks away. In response, the Black man, with downcast eyes, appears to internalize the rejection." Here, Park detects a "startling" moment, "the sheer grief in the Black man's eyes—a deep-set melancholia that promises to abate but never disappear" (Park 65). It's this moment that's indicative of a larger reception of Nugent's work, for he "holds a position of respect but also unease for his critics, as both [Kobena] Mercer and Julien find themselves at odds with him over his prominent use of white men as objects of erotic desire" (Park 64). Consequently, that uneasiness results, in my estimation, as the film's exclusion-yet-retention of white scopophilia.

In *Brother to Brother* viewers track two parallel plots: a fictional present-day narrative centered on Perry, a gay Black male college student cut with nostalgic, flashback scenes that depict a "real-life Nugent's words and anecdotes" memorializing his formative years in 1920s Harlem. Park reads Evans' film as a "critique of whiteness and its powers of interpellation over queer men of color," as the main character, Perry, struggles to reconcile his white liberal partner's racism and internalized homophobia (Park 67). Consequently, as Park argues, for Black queer men the fear of "failed colonial mimicry" haunts queer interracial sexual relations, while for white queer men, interracial sexual relations provide the means to shore up their own potential access to hetero-masculinity through the denigration and effeminization of the racial other (Park 71-72).

Park positions his work alongside Darieck Scott's critique of late twentieth century Black gay male politics in "Jungle Fever?: Black Gay Identity Politics, White Dick, and the Utopian Bedroom." For Scott, representations of Black/white gay male couples "seem to recur where Black gay identity is being constructed" but are "framed by an analytic of suspicion and disapproval. The Black partner in the couple, it is assumed, does not value, indeed detests Blackness, and therefore detests his brothers and hates himself; he is beguiled, enchanted, by a white standard of beauty, by 'whiteness' itself, and consequently has an exclusive desire for a lover with Nordic features. Moreover, his political, social, and cultural allegiances are to 'white' gay politics, to white gay men, and to 'white' cultural forms" (Scott 299-300). In Scott's summation of this gay Black male suspicion, a suspicion espoused "in anthologies such as Joseph Beam's *In the Life* and Essex Hemphill's *Brother to Brother*, in film, performance, and fiction, and in a growing number of magazines, support groups, and service organizations," I am drawn to an interesting slippage between "Nordic features" and "whiteness" wondering, as Scott

will later, how whiteness remains a universal standard even though the meanings ascribed to it change.

Nugent stages a similar moment of suspicion within Book II of *Gentleman*. Stuartt returns to Harlem to visit Rusty and Bum, and the two notice several changes in Stuartt's mien and demeanor. To stage this suspicion, the novel first constructs a moment of confusing desire, not for Stuartt, but for Bum whose "scrutiniz[ing]" gaze on Stuartt's new style prompts a series of confusing and embarrassing passages, language that evinces the movement from Bum's subconscious to his conscious awareness of what precisely in Stuartt he finds alarmingly alluring and attractive. The "pull of the attraction… emanate[s] from [Stuartt]" in a "strange inexplicable way" (Nugent 191). Stuartt's new "aura" produces a confusing and "embarrassing" desire, confusing because "there was nothing feminine or even androgynous about Stuartt's features," and yet, he was possessed by "the same sort of glow that in literature suffuses a beautiful girl who was living her first love" (Nugent 191). It is worth noting that Bum's presence in Rusty's apartment has been an on-going mystery within Nugent and Thurman's respective *roman-a-clefs,* as Thurman also fictionalizes the real-life relationship but reconfigures it as platonic, whereas Nugent, whose main characters describes Bum's continued presence as "connubial…like a husband, with the Sunday papers all around you like that," suggests that it was homosexual. Moreso, if we borrow Park's argument, Nugent also suggests that Black/white queer relationships still afford the white male partner access to a performative heteronormativity.

Regardless, Bum's affective response to Stuartt's glowing presence is an embarrassing one yet seems "incomprehensible and irreconcilable" and "produced in [him] a rebellious nostalgia" for his own bygone youth (Nugent 191). While Bum previously had chided Rusty for the ways in which Black people "romanticize…'lily whites,'" alluding to colorism or the internalization of white supremacy and idolization of lighter or whiter shades of skin in the Black community, Bum's reaction startles him purely because he considered himself immune to an ideology of beauty that favors European features (Nugent 190). And not just any European features, rather, Bum, once he "realized…the difference" and locates it in "Stuartt's hair…cascaded in heavy silken curls, glistening in typical carelessness" which, in comparison to his own seemed "almost as straight," Bum, the Swedish graduate student visiting Harlem, is taken aback by a mirror image of himself, a Nordic, and the value of the Nordic phenotype and its cultural currency in America.

Consequently, when Stuartt explicates the reasons for his new aura as romantic love, Rusty immediately presupposes that Stuartt has come under the spell of Nordic whiteness, as well:

> "I suppose he's large and blond and wears corduroys and sweaters."
> Stuartt's seriousness disappeared.
> "Nope, Rusty—Ray is what's known in the vernacular as 'rough trade.' Ray is a hoodlum. He dresses rather extremely—or rather the cut of his clothes is extreme—but his colors are usually somber. He wears fresh, starched shirts and brilliantly polished shoes. He's Italian—short, slight, sallow, olive-complexioned—with thin, well-shaped lips and brilliant black eyes. His hair is glued to a blue-black sheen—"
>
> (Nugent 194)

Rusty's description "large and blond" is not *only* an encoding of whiteness, as it was so imagined in the 1920s and 30s, rather it is a specific description of Nordic features, an idolization of a supreme whiteness popular amongst anti-immigrant nativists. George Chauncey's analysis of early twentieth century racial/ethnic population data in *Gay New York* may help us to understand the significance of the novel's turn towards Italian bachelor culture and its practices within a tradition of racialized sexuality. For Chauncey, the sheer disproportionate number of immigrant men who outnumbered women may partly explain the tolerance towards homosexual practices and fairy culture among certain immigrant New York subcultures. For example, while the "limited evidence available suggests that African Americans and Irish and Italian immigrants interacted with 'fairies' more extensively," he provides statistical data for comparison and historical context:

> [T]he great majority of the city's Italian immigrants were single men or married men unaccompanied by their families who planned to return to Italy after earning funds to invest there. Eighty percent of the Italians who entered the United States from 1880 to 1910 were males, and the great majority of them were in their prime working years, from fourteen to forty-four years old. So many of them came to work on a seasonal basis or for only a year or two that 43 Italians left the United States for every 100 who arrived in the mid-1890s, and 73 left for every 100 who arrived in the peak immigration years of 1907-1911. By contrast, only 21,000 Jews left the United States in 1908-1912, while 295,000 arrived; 42 percent of Jewish immigrants were females in the 1890s—twice the proportion of Italian females—and a quarter were children under fourteen, compared to only 11 percent of the Italians. Italian men may have been more responsive to homosexual overtures than Jewish men in part simply because far fewer of them were living with their wives.
>
> (Chauncey 72, 75)

The data may help us to understand why in *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* historian David Roediger argues that the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924 and its quota limits holds such great significance. The new "immigration restriction represented the triumph of starkly reactionary, pro-Nordic racism against new immigrants" (Roediger, 140) and gave way to what Jennifer Hoschild claims was a "nationalism 'broadly inclusive of the white working class." Quoting Hochschild, Roediger notes that even the "'language' of race, still broadly applied to new immigrants in the 1920s, 'disappeared over the next few decades in favor of an increasingly general category of 'white' or 'American'" while "[p]eople of color, Hochschild adds, were not just left out of this process. Rather, the move of some to full whiteness 'arguably required the existence of a race which could not traverse the same path" (Roediger 97).

While a discussion of the Italian immigrant communities' relationship to whiteness during the interwar period in which Nordic superiority was held up as a standard, Stuartt's counter description of Ray's sartorial expression and Italian phenotype is precipitated by the term *rough trade.* The term "originally referred to the customer of a fairy prostitute, a meaning analogous to and derived from its usage in the slang of female prostitutes" but "by the 1910s, it referred to any 'straight' man who responded to a gay man's advances" (Chauncey 69-70). But by "the middle third of the century" the term would acquire another definition, "to refer to straight-identified

men who worked as prostitutes serving gay-identified men, reversing the dynamic of economic exchange and desire implied by the original meaning" (Chauncey 70).

If it has not become clear by now, Stuartt and Rusty's comment index both a fluid, if not also unsettling definition of whiteness and sexuality. But the attention to Ray's sartorial expression—"[h]e dressed rather extremely—or rather the cut of his clothes is extreme—but his colors are usually somber" and the notion that he wears "fresh, starched shirts and brilliantly polished shoes" could also suggest that, even for a working class "hoodlum," dandiacal dress functions a signifier of class aspiration, just as it did a century ago for the Bowery's Mose and Liza.

Furthermore, as we should expect with the dandy's efforts to queer readers preconceived notions, Ray's skin is not described as white but "sallow, olive-complexioned" further distinguishing him from the high standard of "Nordic" beauty, which the OED defines as "characterized by tall stature, a bony frame, light colouring." In contrast, Ray is "short, slight, sallow" (Nugent 75).

Chauncey acknowledges that "[it] is difficult to assess the reasons for the apparent differences in the social organization of and larger community's tolerance for male homosexual relations in Italian versus Jewish immigrant enclaves, particularly given the absence of more extensive ethnographic studies of the overall sexual culture of either group," suggesting that the history of whiteness and its relationship to a diverse sexuality is far more hidden than we have known or acknowledged. However, he does suggest that New York's migrant and immigrant communities, particularly those with a greater ratio of men, including African American, Irish, and Italian communities, overlapped with each other in the "bachelor subculture" located in the "poolrooms and saloons where many workingmen spent their time, in the cellar clubrooms and streets where gangs of boys and young men were a ubiquitous presence, and in the lodging houses that crowded the Bowery and the waterfront" (Chauncey 76-77). While the term "bachelor" connotes that many were unwed and "would later go on to marry," early twentieth century bachelor subculture also included married men who, on account of a general rejection of working- and middle-class male respectability, especially the "manner associated with the domesticating and moralizing influence of women," fiercely and jealously guarded divisions of gender roles and performance (Chauncey 80-81).

Consequently, Rusty's suspicion and later retort in the same scene, resembles the suspicions that Darieck Scott locates in the "writings and pronouncements of African American gay men since 1986" that Italian (or White) hoodlums like Ray were *only* interested in Stuartt's "future as a *bitch*" (Nugent 195).

In my estimation, Nugent's careful coding of race in *Gentleman Jigger* complicates contemporary Black gay readings of Nugent's 1920s and 1930's historically situated work. First, I would suggest that the *roman-a-clef* novel provides evidence of what George Chauncey recognized as a gradual shift in the twentieth century sexual regimes, a shift which moved away from the gender-inversion model towards a rigid exclusive model based on sexual-object choice:

> Only in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s did the now-conventional division of men into "homosexuals" and "heterosexuals," based on the sex of their sexual partners, replace the division of men into "fairies" and "normal men" on the basis of their imaginary gender status as the hegemonic way of understanding sexuality. Moreover, the transition from one sexual regime to the next was an uneven process, marked by significant class and ethnic differences.

Secondly, the novel provides evidence of the "significant class and ethnic differences" and the porous racial borders that structured the history of white racialization through the racially passing Black dandy's point-of-view. Stuartt is not the only figure who relies on passing as a process of Lacanian identification. Furthermore, the novel suggest that sexual identities are performative, a paradigmatic notion of sexuality that does not comport with the sexual-object choice-based model's insistence on innate and fixed sexuality.

Instead of turning away from the white male figures and reproducing notions of racial melancholia, Nugent's novel asks that we look again at racialization as a process to understand its interrelation to the history of sexuality, a history that produces performative whiteness as a contested site of identification amidst the twentieth century's unevenly shifting sexual landscape. If sexuality is undergoing a shift and white subjects always already "exclude-yet-retain the racialized other," how does the novel defamiliarize twentieth readers notions of twentieth century racial categories or what Fanon called the historico-racial epidermal schema?

Defamiliarizing the Racial Epidermal Schema or the Dandy as "Trickster with Visual Stereotypes"

In "The Case of *Ebony and Topaz*: Racial and Sexual Hybridity in Harlem Renaissance Illustrations" Caroline Goeser describes Nugent as a "trickster with visual stereotypes," as he often "revers[ed] assumptions associated [with] the stereotypes" of race and cultural identity that associated "Black skin and primitive identity, or white skin and civilization" simply "by reassigning skin color" to "[reveal] how arbitrary the connections were in the first place, ultimately making fun of the 'truths' about racial identity that Americans had learned and assumed to be driven by nature" (Goeser 104). The effect requires viewers to look again, to stare deeply. Nor was Nugent the only member of the Cabaret School to adopt these forms of visual tricksterism. Both "Nugent and [Aaron] Douglas used the same technique in several Harlem cabaret murals, which unfortunately no longer survive. They were executed in red and blue, so that viewers could perceive one scene in red on a blue ground, or another in blue on a red ground. One view afforded them African scenery, but in the other perspective, 'the scene shifted to the modern city" (Goeser 105).

However, in "Biblical Gender Bending in Harlem: The Queer Performance of Nugent's *Salome*," Ellen McBreen notes that Nugent's illustration series, *Salome*, "[did] not engage the dynamics between recognizable white and Black racial tropes. [The figures'] physiognomy, as well as skin and hair color, turn existing racial categories on their heads. With a set of dyes commonly used to colorize Black-and-white photographs, Nugent created unnatural pale green and violet flesh. A pair of his dancers sport outrageous pink and aqua wigs, playing fast and loose with physical details that are widely viewed as immutable markers of race and gender but function here as so many costumes to exchange" (McBreen 27).

Goeser and McBreen's readings suggest that Nugent, working in both literary and visual media, developed aesthetic methods that, anticipating racial stereotypes as learned visual codes, defamiliarized viewers' expectations of skin color and race. As a visual artist, racial taxonomy produced through a history of racialization does not always comport with reality nor the freedom afforded artists working in visual media. Within the novel, where the literary dandy's palette is a mixture of signifiers, we find a meta-commentary on gazing, as Stuartt develops into a painter

and develops a painterly eye. The Black dandy's aesthetic is not necessarily based solely in the body but how other bodies are (re)constructed under his watchful eye.

I turn to these considerations—how (queer) Black/white sexual relations became encoded as sexual deviant and decadent and how decadent aesthetics insists on fluidity and resists fixity—to guide us through the painfully embarrassing and, at times, outright violent scenes that Nugent depicts in Book II. For the most part, scholarship on *Gentleman Jigger* rarely acknowledges how affective embarrassment or violence structures much of the novel's second half, rather, in scholars' hesitation I sense a form of critical embarrassment about our ability to look and understand the contradictions and complications of interracial (queer) desire. Additionally, I argue the novel anticipates this confusion and embarrassment and re-stages it for us to take a closer, studied look. Consequently, if we look closely, if we look again, we can detect Nugent's modernist aesthetic at work and a potent critique of the racialized sexual violence that undergirds US American history.

Part III: The Blurred Lines of Sex Work

Gay Cruising & the Blurred Lines of Male Youth Sex Work

Before Stuartt embarks on a journey of sexual becoming, he takes up an "academically sound" approach—" purchasing and reading the erotic lessons in the practice of love as written by the Indian, Vatsayana, in the lavishly illustrated *Kama Sutra*. But he could not make himself be the aggressive person he knew he would have to be if he was going to shape his own progress in this oldest of all *professions*" (Nugent 173, my emphasis). What is the relationship between queer knowledge and sex work? In the following section of Book II's opening chapter, we find the embarrassing answer, as Stuartt sits in Washington Square Park "watch[ing]" a public ritual of gay cruising:

> Lithe Italian hoodlums in exaggerated clothes creased to razor sharpness, with dark, sallow skins and oiled hair, strutting with clicking heels and a cocky grace which was almost vulgar, but which was strangely attractive nonetheless. Painted boys who ogled the hoodlums hungrily and lowered their eyes in false modesty and brazen coquetry as they passed, leaving trails of perfume. He found these blatant travesties distasteful, but fascinating. A hoodlum would say, 'Hello, sweetheart,' then turn to his companions and pass some remark that would cause them all to laugh loudly. Stuartt's imagination recorded their comments for him. He looked through them whenever they happened to turn their bold eyes on him; he could feel his stomach quiver with excitement, only to sink into a disappointment that confused him when they passed with the most casual of glances, as though he were an empty bench or a tree.
>
> He watched the various villagers and tourists pass, but always his attention would tip back to some group of swaggering Italians, so conscious of their own specific kind of allure. Or focus on some pair--a boy, for example, delicate and effeminate walking with obnoxious complacency beside some assured and

> arrogantly masculine other. Stuartt resented equally the smug, rather pitiful insolence of the delicate lad and the sly knowledge of his attraction smiling between the thin, handsome lips of his escort.
>
> He could imagine them going off to some dark room or hallway--imagine the ugly, attractive happenings: the hoodlum pocketing money or terrorizing the boy because there was not enough money and taking whatever of value there was for him to take.
>
> Stuartt was shamed and resentful, but attracted to the hoodlum and feeling an emotion very akin to envy of the frightened lad. He got up from the bench and started for his rooms. He had an empty and lonely feeling in the pit of his stomach--a nostalgia for something he had never known.
>
> (Nugent 174-175)

Nugent's narrator depicts Stuartt in a state of conflicted desire: scenes of hunger and desperation that are the source of amusement, a flirtation that simultaneously invokes distaste and fascination, his "stomach quiver[ing] with excitement" followed by "disappointment that confused him," the lad's "pitiful insolence" set against his delicateness, itself juxtaposed against the hoodlum-escort's "arrogant" masculinity, and "ugly, attractive happenings" imagined, in which the boy is terrorized as his perceived weakness is exploited for money. How can these scenes of conflicted desire that both repulse and attract Stuartt conjure feelings of "nostalgia" for an unknown memory? Is Stuartt's nostalgia informed by his "academic" reading of Vatsayana's *Kama Sutra* and/or his childhood discovery of Krafft-Ebing, when he realized "the regrettable similarity between the systems manifested in one-hundred-and-twenty-seven cases and himself" (11)?

If Stuartt's reading of the *Kama Sutra* produces a sense of discomfort with occupying the position of the "aggressive person," one who can "shape" their own "progress in this oldest of all professions," then Stuartt's imagination of what follows the cruising scene in Washington Square Park, the Italian hoodlum's violent exploitation of the "painted boy," frames queerness as a site of vulnerability that occupies a psychic and physical space alongside sex work.

But even in the history of early twentieth century gay male sexuality and sex work there exists a confusion about the blurred boundaries between what precisely separates mere sex from sex work. As Don Romesburg reveals in "'Wouldn't A Boy Do?' Placing Early Twentieth-Century Male Youth Sex Work into Histories of Sexuality" late nineteenth and twentieth century social reformers worked alongside the law and court systems to re-draw the boundaries between sex and sex work through a concomitant restructuring of age, gender, class, and race informed by heteronormative, middle-class values. Male youth sex work presented a conundrum, for, as opposed to female prostitution, "boys acts were examples not simply of antisocial behavior but of gender transgression. Girls, not boys, were supposed to be sexual delinquents" (374).

Romesburg finds that male youth entered prostitution for a variety of reasons. Some found a sense of camaraderie with other youth and men active in "fairy" culture, a culture, that as George Chauncey attests, found its freedoms alongside the "tough girls" of a working-class subculture that was centered around the same locales (Chauncey 61). While "fairy prostitution," Romesburg notes "was generally considered a degraded position among boys in sex work. For the fairies, though, sex work was one of the only occupations that enabled them to express alternative gender identities outwardly" (378). The outward expression of effeminacy came with its own potential for danger, as *Gentleman*'s cruising scene evinces and as Chauncey's readings

of journal entries of fairy-identified men from the period attests, "they [fairies] were also regarded as easy marks [for theft and violence] by the gangs of youths who controlled much of the traffic on those streets" (Chauncey 59).

But for other boys, the body was a financial instrument such that sex could be divorced from bourgeois notions of sentiment. To participate in a commoditized gifting economy of heterosexual "treating" and "pickups," male youth found homosexual sex work could supplement their incomes. Consequently, thinking of the body as a financial instrument led to a "disassociation of desire and sexual identification" thereby "facilitat[ing] for some boys the solidification of a more conventionally 'normal' engagement with the modern treating and dating in which boys required more masculine gender and heterosexual performance and identity" (Romesburg 382). Thus, "being picked up did not necessarily relate to one's gender subjectivity—some effeminate boys and men treated more masculine boys, while other masculine boys and men picked up more effeminate boys and fairies. Male pickups, like those between boys and girls, sometimes involved emotional and social, if casual, intimacy" (Romesburg 382). As I noted earlier, Chauncey notes the same shift in the denotation of *trade,* as the term evolved to include male clients, regardless of their choice of partners or professed heterosexual male sex workers who catered to gay male clientele (Chauncey 69-70).

When we account for the varied rationale for male youth sex work, the boundaries and value systems constructed around gender and sexuality become clearly delineated. Romesburg, relying upon Elizabeth Clement's *Love for Sale: Courting, Treating, and Prostitution in New York City, 1900-1945*, reads "treating and dating as socially and morally acceptable (and eventually socially sanctioned) modes of sex barter" as opposed to "explicit cash-for-sex transactions" which further "marginalized… sex work and those who engaged in it under the rubric of 'prostitution.'" Consequently, sex barter "simply became 'heterosexuality'" (Romesburg 383).

While the differences in boys' goals may prove a clear delineation between (1) homosexual sex work as a means towards financial security, particularly for youth who wished to participate in the forms of leisure that catered to heterosexual companionship in the early twentieth century economy, and (2) homosexual sex work as a means towards sexual becoming, Romesburg and Nugent attest to a possible overlap or fluidity, which, for post-modern, contemporary readers operating under the object-choice paradigm of sexuality, one that does not allow for the fluidity often found in the gender-inversion model, has produced a confusion. Furthermore, that blurring of boundaries has been articulated through a racialized sexuality that throws suspicion on Black/white sexual relations fearing those relations produce a melancholia for Black subjects.

Stuartt and Ray's Embarrassment

Both concerns—the blurred lines between queer sex and Black/white sexual relations—come to the forefront in the novel's depiction of Stuartt's first encounter and subsequent relationship with Ray. After Stuartt turns away from an embarrassing but alluring cruising scene in Washington Square Park, he happens upon a "group of young men in their shirtsleeves and vests, lounging about, conversing and laughing." Again, the novel's narrator communicates Stuartt's conflicted desire as "a momentary twinge of nervousness (amounting almost to fear) ...a familiar sensation with him now, and one he enjoyed in a perverse and masochistic way" (Nugent 175). The group passes Stuartt, but Ray lingers, strikes up a conversation, and offers his

sex, almost in code, followed by a more explicit proposition, illustrating the ambivalent turns of desire we also find in the evolving etymology of *trade*.

> "What *do you* go for?"
>
> Stuartt decided to answer in the conversational voice in which he found himself thinking.
>
> "Do you mean which do I prefer, men or women? Men usually."
>
> Now the boy's manner became strangely timid in contrast to his insolent eyes and certain smile as he asked, 'Well, what's the matter with me?"
>
> (Nugent 177)

Although Ray makes the proposition, which Stuartt accepts by ushering Ray into his room, Ray's presence the next morning produces a moment of embarrassment. But before Ray wakes, to which I shall comment shortly, Stuartt is afforded a moment to gaze upon his body. What follows is a description of Ray, a form of visual description that will be repeated as Stuartt happens upon subjects who blur several boundaries: racial, gender, and sexual.

In the remainder of this reading of the novel, I want to focus on these moments as they continually queer notions of racial and sexual fixity. As literary descriptions that closely mimic the scopophilia we associate with the painter's gaze, these moments of gazing, of looking deeply, stage performances of disidentification, and defamiliarize fixed notions of gender, racial, and sexual identity. If, as Sedgwick argues, male (homo)sexual panic is an anxious slippage between identification and desire, given that Stuartt will form a sexual relationship with many of these subjects, identification and desire are racially queered. That racial queering invites a reconsideration of the other's identity, encouraging readers to consider how Stuartt's relationships produce an evolving and fluid self-presentation, or a reconsideration of Stuartt's partners' relationship to white heteronormative sexuality.

Stuartt gazes on Ray's sleeping body:

> He looked at Ray, noting his green-brown skin, darker than Stuartt's own. Ray's lithe, small figure sprawled on its back, one knee drawn up and thrown to the side, one hand on his chest, his head turned to face toward Stuartt. Stuartt seemed unusually aware of detail—of the thin, sensual lips smiling slightly, of the long eyelashes, the hair, mussed and curly—and thought it strange that sleep could so change one and still leave one so the same. Like being dead, only not painted-looking. He knew that when Ray wakened, his lashes would become artifices rather than the naive complement they now were to the contour of his cheeks. He knew that the hair would be sleeked to a glossed highlight to outline the round head. That the lips would be slow and conscious. And Stuartt knew also that the metamorphosed Ray would be as attractive to him as was the sleeping one. He wondered at [*sic*] little at that, for he knew that the wakened Ray would prove an embarrassing person. In fact, he was embarrassed in anticipation and slipped softly from the bed. He would feel more competent dressed.
>
> (Nugent 180)

Stuartt does not code Ray's body as white, rather, in a reverse of expectations, we are immediately given a description of his "green-brown skin" whose darkness eclipses Stuartt's own. That visual reversal extends into the framing of the scene, as Ray's pose and Stuartt's gaze upon Ray, resembles Sandro Botticelli's *Mars and Venus*, in which a "fully clothed Venus sits at the left, upright and alert, whereas the sleeping Mars on the right lies languidly, incapacitated, exposed, and vulnerable" with his right knee drawn up like Ray's, alluding to sleep as a state of vulnerability and weakness. For Nugent, Stuartt's gaze is a fascination with Ray's sleep as vulnerability, for it reveals a "not-painted-looking" beauty, that is as attractive in the body's natural state as is the artificial beauty a dandy like Ray would assume while awake. However, what proves revealing for both partners will be their embarrassment, initially registered here as an affect that Stuartt anticipates which further embarrasses him. Even in this moment of power, Stuartt is made vulnerable by his deep fascination with Ray's vulnerability.

That sense of embarrassment and vulnerability will oscillate back and forth throughout the scene, as the narrator describes Stuartt's anxiety about the potential loss of "respect," a necessary "commodity," should Ray think of this encounter as a purely transactional affair. In this moment of calculation, Nugent figures Stuartt as an active agent, one who thinks of Ray as "a medium he would have to conquer, conquer to his own satisfaction" (Nugent 181). For, as the text reminds us again, sex work often overlaps with queer sex, the "very 'career' into which he [Stuartt] had found himself forced" (Nugent 182). Or, as Romesburg argued, sex is always transactional or an occasion for an exchange, even without money.

Part IV: Power, Seduction, and Violence

A Frank Exhibition of Power

In "Introduction: New Strategies for a Theory of Dandies" from the anthology *Dandies: Fashion and Fine in Art and Culture,* Susan Fillin-Yeh presents a concise history of dandyism while, simultaneously, opening the field to several considerations, such as "the affect of dandies' finesse" or how dandyism "question[s] the 'either/or' limitations of gender binarism and examine[s] the politics of gender" (4). If women are Europe's Other, then Fillin-Yeh brings several scholars who read Europe's Other and Europe's other Others, that is, European women and non-European dandies who take up the sartorial as an expression of stylistic refusal. To look "beyond Paris and London to find dandies in other times and in quite different places" is what "underscore[d] Baudelaire's prescience in 1863" Fillin-Yeh argues (5). Grounding strategies in art history where the "nuances of visual culture" give us a "history of cultural symptoms," Fillin-Yeh's "project takes in both images and actual clothing" as the material culture in which to locate various dandyisms (6).

As we have seen in *Gentleman's* depiction of Stuartt's morning-after with Ray, the same methods are at work—an attention to the body, an attention to the sartorial, and allusions to European visual traditions that frame and deconstruct gazing. In fact, the dandy's lifestyle is one that invites gazing to queer identity and reconstruct the terms of public gazing and surveillance, where the dandy frames its own dandiacal body and then performs its aestheticized body as public spectacle.

I have already argued that Stuartt, confounded by the confluence of queer sex and sex work, surveys a scene of queer public cruising in Washington Square Park. In that scene, rife

with conflicting desire, he is passed over and almost refuses the gaze of the Italian hoodlums who openly survey the painted boys. Instead, his discreet conversation with Ray, near the threshold of his apartment and their eventual sexual encounter, evinces a concern for protecting his person within the safe confines of a private domicile.

Stuartt's apartment is more than a private space. Albeit small, he opens it up regularly to guests for impromptu parties, enjoying "[t]he incongruity of having New York's social and artistic elite mixing with hoodlums and petty gangsters" all with a sense of control over how his guests "mixed, and were so pleased and interested in each other. Stuartt was offering them all a chance to get to know other exciting groups—the kind of people they would never meet or know except through him" (Nugent 209). Stuartt's approach to socialization evinces a method that is in direct opposition to the modes of slumming in Harlem or even in Carl Van Vechten's (in)famous racially mixed parties. At Stuartt's "inconveniently tiny domicile" those who desire to cross social boundaries are crammed into a frame but emerge, "unassumingly" pleased by the atmosphere—"Stuartt's hedonistic democracy" (Nugent 209).

This description of Stuartt's egalitarian space of intimacy precedes a description of a visit to a speakeasy, suggesting that New York's underground social institutions are structured to approximate the same effect, bringing various subcultures together from across the city's segregated spaces, people, not slummers, who long for an adventure into forms of sociality only dreamed about in America's promise of democracy.

The underground speakeasy becomes the bizarre inverse of the above ground social milieu, just as the private party allows for a participation in the forms of egalitarianism promised in the public sphere. And so, in a speakeasy, Ray introduces Stuartt to Frank Andrenopoplis, the Greek "Artichoke King," whose names contain two references (andreno and artichoke) that allude to Frank's sexual appetites. Eventually, with Stuartt's invitation, the trio move from the speakeasy to Stuartt's apartment for more drinking. And it's there where Frank makes the same casual suggestion of sex we found in Ray:

> "I always sleep here," Stuartt answered from the bed beside Ray. "Night."
>
> "Night," Frank echoed. For a while the darkness was replete with silence. Then Frank spoke.
>
> "Asleep, kid?" Frank's voice sounded soft and vibrant in the dark.
>
> "Not yet—why?" Stuartt's voice was a sleepy whisper. There was a silence. Then from Frank's end of the room came the answer.
>
> "Oh, nothing. I just wondered…"
>
> (Nugent 216)

But unlike Ray, Stuartt initially refuses Frank's casual entreaties. Undeterred "Frank agree[s] to pose for Stuartt—to pose in the nude," and in so doing, "trie[s] to get Stuartt to evidence some physical interest in him." Stuartt, again, refuses Frank, this time inventing an imaginary "patron" until "Frank, in an offhand manner, proposes to supplement Stuartt financially. Stuartt accepted" (Nugent 216-17). While the novel avoids the embarrassing exchange previously depicted between a naive Ray and even more naive Stuartt, the narrator leads us to believe that, with an exchange of "a key to Stuartt's apartment," Frank has become Stuartt's new romantic partner.

In the following chapter, we learn more of precisely what Stuartt gains from the transaction in a description of the nude painting depicting Frank. The narrator denies readers with a depiction of the painting's content; instead, the novel constructs Stuartt's gaze:

> Frank had a beautiful body and was an excellent model. It was his vanity that made him so. Stuartt was glad he had nearly finished the nude portrait of Frank--the one in oils which he called *Habeas Corpus*. There was only a little detail left to do now on the background, and then it would be ready for exhibition. Stuartt was certain that it was a good piece of work and would cause comment. That's what intrigued him more than satisfaction of having done a fine work: the comment, the stir--the seeing and hearing his name--the sensation of being sensational. For the *Habeas Corpus* was sensational. It was bound to cause all sorts of prolonged comment and discussion--partly because of Stuartt's treatment, partly because of his execution, which was sure and mastered, although iconoclastic, and partly because of the fact that Frank was the model. For Frank exuded the sex beauties--the awareness of them and the love of them--that seemed so characteristic of his ilk. Because Frank's sex beauties were radiant and his, because they intoxicated others, because he sensed that intoxication and became intoxicated in turn, a portrait of him was not to be ignored. And if interest in the painting did begin to lag, there was always the possible stimulus of revealing the identity of the model.
>
> (Nugent 219)

Before I suggest a reading of what the text does here regarding its queering of racial and gendered aesthetics, I want to note what the text is not doing. We are *not* given a description of the painting. Aside from the previous chapter's note that Frank posed for a nude portrait and this passage's mention of the choice of "oils" as materials, Nugent's narrator withholds the details. Instead, our reading is framed through a description of sensational affect. As a result, we are denied the most basic of spectatorial enjoyment associated with viewing a nude portrait; in its place, we are privy to a description of erotic enjoyment, both in the framing of the nude subject's exhibitionism and in the erotic enjoyment Stuartt anticipates will follow.

Essentially, Nugent gives us two frames, two portraits of erotically charged subjects—a hollow frame of white masculinity and the sensationally erotic charge that Stuartt, the Black dandy, feels in the exhibition of the artwork. In Stuartt's anticipation of the "comment[s]" from audiences, the "seeing and hearing his name," or "the sensation of being sensational," Nugent redirects our spectatorial gaze away from the nude to Stuartt's unsublimated enjoyment.

The doubling of these two frames further suggests another aspect of the novel's queering. Western art has long maintained a distinction between the nude and the naked body. In a reading of Kenneth Clark's famous contrast between the nude and the naked body in art, Lynda Nead articulates "the distinction between bodies deprived of clothes, 'huddled and defenceless,' and the body 'clothed in art: the nude is the body re-formed rather than deformed, balanced, prosperous and confident.'" (14). However, part of the "iconoclast[ic]" shock Stuartt anticipates rests in the modern history of the nude, re-presented and re-configured to unsettle and shock the expectations of the viewer. Stuartt anticipates his work to live within the tradition of (in)famous modern nude paintings like Goya's *La Maja Desnuda* or Manet's *Olympia*, both noted for the unsetting gaze that their uncommonly depicted female subjects return to the spectator, reminding viewers that behind every *nude* exists the erotic charge of the *naked* body.

Fillin-Yeh numbers Manet's model—Victorine Meurent, "whose resplendent nakedness" is found also in Manet's *Dejeuner sur l'herbe*, as a notable female dandy of the nineteenth

century, despite the portrait's "radical and economical construction: no clothes, satin slippers, and a little Black ribbon" (20). Manet's audience was bound to recognize his subject as a contemporary artist. But, framed as *Olympia*, Meurent stands in for the ubiquitous late nineteenth century female French sex worker, whereas, her Black female servant, a detail Fillin-Ye sadly omits, is constructed as Western Europe's other Other.

Stuartt's presence on the page more than recuperates the absent presence that "peripheral Negroes" have played in Western art's history. On the page, Stuartt, as the Black dandy artist-aesthete outshines its subject, or, rather, assumes a privileged position to it. When we consider the portrait's title, *Habeas Corpus*, literally translated as "you shall have the body," the triumvirate of the material painting, its legalese title, and the presence/absence of its artist and subject anticipates the viewer's desire, even racially queers it to suggest that white viewers have positioned themselves in possession and ownership of other bodies through their own legal and philosophical rationale. *Habeas Corpus* re-stages a transfer of ownership, or perhaps a gifting, of the white body back to white viewers: here is your Greek classical body for your consumptive enjoyment. However, would a viewer be shamed or embarrassed by the presence of the painting's Black dandy artist? Would a viewer be doubly shamed and embarrassed by the knowledge of the nude subject's criminality, and, consequently, does this double shaming and embarrassment strip the metaphorical clothes off Western European and Euro-centric cultural traditions? Left with Frank's frank exhibition of power, or rather, denied the privilege of witnessing it, we are only left to ask: where are the emperor's clothes?

Ambiguous Vectors of Desire

In *Habeaus Corpus*, the novel presents Frank's nude portrait as a reversal of white slumming, as Stuartt queers Hellenic ideal through a model of Southern European (white) criminality configured and framed by a queer Black dandy. But the remainder of the chapter, in which Stuartt accompanies Frank on a visit to Chicago, involves a spate of confusing contradictions that complicate the straight-forward transactional nature of queer interracial sexuality/sex work that Stuartt has enjoyed thus far; a complication that compels readers to queer their knowledge of sexuality.

In Chicago, Frank introduces Stuartt to Orini, a major Italian mafia crime boss in Chicago's underworld. Stuartt takes an instant dislike. Furthermore, Orini's presence unravels and disrupts many of the assumptions Stuartt had created regarding his relationship with Frank, for, in the company of Orini, Frank combines his propensity for exhibitionism with an "attitude of possessiveness" (Nugent 220).

In the "gay and dangerous night club ('dangerous' was Stuartt's most romantic adjective)" where they meet, Stuartt's heightened sense of excitement manifests as "his own ambiguous exhibitionistic quantities," ambiguous in the sense that "[he] knew that women were looking at him desirously" while "men were vaguely aware of and jealous of the friendship and dependence he showed with Frank" (Nugent 219-220). For, "Stuartt was the walking, talking, living incarnation of the romantic portrait men and women paint to fill some void in their imaginings," suggesting how the exhibitionistic nature of the dandy, as an ideal for both genders, is configured as a desired object of a woman's gaze but also as an attractive object disavowed by men.

In *Gentleman Jigger*'s Chicago section, I argue, we find a queering of the vectors of desire and identification, a queering that the text has already foregrounded as a confused ambivalence as the Black dandy is a desired/disavowed object of both the male and female gaze. Stuartt's presence requires several other characters to look again, although none suspect his pre-passing racial identity. That queering is magnified when Stuartt meets Chicago's underworld crime boss, whose power is exercised through terror and violence. But when Stuartt becomes embroiled in a sexual relationship with this violent figure, the novel restages what Saidiya Hartman calls "scenes of subjection" to draw our attention to gender and sexuality's reliance on the forms of violence initiated within anti-Black racism.

Frank and Stuartt meet Orini and his gangster moll, Bebe Day. Stuartt is instantaneously disgusted by Orini, a problem that I will discuss later. But Stuartt's instantaneous disgust is juxtaposed to his instantaneous fascination with the movie star qualities of Bebe's fantasy-laden female figuration:

> Miss Day had a deep, husky voice that was most attractive. She wore clothes like only women in the cinema do. An extravagant chinchilla wrap slid gracefully from her fabulously white and beautiful shoulders. Smoke-gray chiffon molded her perfect figure and fell in billowy fullness from her sheathed hips to the floor. Silver slippers were barely visible through the half transparent smoky hemline. A silver chain, with one pendant Black pearl, and Black pearl earrings were her only jewels. She ordered champagne. Stuartt was fascinated.
>
> (Nugent 220)

Stuartt's fascination, his captivating gaze, is broken by Orini's patronizing command "Order up, kid—they're on me" (Nugent 220).

Let's stay with this image of Miss Day for a moment because the novel will portray two different forms of interaction. This initial fascination resembles the framing of "woman displayed as sexual object" or the "*leitmotif* of erotic spectacle," but, as the scene progresses, we understand that Bebe functions as a fantasy for Orini's possessive attitude, not for Stuartt. Bebe and Stuartt are encouraged to dance, leaving Orini and Frank to, presumably, conduct male business, setting up Stuartt and Bebe as effeminized passive subjects (the women) trafficked and easily discarded between men in Sedgwick's conception of modern Western patriarchy's male-to-male arrangements (Sedgwick 15). However, I wonder if Stuartt's fascination with Bebe is grounded in a fascination with the performative nature of white womanhood, its femininity is hyper-realized, "fabulously white," abundant in its "billowy fullness" that protects and "sheath[es]" her body. The novel's rich description and Stuartt's fascination does not lead me to regard Bebe as a model of identification for Stuartt, but rather, Bebe as figured as a female dandy whose style exists to supplement a male fantasy of white femininity.

Stuartt and Bebe move to the dance floor to perform a tango, per Stuartt's request. While the narrator suggests that Stuartt's clothing—" [tuxedo] tails"--also attracts attention, together, "dancing as exhibition couples dance," the two become a sensation, so much so that they lose awareness "that they had been dancing alone" until "the applause burst forth." In another reversal of the vector of desire, in this moment the novel figures Bebe as the one who is fascinated, seeing Stuartt in "a more romantic angle," for he presents as a partner "different from the men she knew, so soft-spoken—a gentleman. One who was not afraid, even of Orini" (Nugent 222).

Consequently, the novel does not suggest that homosexuality trumps heterosexual coupling, but rather, Stuartt's different masculinity, "soft-spoken" and figured as a real "gentleman," the dandy's true aim, threatens the forms of violence that (white men) use to structure their heterosexual relations. If so, where is the scene's violence?

As Stuartt and Bebe return to their seats, the novel records Orini's fascination: "Stuartt stood until she was seated, and then he met Orini's *gaze*. For a moment he returned the *gaze*. Then, turning to Bebe, he spoke. 'You'll pardon me please? I'm going to the bar—" (Nugent 222-223, my emphasis).

Seduction and the Ruses of Power

In this final portion of Nugent's novel, centering on Stuartt's relationship with Orini, I argue that Orini performs "bonds of affection," another term from Hartman, as a ruse for his desire to possess the other, a desire which, if not obeyed, is disciplined through violence (Hartman 86). But the novel also analogizes and positions this power, a power that constructs white male identity, within the US American history of racialized violence.

Upon returning to the table, a surprising chase ensues. Stuartt, having openly displayed an "instant anxious antagonism" towards Orini, moves towards the bar (Nugent 220). Hitherto before, Stuartt repeatedly rejects Orini's offers of hospitality, refusing Orini's offer to purchase drinks. While the narrator records that Stuartt "couldn't account" for his immediate disgust, subconsciously, the text suggests that Orini comes off as an autocrat, "sitting there like a dictator—his handsome black eyes hard, his thin lips impatient—unaware of Stuartt as a person" (Nugent 221). But the novel also records Stuartt's ambivalent desire. Orini "was unobtainable" and his inaccessibility presented a "novel, disconcerting, and unpleasant" sensation that further confused and aroused Stuartt. Stuartt, always the aesthete with a visually inclined painter's mind, is disturbed by the impression a figure like Orini leaves. For Stuartt

> Resented Orini's deft manner, his careless, masterful gestures, his impersonal eyes, his caressing, sarcastic voice and the excitement all these things aroused in him. It angered Stuartt that after the few glances he had offered Orini, he was able to reconstruct in such detail Orini's every physical aspect. His sleek black hair with the one uncowed wave in it, causing a dark lock to fall to his eyebrow whenever he nodded or leaned forward. His compact figure, so slender, yet showing hard contours beneath its dark gray sharkskin suit, the same way an Indian's body is so pronounced through his clothing. His too-lavish attire—gray silk shirt, maroon tie, collar pin showing a small black pearl on either side. The fine linen handkerchiefs he used, the suggestion of perfume, the too-highly-polished shoes, the Turkish cigarettes in a case so slender, so simple, that it vulgarly proclaimed itself to be platinum. Nor could Stuartt forgive Orini his slim, still fingers and the tremendous sensation they aroused. It must be his 'defense' to dislike this man.
>
> (Nugent 223)

The narrator suggests that Orini is defined by his dandiacal *looked-at-ness*, to borrow from Laura Mulvey, and that Stuartt, as a dandy-aesthete, is sensitive to Orini's exhibitionist qualities.

Whereas readers were denied the richly visual description of Frank's body, in Bebe Day and Orini we are given lexical portraits of conspicuous, excess, showiness, and desirability. Bebe and Orini invite the gaze although for different reasons that pertain to how these individual characters make sense of their gendered sexual allure. If Bebe's *looked-at-ness* encourages desire, Orini's *looked-at-ness* demands fear. Stuartt instantly refuses; consequently, Orini gives chase.

Stuartt moves to the bar to order his own drink; Orini follows, offering, but really demanding, to pay. Again, Stuartt refuses:

> A look of surprised anger crossed the face of his antagonist, and he started as if to *strike* Stuartt, then hesitated and drew up. Rocking back on his heels with his thumbs in his vest pocket, he took full advantage of the dramatic silence before he spoke in a cold, hard voice and asked through a tight-lipped smile, "What do you mean, wise guy?"
>
> (Nugent 224, my emphasis)

Stuartt pays for another drink and one for Orini, too; promptly leaves; and Orini follows in pursuit, prompting Orini to place "a hand on his arm" and ask, "You don't like me, do you, sweetheart?" (Nugent 225)

Why does Orini feel threatened by Stuartt's dislike, so much so that he forgets himself and almost gives into instinctual violence? To answer this question, I want to move to the final scene in this chapter of the novel.

Orini invites Stuartt to his house for gambling under the pretense of friendship, although, by this point, we expect this invitation is a ruse. Orini tells Frank to drive Bebe home; he'll take Stuartt in his car.

The rape scene that follows is one in which Stuartt's contradictory desire mixes with a sense of palpable fear, as Orini plans to trap Stuartt in his private apartment and enact a violent scene of subjection, punishing Stuartt for his refusal to submit to Orini's power, power that was cloaked in a ruse of conviviality.

> "So you don't like me, sweetheart?" Orini's voice was soft.
> Stuartt glanced up casually. "I hadn't thought about it, Orini," he answered.
> "Well, think about it now, baby. Think while you're still able."
> "'Still able?' You talk like a murder mystery."
> "Yeah, while you're still able. While your pretty face is still pretty."
>
> (Nugent 227)

In a further complication to readers, the novel shocks again. After two strikes to his face, Stuartt realizes his only escape from violence is to turn the tables and seduce Orini. As such, Stuartt surmises he can protect his life and Frank's reputation.

As readers who sympathize with Stuartt's compromised and endangered position, we must witness Stuartt's deft and careful rhetorical maneuver, in which he convinces Orini that an exchange of sex is far more desirable that an exchange of blows, and that Orini has much to gain by the power of possessing a male lover whose discretion is preferable to a woman's.

To understand Nugent's move, I want to mobilize Saidiya Hartman's reading of rape in antebellum Southern law and its application in cases involving enslaved women. Hartman claims that Southern law necessitated but was horrified by violence and sought to reverse the dynamics

of power through an argument about seduction, total submission, and the bonds of affection. Consequently, the law's "disavowal of rape" confuses and complicates "issues of consent, agency, and will" (Hartman 79-80). The enslaved presents a contradiction for antebellum law, in so much as Southern slaveholders increasingly felt the pressure of abolitionists and anti-slavery campaigns that figured the enslaved as a human being, while slavery necessitated reading the enslaved person as property. That tension came to a head in cases where enslaved women, and sometimes their enslaved husbands, were prosecuted for attacks or murder of their white owners. The state, in its judgments of these cases, could not escape its own sentimentality, registering its own sense of humanity. But, through a perverse reversal, it continued to deny the humanity of the enslaved, its right to bear witness, and instead configured the slave as a subject produced through injury. That injury was justified precisely because the enslaved had (a) seduced the master, revealing the master's human vulnerability and thereby (b) proclaimed the master as one who does not operate in violence but rather desires "bonds of affection." In this twisted formulation, enslaved women were reconstructed as the agents of their own punishment, "blameworthy because of her purported ability to render the powerful weak" through seduction (Hartman 87). Consequently,

> Rape disappeared through the intervention of seduction—the assertion of the slave woman's complicity and willful submission. Seduction was central to the very constitution and imagination of the antebellum South for it provided *a way of masking* the antagonistic fissures of the social by ascribing to the object of property an ensnaring and criminal agency that acted to dissimulate the barbarous forms of white enjoyment permitted by the law…. The complicity of slave women displaced the act of sexual violence.
>
> (Hartman 87)

Further, Hartman positions this fantasy of seduction within a larger paternal Southern fantasy, one structured by "bonds of affection":

> The benign representation of the paternal institution in slave law depicted the master-slave relationship as typified by the bonds of affection and thereby transformed relations of violence and domination into those of affinity. This benignity depended upon a construction of the enslaved Black as one easily inclined to submission, a skilled maneuverer wielding weakness masterfully and a potentially threatening subordinate who could only be disciplined through violence. If what is at stake in social fantasy is the construction of nonantagonistic, organic, and complementary society, then the ability of the South to imagine slavery as a paternal and benign institution and master-slave relations as bound by feelings depended on the specter of the obsequious and threatening slave, for this Manichean construction undergirded both the necessary violence and the bonds of affection set forth in slave law. As well, this fantasy enabled a vision of whiteness defined primarily by its complementary relation to Blackness and by the desire to incorporate and regulate black excess. Seduction thus provided a holistic vision of social order, not divided by antagonisms and precariously balancing barbarism and civilization, violence and protection, mutual benevolence and *absolute submission*, and brutality and sentiment.
>
> (Hartman 88)

If gay Black discourse constructs Black subjectivity, as Darieck Scott argues, through a suspicion and dismissal of Black/white sexual relations, then that suspicion mobilizes the colonial scene of subjection as evidence. Hartman argues that antebellum white male subjectivity was constructed through a disavowal of its own violence and a perverse projection of that violence onto its victim. Consequently, "Black excess" is regulated and incorporated while the violence necessary for that incorporation, *regime maintenance*, is justified.

But Nugent complicates the logic of racial melancholia. Stuartt is not only a subject with contradictory desires, but, as the novel latest attests, he continues to grapple with this contradictory desire while engaging Orini in a relationship that blurs the lines between sex work and sexual intimacy. In a "Letter to Bum," in which Stuartt offers an apology for his actions (again, like Jack in Hughes "Passing," in both ambivalent senses of the word), including his relationship with Orini while engaged to a woman, Stuartt alludes to his relationship with Orini as structured through *play*.

> For it can be childlike to play at cops and robbers, and I play with hoodlums. They play "robbers," but it is serious business with them. They're grown up. I see it for them with a child's delight and "grown-up" asides. I play at everything--prince-and-pauper, rags-and-riches, cowboys-and-Indians--only now my play clothes come from Seville Row instead of Sears and Roebuck, and my playmates are adults instead of minors.
>
> Orini can relax with me because I don't touch his work. I would play cops-and-robbers with him, but he wouldn't be playing long. He'd mean it, and that would amuse neither me nor him. So instead we play house. And, since playing is the most serious thing I know, because it is most important, I am sincere. More sincere than any serious person can ever be, and sincerity is mighty flattering. It holds that which it attracts. I mean, sincerity in its essence.
>
> (Nugent 300)

Here, too, Stuartt's Wildean aphorism queers notions of domesticity and heteronormativity. Analogizing a child's interest in pretense, the queer intimacy Stuartt has fostered with these underworld criminals does not function to relax the rules of engagement but to further delineate the boundaries, including the boundaries of violence that separate *play* from *work*. Through play, Stuartt can put on the pretense of domesticity ("we play house") or the pretense of innocence in childhood games. But these childhood games serve as cultural conditioning or even mythmaking, inculcating children into a system of belief and socializing obedience to ideological hegemonic power. Stuartt's *play* queers and reconstructs these activities and their contradictions to focus our attention on their cultural function. To make sense of Stuartt's analogy I want to turn to a brief discussion of kink and race play within interracial sexuality, particularly where Black voices are centered.

In "Beyond Black and Blue: BDSM, Internet Pornography, and Black Female sexuality," Ariane Cruz examines the contradictions and discourse around Black women and kink, particularly race play. While groups like Samois, a San Francisco-based collective of lesbian feminists, have argued that "BDSM was not antithetical to being a lesbian or a feminist" and instead creates the grounds for "a productive and pleasurable sexual expression that offers a

critique of heteropatriarchy and its naturalization of gendered hierarchies of power with men as dominant, violent, and aggressive, and women as submissive, passive, and nonviolent," feminists women of color such as Alice Walker have derided this position when racialized sexuality is depicted, arguing that claims for a radical deconstruction of heteropatriarchy "mocked the lived realities of minorities such as women of color" (Cruz 414-415).

However, Cruz mobilizes a diverse group of Black women BDSM practitioners whose participation in sex play, particularly race play, "a form of BDSM that 'openly embraces and explores the (either 'real' or 'assumed') racial identity of the players" complicates our understanding of desire and how subjects relate to a history of oppressive racial sexuality. "Race play reveals how narratives of racialized sexual violence hinged on historical wrongdoing and racial transgressions script performances of Black/white interracial intimacy in BDSM" but also in the real world (Cruz 423). Citing Robert Bernasconi's "recorded work on race as a 'border concept'" that "reveal[s] the myriad of contradictions and volatile landscape of racial borders" on which race is constructed, Cruz argues that "race postures itself as a stable, sovereign truth, when in fact, it is a dynamic and fluid site of demarcation legible as a (conceptual) category of perceived purity historically engendered only because of profound mixing. It embodies what [Patricia] Holland calls the 'lie of difference,' masquerading as a fundamental marker of difference and separation; while an emblem of relation and intimacy, its borders, as race play evinces, marked by an erotically charged crossing" (Cruz 429-30).

In my estimation, what Orini finds most disturbing and what Nugent's novel stages through an interracial queer encounter, is the layering of a relationship of difference (upon which interracial and heterosexual coupling is constructed) on top of a relation of similitude (a possibility in a queer coupling). As such, queer Black/white sex relations doubly confuse spectators, because those bodies are made to stand in for an unacknowledged symbolic history. As Darieck Scott claims, "this concussion…is less that we too frequently affix a single, simple meaning to the image of a Black/white couple than we somehow sense in that image an unbearable *surfeit* of meaning, a discordant and uneven collision and collusion of the narratives that make up our colonial and postcolonial histories…violence becomes the pivot on which the narrative turns, or its climax" (Scott's italics; 316). Scott does not merely want a degree of play in meaning but an agency for the subjects involved.

But the narrative does not end with a celebration of these polymorphous sexual liaisons. Instead, its penultimate chapter suggests that the outside world's prohibitions are catching up with the contradictions Stuartt maintains.

Stuartt is Doubly Outed

In the novel's final two chapters Stuartt is doubly outed—as an African American passing for white but also for conducting a secret flirtation and affair with Orini's bodyguard-driver—Tony Bessetti. What the novel makes plain is that Stuartt finds Tony's original disapproval of his boss's open secret distasteful. In this final example of contradictory desire, Stuartt's attraction and seduction of Tony, unlike the form of seduction that he performs under threat of violence while held captive by Orini, is born out of a desire to seek approval. In a performance of his own vulnerability, a performance ambiguously portrayed as intentionally performative but truthful, Stuartt mirrors Tony's closeted vulnerability. The effect and affect surprises even Tony, who

> had been at a loss to express himself. He had been swept along by these honest but superficial theatrics. He had responded automatically and instinctively, his own emotions alive and quivering beneath the *lash* of Stuartt's mood—the *lash* that had so punctured Tony's layer of restraint. Awkwardly he had touched Stuartt's head with a hand become tender and sad—awkwardly and vulnerably, as one does with a child who has been hurt in the unreachable depths.
>
> (Nugent 312; my emphasis)

The novel's use of the *lash* is precisely the symbol suffused with an "unbearable surfeit of meaning," and yet, the novel asks that we bear it as the vehicle of the metaphor. It is not literal, thank Heavens, but its weight haunts the tenderness of the moment. In this final queer reversal, the narrator suggests that Stuartt holds the lash that 'puncture[s] Tony's layer of restraint" (Nugent 312). I would argue that *this* form of race play, a queer reversal of the scene of subjection, speaks to the forms of violence that structure white heteropatriarchy, the forms of violence that operate between (white) men in the history of racialized sexuality. For reasons unexplained or explored, violence had previously punished Tony Bessetti into submission, the performance of a compulsory heterosexuality that Stuartt read as the "fundamental aloneness of being" detected "on Tony's expressionless face." Such that when Tony, prompted by Stuartt's tears, affects his own moment of embarrassing vulnerability, it renders him, not weak but "so much more beautiful and alone and vulnerable" (Nugent 311).

But the meaning of violence was there all along:

> Orini, the modern and ruthless "robber king" and "dictator" of an underworld empire, whose often printed picture caused women's hearts to flutter without really doing complete justice to his rather cruel Latin beauty. Orini, whose autocratic government of the far-flung and remunerative domain of crime was teaching the financial and diplomatic wizards of the world newer and better methods. Orini, the hero of many a male child both minor and adult.
>
> (Nugent 306-7)

I wanted to end with this final moment of the symbolic *lash*, a symbol mobilized in a metaphoric configuration of white-on-Black violence and queer relationality that works to queer our association with the lash to Blackness and slavery. The *work* this symbol produces is very disturbing as are the myths of manhood that are continually disavowed, myths that obscure how violence has been used through a history of racialized sexuality to discipline subjects.

Perhaps this sense of violence that queerly re-presents scenes of subjection—both as psychic and physical violence—explains Nugent's love of taboo material. These are scenes and narratives that do not give readers immediate pleasure, although the lack may stem from prohibitions that structure our hermeneutics. If we sense something is amiss, the Black dandy's performance aims to queer the terms of prohibition to reveal their problematic premises.

Chapter Three: Nella Larsen's Black Female Dandy

Readers do not have to look much further than the scene in Clare's hotel room for an example of complex social antagonisms. For Gertrude, Clare, and Irene, passing functions differently, has different goals, and different effects. What Hughes and Nugent revealed in their respective texts Larsen also reveals: these narratives combine several social antagonisms around race. Although, for each author, black/white sexual relations *also* present a site for investigating the limits of race as does the black dandy's relationship to cultural syncretism. In a literal and figurative sense, black/white sexual relations, or cultural syncretism stage the contradictions within a racialized sexual economy. While the fear of miscegenation has been used as the rationale to scapegoat the Black dandy figure or even Black communities, I have also identified moments in which the Black dandy alone stages the contradictions of the racial regime's logics. The Black dandy's penchant for sartorial expression reveals the limits of relying upon fashion as a stable signifier, much as race, too, defies fixity. In Clare, Larsen's modern Black dandy, we find another site of contradiction—the relationship between race, gender, and commodity fetishism.

While black feminist scholarship on *Passing* has thoroughly teased out the implications of historicist and psychoanalytic readings that reveal the gendered and racial tensions within the novella, especially regarding the politics of respectability that evinced a preoccupation with black women's association with the urban sex worker, I want to offer a historicist reading of black dandyism that encapsulates the tension within the New Negro movement's racial project. Which is to say, early twentieth century forms of blackness are intertwined with evolving conceptions of whiteness and national belonging. Furthermore, within a nascent and burgeoning commodity culture, black women faced nuanced problems. Nevertheless, *Passing* reveals the forms of knowledge and practices black women developed to navigate these shifting landscapes, particularly the tension between commodified models of identification and desire.

We should be worried about Clare. As a Black woman reaching out for support in a dangerous domestic situation, an inability to empathize would indicate a limit or a moral failing. Subsequently, *Passing* reveals the limits of Irene's moral compass, one that is clouded by an envy and fear that play out throughout the remainder of the narrative. Focusing on images of Clare's dandyism, as Irene's reactions give us a sense of the limits of her respectability politics and more evidence of that psychic unraveling that, ironically, aligns Irene with the very man both women abhor, John Bellew. Irene's reaction to Clare starts to resemble the forms of white anxiety that have been articulated about the Black dandy, an anxiety that grows and festers into a fear that Clare and Irene's husband, Brian, are engaged in an extra-marital affair. For the Harlem Renaissance, the racial passing subject is the limit of Black respectability politics.

But, as Ahmed demonstrates, racial passing has its own limits. Passing has no logic nor is it

> identifiable as a discrete practice that has discernible political effects. On the contrary, passing is intelligible only in relation to a complex set of social

> antagonisms; passing for white as a black subject has a very different relation to power than passing for black as a white subject. Equally, passing may function at the level of the intentional subject (the subject who seeks to pass in order to secure something otherwise unavailable to them), or it may function as a misrecognition on the part of others (one may pass for something other than one's self-identification but not seek to, or know it). Passing may be successful -- in which case the difference between the subject and the image assumed becomes unrecognizable - or it may fail - the subject may be detected as 'not being' the identity assumed. Thus, passing may not be a special case that we can speak of as throwing up a crisis of identity in and of itself.
>
> (Ahmed 92)

Previously, I have argued that the history of the Black dandy indexes a contestation over how diasporic Black subjects in the West expressed their freedom and how white anxiety sought to contest that performance by distorting the memory, history, and representation of Black subjects. In a reading of Langston Hughes's "Home" the presence of a Black musician-dandy provides a fictive example that epitomizes the tension between Black expression (through a negotiation of European classical and African American jazz performance traditions) and the racialized, sexual anxiety (i.e., fear of miscegenation) that precedes or distorts reception of Roy's musical performance sexuality. Consequently, to avoid the forms of affective embarrassment that would require his white neighbors in Hopkinsville, Missouri to reimagine forms of equitable sociality, his body is violently brutalized in a modern-day lynching. Whereas, in his posthumous novel, *Gentleman Jigger*, Bruce Nugent's queer Black dandy weaponizes affective embarrassment to negotiate the inevitable scenes of subjection (violence) that continually haunt black/white (sexual) relations.

However, in *Passing* reading is a hermeneutic practice that also informs how Black women characters observe each other in relationship to a racialized gender. *Passing*'s narrative, initiated by a series of letters that trigger Irene's visually rich but sometimes faulty memories, foregrounds how Black women construct specific reading practices informed by their sartorial choices, choices that evince how they negotiate within a limited range of options dictated by competing notions of blackness, womanhood, and sexuality which informed the Negro Movement's evolving conception of black nationality and class-consciousness. Consequently, one's ability to read and decipher the totality of the body—its skin colors, sartorial choices, and presentation of its body—makes possible the evasion of social embarrassment and an escape from a violence that is always already gendered and racialized either in hostile public spaces overtly defined by a differential of racialized power, or, surprisingly, in private spaces in which the specter of internalized whiteness looms large, or even, at times, interrupts the presumed safety of Black women's sociality, as in the case of Jack Bellew's scenes. Larsen's Black dandies not only rely upon passing to access forbidden and racially segregated spaces, but in order to survive, they also develop reading practices to further escape or evade the embarrassment, denigration, humiliation, or death that accompanies such a risky racial performance. Borrowing and revising Judith Butler's question, the novella asks, "is there a way, then, to read Nella Larsen's text…[as] the convergen[ce] [of] modalities of power by which…sexual difference is articulated and assumed?"

I want to offer a reading that explains how the female Black dandy indexes a history of contestation over Black women's sexuality, including the representation of their bodies. In the novella, Clare Kendry, a childhood friend of Irene Redfield, no longer desires to distance herself from Black sociality even though she's passing as white and married to a virulently anti-black racist. Instead of disappearing into whiteness, Clare's passionate desire for fellowship with Irene and other members of Harlem's Black community is expressed through increasingly extravagant sartorial choices. However, Clare's presence in Irene's life triggers a crisis that leads Irene to consider the forms of respectability and prohibitions that have structured her life. Accordingly, Clare's mere presence as a transgressive figure, passing through Blackness and whiteness without a sense of the consequences for herself and others, speaks to the forms of social embarrassment and violence that Irene has long tried to evade.

I offer a reading of several moments in which Irene reads Clare, moments that juxtapose the hermeneutic of racial fetishism (as expressed through the icon of the tragic mulatta and racial passing subject) against commodity fetishism (as expressed through the Black dandy). However, in "The Clothes Make the Woman: The Symbolics of Prostitution in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* and Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem*," Kimberley Roberts argues that turn of the twentieth century Black women were haunted by a fourth stereotype: the Black woman as sex worker or prostitute.

Like Nugent's queer Black dandy and Hughes's Black musician-dandy, Clare's stylized elegance and desire for attention threatens the fixed and stable heteronormative conceptions of racialized gender upon which Irene depends for safety. As the embarrassed friend who perceives that Clare's casual disregard for these boundaries threatens her own identity, Irene responds in ways that strangely overlap with John Bellew (Clare's white husband), in that she, too, is interested in surveilling and policing racial and sexual boundaries. But, as I have argued throughout, the history of racialized sexuality in the United States is one in which racial anxiety and affective embarrassment are used as rationales for exercising violence to police racial and sexual transgressions.

In the narrative's tragic ending, whether readers believe that Irene has pushed Clare off the window's ledge or not, Irene is still an accomplice to Clare's death. Once John Bellew reads Irene as Black, Clare's life is endangered. Irene knew so much, and, throughout the novel, had warned Clare of this form of guilt-by-association that threatens all racially passing subjects. What Irene never owns up to is the power that she possesses as the in-group member, who, in Amy Robinson's formulation of the triangular theater of passing, possesses the lion's share of power. In this case, Irene's silence does not permit the pass, rather, she makes possible Clare's violent murder.

The novel portrays Irene's psychic unraveling as a narratorial unreliability clouded by an all-consuming jealousy. However, from the novel's beginning, Irene provides several rich details from the archives of her own memory, memories that frame how Clare appears as a racial passing subject and decadent dandy. While the narrative speeds towards its tragic ending, Irene is portrayed as the paranoid jealous wife, fearful that her husband, Brian, has become ensnared by Clare's desire for attention, always accented by dandified fashion choices. But, in my estimation, Irene's paranoia, embarrassment, and psychic unraveling have as much to do with the ambiguity and semantic confusion brought on by the two hermeneutics—one informed by race and the

other informed by commodity fetishism.[1] As we shall see, Irene is at once fascinated and repulsed by Clare's sartorial choices as they evidence a history of racialized sexuality that continually threatens Black women's representation. Whether as a tragic mulatta, racial passing subject, dandy, or sex worker, the novel continually asks readers if there is any space left in which Black women in the early twentieth century can perform agency.

Two Competing Hermeneutics & a Crisis of (Mis)reading

I invite us to think of these questions as each of Clare's reappearances in the novel, framed by Irene's ambivalent gazing, suggest that the aesthetics of Black dandyism are iterative moments in which the novel tests the limits of the intersectional nature of Black identities—sexual, gendered, and class.

Irene's memory of her unexpected reunion with Clare at a rooftop hotel in Chicago is framed by ambiguous signs that simultaneously puzzle and intrigue. In one sense, the reunion is plagued by misrecognition, as the text portrays Irene's failure to immediately recognize Clare, who is passing as white, as a critique of her own shallow understanding of race, made even more ironic since Irene is also passing for white. The text intentionally leaves the reader in the dark, such that we are at the mercy of Irene's unreliable narration (her "unseeing eyes") and whatever racial hermeneutics we bring to the text.

Irene's unacknowledged misrecognition/failed reading, I argue, challenges readers to acknowledge that race fails to generate any reliable hermeneutic. Consequently, Irene and readers can only rely upon other contextual clues, mainly Clare's body language and how that language communicates with others, including Irene:

> Presently there were voices, a man's booming one and a woman's slightly husky. A waiter passed her, followed by a sweetly scented woman in a fluttering dress of green chiffon whose mingled pattern of narcissus, jonquils, and hyacinths was a reminder of pleasantly chill spring days. Behind her there was a man, very red in the face, who was mopping his neck and forehead with a big crumpled handkerchief.…
>
> The man remained standing, abstractly, pinching the knot of his bright blue tie. Across the small space that separated the two tables his voice carried clearly.
>
> "See you later, then," he declared, looking down at the woman. There was pleasure in his tones and a smile on his face.
>
> His companion's lips parted in some answer, but her words were blurred by the little intervening distance and the medley of noises floating up from the

[1] In *Materializing Queer Desire*, Elisa Glick defines Marx's "theory of commodity fetishism" as a "split between what appears to be and what really" or "the 'secret' of the commodity-form; in other words, the commodity's 'mysterious' character [which] is the result of a system of exchange that mystifies social relations, so that relations between people take the form of relations between things" (Glick 3).

> streets below. They didn't reach Irene. But she noted the peculiar caressing smile that accompanied them.
>
> …
>
> An attractive-looking woman, was Irene's opinion, with those dark, almost black, eyes and that wide mouth like a scarlet flower against the ivory of her skin. Nice clothes too, just right for the weather, thin and cool without being mussy, as summer things were so apt to be.
>
> (Larsen 14)

Deborah E. McDowell aptly identifies "images of concealment and burial" that pervade the novel, indicative of Irene's sexual repression. Additionally, in this description of Clare, where both Irene and the reader are made ignorant of Clare's identity, the text illustrates the tension between accessibility and inaccessibility, what is available for reading and what is not, stoking the fires of our and Irene's curiosity. Irene is not just an observant reader. She's also curious, looking for signs to interpret, even when "words [are] blurred" (14). Even before a visual reading is available, both bodies are preceded by the sonic registers of identification, the voice, the man's "booming one" and Clare's "slightly husky" register, followed later by the detection of "pleasure in his tones and a smile on his face" (14). Additionally, before we are given a description of Clare's fashion—in its aesthetic and utilitarian function—Irene's curiosity is peaked by the olfactory senses, describing Clare as a "sweetly scented woman" (14). And, with the allusion to the floral design of Clare's vernal dress, also well-suited for the oppressive hot summer's weather, the proliferation of aesthetic description of Clare's style, almost bordering on excess, undoubtedly, as McDowell argues, awakens a buried homoerotic desire in Irene. How could it not? Even without the homoerotic reading available, Clare's excessive sexuality—or Irene's reading of excess—also aligns with the figure of the female sex worker. Along with the "fluttering dress" perfectly "thin and cool without being mussy, as summer things were apt to be," Irene yearns to read through ambiguous signs: Clare's "odd sort of smile" is "a shade too provocative," yet something she "couldn't define" but lingers as "a certain impression" (Larsen 14-15). Taken together, the sartorial and the body language, the text gives the impression that Clare's visibility invites a lookedatness or gazing.

Irene, however, does not. That's because of two fears, as evidence by the overt description of Clare's style and the subconscious suggestion of illicit sexuality, haunt Irene: the distortion of Black women as sex workers and/or the fear of being detected as a racial passing subject. Black respectability politics was informed by two overlapping interests. Middle class Black women reformers affiliated with the Black Baptist church (Kimberley Roberts cites Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Nannie Hellen Burroughs, and Virginia W. Broughton) were eager to rescue Black womanhood from association with sex work, especially as Southern black women migrants, seeking refuge in the urban North, found difficulties in securing reliable work. At the same time, the "New Negro intelligentsia" aimed to "police the black woman's body—in effect, to remove her autonomy completely regarding sexuality issues" (Roberts 109-111). Thus, Irene's sense of Black female identity was constantly surveilled by the adoption of a moral duty steeped in Black reformist politics that subsumed any private interests or desires to the rehabilitation of a public Black identity.

In readings of Larsen's novels, black feminist scholars have wonderfully reproduced the early twentieth century debates around this gendered tension—where conceptions of black women are caught between two very limited models of identification. How do either narrowly defined models of black womanhood intersect with African American conceptions of national belonging, a concern for Harlem's leaders who relied upon interracial national networks of philanthropy and cultural art production to offer up black-owned cultural products in service to broader nationalist and democratic ideals? Without a doubt, as the discourse on the Harlem Renaissance points to, and here I am thinking specifically of David Levering Lewis's argument for a consideration of the Harlem Hellfighters' triumphant return and military parade in February 1919 as a performative event that inaugurates the Renaissance, conceptions of race and blackness were intertwined with conceptions of Americanness. *Passing* re-stages moments in which black women read each other's bodies and problematizes the United States' genealogy of racialized gendering. As a novella concerned with the racially passing black subject, Larsen's narrative suggests that black middle-class women and the larger politics of respectability had not resolved the tension between racial desire and racial identification. If the black prostitute was an inadequate model, or if black women's sexuality should not exist outside of heterosexual marriage, then could black women model their bodies and sartorial aesthetics after a national sartorial aesthetics that catered to and offered up white middle class womanhood as an ideal model? How does this reproduce a troubling form of racialized and gendered desire? Irene, "conscious that she had been staring…returned to her own affairs," only to become "acutely aware that someone was watching her":

> Feeling her colour heighten under the continued inspection, she slid her eyes down. What, she wondered, could be the reason for such persistent attention? Had she, in her haste in the taxi, put her hat on backwards? Guardedly she felt at it. No. Perhaps there was a streak of powder somewhere on her face…Something wrong with her dress…Perfectly all right. *What* was it?...
>
> And gradually there rose in Irene a small inner disturbance, odious and hatefully familiar….
>
> Did that woman, could that woman, somehow know that here before her very eyes on the roof of the Drayton sat a Negro?
>
> Absurd! Impossible! White people were so stupid about such things for all that they usually asserted that they were able to tell; and by the most ridiculous means, finger-nails, palms of hands, shapes of hearts, teeth, and other equally silly rot. They always took her for an Italian, a Spaniard, a Mexican, or a gipsy. Never, when she was alone, had they even remotely seemed to suspect that she was a Negro. No, the woman sitting there staring at her couldn't possibly know. Nevertheless, Irene felt, in turn, anger, scorn, and fear slide over here. It wasn't that she was ashamed of being a Negro, or even of having it declared. It was the

> idea of being ejected from any place, even in the polite and tactful way in which the Drayton would probably do it, that disturbed her.
>
> (15-16)

Like Darwin's ear that serves as "the sign of the atavistic female" in nineteenth century Victorian culture, Irene knows that her own cultural era looks to the body for signs of Blackness. But in dismissing these signs "finger-nails, palms of hands, shapes of hearts, teeth, and other equally silly rot" does she suggest that Blackness is located elsewhere? And if she, in turn, relies upon fashion and cosmetics to create whiteness, is Blackness located in a different site?

In this merging of Clare's dandyism with the figure of the sex worker and racial passing subject, two hermeneutics, two ways of reading, I have argued, confound Irene. Sara Ahmed defines passing as a "set of cultural and embodied practices (passing for the other). In the act of passing through a given place one does not come to a halt or inhabit that place. Likewise, in the act of passing for an-other, or passing through the image of another, one does not come to inhabit the image in which 'one' moves (away from oneself). To this extent, acts of passing cannot be thought of as events: they involve encounters between others whose boundaries are not fixed" (Ahmed 94). In this unexpected reunion, *Passing* suggests that, while Clare is unbothered by her reception, Irene exhibits the anxiety and embarrassment I refer to as a crisis of reading. Clare's boundary crossing performances—as dandy, as sex worker, as white woman, as a Black woman—are not fixed, and, consequently, reflect the fragile boundaries upon which Irene constructs her own racialized gender identity.

(Black) Women's Fashions & Bodies: Gendering Consumption, Racializing Citizenship

The discourse on fashion during America's nineteenth century industrialization combined both an anxiety about profligacy among women and black citizens. As Amann suggests, Western Europe resolved its gendered class conflict, recuperating a modest nationalist male ideal within the image of the dandy, a figure whose carefully tailored clothing incorporated the "anti-court country style into urban culture," providing a sartorial model for identity that both upper- and middle-class men could don in the creation a new nationalist identity (Zakim 324). However, US American discourse maintained a steady tension between modesty and extravagance, frugality and profligacy, a tension that maintained a distinction between genders and races.

As America flourished and the middle class swelled to incorporate more citizens, access to commodities became a marker of national identity. According to Zakim, the colonial era's preoccupation with modesty evolved into a preoccupation with a distinction between differently gendered consumption habits (Zakim 327-9 and 341-2). Nineteenth century US American male dress would continue to reject the "ornamental," like its European counterparts. Modesty turned into middle class uniformity, as the male suit symbolized an "aesthetic of democracy," a uniform of ideological uniformity symbolizing industriousness and earnest labor (Zakim 341-2). Accordingly, the garment industry emerged to quickly supply men with ready-made clothing, evidence of an industry which maintains communication between local clothing retailers, tailors

and seamstresses, and fabric manufacturers, often planning year ahead to replenish stock and advertise styles. And, at the same time, the burden of fashion knowledge fell on the retailer to keep up with changing fashions, allowing US American men to maintain a disavowal between their sartorial performance and sartorial knowledge. Zakim's reading of fashion journals notes their different readerships and purposes:

> [By] the fifties *Godey's* and other journals of domestic culture had begun to include dress patterns in their pages. They effect a certain standardization of women's wear, not only in Philadelphia and New York, but in Wisconsin, Utah, and Florida as well. The patterns were often realized by the wearer of the garment herself, or by her working in close cooperation with a local seamstress. Men took a far less active role in dressing themselves, which meant that they only achieved their fashionability through the tailor's mediation…. Unlike *Godey's*, then, the *Mirror of Fashion*'s plates and instructions were not designed for direct consumption but were for professional use. Only then were they disseminated. This gave men the chance to ignore fashion without risking the wrong appearance…[T]he tailor did indeed facilitate the male "renunciation" of fashion, as paradoxical as it may sound.
>
> (Zakim 343-5)

In contrast, nineteenth century women's fashion continued to be dictated by home-spun production (Zakim 327-329). Until the advent of the late nineteenth century urban department store, "there were no 'clothing warehouses' for women," instead "women continued to shop for cloths rather than clothing…replacing lace edgings, or shoulders, or bodies as the styles changed and they sought to keep up" (Zakim 331). Consequently, "fashionable excess" and the time accustomed for women's self-fashioning "was, more than ever, a female trait…associated with moral weakness," except in the case of the male dandy (Zakim 333).

The male dandy "made 'fashion the business and study of his life,'" "assigned premier status to his outerself," was reported to "spen[d] hours on his toilette each day," and participate in the forms of leisure-walking, promenading, and shopping associated with the European flaneur or US American woman. Consequently, his extravagance, unproductivity, and attention to detail racialized him as foreign and unconcerned with American masculine forms of industriousness:

> In fact, the dandy's essential betrayal was to his sex. He really was, for all practical purposes, a woman. That was because surrender to the "arbitrary, capricious tyrant" that was fashion was a female trait…. [M]en who dress up were denigrated as dandies while women who did the same required no separate category. The same had been true of that other urban type of questionable manliness, the clerk, who was effeminized not only because he desisted from tilling the virgin soil out West, but also by his desire "to dress well and make a good appearance." For women, on the other hand, such concerns were part of nature. They had nothing to apologize for.
>
> (Zakim 325)

For African Americans and the forms of sartorial extravagance and performance rituals portrayed in *Life in Philadelphia*, blackness became doubly excepted:

> An important variation of this genre was the Negro dandy, whose sartorial transgressions were reviewed as particularly galling. Indeed, any Negro who sought to look his best might well have been accused, by definition, of being a dandy, since the spectacle of a well-dressed Negro so clearly violated the American (visual order).

Just as women's predilection for aestheticization was portrayed as a natural weakness, so was black citizens' love of luxury. While white women's behavior could be recuperated within heterosexual marriage, black self-fashioning, even when coded as a celebration of political freedom, was doubly read as transgressive.

Black Women, Commodity Fetishism, and the Department Store

I want to return to three prints in Clay's *Life in Philadelphia Series*: "What you tink of my new poke bonnet…?" (1830), "The New Shoes" (1833), and "Have you any flesh coloured silk stockings…" (May 1829). With their particular focus on black women's consumption in specialty stores, Clay's series evinces an anxiety around black women's earnest regard for self-fashioning or dressing the part, even down to her accessories.

In "What you tink of my new poke bonnet…?" a black woman presumably tries on a ridiculously large bonnet that completely obscures her head and face, rendering the question she poses to her male companion as comically inappropriate. Her face is unreadable. The comically large size of the bonnet resembles the ballooned fitting of her matronly dress, contributing to the disappearance of her form. Viewers familiar with minstrelsy's mammy would not find it hard to imagine the body obscured by her dress, suggesting a white desire to make black women's bodies, and subjectivities, disappear.

In "New Shoes," a print drawn by William Summers and Charles Hunt from a similar Clay print, the depiction of black faces and bodies maintains a uniformity that almost makes gender distinctions indistinguishable outside of clothing. A fashionably dressed black male-and-female couple are visible in the background. The black shop clerk, whose racial similitude is more visible in this print, suggests that black residents frequented black-owned and/or black-operated specialty retail shops. But the text of this print operates to undermine blackness by undermining black sartorial choices. In degrading malapropisms familiar to readers as blackface minstrelsy's negro dialect, she asks "Hab you not got any White or Pink ones I cannot bear Black if is sich a brey Dirty color" while the black clerk in the background replies "Why Miss it may not be so Handsome to look at But you will find it a Good Color to Wear" suggesting that black women sought out fashion that could obscure their own blackness.

Lastly, in "Have you any flesh coloured silk stockings…?" a black female patron in colorfully rendered dress inquires of a male French clerk while another black female patron looks on in the background outside the store. Here, the extravagant fashions of black women are linked to a foreignness. But unlike "New Shoes" the female patron's inquiry for "flesh coloured

stockings" ("flesh" is underlined in the print) suggests a desire to purchase fashion in verisimilitude to skin color.

While these three prints frame white anxiety about black self-fashioning and consumption, their racialized gendering of black women place black women dandies further outside the realm of appropriate civic feeling, suggesting their discomfort either with their race and/or with US American culture attitudes. *Passing* provides a unique response to this anxiety, acknowledging that black women have long developed reading and performance practices to navigate US American racial and gendered hostilities.

Fashion as Mimicry, a Post-Colonial and Psychoanalytic Critique

Black feminist criticism has largely framed the racial tension between Clare and Irene as a tension between desirable class positions for black women (black middle-class respectability versus white upper-class affluence) or a tension between the models of black women's racialized sexuality (heterosexual black womanhood exemplified in motherhood versus the black sex worker exemplified by her mixed-race status or her appeal to interracial sexuality). However, *Passing* also contextualizes the tension black women's self-fashioning in a world of commodity fetishism, where black women's bodies are figured as gendered racial commodities and rely upon self-fashioning and other sartorial practices to exercise agency (i.e., black dandyism). Furthermore, the tension in this economy gendered racial commodification and signification is symbolized in the relationship between the novella's black female characters' bodies (shape and skin color) and their dress. Implicitly, the figure of the black femme prostitute (as either trans- or cis-gendered) functions as a projection of male fantasy, as Kimberley Roberts argues in "The Clothes Make the Woman: The Symbolics of Prostitution in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand* and Claude McKay's *Home to Harlem*," or even symbolizes a Marxist critique of racial capitalism, as Roderick Ferguson argues in *Aberrations in Blackness*. Consequently, the black femme sex worker threatens the social order because the figure relies upon a commodification of flesh. But, within the history of Western fashion and the emergence of dandyism, in which the cut of the clothes draws further attention to the gendering of bodies, black femme subjects face heightened scrutiny regarding the nation's discourse on civic loyalty and social cohesion as registered by capitalism's discourses on racialized gender, racialized sexuality, and racialized class status.

Consequently, I propose, we can revise Robinson's theory to include not only myths of race but gender, as well. If the United States' racial regime produces and demands different models of gendered and racialized identification, within the fantasy of a universal middle class, feminist psychoanalytic readings of *Passing* have problematized the Freudian identification/desire binary. In "*Passing*: Race, Identification, and Desire" Catherine Rottenberg employs Homi Bhabha's racial/post-colonial critique and Judith Butler's theories on gender to forward claims that black subjectivity poses trouble for Freudian models of identification. Freudian psychoanalysis conceptualizes gender and sexual desire as the law of hetero-patriarchal societies: a gendered subject is offered its same-gendered parent as a model for identification ("desire-to-be") through which it can learn desire for ("desire-to-have") opposite gendered subjects through its relationship with an opposite sex parent (Rottenberg 441-442). However,

unlike the performance of gender, Rottenberg reminds readers that "race norms operate by compelling subjects to assume or identify with certain identity categories." Furthermore,

> white racist regimes create a distinct bifurcation between identification and 'desire-to-be,' such that certain subjects are encouraged to privilege and thus desire attributes associated with whiteness, but concurrently these same subjects are forced to identify as black (which has gained its specific signification due to white supremacist discourses such as the one-drop rule)….[W]hiteness circulates as the ideal, while the one-drop rule and all of the prohibitions linked to trying to identify differently help ensure that subjects do not transgress racial boundaries. The ambivalence or contradiction underlying the assumption of whiteness can actually be restated in the following way: identify as black (or else) but aspire to be white. This contradiction, which actually constitutes the hegemonic category of race, proves to be a very effective way of policing racial borders. The particular modality of the bifurcation, in other words, is simultaneously a product of power relations in a given society and that which allows power to operate effectively.
>
> (Rottenberg 441)

In a further reading of *Passing*, I want to put pressure on Rottenberg's formulation. First, I would argue, in a white supremacist regime, *all* (not "certain") subjects are "encouraged to privilege and thus desire attributes associated with whiteness." The problem of race, which Harlem Renaissance writers have dramatized in narratives of racially passing subjects, is that for *certain* subjects, passing as white becomes a means by which subjects raced as black can pass and identify as white. The ambivalence, brilliantly depicted in *Passing*, evinces the racial regimes contradictions: colonial regimes demand *mimicry* while simultaneously rejecting verisimilitude. Rottenberg, referencing Bhabha, recognizes that the "mimic man can potentially disrupt the self-grounding assumptions of whiteness (and colonialism itself)" for "mimicry can always turn to mockery" (Rottenberg 440). If so, what is mimicry's relationship to racial passing? Or how does Larsen's novella bring this tension to the forefront?

Blackface minstrelsy proves that the demand for *mimicry* is always a failed endeavor, because, as Bhabha reminds us, "the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite" results in a failure, a failure recuperated through comic mockery in which the other's performance is ridiculed or an occasion for the other to ridicule the terms under which colonial mimicry is proffered as an inevitable failure (Bhabha 122). (In fact, these two performance traditions—working in contradistinction to each other—is the narrative Robinson uncovers in *Forgeries*, as he charts not only the West's invention of the Negro but black resistance against racial myth.)

But Rottenberg detours from Bhabha in a significant way, one which, I argue, fails to account for the performative and intersectional nature of identities or, as in the case of black dandyism, how the sartorial functions to desire and identification through the class-based models of commodity fetishism. Rottenberg claims:

> If *Passing* discloses that identifying as black has historically been a compelled identification, and not about the *desire* to usurp the other's place (to be or appropriate and thus become the other), then some of psychoanalysis's most basic

> assumptions about identification are put into question. Identification can no longer be understood simply as "an endless process of violent negation, a process of killing of the other in fantasy in order to usurp the other's place, the place where the subject desires to be." Nor can it be understood as the psychological process whereby the subject assimilates an aspect, property or attribute of the other, and is transformed. For identification with blackness under white racist regimes has historically not only been coerced, but it has also been coded as *undesirable*.
>
> Desire and identification are not free-floating entities.
>
> (Rottenberg 443)

And yet, blackface minstrelsy, as Eric Lott's *Love and Theft* illustrates, is evidence of a psychic ambivalence, a re-staging of desire and disgust for blackness or, in the United States, a re-staging of white anxiety about black assimilation of aspects, properties, or attributes of whiteness (i.e., class) that *biologically cannot* and *morally should not*, according to the racial regimes' myth, result in white identification. Afterall, the myth of race includes claims to a natural racial purity, and efforts to maintain this myth evince a chaotic and always changing body of laws, juridical decision, and scientific theories that attempt to police the permeable boundaries of race.

For Bhabha, "the very place of identification, caught in the tension of demand and desire, is a space of splitting. The fantasy of the native is precisely to occupy the master's place while keeping his place in the slave's avenging anger" (Bhabha 63-64). Or, what "constitutes the figure of colonial otherness—the white man's artifice *inscribed* on the black man's body" (my italics) epitomizes the "impossible object that the liminal problem of colonial identity and its vicissitudes emerges" (Bhabha 64). What a post-colonial critique provides Bhabha, an understanding which Rottenberg's analysis overlooks, is the ability to understand how colonial otherness, a racialized gendered otherness, is produced through the status conferred by colonial power (i.e., class status). Colonial power is not only manifested as race, which Bhabha defines as the fetishizing of skin color, but, I argue, it is also manifested in other forms of commodity fetishism which shape and fashion the body.

Irene's Memory of Clare as the Tragic Mulatta

Scholars have debated the significance of the novella's opening symbol that spurs the narrative into motion—-Clare's letter to Irene. Described as a "thin sly thing which bore no return address," "as a little flaunting," written in "purple ink…on foreign paper of extraordinary size," Deborah E. McDowell reads the letter's envelope as "(a metaphoric vagina) which Irene hesitates to open, fearing its 'contents would reveal' an 'attitude toward danger'" (McDowell 374). For McDowell, the text is also a confusion of hermeneutics; Irene's preoccupation with reading Clare as a racial passing subject uncomfortably crosses with Irene's continued disavowal of lesbian attraction. The envelope, as an opening image, establishes the tension, as an "imag[e] of concealment and burial" or a sign of the narrative's dramatization of queer sexual repression (McDowell xxxvi). Ann duCille, among others, has taken umbrage with McDowell's queer reading, proposing that, instead of reading the envelope, its contents, and Irene's disavowal as "signs of lesbian attraction," readers would benefit from a historicist reading that acknowledges

the era's "preoccupation with the 'always already sexual' black female body" including "a woman's way of talking through the body—of expressing material or experiential desire in bodily terms" (duCille 104). Quoting Lauren Berlant, duCille distinguishes between "wanting someone sexually and wanting someone's body," a distinction between desire and identification (duCille 104, quoting Berlant 111). However, in a chapter of *Bodies that Matter* devoted to a reading of the novella, Judith Butler argues (alongside Claudia Tate and Hazel Carby), that these two domains, the psychoanalytic and historicist, "are inextricably linked, such that the text offers to read the racialization of sexual conflict" (174).

I want to continue this methodology and draw attention to Irene's first memory of Clare, a memory that builds on the symbolism of the envelope through the language of the sartorial. As Elizabeth Amann has argued throughout *Dandyism in the Age of Revolution: The Art of the Cut*, in modernity clothing indexes a space of contestation, including a desire to free fashion from the forms of signification demanded under the *ancien regime*'s sumptuary laws, laws that dictated the color that French sex workers must wear or laws that dictated the form of cloth acceptable for the enslaved in the colonies. For Black subjects fashion becomes the means in which to test those claims.

Reading the envelope and Clare's desire for Black sociality, a move fraught with danger, triggers Irene's childhood memory of Clare. In this primal scene the text alludes to the position of the tragic mulatto/a within the nation's history of racialized sexuality and violence:

> And for a swift moment Irene Redfield seemed to see a *pale* small girl sitting on a ragged *blue* sofa, sewing pieces of bright *red* cloth together, while her drunken father, a tall, powerfully built man, raged threateningly up and down the shabby room, bellowing curses and making spasmodic lunges at her which were not the less frightening because they were, for the most part, ineffectual. But only the fact that the child had edged herself and her poor sewing over to the furthermost corner of the sofa suggested that she was in any way perturbed by this menace to herself and her work.
>
> (Larsen 9; my emphasis)

The novel gives no clue as to how Irene was privy to this scene of domestic violence. Rumors of Clare's early pre-passing life circulated amongst Irene and her peers. But, as readers, the symbolic colors position Clare's threatened figure within a shameful national past, made more tragic by Clare's semblance—her *paleness*—to her violent father, who Irene recalls only a few paragraphs later, "had been brought home dead, killed in a silly saloon-fight":

> Clare, who was at the time a scant fifteen years old, had just stood there with her lips pressed together, her thin arms folded across her narrow chest, staring down at the familiar *pasty-white face* of her parent with a sort of disdain in her slanting black eyes.
>
> (Larsen 10; my emphasis)

I want to suggest three take-aways from Irene's memory of Clare's childhood trauma. First, Clare's reliance on the sartorial, "sewing pieces of bright red cloth" into, what Irene later calls, "a pathetic little frock" for a Sunday school's picnic collapses several significations of Black fashion. In *Stylin'* White and White draw readers' attention to a number of these instances for enslaved African Americans who paid particular attention to the style and self-fashioning of their body for Sunday service, social balls, or other leisure activities. Additionally, in fugitive slave advertisements, White and White read descriptions of fugitives' clothing as evidence of a reward economy that aimed to create allegiances, hierarchies, and currency amongst the enslaved or within slavery's labor and sexual economy. Clothing would continue to be utilized to signify pleasure, as modern Black workers took great pains to distinguish their identities under racial capitalism by attending social functions with a great attention towards the sartorial. I would suggest that Larsen's color symbolism makes all these historicist readings available, positioning Clare's penchant for the sartorial as a form of dandified style that has served African Americans in the development of an aesthetic that mixes freedom and joy.

Secondly, the traumatic nature of Clare's childhood, juxtaposed against her adulthood spent passing as white, renders her as a tragic mulatta figure—torn between two opposing communities. As Robinson argues in *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning,* the tragic mulatta figure appeared by the beginning of the nineteenth century, and like other icons/stereotypes of the Negro, was hotly contested. Originally adopted as a figure for abolitionists texts, representing the sexual assault that Black women suffered under slavery, the figure would be appropriated by anti-abolitionists and associated with miscegenation and hypersexuality, a further alignment with the antebellum Black dandy (Robinson 55-57).

By the end of the nineteenth and turn of the twentieth centuries, a slightly amended discursive contestation over the figure ensued as black minstrels such as Sam T. Jack "reclaimed the mulatta as an anti-racist agent" in exhibitions such as the *Creole Show* for the purpose of "undermin[ing] a major ideological support for the anti-miscegenation rationale for the lynching of Black men" (Robinson 151). And by the early twentieth century, the mulatto/a would be re-appropriated again by white supremacists, most notably in *Birth of a Nation,* as a figure whose "neurotic sexuality" and "sexual depravity" threatened the reproductive health of the white heteronormative family (Robinson 99). Irene's annoyance with Clare's intrusion into her social life has much to do with how Clare's body and history signify within Black respectability politic's racial hermeneutic. Clare has chosen sides, but, by reneging, she risks inviting the forms of surveillance and violence that have terrorized communities that protect transgressive and/or boundary crossing subjects.

Lastly, the absence of any mention of Clare's mother and the confrontation with her father's ghostly image, the "familiar pasty-white face," suggest the strange ways the tragic mulatto and mulatta figure are linked in a generational trauma of violence that, as the novella depicts, continually punishes Black women.

But is there room to read Clare's desire for Black sociality (a problem of racial passing) as an act of stylistic refusal (a project of black dandyism)? We can see the same problem born out in Monica Miller critique of Houston Baker's revised arguments on black modernity and the Harlem Renaissance. Baker, in a reappraisal of Booker T. Washington's "mulatto modernism," a disdainful term for Washington's combination of bourgeois colorism and uplift, is critical of

Washington's adoption of Western aesthetics and style without a regard for the violence of US American imperialist and racial politics and the needs for Black mobility/freedom (Baker 33-34, 62-63). Miller's interest lies in rescuing "other manifestations of black dandies and dandyism" that maintain a "potential for mobility while grappling with an 'acknowledgement of radical uncertainty'" (Miller quoting 178 James Levy). In so doing, she argues for the dandy's cosmopolitanism, defined, and exemplified by James Weldon Johnson, as a modern Black cultural practice that borrows from "both European and African and American origins," where the *cosmopolitan dandy* "expresses with his performative body and dress the fact that modern identity, in both black and white, is necessarily syncretic, or mulatto, but in a liberating rather than constraining way" (Miller 178). Or, to put it another way, in Miller's formulation, there is room for passing if we liberate its artifice, style, and aesthetics from a specified signification enforced and informed by a group politic (i.e., respectability politics).

In *Passing*, Larsen doesn't take sides, rather the novel queries both positions. How can Black women perform agency within the heteronormative limits of Black respectability politics? Considering the history of racialized sexuality in which Black women's bodies and sexuality are continually recuperated as commodities, is there room for Black women's agency within other forms of commodity fetishism? Can style and fashion continue to provide a space for stylistic refusal and an expression of or desire for liberation? If Black women can be read as more than wives/mothers, if these are simply states they can elect to *pass* through, what are all the myriad ways Black women imagine and perform their identities? And lastly, what does Black women's style and expression look like within commodity fetishism or in an economy of sartorial semiotics that does not limit visibility to an association with the female sex worker?

The Black Female Flaneur & the Boudoir as Domestic Imprisonment

In one respect, I feel as Irene must feel: obsessed over an image that I find impossible to shake. Although, for Irene the image is a different one. In the third chapter of Part One, immediately following Irene and Clare's unexpected reunion in the Drayton Hotel's rooftop restaurant, Larsen privileges us to a disturbing scene that crystallizes the form of affective embarrassment and violence to which I have referred. An ambivalent Irene Redfield, sensing the danger that would ensue should she socialize with Clare, against her better judgment, reluctantly acquiesces to Clare's desperate and incessant invitation to meet again. Upon reaching Clare's hotel room, the text describes the mise-en-scene that has always left a deep impression as it reminds me of dandyism:

> Entering, Irene found herself in a sitting-room, large and high, at whose windows hung startling blue draperies which triumphantly dragged attention from the gloomy chocolate-coloured furniture. And Clare was wearing a thin floating dress of the same shade of blue, which suited her and the rather difficult room to perfection.

> For a minute Irene thought the room was empty, but turning her head, she discovered, sunk deep in the cushions of a huge sofa, a woman staring up at her with such intense concentration that her eyelids were drawn as though the strain of that upward glance had paralysed them. At first Irene took her to be a stranger, but in the next instant she said in an unsympathetic, almost harsh voice: "And how are you, Gertrude?"
>
> …
>
> She was thinking: "Great goodness! Two of them."
>
> (33)

The tone of the room is all wrong. It's the antithesis of the provocatively smiling, flirtatious, and vivaciously dressed Clare that we had been previously introduced to. Instead of standing out, Clare's fashion choices blend into the room's drab and foreboding decor. She's wearing "the same shade of blue" as those "startling blue draperies" which I imagine are both working hard to juxtapose the "gloomy chocolate-colored furniture" (33). But, as the text states, it's a "difficult room" to work with. Hilariously, Larsen doubles down on the sentiment, disappearing Gertrude into the chocolate-colored furniture, "sunk deep" into its cushions. It appears the room and its furniture are swallowing the women. Metaphorically, that's the effect the text creates, where Clare and Gertrude, two women whose marriages to white men, one passing as white and the other enjoy the privileges associated with a proximity to whiteness, disappear metaphorically within the confines of heteronormative domesticity.

I have always had a sneaking suspicion that the vehicle of the metaphor used to represent Clare and Gertrude alludes to Balzac's metaphors for the dandy, as "meuble de boudoir" (boudoir furniture), where *boudoir*, the OED denotes is "a small elegantly furnished room, where a lady may retire to be alone, or to receive her intimate friends. Formerly sometimes applied to a man's private apartment." *Boudoir* literally means "a place to sulk in" taken from the verb *bouder* "to pout, sulk".

In her reading of three of French dandyism's "most famous manifestos…Balzac's

Traite de la vie elegante (1830), Barbey d'Aurevilly's essay on Beau Brummell (1843), and Baudelaire's *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (1863)" which would "narrate the progress of dandyism into decadence," Rhonda Garelick compares this strange sense of self-fashioning that reduces the dandy to furniture to modern labor's inanimate and mechanical world of instrumentality that reduces the worker to an automaton. Ambiguously, the French dandy sought to evade the association yet also succumbed to a similar effect. Quoting Balzac, Garelick writes

> "In making himself (*en se faisant)* a dandy, a man becomes a piece of boudoir furniture, an extremely ingenius mannequin, who can sit upon a horse or a sofa…but a thinking being...never."
>
> The dandy who lives by his 'philosophie des meubles, des gilets' ends up conquered by the inanimate world or even aspiring to its condition. A man may turn himself into a dandy by an act of will (*se faisant*), but strangely, he becomes

> in turn a piece of bedroom furniture. In the boudoir, but not of it, decorating but not acting, the dandy will occupy an erotic arena, but only passively. And though Balzac does not pursue it here, the juncture of sexuality and the object world will come to play an essential role in decadent dandyism, where commodity fetishism becomes a node of expression for (particularly homosexual) desire.
>
> (18-19)

This sense of "mechanomorphism and the reification of the self," where Balzac aims to "distinguish the worker from the dandy, expressing his disinterest in the coarse world of utility or service," signifies differently when the dandies in question are Black women subjects. This early phase of proto-decadent dandyism had a strangely difficult analogous relationship to women, as "the decadent dandy…exhibits great interest in the spectacle of the woman…since dandyism attempts to incorporate into the male persona something of the highly social performance usually expected only of women" (Garelick 6). Women are both mistrusted and jealously lauded for their "doubleness of nature" and their penchant for "self-transformation or disguise," Baudelaire writes, although within this category he also includes "eunuchs and prostitutes…and military men," all of whom depend upon "theatricality or obfuscation of self" (30-31).

The psychic ambivalence at work in these texts alludes to something of a crisis of Western male identity, which Walter Benjamin (writing on Baudelaire) and Houston A. Baker Jr. (writing on Booker T. Washington) attribute to an anxiety about a changing world of sociality, where the dandy's placid and unflappable mien buttresses him against the market's volatility in an evolving liberal democracy whose middle class simultaneously vie for power and the political support necessary to safeguard their position from aristocratic insouciance.

When we read this contestation of power through a racial lens, Irene's thinking "Great goodness! Two of them" corresponds with her own anxiety regarding how America's Black middle class navigates its position within the nation. Her strategy—marrying a Black man ("darker" than she) and raising Black children—seems to be the source of her animosity towards Clare and Gertrude. As Ann duCille argues, the novella "ultimately affirms neither Irene's values nor Clare's; rather, it holds both up to scrutiny, if not ridicule, as signs of the times" (442). And in this chapter, Clare and Gertrude's internalized anti-blackness is fully externalized, as both women admit to the "fear that [their children] might be dark" (Larsen 36).

In Larsen's *Passing*, Black style is not simply expressive of an existing privilege, rather, it is formative of freedom. What startles Irene and me, as well, is the form of domestic imprisonment that Clare has purchased in her desire to assume, in both senses of the word, the privileges of whiteness. As a result, her body, like the French flaneur and proto-decadent dandy of Balzac and Baudelaire's text, is abject, inert, immobile, and seemingly without any ability to engage in the forms of sociality that make possible participation in a political struggle.

Furthermore, the novella suggests that a different lingering image of Clare haunts Irene, not one of domestic imprisonment, but a spiritual or mental emptiness far ghastlier than the dandy's unthinking presence, one more reminiscent of the trauma that many Black women have navigated within the nation's history of racialized sexual assault.

Passing is structured by an unreliable narrator's memories and hazy recollections which zero in on certain details but forget others. Nevertheless, upon each encounter with another black woman, Irene never fails to register the sartorial and the body, suggesting that black women possess an acute awareness of how their bodies and fashion choices are read.

Aside from Irene's memory of a childhood Clare going to great pains to sew a "pathetic little red frock[s]," (10) Clare later appears in the Drayton as a "sweetly scented woman in a fluttering dress of green chiffon whose mingled pattern of narcissuses, jonquils, and hyacinths was a reminder of pleasantly chill days" (14). In fact, this initial memory of the encounter which launches the story re-stages the strange and disorienting moments of misrecognition that lead to a furthered strange and uncomfortable recognition, as the novella puts Irene's forms of temporary racial passing (for economic and psychic convenience, efforts to avoid the embarrassment of being ejected from segregated spaces) in relation to other black women's racial passing performances, inviting readers to read, alongside Irene, all of the characters' bodies, clothing, and behavior as signs of their self-conception of desire and identity. Clare initially appears with a man, who we later realize, was not her husband, suggesting that, in Irene's mind, Clare's desire-to-have, likened to the insatiable desires of commodity fetishism, puts her in close proximity to the sex worker.

Later in Part One, when Irene visits Clare's hotel, Clare is remembered as "wearing a thin floating dress of the same shade of blue" as the "startling blue draperies which triumphantly dragged attention from the gloomy chocolate-coloured furniture," (33) suggesting that, in contrast to her vernal green dress, in private, Clare almost disappears into the fabrics of her room like a silent, trophy wife whose ability to pass as white secures her safety. Furthermore, Clare's private domestic scene demands that other black women comply with silence, a moment tested when Clare's white husband, Jack Bellew enters. In the hotel room, Irene also re-encounters Gertrude, another childhood friend who, like Clare, has also married a white man, but initially misrecognizes her as a stranger.

Gertrude's body is almost lost and swallowed by domesticity, "sunk deep into the cushions of a huge sofa" (33) and is later read as having "grown broad, fat almost" with "clipt" black hair from which "all the live curliness had gone" while wearing an "over-trimmed Georgette *crepe* dress" that "was too short and showed an appalling amount of leg, stout legs in sleazy stockings of a vivid rose-beige shade" (35). Although it would appear that Irene and Gertrude's body shapes are drastically different, both suggest a form of excess. For Clare, that excess is rendered as interracial sexual desire, whereas, for Gertrude, that excess has been internalized, swelling, and almost distorting her body beyond recognition. Granted, Gertrude's husband and family know that she identifies as black, even though Gertrude explicitly vocalizes a disdain for dark skin, even fearing that her children would "turn out dark" (36). Despite the different approaches to racial identification in all three of the women, Irene's reading of Gertrude and Clare's fashion and bodies intimates a preoccupation with the relationship between class- and race-consciousness within interracial, heterosexual marriage. Undoubtedly, the allegiances and forms of desire present an overwhelming conundrum, a preoccupation which is undermined once Jack Bellew enters. To Gertrude and Irene's surprise, and even the reader's, Bellew's nickname for Clare, "Nig," indexes his own fetishization of racial purity and inability to read racialized, gendered bodies.

Irene's trauma is triggered by John Bellew's arrival where he greets his wife with a strange nickname, "Nig," short for nigger. In this moment of affective embarrassment, where

Gertrude "started slightly, settled back and looked covertly towards Irene, who had caught her lip between her teeth," Irene, again, struggles to read:

> In Clare's eyes, as she presented her husband, was a queer gleam, a jeer, it might be. Irene couldn't define it.
>
> (39)

Once Bellew explains the comic meaning of the greeting (he has noted that Clare's complexion has been steadily growing darker), dramatically ironic since, by this point in the narrative, readers have also become powerless in-group members privy to Clare's status as a racial passing subject, Irene finds it difficult to sustain a dandified placidity, to stay "under the body," as Booker T. Washington would phrase it:

> Bellew put out his hand in a repudiating fling, definite and final. "Oh, no, Nig," he declared, "nothing like that with me. I know you're no nigger, so it's all right. You can get as black as you please as far as I'm concerned, since I know you're no nigger. I draw the line at that. No niggers in my family. Never have been and never will be."
>
> Irene's lips trembled almost uncontrollably, but she made a desperate effort to fight back her disastrous desire to laugh again, and succeeded…. she turned an oblique look on Clare and encountered her peculiar eyes fixed on her with an expression so dark and deep and unfathomable that she had for a short moment the sensation of gazing into the eyes of some creature utterly strange and apart. A faint sense of danger brushed her, like the breath of a cold fog.
>
> (40)

Again, the affective embarrassment, which, for Irene, has expressed itself as an anxious and fearful laughter, made all the stranger since Clare's "expression" appears "so dark and deep and unfathomable". If this is the same mien as the French proto-decadent dandy, as Balzac describes it, the "mannequin ingénieux" that resembles less a human and more a creature, then this dandy performance terrifies Irene, so much so that its emptiness and illegibility lingers and haunts her in the chapter's end:

> And all the while, on the rushing ride out to her father's house, Irene Redfield was trying to understand the look on Clare's face as she had said good-bye. Partly mocking, it had seemed, and partly menacing. And something else for which she could find no name. For an instant a recrudescence of that sensation of fear which she had had while looking into Clare's eyes that afternoon touched her. A slight shiver ran over her.
>
> "It's nothing," she told herself. "Just somebody walking over my grave, as the children say." She tried a tiny laugh and was annoyed to find that it was close to tears.

…

> And late that night, even, long after the last guest had gone and the old house was quiet, she stood at her window frowning out in the dark rain and puzzling again over that look on Clare's incredibly beautiful face. She couldn't, however, come to any conclusion about its meaning, try as she might. It was unfathomable, utterly beyond any experience or comprehension.
>
> She turned away from the window, at last, with a still deeper frown. Why, after all, worry about Clare Kendry?
>
> (45)

Clare's Gowns & Irene's Racialized Class Insecurity

Aside from a tea party in Part III, in which Clare is described as "stunning" in a "superlatively simple cinnamon-brown frock which brought out all her vivid beauty" accented by a "little golden bowl of a hat" and "a string of amber beads," there are two additional occasions in which she appears in women's formal wear. Regardless, in all three examples, Irene never fails to compare her own appearance to Clare's extravagance, displaying her own middle-class insecurities as a racialized envy. Since, as scholars have noted, Irene's sense of self is defined through black uplift's heteronormative model, Irene's modesty is constantly undermined by Clare's dandyism. And, while scholars have rightly made much of Irene's suspicions of infidelity or jealousy, as Butler argues, I have yet to read a reading of Irene's envy, defined as a feeling of inadequacy triggered by another's possessions. Even in the aforementioned moment, a tea party to which Irene has expressly not invited Clare, Clare's stylish simplicity, reminiscent of the 1920's era Chanel cocktail dress, the quintessential form of elegant minimalism, renders "stunning" by both Felise Freelander and Irene—"Isn't she stunning today?" / "Yes, she was stunning" (Larsen 92). In turn, Irene's envy is focused on Clare's jewelry—"a string of amber beads that would easily have made six or eight like one Irene owned" (Larsen 92).

In scenes that precede and follow—Clare's appearance at the Negro Welfare League dance and her final tragic appearance at the Freelander's house party—Clare appears in a gown. In the former scene, in which Butler's brilliant intersectional and psychoanalytic analysis reads Irene's "remembered…little choked exclamation of admiration" as a sign of sexual repression, the narrator betrays Irene's disavowal with a precise detailing of Clare's body, appearance, and the form of affect her presence triggers:

> Clare, exquisite, golden, fragrant, flaunting, in a stately gown of shining black taffeta, whose long, full skirt lay in graceful folds about her slim golden feet; her glistening hair drawn smoothly back into a small twist at the nape of her neck; her eyes sparkling like dark jewels. Irene, with her new rose-coloured chiffon frock ending at the knees, and her cropped curls, felt dowdy and commonplace.
>
> (Larsen 74)

This may be Larsen's richest passage, for even with the suggestion of Clare's "fragrant" affect, she moves towards the synesthetic, a move repeated in the novella's finale, when Irene's trauma

is registered as almost visually monochromatic and sonically disorienting. But here, the vernacular of race is displaced by a myriad of visual, olfactory, and tactile descriptions denoting how the stately gown functions to blur the class distinctions between the aristocratic and bourgeois women, or rather, what defines bourgeois style is its appropriation of aristocratic luxury. And while women's gowns come in a few different types and shapes, the description of the gown's "folds" and "stately" style evoke a reading of Clare's body as containing jewels. Juxtaposed against Irene's sense of feeling "dowdy and commonplace" we understand that Clare's appearance undermines a sense of a commonly expressed black middle-class solidarity. And, borrowing Bhabha's formulation, Clare's encourages the enviable position that Harlem's black middle classes may have occupied as they traversed the city's ever-increasing commodity culture. As Leach and Parker indicate in their histories of the twentieth-century department store, US American commodity culture fetishized whiteness, and Clare reproduces the aesthetic.

If we subscribe to the theory that Irene is somehow responsible for Clare's death, then her guilt may reside in her envy for Clare's class privilege, read as an approximation or performance of white women's privilege, through the racial pass aided by her sartorial mimicry. Or, if we believe Jack Bellew, as a white husband who adheres to the myth of racial purity, must recuperate whiteness by violently punishing Clare's racial transgression, the novel portrays those transgressions through a number of registers, including the sartorial. While women's fashion styles may have changed throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century, white racial feeling, and anxiety, evinced by Clay's *Life in Philadelphia* series, has not.

In her reading of *Quicksand*, Kimberley Roberts argues for a reading that "focus[es] on clothing, specifically on its panoply of colors" which "allows [Larsen] to discuss at a symbolic level the politics of skin color" (Roberts 109). For

> [t]he displacement of the color of one's skin onto the color of one's visible exterior, one's clothes, as well as the resonances relating to female sexuality conjured by certain types of clothing, gave both Larsen and McKay a kind of code for discussing not only race, but a number of class, gender, and sexuality issues, as well. Thus in their texts we find a series of interconnections between sexuality, economics, and color.
>
> (Roberts 109)

But, as I have argued, this triad does not coalesce only on the "prostitute," as that feminine figure who "makes herself sexually desirable and different from the 'respectable' women through her colorful appearance in order to sell sex" (Roberts 109) Rather, in the space Larsen opens for an ""analysis of the commodification of the exotic/erotic" we find all forms of blackness, black femininity and masculinity, as racial models of identification and desire are coded through class status and nationality.

Conclusion

Throughout *An Embarrassment of Queer Possibility*, I have called attention to a narrative of conflict within Western historiography, a contestation over the memory and meaning of the diasporic African presence in the West. As Cedric Robinson argues in *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning: Blacks the Regimes of Race in American Theater & Film Before World War II*, historians must distinguish between (a) the distortions of truth, racial myths, and seductive archaeologies that have produced race and (b) the genealogies of resistance, the "historical knowledge of struggles," and "the memory of hostile encounters which even up to this day have been confined to the margins of knowledge" (Foucault 83). What Robinson and I both decry is the failure to imagine "the historical and cultural African subject," a task made difficult by the vast and wide-ranging production of race that overshadows, dare I say haunts, Black subjects, among others, in the West. Of all the various stereotypes, icons, guises and "masks of blackness" that functioned to conceal the oppressive and violent relations of power in racial regimes, the elegantly and stylistically dressed Black dandy continues to pose as a threat and reveal several contradictions.

As I argued in my introduction's reading of Robinson's history of the "invention of the Negro" in *Forgeries of Memory and Meaning* and various historiographies of transatlantic Black style, including Monica Miller's monograph on transatlantic male Black dandyism, *Slaves to Fashion*, the history of this conflict between regimes of power and various insurgencies stretches back to Elizabethan England where royal power colluded with the country's capitalist class to invest in the African slave trade. As Robinson argues, the presence of African subjects, particularly Moorish cultural influence and celebrated African mercenaries in Europe (e.g., Peter Negro), posed a problem for the continued exploitation of African slave labor, a process that resulted in the creation of a national white identity and a fictive Black subject, and, consequently, overshadows the memory and long history of an African presence in Europe and the long history of racialism within Europe. Additionally, enslaved West African subjects in the West had long maintained a syncretic cultural lifestyle, as evidenced by West African bricolage fashion and the adoption and participation in European-inspired colonial holidays.

By the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, Western Europe's middle classes increasingly became invested in their own political power, such that style, now freed from various state-sanctioned significations, increased its representational force to become a site of contestation (Amann). For Europe's subcultures, too, the appropriation of "signs, performances, objects, and gestures from the dominant culture" gave way to new meanings, conflicts, and forms of stylistic refusal (Amann, Miller, Hebdige). The dandy's "aristocratic drag," as Ellen Crowell describes it, and its depiction in literature, indexes various tensions at the level of class, gender, sexuality, and race. On the Western white male's body, the dandy's luxurious aesthetic nostalgically calls attention to the aristocracy's waning power, while, at the same time, the figure's disdain for bourgeois commodity culture exhibits the ambivalent tensions and contradictions within Western Europe's continued reliance on racial capitalism. But when Black and minoritarian subjects take up European customs, styles, and fashions, these contradictions surface in ways that trigger various forms of white (male) anxiety. Whether found in Eric Lott's history of early blackface minstrelsy in *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* or in the fugitive advertisements and accounts of Black style in White and

White's *Stylin'*, white anxiety often scapegoated the Black dandy, depicting the figure as a hypersexual subject who must be violently eradicated or a legacy of illicit Black/white sexual relations that must be disavowed. This process of regime maintenance (e.g., white supremacy), as Robinson reminds us, relies on various forms of violence to discipline transgressive subjects thereby recuperating their bodies and power for the state. This is the same process which Sara Ahmed and Elisa Glick demand that we recognize, for the dandy and the West's other Others do not by their mere presence destabilize the binary oppositions and contradictions that constitute Western society. Contrary to what Homi Bhabha may claim about the mimic man, racial regimes work to maintain power by violently policing and silencing resistance.

The Harlem Renaissance, as a movement that contains several cultural strategies aimed at wresting control over Black racial production, contends with this legacy of violence and its psychic aftermath. For the writers associated with the Harlem Renaissance, the Black dandy appears alongside several other figurations, icons, types, distortions, and performances of Black identity, such as the racial passing subject, the tragic mulatto/a, and the sex worker. The confluence of these figures and the intersectional depiction of Black identity in these texts suggests that blackness cannot be contained by the limiting frame of the regime's racial stereotypes. Additionally, for queer Black writers, autobiografiction, as a form of literary dandyism, has provided a measure of continued resistance against the regime's violent erasures. In my readings of Langston Hughes' short stories in *The Ways of White Folk*, Bruce Nugent's posthumous novel, *Gentleman Jigger*, and Nella Larsen's novella, *Passing*, Black subjects contend with a form of affective embarrassment as they mediate between the vast reaches of the US American regime's racial production and their own genealogies of resistance. In doing so, Black dandyism, as a practice of stylistic refusal, aims to queer notions of Black identity while calling attention to the histories of racialized sexuality that frame Black modern subjectivity.

In my quest to understand why the Black dandy represents and indexes this narrative of conflict within the West—both Western regimes' long history of racial production and the marginalized acts, forms, and practices of resistance that Black subjects performed through style—I was initially drawn to Carlyle Van Thompson's tragically overlooked reading of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* as a racial passing novel. In *The Tragic Black Buck: Racial Masquerading in the American Literary Imagination*, Van Thompson references several representations of blackness, where the black buck "or dangerously free [B]lack man who threatens white society" also resembles the nineteenth century depictions of Black dandies and dandizettes (2). I would argue that, within Van Thompson's definition, the black buck may, in fact, be the twentieth century black male dandy, as both figures are depicted as sexually libidinous subjects who threaten white heteronormativity. In readings of Charles Waddell Chesnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars* (1900), James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (1912, 1297), F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925), and William Faulkner's *Light in August* (1932), Van Thompson's project locates the "[B]lack buck" within novels of racial passing which stage the "paradoxical phenomenon in American literature of light-skinned black male individuals who pass for white" (xi-xii). Paradoxical in the sense that passing can challenge but, sometimes unsuspectingly, reify "the hedonistic and hegemonic ideology of biological white supremacy," as evidenced by the violence racial regimes employ to maintain power (Van Thompson xi). Undoubtedly, Van Thompson finds the same overlap that I have read in Hughes's short stories, Nugent's *Gentleman Jigger*, and Larsen's *Passing*, where the dandy's syncretic blending of European and African diasporic cultural practices and elegant sartorial style works to highlight the paradoxical nature of racial passing. Passing subjects

occupy both racial positions at the same. But therein lies both Gatsby's failure and modern reader's misinterpretation of Fitzgerald's text.

As much as Fitzgerald and Jay Gatsby deploy the mechanics of the racial pass, masquerading and concealing Gatsby's pre-passing identity through choices of color, symbolism, and language, Gatsby cannot escape Tom Buchanan's suspicious, anxious, and embarrassed white "taxonomic gaze" that ultimately ends, tragically, in what Van Thompson calls a "symbolic lynching" (94-99). And yet, traditional readers, perhaps in their disdain for Tom's virulent white misogyny and (sub)conscious sympathy for Gatsby's class-crossing, racial desire, and aspirations, fail to recognize or imagine American Africanism, to borrow Toni Morrison's term, playing in the darkness of the text.

Gatsby's racial passing is made possible by Gatsby's dandyism, the highly aestheticized and religious devotion to style and whiteness that obscures our ability to detect the novel's racial distortions. Which is to say, it is not the mixed-raced subject who is distorted, but our understanding of (a) how racial production functions within racial regimes and (b) how Black subjects imagine, create, and resist these fictions. Consequently, our postmodern hermeneutic of racial production extends beyond the fetishization of skin color to recognize how race is performed through several different mechanisms—the sartorial and other forms of stylistic refusal like Homi Bhabha's mocking "mimic [hu]man"—and even how racial passing is but one of many strategies of racial self-presentation. Reading *The Great Gatsby* as *only* a racial passing narrative may be inadequate because the Black diasporic experience is far more intersectional and complex than racial stereotypes allow. The generalized nature of a racial stereotype flattens and universalizes more than it deepens and complexifies identity.

Between Embarrassment and Violence

This project was doubly inspired by Bruce Nugent. Initially, I was drawn to the aura around Nugent's longevity, wonderfully portrayed in the black-and-white flashback scenes of Rodney Evans's film, *Brother to Brother*—the scenes of Nugent's formative years spent amongst Langston Hughes, Wallace Thurman, Zora Neale Hurston, and Aaron Douglass, just to name a few. As Cody St. Clair notes in his reading of Nugent's "Smoke, Lilies, and Jade" and *Gentleman Jigger*, Nugent studies were "prompted by the literary canon wars and the recovery of queer histories in the 1980s," and with the publication of his small but potent body of work, Nugent's taboo content and non-conformist aesthetic continues to excite, surprise, and baffle scholars in the best possible way.

But reading and re-reading his autobiografictive novel took time because it's far from a perfectly structured narrative. If readers search the text for a superhero of unabashedly queer pride, they may be disappointed to find the novel's main character fails to live up to our contemporary paradigms. Stuartt Jerome Brennan may not harbor a racial inferiority complex, but, nevertheless, embarrassment circulates throughout the text. He is either embarrassed for his fellow young, Black artists and their racial inferiority complexes or embarrassed for his own position as a young but inexperienced queer man whose desire for sex dangerously overlaps with the position of the sex worker. But what the novel has led me to theorize is (1) how *affective embarrassment*, in all the senses Rowland S. Miller identifies (empathic embarrassment, fear of

embarrassment, and even shame as an internalized and prolonged sense of social embarrassment), structure the experience of the Other and (2) how *violence* disciplines transgressive or wayward Othered subjects who overcome embarrassment.

Undoubtedly, I have only begun to thoroughly unpack how *embarrassment* shows up in these texts, and I have done even less to enumerate the various forms of *violence* that Hughes, Nugent, and Larsen anxiously depict. Nevertheless, in my reliance on Robinson's formulations on racial regimes, resistance, and regime maintenance, I have centered Black agency. That is—in between the (1) *affective embarrassment* that works to hamper; impede; obstruct; confuse; perplex; make one feel awkward or self-conscious; to cause one to appear incompetent, inadequate, or less worthy of respect; humiliate, or to make oneself seem foolish by behaving in an inappropriate or incompetent manner; to make a fool of oneself; and the (2) *violence* (whether as depicted in lynching, sexual assault, or murder) that disciplines the transgressive subject who overcomes their embarrassment, there lies a middle ground in which Black dandies, in their stylistic refusal, perform agency and declare their freedom from oppressive racial regimes.

In the fiction of Langston Hughes, Richard Bruce Nugent, and Nella Larsen we find the space in which Harlem Renaissance authors imagined how stylistic refusal was integral to an African diasporic and African American genealogy of resistance to the distortions and inventions of racial production. As such, the Harlem Renaissance may not have been a campaign with a clear programmatic end date. Instead, it was an invitation to re-imagine the Black subject's place in modernity.

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