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**Hidden in Plain View: Where Interracial Meets Queer in Nineteenth-Century U.S.
Literature and Culture**

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Doctor
of Philosophy

in

Literature

by

Lauren Heintz

Committee in charge:

Professor Fatima El-Tayeb, Co-Chair
Professor Shelley Streeby, Co-Chair
Professor Sara Johnson
Professor Roshanak Kheshti
Professor Nayan Shah
Professor Megan Wesling

2015

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Co-Chair

Co-Chair

University of California, San Diego

2015

DEDICATION

For their support and love, I dedicate this dissertation to my family: my mom, Terry, my dad, Jack, and my brother, Jacob.

EPIGRAPH

Finally she speaks and her voice is soft but stern. "I don't know," she says. "I don't know whether the bird you are holding is dead or alive, but what I do know is that it is in your hands. It is in your hands."

~ Toni Morrison

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Signature Page.....	iii
Dedication.....	iv
Epigraph.....	v
Table of Contents.....	vi
Acknowledgments.....	vii
Vita.....	xii
Abstract of the Dissertation.....	xiv
Introduction: The Ghost of Queer Time Past.....	1
Chapter 1: The Crisis of Kinship in Victor Séjour’s “Le Mulâtre”.....	22
Chapter 2: “She passed down Orleans Street, a polished dandy”: The Queer Race Romance of Ludwig von Reizenstein’s <i>The Mysteries of New Orleans</i>	61
Chapter 3: Hidden in Plain View: A Queer Archive of Interraciality.....	97
Chapter 4: John Brown’s Bed.....	147
Afterword: Speculating Upon the Historical.....	204
Bibliography.....	209

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Roshanak Kheshti is both friend and advisor, and for breaking that boundary I am very thankful. Roshy has guided me through those academic struggles where efforts at world building break down, in which you have to learn to navigate academic institutions in ways that are personally sustainable. I look forward to what comes of having Roshy as advisor, friend, and now reader of my work. For giving me the opportunity to work within the field of academic publishing, I thank Nayan Shah for taking me on as his editorial assistant for the journal *GLQ*. Working with Nayan for *GLQ* and in the Critical Gender Studies program for his queer theory course has been a pleasure. I thank Meg Wesling for taking me on as her research assistant in the Literature department at UCSD. I thank Meg for her durational engagement with my work from undergrad to the PhD, for having me work with her as a research assistant, and for having those difficult conversations with me, about pedagogy, positionality, and making it through the phases of graduate school. I feel humbled and lucky to have such a committee, one in which I have to force myself to cut these gratitudes short, because there are so many more thanks to give.

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of you. I have taken away so much from reading all of your brilliance; the awe and inspiration was never ending -- let's never let it end. I am also lucky to have been part of such an amazing cohort (co-heart): thanks to Rosiangela Escamilla, Allia Ida Griffin (from Saint Francis to UCSD!), Anthony Yooshin Kim, Ashvin Kini, Melissa Martinez, Chris Perreira, June Ting, Megan Turner, Niall Twohig, and Ben Van Overmerire. I feel especially grateful for those who came before me, and who still remain close even as we all scatter apart: Mariola Alvarez, Caralyn Bialo, Josen Diaz, Jodi Eisenberg, Tania Jabour, Joo Ok Kim, Jason Farr, Chien-ting Lin, Viviana MacManus, Yumi Pak, and Chase Smith. Across disciplines and cohorts, there are so many more who continue to impact me: Christina Carney, Victor Betts, Sarika Talve-Goodman, Katrin Pesch, Kai Small, and Maki Smith.

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This dissertation has also received generous funding support. The teaching support provided by the Muir Writing Program at UCSD, directed by Carrie Wastal and Marion Wilson, was a valuable and necessary component to my growth as an instructor and graduate student. To the Literature Department at UCSD, for providing a year of funding support to do archival and dissertation research. The Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture generously awarded this dissertation with the Lapidus Fellowship. I feel ever grateful to have received the Dissertation Completion Fellowship from the American Council of Learned Societies in conjunction with the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation. In the upcoming academic year, I look forward to being a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow in the English Department at Tulane University.

Family sustains in ways that has made it okay to feel both pleasure and discomfort when writing the dissertation. I want to thank my extended family for their ever-present support, especially my aunts Amy and Katie (the original Dr. Heintz), my uncle Greg, my grandma (whose nightly reading voice still echoes in my head), my grandmama, and my aunt Laura whose perseverance is a true model of beauty. In high school, my mom gave me Toni Morrison and my dad William Faulkner, and I have not veered too far off since then. My mom's strength, determination, and unbounded devotion are more than enough, but even with that, she has a true gift of being able to listen with loving calm. She always manages to engage my work from her own points of departure, inevitably adjusting how I have come to think, care, and grow forward. My dad is endlessly curious and inquisitive, always taking the time to talk past when we should both be in bed. Sharing my interests in graduate school with his thirst for knowledge has been so genuinely fun, and I'm so

happy we share this. My brother Jacob reminds me that sometimes all you need is a nod and a smile to know it's all good. I'm so thankful to be a sister to you and Alex, and an aunt to the sweet and hilarious Nathan and Brandon. To Ash (who some may think is my brother), I am settling for no less than to call you my family in these years, my co-heart. Lastly, Sara has been quite literally next to me for every inch of writing, research, travel, laughter, discomfort, and joy these past years. You have opened up a panorama of perspectives and affects that I just can't do without. Words fall so short, thank you buggy.

VITA

EDUCATION

- 2015 Ph.D. Literature, University of California, San Diego
- 2009 M.A. English, University of Pennsylvania
- 2006 B.A. with Distinction: Literature, University of California, San Diego

AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS

- 2014-2015 Andrew W. Mellon/ ACLS Dissertation Completion Fellowship
- 2014 The Historical Society of Pennsylvania/The Library Company of Philadelphia, McFarland Short-Term Fellowship (offered)
- 2014 Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture, Lapidus Fellowship
- 2013-2014 Dissertation Research Fellowship, UCSD Literature Department
- 2013 Graduate Teaching Scholars Fellowship, UCSD Center for Teaching Development

TEACHING APPOINTMENTS

- Summer 2013 Associate-In, UCSD Literature Department
LTEN 149: "Law, Race, and Space: Explorations in Nineteenth-Century U.S. Law and Literature"
- 2012-2013 Primary Instructor, UCSD Muir College Writing Program
Muir 50: "Bringing Down the House: Re-Imagining the Notion of Family"
- 2011-2012 Reading Assistant, UCSD Critical Gender Studies
Dr. Sara Kaplan, Critical Gender Studies 105 "Queer Theory"
Dr. Nayan Shah, Critical Gender Studies 105 "Queer Theory"
- 2009-2011 Primary Instructor, UCSD Muir Writing Program
Muir 50, "Artist and Audience: Visual Culture and the Construction of Gender" Muir 40, Introductory Writing and Composition

EDITORIAL AND RESEARCH APPOINTMENTS

Summer 2014 Research Assistant, UCSD Literature Department, Dr. Megan Wesling

2012-2013 Editorial Assistant to Dr. Nayan Shah, *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* (Duke University Press)

2011-2012 Research Assistant, UCSD Literature Department, Dr. Megan Wesling

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Hidden in Plain View: Where Interracial Meets Queer in Nineteenth-Century U.S.
Literature and Culture

by

Lauren Heintz

Doctor of Philosophy in Literature

University of California, San Diego, 2015

Professor Fatima El-Tayeb, Co-Chair

Professor Shelley Streeby, Co-Chair

Hidden in Plain View is a study of the history of sexuality as it emerges from the institution of slavery in the United States and its transnational circuits. In order to situate the place of slavery in queer studies, I trace diverse sexual encounters within antebellum society, such as master-slave sexual acts, same-sex desire, alternative kinships, and cross-dressing, as they are encoded within a wide variety of sources, including sensational fiction, visual satires, and periodicals. My study requires a composite archive to enrich our account of the sexual landscape of the early nineteenth century, before the advent of

the culturally defining and legally limiting terms of miscegenation, heterosexual, and homosexual. The sources that I gather in *Hidden in Plain View* depict how interracial desire is reworked in the literary and cultural imagination as a homoerotic space of same-sex affiliation.

The arc of the project works through complex scenes of interracial and same-sex sexual affiliations within and tangential to the institution of slavery. These literary, archival, and historical accounts of sexual display do not reveal a triumphant insight into the queer past, and as such, they remain “hidden in plain view” within the sexual record of the institution of slavery. From Victor Séjour’s transatlantic short story of the fraught love of a slave for his master in pre-revolutionary Haiti (1837), to the German immigrant Ludwig von Reizenstein’s sensational fiction of revolutionary lesbian desire and interracial romance in New Orleans (1855), I connect the sphere of the erotic with the shifting political and social boundaries of race and sexuality. The archival research I conducted on E.W. Clay, for example, reveals his visual satires (1830s) as mocking abolitionist politics not just through deriding heterosexual interracial desire, but through depicting same-sex desire as part and parcel of interraciality. These joint histories insist that the sexualized racism of slavery is an indelible part of how queerness is constituted today, despite its excision from current queer neoliberal politics. *Hidden in Plain View* thus shores up a narrative of the interracial, same-sex intimacies of people often deemed undesirable.

INTRODUCTION: The Ghost of Queer Times Past

On April 28, 2015 a striking confluence of events came to the fore, both for their uniquely prominent place in U.S. politics, and for the sense that yet still, their simultaneity gestured to a familiar narrative. April 28 marked the beginning of wide-scale protests in the city of Baltimore, Maryland, following the funeral of Freddie Gray, a twenty-five-year-old unarmed black man who was killed in police custody without having committed a crime. The protests responding to the police violence that led to his death are the latest in what has been now at least three full years of enormous civil unrest over the deaths of unarmed black men and women by police and law enforcement officials (and to be clear, these killings and the protests against them have been happening for centuries). April 28 also marked the day that the Supreme Court would begin hearing oral arguments for *Obergefell v. Hodges*, the case that is set to rule upon whether or not gay marriage will continue to be a state mandated right, or if it will become a national right. This will be the Court's most direct ruling upon gay marriage since June 2013, when the Court struck down the Defense of Marriage Act, thereby opening up state-by-state possibilities for legislation allowing gay marriage. In June of 2013 as well, Travyon Martin's killer, George Zimmerman began the trial that would acquit him of murder charges in *State of Florida v. George Zimmerman*. These recent parallel legal and social histories reveal, however, that the mandates for civil rights bifurcate as black social and physical death cleaves from gay civil protection.

This divide puts into bold relief the continued imagining that civil and social protections work within a single-issue domain, in which gay rights do not intersect with race rights, and more importantly, it presumes that anti-black racism has nothing to do with queer politics. As David Eng, Janet Halley, Siobhan Somerville, and others have argued, the analogous rhetoric of “like race” arguments for gay civil rights perpetuates this imaginative divide, in which the gay civil rights movement is rendered as “just like” the civil rights movements of the 1960s, or when gay marriage is analogized to interracial marriage.¹ Tracing “like race” arguments to the 2003 Supreme Court case *Lawrence v. Texas*, which afforded the right to “certain intimate conduct” between gay couples,² David Eng argues that “queer liberalism’s freedom is predicated on the systemic dissociation of race from (homo)sexuality as coeval historical phenomena” (Eng 40). That is, in order to obtain “queer freedom,” queer must compare itself to race, but never set itself up as a historically constitutive element of race.

Significantly, *Lawrence v. Texas* is a gay rights case that was caught up in a web of interraciality and anti-black racism: the plaintiffs, John Geddes Lawrence and Tyron Garner are an interracial couple, and “Robert Eubanks, the jilted third in the Lawrence/Garner love triangle, called the Harris County police dispatcher with the following words: ‘There’s a nigger going crazy with a gun’ ” (Eng 47). In return, *Lawrence v.*

¹ See David Eng, “Freedom and the Racialization of Intimacy: *Lawrence v. Texas* and the Emergence of Queer Liberalism,” *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies* eds. George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007); Janet Halley, “Like-Race Arguments,” in *What’s Left of Theory?: New Work on the Politics of Literary Theory* eds. Judith Butler et al. (New York: Routledge, 2000); Siobhan Somerville, “Queer Loving,” *GLQ* 11.3 (2005): 335-370.

² “Certain intimate conduct” is the phrasing used by Justice Kennedy in the opinion for the case. *Lawrence v. Texas*, 539 US 558, 562 (2003).

Garner began as a case in which police responded to an anti-black racist epithet that marked an unarmed black man, Tyron Garner, as armed, “crazy,” and dangerous, carrying the weight of history that such a racist slur brings with it. As Eng reveals, the logistics of *Lawrence v. Texas* perhaps lend themselves to an intersectional analysis, given that the plaintiffs are an interracial couple and given Robert Eubanks’s initial racist police call. Yet, the precedent that the *Lawrence* ruling establishes is one in which the interraciality and anti-black racism that consume the case have nothing to do with the ruling in the case. The only invocation of race comes in the form of a continued comparison of gay marriage to *Loving v. Virginia*, which struck down the constitutionality of anti-miscegenation marital laws. Erasing the interracial and racist component of the *Lawrence* case itself, and supplanting it with an analogous comparison of *Lawrence* to *Loving* establishes the means by which future rulings on gay rights are only made to invoke race as a separate, analogous component to the case, rather than as an integral element. As Somerville attests, “one effect of attempting to establish race and sexual orientation as parallel categories of discrimination is that, in practice, they tend to be seen as mutually exclusive” (Somerville 345). Establishing such a precedent becomes even more telling when anti-black racism in the form of state sanctioned police brutality continues to exist as gay rights continue to make “progress” (for some). The call made to the police about a “nigger going crazy with a gun,” as code for sodomy, invokes the recent allegations made by officer Darren Wilson, the man who killed the unarmed Mike Brown. Commenting on

Mike Brown's demeanor, Wilson states: "I looked at his face. It was just like intense. It was, I've never seen anybody look that, for lack of a better words [sic], crazy."³

Paradoxically, adjudicating upon gay sex only comes into being through a racist speech act, yet ruling in favor of gay liberal intimacy only proves successful through the erasure of interracial sex and anti-black racism from its constitutive place within queer sexuality. This process of erasure is precisely what makes gay and lesbian liberal intimacy complicit with racism in the US. Pushing against such a method of forgetting, Eng puts forth the following provocative question: "what if we were to pursue a reading of *Lawrence* through an alternate legal genealogy, through the specter of race and the ghost of miscegenation?" (Eng 48). This dissertation, in part, seeks to think through these complicated attachments through responding to David Eng's call that we remember these "coeval historical phenomena" in order to better understand where and when miscegenation became the ghost of queer times past. Siobhan Somerville provides one hint for these linkages insofar as they tie into this legal history I have traced thus far. She reminds us that "Significantly, the analogy between interracial (heterosexual) sex and same-sex sodomy did not play a major part in the Supreme Court's majority opinion in *Lawrence*," instead, "the comparison between same-sex and interracial *marriage*, remains at the forefront of public debate, legislative action, and potential Supreme Court rulings" (Somerville 339-340, my emphasis). But why? Why has interracial marriage, not interracial sex, proven to be the go-to analogy for gay sex in *Lawrence*, a case which

³ St. Louis County Police Department, Bureau of Crimes Against Persons, "Office Darren Wilson's Initial Report on Fatal Shooting," Aug. 2014: 13. Web. April 2015.

declaratively states that it does not adjudicate upon gay marriage? Perhaps, I aim to think, this is because interracial sex and gay sex have always been part and parcel of each other. And in return, rendering an analogy would be illogical because you cannot establish an analogy for what has been historically and symptomatically one and the same. Laws policing sex in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century U.S. always situated sex along the color line within the same domain as sodomy. Thus, there is a necessary shift made towards marriage as the proper domain for intimacy that reframes the illicit, interracial love triangle that instigates *Lawrence* into a case implicitly and explicitly about marriage. In return, miscegenation becomes the ghost of queer times past when the history of miscegenation vis a vis U.S. slavery and interracial sex and concubinage is erased (ghosted) from the picture and replaced with its mid-twentieth-century marital counterpart, *Loving v. Virginia*.

In *Hidden in Plain View*, I take aim at the history of sexuality in the antebellum U.S. and its transnational circuits of slavery in an effort to chart a much deeper historical trajectory that illuminates how queer has always emerged from a discourse and practice of sexualized racism. In order to better understand the confluence of anti-black racism and queer liberal progress that is happening today, illuminated by this recent legal and social history, I provide a literary and cultural history of these linkages as they began to be articulated in the nineteenth-century U.S., the Caribbean, and their European ties. More specifically, I situate this emergence through tracing the capacious realm of nineteenth-century ideologies of interracial sex, as they are articulated in the cultural and literary imagination of the nineteenth century through a paradoxical logic of homosocial

and same-sex eroticism.⁴ That is, the simultaneity of slavery's capitalistic exploitation of interracial reproduction as it existed alongside the cultural fear of the mixed-raced child led to the production of racist cultural and pseudo-scientific identitarian constructions in which mixed-raced peoples were regarded as sexually excessive, yet sexually sterile; in which the mixed-raced body was no different than the mixed-gendered body; in which passing was fluid for both one's race and gender; in which mixed-raced reproduction beget alternative kinship formations of dual mothers, displaced fathers, and multiple networks of extended care. *Hidden in Plain View* thus argues that interracial sex has always functioned along the lines of what we now call queer, but the racist implications that subsume terms such as "mulatto," etymologically meaning "sterile mule," have been erased when queer claims its historical past as one that is steeped in whiteness, a whiteness set apart from the act of interracial sex that, a whiteness that is embodied in the form of canonical figures representing emergent homosexuality such as Walt Whitman or

⁴ A note on terminology. Throughout the dissertation, and indeed in its title, I use the term "interracial" instead of miscegenation or amalgamation. While amalgamation was used to denote racial mixing as early as the late eighteenth century and was largely used to analogize blood mixing to the mixing of metals, and while miscegenation is term invented in 1864 that explicitly targets post-emancipation anxieties of mixed-raced reproduction, I use interracial, a term not in effect until the 1880s, because I believe it most closely aligns with the varied language used throughout my sources that gesture to a host of mixings, companionships, crossings, and unions. "Inter" as a prefix is to be "between, among, amid, in between, in the midst," and as such, does not always carry with it an explicit connotation of sex, reproduction, and ideologies of blood that are subsumed within the terms amalgamation and miscegenation. The relations that I discuss in this dissertation are often about being "in the midst" of multiple and ambiguously raced peoples, a situatedness that, while absent of explicit sexual acts, can still lend itself to a sexualized meaning that is ubiquitous in terms of racialization and sexualization. Interracial also signals black-white sexual relations throughout the majority of the dissertation. While I do understand that interracial is inclusive of various racial mixings, the dissertation's focus on slavery moreover that U.S. colonialism and imperialism leaves the focus on black-white relations. Finally, my decision to use a historically anachronistic term in my discussion of race goes along with my decision to use a historically anachronistic term, queer, to discuss sexuality in the nineteenth century. These decisions are pointed and direct in my effort to push against historicist demarcations that would otherwise limit a queer reading of interraciality to a post-1864 (post-miscegenation) and post-1892 (post-homosexual) moment.

Oscar Wilde. I put pressure on the notion that such a construction of homosexual whiteness can somehow be figured as separate from histories of U.S. slavery and colonialism.

To be clear, this is not to say that queer scholarship, which many have argued is propelled by a genealogy of white scholars tracing to Foucault, is itself racist, or that queer studies inherently engages in racist projects. Far from it. Instead, it is imperative to be attentive to the ways in which whiteness has historically created racist stereotypes through pitching same-sex and various “deviant” desires as a racist tool that sexualizes people of color as nonnormative. At the same time, queer politics often, in the present moment, lapses race as a viable category that fundamentally alters how queer politics can be understood and approached. In order to better attend to what Sharon Holland calls “the erotic life of racism,” I ask centrally throughout this dissertation, how can queer theoretical projects keep intact the erotic life of racism as one queer historical legacy stemming from antebellum slavery?

There are two primary reasons, I argue, as to why interracial sexual encounters in the antebellum U.S. are not read within a queer lens. The first, I suggest, is because interracial sex is most often framed within a discourse of mixed-raced heterosexual reproduction. Therefore, the centrality of the biological reproductive act to this framework leaves the largely non-reproductive realm of queer sex as an absent outlier to the discussion. Indeed, the violent means by which reproduction was used as a mechanism of material, capitalistic exploitation in slavery, one that was often predicated upon white male sexual violence enforced upon black women, enslaved and free, rightly

leads much scholarship, especially feminist scholarship, to interrogate the material sexual and racial relations of biological reproduction in the antebellum period. But whether or not such reproductive acts produce sexual and gendered relations that can be understood within the “normative” domain is the question that such black feminist scholars as Hortense Spillers, Hazel Carby, and Saidiya Hartman have long asked. As Hartman avers, “How can we understand the racialized engenderment of the black female captive in terms other than deficiency or lack in relation to normative conditions and instead understand this production of gender in the context of very different economies of power, property, kinship, race, and sexuality?”⁵ Following in Hartman’s proposal to flip the terms of relation away from a comparative project to one that alters the very context under which we examine race, gender, and sexuality, I am not so much interested in proposing whether or not interracial sex, reproductive or not, can be considered as what we now call queer. Instead, I am interested in questioning why queer theory has rarely turned its lens to these relations, and additionally, how such interracial and reproduction relations alter what queer scholarship considers as “normative” and “reproductive.” As Kathryn Bond Stockton argues, “Something, to be sure, breaks down ‘homo’ in the mix of light and dark. Nor can homosexual miscegenation be conceived as conceiving, in the usual sense, a mixed offspring. There is no baby.”⁶ While Stockton astutely thinks through how “homo” breaks down when we attend to homosexual miscegenation, I am

⁵ Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997): 100.

⁶ Kathryn Bond Stockton, *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where “Black” Meets “Queer”* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006): 36-37.

interested in how heterosexual miscegenation breaks down when we attend to its “nonnormative” kinship and reproductive patterns *in the first place*. In the cultural texts I look at, there is a baby, and yet there is still a lingering queerness.

The second road-block that juts up against a queer theoretical turn to antebellum interracial sexual relations coheres around what this introduction began with: the fact that interracial encounters are often expressed in the political, social, and cultural imaginary through various forms of sexualized racism. The means by which racist practice wields same-sex deviance to subject people of color to discriminatory practice does not lend itself nicely to queer recuperative projects. Calling out queer sex in the nineteenth-century is a mechanism of racist speech acts. As I show most clearly in Chapter 3, labeling a black man as same-sex desiring is less “homophobic” than it is racist in the 1830 moment I engage. Interestingly, labeling a black man as a “nigger going crazy with a gun” in 2003 was one means to bring about the force of homophobia. These two injurious speech acts blur the boundaries between homophobia and racism from the 1830s moment to now. Yet, these scenes of racist hailing in the nineteenth-century have not yet be read as queer because queer is largely a discourse of desire. Better stated, Sharon Holland argues: “So often our ‘racist’ culture is held as separate and apart from our desiring selves. To think about desire is to arrive at a queer place. But I do not mean for that queer place to become overdetermined by its association with desire, with the erotic. In essence, I am opening the door to a notion of the ‘erotic’ that oversteps the category of the autonomous so valued in queer theory so as to place the erotic - the personal and political dimension of desire - at the threshold of ideas about quotidian

racist practice.”⁷ In many ways, the quotidian racist practice displayed in nineteenth-century political satires, or the everyday promulgation of race sciences, are everywhere grounded in a discourse of the erotic and an obsession with the sexual that often reaches to the realm of same-sex and cross-gendered modes of relating and being.

The chapters in this dissertation move through these two central currents of thought by gathering a range of materials and sources in order to attend to the unevenness of this discussion of interracial reproduction and racism as it is tied to queer in the antebellum period. That is, I draw together a vast array of source material, from short stories, sensational fiction, visual satires, newspaper articles, congressional debates, abolitionist petitions, political satires, and to visual art to suggest that the everyday domain of how interracial was tied up with a type of racialized queer sexuality extended to the political, the quotidian, the sensational, and the social. The first two chapters confront the discourse of interracial reproduction and the final two confront the entanglement of the queerly erotic with anti-black racism. It is important to note, as well, the varied perspective of the cultural texts in these chapters. That is, in Chapter 1 introduces us to the ties that bind interracial reproduction to queer through reading African American slave narratives and African American fiction, before turning to how such reproduction in and around the slave economy is imagined queerly by white authors and race scientists, in Chapter 2. In the final two chapters, I begin the discussion of racist practice as having a homophobic bent through taking aim at the white supremacist satirist, EW Clay. As Chapter 3 unravels and Chapter 4 digs its heels in, I attend to

⁷ Sharon Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012): 9.

African American writers, novelists, and artists who have used creative practices to both resist and rethink such a legacy of sexualized racism.

Chapter 1, “The Crisis of Kinship: Victor Séjour’s ‘Le Mulâtre’” responds to Sharon Holland’s claim that, “the place of slavery in queer studies has yet to be reckoned with,” a directive that comes from Holland’s pointed critique of Butler’s *Antigone’s Claim* as falling short of taking up the kinship relations of the institution of slavery. In response to the Holland/Butler conversation, this chapter establishes a reading practice that resists ascribing Oedipal ideologies of patriarchal kinship to the violent interracial sexual relations in plantation slavery. I do so through an examination of the refrain “I was born” in African American slave narratives, as well as a close reading of the first known fiction publication by an African American, Victor Séjour’s “Le Mulâtre” (1837). Séjour’s transatlantic short story lays bare the crisis of kinship perpetuated by New World slavery that breaks kin and family apart, instigating cross-generational, same-sex, and incestuous desires that seep into the narrative as ambiguous erotics. I argue that these erotics exist along an axis of what is otherwise called queer kinships: where parents are “multiply occupied or displaced” and erotic and familial affiliations become proliferate.

Chapter 2, “She passed down Orleans Street, a polished dandy”: The Queer Race Romance of Ludwig von Reizenstein’s *The Mysteries of New Orleans*,” takes the nineteenth-century trope of the race romance as its central aim. The race romance, which pitches an interracial couple as the future potential for the dissolution of the races through their mixed-race offspring, is a utopian scenario generally fails, leaving interraciality as

never able to achieve heterosexual domesticity. Rather than see such a failure as an end in and of itself, I attend to the “deviations from the plot” of heterosexual interracial futurity that so often befalls the race romance. I suggest that the race romance offers quite a lot in terms of the queer affiliations it ends up producing otherwise. In short, I look at the unraveling of the race romance not for its incapacity to achieve heterosexual domesticity, but for its capacity to be something else, to be a bit queer, even if that sense of queerness is not how we understand it today, amidst the binary of hetero/homo relating.

Reizenstein’s invocation of cross-dressing, via female masculinity and male femininity, as the erotic mechanism that joins this heterosexual interracial couple prompts an implicitly queer element to both heterosexuality and the race romance. It is from this point of departure in which I argue that Reizenstein’s *The Mysteries of New Orleans* serves as a mid-nineteenth-century literary conduit to the rhetorical and ideological ties between interracial desire and queer sexual formations as they are consumed by the discourse of mixed-raced reproduction.

The archive of same-sex desire in the early nineteenth-century U.S. is not only spare, but, as Heather Love cautions, it is mired with difficult affects. Chapter 3, “Hidden in Plain View: A Queer Archive of Interraciality” builds upon Love’s call to allow the archival object to perform in unsatisfying and unsettling ways. Moving beyond the affects of shame, guilt, and depression that Love examines, I confront archival texts and images in which the portrayal of same-sex desire is also the scene of racist hailing. Drawing primarily from E.W. Clay’s visual satires published in Philadelphia and reproduced alongside print-narratives in London (1830s), I examine a host of visual

satires that affix queer desire to the stigma of interracial desire. This chapter questions if or how we can lay claim to these subjects as black queer figures from the past when reminded of the stigma of sexual deviance historically affixed to the black body. How do we account for early portrayals of same-sex desire when these depictions are leveled with the intent to injure? I argue that one step towards answering this question is to insist that a focus upon the erotic and the queer must also keep intact the history of racist injurious speech that informs queer history.

Chapter 4, “John Brown’s Bed” examines what I read as various queer “bedside scenes” that surface in the cultural imaginary of John Brown, since the time of his execution to the present moment. Specifically, I engage feminist and black feminists who take up the legacy of John Brown in order to reorient the masculinist hold that prevails over Brown’s myth-making. I argue that these queer bedside scenes, which engage cross-dressing, racial passing, and homoerotic encounters are evidence of the imaginative re-tellings of John Brown’s rebellion and court trial, which are curiously the site of homoerotic story-lines, perhaps because of Brown’s stature as a hyper-masculine, U.S. hero of cross-racial relations. From Pauline Hopkins’s interracial romance *Winona* (1902), to the *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper’s* reporting of Brown’s trial, to Lydia Maria Child’s letters to Brown, to Kara Walker’s paintings of Brown, and to Michelle Cliff’s *Free Enterprise*, I trace various homoerotic encounters that surface in each re-telling. Cross-dressing, emasculation, homosociality, and gender inversions proliferate amongst the legend and history of indigenously dubbed “Osawatomie Brown,” a racial appropriation set in conjunction with Brown’s desires to free and father the enslaved.

Historical Methodology: The Shadow that Haunts the Thing Not Named

In May 1838, Pennsylvania Hall was dedicated as Abolition Hall, as a venue for abolitionist groups to meet, engage in public debate, and convene for the purposes of discussing the anti-slavery platform, as well as other political projects such as the temperance movement. The inauguration of Abolition Hall, however, only lasted four days, after which a mob set fire to and burned down the hall in protest of the abolitionist agenda as well as the anti-segregationist atmosphere of the hall which included attendees from various racial backgrounds. Years later, in 1850, a satirical drawing of the short-lived Abolitionist Hall was published under the racist minstrel pseudonym, “Zip Coon.” The original print has not survived, yet the Library Company of Philadelphia holds a photographic copy of the piece, with the lengthy title, *Abolition Hall: The Evening Before the Conflagration at the Time More than 50,000 Persons Were Glorifying in its Destruction at Philadelphia May - 1838, “Drawn on Stone by Zip Coon.”* As the Library Company’s description of this image details, this is a “Photographic reproduction of a racist anti-abolitionist cartoon depicting a busy street scene with the hall being used as an interracial brothel by the second Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women on May 16, 1838.” The reprint here clearly shows numerous men and women frolicking outside of the Hall, as well as inside, as we gain snapshots of various illicit scenes on the street and in each of the building’s windows. As the Library Company’s archivist Krystal Appiah has noted in her research on Pennsylvania Hall, most of those affected by the mob scene were African Americans and not the white women of the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women. Yet, in response to the burning of the hall, it was

reported that “[Laura] Lovell [of the Fall River Female Anti-Slavery Society in Massachusetts] and other white female attendees walked arm in arm with their black comrades in order to protect them from attack as they departed the Hall.”⁸ Lovell recounts her memories of this violent uprising in her text *Report of a Delegate to the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women* (1838), in which she recalls that the white women concluded that they “should, as far as possible, protect our colored sisters while going out, by taking each one of them by the arm.”⁹

As such, the “Zip Coon” image mockingly recreates the decision for the women to leave arm in arm into a scene of sexual excess. Turning Abolition Hall into a type of brothel, those that are seen here walking arm in arm engage in a type of threesome: there are two men, one white and one black, walking arm in arm with a white woman, and also, there are two women, one white one black, walking arm in arm with a white man. The triangulation of the threesomes in the photo leaves us wondering to whom is the affection being attributed, and how the sexual desires circulate amongst these armed companions. Must we only imagine that the two men are solely desirous of the woman, or the two women are only desirous of the man? Or might there be affection moving through the three bodies in such a manner that interracial desire here becomes a superfluous triad of eroticism mixing heterosexuality with homosexuality? The image, as a highly outlandish

⁸ Kyrstal Appiah, “Abolitionist Women at Pennsylvania Hall,” *Beyond the Reading Room: The Library Company of Blog*, May 2013. Web. May 2015.

⁹ Laura Lovell, *Report of a Delegate to the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women, Held in Philadelphia, May, 1838; Including an Account of Other Meetings Held in Pennsylvania Hall, and of the Riot. Addressed to the Fall River Female Anti-Slavery Society, and Published by its Request* (Boston: Knapp, 1838): 17.

and sexualized rendition of Abolition Hall as a near prostitution house leaves these interracial desires indefinite, unable to be clearly defined.

In 1860, on the eve of the Civil War and at the height of Lincoln's presidential campaign, Louis Maurer sketched an anti-Lincoln, anti-Republican satire directed at the party's abolitionist platform. The image shows Abraham Lincoln, Horace Greeley (editor of the New York Tribune), William H. Seward (Lincoln's Secretary of State) and two other New York newspaper editors who were friendly to the Republican cause. All the men in the image are joined together for the Republican cause. Lincoln is seen tied to Greeley, as they both "dance to the same tune"; the same is to be said of the two other newspaper editors, joined at the arm and setting the tambourine in motion. That these men are joined, dancing, and entangled in each other's arms insights a type of homosocial bonding over their interracial agenda. What further drives this homoeroticism of the image is the depiction of William H. Seward, secretary of state, in the background. While the satire is clearly about the abolitionist agenda, the incitement of interraciality comes most acutely through Seward, who is portrayed holding a wailing black child. Seward comments, "It's no use trying to keep me and the 'Irrepressible' infant in the background; for we are really the head and front of this party." Indeed, Seward and the child are in the background, albeit in the center of the image, but their presence is undeniably noticeable: Seward is wearing a woman's skirt, a coat jacket, and a bow tie. As Seward becomes the embodiment of the party's interracial agenda, he at the same time becomes feminized.

Dressed partly in drag, Seward's interracial sentiments and desires simultaneously transform him into a gender ambiguous person, or at the very least his gender

performance becomes mixed. Importantly, Seward “becomes woman” not simply because of the invocation that he is left to metaphorically “mother” the black child, and pejoratively the newly freed black race. More so, I suggest that Seward’s cross-gendered performance comes into play in part because of the historical foreclosure of white paternity for a black child. As such, “white paternalism” (echoed in chapter 4 on John Brown) is fundamentally oxymoronic and thus the “great white savior” to the races becomes a savior in drag, necessitated by the historic legacy of refusing interracial heterosexual families in the slave economy. In return, a white man holding a black child immediately brings to the fore the sexual and gendered deviance of this interracial construction.

Taken together, these two images represent the historical arc of the dissertation, namely the thirty year period from 1830 to 1860, in which the antebellum U.S. and its transnational circuits, extending from the Caribbean to France, Britain and Germany, respond to the abolition of the slave trade through the simultaneous rise of transnational abolitionist movements as well as the rise of racist, anti-integrationist movements. More broadly, the sources that I examine throughout the dissertation engage with much of the long nineteenth century, reaching back to the Haitian Revolution, 1791-1804, and forward to the turn of the twentieth century. Additionally, taken together these images exemplify the varied articulation of interracial relations in the sexual imaginary that proliferates during this antebellum period in which the sexual and social freedoms of African Americans and black diasporic subjects are vied for and contested against. Yet, despite the circuits of desire that permeate between the interracial threesomes in *Abolition Hall*, and in the face of William Seward’s cross-gendered garb, such images bring with

them the overwhelming capacity and tendency to be glossed as nothing other than sexual deviance that exists only insofar as it relates to heterosexual interraciality. Because, as I argue throughout the dissertation, “miscegenation” is definitionally associated with heterosexual interracial reproduction and interracial marriage, such images are not viewed within a queer frame. Such a reification of interracial as synonymous with reproduction, however, denies historical legacies such as those depicted above, in which the interracial is yoked to the realm of the homoerotic and the gender deviant. My methodology, then, when turning to the historical record, specifically in the mid-nineteenth-century campaigns against abolition and interraciality, contends that it is important to note that the interracial in this period was always already inveighed against *as queer*. These anti-miscegenation, anti-abolition pamphlets and satires paired heterosexual interracial couples with same-sex and/or cross-dressing interracial couples, thus interweaving interracial sexuality with queer sexuality. They were, in fact, one in the same. In return, the contemporary discourse that ascribes an analogous model to these sexualities is missing the legacy of their duality.

And to miss this legacy, to gloss over it, to not see it, as David Eng notes, renders miscegenation the ghost of queer times past. This act of missing or not seeing the interracial in queer, or the queer in interracial is, for example, a type of ghosting that is akin to what Toni Morrison calls the “shadow” that fills the American literary tradition. In *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison argues that American literature is centrally concerned with a “meditation on the shadow,” that is the Africanist presence in American literature. Morrison insists upon the centrality -- not marginality, not obscurity, not alterity -- but the

centrality of the Africanist presence in American literature such that “It takes hard work *not* to see this,” and that “every well-bred instinct argues *against noticing*.”¹⁰ Building upon Morrison’s claim, I suggest in addition that every well-bred instinct, an instinct that takes its cue from being bred well within the rubric of the heterosexual, argues *against noticing* that interracial is and can be attached to queer. I propose that for interracial queer desire to be “hidden in plain view” speaks to a critical blind spot that is both the product of a reading practice that employs a form of heterosexual glossing alongside Toni Morrison’s concept of “meditating on the shadow.” To think of these interracial queer desires as hidden in plain view refuses the narrative of “mining history,” because to mine history presumes that these instances are covered up, hidden, and that it takes work to discover them, as opposed to considering how it takes work *not to see* them, that it takes work to ghost them. Not insisting that these connections between interracial and queer are everywhere would run the risk of reinscribing concepts of alterity, of perpetuating the notion that the ghost that haunts somehow only creeps in the doorway rather than shaking the entirety of the house.

Morrison’s methodology outlined here in many ways resonates with what Siobhan Somerville calls a queer method. She argues that to engage a queer method is to “listen for ‘the inexplicable presence of the thing not named’ and [to be] attuned to the queer and racial presences and implications in texts that do not otherwise name them.”¹¹ In so many

¹⁰ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992): 7, 10.

¹¹ Siobhan Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000): 6.

words, a queer method is attuned to the circuits of desire in the satire *Abolition Hall* and to the cross-dressing in *The Great Exhibition of 1860*, those queer pairings which are “not named” under all the heterosexual significations that interracial ostensibly carries. But to set such a method in conversation with Morrison is to, importantly, not just “see” the racial presence in these queer iterations, but to better yet understand that it is only this racial presence which produces such desires in the first place. In short: Melville’s *Moby Dick* is nothing without the racializing force of the whiteness of the whale; *Abolition Hall* is nothing without the sexualized racism of interracial deviance.

This brief dialogue staged here, between black feminist and queer theoretical methodological practices, is echoed throughout the dissertation, as I work to bring attention to the congruencies between the methodological practices of black feminism and queer theory that meditate upon the shadow that haunts and the presence of the thing not named. This dissertation continuously builds upon and expands this conversation as one response to key interventions made in queer of color critique, which ask, in part, “that we attend to the putatively nonnormative affect and sexuality of the black subject as a potentially useful site for extending queer theoretical praxis...keeping in mind [Roderick] Ferguson’s admonition not to simply extend a queer theoretical approach to questions of race but to also permit racial formation to transform queer critique.”¹² But “when and where,” to invoke Michelle Wright, the “black subject” becomes “a potentially useful site for extending queer theoretical praxis” is a central concern of this

¹² Tavia Nyong’o, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009): 88-89.

dissertation. That is, the “when and where” of the “shadow” that Morrison meditates upon is a black subject who is produced in the early white literary imagination of the nineteenth-century U.S., a historical focal point that is central to the work of the black feminists I engage, such as Spillers and Hartman in addition to Morrison. The “when and where” of much queer of color critique (Nyong’o largely an exception) is the contemporary, post-1948 moment. In short, the “black subject” as a useful “site” for queer theoretical praxis differs widely as to where and when such a site falls.

Drawing attention, then, to the vast array of queer scholarship that contends with the where and when of the nineteenth-century U.S. as a type of watershed moment in (white) queer history, and the vast array of black feminist scholarship that lies therein as well, I drive a wedge through this gap, extending the where and when of my analysis of queer interraciality to just such a space and time. Through drawing together a composite archive of cultural texts from the nineteenth-century U.S. and its transnational circuits, *Hidden in Plain View* insists upon a joint history that locates the sexualized racism of slavery as an indelible part of how queerness has come to be constituted today. This dissertation thus shores up a narrative of the interracial, same-sex intimacies of people often deemed undesirable because they are mired with the weight of histories of racism, and under such a weight, these interracial erotics have become the ghost of queer times past.

CHAPTER 1: The Crisis of Kinship in Victor Séjour's "Le Mulâtre"

"It is only when you are stranded in a hostile country that you need a romance of origins: it is only when you lose your mother that she becomes a myth." Saidiya Hartman, Lose Your Mother

In Sharon Holland's *The Erotic Life of Racism*, Holland responds to a question Judith Butler poses in *Antigone's Claim*. Butler's question is one of provocation around the Oedipus complex, concerning its place in the field of queer studies and the space of queer lives. Butler asks: "What will the legacy of Oedipus be for those who are formed in these situations where the positions are hardly clear, where the place of the father is dispersed, where the place of the mother is multiply occupied or displaced, where the symbolic in its stasis no longer holds?"¹³ Holland's response to Butler's question is more of a reframing and a rethinking than a direct answer. Holland suggests that Butler's "challenge to the claims of social and cultural norms of kinship...can have more radical *claims* if she were to extend it to the infrastructure of American slavery - articulated as something imposed upon and practiced by us all, rather than something particular to certain bodies. Such claims to kinship...were and are obliterated by liaisons created as a result of slavery's economic structure."¹⁴ Holland extends her reach to suggest that, "the place of slavery in queer studies work has yet to be reckoned with" (Holland 62). In reorienting Butler's question of kinship, Holland leaves us with a future imperative, in

¹³ Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000): 23.

¹⁴ Sharon Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012): 62.

which “yet to be reckoned with” reads more closely as “must be reckoned with,” if such queer theoretical concerns over kinship are to become radical claims.

What will the legacy of Oedipus be if we refuse to uncouple queer kinship from the infrastructure of slavery? In this chapter, I build upon Holland’s black feminist critique in order to situate the place of slavery in queer studies. I suggest that Holland’s pointed call for queer studies to reckon with the institution of slavery stems directly from a concern over kinship, thus the question of kinship stands as perhaps one obvious entry point for queer studies to engage with the legacy of slavery.¹⁵ Slavery’s “peculiar institution” supports a host of aberrant sexual practices, such as coercive desires, same-sex sexual servitude, rape, concubinage, interracial prohibitions, affective excesses and other “peculiar” acts of the institution.¹⁶ But what I argue here is that this array of aberrant sexual practices in slavery is not separate from, but is rather born out of the kinship affiliations that define the sexual economy of slavery, which throw into crisis the question of family, parentage, generations, lineage and descent. This “crisis of kinship” permeates the lives of the master class, free people of color, the captive, the colonized,

¹⁵ Indeed, Mark Rifkin’s *When Did Indians Become Straight*, especially the chapter “Romancing Kinship,” has argued that the question of kinship is a concerted site of study and theoretical investigation from which to engage queer indigeneity. Rifkin, *When Did Indians Become Straight: Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁶ Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman’s article “‘The Strangest Freaks of Despotism’” argues the following over the term “peculiar”: “While I will not go so far as to posit that ‘peculiar’ in this designation connotes all that is meant by ‘queer’ as it is used in the current academic/activist lexicon to refer to non-heteronormative sexuality and identity, I do think it is important to recognize the synonymy of these two terms, to grasp fully what the designation ‘peculiar’ reveals about the sexual arrangements, and thereby the larger social infrastructure, of the institution...slavery was peculiar in a sense more directly associated with the economies of desire and sexuality in that it provided a cover under which aberrant sexuality flourished.” Abdur-Rahman, “‘The Strangest Freaks of Despotism’: Queer Sexuality in Antebellum African American Slave Narratives,” *African American Review* 40.2 (2006): 229.

and those born into slavery. Here, concerns over inheritance and extending one's mark across time are detached from the reproductive act, parentage takes on numerous forms, while care and community sustain bodies through affective attachments amidst material and psychic violence. This, in its most basic understanding, already suggests an overlap between the question of kinship in black studies and the question of kinship in queer studies.

In this chapter, I engage, in part, Victor Séjour's short story "Le Mulâtre" (1837) as a means to provoke these critical questions around kinship. Specifically, Séjour's text has come to be representative of kinship formations in the slave economy. In an unprecedented manner for anti-slavery writing in the early nineteenth century, Séjour's text foregrounds the sexual violence of slavery as a social and cultural violence that breaks kin and family apart. While emblematic of slavery's kinship formations, Séjour's text has simultaneously been rerouted through scholarly Oedipal readings. This pairing allows me to consider the limits of the Oedipus complex (as Butler does) when mapped onto slave kinship formations, and to consider the "radical claims" (that Holland calls for) that can be made through a more capacious understanding of Oedipus, slave kinships, and queer desires. Reading Séjour's text thus sets up a methodological means to

engage the complex and even contradictory language of sex and desire that proliferates from the crisis of kinship in slavery.¹⁷

It is my contention that placing kinship relations in the sexual economy of slavery under the rubric of Oedipal triangles belies the violent, coercive nature of interracial sex acts that confound the possibilities of familial, gendered, and sexual identifications that the Freudian Oedipal design sets out to articulate. This chapter, then, works to address the following: First, my move away from paradigmatic Oedipal structures is strategic, as I consider the potential for Séjour's text to have an impact on kinship models that push against Western familial standards. Second, I attend to the difficulty in reading a racialized account of kinship with the tools of queer theory through bringing the notion of queer kinship into more direct conversation with kinship as theorized within black feminism. Finally, while Séjour's text supports a critique of the limits of the Oedipus complex, I also turn to Séjour's text to connect this critique to contemporary theories of "queer kinship." Thus, my reading of "Le Mulâtre" not only asks that we consider the historically specific kinship structures of the text outside of normative sexual paradigms, but that we also consider the urgency of such a critique today, for the history and legacy of slavery is, as Holland argues, "something imposed upon and practiced by us all."

¹⁷ In my critique of the use of the Oedipus complex in readings of "Le Mulâtre," I am less concerned with a critique of the Oedipus complex itself than I am concerned with scholarly recourse to Oedipus as an analytic. I follow in line with Butler's critique of Oedipus in *Antigone's Claim*: "I am less interested in what the [incest] taboo constrains than the forms of kinship to which it gives rise and how their legitimacy is established precisely as the normalized solution to the oedipal crisis. The point, then, is not to unleash incest from its constraints but to ask what forms of normative kinship are understood to proceed as structural necessities from that taboo" (Butler, 30).

“Where the Positions Are Hardly Clear”

Same-sex acts in the archive of slavery are not prolific, but they are certainly there. And like any discussion of sex and sexual relating, these acts are not uniform, but vary along the lines of the racial and sexual power structures that the institution upholds. Recently, various scholars working along the axis of black feminism and queer studies, investigating histories of sexuality in slavery, have examined the ways in which enslaved people sustained and crafted emotional bonds amongst each other as a means of surviving through networks of extended kinship and same-sex care. Such affiliations were often created in response to the material and psychic violence perpetuated through sex, which was wielded as a mechanism of power, in terms of rape and abuse, and relatedly as a mechanism of degeneracy and de-habilitation, in terms of breaking kin and family apart. Scholars such as Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman, Omise’eke Tinsley, and Roderick Ferguson have made such moves to consider how “queer,” or various forms of same-sex affiliations as well as same-sex instances of abuse, circulated within the institution of slavery and how these histories resonate, or don’t, with our understanding of sexuality today.¹⁸ But moreover, such a turn is, perhaps more so, working towards the critical question “what happens when queer theories start with explicit formulations of racialized sexuality and

¹⁸ In addition to Sharon Holland, there are a number of recent texts that engage the intersection of slavery and queer studies. See Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman, *Against the Closet: Black Political Longing and the Erotics of Race* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012); Jafari Allen and Omise’eke Tinsley, *Black/Queer/Diaspora*, eds. *GLQ* 18.2-3 (2012); Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward A Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2004). Gayatri Gopinath, “Archive, Affect, and the Everyday: Queer Diasporic Re-Visions.” *Political Emotions: New Agendas in Communication*. Ed. Janet Steiger et al. (New York: Routledge, 2010); Tavia Nyong’o, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Omise’eke Tinsley, *Thieving Sugar: Eroticism Between Women in Caribbean Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

sexualized race, rather than add them in after theories like performativity have already been elaborated?”¹⁹ Such a move alters and forces queer studies to contend with a past it has largely ignored, a past that shores up how histories of colonization and enslavement are inextricably tied to the history of sexuality, rather than bracketed off as its tangential or “vestibular” element.

This cadre of work in black queer studies, oriented towards historical and literary analysis of eighteenth and nineteenth-century New World slavery, largely builds upon the critical work of black feminist scholars, such as Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, Hortense Spillers, and Patricia Collins, whose reformulations of black female sexuality, motherhood, kinship, and the “uses of the erotic” of women loving women, open up the means by which slavery, in effect, can be (and in many ways already has been) “queered.” In *Thieving Sugar: Eroticism Between Women in Caribbean Literature*, Omise’eke Tinsley traces the “broad, metaphorical lexicon of nouns” that women in Suriname used to “called their female partners,” of which, Tinsley tells us, “the most common name for a same-sex lover was *mati*” (Tinsley 35). While such names for female lovers are used today, Tinsley connects this affective term to a much longer history, as “this term dates to the Middle Passage. *Mati* is a mate as in ‘shipmate,’ she who survived forced transport and enslavement with me” (Tinsley 35). Surviving the Middle Passage together, becoming *mati* was a bond that often extended beyond the space of the ship, as care and commitment continued amongst landed enslavement as

¹⁹ Omise’eke Tinsley, “Black Atlantic, Queer Atlantic: Queer Imaginings of the Middle Passage,” *GLQ* 14.2-3 (2008): 191-215.

well, and the legacy of such care, as Tinsley attests, remains in linguistic and affective use today. Once arrived and survived, *mati* forged alternative kinship networks, such that “same-sex relationships served the additional purpose of shoring up emotional support, and help with household management that men were not always expected to provide” (Tinsley 35). In many ways, to invoke the history and legacy of *mati* is not only to significantly disavow such disparaging ideologies of black female sexuality as the “matriarchy myth,” but it also points to creative and critical modes of survival that turned to sexual affiliations in order to resist and reorient the power dynamics of enslaved women’s forced sexual relating with both white and enslaved men. Sex as a tool of reproduction here is dislodged, even if *mati* at times existed alongside heterosexual procreation. The emotional care of women loving women is both a central as well as supplemental means of sexual affiliation in slavery.

In Miguel Barnet’s *Biography of a Runaway Slave*, he transcribes the oral history testimony of Esteban Montejo’s life as an enslaved man and as a maroon in Cuba, in the mid-to-late nineteenth-century.²⁰ Telling his story to Barnet in 1963, Montejo recounts daily “Life in the Barracoons,” or the slave quarters, as it was layered with cultural practices from music, to religion, to medicine, to housework, and to modes of sexual affiliation. Offering what is perhaps the gendered inverse of the women loving women *mati* of Tinsley’s social history, Montejo tells not of women left together in the absence of

²⁰ Miguel Barnet, *Biography of a Runaway Slave* (1968), trans. W. Nick Hill, (Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1994).

men, but of the scarcity of women within the sugar plantation economy in Cuba. Montejo recalls:

life was lonely anyway because women were pretty scarce...Many men didn't suffer because they were accustomed to that life. Others had sex with each other and didn't want to have anything to do with women. Sodomy, that was their life. Those men washed clothes, and if they had a husband, they also cooked for him. They were good workers and were busy tending their conucos. They gave the produce to their husbands to sell to the guajiros. And the word effeminate came about after slavery because that situation continued on. (Barnet 40)

Unlike cultural and historical traces of the word *mati* that link same-sex affiliations amongst women to the profound historic space of the slave ship, Montejo, telling his story in 1963, relies upon a legal lexicon of sexual identification, in which these men are seen to engage in “sodomy,” a term steeped in juridical and social taboo. However, Montejo, with great ease, tells of the simple, everyday acts of two men who are “husbands” to each other. Selling food, cooking, cultivating the garden, and washing clothes are routines of daily life that made these men sustain emotional comfort and care, not despite the gender disparity, but because these men, regardless “didn't want to have anything to do with women.” While Montejo's forthright depiction of same-sex affection amongst men in the barracoons is overlaid with the sexological terminology of sodomy and the marital use of the word husband, Montejo does suggest that such bonds amongst men are the root for a type of sexual understanding that comes later, in which the term “effeminate” takes on a particular form and legacy from such affiliations formed during slavery.

While the husbands of the barracoons gesture to same-sex relations amongst enslaved men, Montejo also describes, in unflinching detail, the homosocial encounters that were prolific amongst white and black men. In a remarkable anecdotal aside, Montejo imparts a glimpse into the rousting games played at local taverns where food and liquor were sold. “I recall,” Montejo tells his interlocutor, “a game they called ‘the cracker.’ The way that game worked was that four or five hard salt crackers were placed on the wooden counter or any board, and the men had to hit the crackers hard with their dicks to see who could break the crackers...Blacks as well as whites played it.” A second game of similar caliber was the “jug game”: “They would take a big jug with a hole in the top and stick their do-hickey through it. The one who reached the bottom was the winner” (Barnet 29). Just as easily, Montejo’s acceptance of black male, same-sex husbands resonates here with his passing references to homoerotic games played amongst white and black men, a criteria of which depended on having “hard” and erect “dicks” to win the game. Being aroused, whether for sexual play or bar-sport play, perhaps had its limitations to finding the end of the jug, but there is room here, I wouldn’t hesitate to say, for such games to perhaps lead to other sorts of affiliations amongst the interracial jesting of the tavern men.

Both Montejo and Tinsley’s examples of same-sex affection point to modes of affiliating that provide sexual relief and as well as bodily survival amidst the imposition of slavery’s violences. In this regard, *mati* in Suriname and the barracoon husbands of Cuba carved out a space for existing otherwise. Harriet Jacobs, in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, points to the pervasive limit of this possibility, where same-sex sexual acts

were not a life-giving outlet that kept the body and soul together. Instead, Jacobs reveals how same-sex sexual servitude was a tool of subjection used by the master class upon the enslaved. Jacobs tells of an acquaintance named Luke, who was owned by a nearby, wealthy plantation owner. Jacobs's story of Luke is perhaps the most graphic depiction of violence and sex in all of *Incidents*, a narrative account that, as Abdur-Rahman argues in *Against the Closet*, "demonstrates the obfuscation, if not complete undoing, of both sexual and gender normalcy under slavery" (Abdur-Rahman 46). Of Luke, Jacobs tells us, he "was appointed to wait upon his bed-ridden master, whose despotic habits were greatly increased by exasperation at his own helplessness. He kept a cowhide beside him, and, for the most trivial occurrence, would order his attendant to bear his back, and kneel beside the couch, while he whipped him till his strength was exhausted. Sometimes he was not allowed to wear anything but his shirt in order to be in readiness to be flogged."²¹ The sexual and "filthy freaks," as Jacobs describes them, that the master perpetrated against Luke were of a sexual character too graphic to reveal. But that Jacobs tells of Luke's both literal and metaphoric state of being "chained to the bed" of his master, and forced to walk around in only his shirt (paradoxically for the purpose of being whipped on his back), is enough to understand that the rape and sexual violation that permeated slavery extended to same-sex servitude, here between the master and his slave Luke.

The sadomasochistic violence of this scene prompts scholar Abdur-Rahman to compare Luke's sexual punishment to that of Aunt Hester's beating in *The Narrative of*

²¹ Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861): (New York: Signet Classic, 2000): 216.

the Life of Frederick Douglass: “As in Douglass’s depiction of the beating of Aunt Hester, the cowhide functions as a phallic replacement, as an instrument for inflicting punishment and sexual torture” (Abdur-Rahman 47). Abdur-Rahman’s pointed comparison, I believe, opens up the possibility to read same-sex sexual violence in slavery along the same axis as heterosexual violence in slavery. That is, while Abdur-Rahman in no way collapses the particularities of these two instances, the rigidity of reading heterosexuality versus homosexuality, as we understand it today, does not necessarily cohere within the fraught sexual terrain of slavery where normativity and strict lines of sexual relating do not bear precise meaning in the cultural lexicon as we know it. Instead, “if sexual and gender normalcy” unravel within the institution, then perhaps instances of heterosexual exploitation can be read as queer.

Let me turn to Saidiya Hartman’s groundbreaking reading of the beating of Aunt Hester in Douglass’s narrative to express more clearly this point of intersection, or better yet this point of obfuscation. I quote Hartman at length for the nuance of her argumentation:

By locating this “horrible exhibition” [Aunt Hester’s beating] in the first chapter of his 1845 *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, Douglass establishes the centrality of violence to the making of the slave and identifies it as an original generative act equivalent to the statement “I was born.” The passage through the blood-stained gate is an inaugural moment in the formation of the enslaved. In this regard it is a primal scene. By this I mean that the terrible spectacle dramatizes the origin of the subject and demonstrates that to be a slave is to be under the brutal power and

authority of another; this is confirmed by the event's placement in the opening chapter on genealogy.²²

Hartman's language is everywhere steeped with the discourse of kinship, birth, and reproduction as a means to articulate the significance of Aunt Hester's beating in Douglass's narrative. Knowing that the genre of the slave narrative necessitates the opening statement "I was born" to validate the humanity of the person telling her story, Hartman, however, suggests that the moment when the enslaved person first witnesses violence (and here that violence is deeply sexual) is a "generative act." Flipping the scales here, Hartman affirms, this instance of beating is not degenerative in that it degrades, dehumanizes, and fissures one person from another, but instead it is "generative" and is as significant a moment of "the origin of the subject" that it is in line with the statement that ushers in every slave narrative, "I was born." To witness a beating, then, is to be born. It is a "primal scene" both in its instance of the earliest instantiate of the self, of being born, and in its intrinsic place in the institution of slavery. Douglass's genealogical account of the self, of being born, is therefore tied to Aunt Hester's beating.

Significantly, this scene of origin, birth, and genealogical beginnings exists entirely outside the domain of heterosexual reproduction. That is, Aunt Hester is beaten by her male master because, it is presumed, she had taken up with a man named Ned

²² Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997): 3. It is necessary, as well, to acknowledge Fred Moten's extensive and pointed reading of this scene as well as Hartman's decision not to reproduce this scene in her text. Moten's discussion, as well, launches an investigation of what he calls "wounded kinship" stemming from his reading of Douglass. See Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

from a nearby plantation. The master's outrage is thus sexually overwrought, and as he beats the half-naked Aunt Hester, Douglass is witness to sexual violence perpetrated by a man against his perceived slave mistress. In return, this instance of sexual violence is presumably one that reads along the lines of heterosexual violence, unlike the same-sex violence inflicted upon Luke in Harriet Jacob's narrative. Yet, the signal element of Hartman's reading, nevertheless, gestures to a mode of relating between Douglass and his Aunt Hester that is beyond the confines of heterosexual familial bonds as we know it today. In short, the act of sexual violence between Aunt Hester and her master begets Douglass, such that he was born in that moment. This is not the record of the rape of a slave woman by her master that later leads to her birthing a child. This is not the sexual reproduction of the institution that works alongside and for capitol labor production. This is a labor of another sort, but it still "generates" Douglass no less. What kind of a birth, then, is this? What, if anything, do we call Douglass's relationship to Hester that signals how she relates to him in excess of the familial demarcation, "aunt"? What is this kinship relationship of an Aunt begetting her nephew? As Douglass passes through the metaphorical birth canal of the "blood stained gates" of Hester's sexual beating, does Hester become his mother/aunt, and he her son/nephew? And if witnessing sexual violence is akin to the statement, "I was born," what is Harriet Jacobs's relationship to Luke? Is Luke's same-sex beating so violently sexual that it is also "inaugural" for Jacobs?

These relations, formed through the sexual violence of slavery, I believe, are not unlike those very relations that Judith Butler wonders about, those "where the positions

are hardly clear, where the place of the father is dispersed, where the place of the mother is multiply occupied or displaced.” As Butler states, “the symbolic in its stasis no longer holds,” and indeed, the multiplicity of Aunt Hester becoming aunt/mother and Douglass becoming son/nephew gestures to an excess beyond the lexicon of normative familial relationality that is here born of the very violence of slavery, and born out of an instance of non-hetero-reproduction. It is from this point of departure that I want to advocate for a reading practice that seeks to keep open, opaque, and tenuous those modes of relating “where the positions are hardly clear.” While in Montejo’s narrative, the husbands are discernible as queer relations that line up with a broad understanding of homosexuality given Montejo’s 1963 oral testimony, Douglass’s primal scene gestures to a moment of heterosexual violence that remains to produce an indeterminate understanding of kinship, birth, and affiliation insofar as it does not fall within the limits of heterosexual kinship standards. In return, I hope to keep intact that space where *mati* might touch Douglass’s primal scene, where the act of creating queer bonds for bodily and emotional sustenance brush alongside Aunt Hester’s beating and Douglass’s birth. The two are perhaps not so far apart. In turning, now, to Victor Séjour’s “Le Mulâtre,” it remains in these instances of being “hardly clear” that I hope to examine where queerness and kinship intersect around the racializing logics of slavery, even, and perhaps especially, in moments that might otherwise be considered conspicuously heterosexual.

“A Romance of Origins”

Fractured kinships in Victor Séjour’s “Le Mulâtre” (1837) are as severed as the bifurcated word that cuts through the ending of the story: “pè...re.”²³ In this sensational short story, the revengeful mulatto, Georges, exacts retribution upon his former master (and unknown father) Alfred. Just as Georges raises the axe to strike down upon his master’s head, the paternal confession slips from Alfred’s lips; when Alfred begins to utter the word “père,” revealing the unknown secret that has plagued Georges’ life, the axe cuts and we hear the soft incantation of the word’s end roll away with Alfred’s head. Georges’ fraught heritage remains suspended, a specter balancing on the line of life and death. Here, a dual blow is delivered. Frantic and believing himself cursed for killing his father, Georges turns a weapon upon himself, a shot is heard, and Georges’s body is found lying next to Alfred’s corpse. Georges’s actions, both his revenge and his suicide, stem from the familial drama that punctuates the story’s plot. Born a slave to his mother Laïsa, Georges was denied the knowledge of his father, for knowing Alfred’s paternity means knowing the sexual violence committed upon his mother. Georges’s revenge, however, is not one of familial piety towards his mother, but is rather restitution for Alfred’s sexual violation and execution of Georges’s wife, Zélie. Georges’s discovery that his disavowed father is his pernicious master, that his mother and wife are victims of rape

²³ Victor Séjour, “Le Mulâtre” in *The Multilingual Anthology of American Literature*, ed. Marc Shell and Werner Sollors (New York: NYU Press 2000), 179,181. English translation, “father.” All English translations of the text will be taken from this anthology. I draw on the translations given in the anthology as well as offer my own adjustments and interpretations. Hereafter cited in text, attributed to Séjour.

and seduction, and that his kinship ties are beyond restoration leads to this dramatic, sensational ending.

Séjour's "Le Mulâtre" was published in France in the *Revue des Colonies*, a serial produced by radical free people of color living in Paris.²⁴ "Le Mulâtre" holds significant weight in the canons of US literature, as it is considered the first known short story to be published by a person of African American descent.²⁵ Séjour, born in New Orleans to his free Haitian father and his free New Orleans born mother, was a noteworthy young writer. Recognizing and encouraging this skill, Séjour's father sent him to France to pursue his education and to write free of the severity of Louisiana's 1830 state law, which allowed the arrest of anyone writing inflammatory literature of an antislavery nature in New Orleans.²⁶ Séjour then resided in Paris and wrote in the company of Alexandre Dumas and Victor Hugo. Séjour indeed saw his literary pursuits flourish, as he would go on to write not only this short story, but numerous plays that were widely viewed in Parisian theaters.

Cultivated by these transnational literary circuits, Séjour's short story functions through multiple valences of influence. "Le Mulâtre" is as much a product of the French Romantic tradition flourishing amongst his cohort in Paris as it is a product of the racial and literary tensions in New Orleans and the legacy of the Haitian revolution. Not only is

²⁴ For more on the *Revue des Colonies*, see Sara E. Johnson's chapter, " 'Sentinels on the Watch-Tower of Freedom': The Black Press of the 1830s and 1840s," in her text, *The Fear of French Negroes: Transcolonial Collaboration in the Revolutionary Americas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

²⁵ Sollors, *Multilingual Anthology*, 164.

²⁶ Caryn Cossé Bell, *Revolution, Romanticism, and the Afro-Creole Protest Tradition in Louisiana, 1718-1868* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997): 94.

Séjour's father from Saint Marc, a town in Haiti, but the story takes place in Saint Marc presumably days before the first uprisings of the Haitian revolution (1791-1804). "Le Mulâtre" thus highlights the transnational nature of early American literature, in which New Orleans, Haiti, and Paris are triangulated in the space of the text.²⁷ In a broad sense, Séjour's text is a critique of New World slavery, written in a period in which French and US abolitionists as well as black antislavery writers challenged its inhumanity. A cursory reading of "Le Mulâtre" reveals the character relations as follows: Alfred is the master of the plantation in Saint Marc; Laïsa is a young Senegalese woman who is bought by Alfred and is also impregnated by him; Georges is Laïsa's son and does not know who his father is; Zélie is Georges's wife and is also the object of Alfred's desires; Georges and Zélie have an unnamed two-year-old son. However, the contours of these character relations become vexed, confused, and opaque as soon as sexual relations becomes textual analytics. Yet, what type of sexual relations these are, and whether or not they can be encompassed within such a rubric as the Oedipal complex are fraught avenues of inquiry.

I hope to put pressure on the ease with which heterosexual forms of sexual relating are read into the text, and the dis-ease that comes with reading same-sex modes of sexual relating when addressing textual moments of sexual ambiguity, where the relations are "hardly clear." Might the often unquestioned impulse to invoke the sexual, psychoanalytic orderings of the Oedipus complex as a marker of (normative) sexual

²⁷ Anna Brickhouse, *Transamerican Literary Relations and the Nineteenth Century Public Sphere* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

development overwrite the potential ambiguities of sexual relations within the institution of slavery?²⁸ Defining sexuality in relation to Séjour's text should perhaps remain ambiguous to, in part, counter the ways in which the Oedipus complex enables a type of heterosexual glossing that eschews the possibilities of more complex modes of sexual relating that Séjour's text offers.

Werner Sollors, in *Neither Black Nor White Yet Both* (1997), provides one of the earliest accounts in recent literary criticism of Séjour's short story, given that the same year the text was translated into English and included in Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s edited volume, *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* (1997). Specifically, Sollors states that Séjour's text is most effective in "locating the deep tragic themes of the son's search for the name of the father and of the father-son conflict culminating in a lurid, unknowingly committed patricide in an interracial family structure in which a modern Oedipus or Job endures the loss of his mother and his wife."²⁹ Sollors does not linger upon the legacy of Oedipus; rather, he uses it as a means to articulate the "mythic" and "tragic theme" of unknown patricide in order to link this "interracial family structure" to the Oedipus myth. Similarly, Anna Brickhouse, in *Transamerican Literary Relations*, places the Oedipal reading of the kinship relations in the text as a central

²⁸ In David Eng's poststructuralist critique of the Oedipus complex, he provides a cogent synopsis of the Oedipus complex, stating: "A traditional Freudian account of Oedipal displacement comes in the form of the little boy's loss of his mother as a prohibited object of desire. The little boy's displacement from his maternal origin is legislated by the Oedipus complex and its particular incest taboo, constituted not only through the father's interdiction of the son's desire for the mother as sexual object, but also by the heterosexual orientation of the little boy's identifications and desires as he searches for her suitable replacement." See David Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* (Durham: Duke University Press): 87.

²⁹ Werner Sollors, *Neither Black Nor White Yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997): 167.

component of the story's unraveling, as well as a central theoretical component of the master/slave dialectic. She suggests that in order for proper kinship affiliations to be maintained on the side of the master, and in order for kinship relations to be deprived on the side of the enslaved, this dyad "depends for its coherence on the repression of certain illegitimate kinship relations" as well as "a collective and spectacular disavowal of the very desires that produce its illegitimate genealogies" (Brickhouse 122, 123). Illegitimate and disavowed kinships are the order of things in the text, as well as the larger order of negotiated desires and genealogies in the slave economy. Brickhouse thus turns her attention to the very illegitimate and disavowed act that subtends kinship relations as well as in the Oedipus complex, namely the incest prohibition.

While Sollors mentions that Alfred's (the master) desire for Zélie (Georges's wife) is an "incestuously toned desire," Brickhouse considers Alfred's desire for Zélie as "desiring the woman who is structurally, and very likely also biologically, his daughter" (Sollors 167; Brickhouse 124). Immediately following Brickhouse's more "structural" rather than "tonal" reading of the incestuous desire that propels Alfred to Zélie, Brickhouse states: "In the generic Oedipal triangles shaping the narrative, father and son struggle over this daughter/sister-wife rather than the mother" (Brickhouse 124). Incest in the Oedipus complex rests upon the incestuous relation amongst father, son, and mother; incest in S  jour's text rests upon the "tonal or structural" relation amongst the master/father, the slave/son, and Z  lie - the daughter/sister-wife. In this latter triangulation, incest signifies a pluralistic encounter that is in excess of the confines of the Oedipus complex. Z  lie, too, could take on the moniker of daughter/sister-wife *and*

mother, as she and Georges have a son. The very real fact of incest as often occurring in slavery does not necessarily discount the potential for Oedipal-like affiliations, however, what plays out in Séjour's text is an abundance of sexual possibilities that explode easy familial positionalities. Even if this is a case of incest, it is Oedipus in reverse: incest in slave societies rarely, if ever, functions from son to mother. Instead, incestuous desire moves from "white father and his mixed-race daughter," in which, Dorris Garraway continues, "the father's failure to pass on the incest prohibition is due not primarily to his refusal to recognize his mulatto offspring but to his *own* incestuous transgression."³⁰ This pluralistic stance that Zélie is made to occupy cannot be contained by an Oedipal reading, and instead these sexual relations spill forth into something else: daughter/sister-wife.

Both the tonal and the structural invocations of incest leave me lingering upon the *question* of the importance of incest when reading sex in slavery. The question may not be whether incest does or does not occur on either a structural or tonal level, but for what ends does reading incest into the text function? Is it to read incest into the text more easily for the purposes of reading the Oedipus complex into the text, or for the purposes of reading the material relations of the sexual economy of slavery into the text?

In order to confront these sexual excesses rather than limit them to substitutive Oedipal positions, one approach might be to remain centrally attentive to the fact that the sexual relations of the text initially stem from the violent act of the master's forced sexual relations with Laïsa, Georges's mother. When Alfred first purchases Laïsa, he watches the

³⁰ Dorris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005): 280-281.

slave trader “promenait ses mains impudiques sur les formes puissantes et demi-nues de la belle Africaine [run his shameless hands over the powerful and half-nude form of the beautiful African girl]” (Séjour 152). After the trader shamelessly strokes Laïsa’s naked body, Alfred, deplorably, inquires about her purity, to which the trader replies that she is “aussi pure que la rosée du ciel [as pure as the dew from the sky]” – and her “guaranteed” ability to reproduce is accounted for (Séjour 152). At once running his hands over her body and testifying to her purity, the slave trader exacts an exchange with Alfred, one based in the contradictory logic of sexual purity, sexual accessibility, and the sexual capacity to reproduce. Through this violent and homosocial exchange in women that takes place upon the slave auction block, Alfred takes Laïsa’s “purity” into his own hands. We are told by the narrator that, “Je ne vous dirai pas tout ce qu’il fit pour posséder Laïsa; car celle-ci fut presque violée [I won’t recount to you everything that he did to possess Laïsa; for the girl was nearly raped]” (Séjour 154). Antoine, the narrator, clearly knows the extent to which Alfred consistently violated Laïsa, he recalls that she was forced to share his bed for a year. But Antoine is only verbally able to recount such violation with the instability of the term “presque,” signifying that she was “almost” or “nearly” raped.

The indeterminate nature of the term “presque” as qualifier for the act of rape suggests, on the part of the narrator, not that he did not understand the sexual violation that took place, but that there is a certain unavailability of language to express what such a violation might mean under the rubric of the sexual economy of slavery. Indeed, as Saidiya Hartman asks, “If the definition of the crime of rape relies upon the capacity to

give consent or exercise will, then how does one make legible the sexual violation of the enslaved...when the legal definition of the enslaved negates the very idea of ‘reasonable resistance’?”³¹ It is Antoine’s very incapacity to “make legible” the crime of rape that Alfred impresses upon Laïsa which results in the linguistic confusion over the term “presque.” Finding a language to express the act of sexual violation builds upon the difficulty of finding a language to understand what the resulting act of reproduction means in terms of kinship and affiliation stemming from an instance of “presque violée.”

If the discursive indeterminate event of “presque violée” sets in motion in the birth of Georges, the hidden paternity of Alfred, and later the death of Laïsa, then it is this instance of sexual instability that the slave economy produces which sets up the occasion for the unknown father. Yet, the injunction of the Oedipus complex as an analytic for the “interracial family” in “Le Mulâtre” presumes a heterosexual sexual identification that carries with it a tincture of proper sexual as well as gender identification: “proper” insofar as Oedipus signifies proper sexual object choice, and proper insofar as family presents something other than the sexual violation of “presque” rape that subtends the story.³² While the foundational theory of Oedipus is invoked as a means to name the complexities of kinship in slavery, it is the very instance of its capitulation that ends up reproducing the traditional, structural, and cultural paradigms of sexuality and family that this scholarship tries to undercut. Thus, to attempt to name the complexities of kinship in

³¹ Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 80.

³² I am aware that interracial family has been historically and currently cast as deviant as opposed to heteronormative. However, I am more concerned with the invocation of the term family within the historical time period of slavery to stand in for what I see as interracial sexual relations.

slavery already discounts the very illegibility of the sexual acts that take place within the institution of slavery. These peculiar, violent, and excessive sexual acts lead to moments of “presque violée,” identity formations of “daughter/sister-wife,” and genealogical ties that confound “tonal or structural” lineages of decent.

Indeed, as Dorris Garraway argues in *The Libertine Colony*, “the very notion of an Oedipal complex is problematic in a slave society, where the family is often cut through with racial and class antagonisms” (Garraway 279-280). These antagonisms represent a layered account of sexuality, in which, for example, the expression of miscegenation is at once an expression of incest. As Garraway further asserts, “The coincidence of incest and miscegenation in a slave society might at first appear odd since the two ideas seem to be mutually exclusive ... That such radically contradictory practices could and did occur simultaneously in slave societies is one of the most remarkable yet little studied phenomena of this form of social organization” (Garraway 278).³³ The ability to account for these contradictions, in which miscegenation is at once incest, leads sexuality in the slave economy to function within a set of dynamic and contradictory relations that should produce an excess of inquiry as opposed to a reified examination that sieves these encounters through the screen of the Oedipal.

It is in this regard that the egregious effort to replace “proper” patriarchal kinship structures with the pathologization of maternal kinship structures has, additionally, failed in its attempt at naming the sexual kinship relations stemming from slavery. When the

³³ See also, Sharon Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism*, in which she argues, “incest is frequently miscegenation in the Southern imaginary. In other words, because of chattel slavery we cannot readily separate the practice of incest and the occurrence of miscegenation” (Holland, 5).

notion of mother-right -- the deviant inverse of patriarchal Oedipus -- is applied to the slave economy and settler colonialism, it becomes a systematic means of violent and material disenfranchisement. The legacy of such exploitation is that kinship arrangements either based upon or forced into a maternalistic system become a means of state-sanctioned pathologization. We see the marker of this legacy most explicitly in the now infamous “Moynihan Report.” Published in the U.S. in 1965 as *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*, Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s report perversely addresses the forced history of slaves following the condition of the mother, often leading to a maternal kinship system, only to rewrite this history as the matriarchal-myth, pitching matriarchy directly against heteronormative patriarchal kinship structures. As Roderick Ferguson argues, the Moynihan Report suggests that the “pathology” of the black family is that, “it replaced the male patriarch with a female head, retarding ‘the progress of the group as a whole.’”³⁴ In this regard, “the discourse of black matriarchy was founded on assumptions that presumed heteropatriarchal culture as the appropriate and regulatory norm” (Ferguson 123). The imagination of black matriarchy in the Moynihan Report neglects the historical material conditions that created the familial and gendered relations stemming from the slave economy, and as such posits an always present and non-substantive binary between “white families” and “black families.” Maternalism is always one step short of the “progress” towards patriarchy, which assumes, as Ferguson suggests of Moynihan, that heteropatriarchal culture is the norm to be achieved.

³⁴ Roderick Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 122.

Through the divisions of an either/or model, in which sexual social organizations fall either towards matriarchy or Oedipal patriarchy, the simultaneous constructs of sexual relating in slavery get lost: where miscegenation is also incest, where patriarchal master-rule is also matriarchal mother-right. This simultaneity is in part due to the many revisions to the *Code Noir* in Haiti and other French colonies. In the 1685 version of the Code, while slaves do follow the line of the mother, the manumission of the enslaved woman is mandated in a legal decree to free slave women who bear a white man's child (so long as the white man is not married). In 1685, then, the effort to keep biological families together, and to place the onus of paternal care on the white master was at least legally inscribed if not always socially practiced. Yet, in the later 1733 version of the Code, a revisionist stance is taken towards interracial relations in which the above article 9 is rewritten to not only "forbid marriage with a person of color, but ... [to abolish] the emancipation that could follow such an alliance."³⁵ The 1733 revisionist stance towards interracial reproduction of a white man with an enslaved woman points towards the legal decree to restrict white patriarchal familial governance over interracial families, thus creating a maternalistic system that was once, in 1685, overlaid with paternal accountability.

While formal, interracial alliances amongst the master class and the enslaved were forbidden in the French Antilles via the 1733 Code, this is to say nothing of the illegible and unnamable alliances that circulate, as Séjour articulates, amongst the master/father, daughter/sister/wife, son/brother/husband. The instance of "presque," as being "almost"

³⁵ Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995): 225.

or “nearly” that which it attempts to name, insists that the act of naming sexual acts, familial relations, and kinship ties in the slave economy reaches a critical limit if not a critical crux. Sexual acts, desires, and modes of affiliation cut through easy lines of linguistic expression; they are only nearly or “presque” arrived at, they remain “where the positions are hardly clear.” In this space of sexual ambiguity, then, these questions remain: how do we approach that which cannot be named? How do we resist containing and codifying sexual acts that have never sought legibility and discovery in the first place?

“As Much As One Could Love a Man”

The simultaneity of miscegenation/incest as a conflated sexual encounter in plantation slavery is most often expressed through the sexual relations of a white master with his mixed-raced daughter. In “Le Mulâtre,” this is presumed to occur between Alfred and Zélie, even though there is no clear indication that Zélie is Alfred’s daughter. Nevertheless, Zélie becomes a stand-in for the miscegenation/incest sexual paradigm. Yet, if the familial and sexual relations that derive from this sexual economy are often confused, then might there be an instance of miscegenation/incest that does not align with the heterosexual understanding of incest? In other words, we might do well to attend to the proliferations of miscegenation/incest wherein the mixed-raced son is implicated in the incestuous act. Given that the sexual logics through which the slave economy functions produce erotic, peculiar, odd, and at odds desires, in which sexuality acts as a “fundamentally irrational force,” I suggest that the instance of miscegenation/incest not

be limited to a heterosexual paradigm (Abdur-Rahman 3). This is especially the case given that any type of “presumed heterosexuality” coheres around little that is of sexual consequence or meaning within this space and time. It is worth considering if the inclination for miscegenation/incest between the white master and the mixed-race daughter can also be extended to the affectation between the white master and his mixed-raced son, and if such a sexual mode might further dislodge the primacy of patriarchal, heterosexual determination.

Tracing such discursive instances of sexual excess in which the rhetorical symptoms of sexual and familial identification remain outside the bounds of kinship relations, the affective relations between men are similarly set into crisis. After Georges’s mother Laïsa passes, Georges is left without a parental bond, and subsequently turns his attentions and affections towards his master Alfred. Of Georges, we are told that, “Comme si la nature le poussait vers Alfred; il l’aimait, autant que l’on puisse aimer un homme [It was as if instinct drew him towards Alfred; he loved him, as much as one could love a man]” (Séjour 158). Drawn naturally towards Alfred, Georges finds that he loves Alfred “as much as one could love a man.” The ambiguity that surfaces around the phrase “puisse aimer” (could love) is similar to the uncertainty that we find with “presque violée.” “Puisse,” or the English “could,” expresses the subjunctive mood, such that the uncertainty or potential that lies in the expression “autant que l’on puisse aimer un homme” signals the subjunctive mood’s expression of wish, desire, emotion and possibility. The affective possibility of Georges’s love for Alfred is open ended. The desire that lies therein is without a definitive referent. The emotional possibility for

attachment to Alfred is an expression of wish fulfillment, yet the *type* of wish is unnamed. How much could one, in fact, love a man? What could this love be if released from the heteronormative assumptions that are the very inscription of kinship and genealogical affiliations in the first place?

Through Georges's love ("puisse aimer") for Alfred, Séjour plays with the contours of kinship that skirt the lines of the biological, the psychic, and the social, questioning whether Georges's natural or (in the English) instinctual feeling of love for his unknown father Alfred is a verifiable kinship tie in the context of the slave economy. In many ways, Séjour tests the lineaments of kinship and whether or not "natural" bonds are sustainable or legible in this context. If Georges is naturally drawn to Alfred, we might ask in what manner of affection do we locate this natural feeling? Séjour does not say that Georges loves (aimer) Alfred as much as one could love a father or even a master, but as much as one could love a man ("aimer un homme"). The love that draws Georges to Alfred is questionably one of "natural" paternal kinship ties, but it is also questionably one of other instinctual desires that draw one man to another. It may be both. If Georges's love for Alfred is one of instinctual familial bonds, then this love is arguably sexually incestuous, and thus reorients the Oedipal to include same-sex incestuous desire. Yet, as Hortense Spillers reminds us, in slavery, and perhaps elsewhere, "the *feeling* of kinship is not inevitable," and thus to aver that Georges's love for Alfred is familial despite his unknown kinship tie is to assume that feeling love for a father is

natural as opposed to cultural.³⁶ How Georges's feels for Alfred, then, is a feeling of love in which Georges's statement gestures to a complex sexual mode, in which miscegenation/incest/same-sex both clash and align.

To consider the possibility of desire between Georges and Alfred is to consider the love of one man for another as exceeding the limits of the familial, extending forth from kinship, erotic love, miscegenation, and even the dire tension between submission and seduction. Whether or not Georges' love for Alfred can be named as either familial or erotic is perhaps besides the point. But what does remain clear, nonetheless, is that it is the very crisis of kinship in slavery that hides Alfred's paternity from Georges and allows for the affective response garnering Georges's love for Alfred. Yet, in the traditional Oedipal design, this unknown paternity would lead to Georges's love for his mother. The failure of Georges's love to be directed towards his mother and instead directed towards his master/father signifies the failure of the Oedipal design to work in an instance in which patriarchy and matriarchy are dually enforced, and in an instance in which miscegenation and incest are simultaneously enacted. Moreover, it is precisely through the bereft contours of kinship that we arrive at this construction of love, a love that is as uncertain as it is inciting. In other words, this "queer" desire is the direct product of kinship in slavery, in which the bourgeois cultural lexicon of the family such as son,

³⁶ Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* (Summer 1987): 76.

mother, or father has no inherent meaning, in which the natural, instinctual familial bonds are always tenuous. They “could” take us one place, or “nearly” take us another.³⁷

These instances of affective surplus in “Le Mulâtre” are the basis upon which we can confront the coherence of dominant kinship orders. Sitting with these complexities might be one reading strategy or methodology in which to consider, simultaneously, the affiliations that lead to the instance of Laïsa’s “presque violée” and Georges’ conditional, “puisse aimer” for a man. On a linguistic level, each of these instances resist clear signification. On a plot level, each of these instances are triangulated by the nefarious acts of the master/father: Laïsa is “presque violée” by Alfred, which instigates his paternal absence, leading to Georges’s “puisse aimer” for Alfred. This crisis of kinship born out of the slave economy produces a triangulation that attests to the limits of the patriarchal Oedipal structure and its normative kinship associations because, at the very least, these sexual acts and possible desires resist coherent discursive expression.

When we place Georges’s love for Alfred, for a man, as an integral component to kinship in slavery, what do we call this relationship? I have struggled with this question for quite some time, searching for a means through which to read the aberrant desires that stem from the kinship affiliations born out of slavery and servitude. There are prolific discursive strategies that examine kinship in slavery, of which Georges’s love for Alfred

³⁷ I am aware of the large weight that is placed upon such a reading, in which an African American literary first may be hinting at queer desires. However, reading same-sex love as an indelible part of this text is not to say that Georges is “gay” or that he does, or even could, inhere such an “identity” – but it is also not to say that his affections should only be imagined within the realm of heterosexuality either. Rather, it is to consider what opens up when we afford ourselves the same critical leaps when reading queerly as scholars have done for so long when reading heterosexuality.

might be folded into, such as, to pose a few: fictive kinship, wounded kinship, natal alienation, kinlessness, families we chose, or queer kinship.³⁸ This list is not meant to be exhaustive, but rather indicative of the various means of engaging kinship ties that are non-heteropatriarchal as well as kinship relations specific to the sexual history of slavery. Georges's love for Alfred might resonate with each of these analytic paradigms, yet it may fall by the wayside as well. In many ways, Georges's love for Alfred is not a positivist love in the archive of slavery that gets us somewhere hopeful or even somewhere certain about queer affiliations within the historic institution and its historic record. And indeed this love gets Georges nowhere but to his own end. But he still loved Alfred, as much as one could try to love. Is that to be discarded? What we make of this as a same-sex, interracial, incestuous desire that crosses boundaries through and through is the difficult task.

³⁸ For "fictive kinship" see Kimberle Hanger *Bounded Lives, Bounded Places: Free Black Society in Colonial New Orleans, 1763-1803* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997); for "wounded kinship" see Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); for "natal alienation" see Orlando Patterson *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); for "kinlessness" see Nancy Bentley, "The Fourth Dimension: Kinlessness and African American Narrative," *Critical Inquiry* 35.2 (2009); for "families we chose" see Kath Weston, *Families We Choose: Lesbians, Gays, Kinship* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); for "queer kinship" see, for example, Judith Butler "Is Kinship Always Already Heterosexual?" *Differences* 13.1 (2002); Elizabeth Freeman, "Queer Belongings: Kinship Theory and Queer Theory." *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*. Ed. George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry. (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 295-314; Mark Rifkin, *When Did Indians Become Straight?: Kinship, the History of Sexuality, and Native Sovereignty* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Meg Wesling, "Neocolonialism, Queer Kinship, and Diaspora: Contesting the Romance of the Family in Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night* and Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*," *Textual Practice* 25.4 (2011).

Kinship in Difference

To reroute us back to where I began, by way of a proposed response to these inquiries, in what follows I end by engaging a direct dialogue between black feminist and queer approaches to kinship. So as to leave tenuous the uncertainty of sexual relations and affiliations that are “hardly clear,” this dialogue is set in motion with the intention of keeping intact both the overlaps and the disjunctures in queer theoretical and black feminist approaches. In short, what theoretical bearing does Séjour, as a type of theorist himself, have upon the scholarly impulse to read sexuality and kinship today as bound to the legacy of the history of slavery? Taking “presque violée” and “puisse aimer” as theoretical and textual analytics stemming from nineteenth-century fiction is one means of instigating the conversation about kinship in slavery as it intersects with queer kinships, both of which remain “hardly clear.” If sexual and kin affiliations in slavery have always been “hardly clear,” and if, indeed as Sharon Holland states, this legacy is “articulated as something imposed upon and practiced by us all, rather than something particular to certain bodies,” then might current queer theoretical inquiries into kinship be always already influenced by the legacy of slavery, even if these inquiries bracket its centrality?

Theorizing kinship in a way that remains in excess of the heterosexual impulse to reproduce has been the aim of many queer theorists who place as central kinship ties formed amongst nonreproductive queer lives.³⁹ While the investment in queer kinship is

³⁹ See for example, Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim*; David Eng, *The Feeling of Kinship*; Gayle Rubin, “The Traffic in Women: Notes on the ‘Political Economy’ of Sex,” *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna R. Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975).

prolific in queer scholarship, I turn to Elizabeth Freeman's essay "Queer Belongings: Kinship Theory and Queer Theory."⁴⁰ Freeman takes up, centrally, the question as to whether or not kinship theory can be queered. Throughout the essay, Freeman builds upon the notion of "queer belonging" as a form of queer kinship, arguing that one central difficulty in imagining kinship theory alongside the notion of queer belonging is that queer and generation have posed something of a contradiction of terms. Extending one's mark across time and belonging, or "being long" as Freeman calls it, poses a problematic given that, "queer 'descent groups' seem for the most part *linguistically inconceivable*" (Freeman 297; emphasis mine). Queer generationality, in effect, doesn't have a name; descent groups seem "hardly clear." The response to this linguistic inability to name queer descent groups "is not that we need a new set of terms," Freeman avers, "but rather, *a different sense of what kinship might be*" (Freeman 298; emphasis mine). Freeman calls attention to a paucity of language that exists to express the notion of queer descent within the current rubric of kinship theory. This discursive lack, we know, permeates sexuality in the slave economy. But the answer, Freeman argues, does not lie in ratcheting up a host of names for queer affiliations, rather, she resists the urge to give a name and calls for a type of affective relation to kinship in queer lives -- "a different sense of what kinship might be." What "sense" of kinship does queerness offer? What does it gesture to? How does it reach out to touch? Freeman, ultimately, imparts an

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Freeman, "Queer Belongings: Kinship Theory and Queer Theory." *A Companion to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Studies*, ed. George E. Haggerty and Molly McGarry (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2007): 295-314.

affective understanding of kinship relations such that sense and sensuality as opposed to biological relating produce “senses” of belonging.

When Freeman turns to kinship as it has been taken up by the larger field of critical race theory, she draws upon Hortense Spillers’s essay “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book.” In “Mama’s Baby,” Spillers argues that the transatlantic slave trade and the Middle Passage obliterated all forms of sexual and gendered identification for enslaved African peoples, leaving the enslaved to be profoundly “misnamed” as “man” or “woman” when the cultural and social significance of those gendered terms could not be played out or acquired by those who survived the Middle Passage. In return, when considering the bonds that did form amongst the enslaved, and the social and cultural practices that proliferated as a means of survival therein (think of Tinsley’s *mati*) Spillers argues that, “whether or not we decide that the support systems that African-Americans derived under conditions of captivity should be called ‘family,’ or something else, strikes me as supremely impertinent” (Spillers 75). Instead, Spillers suggests that we “undo this misnaming...for a quite *different structure of cultural fictions*” (Spillers 66). I want to linger over the potential congruency between Spillers’s imperative for a “different structure of cultural fictions” and Freeman’s “different sense of what kinship might be.” Each author seeks different modes of affiliation that exist in excess of “kinship proper” such that we might re-imagine the whole order altogether, rather than redress through renaming within the existing order.

Interestingly, both scholars invoke drag when excavating each perception of difference in kinship. A “different sense of what kinship might be,” for Freeman, is

expressed through the iconic drag performances of the queens and house mothers in *Paris is Burning*, and is perhaps best epitomized by the gendered, generational, and racial drag of the performance artist Vaginal Cream Davis. Freeman argues that queer lives and performances offer a means to rethink kinship through creative reformulations of time and generations. Freeman explains that in “official kinship,” a child will progress from “nephew to uncle, or daughter to mother, but rarely the other way...from nephew to aunt, from daughter to father” (Freeman 310). These generational and gendered crossings, however, are possible in queer life. The queens in *Paris is Burning* go from being sons to house mothers, and Vaginal Cream Davis, in her drag performance, “moves not only across gender and generation but across time,” and importantly, across race - from black to white (Freeman 310). Extendability, then, in queer life functions to upend linear generational order, gender stability, and, in Vaginal Davis’s case, racial stability. Queer and black queer performativity rewrite the familiar and familial order of things for the purposes of extending bodily affiliations in a-temporally sustainable ways.

When Spillers calls for a “different structure of cultural fictions,” when she turns to the ways in which black women have historically been mis-named, Spillers calls up Sapphire. But here, Spillers tells us as she flips the scales, “ ‘Sapphire’ enacts her ‘Old Man’ in drag, just as her ‘Old Man’ becomes ‘Sapphire’ in outrageous caricature.” By this account, Sapphire becoming her Old Man is an instance of a cross-gendered, cross-generational, and cross-racial drag akin to Vaginal Davis’s performance. But how Sapphire becomes her Old Man, and the same in reverse, is the result of the “stunning reversal of the castration thematic, displacing the Name and the Law of the Father to the

territory of the Mother and Daughter” (Spillers 66). Spillers brings us back to Oedipus; to the thwarted, mixed-up, Oedipus in reverse that permeates the institution of slavery. As the child born in slavery follows the line of the mother, both mother and daughter are positioned genealogically in the place of the law of the father, and the father becomes, in return, “Sapphire.” This reversal, this “misnaming,” is what Spillers seeks to undo when she calls for “a different structure of cultural fictions,” as indeed Mothers and Daughters in slavery have never been able to occupy those symbolic positions, as mothers did not hold claim over their daughters.

By this account, drag is not necessarily a performative upheaval as it is instead steeped in the sexual and gendered violence of slavery. Drag here is as unwanted as, in Harriet Jacobs slave narrative, the instance of Luke being emasculated by his master, forced to remove his trousers and walk about in a dress of a shirt. Luke “becoming female” is an instance of drag in violence. These queer incantations exist in the historical and fictional archive of slavery, but they are not self-generated, subversive acts of survival, and instead, the queerly gendered drag persona of Sapphire as her Old Man is a queerly racist inscription that forces Sapphire to become her opposite. Yet, Spillers is not calling for a re-affirmation of gender roles, for Sapphire to become “female” over and above becoming her Old Man. Instead, for an understanding of the gendered relations of African American “men” and “women,” Spillers argues that the “African-American male” must accept “the power of ‘yes’ to the ‘female’ within.” For Sapphire, “actually *claiming* the monstrosity,” is the way in which “ ‘Sapphire’ might rewrite after all a radically different text for a female empowerment” (Spillers 80). A radically different

text. A different sense of what kinship might be. A different structure of cultural fictions. These are all articulations of kinship in difference. None of these formulations create a new set of kinship terms, or rewrite the current ones, but instead each recognizes and accepts these kinship forms in their difference, with their monstrosity, in order to keep that trouble intact. I would argue, then, that Vaginal Cream Davis's drag persona, mixing her homage to Angela Davis in name, her acts of "becoming white," and her insistent monstrosity in what José Muñoz calls "terrorist drag," is one legacy of drag in difference stemming from the sexualization of blackness in slavery. Vaginal Cream Davis's performances can trace us back to this history, and her contemporary act is not to be dissociated from this monstrous past that Spillers highlights. Indeed, as Muñoz further avers, "Davis's political drag is about creating an uneasiness, an uneasiness in desire, which works to confound and subvert the social fabric."⁴¹ To create a different structure of cultural fictions, and to offer up a different sense of what kinship might be is to confound and subvert the social fabric of kinship from within, rather than seek an exterior alternative. Vaginal Davis's performance, and Sapphire in drag are one site of a collision point in queer theory and black feminist discourse, I believe.

Spillers's turn to the monstrous is an insistence to attend to the the "uneasiness of desire," the messy overlap I have traced throughout this writing -- of same-sex desire as sustenance, and same-sex desire as racist violence. Where drag and indeed queerness are located in slavery, then, is within and alongside all its monstrosity. Where queer theory

⁴¹ José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1999): 100.

must, after all, reckon with slavery is at the site of its most undesirable, where the positions that are hardly clear, be they in drag, in the beating of Aunt Hester, amongst barracoon husbands and *mati* on and off the slave ship, or the confused love for a master. Instances of queerness that proliferate here are not congratulatory, they are slippery at best and an end point at most common. In this chapter, I have followed Séjour's text to its perhaps unlikely end as a marker of affective excesses, queer desires, and drag performativity. Throughout, I have sought a means to attend to the desires, affects, and sexual acts stemming from the crisis in kinship in the slave economy in a manner that does not subsume these textual expressions under dominant kinship orders, or render them as isolated and particular to those enslaved. I have argued for a necessary theoretical engagement with affective desires that often exceed the limits of linguistic containment and expression, especially the limits of the lexicon of proper kinship formations. While I do not propose a definitive solution for the intersecting notions of kinship in slavery with that of queer kinship, I offer a joint rather than uncoupled effort to examine the histories of these formations and their effects upon all bodies, rather than particular bodies. The myriad and complex kinship formations in Séjour's text, and other's like his, should be seen as setting a foundational understanding for the complex kinship formations in which queer theory is invested. In this sense, I resist mapping queer theories of kinship onto Séjour's text, because indeed queer theory would not, and has not, named such affiliations as queer. Rather, kinship in slavery has remained just that - kinship in slavery, historically and socially. A shift in perspective is in order, in which we place as central the

profound impact that the sexual histories of slavery have upon all kinship formations, queer or otherwise.

CHAPTER 2: “She passed down Orleans Street, a polished dandy”: The Queer Race Romance of Ludwig von Reizenstein’s *The Mysteries of New Orleans*

Ludwig von Reizenstein's sensational, serialized novel, *The Mysteries of New Orleans* (1854-1855), opens with the lament that in New Orleans, “the chains of a maligned race rattle day and night” because “no angels have yet appeared to our *Negritians* to announce the birth of a Toussaint L’Ouverture!”⁴² Foreshadowing what is to come at the end of Reizenstein’s five-volume text, the prologue provides the first and only glimpse of the prophetic child, the “sun-god” Toussaint. The reincarnated revolutionary leader will deliver the entire U.S. South from the “evils” of slavery, instigating a bloody race war at the future date of 1871. Shortly after this auguration, we meet the couple that is to give birth to the new Toussaint. Much of the novel hinges on the fact that Toussaint L’Ouverture is to be born of a light-skinned mulatto woman (Lucy) and an effeminate, white German aristocrat (Emil), both of whom are introduced as an eroticized, cross-dressing couple. Curiously, it is when they are masquerading in each other’s clothes that the text’s revolutionary design is announced: an anachronistic and anachronistic re-imagination of the Haitian revolution led by the now interracial Toussaint.

Reizenstein is somewhat of a self-professed, rogue novelist. In a spat between the newspaper that Reizenstein’s text was published in, *Louisiana Staats-Zeitung*, and its rival newspaper, the *Deutsche Zeitung*, the editors of the latter denounce the “wanton wiles” of

⁴² Ludwig von Reizenstein, *The Mysteries of New Orleans*, trans. and ed. Steven Rowan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 3. All subsequent quotations of Reizenstein’s text will be cited in text as *Mysteries*.

Reizenstein's text as "betraying a lack of propriety that borders on moral decadence," a decadence that "should not be brought into the family for a few cents" (*Mysteries* xxi). Reizenstein returns the stab to mock the kind of domestic, sentimental piety in fiction that "will only be read by shy, superannuated virgins." Rejecting the genre of sentimentality, Reizenstein takes his rebuttal one step further as he, too, separates himself from the "disreputable novelist Ned Buntline," who Reizenstein claims "launched the literature of mysteries on American soil and thereby utterly killed all their enchantment" (*Mysteries* xx). Whether or not Reizenstein was attempting to revamp the sensational "mysteries" genre or distance himself from it, and despite Reizenstein's all out refusal of sentimentality, he still predominantly employs the trope of the "race romance" that remains typical to both "mysteries of the city" novels as well as sentimental domestic fiction. Yet in *Mysteries*, the cross-dressing, extramarital race romance between Lucy and Emil is certainly bawdy enough for an illicit readership searching for something beyond the sentimental romance.⁴³

While the race romance in *Mysteries* between Lucy and Emil is caught up in gender-play, adultery, licentiousness, and scandal, the race romance as a predominant trope in nineteenth-century sensational and sentimental fiction most commonly dramatizes the scenario of a white man falling in love with a woman of color, who is

⁴³ For more on the genre of the "mysteries of the city" novel, see Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (London: Verso, 1998), especially 96.

often described as being tragically light skinned.⁴⁴ The race romance seeks to advance the promise of incorporating the person of color into the imagined white republic of the United States. But also, the race romance most often hinges on the quintessential sensationalist promise of the mixed-raced child, one who is born of an interracial union that ushers in a type of racialized utopianism. The intent of the race romance is to instigate the dissolution of the races through the appropriation and incorporation of the interracial child into whiteness. Yet, while the above is the idealized scenario of the race romance introduced in nineteenth-century fiction, more often than not the race romance unravels as an all out doomed enterprise by the end of the novel.⁴⁵ In Dion Boucicault's *The Octoroon* (1859), for example, in the U.S. version of the play, the story ends with the tragic death of the octoroon heroine Zoe in the arms of her white lover George; in Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok* (1824), the "noble savage" Hobomok leaves his white lover, Mary, and their son, Hobomok, for the sake of white domesticity as Mary nurtures her family with her new white lover Charles Brown. It seems, then, that the future dream of heterosexual domesticity and mixed-raced reproduction sought after in the race romance is enticing at its best, and naught at its most typical. The common occurrence of this

⁴⁴ For more on the race romance, see: Tavia Nyong'o, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performativity, and the Ruses of Memory* (Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press, 2009); Shelley Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). For the frontier romance, see Ezra Tawil, *The Making of Racial Sentiment: Slavery and the Birth of the Frontier Romance* (Cambridge University Press, 2006). For a preliminary overview of the tragic mulatta figure, see: Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987); Hortense Spillers, "Notes on an Alternative Model - Neither/Nor" in *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

⁴⁵ I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer at *Studies in American Fiction* for guiding me in my thinking on this point.

failure has been a point of focus for scholarship on early-to mid-nineteenth-century sentimental and sensational fiction. Indeed, Ezra Tawil opens his study of the “racial sentiment” of the “frontier romance” through stating that “the most intriguing of the multiple romance plots in Catherine Marie Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie* is the one that never materializes” between the white male hero and the “Indian” princess.⁴⁶ The “wayward fate” of the heterosexual racial alliance that never materializes, Tawil concludes, functions to establish racial difference through the discourse of sentiment, affect, and feeling.

While these moments of failure sometimes function to reinstitute the predominance of white domesticity, I want, for this chapter, to remain in the midst of the throes of the interracial romance, in the denouement of its failure, to see what it affords of our understanding of sexuality and race. That is, can the race romance be a politics of sexualization that does not necessarily end with this moment of interracial heterosexual failure? What does this failure afford beyond the presumed restoration of white domesticity? Finally, we might ask, if the race romance does not achieve heterosexual bliss in its own right, then what, in fact, does it achieve as it is playing out? In this chapter, I am not necessarily interested in the doomed nature of the race romance *as such*, but how, through its false starts, its creation of aslant family ties, its multiple and adoptive parent formations, and cross-dressing gender inversions, there arrives something else, something beyond the dream of the hetero-domestic.

Put another way, this chapter is concerned with the sorts of queer affiliations that

⁴⁶ Tawil, *The Making of Racial Sentiment*, 1.

the race romance produces if not the normatively domestic.⁴⁷ Are we left, as Peter Coviello warns, so “bleakly stranded” amidst a stark oppositional stance for reading the race romance -- domestic failure or success -- with no room for other modes of relating, being, and affiliating?⁴⁸ Tavia Nyong’o, in *The Amalgamation Waltz*, asks a similar question, I believe, when he inquires how we might undertake an extended investigation of the race romance from the perspective of its queer overtones. He posits that while “[t]he mixed-race child as harbinger of a transracial future is emplotted within the straight time of heterosexuality, wedded to progress,” everyday performances of intimacy often “deviate from that plot,” invoking “queerer temporalities” (Nyong’o 176). Of these everyday performances of queer intimacies that adhere to the race romance, Nyong’o asks: “is it not possible to unyoke racial hybridity from its association with progressive, heterosexual time? Into what alternate temporalities might it then fall?” (Nyong’o 178). Indeed, when the race romance of nineteenth-century fiction fails to achieve domesticity,

⁴⁷ In this dissertation, *queer* does not signify a sexual identity that neatly coheres along the binary of heterosexual or homosexual. Rather, queer is that which obstructs the normative, dominant condition of sexual relating. As I argue in this chapter, the male-female relationship between Emil and Lucy is queer insofar as it disarticulates from the ability to be read within the confines of nineteenth-century domesticity. In my larger argument I suggest, as well, that queer, in obstructing the dominant, is necessarily linked to processes of racialization, specifically the interracial. I suggest that, perhaps in reverse, the aberrance of interraciality already informs a queer reading; that is, the sexualizing logics of race science gesture to what is later understood as homosexual, and as such, revisiting this period under the lens of queer does more to reorient queer readings towards race in the nineteenth century, rather than reorient readings of race towards queerness. In this sense, I follow Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman, who argues, “I link queer explicitly with racialized identity...there is always already something queer about blackness - and something queer about desiring blackness. Thus, although not uncomplicatedly, this study takes queer and black as mutually referencing, mutually reinforcing terms.” Abdur-Rahman, *Against the Closet: Black Political Longing and the Erotics of Race* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012): 158 n. 7.

⁴⁸ Peter Coviello, *Tomorrow’s Parties: Sex and the Untimely in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013): 25.

where *does* it fall?

Here, I attend to the “deviations from the plot” of heterosexual futurity that so often befalls the race romance. And in being befallen, I suggest that the race romance offers quite a lot in terms of the queer affiliations it ends up producing otherwise.⁴⁹ In short, I want to look at the unraveling of the race romance not for its incapacity to achieve heterosexual domesticity, but for its capacity to be something else, to be a bit queer, even if that sense of queerness is not how we understand it today, amidst the binary of hetero/homo relating. Reizenstein’s invocation of cross-dressing, via female masculinity and male femininity, as the erotic mechanism that joins this heterosexual interracial couple prompts an implicitly queer element to both heterosexuality and the race romance. It is from this point of departure in which I argue that Reizenstein’s *The Mysteries of New Orleans* serves as a mid-nineteenth-century literary conduit to the rhetorical and ideological ties between interracial desire and queer sexual formations. The vast repertoire of what we have come to know as queerness in contemporary scholarship interestingly coheres around the affiliations that the nineteenth-century race romance

⁴⁹ Of course, the linkage between queerness and failure is the site of much queer theoretical debate, most explicitly examined in Judith Halberstam’s *The Queer Art of Failure*. Halberstam argues, “Heteronormative common sense leads to the equation of success with advancement, capital accumulation, family, ethical conduct, and hope. Other subordinate, queer, or counter-hegemonic modes of common sense lead to the association of failure with nonconformity, anticapitalist practices, nonreproductive life styles, negativity, and critique” (89). While I indeed follow Halberstam here, I hope to put pressure, as well, on the presumed mode by which the heteronormative can succeed. That is, I do not argue that the race romance fails in sensational fiction because there is the presence of queerness which makes it fail, but instead that the prospect of hetero-futurity in the race romance is itself a failed idea. It is the queer, then, that picks up from here and imagines an otherwise of being both within and beyond this failure. For more on the link between queer and failure see, Judith Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 2007); José Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU Press, 2009).

procures: of which we have, but are not limited to, non-normative kinship and familial structures, generational degeneracy, gender ambiguity, non-linear and non-progressive temporalities, and aberrant reproduction that does not cohere around heterosexual futurity. Like the queer figure, the interracial figure is both sexually excessive, yet sexually sterile, both a figure of otherness and difference, yet a figure of perverse similitude.⁵⁰ These critical and often contradictory modes of imagining interraciality in early nineteenth-century fiction alight the mutual imbrication of queer affiliations and the sexualization of the interracial race romance.

“The Body Politics of the Culture of Sensation”

Reizenstein, an aristocrat who immigrated from Germany to the U.S. in 1848, worked for and subsequently serialized *Mysteries* in the liberal New Orleans German language newspaper, *Louisiana Staats-Zeitung*, only four years after moving to Louisiana.⁵¹ Typical to the “mysteries of the city” genre, the over five-hundred page story takes on epic proportions, introducing and dismissing characters simply for sensational purposes. The majority of the plot follows a group of German aristocrats who immigrate to the U.S. and settle in New Orleans in the 1850s. The text moves in and out of various failed relationships, flights of sexual licentiousness, murder schemes, and the explicitly

⁵⁰ For nineteenth-century ideological constructions of interracial reproduction and the interracial figure, see especially, Alys Eve Weinbaum *Wayward Reproductions: Genealogies of Race and Nation in Transatlantic Modern Thought* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

⁵¹ Steven Rowan, “Introduction: Searching for a Key to *The Mysteries*,” in Ludwig von Reizenstein’s *The Mysteries of New Orleans* (Baltimore: John’s Hopkins University Press, 2002), xix.

violent behavior of many of the characters. Yet the impetus of the story rests in the portentous design of the centuries old Free Mason and prophet, Hiram, who professes that the birth of Toussaint will bring about an impending anti-slavery revolution. *The Mysteries of New Orleans* was translated by German-American studies scholar Steven Rowan in the late 1990s and was republished in book form in 2002. Rather unjustly, the text has received little scholarly attention since this translation, despite its re-imagination of the Haitian revolution, its forthright defense of lesbian love and gender nonconformity, and its use of the trope of the race romance.⁵²

In *American Sensations*, Shelley Streeby lays out an intersectional conversation when looking to the popular sensational genres of 1848 in the works of such “disreputable” (as Reizenstein avers) novelists as Ned Buntline and George Lippard. In sensational fiction, the “reconceptualizations of the boundaries of race and nation,” Streeby affirms, shift alongside the changing “boundaries of gender, sexuality, and class” (Streeby 25). One literary trope that functions to explore these shifting boundaries is what Streeby calls “the international race romance” (Streeby 86). While the international race romance, specifically in Streeby’s study of the 1848 US-Mexico War, often positions itself as the “masculine” U.S. marrying and incorporating a “feminine” Mexico through the romance of a male U.S. hero and female Mexican heroine, the lineaments of masculinity and femininity are often not clearly marked in sensational

⁵² For the handful of scholarly critiques on *The Mysteries of New Orleans*, see: Kirsten Griesz “The Gulf of Mexico System and the ‘Latinness’ of New Orleans” *American Literary History* 18.3 (2006): 468-496; Patricia Herminhouse, “The German Secrets of New Orleans” *German Studies Review* 27.1 (2004): 1-16; Sarah Elizabeth Klotz, “Black, White and Yellow Fever: Contagious Race in *The Mysteries of New Orleans*,” *The Mississippi Quarterly* 65.2 (2012): 231-261.

fiction. Instead, the race romance reveals “the boundaries of an emergent heterosexuality as well as its excluded alternatives” (Streeby 85). The race romance, in all its heterosexual domestic strivings, is rather tormented by the “body politics of the culture of sensation,” a culture Streeby argues is also invested the “excluded alternatives” to heterosexual relations.

These body politics of the culture of sensation work to redefine boundaries along sexual, national, and racial lines. This is frequently expressed through the mulatta character who is often the subject of the race romance. As Cassandra Jackson points out, not only does the interracial romance gesture to shifting boundaries along racial and sexual lines, but, in addition, the mulatta figure is distinguished by her fluidity, which “suggests more than a fixed figure designed to pander to white audiences. Instead, it suggests a complex vehicle for discussions of racial difference. It is through this matrix of similarity of bodies and difference in characterization and narrative that writers of mulatto fiction make meaning.”⁵³ William Wells Brown’s *Clotel, or the President’s Daughter* (1853), for instance, provides such an example of the tragic mulatta character, Clotel, who is caught in the throes of the race romance. When Clotel is sold back into slavery by her white lover Horatio, she later jumps to her tragic death, never to reunite with her family. While this tragic ending at first seems to affix racial binaries rather than point to their fluidity, as Jackson has it, the failed achievement of racial union neither erases nor subverts the various articulations of Clotel’s body and sexuality expressed

⁵³ Cassandra Jackson, *Barriers Between Us: Interracial Sex in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004): 3-4.

throughout the text. *Clotel's* cross-dressing scene of racial and gendered passing, playing the “gentleman” Mr. Johnson, we recall, reveals her gender, racial, and sexual fluidity; the sexual tension that enthralls Horatio’s legitimate white wife Gertrude against *Clotel* instigates a fraught triangulation of sexual desire.⁵⁴ These deviations from domestic heterosexuality are not exclusive to *Clotel*, and thus they are where I want to linger -- in that space where the doomed failure of interracial domesticity produces not a shuttered off end, but instead issues moments of opacity where sexual and racial boundaries become unclear. In *Mysteries* as well, acts of cross-dressing, same-sex desire, and the destabilization of masculinity and femininity insight the body politics of the race romance, leaving interracial “heterosexual” desire dually encoded with its queer counterparts.

The race romance was not only a significant element of U.S. frontier romances and sensational fictional in the mid-nineteenth century, the trope of the race romance also found an ideal setting in literary re-creations of the Haitian Revolution. Heinrich von Kleist’s novella, *Betrothal in Santo Domingo* (1811) is perhaps the earlier German precursor to Reizenstein’s text. Kleist’s novel scripts the revolution as a chaotic “revolt” led by “primitive” slaves who directed their violence at innocent, heroic white plantation owners. Kleist’s text, similar to Reizenstein’s, engages the character of the seductive mulatta woman, as *Betrothal in Santo Domingo* centers upon the fraught relationship between the Haitian mulatta woman Toni, and the white German man, Gustav. While this

⁵⁴ William Wells Brown, *Clotel or, The President's Daughter* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004): 142, 90.

union works to foil the revolution and save the imperiled whites, positioning the mulatta character as aiding colonial whiteness, the novel ends with Gustav fatefully killing his lover Toni and committing suicide moments after. A second novel, published in Philadelphia and contemporaneously with *The Mysteries of New Orleans*, Frances Pratt's *La Belle Zoa; or, The Insurrection of Hayti* (1854) is a novel about the affairs of Zoa, a French white woman, and her mulatta half-sister, Adelle. The novel traces both the relationship between Zoa and her white (also effeminate, as is Emil in *Mysteries*) husband Pallette. Zoa and Pallette have a child that Zoa desires to name after her mixed-raced sister Adelle. However, Pallette's infidelity prompts Zoa to poison herself as well as her daughter Adelle, foreclosing the possibility of incorporating her mixed-raced heritage into her white domestic family.⁵⁵ The failed race romance twinned by the figure of the tragic mulatta permeates these texts as their transnational, sensational accounts of the Haitian revolution navigate the slippages of so-called racial and sexual boundaries. They vie, that is, to keep pace with the hetero-domestic all while being permeated by moments of infidelity, affronted by effeminacy where masculinity should be, and adopted by mixed-raced genealogies amidst a family line of impossibly "pure" whiteness. The tendency in both Kleist and Pratt's texts to revise the Haitian revolution as either one that was led by mulattos or was significantly undermined via the fraught romantic union of mulattos with whites is a common effort to downplay the past success of and future

⁵⁵ Frances Hammond Pratt, *La Belle Zoa; or, The Insurrection of Hayti* (Freeport: Books for Libraries Press, 1972): 17, 39. For more on the tendency in novels of Haiti to end with failed domesticity and generational ties, see Elizabeth Maddock Dillon's, "Reassembling the Novel: Kinlessness and the Novel of the Haitian Revolution," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 47.1 (2014): 167-185.

potential for slave uprisings. Haitian scholar Michel Rolph Trouillot, in *Silencing the Past*, puts into bold relief the subsequent historical accounts of the revolution that either “erased” the event completely or “banalized” its significance: “many historians are more willing to accept the idea that slaves could have been influenced by whites or free mulattoes, with whom we know they had limited contacts, than they are willing to accept the idea that slaves could have convinced other slaves that they had the right to revolt.”⁵⁶ While *Mysteries* does participate in this “banalization” of the Haitian revolution, as Trouillot suggests, *Mysteries* remains an interesting case. On the one hand, the race romance in *Mysteries*, shockingly, does not end in tragedy -- there remains a type of celebratory component to the fact that both Emil and Lucy live happily without being tied to familial domesticity. On the other hand, Reizenstein is most clearly *not* trying to thwart the revolution. Instead, *Mysteries* takes an anti-slavery stance in which there is at least the desire for a version of the revolution to happen successfully in a U.S. context. In this regard, when Reizenstein casts Toussaint as born of a white man and a mulatto woman, Toussaint’s mixed-raced status is very much a historically symptomatic rewriting, both through the race romance in mid-nineteenth-century U.S. sentimental and sensational fiction, as well as in the transnational reimaginings and banalizations of the Haitian revolution. Yet, where Reizenstein cleaves from the norm is in his unwieldy effort to cast aside domesticity as well as revamp, rather than stamp out, the revolution of 1791.

⁵⁶ Michel Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press). For more on the excision of the Haitian revolution from philosophical thought, see Susan Buck-Morss, “Hegel and Haiti” in *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009).

Revolutionary Erotics

Reizenstein's transnational re-mapping and historical revision of the Haitian revolution is, in many ways, a novelistic pursuit along the lines of what Edward Glissant calls the "nonhistory" of the Caribbean, one in which "linearity gets lost" to contend with "a tortured sense of time...prey to a kind of future remembering."⁵⁷ Reizenstein's backwards turn to the Haitian revolution gets pinned to the future date of 1871, an apt articulation of Glissant's "future remembering." Indeed, the only instances in which we glimpse Toussaint's past/future revolution are through dream sequences, mirages, and magic lantern picture shows. In one of the three brief instances in which we catch sight of Toussaint's revolution, the prophet Hiram concocts a magic lantern show for his German audience. Projected onto a smoke-screen wall are "Ethiopians, blacker than storm clouds...These columns are men and women. What had been acanthus leaves has become woolly hair, the snails have become nourishing breasts, and the eggs and staves have become male generative organs, the inexhaustible sources of future power and greatness" (*Mysteries* 487). In this bizarre scene, the anthropomorphized bodies of Ethiopian men and women are here overlaid with a deeply problematic equation of the "nature" of blackness. Leaves, snails, eggs and staves become the point of origin for those who will lead the upcoming revolution, thus affixing blackness to the inhuman. The "source of future power and greatness" is rooted in the linkages that Reizenstein draws between blackness, nature, and sex -- making coeval nature and "inexhaustible" sexuality,

⁵⁷ Edward Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* (Charlottesville, University Press of Virginia, 1989): 80, 144.

a juncture that Greta LaFleur argues becomes a popular eighteenth century understanding of sexuality. Botany was used, LaFleur tells us, “as a new means of understanding variety in social and sexual organization,” and here we have it, as this mirage moves from leaves to hair, from snails to breasts.⁵⁸ Furthermore, the focus on the sexual anatomy of these figures and the association of genitals with power renders this coming revolution to be one accomplished by an eroticization and racialization of physical greatness.

The turn to the natural as a type of racialization and sexualization of blackness was very much a part of Reizenstein’s world. While Reizenstein was a journalist and fiction writer, he was also an avid entomologist and member of the New Orleans Academy of Sciences (NOAS). Reizenstein was revered for being a New Orleans based Lepidopterists, or researcher of moths and butterflies.⁵⁹ Yet, Reizenstein’s participation in the NOAS points to more, perhaps, than his study of winged insects. During Reizenstein’s tenure at the NOAS, and amidst the years surrounding the publication of *Mysteries*, the most prominent member of the Academy was Samuel Cartwright.⁶⁰ In 1851, notably responding to the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, Cartwright published his most infamous texts, titled “Drapetomania, or the Disease Causing Negroes to Run Away.” In 1853, Cartwright gathered his ideas under the theory that the “negroes consume less

⁵⁸ Greta LaFleur, “Precipitous Sensations: Herman Mann’s *The Female Review* (1797), Botanical Sexuality, and the Challenge of Queer Historiography,” *Early American Literature* 48.1 (2013): 93-123.

⁵⁹ See Vernon Antoine Brou Jr., “Barond Ludwig von Reizenstein (1826-1885) Father of Louisiana Lepidopterists,” *Southern Lepidopterists’ News* 32.3 (2010).

⁶⁰ I thank Mary Lou Eichhorn, reference associate at the Williams Research Center of the Historic New Orleans Collection, who drew my attention to the overlap in Samuel Cartwright’s tenure at the New Orleans Academy of Sciences and Reizenstein’s publication dates.

oxygen than the white race” which attests to “their motions being proverbially much slower, and their want of muscular and mental activity.”⁶¹ This latter finding is Cartwright’s “Philosophy of the Negro Constitution,” an essay that would later be included as part of a lecture and compiled publication delivered at the New Orleans Academy of Sciences, titled *Ethnology of the Negro or Prognathous Race* (1857). Bringing together the contradictory prognosis that slaves succumb to the “drapetomania” disease to run-away, while at the same time being ailed with the “dysaesthesia aethiopica” disease which causes one to “be like a person half asleep,” Cartwright concludes that to give an exhaustive account of these diseases, “would be to write a history of the ruins and dilapidation of Hayti.”⁶² For Cartwright, Haiti stands in as all that is ill with blackness, and serves as the displaced site for his contradictory claims couched in and sanctioned by the disparaging field of race science. Although Reizenstein’s background in entomology is rarely seen to collide with his fiction, Reizenstein’s membership in the NOAS gestures to his views of blackness as derivative of nature, insects, and non-human species propelled by otherworldly sexual and eroticized greatness, here epitomized by the history of the “dilapidation of Hayti.”

In 1853, the year before Reizenstein’s first installment of *Mysteries*, the rampant and catastrophic outbreak of yellow fever in New Orleans disproportionately infected and

⁶¹ Samuel Cartwright, “Dr. Cartwright on the Philosophy of the Negro Constitution,” in *The New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal, Volume VIII*, ed. A. Hester, M.D. (New Orleans: Printed by Joseph Cohn, 31 Poydras Street, 1852): 201.

⁶² Samuel Cartwright, “Dysaesthesia Aethiopica, or Hebetude of Mind and Obtuse Sensibility of Body - A Disease Peculiar to Negroes - Called by Overseers, ‘Rascality,’” in *De Bow’s Review: Southern and Western States, Volume XI* (New Orleans, 1851).

killed whites over New Orleans enslaved blacks and *gens de couleur libres*. Here we have disease infecting whites, as opposed to the diseased status of blacks that Cartwright devises above. This divide along racial lines of the yellow fever disease was a frightening upheaval of the “science” of the day. The outbreak led many doctors and race scientists, Cartwright included, to conclude that African Americans possessed a “biological” immunity to the disease. As Ari Kelman reminds us, “Cartwright, for instance, wrote, ‘the difference in the organic or physical characters imprinted by the hand of Nature on the two races’ accounted for African-American immunity.”⁶³ The “organic” and “natural” immunity to the disease situated African-Americans as a climatized group of people whose racial origins fundamentally differed from that of whites. In this regard, defining African Americans in terms of their organic ties was typical of the race science permeating Reizenstein’s historical, cultural milieu, and moreover, these racial hypotheses were made acutely consequential during the yellow fever outbreak.

Indeed, the disproportionate distribution of the disease led those in New Orleans to fear a large scale slave revolt, in which slaves would capitalized on the disease-ridden state of white New Orleans residents. In return, when Reizenstein links the dream-like images of the past revolution in Haiti to the ever-growing fear of a slave revolution in New Orleans, his use of “organic,” “natural,” as well as hauntingly ephemeral descriptors for the revolutionary group reads more than a metaphor to Reizenstein’s audience, and instead ignites very real fears of what Ari Kelman calls “New Orleans’s phantom slave

⁶³ Ari Kelman, “New Orleans’s Phantom Slave Insurrection of 1853: Racial Anxiety, Urban Ecology, and Human Bodies as Public Spaces,” in *The Nature of Cities* Ed. Andrew C. Isenberg (University of Rochester Press, 2006): 15. I thank my reviewer at *SAF* for drawing my attention to this essay.

insurrection of 1853.” No less so, in *Mysteries* the fantastic return of the Haitian revolution via the rebirth of Toussaint is made even more sensational by the co-collaborator of revolutionary possibility, the yellow fever epidemic.⁶⁴ Reizenstein pointedly entangles the proximate past of the “ruins and dilapidation” of Haiti’s revolution with the present-day fear of the 1853 “phantom slave insurrection.”

Calling forth such phantoms in *Mysteries*, we are again made aware of these portentous forebodings through the recollection of a dream. Jenny, the legitimate wife to Emil, pens in her diary what she remembers as a restless night’s sleep during her immigration from Germany to New Orleans. Overlaid for an evening in the Antilles, within sight of the “isle of Haiti,” Jenny’s dreams are haunted by both Haiti’s past and what this past will reckon upon the future of her marriage to Emil. In her diary, she writes a frantic entry: “Descending from the cliffs [of Haiti] I saw -- oh, my senses still swim when I think of it today -- Emil, *my* Emil, holding the hand of a beautiful young woman with long, black hair and great sparkling eyes [...] A streak of fire swept across the island, illuminating millions of black men -- they streamed in long columns, whose ends could not be seen, behind flowing, blood-red flags, rushing like spouts of fresh blood, and above these troops I saw that fatal woman along with Emil” (*Mysteries* 99). Blood spouting, fire sweeping, teams of revolutionary black men, and Emil embracing “that fatal woman” Lucy are the stuff of nightmares for Jenny.

⁶⁴ For an extensive analysis of yellow fever in *The Mysteries of New Orleans*, see Klotz, “Black, White and Yellow Fever.”

To reinforce the threat of the revolution alongside the revolution's threat to Jenny's marriage, Jenny's nightmare was preceded by an evening of marital bliss, as she recalls the lively conversation on board the ship that night: "Domestic happiness was described and relationships established," Jenny confesses, "I quietly suppressed ambition and saw myself in the quiet idyll of a plantation" (98). The past/future revolution, then, is not only symbolic of laying to waste the plantation economy and the white racial dominance that remains therein, but the revolution becomes the sensationalized perpetrator of white domesticity. The "white fright" that constitutes the horrors of Saint-Domingue is largely redeployed as a fear of the ruination of that very core of whiteness, the domestic family formation. In return, when Jenny catches a glimpse of Emil, "who hung joyfully on [Lucy's] mouth," this dream-vision becomes the articulation of the race romance as a foil to white domesticity, as its direct antithesis. It is by way of this end to Jenny's hopes for family life on a New Orleans plantation that Reizenstein provides the point of departure for the race romance, and in return, the first steps towards a slave revolt. Yet, the race romance between Emil and Lucy is as bound, itself, to anti-domesticity as it is bound to upending Jenny's domestic ideals.

What Reizenstein delivers, then, is a host of queer erotics that propels the sexual intrigue driving the race romance. The night that Hiram calls upon Emil and Lucy to tell them their role in his design, we find the couple cross-dressing in each other's clothes. Emil and Lucy's cross-dressing performance not only begins the opening action of the text, but the cross-dressing episode is referenced numerous times as the act that draws Hiram to the couple. Leading up to this scene, Lucy and Emil's night of romance is cut

short due to Emil's sudden bout of guilt for his adulterous acts with Lucy. Furious and enraged at Emil's newfound piety, Lucy decides to play a trick on Emil by masquerading around town in his clothes: "She stripped quickly, and in a few moments a second Emil stood in front of the mirror. She lacked only the blond hair and the comfortless German eyes...she left the house and passed down Orleans Street, a polished dandy" (*Mysteries* 14). Just as Lucy leaves, Emil recants his marital devotion and decides to return to Lucy, only to see her crossing Orleans Street in his dandified clothes. Emil, we learn, is delighted to return the jest, as he seizes the chance to wear Lucy's clothes given that, "her clothes fit him – of that Emil was certain" (*Mysteries* 18). An evocative description of Emil's beauty shows him "standing half naked in front of the full-length mirror, moving his upper body back and forth on his elastic, full haunches...Emil was pretty. Perhaps too pretty for a man" (*Mysteries* 18). The apparent ease with which Emil sports Lucy's clothes, and the remarks made by male onlookers regarding "how nicely those trousers fit [Lucy]," suggest that normative codes of masculinity and femininity do not apply to this couple, nor are they upheld in Reizenstein's text.

The night of their double masquerade, Hiram intercepts Emil and brings him to Lucy where they find her at the Hamburg Mill "dancing joyously with a young Creole girl, seized in a saraband" (*Mysteries* 82). Although Lucy entertains her homoerotic desires on the dance floor with a Creole woman, once she feels Emil's gaze upon her, "Lucy advanced toward Emil, dressed (we must recall) as a gentleman, hand in hand with the young Creole. She took one look at him and was shaken, then stared at him; then she fell into his arms as if she were insane" (*Mysteries* 82). The erotic excitement stimulated

by the act of cross-dressing, by the blurring of the boundaries of masculinity and femininity, gestures to a queer excess that is implicit within the race romance. As Karen Sánchez-Eppler argues, “miscegenation and the children it produces stand as a bodily challenge to the conventions of reading the body, thus simultaneously insisting that the body is a sign of identity and undermining the assurance with which that sign can be read.”⁶⁵ Here, Lucy and Emil’s so-called heterosexual eroticism is not, in fact, contained by discursive markers of normative masculinity and femininity, but rather “challenges the conventions of reading the body” by spilling forth to an eroticism that queers these boundaries of race, gender, and sexuality.

Beyond Lucy and Emil’s ease at gender passing, it is significant that Lucy passes as “a second Emil,” who only lacks Emil’s “blond hair and comfortless German eyes,” to say nothing of her need for Emil’s white skin. Lucy’s gender and racial passing gestures to what Hortense Spillers calls the “pansexual potential” of sexuality stemming from New World slavery in which “we lose at least gender difference in the outcome, and the female body and the male body become a territory of cultural and political maneuver, not at all gender-related.”⁶⁶ More than a cross-dressing masquerade with all its queer eroticism, this drag performance invokes the sexual economy of slavery’s peculiar institution, a sexual economy that disallows any normative codes of gender or sexuality to be given to the black woman, and in return, to resonate with the white man who

⁶⁵ Karen Sánchez-Eppler, *Touching Liberty: Abolition, Feminism, and the Politics of the Body* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993): 33.

⁶⁶ Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* (1987): 67.

sexually engages with her.⁶⁷ The coming revolution is envisioned through the ungendering of Lucy and Emil, confusing the sexual and gendered dynamics of the two, radically altering the implicit heterosexuality of the race romance.

Approximately one year after Lucy and Emil are found masquerading in each other's clothes, Hiram meets Emil and Lucy at the source of the Red River,⁶⁸ and finds the couple in a sensual, nude embrace. Hiram addresses them and declares, "*Your child shall be called Toussaint L'Ouverture!*", only to be met with Emil and Lucy's shocked reply: "'Our child?' Emil and Lucy cried out at the same instant, looking at Hiram questioningly" (*Mysteries* 416). Emil and Lucy's confusion testifies to the possibility that any copulative act they were to have engaged in is entirely unknown to them. After Hiram announces Toussaint's name, he clarifies the circumstances of this event, which oddly have already taken place moments prior in the text. He tells the bemused couple: "Today is the twenty-first of April, 1853. In this year, in this month, and on this day, a Caucasian and an Ethiopian shall bathe in the source of the Red River. They shall walk across the mesa and fall lovingly into each other's arms. They shall conceive a son, who shall be the liberator of the black race" (*Mysteries* 416). The vexed temporal ambiguities of this annunciation indicate that the moment of conception has already passed, and that

⁶⁷ On the sexual peculiarity of the "peculiar institution" and its relation to queerness, see Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman, "'The Strangest Freaks of Despotism': Queer Sexuality in Antebellum African American Slave Narratives," *African American Review* 40.2 (2006).

⁶⁸ For more on the significance of the Red River and *Mysteries*'s engagement with westward expansion see Kirsten Gruez, "The Gulf of Mexico System and the 'Latinness' of New Orleans" (2006).

it was entirely a surprise to Emil and Lucy, leaving Toussaint to be the result of some queer form of an “immaculate” conception.

The “questioning” disposition over the act of conception is further impacted by the racial, social, and sexual ideological constructions of the mulatta woman in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. When moving to New Orleans (and before meeting Emil), Lucy runs the Mulattoes’ Settlement, an “important house” that hosted “the most magnificent balls” for the mulatto girls who lived there (*Mysteries* 11). The description of the Mulattoes Settlement wavers between being either a brothel or a plaçage house, one that finds white suitors for free women of color either in terms of prostitution and sex, or in terms of extra-legal marriage, respectively.⁶⁹ As “Madame Wilson” of the Mulattoes Settlement, Lucy assumes the popular role for a free mulatta woman, namely that of a prostitute or a placée, yet the narrator notes, “most people spoke of her as living by selling her charms” (*Mysteries* 12). Of the libertine mulatta prostitute, Moreau de Saint Méry, in his social history of eighteenth-century Saint Domingue, argues that “the true origins of the mulatto race..is the concubinage of whites with negresses.”⁷⁰ Yet, Moreau goes on to postulate that such origins in concubinage do not continue forth to produce a mulatto lineage from this point of departure. Rather, as Dorris Garraway asserts, “in

⁶⁹ For more on plaçage, see Monique Guillory “Under One Roof: The Sins and Sanctity of the New Orleans Quadroon Balls” in *Race Consciousness: African-American Studies for the New Century*, eds. Judith Jackson-Fossett and Jeffery A. Tucker (New York: New York University Press, 1997).

⁷⁰ Dorris Garraway, *The Libertine Colony: Creolization in the Early French Caribbean* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005): 271. Garraway’s citation is from Médéric Louis Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Descriptions topographique, physique, civile, ploitique, et historique de la partie française de l’isle Saint-Domingue: Nouvelle édition entièrement revue et complétée sur le manuscrit suivie d’un index des noms de personnes*, 3 vols. (1797; reprint, edited by Blanche Maurel and Étienne Taillemite, Paris: Société de l’histoire des colonies française, 1958): 107.

Moreau's biopolitical fantasy the libertine and sterile mulata represents the endpoint of a previous fertile liaison between white men and black slave women."⁷¹

This notion of the "sterile mulatta" derives from its etymological origins in husbandry, in which the cross-bred mule (from the root *mul-*) became the moniker for interracial peoples. Hortense Spillers reminds us of this legacy: "If 'mulatto' originates etymologically in notions of 'sterile mule,' then mulatto-ness is not a genetically transferable trait."⁷² The sterility that is associated with mulatta women is a racialized biopolitical and etymological invention that affixes sexual degeneracy to the so-called "mulatto race." Such degeneracy is imagined as two-fold, both in terms of the mulatta woman's inability to biologically reproduce successive generations of "the race," and in terms of social sexual degeneracy through her relegation to libertinage and prostitution. Each form of degeneracy places the mulatta woman in a social position that does not allow for generational reproduction, family formation, or domestic propriety. The confusion over Lucy Wilson's pregnancy suggests that the idea of the sterile yet libertine mulatta woman continues to circulate in Reizenstein's text. Indeed, this is further reinforced through Hiram's assertion that, "Although she has been barren until now, Lucy will bear a son" (*Mysteries* 417). Having been barren throughout her life, the ability to conceive in this instance speaks more to the fantastical nature of Reizenstein's sensational

⁷¹ Garraway, *The Libertine Colony*, 271. While Moreau postulates this sterile outcome between a white man and a mulatto woman, a French race scientist of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, Étienne Serres, claimed in 1864 that in "the union of the Ethiopian with a Caucasian woman...the act of reproduction is not only painful, but frequently non-productive." Quoted in Jennifer De Vere Brody, *Impossible Purities: Blackness, Femininity, and Victorian Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998): 8.

⁷² Spillers, "Notes on an Alternative Model - Neither/Nor," 310.

drama than to the novel's belief in the actual ability for the mulatta woman to reproduce. This birth is a racial and sexual anomalous sensation.

This "stunning" announcement of the coming birth of their son Toussaint is yet one instance of the ways in which temporality and generational succession through biological reproduction are misconstrued as they circuitously bring forth the revolution. That Lucy Wilson is to have a son despite the eugenicist discourse of the sterile mulatta is suggestive of the anti-generationality of the birth. More simply put, the rebirth of Toussaint "delivers not the future but the past."⁷³ Here, the notion that birth is a reproductive act instead becomes deployed as one that is "endlessly unproductive." Toussaint as a figure from the past makes his birth not the site of futurity, but the site of endless return. While Lucy and Emil fulfill the role of the race romance and reproduce a child, the rebirth of Toussaint read as sensational reincarnation, thus keeping intact the dubious position of Lucy's ability to *actually* reproduce, as well as unsettling whether or not this race romance follows along the lines of heterosexual futurity.

This mixed-up, mixed-race birth is anything but normative -- in fact, the lineaments of the domestic family structure are made threadbare when we find out that Lucy and Emil are not required to raise Toussaint. Instead, Toussaint will be raised by "the tall old Negress Diana Robert" (*Mysteries* 507). Diana Robert is somewhat of a mysterious character in the novel, appearing only alongside Hiram as a type of side-kick to his revolutionary design, cleaning up any mess he makes, and running any errand that he needs. In regards to Toussaint, Hiram states: "When I die, Diana Robert will rush to

⁷³ Valerie Rohy, "Ahistorical," *GLQ* 12.1 (2006): 63, 64.

Lucy and Emil and provide them personally with money only for the basic necessities, since their frivolity is limitless - they would squander everything despite all their experiences, and they would neglect the child” (*Mysteries* 533-534). Financial frivolity and parental neglect are what Diana Robert is assigned to keep in check. The scandalous and exuberant lifestyle of Emil and Lucy are simply not fit for the monetary and child rearing duties of domestic family life. The novel’s epilogue provides a rather intriguing ending that further dissociates Emil and Lucy from their role as parents. In 1854, New Orleans is graced by a magnificent boat from Haiti, named, more than aptly, “Toussaint L’Ouverture.” Sailing into the harbor, “Faustinus I, Emperor of Haiti [Faustin Soulouque]” delivers the message that Emil and Lucy “should come aboard the brig ‘Toussaint L’Ouverture’ without the least delay, leaving their son in New Orleans in the care of Diana Robert” (*Mysteries* 537). While Lucy and Emil continue their romance, complete with the sensational ending of sailing off into the sunset, their son Toussaint is made to stay in the care of Diana Robert. The displacement of maternal labor onto Diana Robert unsettles the nuclear family framework and opens this network of relations between Lucy, Emil, Toussaint, and Diana Robert towards the extended dynamics of family, child rearing, and alternative kinships. Moreover, the imperative of the race romance as a type of assimilation of the person of color into the “white” U.S. nation state via white patriarchal familial formations is necessarily undermined when Toussaint is reared by the free “Negress” Diana Robert, instead of his white father and “light-skinned” mulatta mother. In short, the notion of racial progress that is so central to the narrative of

the race romance is tossed aside as the child is no longer indelibly bound to patriarchal whiteness.

In terms of its inability to achieve domesticity and advance white familial norms, this ending certainly gestures to the failure of the race romance, even though Emil and Lucy avoid death and tragedy. In terms of the domestic model that this interracial family produces, we find that Diana Robert's maternal labor unsettles the any normative domestic family formation. Taking on the care of Toussaint, Diana Robert's presence invites into the sphere of the race romance the "uncanny pseudo-parents like wet nurses and au pairs" who, Nyong'o asserts, "all dot the perimeter of this promised land of heterosexual nucleation, atavistic relics or futuristic neologisms that aid and abet human reproduction" (Nyong'o 176). Indeed, dotting the perimeter of this race romance are numerous queer affiliations that force a revision as to what the domestic failure of the race romance looks like, as to what this domestic failure produces otherwise. Diana Robert, in some senses, allows for Lucy and Emil's queer relationship to continue -- they are free from being bound to the gender norms of domesticity, allowed to continue in their cross-dressing and gender non-conformity if they please, to squander their money, to be decisively non-parental, non-familial, and to yet *live on*.

But even if this instance of survival in failure could be read as some form of queer triumphalism over domesticity, what is not to be passed over is that this queer expression is yoked to the racial and racist logics permeating Reizenstein's articulation of blackness and the mulatta. That is, what allows for this instance of queer generationality to exist is precisely the conditions of racialization in slavery that inform how we arrive at

this understanding of queerness. The enslaved and free black maternal labor of “wet nurses” exploited in slavery instigate family formations of multiple mothers and displaced parents; the racialization and sexualization of the mulatta woman renders her sexually excessive, yet never to reproduce, never to occupy the normative gendered position of mother. It is through these convergences of race and sexuality in the race romance that we end up here, with queer affiliations that abey and abet, along the way, the racializing logics that perpetuate this domestic failure.

“Marriage is the Grave of Love”

Is queer bound to the articulations of the interracial? There are a variety of implications that I hope posing such a question will alight. “The mulatto,” as Siobhan Somerville avers, not only becomes “an embodiment of the object of eugenic efforts,” but the mulatto also “becomes an important, if contradictory, figure in sexologists’ attempts to characterize the sexual invert.” As Siobhan Somerville further argues, “notions of ‘shades’ of gender and sexual ‘half-breeds’ ” interlaced the sexual invert, and later the “homosexual,” with the mixed-raced person.⁷⁴ In this formulation, according to Somerville, race science is the antecedent to sexology, and the mulatto is the antecedent to the homosexual. What happens, I believe, in this narrative is the fruition of a type of progressivity of sorts, in which the interracial figure, as a precursor to the sexual invert, gets usurped by the arrival of the homosexual figure. That is, the logic by which the

⁷⁴ Siobhan Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000): 31, 33.

interracial figure stands as the foundation of sexual deviance by which homosexuality is formulated gets lost, taken over by this grand and troublesome “arrival” of sexual identity coalescing around homosexuality and heterosexuality. What I call here progressivity is what Peter Coviello deems is “a persistent tendency towards teleology: a tendency...to imbue the end-of-century regime of sexual specification with a kind of a priori givenness, such that all varied and scattered discourses must be understood to conduce toward it” (Coviello 42). In the schema that I map out above, the racializing logics that lead to the emergence of homosexuality undergo a problematic exchange, in which homosexuality in our current imaginary of the nineteenth-century is primarily affixed to whiteness, to say little of the “varied and scattered discourses” of its interracial past.

What I want to assert here is that while race science indeed underwent a sexualization of the interracial figure in such a way that she was regarded as sterile, degenerate, and sexually excessive, and sex science built upon this “contradiction” in the sexual logic of race science, when scholars examine same-sex desire in the mid-to-late nineteenth-century, interraciality is seen to “conduce towards” homosexuality, and thus homosexuality as an enterprise of white sexual relating avoids, and indeed erases, its interracial past. Rather anachronistically, when the revered queer white figures of the nineteenth-century (read, Oscar Wilde, Walt Whitman, Gertrude Stein) become the point of departure for how to examine queer tendencies in an earlier period, it says nothing of the mutual imbrication of the interracial with the queer and, as a result, problematically de-centers the racism of sexology’s foundations.

The question, then, is queer bound to the articulation of the interracial, has provocations at its core. And the implications and the necessity for such provocations are to resist reading emergent queerness in the mid-to-late nineteenth-century (and indeed the legacy of that moment today) apart from the racializing logics of race science that have so informed it. This abstraction, this de-centering of race science with the rise of identificatory sexuality, of course, is a further instantiation of what Hortense Spillers argues is the inability for the black woman to possess sexuality. “Black women are the beached whales of the sexual universe, unvoiced, misseen, not doing, awaiting *their* verb,” and in this awaiting, Spillers avers, “sexuality touches her nowhere.”⁷⁵ While race science clearly sexualized the mulatta woman, the rise of sexology took from her “mixed” status to theorize the “mixed” status of sexual inverts. The two are conjoined, yet homosexuality, as an identity, was never offered, according to Spillers, to the black woman. Yet as I have detailed above, the characterization of Lucy in *Mysteries* everywhere coheres with the sexualizing race science of the day *as well as* with notions of inverted sexuality, in Lucy’s cross-dressing tendencies, that would align her with emergent sexology. The insistence, then, in this co-constituency when asking if queer is bound to the interracial is two-fold: it is both to resist the tendency to read queer whiteness as the primary race occupying queer affiliations in the mid-nineteenth-century, and, on the other hand, it is to resist the assumption that white queer subjects are set apart from the legacy of race science, that their histories are not always entangled.

⁷⁵ Hortense Spillers, “Interstices: A Small Drama of Words,” *Black, White, and In Color* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006): 153.

In this concluding section, to take this imperative to task, I want to consider what would it would mean to read the racializing logics of interraciality to read a queer white figure. Reizenstein's *Mysteries* affords such a unique opportunity. The race romance between Emil and Lucy is not the only romance of the novel, nor is it the only queer romance. In fact, the relationship between Claudine and Orleana is termed, rather remarkably for 1854, a "lesbian" romance, thus providing in this early moment an outright queer couple named as such. Yet, their nominative status as lesbian, I hope to show, should not be read as more "truthfully" queer than Lucy and Emil's. Instead, in this historic moment in which the convergence of race science and sex science are beginning to take form, I believe we can learn a lot about this lesbian couple through reading them alongside the logics of Emil and Lucy's race romance, their failed domesticity, and their impropriety as a heterosexual couple, one that gestures to other sorts of affiliating and sexual relating. The declaration of "lesbian," then, I hope will take on a more capacious reading than might be available within the homo/hetero binary that would otherwise, possibly, usurp a reading of a white lesbian couple in this proto-sexology moment.

Predominantly a side-story in the text, we are introduced to Claudine, a young white German immigrant who is on the brink of her failed marriage to Albert. Albert, an adulterous and negligent husband tells Claudine, his wife, that "marriage is the grave of love" (*Mysteries* 29). Heartbroken by his curt statement, Claudine seeks comfort in her long time companion and friend, Orleana. Given that the chapter is titled "Lesbian

Love,”⁷⁶ we see quickly where this evening of consolation is leading. While saddened by her husband’s infidelity, we learn of Claudine’s own distress, discomfort, and disinterest with her marriage. She confesses that she has loved Orleana for quite some time: “ ‘Orleana, if you only knew what I still felt for you when I stood at the altar with Albert’ ” (*Mysteries* 144). Marriage, it appears, is the grave for all sorts of love. Claudine “still felt for” Orleana at the wedding alter, hinting at not only the long *durée* of their affection, but also, the manner by which that symbol of heterosexuality, the wedding alter, shuts off access to such feelings.

The erotic language of the scene quickly moves from expressions of love, beauty, and desire to explicit sexual excitement offered through numerous exclamations. Narrating a tantalizing exchange of sexual desire, the two women indulge their affections that have, until now, been constrained by Claudine’s marriage: “ ‘How your breasts make my blood boil!’ ... ‘Orleana, how excitingly loose your clothes are!’ ... ‘Claudine, how difficult it is for me to get these things off of you!’ ” (*Mysteries* 149). These outbursts of sexual excitement, embarrassment, and intrigue portrayed in this moment of same-sex desire are defended by the narrator, who emphatically states that their love has “no crime” and that “it is no sin against the holy of holies of femininity to contemplate it” (*Mysteries* 148). The narrator’s defense of lesbian sexuality, as one without “crime” or “sin,” is not only a recognition of the precarious state of such sexual affiliations; it also,

⁷⁶ “Lesbian Love” is a direct translation from the original German title of the chapter, “Lesbische Liebe,” (thank you Fatima). Indeed, at the time of the text’s publication, the use of the word lesbian to identify the sexuality of same-sex intimacy between women was extremely rare. To be clear, in drawing attention to the term lesbian, I do not presume that lesbian in Reizenstein’s text necessarily aligns with what one may presume to be lesbian today, because indeed, “lesbian today” it itself an overarching statement.

in many ways, echoes the exoneration of the adultery between Emil and Lucy, as well as the queer acts of their gender-play that incites such infidelity. On the one hand, the narrator defends Emil's femininity, stating that "True beauty deserves our wonder, whether it gleams from a woman or a man." This defense of male femininity goes hand in hand with the defense of Emil and Lucy's affair, the site where they are both able to most fully express their gender non-conformity. As such, for Emil to "resume legitimate lovemaking with [his] wife" is to "spin fantasies about your nice marriage nest" (*Mysteries* 464). The ridicule of "legitimate" domesticity and marital propriety sets up the text's firm defense of the queer, extramarital affairs of Claudine and Orleana as well as Lucy and Emil. The text isn't even pretending to be interested in the marriage plot, rejecting the domestic romance at every turn and instead laying out the possibility for romance otherwise.

It is from this anti-marriage stance, in which marriage is declared "the grave of love" for both romantic unions, that I take issue with the claim that editor and translator Steven Rowan makes in his introduction to *Mysteries*. Rowan suggests that the "tender" lesbian relationship between Claudine and Orleana portrays "the only sympathetic lovers -- really the only 'straight' people -- in [Reizenstein's] entire story."⁷⁷ To fold this sexual expression into the realm of "straightness" not only undermines its historical significance

⁷⁷ Rowan, *Mysteries*, xxx. It should be noted, too, that Rowan places the lesbian relationship in contradistinction to what he calls "perverted sexuality: the effeminate cross-dressing dandy Emil, the equally effeminate architect Alfred, Emil's amoral hooker-lover Lucy." I find it odd that being dandified is regarded as deviant, while lesbianism is seen as "straight." Additionally, the rather disparaging description of Lucy as an "amoral hooker" is certainly an anachronistic use of terms to toss onto the character, as well as one that ignores the historical specificity of mulatta women in New Orleans.

as an early expression of lesbian sexual identification, but it also disregards the gendered significance of two women decidedly denouncing marriage and creating a manner of sexual affiliation to exist otherwise. But more pointedly, what I feel the relationship between Claudine and Orleana gestures to is the overall insistence that marriage and domesticity is *itself* doomed to fail because heterosexuality is what's faulty. Rowen's statement which suggests that Claudine and Orleana's relationship is the "straightest" in the text because it is "tender" and sympathetic presumes that straightness collates around such healthy signifiers, and, by implication, reinforces the notion that queerness can never be a good thing. These characters - Claudine and Orleana and Lucy and Emil -- perhaps recognize the doomed enterprise of domesticity on its own terms and instead chose queer affiliations that are themselves, in the most, tender or beautifully gender non-conforming. To each her own.

To give further credit to Claudine and Orleana's erotic lesbian affection, the narrator presents an aside which details a vast historical trajectory of lesbianism, starting with the well-known isle of Lesbos, moving then to Greece, Germany, Great Britain, and from there, quite swiftly, to Virginia and Louisiana (*Mysteries* 147-148). This historical sweep - from antiquity to nineteenth century Louisiana - is now made present by the affair between Claudine and Orleana. More so, the narrator even claims that Orleana strikes a "surprising resemblance" to the supposed lesbian lover of "Queen Elizabeth," who the Queen sent to protect the lesbian enclave in Virginia (which of course did not exist in the seventeenth century, *Mysteries* 148). This temporally queer lineage of lesbian affinity and the suggestion of genetic resemblance between Orleana and the Queen's

lover is, as Sarah Klotz's argues, an expression of lesbian generationality that perhaps "create[s] supernatural kinship structures such as lesbian reincarnation."⁷⁸ The invocation of alternative kinship formations and lesbian reincarnation, I believe, mirrors the text's preoccupation with the reincarnation of Toussaint. Indeed, the similitude posited between the interracial and homosexual figure's inability to reproduce as a logic of both eugenics and sexology is here re-routed through the sensational ploy of reincarnation. Additionally, just as the reincarnated child Toussaint is to be raised outside the confines of the nuclear domestic family structure, placed under the care of Diana Robert, the New Orleans "Headquarters of the Lesbian Women" tend to "flame with particular intensity for the charms of pretty, young married women, since they see them as a satisfying substitute for the ability to reproduce. When such a combination comes about, it is inevitable that the children will enter the community" (*Mysteries* 304). The extramarital liaisons between married women and women of lesbian "lineage" creates a kinship structure in which the children that are relational to these affairs become part of a community of extended care affiliations.

Both romances are championed in the text, hailed as exemplars of "the titanic struggle of sensuality against law and morality" (*Mysteries* 151). Significantly, the "epic struggle of sensuality against the law" is articulated through the language of revolution. Immediately following the love-making scene between Claudine and Orleana, the narrator incites, remarkably, an intersectional call to revolution from the standpoint of class, race, and sexuality: "'Revolution!' thunders the proletarian when he beholds the

⁷⁸ Klotz, "Black, White, and Yellow Fever," 4.

fair daughter of Pharaoh. ‘Revolution!’ The slave rattles, when he sees the white child of the planter... ‘Revolution!’ The women of Lesbos would storm, if we were to rebuke their love” (*Mysteries* 151). In this complicit formulation, both the race romance and the lesbian romance are revolutionary modes of sexual affiliation, not only in that they upend the dominant marital regime, but each are yoked to histories of slavery, class oppression, and gendered oppression. The nexus of sexual relating, reproduction, and kinship are mirrored between the interracial romance and the lesbian romance: adultery is sanctioned, queer erotics are hailed, reincarnation begets reproduction, and child rearing extends beyond the limits of the domestic family. Each romance, through failed domesticity, finds modes of affiliating that are capacious and sexually unbound. Yet, remarkably so, Reizenstein’s portrayal of these errant ways of being is, we might say, rather calculated. These two romances make the same moves; they work for a mode of relation that is superfluously outside domesticity. It may be, then, that queer is bound to the interracial insofar as it is bound to a space beyond domesticity. But still, the revolutionary erotics of this declaration gestures towards both anti-slavery and anti-marriage formations that imbue sexual “revolution” with a politics that is not limited to the realm of the sexual.

Amidst this romantic entanglement, the articulation of revolution resonates with what Elizabeth Freeman suggests is a sexual refusal of progress. Queerness is a type of sticking to the before, such that “[t]his stubborn lingering of pastness (whether it appears as anachronistic style, as the reappearance of bygone events in the symptom, or as arrested development) is a hallmark of queer affect: a ‘revolution’ in the old sense of the

word, as a turning back.”⁷⁹ Freeman’s parenthetical invocations -- anachronism, the reappearance of bygone events, and arrested development -- all cohere around the revolutionary articulations in Reizenstein’s text, such that Toussaint’s revolution is envisioned as an anachronistic reappearance of bygone events, and the lesbian call to revolution is one of arrested development (we recall, the lesbians “*would storm*” to revolution if need be). This is all to say, in effect, that such parallel literary devices are evidence of the inability to articulate the race romance and the lesbian romance apart from each other. In “sticking to the before,” as these queer romances do, they fail to ever arrive at domestic futurity. In one regard, then, the lesbian romance is stuck to the failures played out in the trope of the race romance. The novel in fact ends not with the triumphant return of Toussaint, but with the tragic details of Claudine’s departure, and Orleana’s death of a broken heart. But moreover, what I want to suggest here is that “sticking to the before” means sticking to the messy logics of racialization that are indeed the precursor to queerness. Enthralled in the failed enterprise of heterosexual domesticity in which Emil and Lucy never witness the return of their son, in which the progress of racial harmony never arrives, in which the lesbian lovers die of broken hearts, Reizenstein, emphatically, reaches out for queer mechanisms of attachment that surface along the way.

⁷⁹ Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010): 8.

CHAPTER 3: Hidden in Plain View: A Queer Archive of Interraciality

Don't Touch That: Archival Refusals

Heather Love, in her text *Feeling Backward*, questions the recuperative project of queer archival work. Queer recuperation, Love argues, seeks to “approach [queer] figures from the past with a sense of the inevitability of their progress toward us - of their place in the history of modern homosexuality.”⁸⁰ Using a queer past for a defense of our own modern homosexual attachments does not, in some senses, “take care” of the affective particularity of these past figures. Love thus suggests that while “Our existence in the present depends on being able to imagine these figures reaching out to us...Still, it remains difficult to hear these subjects when they say to us, ‘Don’t touch me’ ” (Love 40). The queer archival subject’s own resistance to being recuperated is what Love seeks to leave as tenuous and unabiding. When offered up as queer, these historical archival figures don't want to be touched; they recoil from one’s reach, desiring to remain beyond the grasp of modern, homosexual strivings. Ultimately, Love questions the current desire to turn back to shameful queer subjects and recuperate them for a prideful now. This model, however, presumes that “these subjects” are recognizable as queer in the first place, even if they avoid our reach. I would like to ask, instead: what about those

⁸⁰ Heather Love, *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007): 40.

unrecognizably queer subjects? What about archival texts whose legibility as queer is refused?⁸¹

Let me begin with an example. While doing archival research at the Library Company of Philadelphia in the fall of 2013, I came across an image from Francis Trollope's travel narrative *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832). The image, with the caption "Live Stock, Virginia, 1830" depicts a white man who is standing behind a black man, and both are positioned at the foot of a bed. The white man wraps his arms around the black man, and his chin is nearly resting on the black man's shoulder. The black man looks down at the bed with a long, sullen look, as he stands with one hand in pocket, and the other holding a cane. While Trollope's book is located in the Library Company, a second online database, titled "The Atlantic Slave Trade and Slave Life in the Americas: A Visual Record," run by the University of Virginia, provides a curious description of the image: "The scene is the interior of a cabin, a bed in the right-hand corner; a calabash ladle or drinking gourd hangs on the wall. The black man with the cane, and the white man behind him with his hands on the black man's chest. The scene, including the image's caption, is puzzling." Puzzling indeed, the image lends itself to

⁸¹ Archival inquiries in queer studies have often focused on the ephemeral nature of queer archival texts, as best expressed in José Muñoz's "Ephemera as Evidence." The impermanence and absence of queer texts from official archives thus leads queer archival practice to constitute an alternative archival practice that resists state sanctioned or otherwise "official records." At the risk of being perhaps reactionary, this chapter does not turn to alternative archival sources such as revisionist fiction or the ephemeral. This is not to say that I value archival texts over ephemeral evidences and alternative texts, but I do want to "stay with the trouble," as it is, that archival texts pose. My archive, then, is comprised of texts I compiled while doing archival research. I turn to nineteenth-century visual satires, congressional records, fiction and nonfiction texts. I keep with texts housed in the official archive in order to consider how the texts themselves can perform otherwise, as opposed to considering how contemporary queer narratives perform these texts otherwise.

diverse interpretations, especially given that there is no context for the image provided in Trollope's text. The title "Live Stock" is paired with a subheading which states that the male slave is being examined for sale.

Coincidentally, during the month of my research at the Library Company, one archivist was in the midst of curating a show titled "That's So Gay: Outing Early America." Many of the documents for the show were from the nineteenth century, of notorious authors such as Walt Whitman and Herman Melville, or sensational tales of women sailors who cross-dressed as men. A few ephemeral photos of unknown men and bachelors standing together, arms over shoulders, hands resting on one another's legs, were exhibited in house and for the online exhibit for the show. Of these images, it is written, "the exact nature of the relationships of the various people in these photographs probably will remain forever unknown or unknowable. But it's tempting to speculate."⁸² I wondered the same about the image from Trollope's text. The "puzzled" description of the slave being exhibited for sale in front of a bed is, indeed, tempting to speculate about. But the image of a same-sex, master-slave embrace, with the master's (or slave trader's) arms wrapped around the black man's body standing in front of a bed is not one that would be readily included in an exhibit about gay life in the nineteenth century, largely because this "embrace" is not a wanted one, it is a coercive one. Yet, it is still an embrace no less. I would not hesitate to say that had the black man been a black woman, under the

⁸² "That's So Gay: Outing Early America," *Gay History in the Collections of the Library Company of Philadelphia*, Feb. 2014. Web.

heading of being examined for sale as “live stock” in front of a bed, the embrace would most certainly be read as sexual as opposed to “puzzling.”

What happens when historical texts, such as the above, are offered up in the contemporary moment, and someone doesn’t want to touch it? What happens when these images are recoiled from, and refused as being legibly sexual? What happens when these subjects are denied existence as queer, whether or not they reach out to us?⁸³ There is a difference, I believe, between the imperative that Love calls for, of being mindful of the past subject’s own refusal through the refrain “don’t touch me,” and that of the archival refusal, of not wanting to touch the object in the first place. In this chapter, I consider texts and images (such as the above) whose queer eroticism is interlaced with the sexual politics of interracial sex within and tangential to the institution of slavery, but whose inclusion in the queer archive is discounted, refused. Few *want* to touch these subjects, let alone protect them of their shameful queer disposition. The subjects I discuss here do not even have the luxury to turn away.

I argue that the nexus constituting this act of archival refusal is the tricky intersection of recognizing interracial as attached to instances of same-sex affiliation, an intersection that is largely considered an impossibility in nineteenth-century historiography. Indeed, Nayan Shah argues in his study of early twentieth-century

⁸³ In this chapter, *queer* does not signify a sexual identity that neatly coheres along the binary of heterosexual or homosexual. Rather, queer is that which obstructs the normative, dominant condition of sexual relating. I also follow scholar Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman here, who argues that “I link queer explicitly with racialized identity...there is always already something queer about blackness - and something queer about desiring blackness. Thus, although not uncomplicatedly, this study takes queer and black as mutually referencing, mutually reinforcing terms.” Abdur-Rahman, *Against the Closet: Black Political Longing and the Erotics of Race* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012): 158 n. 7.

“stranger intimacies,” that “it is worth noting that the historical scholarship on interracial marriage and same sex relations has rarely intersected.”⁸⁴ Broadly speaking, the discourse of the interracial is one predicated upon reproduction and the mixed-race child, as well as the legalities of interracial marriage and sex that Shah examines. Interracial sex is thus assumed to center upon the family and the interracial child, a harbinger of either the longed for, or threatening, dissolution of the races (as discussed in the previous two chapters). Queer desire, on the other hand, is predicated upon non-reproductive sex acts that often promise no future, or, when they do, it is often a future that is imagined apart from biological reproductivity. The archive thus engages the scenario of interracial and queer as two disparate events: interracial is representative of reproduction and heterosexual kinship, and queer is that of non-reproduction and illegible kinship. The intersection of interracial and queer makes for a difficult negotiation of the queer archival practice of “don’t touch me” when these object exists within an interracial historical framework that implores us not to touch them. The questions I hope to address here are: What is one method of approach to attend to the intersections of queer and interracial in archival practice? What discursive overlaps signal these connections while maintaining the precariousness of the archival subject’s eroticized and racialized disposition?

These two modes of understanding, positing reproductive versus non-reproductive pasts, place differential use-values upon the archival object, such that the queer object is predisposed to loss and erasure due to its non-linear, un-inherited mode of relating. Thus,

⁸⁴ Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacy: Contesting Race, Sexuality, and the Law in the North American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011): 3.

the queer object must be recuperated lest it threaten to disappear from a collective cultural inheritance of LGBT belonging. But this is what Love cautions against, that of an assumed collectivity of queer pasts. The point of tension, then, lingers upon the method of recuperation within queer archival practice that seeks to take care of this archival loss and melancholic attachment to queer pasts known and unknown, but it still remains loss that orients the queer turn towards the archive.⁸⁵ I suggest that this negotiation of the queer subject couched in loss is not the same discourse that miscegenation and sex in the economy of slavery enters into. As Anjali Arondekar argues: “Marginality, loss, abjection have become the hermeneutics of queer archival studies” in discourses of “queer failure” that work against neoliberal discourses of queer pride. However, “there is nothing spectacular about loss in colonialism.”⁸⁶ In the archive that Arondekar traces loss and sexuality together are an “archival site of radical abundance.” In the archive of slavery, interracial sexual acts are structured through excessive violence and racist injury for the black subject, especially the black female subject. This sexual violence is written into discourse at every turn: it is overwhelmingly abundant. As Saidiya Hartman argues, “Scandal and excess inundate the archive” of colonial slavery in that “the libidinal

⁸⁵ In addition to Heather Love’s *Feeling Backward*, see: Anjali Arondekar, *For the Record*; Carla Freccero, *Queer/Early/Modern*; José Muñoz, “Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts”; Nayan Shah, *Stranger Intimacies*; Valerie Traub, “The New Unhistoricist in Queer Studies.”

⁸⁶ Anjali Arondekar presentation, “The Kala of the Archive: Sexuality, Historiography, South Asia” at UCSD’s “Engaging the Archive: Postcolonial and Indigenous Feminist Interventions,” February 2014.

investment in violence is everywhere apparent in the documents, statements, and institutions that decide our knowledge of the past.”⁸⁷

Arondekar and Hartman’s approach towards how sexuality is imagined in the archive of slavery is in line with Toni Morrison’s arguments in *Playing in the Dark*. Morrison argues that American literature is centrally concerned with a “meditation on the shadow,” that is the Africanist presence in American literature. Morrison insists upon the centrality - not marginality, not obscurity, not alterity - but the centrality of the Africanist presence in American literature such that “It takes hard work *not* to see this,” and that “every well-bred instinct argues *against noticing*.”⁸⁸ Building upon Morrison’s claim, I would like to suggest in addition that every well-bred instinct, an instinct that takes its cue from being bred well within the rubric of the heterosexual, argues *against noticing* that interracial is and can be attached to queer. But it is not just a heterosexual instinct to gloss the interracial as always straight, it is impacted by the long-standing literary lacuna that lapses blackness as central to U.S. cultural and literary productions in general. Coupled together, it is perhaps no shock that interracial queer desires continue to remain hidden in plain view in the archive of nineteenth-century interracial sex.

As the title chapter to this dissertation, I propose that for interracial queer desire to be “hidden in plain view” speaks to a critical blind spot in literary and archival histories that subtend much queer theoretical engagement with the nineteenth century. To think of these interracial queer desires as hidden in plain view refuses the narrative of “mining

⁸⁷ Saidiya Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” *Small Axe* 26 (2008): 5.

⁸⁸ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992): 7, 10.

history” that subtends much queer historical projects. To imagine the history of sexuality in slavery as lacking would be an impossibility, as the institution was predicated upon violently managing and exploiting sexuality. In return, the abundance of discourse of sexuality in slavery also lends itself to non-heterosexual formations, and thus to “mine” such a history would presume that these instances are covered up, hidden, and that it takes work to discover them, as opposed to considering how it takes work *not to see* them, that it takes work to turn away from them. In such cases as this, Arondekar further argues, “the story of sexuality estranges settled readings of recuperative scrutiny, drawing us more into the queer forms of an archive’s becoming, angled through lineages of the non-reproductive and the unfinished.”⁸⁹ When these stories of sexuality “ estrange settled readings of recuperative scrutiny,” it is not the object that turns away, insisting don’t touch me, it is the rather the archival inquirer who turns away, feeling estranged by encountering a queer past that is entangled with anti-black racist practice. In return, attention must be redirected not to the subject in the archive who turns away, but to the subjects in the archive that don’t have the luxury to turn away because they glare at us from the center of the image.

In this chapter, I engage visual archival images that reveal an abundance of sexual display, yet their readability as queer remains questioned if not ignored because these images are couched in the sexual violence and racist injury that Hartman describes above. The images I engage in this chapter are drawn from the debates concerning interracial

⁸⁹ Anjali Arondekar, “In the Absence of Reliable Ghosts: Sexuality, Historiography, South Asia,” *Differences* 25.5 (2015): 101.

unions in abolitionist and anti-abolitionist discourse. Looking at both sides, abolitionists who call for interracial unions, and anti-abolitionists who mock both these unions and the prospects of free blacks in general, I consider how interracial is garnered as a site of sexual discourse that exceeds the confines of the heterosexual. The images I turn to unveil a proliferation of sexual acts that find their mark not through a limited discourse of sex, but rather through an excess of sexual display, one that is much more encompassing than the heterosexual discussion of the interracial.

Circuits of Desire

I begin by engaging the archival record of the scenario of the interracial, in which the nineteenth-century satirist and lithographer E.W. Clay, who created numerous satires of abolition, amalgamation, and black “Life In Philadelphia,” figures prominently.⁹⁰ I turn to one piece in particular, *Johnny Q, Introducing the Haytien Ambassador to the Ladies of Lynn Mass.* (1839), in order to walk through how the scenario of interracial desire performs beyond heterosexual desire. In particular, I follow closely the repertoire of the scenario that Diana Taylor's gestures to in *The Archive and the Repertoire*. Diana Taylor argues that a performance studies analysis of an archival scenario is one method to bridge the gap between institutionalized archival memory and memory as it is performed through repertoire. A scenario is the intersection wherein we might come to find the

⁹⁰ E.W. Clay's satires appear in many scholarly examinations of miscegenation, those influential to my thinking are: Nancy R. Davidson, “EW Clay: American Political Caricaturist of the Jacksonian Era”; Elise Lemire, “*Miscegenation*”: *Making Race in America*; Monica Miller, *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity*; Tavia Nyong'o, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory*; Richard Powell, *Cutting a Figure: Fashioning Black Portraiture*.

archive performing otherwise. It is difficult to define a scenario because, as Diana Taylor argues, a scenario (such as the scenario of colonial discovery) brings with it a "portable framework [that] bears the weight of accumulative repeats. The scenario makes visible, yet again, what is already there: the ghosts, the images, the stereotypes."⁹¹ The scenario is thus a known trope, like that of discovery, yet it brings with it a form of abundance through its "accumulative repeats" in rehearsed and rehashed repetitions. This accumulation of the scenario invites us to examine not just the "narrative and plot" of the scenario, but also "corporeal behaviors such as gestures, attitudes, and tones not reducible to language" (Taylor 28). This joint examination of narrative and behavior suggests that scenarios "are, ultimately, flexible and open to change" (Taylor 29). Following Taylor's approach, in what follows I take into account the layers of the archival object when examining *Johnny Q* in order to expose the instabilities that otherwise encompass a stabilized scenario.

That is, *Johnny Q* is "supposed to be" about E.W. Clay mocking abolitionist women and their desire to marry free black men. Yet whether or not *Johnny Q* succeeds in doing just this is what I believe remains open for debate. Following this idea of scenario, I examine E.W. Clay's *Johnny Q* through tracing how it fits into the political scene concerning debates around abolition and abolitionist calls for mixed-raced marriage rights. I also attend to performative elements of Clay's visual satire, such as the fashionable ensembles of the men in the image, and the dialogue that floats about the

⁹¹ Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory In the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003): 28.

image. Finally, I turn to the legacy that the satire leaves. Together, this composite repertoire of Clay's *Johnny Q* allows the piece to be read as dynamic, and, as I hope to show, moving beyond a strict mockery of abolitionism and interracial heterosexual desire.

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Scene. Between December of 1838 and February of 1839, addressing the 25th Congress, then House Representative John Quincy Adams brought forth numerous anti-slavery petitions to the House floor. In December of 1838, Adams and Congressman Grennell of Massachusetts added a contingency to these petitions, urging the U.S. to “[open] negotiations and international intercourse with Hayti” in the interest of “the expediency of an early recognition of the Republic of Hayti.”⁹² However, Congressman Henry Wise of Virginia adamantly dissented the petitions of Adams and Grennell, stating that the recognition of and international intercourse with Haiti is “a subject of wholesale amalgamation, incorporating a black Republic with a white one.”⁹³ The discursive exchange between Adams’ petition and Wise’s dissension is telling. That Adams’ petition to recognize Haiti for the purposes of “international intercourse” is regarded as “wholesale amalgamation” points to the extent to which recognition of free blacks immediately sparks thoughts of amalgamation. Congressman Wise imagines that the “intercourse” with Haiti will lead to its direct incorporation into the body politic of the

⁹² *The Congressional Globe*, 25th Congress, 3rd Session (The Library of Congress, 1838): 39. I thank Krystal Appiah at the Library Company of Philadelphia for her research expertise which pointed me to *The Congressional Globe* for my research on Adams’s petitions for Haitian recognition.

⁹³ *The Congressional Globe*, 1838; 39

United States, setting off a nationalistic amalgamation scheme in which a black Republic is seen to metaphorically couple with a “white one.” Thus, “international intercourse,” when speaking of the commingling of racialized republics, directly incites a sexual dialogue of “wholesale amalgamation.”

Perhaps bolstered by the above Congressional petitions to skirt the infamous “Gag rule” and bring to the political fore the debate over slavery and abolition, shortly following these debates the Ladies of Lynn, an abolitionist group writing in line with their own Congressman Grennell of Massachusetts, delivered a petition to the House in February 1839. The House of Representative’s “Report on the Sundry Petitions Respecting Distinctions of Color” details “the petitions of Aroline Augusta Chase and 785 ladies of Lynn,” whose seek to repeal “the fifthe section of the seventy-fifth chapter of the Revised Statues, reaffirming an act of 1786, [which] declares, that ‘no white person shall intermarry with indian, negro, or mulatto.’ ”⁹⁴ The petition pushes for a reform in marital law, opening up possibilities for interracial marriage. The tone and weight of the petition rests primarily upon the possibility for white women to marry men of color, thus foreclosing discussion regarding women of color marrying white men.⁹⁵ While the

⁹⁴ “Report on the Sundry Petitions Respecting Distinctions of Color,” House - No.28 (1839): 5.

⁹⁵ The text here remains explicit in its gendered appeal of “Whether the blue-eyed daughters of the Anglo-Saxon lineage shall mate with the dark African, or the red Indian” (“Sundry Petitions,” 11). Various mock-petitions were brought forth in jest, citing “ladies of color” and their desires for white men, and a second mock petition by white general “Samuel Curtis and 192 others” desiring women of color (“Sundry Petitions,” 14;15). That the appeal of white men for women of color is seen as an unserious matter only gives further evidence to the history of interracial sex between women of color and white men as something that is outside the bounds of marital sexual affiliation. It is also worth noting that the petition called for the repeal of the article that restricted the right for whites to “intermarry with indian, negro, or mulatto” and in Clay’s rendition, the notion of intermarriage is reduce to that between whites and blacks, thus erasing the indigenous figure to heighten the binary racial tension between whites and blacks.

petition brought forth by the Ladies of Lynn regarding the right for interracial marriage may not have a direct correlation to the petition for “international intercourse” with Haiti, the invocation of “wholesale amalgamation” by Congressman Wise brings these two issues into close contact. The petition from the Ladies of Lynn situates interracial marriage as a key component of the anti-slavery agenda, and the desirous turn towards Haiti to recognize the nationhood of the first black Republic is wielded as an interracial marital scheme on a national level. In short, any and all mention of the recognition of free blacks sparks a heated debate steeped in the language of sexuality.

Re-staging the congruencies and overlaps between these two petitions, the popular visual satirist and lithographer, E.W. Clay sketched his version of what “wholesale amalgamation” with Haiti would look like if paired with the interracial desires of the Ladies of Lynn. His piece, *Johnny Q, Introducing the Haytien Ambassador to the Ladies of Lynn, Mass.*, subtitled, “Respectfully inscribed to Miss. Caroline [sic] Augusta Chase, & the 500 ladies of Lynn who wish to marry Black Husbands” was published in New York in 1839 by J. Childs. Suturing the abolitionist petitions for interracial marriage with John Quincy Adams’ numerous petitions for Haitian national recognition, Clay situates the scenario of “wholesale amalgamation” as central to both debates. In return, sexual discourse is grafted onto international trade politics by way of transplanting Adams’s petition within the scene of the Sundry petitions. In all, Clay’s satire, and Congressman Wise’s salaciously toned objection to trade with Haiti transform an otherwise de-sexualized political agenda into one of sexual politics.

Here, Clay depicts a room of nearly fifteen white women, ten black men, two white waiting servants, along with John Quincy Adams and “Gen’l Marmalade, the Ambassador from Hayti,”⁹⁶ in the center-right of the image. While the “ladies of Lynn who wish to marry Black Husbands” are gathered amongst their prospective black male partners, all attention is drawn towards the Haitian ambassador. Standing in as a synecdoche not only for the black Republic but for free blacks in general, the Haitian ambassador and his body become the site and “sight” of a constellation of desires and speculations concerning blackness and interracial desire. The dissolution of white racial order in Haiti following the Haitian Revolution in 1804 renders Haiti’s now free black republic emblematic of the threat that interracial desire poses to the imagined white racial unity of the U.S. nation state. Additionally, with the diasporic move of free black and mulatto Haitians to the U.S., especially Louisiana, Haiti’s history of open and somewhat sanctioned interracial liaisons was imagined as an immediate imposition on the U.S. institution of slavery and racial binaries. Haiti thus surfaces as a placeholder for discourse on interracial liaisons. Recent scholarship on *Johnny Q* has regarded Clay’s image as a hyperbolic representation of the fear of interracial mixing. In Amber Moulton’s reading of *Johnny Q*, for example, she suggests that Clay’s image warns that abolition and interracial marriage will open the floodgates and “turn society’s existing racial order on

⁹⁶ For more on the pejorative naming of the ambassador as a type of sweetened food, here, “Marmalade,” see Kyla Tompkins’ *Racial Indigestion: Eating Bodies in the Nineteenth Century*. Tompkins argues “sugar, a commodity repeatedly linked to blackness...circulated as part of a colonial trade circuit.” Tompkins continues, and locates her argument in popular nineteenth-century literature, stating: “Sugar, then, seems to have been linked to the slave body securely enough that Hawthorne could casually turn a popular image of blackness in popular culture into a sweet” (Tompkins, 97).

its head and spark a nationwide orgy of interracial sexual activity.”⁹⁷ While *Johnny Q* is firmly concerned with the socially ubiquitous yet legally denied place of interracial sex within the nation-state, I suggest that closer reading of the image reveals less that there is a future, impending threat that will “spark” amalgamation, and instead speaks more to the shock of the already apparent existence of “wholesale amalgamation” permeating the U.S. nation state.

Additionally, the visual genre of satire that EW Clay employs as his means of ridiculing both John Quincy Adams and the Ladies of Lynn is directly influenced by the earlier heyday of British satire in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, most prominently crafted by the Cruikshank brothers.⁹⁸ This form of satire is often applauded for its “dissolution of hard and fast distinctions between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture,” serving as a medium of political protest and ridicule of the elite.⁹⁹ However, the method by which high and low culture is blended is often at the expense of “low” culture, in which those in high rank are moved down a peg through their proximity to, say, blackness, serving to further instantiates marginality as abject and debase. In turn, while satire is wielded as a mechanism to scrutinize the “high,” the role of the “low” often remains fixed. In response to this unilateral approach to the satire of the high through its proximity to the low, viewing Clay’s *Johnny Q* satire through the lens of scenario is one means to confront the

⁹⁷ Amber Moulton, “Closing the ‘Floodgate of Impurity’: Moral Reform, Antislavery, and Interracial Marriage in Antebellum Massachusetts,” *The Journal of the Civil War Era* 2.1 (2013): 4.

⁹⁸ Clay’s *Life in Philadelphia* is a direct homage to George Cruikshank’s *Pierce Egan’s Life in London* (1821) satire series.

⁹⁹ Diana Donald, *The Age of Caricature: Satirical Prints in the Reign of George III* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996): 2.

performative ruptures present in his vitriolic satires concerning interraciality. Put another way, in Judith Butler's examination of the performativity of satire and speech, she argues that while satire in its best form is the "redoubling of injurious speech" in order to "recontextualize persecutory language," satire can also function to reiterate injurious speech and perform again persecutory language.¹⁰⁰ As such, it remains difficult, often, to look to social satires that do not have transformative politics as their aim. Nevertheless, the reiterative component of the genre of satire allows one to sideline the so-called "original intentions" of these satires through focusing, instead, upon how the reiteration fails to arrive at that intention through its very ambivalence.

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Fashion. Bending forward in a courteous bow, the Haitian ambassador tips his hat off, raises a monocle, sharpens his left foot forward, and shows off his grand court dress attire. His fashionable ensemble is complete with tasseled epaulets, feathered hat, a tightly fitted embroidered jacket with coat tails, form-fitting pants accentuating his buttocks, detailed tights showing off the curvature of his calves, and a sword, suggestively extending up and outward, over and across his rear. Within this bodily display and stylistic fashioning of the ambassador, the Ladies of Lynn recognize markers of whiteness. They remark that they are shocked to see the Haitian man's powdered hair, dashing clothes, and to smell his aromatic perfume. They say: "Why! his Excellency wears powder I guess!" They confess: "What a delightful perfume he has brought into the

¹⁰⁰ Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (New York: Routledge, 1997): 99.

room with him.” In short, they are in awe to see their possessive whiteness reflected back in the ambassador’s blackness. As I will discuss in more detail in the next section, Clay’s oeuvre is built on mocking blacks who mimic white style to a grotesque degree of extravagance. Thus, while Clay here reverses what are common stereotypes of blackness, such as the racist viewpoint that blacks have unkept hair, are unfashionable, and are ill-smelling, Clay is not necessarily doing so with compliment. Yet whether or not we can or should read this scene as Clay most likely intends, in which the Haitian ambassador is depicted as an outlandish caricature of French court fashion, is up to how we view the performative display of fashion functioning within the history of French colonialism and Haiti, formerly Saint Domingue.

The Haitian ambassador performs transatlantic high French style, a fashion that was fifty years prior the marker of the French colonial regime in Saint Domingue. Yet, it is well known that French colonial style in Saint Domingue before the Haitian revolution is all but detached from the fashion, culture, music, and modes of embodiment performed by the slaves and the *gens de couleur libre* in the colony. The vast networks of cultural expression that circulated amongst colonial elite, free mulattos, and enslaved blacks continuously destabilized racial classifications. To build upon the discourse of hair that surfaces in Clay’s image (“why his excellency wears powder I guess!”), the fashion of the headdress amongst *gens de couleur libre*, specifically women, in Saint Domingue was far from a benign mode of dress in the colonies. As Sara Johnson argues, “each time [sumptuary] laws were enacted to mark distinctions between social classes, distinctions understood in terms of racial classification, an ingenious manner of working around those

regulations emerged. For example, prohibiting women of color from wearing hats only made the art of adorning oneself with *mouchoirs* more sophisticated.”¹⁰¹ Indeed, the “importance of fashion and its manipulation” in colonial Saint Domingue reveals how these sumptuary laws aimed at limiting the cultural expression of free and enslaved blacks, yet these laws were in fact more concerned with the ways in which style and fashion was dissolving the distinctions between black and white.

In Colin Dayan’s discussion of Baron de Wimpffen’s *A Voyage to Saint Domingo in the Years 1788, 1789, and 1790*, Dayan calls our attention to Wimpffen’s fascination with the headdress of the mulatta. Wimpffen remarks: “ ‘Their favorite coiffure is an Indian handkerchief, which is bound round the head: the advantages they derive from this simple ornament are inconceivable; they are the envy and despair of the white ladies.’ ”¹⁰² In return, through the sumptuary laws in which “fashion became a battleground,” we find that the battle is waged because of the fear that white women are “becoming black.” As Dayan argues, “this picture of white ladies imitating women of color” points to the irony by which colonialist law attempted to enforce racial distinctions by shuttling the language of mimesis and mimicry around in a dizzying manner. Thus, the unidirectional, top-down flow that suggests blacks mimic whites is here unsettled, pointing to a much more vexed relation in which sumptuary laws regulate people of color so as to regulate whites from their own propensity to imitate people of color.

¹⁰¹ Sara Johnson, *The Fear of French Negroes: Transcolonial Collaboration in the Revolutionary Americas* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012): 127.

¹⁰² Colin Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995): 174-175.

A print by J.L. Boquet from 1795, titled *Pillage du Cap Francais en 1793*, also gestures to the reversal of fashion and mimicry that Johnson and Dayan have established. Boquet's engraving, a print detailing excessive chaos and upheaval following the 1793 pillage of the Cap Français during the Haitian Revolution, portrays black and Carib Haitians celebrating their victory by mocking the French through wearing their clothes. Boquet's inscription at the bottom of the image reads, "during the eleven days of pillage at Cap Français blacks massacred a party of whites and burned the town. The blacks mocked the French by wearing their clothes."¹⁰³ Both the image and the artist's inscription at the bottom of the sketch call attention to this act of sartorial mockery. In stunning similarity to Clay's piece, a black man in French court attire bows in the center of the image, taking off his hat, leaning forward towards a French white man. Yet here, the jest of mockery that the image displays is directed towards the fashion of the white men. Setting this instance of jest in conversation with Clay's image, the fashionable display of the Haitian ambassador is caught up in this historical circulation of fashion and mockery in the French colonies, in which clear distinctions between who is mocking whom becomes confused.

To return to Clay, then, *Johnny Q* and the fashion of the Haitian ambassador is in fact caught up in a mutually constitutive history of cross-cultural exchange that denies an easy one-to-one ratio of blacks mimicking whites, and instead forces us to question who in fact is mimicking or mocking whom when it comes to the Haitian ambassador's dress

¹⁰³ J.L. Boquet, *Pillage du Cap Français, 1793*. John Carter Brown Archive of Early American Images, 09-146.

in Clay's satire. Just as the man in Boquet's image gestures, so too does the Haitian ambassador take off his hat and bow towards his white audience. Might the ambassador, if we read this historical legacy, be subverting Clay's own attempt at mocking blacks who seemingly mimic "white" Fashion? Through the example of the headdresses worn in Saint Domingue and the debate over colonial sumptuary laws, along with the *Pillage du Cap Français* as a site not only of nationalistic upheaval, but racial and sartorial upheaval, we find that the fear of "wholesale amalgamation" is caught up in cultural as well as sexual fear. That is, this legacy of sartorial mixing points to the ways that racial mixing exists, for one, outside the confines of heterosexual reproduction.

The fear of amalgamation that results from "international intercourse" with Haiti as well as the marriage petition from the Ladies of Lynn is expressed in part by Clay through the symbol of clothes and fashion. Here, and in his other *Life in Philadelphia* pieces, racial mixing is expressed by a fear of "blacks becoming white" through fashion as symbolic of sex. Yet, as these historical fashion legacies show, the fear also points to that of whites becoming black. Turning to fashion, then, allows us to see one avenue of expression of the ways in which the interracial exceeds the discourse of heterosexual reproduction. This history of fashion in the French colonies also destabilizes the "intent" of Clay's piece to outright mock black's attempts at becoming white as this history shows that blacks were always on the vanguard of fashion, and thus the Haitian ambassador's pomp and demeanor are most likely *not* derivative of French colonialism.

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Exclamation. There is one prominent quote in *Johnny Q* that has led scholars to declare that *Johnny Q* is, in fact, definitively addressing sex in a more direct way than symbolically through fashion. At the far left of the image we read the exclamation, “How I should like to kiss his balmy lips!” (fig. 4). Presumably because of the sexual scandal of the Sundry Petition that the Ladies of Lynn brought forth the House, scholars have unanimously attributed this quotation to one of the Ladies of Lynn who wishes to marry a black husband, and that potential suitor here seems to be the ambassador. Through this remark, then, scholars wield proof that *Johnny Q* is in fact about interracial sexual desire. This quote remains the one explicit discursive marker that sexual acts are to be had at the Ladies of Lynn’s abolitionist meeting, that eroticism is clearly present. Elise Lemire, in her text “*Miscegenation*”: *Making Race in America*, states:

All of the white women lean forward eagerly to see the dark visitor. Several make admiring and even sexual comments about him and are thus perhaps leaning forward out of a desire to embrace him. One white woman is made to remark, ‘How I should like to kiss his balmy lips!’ Clay implies that their attraction must be to the ambassador’s own heightened sexuality....That the women have this lascivious interest in the ambassador supposedly explained their fight for the right to inter-marry and their willingness to attend a meeting with so many black men in attendance.¹⁰⁴

Lemire’s focus when examining this quote and others in the image is reserved to a consideration of the white women and their “lascivious interest” in the ambassador, whose “heightened sexuality” is perhaps exuded by his attire, expensive perfume, and powdered hair. What remains neglected, then, is the active presence of the “black men in

¹⁰⁴ Elise Lemire, “*Miscegenation*”: *Making Race in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002): 62.

attendance.” Just as the white women “lean forward eagerly to see the dark visitor,” so too do the black men lean forward, smile, sharpen their gaze at the ambassador, and, indeed, comment upon his appearance.

One man remarks about the ambassadors feet, another comments that the ambassador’s hair is interestingly styled in a “pig-tale.” It seems apparent, then, that the ambassador is not just enticing to the white women, but that he his attractive to all. In return, we must attend equally to the ways in which Clay renders active not only the white women, but the black men who are the supposed suitors of the Ladies of Lynn. What of their desires? What of their active and dialogic role above and beyond being background scenery for the image, or passive spectators, waiting by idly? I argue that it is not a white woman who exclaims, “How I should like to kiss his balmy lips!,” but instead, the black man to the far left of the image clearly makes this remark. Yet, the ease with which this comment is attributed to a white woman testifies to the cultural assumption that such a desire could only circulate between a white woman and a black man. How might, instead, we come to understand that the discourse of the interracial is caught up in same-sex sexual display?

When presenting a version of this chapter at the American Studies Association Conference in 2014, scholar Ben Sifuentes-Jáuregui, a generous respondent to my paper, posed the provocative question: what if the man to the far left desires to kiss John Quincy Adams?¹⁰⁵ After all, the image is titled *Johnny Q*, what if we were to read this as Johnny

¹⁰⁵ I want to give my thanks to Ben Sifuentes-Jáuregui for this astute reading and generous comments. I also want to thank Caroline Wigginton for organizing the panel. Caroline followed up to Ben’s comment, adding, that we might very well read *Johnny Q* as *Johnny Queer*.

queer? This affords the possibility in which queer desire is not relegated to the so-called deviant and “heightened sexuality” of blackness, but instead queerness indeed circulates interracially. What if the man to the far left wants to kiss both men? These confused and vexed “circuits of desire,” as Sifuentes-Jáuregui calls it, leave us wondering what it might mean for a black man to perhaps want a white man, or alternatively, what it means to have black queer desire floating about the room at an abolitionist meeting in which white women wish to marry black husbands. What does this do to the interracial marriage plot?

The declaration of same-sex erotic desire by the man on the far left is further emphasized through a more implicit statement made by one black man standing behind Adams. This man remarks that the ambassador (or Adams?) is a “Dem’d fine specimen of a man!” While the declarative statement may not as readily collate around same-sex desire, the image’s composition suggests that this man’s intrigue for the ambassador’s body is reinforced through the mirrored pose between him and the ambassador. Both men hold a scrutinizing monocle to their eye, such that while the ambassador’s gaze is directed at the audience of women, the black man sharpens his look at the ambassador, creating a discerning overlap between the supposed heterosexual gaze of the ambassador and the queer gaze of the black man. As Monica Miller reminds us in *Slaves to Fashion*, the “pose of an iconic black dandy caricature” is often one who “wears a tuxedo and peers through a monocle.”¹⁰⁶ This visual cue draws a direct line between the two men, thus creating a type of triangulation of desire in the room when we join the man to the far left, and his exclamation for a kiss. Black dandies, Miller argues, “disrupt and destabilize

¹⁰⁶ Monica Miller, *Slaves to Fashion: Black Dandyism and the Styling of Black Diasporic Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009): 76.

conceptions of masculinity and heterosexuality, they are queer subjects who deconstruct limiting binaries in the service of transforming how one conceives of identity formation” (Miller 11). Indeed, the dandified fashion and monocle wielding pose of the ambassador positions the ambassador as the object of desire amongst both the white women and the black men of the room. Thus, the instability of the ambassador’s sexualization alters how we come to read the sexualization of interracial desire in general. As a black dandy, we cannot readily presume either heterosexuality or homosexuality, but instead the ambassador becomes a liminal figure who destabilizes the imposition of such binaries in the first place.

While the fashion accessory of the monocle is symbolic of black dandy aesthetic, the ambassador’s pose, in which he bows forward such that his sword extends upward and outward from his rear, is arguably suggestive of anal desire. As symbolically phallic, the positional of the sword in this image veers away from its traditional placement as elongated and outstretched in front of the man’s body, an extension of his dual sexual and militaristic prowess. Here, instead, the position of the sword reads less as the ambassador’s own phallus than one that is penetrative from behind, focusing attention upon the anality of the sword. As Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman argues, “In the collective cultural imagination, notions of an ass-centered or generally anal sexuality haunt even heterosexual desiring and coupling between black people. The purported anality of blacks’ sexual desire is everywhere evident in contemporary popular culture and visual culture” (Abdur-Rahman 14). The anality of the ambassador’s performative display vis a vis the dandy aesthetic and the male-male desires floating about the room situate the

ambassador as sexually excessive. Of course, the sexual ubiquity of the black body is an indelible part of discourse of race and sex within the nineteenth U.S. and the plantation economy, and Clay's piece can indeed be read as a gross, visual exaggerations of such a deplorable sexual imaginary.

Of course, the sexual ubiquity of the black body is an indelible part of discourse of race and sex within the nineteenth-century U.S. and the plantation economy, and Clay's piece can indeed be read as a gross, visual exaggerations of such a deplorable sexual and, importantly, gendered imaginary of blackness. The sexual ambiguity and deviance of the black dandy is the result of his failed masculinity, thus resulting in an effeminacy that is counter to the imaginary of the hyper-masculine, excessive and dangerous gendered ideology of the "uncivilized" black man. The gender of the black man is thus turned into a caricature of "civilized" masculinity if he attempts to act "cultured," thus ensuing the direct inverse of his hyper-masculinity: dandified effeminacy. In Clay's satire, what is implied is that if the racial order collapses through interracial sexuality, then, in turn, there will be a collapse of the gendered ordered, leaving race, sexuality, and gender interwoven into representations of racialized populations in which failed, deviant heterosexuality is always the imaginary. Thus, the perceived stability of heterosexual/homosexual does not apply to racialized populations whose gendered order, in the first place, is thrown into crisis.

The active role of these men in the image is central, not tangential, yet how to broach their dialogic and embodied role in this image is a difficult line to walk. The imagined effeminacy and failed heterosexuality are indeed injurious scenarios of the

gendering of blackness and the sexualization of interraciality. But also, the subsequent turning away and active not-seeing of these men has marked their absence in the sexual archive of abolitionist, interracial desire. Clay did not render these men absent and passive: he rendered them visible, central, and active to this particular construction of interracial, abolitionist discourse and erotic desire. I want to consider what comes if we do not turn away from them in our understanding of processes of racialization and sexualization. That is, if the exclamation “How I should like to kiss his balmy lips!” is the evidence for interracial sex as a part of *Johnny Q*, then what do we do when this marker of the interracial is in fact queer, and no less significantly, when it is between two black men? How do we approach these figures when their queerness is the product of racist speech? What do we make of this moment of intra-racial, same-sex desire as part of the archive of sex in abolitionist discourse and its derivation from slavery? These questions provoke not only a shift in viewing practice when encountering interracial desire in the archive of slavery and abolitionism, but also to consider the legacy that this layered discourse about interraciality leaves in its wake.

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Legacy. The scenario of interracial desire would presume a certain expectation or inherent validity that coheres around white female desire for black men, thus rendering either obsolete or impossible the desires between two black men. E.W. Clay’s piece would seem an aberration or isolated incident in this archive of interracial desire in abolitionism. Yet, there remains a historical aftermath to what E.W. Clay lays out in this piece mocking abolition and mocking amalgamation. During the 1864 presidential

election, the popular lexicon of interracial desire that was expressed through the term “amalgamation” (as we have seen in both Clay’s piece and in Congressman Wise’s dissent) took a turn when David Croly and George Wakeman coined the term “miscegenation.” In the satirical pamphlet, *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro*, Croly and Wakeman parody the abolitionist desire to “blend the races,” as they comically argue that miscegenation is the only way for the progress of white man. In some ways usurping the discourse of abolitionists such as the Ladies of Lynn, Croly and Wakeman take the discourse of miscegenation to its limit.

As a pointed political attack, however, they target various political figures who have expressed “devotion to the negro race.” Croly and Wakeman, write, for example, “The sympathy Mr. [Horace] Greely, Mr. [Wendell] Phillips, and Mr. [Theodore] Tilton feel for the negro is the love which the blonde bears for the black; it is a love of race, a sympathy stronger to them than the love they bear to women.”¹⁰⁷ Race in terms of blackness, in this framing, does not attach itself to the expression of gender. That is, the love of “the black” is seen as separate from the love of women. Yet oddly, race in terms of whiteness attaches itself to white men, thus inverting the most common fear and anxiety of the preservation of whiteness in which white women would couple with black men (the fear that EW Clay satirizes in full). As the title of the pamphlet indicates, miscegenation is here applied to “white men” and the ungendered category of “negro,”

¹⁰⁷ David Croly and George Wakeman, *Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Race, Applied to the American White Man and Negro* (New York: H. Dexter, Hamilton, & Co., 1864): 27.

thus keeping in place the history of white male sexual exploitation of black women, and opening up the queer miscegenous sexual possibilities of white men coupling with black men. The confusion over what gender white men are attached to when engaging in miscegenation is left to the influence of imagination.

Indeed, numerous anti-abolition, anti-miscegenation visual satires were created in response to Croly and Wakeman's pamphlet, visualizing in broad range what such miscegenated desires might look like. The last in a series of four political cartoons printed by G.W. Bromley & Co. in 1864, *Political Caricature No. 4, The Miscegenation Ball* directly wields the newly coined term "miscegenation." The cartoon displays numerous white men dancing and socializing with black women at the ball. Scholarly discussion of *The Miscegenation Ball* has centered on heterosexual pairings of white men with black women. Such readings, however, overlook the fact that on the dance floor there are three to four pairs of white and black men in intimately close contact. In fact, in the center of the image, two men stand so close together that it is difficult to discern where the seam of one man's coat jacket ends, and where the other's begins.

As the two men lean in towards each other, smiling affectionately, they occupy the center of the image, yet they continue to remain hidden in plain view amongst the numerous pairs of interracial heterosexual couples. If this political cartoon is a visual manifestation of the neologism "miscegenation," then the fact that it carries with it erotic displays of same-sex affection suggests that the term collates around same-sex desire. Here we have the instance of the white man's love of "the negro" expressed as a love of both genders of "the negro" as white men dance with black women, and white men

closely embrace black men. We might argue that these undertones of same-sex desire are carried over from the ways in which amalgamation in E.W. Clay's day, nearly thirty years prior, already imagined the same-sex deviance that permeated the realm of the interracial. In Clay's 1839 publication of *Johnny Q*, the abolitionist call for interracial marriage was already being rescripted by Clay as a political site that hosted numerous and proliferating types of desires, one of which was the intra-racial desire of black men for other black men. As the furor over abolition and marriage rights became manifested in the anti-slavery political campaign of the Republicans in the 1860s, the neologism miscegenation brought with it this long standing legacy of imagining abolition as coterminous with amalgamation, and imagining the interracial as always already encoded by various desires, such as same-sex and even cross-dressing sexual affinities.

The historical aftermath of Clay's piece also continues today, in its position and subsequent examinations in the archive. As I stated in the introduction to this chapter, while doing archival research on EW Clay in the fall of 2013, the Library Company of Philadelphia happened to be in the midst of curating a show about gay life in the nineteenth century. Excited about the potential confluence of my research with that of the show, I spoke with the archivist about the archive's holdings and the scope of the exhibit. One archivist admitted that a downfall of the show was the lack of representations of people of color. The show boasts holdings such as a first edition of Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, "local" same-sex subjects photographed arm in arm, hinting at female desire or male homoeroticism, and comic valentine cards of cross dressed women and men. In response to the archivist's admission, I then described my work on the

intersection of interracial and same-sex desire in the nineteenth century U.S., and I pointed out that indeed there were pieces in this archive around which race and queer desire were depicted together - pieces that brought me there to do research in the first place. When I pointed out the exclamation, “How I should like to kiss his balmy lips!” to the archivist, they hesitated and responded that, while interesting, we cannot be sure that this statement is coming from the black man because the line extending forth from this quote is placed ambiguously.

Somewhat confused about this sentiment of refusal immediately following the archivist’s initial sentiment of appeal for such intersecting histories to be included in the exhibit, I was reminded of the host of scholarly refusals to read this image as queer, and wondered what role such an archival refusal plays in continued scholarly inquiries. As Tavia Nyong’o argues, the “performativity of race and race mixing” exposes “a miscegenous body that exceeded the rhetorical conditions that announced and would contain it” (Nyong’o 31). I believe the rhetorical condition that announced and would contain this piece is the moment of archival refusal. This specific archival encounter gestures to a moment of inter-personal exchange with a past object, in which both it (the object) and myself became deeply unsettled by differentiated glances, differentiated modes of seeing. “The scenario places spectators within its frame, implicating us in its ethics and politics”; and I indeed felt implicated during this first day of study, this initial encounter, this instance of wondering if my queerness was over-imposing upon this piece, and if in fact both were being refused (Taylor 33). Careful to not touch that which does not want to be touched, to not recuperate the past for the politics of queer now, I was

confounded by this moment of being momentarily stuck. The archival refusal is such that queer and interracial are “derailed before they ever gain a footing” (Hartman 13).

The After-Life in Philadelphia

It is one thing to put pressure on the limited heterosexual understanding of miscegenation and amalgamation in order to attend to the historical link between interracial and queer. It is another thing, however, to lay claim to this subject as a black queer figure from the past. It remains difficult to resist detaching the negativity that writes this character into being, to heed what Heather Love cautions against, namely the impulse to recuperate this subject as a positivist representation of desire from a black queer past. Perhaps this is why this figure gets turned away from. Not only does the profession, “How I should like to kiss his balmy lips,” unsettle the discourse of interracial from being strictly heterosexual, but this profession is entangled with overt insult and intended injury. This figure remains a threat both to the heterosexual hold over interracial and he is also a reminder of the stigma of sexual deviance that gets affixed to the black body. How do we turn to figures marked by insult and injury as evidence of a queer past when this queer past is not self-proclaimed or self-explored? If Clay’s images and Croly and Wakeman’s pamphlet offer a glimpse into the ways in which interracial, same-sex desires have always been used as a tool for ridicule, then in what ways do these images function in our understanding of queer pasts, and especially the intersection of race in the queer pasts? That is, these images gesture to an important link between same-sex sexuality now and same-sex desire in the mid-nineteenth century: queer is and was often

the launching point for a joke, for harassment of sorts. Can we “recuperate” these desires if they are so laden with ridicule? The rift in approach is rather clear: here, there is shame attached to reading the black queer figure injured by insult. In the canonical queer archive, the subjects of the past divulge their own shame, an affect we must take care of as tenuous.

As Dwight McBride argues in “Straight Black Studies,” “the politics of black respectability as understood in this way can be seen as laying the foundation for the necessary disavowal of black queers in dominant representations of the African American community.”¹⁰⁸ Further articulated by Matt Richardson in *The Queer Limit of Black Memory*, the queer subject in the archive of black studies is positioned through a double negation: “The Black queer falls even deeper into the abyss of negation because we are not even part of the memory of loss,” because “any picture of the quotidian that reveals so-called deviant behavior is excised from any formal accounting of lived experience as a measure of self-protection for the individual and for the collective ‘self’.”¹⁰⁹ To resist the politics of respectability is to keep intact black queer histories within the collective memory of African American historical loss. However, to welcome the black queer subject into the collective memory of African American history is also to confront historical markers of deviance scripted onto the black body, markers we are confronted

¹⁰⁸ Dwight McBride, “Straight Black Studies: On African American Studies, James Baldwin, and Black Queer Studies,” in *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* eds. E. Patrick Johnson and Mae G. Henderson (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005): 71

¹⁰⁹ Matt Richardson, *The Queer Limit of Black Memory: Black Lesbian Literature and Irresolution* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013): 10, 11.

with in Clay's satires. This presents an uncomfortable double bind that is not easy to negotiate.

Both McBride and Richardson's methodological response to the excision of black queer memory -- by the politics of respectability in African American studies and by the disavowal of blackness in canonical studies -- is to examine literary cultural productions. This shift away from the "official" historical and archival narrative is a method that finds "recourse in different sources of knowledge," produced, for example, during the Harlem Renaissance by authors such as James Baldwin, or the "imaginative archive" written by black lesbian authors such as Dionne Brand (Richardson 11). The turn to twentieth-century literary and cultural productions is one means to confront the negativity that subsumes black queer pasts. As Richardson suggests, these cultural texts offer up "rebellious narratives that insist on interfering in the familiar heterosexual and normatively gendered story of the past, creating anachronism by centering queers who 'don't belong' in the historical narratives as they are currently known" (Richardson 13). Richardson's methodology, along with others scholars working in queer of color critique,¹¹⁰ often resist placing archival and historical texts as central. Understandably so, the official record of the colonial archive of slavery provides us with few black subjects who had the ability to record their own thoughts on sex and desire. Instead, when sexuality arises, it is most often presented with intended insult, with marked shame, with

¹¹⁰ For example, Rod Ferguson in *Aberrations in Black*, suggests a turn to black feminist cultural texts, such as Toni Morrison's *Sula* as an alternative to and critique of sociological narratives that construct black sexuality through defamation, such as the Moynihan Report.

ascribed derision, and excessive violence such that the abundance of negativity becomes the referent for black sexuality in the archive of slavery.

While I do not view Clay's piece as an anachronism of same-sex desire, it is an anathema of same-sex desire. Thus, turning to Clay's piece is in a sense turning to a historical document that has been affirmed in its racism and sexism. Such "evidence" of a black queer past is not desirable because, unlike James Baldwin's literature, or creative reimaginings of same-sex intimacy in Ana-Maurine Lara's *Erzulie's Skirt*, the derogatory renderings in Clay's piece remind us of the loss of agency for black subjects in the colonial archive, the shame of deviance rendered as blackness, and the abundance of negativity that disallows this subject from being read as queer in the present moment. However, I want to consider whether nineteenth-century archival texts can be placed within a continuum alongside twentieth-century re-inventive cultural and literary texts, and whether or not archival texts can also be the objects of study for what McBride calls "a useable past for black queer studies."¹¹¹

In "Venus in Two Acts," Saidiya Hartman reminds us that "infelicitous speech, obscene utterances, and perilous commands give birth to the characters we stumble upon in the archive... [Yet] if it is not longer sufficient to expose the scandal, then how might it be possible to generate a different set of descriptions from this archive? To imagine what

¹¹¹ In McBride's decision to turn to Baldwin as one literary figure through whom one can engage a black queer past, McBride calls for further work that extends beyond this literary figure and moment. He states: "In my treatment of Baldwin that follows, I do not want to suggest that there have not been other figures who might serve as models in our search for a useable past for black queer studies. Quite the contrary, this is more of a call for further work and further intervention in and interpretation of the past of black queer studies and of the object of its analysis" (McBride, 71).

could have been?”¹¹² Hartman offers a speculative approach that might move beyond the insufficiency and simplicity of “exposing the scandal” and the “infelicitous speech” that subsumes archival texts such as Clay’s, in which turning to Clay’s racist sketches is often done with a deep seated pleasure for the spectacle of violence. Hartman suggests that while we must accept that “this is the manner in which [these characters] enter history,” such an entrance is only one portion of history. To “image what could have been” for the subject in the archive is to delimit the archival source from its fixed placement as past object that performs uniformly through its racist intent. Instead, Hartman’s speculative approach allows the archival object to perform again, to perform otherwise. Judith Butler also writes of the future temporality of injurious speech. She states that in order for injurious speech “*to have a future it never intended*, for it to be returned to its speaker in a different form, and defused through that return, the meanings the speech act acquires and the effects it performs *must exceed* those by which it was intended” (Butler 14-15; emphasis mine). While I have already suggested that Clay’s *Johnny Q* performs beyond that scenario of heterosexual interracial desire and instead reveals how interracial abolitionist politics was also imagined through the deviance of same-sex desire, I hope to continue to question what it means to read such injurious same-sex desires that are affixed to the black body. In order to do so, I look to the futures and afterlives of Clay’s injurious speech, specifically his *Life in Philadelphia* (1828-1830) satires, as they are reiterated in three nineteenth-century cultural texts.

¹¹² Hartman, “Venus in Two Acts,” 6-7.

Clay's *Life in Philadelphia* series was a widely popular set of satires, in which Clay produced fourteen different plates. Like *Johnny Q*, his lithographs were sketched with dialogue to accompany the visual scene. The majority of Clay's fourteen plates are directed at ridiculing the free black population of Philadelphia (he would go on later to do a series titled *Life in New York* of the same topic). As Monica Miller argues, Clay's series "lampooned blacks' upwardly mobile lifestyles in grotesque caricatures of supposed black society. In prints depicting blacks in elaborate costumes and bourgeois social situations the artist ridiculed again and again black pretensions, intellectual capacity, and aspirations."¹¹³ The ridicule in Clay's sketches that Miller highlights is indeed the driving force of the *Life in Philadelphia* series. Black folks are made caricatures of fashionable life, outfitted with outlandish clothes, exaggerated decorum, and are continuously amiss in performing social niceties, such as calling on one's lover, or performing the latest dance. The social jest of satire which often targets bourgeois society is here turned into racial insult, as even the idea of free blacks aspiring to bourgeois lifestyle is itself what becomes the farce.

While Clay's largely monolithic satirical approach to free black folks in Philadelphia and New York was widely appropriated by other cartoonists such as William Summers, Clay's satires were also redeployed in manners that did not involve direct copy. While Clay's fourteen plates in his Philadelphia series engage in the routinized theme of mocking free blacks, there is no underlying narrative that necessarily ties these otherwise disparate plates together. However, in 1831, the London based publisher, Hurst,

¹¹³ Miller, *Slaves to Fashion*, 104.

Chance, and Co., set nine of Clay's plates to narrative form in a fourteen-page short story in the serial print, *New Comic Annual for 1831*.¹¹⁴ The narrative uses Clay's images as plot points that move the story sequentially forward, in which the overall storyline ruminates upon the question of liberty, and whether or not true liberty is attainable through the status of being free. Riding in a four-horse stage coach in the rural outskirts of London, four white men begin to engage in a discussion sparked by the remarks of Mr. Tomson, the fourth passenger who states that he can finally sleep at night because he signed the petition "to abolish the diabolical traffic in human beings" (*NCA* 148). While Tomson expresses his rage against an institution that allows "a husband and father to be severed from his wife and children and sold to strangers...and each, deprived of precious liberty," the "thin-faced" and pale visaged passenger questions whether or not freedom necessarily imparts liberty, given that "liberty only exists in the mind" (*NCA* 149).

This query is explored through an examination of the lives of newly freed black people, and the blueprint for such a rumination is directly appropriated from E.W. Clay's caricatures in the *Life in Philadelphia* series. The thin-faced man states: "I once manumitted fourteen slaves of both sexes, and sent them to New York, each with sufficient fund for an outfit; and I was curious to know, after the lapse of a few years, the result of my experiment" (*NCA* 150). He describes six separate accounts of his "experiment," visualized by Clay. The thin faced man bemoans the inability of his manumitted slaves to engage in proper fashion, romance, courtship, dance, politics, as

¹¹⁴ Author Unknown, *The New Comic Annual for 1831* (London: Hurst, Chance, and Co., 1831). The Library Company of Philadelphia. Hereafter to be cited in text as *NCA*.

well as community service. In EW Clay's Plate 9, for example, the polished black dandy, Mr. Caesar asks Miss Florinda, "How you like de new fashion shirt, Miss Florinda?" She replies, "I tink dey mighty elegum...when you carry de colour in de Abolition Siety." Caesar's obsession with gaining approval for the fashion shirt, fitted, as we see with an oversized kerchief bow and high collar, is met with Dinah's outlandish speech, calling the outfit "elegum" as she compares Caesar to "Plato, God of War!". As a direct copy from Clay's original plate, the reiteration of this scene and its accompanying dialogue redeploys Clay's ridicule at abolitionist societies and free blacks. Clay's derision is arrived at through parodying black folks in their own seeming self-affliction. It is the black characters themselves who are made to speechify Clay's own disdain.

Unlike Clay's isolated plates that are not set to a narrative storyline, in *The New Comic Annual* the derision is not limited to what the black characters do or say in visual word-bubbles, but such scenes are given further texture through the commentary of the former master. Having come across Mr. Caesar and Miss Florinda, the former master/thin-faced man calls this interchange a "mimic scene" given the "preposterous cut of their dresses" (*NCA* 152-154). And elsewhere he is made to comment, that his "attempt to make humans happy" was "ridiculous," because "giving liberty to a slave" is like "giving a pearl to a swine...a sharp edged tool to a baby" (*NCA* 155, 157). While these remarks clearly show that the thin-faced man does indeed defame the fashionable life-style of the black characters, he at the same time provides an obsessive amount of detail regarding their clothing. He provides a narrativized obsession that only serves to amplify the already labored details of fashion that Clay animates in his visual pieces. Of the outfits,

the thin-faced man provides the following description: “SANCHO. -- Cravat, *blue*; waistcoat, *pink*; coat, *black*; hat, *white*; inexpressibles, *yellow*. DINAH. -- Feather, *pink*; hat, *yellow*; dress, *red*; trimmings, *yellow*. ROMEO.-- Hat, *black*; cravat, *pink*; coat, *sky-blue*; pantaloons, *yellow, black stripes*; eye-glass ribbon, *pink*” (NCA 152). Arrayed in colors - pink, yellow, red, sky-blue, yellow and black stripes - and adorned in accessories - cravat, eye-glass ribbon, feather and various “inexpressibles” - the thin-faced man cannot take his eyes of their clothes, whether he wants to or not. He scans their bodies through a dizzying array of color combinations that accent the pomp and flair of their fashionable design.

Although intended to lampoon, we are left to wonder at the fact that “Clay worked out in repeated and loving detail...scenarios he supposedly execrated.” As Tavia Nyong’o continues to argue, “How much distance can there be between the pen and the hand that holds it? If anxiety is triggered by the feared object...its repetition in insult and imagery could produce fantasy as much as phobia.”¹¹⁵ Thus, while the thin-faced man describes such sartorial efforts as “mimic scenes,” his detailed overview of the characters’s clothes in addition to Clay’s own “repeated and loving detail” of black fashion force us to consider the ways in which this “mimic scene” reveals how the limits of mimicry do not rest upon the black subjects. Rather, the reproduction of the stylistic features of the clothing verge towards fantasy, perhaps an obsessive desire that is telling of Clay’s compulsion to mimic his subjects in these prints. The collapse of insult with fantasy, of

¹¹⁵ Tavia Nyong’o, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2009): 30.

defamation with “loving detail” provides recourse to think through how injurious speech is always produced and performed in excess of the intent to injure. Furthermore, the ambivalence of the obsessive detail as it is paired with insult provides room for doubt when looking back upon the grotesque characters who clearly do not match up with the sartorial finery listed above. This equivocation comes through clearly when the “amiable” character, Mr. Tomson, closes the short story by saying, ““All this may be true...but it is not our province to sit in judgement, nor our duty to prosecute a whole race for the failings of a thousand...we should do the deed of mercy” (*NCA* 161). Mr. Tomson’s remark is prefaced with doubt, when he opens by saying - “all this may be true...but.” With suspicion, Mr. Tomson questions whether or not the injurious speech is couched in anything with backing that can hold up to its own weight. Within such derision there lies at least a form of affective attachment.

While *The New Comic Annual* provides this fleeting rebuttal of the racist ridicule that circulates in these “fashion” plates, the sentiment of fantasy that Tavia Nyong’o gestures to fixates upon Clay’s own obsessions with black life in Philadelphia. That is, *The New Comic Annual*, as one “after-life” to Clay’s prints, only gets us so far in reorienting how we read Clay’s piece. After all, the derision towards black fashion continues to be lampooned, and is only subtly inverted. Taking us a few steps further, Joseph Willson, a free black southern man who moved to and published in Philadelphia, released his own nonfiction account of the “higher classes of colored society.” Published in 1841, *Sketches of the Higher Classes of Colored Society in Philadelphia, by a “Southerner,”* was Willson’s first and only nonfiction text published outside of his

occupation as a newspaper printer. Willson moved from Georgia to Philadelphia in 1833 due to the difficulty facing free people of color in Georgia in the 1830s.¹¹⁶ Working in the print industry and arriving in Philadelphia in the 1830s amongst the social and cultural position of what Willson defines as the “higher classes of colored society,” it is very likely that Willson was confronted by the popularity and circulation of Clay’s sketches mocking the very society that Willson was entering into. Indeed, Willson’s decision to title his piece “sketches” gestures to his direct invocation of Clay. In his text, Willson blends his nonfiction genre with that of the visual as his sketches become a performative re-writing of Clay’s satirical visual sketches.

In the preface to Willson’s text there is significant evidence that *Sketches* is in direct dialogue with Clay’s satires. Willson opens his text with a type of warning, in which he undercuts what some disingenuous readers might expect of a text titled *Sketches of the Higher Classes of Colored Society*. He states: “Others again, there are, who like to see their neighbors’ merits caricatured, and their faults distorted or exaggerated, - will expect burlesque representations, and other laughter exciting sketches, and probably be thereby led to procure this little volume for the purpose of gratifying their *penchant* for the ludicrous...they will find upon perusal, that they had indulged in a very erroneous impression” (Willson 79). Berating before he begins, Willson is forthright in his denouncement of the popular culture of “burlesque representations” and “laughter exciting sketches” that feed into “the insatiable desire which pervades the reading classes,

¹¹⁶ All biographical as well as textual citations of Willson’s text are from the edited edition, Julie Winch, *The Elite of Our People: Joseph Willson’s Sketches of Black Upper-Class Life in Antebellum Philadelphia* (University Park: Penn state University Press, 2000).

for productions of a defamatory character” (Willson 81). Willson here underscores the entanglement that Nyong’o articulates: that there is “gratifying” pleasure and desire yoked to racist injury. While the redoubling of injurious speech in *The New Comic Annual* reiterates this imbrication - the loving detail of sartorial style visually and verbally paired with the intent to injure - Willson’s text is a revisionist future of Clay’s visual satires. Here, Willson’s own sketches are guided with the explicit and stated intent of providing a representation of the higher classes of free black society in Philadelphia that does not “administer wanton and undeserved ridicule, or to excite it in others” (Willson 82).

Sketches overviews various everyday happenings of Willson’s social circle in Philadelphia, such as educational practice and policy, political conventions, literary and debate societies, religious practices, and morals and ethics, all of which constitute the designation “higher classes of colored society.” Within this scope, Willson also describes the “social intercourse” free Philadelphian blacks, the topic of which is of course the directive of Clay’s ridicule. In fact, Willson provides direct commentary upon the subject matter of various *Life in Philadelphia* sketches, namely the culture of music and dance, fashion, courting habits, and political discourse. In each case, Willson undermines the invective of Clay’s pieces. Willson gives close attention to the decorum, respectability, and sober sociality of Philadelphia’s free black society. Specifically regarding fashion, Willson provides the following account:

Unlike fashionable people of other communities [the higher classes of colored society] mostly live within their incomes...they manage well to maintain even appearances, and support such comforts, conveniences and

luxuries...In this way they avoid many of the embarrassments that are common to those whose sole claim to 'fashion' consists in the success they may meet with in making a commanding 'show' on particular occasions. They keep up, apparently, an even tenor at all times, -- seeming very wisely to consider that it is quite as proper for themselves to enjoy the fruits of their possessions and exertions. (Willson 98)

Fashion, for Willson, means a display of "even appearances" that refuses to make a "commanding 'show'" of one's wealth. Doing so would instead be in line with "fashionable people of other communities," in which we can glean that "other communities" most likely refers to fashionable whites. The fashionable person of color to Willson stays within her means, neither putting on airs nor downplaying her luxuries for the ascetic morals of refusing indulgence or denying enjoyment. Willson's final point on dress -- "it is quite as proper for themselves to enjoy the fruits of their possessions and exertions" -- hints at the acceptance of fashionable display and polished self-refinement as a means of self-presentation that may verge on the subtly boastful and prideful, but not the grotesque. Thus, Willson ends with an embrace of fashion, finery, and looking polished, thus revising the very notion that black fashionability even approaches the extravagant and gaudy thread the Clay strings along.

In fact, Willson somewhat eschews the side of the sartorial debate that calls for utmost modesty and reticence, a stance that was often urged in the nineteenth-century free black press, an early form of the politics of respectability. During the same period, in 1837 in *The Colored American*, a series of letters to the editor, titled "On Dress," made clear this debate. The initial letter "On Dress," published on August 12, 1837, was in line with Willson's design. The author Mr. Augustine states, "No eye is so vulgar or destitute

of refinement, as not to look upon a clean and well dressed person with pleasure.”

Refined dress, to Augustine, is not only caught up in personal pleasure, but it always incites the pleasure of the spectator -- a pleasure we are led to believe rests in Clay’s gaze as well. In response to Mr. Augustine’s opinion that “neatness of dress” affords “pleasure,” three separate letters are sent to the editor to denounce this stance. Ms. Agnes, for example, on August 26, 1837 responds by saying that simple dress is “of higher respect than the mere well dressed city gentleman, with his embroidered and highly perfumed cambric pocket handkerchief, and his sparkling rings.” Between Mr. Augustine and Ms. Agnes, it is safe to say that Joseph Willson clearly leans to the former, as Willson does not call for simple dress, but rather an even-keeled presentation of one’s “possessions and exertions.”

In fact, a close member of Willson’s social milieu who fits the description of the “well dressed city gentleman” became the object of an E.W. Clay sketch. Clay, as Monica Miller argues, at last concedes to the finery of black fashion and the polished black dandy look in a print titled *Philadelphia Fashions, 1837*, published seven years after the *Life In Philadelphia* series. Julie Winch’s research suggests that the man in the image, referred to as Frederick Augustus, is most likely Frederick Augustus Hinton, a prominent member of Philadelphia black society, who worked as a barber and was involved in Philadelphia’s antislavery movement. Significantly, Mr. Augustus was also Joseph Willson’s brother-in-law and financial confidant.¹¹⁷ As Monica Miller sates, “this print shows an elegant black

¹¹⁷ Winch, *The Elite of Our People*, 60.

dandy couple, not grotesque like their predecessors, training their eyes directly on the viewer” (Miller 104-105).

In the print, Mr. Augusts responds to his female companion, who is asking what he is looking at. Clay scripts Augusts’s response as saying, “ ‘I look at dat white loafer wot looks at me!’ ” With sharp edges, clean style, and with none of the stereotypically grotesque features of the *Life In Philadelphia Series*, this piece emulates the penchant for fashion that Joseph Willson articulates in his sketches, those that are clearly the stylings of his social circle. If we consider the style as it is paired with bodily affect, as Miller contends, the gaze that Frederick Augustus imparts in this image “is confrontational.” Miller states, “Mr. Augustus’ ‘look’ at the viewer...magnifies concern about the viewer’s own sense of self and forces a comparison of this self with that of the nattily clad black man” (Miller 105). As opposed to the *Life in Philadelphia* series, this image situates the fashionable black figure in the center of the image, facing forward, lifting his monocle to scrutinize the “white loafers” who are trumped by Augustus’s aesthetic.

By coincidence, Clay’s print is published the same year as the debates “On Dress” in *The Colored American*. Significantly, in Clay’s piece Augustus’s statement that the “white loafer” who looks at him in his polished three piece suit attests to the argument for polished dress made in *The Colored American*. Even a disheveled character such as the white loafer appreciates fashion when he sees it, and gains “pleasure” in looking. Because, as argued in *The Colored American*, “no eye is so vulgar or destitute...as to not look upon a clean and well dressed person with pleasure.” Augustus is the figure of the “well dressed city gentleman” with “cambric handkerchief” that Ms. Agnes derides in

The Colored American. Augustus performs this look with exception: finely clad with a top hat, black coat jacket, cravat tie, checkered pants, vest, eye glass and walking cane. While we surmise that the white loafer looks at Augustus with interest and pleasure, we might also consider if Clay himself looks at Augustus with pleasure as well. There is a clear shift in Clay's imagery, both concerning the commanding gaze of the fashionable black subject, and the amenable display of fashion adorned by free blacks. This shift is one from abjection to one of command and appeal. It destabilizes and cuts across the distance that is established between the artist/audience (the white loafer) and the subject (the black dandy). For both Clay and the white loafer to look upon a well dressed gentleman with pleasure speaks to a type of intimacy of exchange that circulates amongst the black and white men. The awe over fashion and aesthetics, the exchange of looks, the dandified pose of the monocle, and the desire projected in these back and forth glances indeed hints at homoeroticism and same-sex interracial desire.

That Clay depicts the unique and picturesque *Philadelphia Fashions* in studied and refined detail, without ridicule of the black subject, but instead with ridicule of the white "loafer," allows us to rethink the *Life in Philadelphia* series and Clay's supposed distance from his subjects. If *Philadelphia Fashions* is understood as one future of the injurious speech of Clay's *Life in Philadelphia* series, then such a revision provides room to look again at the racist hailing that was cast prior. Looking with pleasure may very well have been the undercurrent directing much of Clay's satirical oeuvre. Considering that Clay compiled the largest single-authored depictions of free black Americans in Philadelphia, Clay's obsession over black style puts pressure on the very "intent" of

Clay's satires through an emphasis upon where intent to injure becomes stitched to desirous obsession.

As Sharon Holland asks in *The Erotic Life of Racism*: "What would happen if we opened up the erotic to a scene of racist hailing?"¹¹⁸ Clay's loving detail *is* the racist hailing. The homoerotics that circulate in *Life in Philadelphia* are indeed racist and at the same time they are queerly erotic and lovingly intimate. If this is the case, then coupled with Clay's anti-blackness in this nineteenth-century moment is a persistent expression of queerness, both in the form of queer ridicule, and in the form of queer loving detail. These complex and complicated desires, in many ways, are manifested in the injurious speech of *Life in Philadelphia*. Yet this and the concession implicit in the pleasure of looking that is visualized in *Philadelphia Fashions* provides a space to ruminate upon the erotic element of injurious speech. If love, desire, and pleasure are key terms that inform Clay's racist hailing, then what does the inclusion of the erotic with hate speech do for our understanding of the futures of injurious speech in relation to archival practice?

I believe one step towards answering this question is to insist that a focus upon the erotic, the queer, and the pleasure in looking as they are bound to racist practice is to disallow the ability to dissociate from the racist object's injurious hailing. To detach from the hailing would be to turn away, to keep the image in its frame of injurious speech, to leave it to its monolithic realm and to allow the intended speech to perform its injury.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ Sharon Holland, *The Erotic Life of Racism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012): 3.

¹¹⁹ As Butler argues in *Excitable Speech*: "Keeping such terms unsaid and unsayable can also work to lock them in place, preserving their power to injure, and arresting the possibility of a reworking that might shift their context and purpose" (Butler 38).

But to maintain that the scene of racist hailing, as Holland argues, unfolds “a series of dependencies and intimacies” is to keep intact the boundedness of the injurious encounter. Its intimate affect is also dependent upon the racist hailing such that those who are implicated cannot turn away, even if they want to. The difficulty, I believe, lies in coming to terms with how queer intimacy is often caught up in racist practice. With every racist detail of Clay’s *Philadelphia* series, with every racist detail of his rendering of the Haitian ambassador came an intimate detail of sexual eroticism. These loving details are the racist hailing.

In looking at queer texts in the archive of interracial sex within abolition and slavery, queer uncomfortably surfaces as anti-blackness. In return, the anti-blackness is rooted in the archive of queer pasts. As Kyla Tompkins writes in her study of the racist iconography of nineteenth-century food trade cards that invoke black subjects for contemptuous and consumptive ends, she suggests “that against the liberal tendency to look away from racism we *must* look at these images - classic examples of racial kitsch - not only to render their historical weight visible and material but also to recognize both sides of their terrible ambivalence..often loving and intimate as well as deeply hateful.”¹²⁰ In urging that “we *must* look at these images,” Tompkins points to the fraught ambivalence that coats these images, ambiguities that gesture to the mutual ties of intimacy and hate. But who is the “we” that must look? Just as turning to a queer past is a cautionary turn in that recuperation of that past threatens to make uniform what a queer past means and who a present queer viewer might be, so too is the effort to defamiliarize

¹²⁰ Tompkins, *Racial Indigestion*, 151.

naturalized concepts of race along with sexuality when looking at a racist archival scenario. In other words, turning to a queer racist image present in the archive must acknowledge various kinds of denials, repressions, affective responses, and even violent interpolations when being hailed by such an injurious object from the past. Looking at Clay's image will have varied consequences for black and non-black, specifically white, audiences, as well as queer and straight audiences, and the intersectional identities that exist therein.¹²¹

In my own case, perhaps the "we" signals myself and the archivist, as we jointly looked together at the image, a moment in which two white lesbian women reacted differently to the image, in which these reactions garnered diverse consequences. And what if we had both agreed that the "kiss" in the image signaled queer desire? Would my archival desires have been validated and satisfied by this shared, collective moment between me and the archivist?¹²² Perhaps not, perhaps validation would have made room for recuperative violence that did not acknowledge the racism of this eroticism. Would I have wanted this image displayed in the archival show that I visited months later, in which reference to a black queer past was through a reference to Mark Twain's characters of Huck and Jim, or in which white male fantasies about "dark" men in Hawaii and tropical paradises were the evidence for queer interraciality? I am not sure what a collective response would have garnered precisely because that assumption of a uniform

¹²¹ I want to thank Fatima El-Tayeb for pushing me to contend with the complexities of invoking an imperative "we," and what this actually signifies.

¹²² I want to thank Chris Perreira and my writing group for helping me think through this alternative possibility.

collectivity is always shot through with instability. What I do believe is necessary, though, is that I must look at such images of a queer racist past because as a white queer scholar, it is imperative to be attentive to the ways in which whiteness is participant in creating racist stereotypes that cohere around queer at the same time as queer politics often, in the present moment, lapses race as a viable category of inclusion for queer politics. To enumerate the performative power of the archival scenario, of the futures of injurious speech, is to count the steps of the performative dance of archival practice, namely the look and the turn. It is no secret or surprise that this is a complicated dance. When I look at archival objects, which way do I turn? Keeping intact the intimacy that the racist hailing imparts, allowing it to perform again, to reiterate its awful snare, to move again through its hurtful past, allows for a reactivation in which the object is reconstituted and remembered again. And in this reactivation, I become attached to this object, its injurious future is now, performing and speculating upon “what could have been.”

CHAPTER 4: John Brown's Bed

“And when the smoke cleared the name officially attached to the deed was John Brown. Who has ever heard of Annie Christmas, Mary Shadd Carey, Mary Ellen Pleasant? The official version has been printed, bound, and gagged, resides in schools, libraries, the majority unconscious. Serves the common good. Does not cause trouble. Walks across tapestries, the television screen. Does not give aid and comfort to the enemy. Is the stuff of convocations, colloquia; is substantiated - like the Host - in dissertations.” Michelle Cliff, Free Enterprise

There is a rogue line left unexamined, unexplored, and unelaborated upon in the deposition of John Brown's 1859 trial for his antislavery insurrection at Harper's Ferry, Virginia. During witness examinations, Mr. Green, the Northern counsel member who arrived in time to represent John Brown's defense, cross-examines "Conductor Phelps," whose train was prevented from crossing the bridge at Harper's Ferry due to the fighting action that had caused chaos for the conductor and the passengers left stuck on the train. Conductor Phelps is questioned at the close of the night, and Mr. Green worries that Phelps won't get through his whole story: "As this was a very important witness, and as it was late in the evening, [Green] would ask the Court to adjourn until morning."¹²³ Green's request to delay until the morning so that Phelps will have ample time to tell his story in full, however, is denied. The final statement made by Phelps before he is cut off is the following: "When Brown was parleying with us at the bridge, the three armed men remained on the bridge; saw what seemed to be a man dressed in woman's clothing pass, followed by a boy with a box or a bundle" (De Witt 70-71). Immediately following this

¹²³ Robert M. De Witt, *The Life, Trial and Execution of Captain John Brown, Known as Old Brown of Ossawatimie, Compiled from Official and Authentic Sources (1859)*, (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969): 70.

statement, a new witness is sworn in, and Phelps is never to return to the stand to testify. I am left wondering, who was this cross-dressed figure? Was this person a member of Brown's insurrection? Why would this be the final statement of the "very important witness" if this particular disclosure does not gain recognition by either the defense or the prosecution?

While the "man dressed in woman's clothing" does not make further appearance in the trial transcript or the illustrated press documenting Brown's trial, cross-dressing does make its appearance in strange abundance in the fictional and artistic record of John Brown. In James McBride's recent publication, *The Good Lord Bird* (2013), the frame-narrative tale opens with the statement, "I was born a colored man and don't you forget it. But I lived as a colored woman for seventeen years."¹²⁴ The narrator is Little Onion, now an elderly man named Henry Shackleford, who, during his time spent with John Brown in Kansas and Harper's Ferry, was mistaken to be a girl, Henrietta, who Brown eventually dubbed as Little Onion. The oral history of this tri-part character is, as the story goes, an extant slave narrative discovered in the wreckage of a church fire. The "wild slave narrative that highlights a little-known era of American history," is revered not for providing a new glimpse into slave life in the Kansas-Missouri territory, but because, "Until now, no full account of Brown or of his men has ever been known to exist" (McBride 1, 2). Interestingly, we only come to know the "full account of Brown" through the genre of the slave narrative, and through the voice of a formerly enslaved

¹²⁴ James McBride, *The Good Lord Bird* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2013): 7. McBride's text, additionally, is currently being adapted to film.

“octoroon” boy cross-dressed as a girl. Indeed, it was Brown’s mistake and patriarchal whiteness that took Henry for Henrietta. As the narrator recounts, Brown caused a ruckus in the barbershop where Henry’s father worked as a city slave. After learning that the two are enslaved, Brown seeks to free them both by recruiting Pa for his crusade, along with Pa’s “tragic octoroon daughter,” in Brown’s words (McBride 19). Confused, Pa tries to correct Brown’s gendered mistake while the three are about to make a run for it out of the barbershop. Pa begins to explain that Henry is no “tragic octoroon daughter” when he starts to declare, “ Massa, my Henry ain’t a--,” only to be cut off mid-sentence by Brown (McBride 20). As the narrator explains, “See, my true name is Henry Shackleford. But the Old Man heard Pa say, ‘Henry ain’t a,’ and took it to be ‘Henrietta,’ which is how the Old Man’s mind worked. Whatever he believed, he believed. It didn’t matter to him whether it was really true or not. He just changed the truth till it fit him. He was a real white man” (McBride 20). Pa is never able to get his word in about Henry being his son, and moments later Pa is killed, and Brown sweeps up his new “tragic octoroon daughter” to freedom, stepping in, in true John Brown form, as Henrietta’s white patriarchal savior. Terrified of Brown as some kind of outlaw and lunatic, Henry makes no moves to reclaim his boyhood, and instead passes for a girl all the way to Harper’s Ferry, and for years beyond as well. In this account, it is Brown’s whiteness (“a real white man”) that names Henry as Henrietta.

In Michelle Cliff’s 1993 novel, *Free Enterprise*, we are not told a story of John Brown, but one of a dense mix of memories, oral histories, and epistolary confessions running between Mary Ellen Pleasant and Annie Christmas, two women who were “a

friend of John Brown.”¹²⁵ Their stories in the least falter on John Brown’s raid, and in the most reflect the circum-Caribbean slave trade, the routes passed from slavery and servitude to freedom, and the precarious aftermath of surviving reconstruction, be it, in Pleasant’s case, through capitalist free enterprising for and among blacks in California, or, in Christmas’s case, living a solitary life conversing with only those who have histories and stories they’d rather not tell. It is in this manner that we find traces of John Brown throughout their stories; on the other hand, it is in the historical record of Brown that we find traces of Mary Ellen Pleasant. The raid at Harper’s Ferry failed, it is suspected, because John Brown jumped the gun and did not stick to the plan and the date that he had struck with the free and enslaved blacks he was seemingly fighting for; and most infamously, he skirted the advice of Harriet Tubman. As Mary Ellen Pleasant narrates it, “I was greeted on the road to Charleston, fifty-two rifles concealed in the back of the wagon, dressed as an itinerant blacksmith, by a messenger telling me Harper’s Ferry was a fiasco, everyone was dead” (Cliff 139). Almost dead, as Annie Christmas tells of her fate: “I, with my blackened skin and in my masculine state, was chained to other men, on a gang...At first my masculine state protected me. But eventually my sex became known” (Cliff 196-197). The end of the story is not one that Annie tells, as one can imagine the violence that ensues once her sex became known. In a letter to Mary Ellen Pleasant, she tells of her sexual violation as a woman forced to remain “a man amongst men” (Cliff 207). These intimate letters are the only access to these histories, to the story Annie avows “I do not tell.” Letters, too, are one amongst many modes of

¹²⁵ Michelle Cliff, *Free Enterprise* (New York: Dutton Books, 1993).

access that we have to John Brown's dealings -- letters to Frederick Douglass, to Garrett Smith, to Lydia Maria Child. These are conserved, accessible now online for posterity, as Cliff states, "for dissertations." Indeed, John Brown's letters are what I access in this dissertation, but alongside the novelistic histories of Mary Ellen Pleasant, Annie Christmas, as well as Winona in Pauline Hopkins's fiction. Was Mary Ellen Pleasant the crossed-dressed figure the conductor remembered? Was Winona, who we will find also blackens her skin and dons men's clothes for "the cause," another Annie Christmas? Who are these women who line this history, who gender this masculinist world, who queer these narratives otherwise imbedded in the minds of "the majority unconscious"?

It is perhaps not unlikely that the fleeting piece of evidence of cross-dressing in the trial transcript provides the foundation for cross-dressing in the fictional record of John Brown. Intentional or not, historical or speculative, this blurred juncture -- of the official record preserved for legal substantiation as it becomes reoriented through fiction -- provides the means by which these instances of cross-dressing and queer interracial eroticism can offer a glimpse as to how Brown's crusade is attached to a history of sexualization. Significantly, the interracial as queerly sexual, through the signpost of cross-dressing, is made manifest in each of these texts not upon the body of John Brown, but upon the body of the person of color who provides the lens through which we come to know John Brown. A complex literary methodology of displacement is at work here, in which Brown's own cross-racial affiliations and modes of identification get mapped onto interracial characters, who then are made queer through cross-dressing and homoeroticism. That is, each of these African American novels engages in a

politicized move to decenter the iconoclasm that surrounds John Brown through telling his story obliquely, through the perspective of the various struggles of African Americans who were present and active in this history.

I argue that in this process of decentering, John Brown's interraciality gets dragged onto these characters (quite explicitly as drag) in the form of cross-dressing and queerness. Each racial and gendered displacement, be it onto the body of the interracial character or onto Brown, does not function to further reify Brown's white masculinity or further instantiate mixed-raced sexual deviance. Rather, the narrative and visual lens in each piece reveals the rhetorical and artistic strategy of African American cultural productions, primarily by women, on Brown that flip the scales of representation in order to unsettle any clear distinctions about race, gender, or sexuality that circulate in the historical legacy of Brown. Brown's very desire to be the white savior and indeed white father to the enslaved is a standpoint that infantilizes, subjugates, and renders abject those millions of enslaved he feigned to fight for through his cause, which he believed to be "their" cause.

More often than not, it was African American women who were imagined as removed from the scene, given that the spectacle of violence surrounding the execution of Brown was even more horrific for the two black insurrectionists, Shields Green and John Copeland. As Franny Nudelman reminds us, "While the bodies of Edwin Coppoc and John Cook were, like Brown's, turned over to their families, Governor Wise refused to relinquish the bodies of the two black raiders, John Copeland and Shields Green. Instead, their bodies, after a brief burial, were dug up by a group of medical students and taken to

the Winchester Medical College for dissection.”¹²⁶ The posthumous martyrdom of Brown’s body set against the scientific racism that beset the bodies of Copeland and Green, along with the sheer forgetting of figures such as Mary Ellen Pleasant from the record renders abject and absent those everyday acts of resistance that were already taken up by free and enslaved blacks, acts that fomented race relations to the brink of Civil War which were are just as significant, if not more than, Brown’s botched rebellion. This status of absence and abjection seemingly clashes with what, in Michelle Cliff’s novel, she calls Brown’s act of “pedestalizing the African, a practice as potentially degrading, and damaging, as enslavement” (Cliff 143). In the contradictory yet pervasive folds that entangle racism with historiographic erasure alongside pedestalization are where African American authors, and as I focus in this chapter, African American female authors and artists come to re-present the history of John Brown through what I argue is a queer, feminist, oblique stance. Such a perspectival methodology, working through strategic acts of displacement makes it possible to read Brown’s complex history of desire, racism, and “pedestalization” of blackness as in keeping with the tandem of interracial desire and erotic racism that I have argued queers interraciality in the nineteenth century. In return, the African American women authors and artists in this chapter situate Brown’s own interracial sentiments as the seed that germinates the homoerotic scenes in the fictional record of Brown. They consider what these cross-gendered switches tell us about

¹²⁶ Franny Nudelman, *John Brown’s Body: Slavery, Violence, and the Culture of War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004): 7.

Brown's own racialization and sexualization beyond the powers that rest in his unflinching masculinization and whiteness.

As the culminating chapter to the dissertation, it seems fitting, perhaps, to ask if John Brown, the quintessential “martyr to interracial radicalism”¹²⁷ can in fact be read as a queer interracial figure in line with those characters and ideologies of interraciality that are not only presented in the texts relevant to this chapter, but also presented in those throughout the dissertation. John Brown, as the symbolic embodiment of interracial radicalism often remains subject to discourses of race and racialization, but rarely to discourses of (queer) sexuality that, as I have shown throughout, permeate the very fabric and understanding of the interracial in the nineteenth century. Perhaps this has remained the case because of Brown's unwavering masculinity, paternalism, and religiosity. This mighty triad certainly renders difficult any attempt to read Brown as a sexualized figure, let alone a queer figure. In a concerted push against the masculinist hold over scholarship on John Brown, I offer a reading of Brown through a queer lens that situates how white feminist and black feminist authors and artists dislodge Brown from his durational and fixed place within an imaginary of righteous paternalism and masculinity that so often is the focus of historic studies of Brown. Decentering Brown's fixed masculinity and paternalism, in much the same way as these African American fictions do, is one effort to question where and when interracial sentiments as queer attach themselves to unlikely bodies, such as that of John Brown's body.

¹²⁷ R. Blakeslee Gilpin, *John Brown Still Lives! America's Long Reckoning with Violence, Equality, and Change* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011): 182.

Indeed a play on the nineteenth-century lyrical refrain “John Brown’s body,” the title of this chapter, “John Brown’s Bed,” supplants “body” with “bed” pointedly. I endeavor to more explicitly move our analysis of John Brown into the realm of the sexual, in which “John Brown’s body” might more readily be re-oriented towards an analysis of how John Brown’s embodiment is the nexus for a joint investigation of his racialization *and* sexualization. Shuttling back and forth between the nineteenth-century historical record of Brown and his place in early-twentieth and twenty-first-century writing and art by African American women, I examine what I call three “bedside scenes” that surface in the nineteenth-century illustrated press, Pauline Hopkins’s *Winona*, and in Kara Walker’s artworks. Each scene depicts various iterations of “John Brown’s bed,” which I argue comes to signify the locus of the sexualization of John Brown’s body in each narrative.

Court Bed

At the close of 1859, detailed images and reports of John Brown’s raid, trial, and execution circulated throughout the North American illustrated press, from the beginning of the trial on October 25, to his sentencing on November 2, and finally to his execution on December 2. In the end, Brown was convicted as guilty and hanged for the alleged crimes he committed while leading the antislavery insurrection at Harper’s Ferry, Virginia. *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* issued a special supplement on November 19, 1859, titled “A Pictorial History of the Harper’s Ferry Insurrection,” which compiled many images from the weeks past, and pieced together a cohesive narrative of events,

from the first shot fired at Harper's Ferry to the sentencing of Brown along with four other insurrectionists. While the images range from illustrations of the stand-off at Harper's Ferry to scenes of Brown and his men in prison, my attention was drawn to a few images in particular while doing research at the Library Company of Philadelphia. Printed on the large scale formatting of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* and *Harper's Weekly*, covering these pages nearly two feet in length, are depictions of a defeated John Brown lying in bed, covered by a blanket in the middle of the courtroom during the entirety of the trial. The *Frank Leslie* image of Brown in bed in the center of the court is the only illustration that shows the courtroom scene in its entirety. Brown occupies the center of the image, reclined on his bed or cot in the middle of the courtroom, surrounded by both council and spectators. *Harper's Weekly* provides a similar depiction of Brown depleted and exhausted, lying prone on his cot in court, along with a second image in which Brown is accompanied at his bedside by his council, Mr. Hoyt, amidst trial proceedings. *Harper's* indeed portrays Brown in an extremely dejected state, far less regal than in the *Frank Leslie's* piece, where Brown at least appears somewhat groomed and decently dressed.

John Brown's bed certainly brought a performative element to the trial, as it became a site through which Brown's ability, sanity, and masculinity were subject to scrutiny. In Robert M. DeWitt's 1859 reprint of the trial transcript in the compiled text, *The Life, Trial and Execution of Captain John Brown, Known as Old Brown of Ossawatomie* [sic], nearly every trial session opens with a description of the state of Brown in bed. During the afternoon session of the first day of trial on October 25, we are

told: "The jailer was ordered to bring Brown into court. He was found his in bed, from which he declared himself unable to rise. He was accordingly brought into court on a cot, which was set down within the bar. The prisoner laid most of the time with his eyes closed" (DeWitt 63). While on the third day Brown walked "feebly" from the jail, he took his assumed position in the courtroom as he "lay down upon his cot." Yet, later that day, upon hearing that none of the witnesses Brown had subpoenaed had come to trial, "Brown arose from his mattress, evidently excited, and standing on his feet, addressed the Court...Brown then lay down again, drew his blanket over him, and closed his eyes and appeared to sink in tranquil slumber" (DeWitt 76-77). Brown's "week and haggard" state of appearance was due, largely, to the injuries he suffered at Harper's Ferry, namely, "Brown fell under two bayonet wounds -- one in the groin, and one in the breast, and four sabre cuts on the head" (DeWitt 55, 36). Brown's injuries and ill-health, however, were continuously questioned in the courtroom given that Brown lay prostrate with blankets up to his chin one instance, and stood up in excitement the next. Mr. Green of the prosecution thus dubbed the whole bedside performance "Brown's sham sickness," a dramatic stunt to delay the court until Brown's proper counsel arrived in Virginia.

In either case, be it a sham or a sincere debility, John Brown's bed was a constant talking point throughout the trial, and its pictorial representation in the illustrated press rendered Brown more effete than heroic as he suffered, in part, from a quite suggestive and emasculating groin wound. Brown's widely disseminated precarious state was so newsworthy that it led prominent abolitionist Lydia Maria Child to write to both Brown and Virginia Governor Henry Wise, expressing her overwhelming sympathy for his

heroic cause as well as his current state of health. Indeed, Child's letters to both Brown and Wise verge on the emphatic. Writing to Governor Wise regarding her enclosed letter to Brown, Child reveals her sentiment, as she tells Wise that Brown "needs a mother or a sister to dress his wounds, and speak soothingly to him. Will you allow me to perform that mission of humanity?"¹²⁸ Child, situating herself as abolitionist comrade turned mother/sister to the wounded Brown, is so overtaken by sympathy that all she desires is to attend to him by his jail-bed and "speak soothingly to him." Responding to Child's request, Governor Wise is compelled, in a manner, to recapitulate Child's unconfined sentiments, as he avers: "You [Child] ask me, further, to allow you to perform the mission 'of mother or sister, to dress his wounds and speak soothingly to him.' By this, of course, you mean to be allowed to visit him in his cell, and to minister to him in the offices of humanity" (*Correspondence* 4). Governor Wise in effect reorients the potential desirous sentiment that could rest within the phrase "speak soothingly to him," so as to mean "ministering the offices of humanity." This desensitized revision of sorts speaks to Wise's guarded effort to strip away the underlying desire in Child's letter to become Brown's surrogate mother/sister through her performative, soothing-speech act.

What or who exactly Child could become at Brown's bedside is even more suggestively and sexually rendered in her direct letter to Brown. Writing much more forthright to Brown than she did to Wise, Child avidly declares to Brown: "I sympathize with you in your cruel bereavement, your sufferings, and your wrongs. In brief, I love

¹²⁸ Lydia Maria Child, *Correspondence between Lydia Maria Child and Gov. Wise and Mrs. Mason* (Boston: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1860): 3.

you and bless you. Thousands of hearts are throbbing with sympathy as warm as mine. I think of you night and day, bleeding in prison, surrounded by hostile faces, sustained only by trust in God and your own strong heart. I long to nurse you - to speak to you sisterly words of sympathy and consolation” (*Correspondence* 14). Unable to deny her warm, throbbing heart, unable to quell the thoughts that occupy her mind day and night, Child, in brief, declares her love for Brown. Child’s unabashed longing to nurse Brown back to health somewhat reads as an extra-marital erotic effort at “taking-care,” and thus her overflowing sentiments are likewise diverted by Brown as they were tempered by Wise (we must remember that Brown already had a wife and numerous children who could perform such a task).

Brown, with great rhetorical care, in the end objects to Child’s “longings” as he replies, “I should certainly be greatly pleased to become personally acquainted with one so gifted and so kind, but I cannot avoid seeing some objections to it, under present circumstances.” Brown’s first objection is that he is at present under the care “of a most humane gentleman,” who has given Brown “every possible attention I have desired, or that could be of the least advantage; and I am so recovered of my wounds as no longer to require nursing” (*Correspondence* 15). Brown’s gentleman nurse has given sufficient attention and care so as to usurp the affection that would otherwise be provided by Brown’s actual wife, or Child’s maternal/sisterly surrogacy. Brown’s second objection is regarding the fact that he does have a wife and family, and thus he claims care can be rendered more profitable by Child if given to his surviving family in the form of

monetary donation. In return, Brown indeed quiets Child's throbbing heart, devotion, and love, as he redirects her affect into the rather bleak form of tactile monetary donation.

Given that the sentiments and affects that pulse to find expression at Brown's bedside do not come to fruition in the form of Child's physical endeavors, it appears then that the two men seek to contain the overflow of feminine desire coming from Child. Working to restore proper order to the manner in which sentiment can be expressed, both Wise and Brown jockey to restrict the presence of femininity from making its mark at this trial. However, it is Brown's very bed-ridden emasculation that brings Child as sister/mother/nurse to Brown's bedside, if only ever achieved in letter form. Her consoling words, no less, reach both Wise and Brown if not her physical presence. Her affective impulses spill forth and permeate this scene of so-called governmental, militaristic, and juridical masculinity, forcing both men to vie with her unfiltered, longing, and throbbing sentiments. Indeed, Child's sympathy for Brown struck a cord of fear in Governor Wise, such that in the aftermath of Brown's execution, Wise admits that had Brown been confined to prison longer, his celebrity would have grown to an unprecedented scale. In a letter to the "Senate and House of Delegates of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia," Governor Wise writes that had Brown been incarcerated longer, "the sympathy would have asked on and on for liberation, and *to nurse and soothe him*, whilst life lasted, in prison. His state of health would have been heralded weekly as from a palace; visitors would have come affectedly reverent, to see the *shorn* felon at his

‘hard labor.’”¹²⁹ Wise’s rhetoric directly echoes the language of Child’s letter, as Wise finds a threat in the “affectedly reverent” behavior that would “nurse and soothe” Brown. This abundance of sympathy would have been simply too much for Wise to control. This excess of affect for Brown’s state of health speaks to ways in which his bedside performance fomented an array of responses. Indeed, Brown’s health was “heralded weekly as from a palace” in the pictorial representations of Brown in bed in the courtroom, and Child’s epistolary mark of soothing sympathy was more than Wise could handle, as it already rendered Brown a martyr of sorts before the noose was laid about his head.

Governor Wise, we might recall from the previous chapter, has already made his mark as an influential character in my study of interracial sexuality in the mid-nineteenth century. It was Governor Wise (then Congressman) who dissented John Quincy Adams’s 1838 petition to engage in “international intercourse” with Haiti, to which Wise replied that the proximate threat of the free black republic engaging in “intercourse” with the imagined “white republic” of the U.S. would lead to “wholesale amalgamation.” Now twenty years later, one of Wise’s final actions as governor is to successfully deliver the death sentence to a man who, according to Wise’s ideological track record, brought such an instance of “wholesale amalgamation” into the state of Virginia. Brown’s cross-racial “intercourse” with free and enslaved blacks sparked insurgent and revolutionary fear in the U.S. South through the very act of whites and blacks working together towards an

¹²⁹ Henry Wise, “Senate and House of Delegates of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia,” in *Governor’s Message and Reports of the Public Officers of the State, of the Boards of Directors, and of the Visitors, Superintendents, and other Agents of Public Institutions or Interests of Virginia* (Richmond: William F. Ritchie, 1859).

anti-slavery uprising. Moreover, during Brown's final speech to the court on the sixth and last day of the trial, he rose from his bed and declared the following: "Now, if it is deemed necessary that I should forfeit my life for the furtherance of the ends of justice, and mingle my blood further with the blood of my children and with the blood of millions in this slave country whose rights are disregarded by wicked, cruel, and unjust enactments, I say let it be done" (DeWitt 95). Anticipating his impending execution, Brown asserts that his execution and final bloodshed will not be an end point, it will instead suture past and future bloodshed to garner a type of collective endeavor towards justice joining himself to the enslaved. Brown's own interpretation of bloodshed through execution serves as a counter-argument to what Wise imagines will both soften any "soothing" sympathy for Brown, as well as any cross-racial allegiances.

The common parlance of blood "mingling," mixing, and miscegenation in the mid-nineteenth century was used, paradoxically, as a means to articulate racial difference through the wide-spread lexicon of one-drop rules and mixed-blood racial classification. That is, mixed-blood was more often used as a means to demarcate a so-called person of color from a so-called "pure" white person, rather than gesture to a fluid union of the races.¹³⁰ Yet, when Brown talks of mingling blood, as Franny Nudelman argues, "Brown refuses this distinction. Blood shed, first by slaves and then by Brown himself, is reinterpreted as one blood, a common fluid that circulates between Brown, his children, and enslaved millions" (Nudelman, 23-24). The common, circulating fluid between

¹³⁰ As I have argued in Chapter 2, even when the idealistic race romance portends to join the races and fold the person of color and future mixed-raced offspring into the realm of whiteness, this effort at mixing for the supposed purposes of union rather than division fails more often than not.

Brown, his children, and the enslaved takes on a dynamic significance through the rhetorical effects of the use of the term “further” in Brown’s claim that his death will only serve to “mingle my blood further with the blood of” his children and the enslaved. “Further” here signifies both that his blood is already mingled with the enslaved, such that new bloodshed will only mix it “further” than it already is. And on the other hand, “further” gestures to a future elsewhere, in which his bloodshed will “further” the cross-racial cause that his insurgency set out to ignite. Brown’s mixed blood, becoming further mingled, offers a past/future performative speech act that calls up Wise’s fear of “wholesale amalgamation,” always already having been mixed, and always on the precipice of further mixing.

Brown’s metaphoric imaginary of his mingled blood amongst himself, his children, and the enslaved indeed fixates upon the cross-racial progressive idealism of Brown as the great father to the enslaved. Indeed, in 1834, Brown wrote to his brother Frederick that he and his wife “have agreed to get at least one negro boy or youth, and bring him up as we do our own...We think of three ways to obtain one: First, to try to get some Christian slaveholder to release one to us. Second, to get a free one if no one will let us have one that is a slave. Third, if that does not succeed, we have all agreed to submit to considerable privation in order to buy one.”¹³¹ Having never actually “obtained” a black child for his own family, Brown does metaphorically, and as we will see in the final section of the chapter, become the great white father to millions of

¹³¹ John Brown, “John Brown to his Brother Frederick. Randolph, PA. November 21, 1834.” Old South Leaflets, No. 84, “Words of John Brown,” copy in John Brown Pamphlets, Vol. 1, Boyd B. Stutler Collection, West Virginia State Archives.

unnamed “negro boys or youth.” In this effect, when Brown mingles his bloodshed with the proxy bloodshed of those enslaved, he, as Nudelman argues, “radicalizes, a tradition of abolitionist sympathy” by positioning himself through the proxy of bloodshed as already mingled with the enslaved (Nudelman 18). It is perhaps Brown’s cross-racial “radicalized abolitionist sympathy” that draws Lydia Maria Child as fellow sympathetic abolitionist to his bedside, longing to be part of the metaphorical cross-racial family by becoming his sister/wife, ever more than a friend or comrade.

Child’s sentimentality overlaid with her sexualized rhetoric cannot, in return, be read as simply wanton desires on her part, or simply the excess sentiments of femininity. Hers is instead a cultivated response to the exuberant scenes of Brown’s trial. We might, additionally, wonder about the broader desires that circulated around Brown’s trial (and thus around his bed) that can’t be relegated to the sexist dismissal of Child’s maternalistic sentimentality. I would argue that there is quite an abundance of homosocial desire for the Old Man that finds its way both into nineteenth-century remembrances of Brown, and into contemporary historiographic impulses to express continued “affective reverence” to Brown’s persona. For the twentieth anniversary of Brown’s death in December of 1879, in a journalistic commemoration reporter William A. Phillips for the *Atlantic Monthly* disclosed “Three Interviews with Old John Brown,” offering a glimpse into the life and personality of the impenetrable character of John Brown. In the first vignette, Phillips remembers an evening in Kansas, in 1856, when Brown “urged” Phillips to go with him on a type of stake out to locate the Kansas pro-slavery camp. Overlaid that evening, Phillips recalls the night that they spent together: “We placed our two saddles together so

that our heads lay only a few feet apart. He spread his blanket on the wet grass, and, when we lay together upon it, mine was spread over us. Previous to doing this he had stationed a couple of guards. It was past eleven o'clock, and we lay there until two in the morning, scarcely time enough for sleep; indeed, we slept none." Cozied up under their blanket on the dewy, wet grass, Brown gazed up at the stars and in these quiet gestures, Phillips discovered that "a poetic and impulsive nature lay behind that cold exterior. The whispering of the wind on the prairie was full of voices to him, and the stars as they shone in the firmament of God seemed to inspire him."¹³² From their starry night to their parting moment when Brown "held [Phillips's] hands firmly in his stern, hard hands," and "leaned forward and kissed [Phillips] on the cheek," Phillips indeed keeps close this sentimental, heartfelt memory of their "poetic" night spent together blanketed under the stars of the Kansas sky.

Whatever the affective reverence is that impresses Phillips to recall such a heartfelt scene twenty years later, the homosocial eroticism that warms these two men between their blankets is a type of homosocial impulse that I believe circulates in current scholarship, in the impulse to bring Brown to life, ever to be commemorated through scholarly attachments to his life. The proverbial "boy's club" that is scholarship on John

¹³² William A. Phillips, "Three Interviews with Old John Brown," *The Atlantic Monthly*, 44.266 (December 1879): 738-744.

Brown is overwhelming at best.¹³³ While indeed my focus on Lydia Maria Child, Pauline Hopkins, Kara Walker, and Michelle Cliff is a pointed effort to shift away from the overbearing influence of masculinist scholarship on Brown, I would not be so quick to keep the discourse of the sexual to the realm of female authorship. Indeed, as we see above, Phillips is quite keen on his erotic memory of Brown. Others, too, are tempted to keep this tradition going. Take, for example, Bruce A. Ronda's introduction to his text, *Reading the Old Man* (2008): "I have found myself drawn to John Brown. I understand his heritage all too well. I think I know something of his commitment to social justice. His choice of violent means is troubling to me, but I was equally moved and humbled by his willing identification with African Americans...I stand amazed, judged, humbled...I was interested in how his mind and heart worked" (Ronda xxii). Or take, Albert Fried's *John Brown's Journey: Notes and Reflections on His America and Mine*, which in the forward declares itself to be a book that is deeply personal, "telling how and why I

¹³³ I performed an extensive subject search through UCSD's Geisel library catalogue for book length studies of John Brown to consider this gendered disparity. Of the sixty-two broad entries on the subject "John Brown," two are by women, and remarkably, these two texts are co-edited with men (see *Terrible Swift Sword* eds. Peggy A. Russo and Paul Finkelman; *The Tribunal* eds. John Stauffer and Zoe Trodd). Of the forty-one entries under the subject "History of Harper's Ferry and John Brown," the only woman author is Lydia Maria Child for her *Correspondences*. Of the subject, "Literature and John Brown," none of the ten are women. The only two prominent entries for women are for the subjects, "John Brown, Relations with Women" (see Bonnie Laughlin-Schultz, *The Tie that Bound Us*; also under "John Brown and Family"), and "John Brown and Public Opinion" (see Janet Kemper Beck, *Creating the John Brown Legend*). These latter two subject headings remove these female authors from the realm of capital-H History, and thus these texts remain in place about "opinions" and "women's history." Additionally, Franny Nudelman's *John Brown's Body*, does not even garner a subject link for either John Brown or Harper's Ferry (despite the text's obvious title); Michelle Cliff's *Free Enterprise* is included in fiction on Harper's Ferry, but not fiction on John Brown; and Pauline Hopkins's *Winona* is not included under either subject.

became interested in John Brown, what I learned about him and his world.”¹³⁴ Fried’s exploration into the world of John Brown through a meta-examination of his own research methods and daily happenings works to blur where Fried’s life ends and John’s (Fried often calls Brown by his first name) begins. Recounting a new insight in each chapter, for example, Fried walks through his research at one point returning to Brown’s last words before his death “now read[ing] it with some emotion” (Fried 13). The emotion Fried feels for Brown continues, as he “wanted to become acquainted with John Brown directly,” and to “know about his conduct at home, about his relations with his wife and children” (Fried 17, 30). In the end, Fried reveals that his fascination with Brown led to a book that is ultimately about “the sense of curiosity and discovery that had drawn me deeper and deeper, often against my better judgement, into his life and times...it would be about John Brown and me and our strange friendship” (Fried 276). A strange posthumous friendship indeed, a friendship that turns on emotion, that wavers about going deeper into Brown’s life against one’s better judgement (of what?). These homosocial haunts that foray into the life of Brown for strange friendships nevertheless produces strange scholarly bedfellows.

While my interests and intentions for this chapter lie elsewhere, the very fact that this boy’s club on Brown gestures to a type of scholarly compulsive homosociality means that there is ample room for further investigation to this discursively erotic trend amongst the men in John Brown’s life and legacy. Intervening into this homoerotic masculinist

¹³⁴ Albert Fried, *John Brown’s Journey: Notes and Reflections on His America and Mine* (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1978).

world might very well be through calling attention to this overt desire towards connecting personally with John Brown's life, but also, it includes turning more centrally towards those white feminist and black feminist renderings of Brown that often, save Child, make little reach to identify with Brown, to become his "strange friend." If John Brown's bed is one site of vexed desires, homoeroticism, and interracial sympathies, situating Brown as an imagined lover to the sympathetic abolitionists and an imagined father to the enslaved, then I hope to consider, *further*, how John Brown's bed and his "cross-racial blood" circulates in the cultural imaginary of African American women's fiction and art.

Prison Bed

In 1860, one year after writing her sentimental letters to Brown in the name of the abolitionist cause, Lydia Maria Child wrote what is now a well known letter to Harriet Jacobs. Serving as Jacobs's amanuensis for her slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Child offers only two editorial remarks in her letter to Jacobs, believing the manuscript to be well written and comprised of interesting events. Of the two changes, the first is that Child wishes to hear more of "the outrages committed on the colored people, in Nat Turner's time." The second advised alteration, not unrelated to the first, is the following: "I think the last Chapter, about John Brown, had better be omitted. It does not naturally come into your story, and the M.S. is already too long. Nothing can be so appropriate to end with, as the death of your grand mother."¹³⁵ Putting these two editorial remarks together, Child implies that Jacobs's sentiments about the Brown rebellion would

¹³⁵ Lydia Maria Child, "Letter to Harriet Jacobs," August 13, 1860. Isaac and Amy Post Family Papers, University of Rochester Library.

be better served in the previous chapter in which Jacobs's recalls Nat Turner's slave rebellion. As Bruce Mills argues, "this chapter [on Nat Turner] offer[s] Jacobs the opportunity to comment upon Brown's rebellion *obliquely* and in a place that would not disrupt so dramatically the 'natural order' of the story."¹³⁶ Child's remarks here are telling. As this letter is dated only eight months after Brown's execution, it appears that Jacobs's chapter on Brown would be pointed and timely. However, Child herself, also in 1860, published her *Correspondence* letters between Brown, Wise, and herself (those we read above); and in this regard, we are left to wonder if Child feels some "natural" purchase upon Brown's rebellion over and above Jacobs. Pairing Jacobs with Nat Turner's rebellion, and pairing herself with Brown's, Child seems to insert a rather remarkable racial rift here, in which the rebellion led by the enslaved fits Jacobs, and John Brown's rebellion led by whites fits Child, despite Brown's profuse insistence that his rebellion was not for abolitionists, but was for the enslaved. Yet, any other pairing, according to Child, would disturb the "natural order" of things. Moreover, that Jacobs displaces her sentiments for Brown's rebellion onto Turner's effects a narrative strategy that Mills here names as "oblique." African American women are only allowed and ever able to arrive at Brown's rebellion aslant, through displacement. It is this narrative strategy, I would like to suggest, that remains cultivated and championed in the works of Michelle Cliff, Kara Walker, and Pauline Hopkins, perhaps in homage to Jacobs having the words ripped out from under her, perhaps in radical defiance to keep intact this

¹³⁶ Bruce Mills, "Lydia Maria Child and the Endings to Harriet Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*," *American Literature* 64.2 (1992): 257 (my emphasis).

rhetorical violence, now spinning forth into creative, oblique offerings of Brown that would never otherwise be heard. Theirs are the narratives that bite.

Had Jacobs printed this chapter, she would have been the first African American woman to publish her perspective of Brown's raid (was she in favor of it? Did she have criticisms to voice? Was she too affected by Brown's faulty change of plans, along with Harriet Tubman and Mary Ellen Pleasant?). Instead, it isn't until 1902, with Pauline Hopkins's novel, that we arrive at the first full length "oblique" narration of Brown's rebellion by an African American woman. Hopkins's novel, *Winona: A Tale of Negro Life in the South and Southwest* (1902) was published in the *Colored American Magazine*, an African American periodical for which Hopkins was a board member and a prolific fiction writer, journalist, and editor.¹³⁷ As the title of the novel makes clear, *Winona* is and is not about John Brown. Writing amidst the failures of post-Civil War reconstruction and the incessant racism and violence against people of color instituted by Jim Crow lynch law at the turn of the century, Hopkins, interestingly, decides to set *Winona* entirely in the pre-Civil War period, in the geographic regions of upstate New York and the "bleeding Kansas" conflict zone. Drawing on the history of "John Brown and the Free Soil movement in Kansas," Hazel Carby argues, "*Winona* was transparently a call for organized acts of resistance against contemporary persecution displaced onto a fictional history."¹³⁸ Using the history of "Bleeding Kansas" and Brown's fight against slavery in this region as a point of contact for Hopkins's contemporary moment that is plagued by

¹³⁷ Pauline Hopkins, *Winona: A Tale of Negro Life in the South and Southwest* (London: Dodo Press, 2008).

¹³⁸ Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987): 155.

Jim Crow violence, Hopkins comes to illuminate the history of John Brown only as it is relevant to the current perspective of post-reconstruction civil rights struggles in North America.

Tellingly, Hopkins begins her story of John Brown obliquely, through charting the “many strange tales of romantic happenings in this mixed communities of Anglo-Saxons, Indians, and Negroes” along the American and Canadian borders (Hopkins 1). It is for this reason that *Winona* is more often read as an interracial romance or a tragic mulatta tale that situates the mixed-raced Winona and her white love interest Maxwell at the heart of the novel, rather than a novel in which John Brown takes center stage. However, the idea of a romance should not be considered as so far off and disparate from the legacy of Brown. Indeed, Lydia Maria Child’s sentimental letters to Brown certainly alight a romantic interest in his fate and legacy. Furthermore, De Witt’s narrative, *The Life, Trial, and Execution of John Brown*, published only weeks after Brown’s execution, opens by stating that “the romantic history and personal character of the chief actor [John Brown], have awakened in the public mind an ardent desire to know more of the man and his intentions” (De Witt 7). As I will show in detail later, much of Hopkins’s descriptions of Brown are taken directly from De Witt’s text, and it is perhaps likely that Hopkins is responding to such a call that De Witt lays out -- Hopkins provides us one expression of the “ardent desire” to know more of the “romantic history” of Brown.¹³⁹ By narrating

¹³⁹ It is important to note that De Witt’s text is admittedly a compilation of sorts, one that draws on various journalistic and biographical reports of Brown produced during the tenure of Brown’s campaigns. While I am unable to know if Pauline Hopkins is directly referencing De Witt or the sources that De Witt drew from, what remains significant is Hopkins’s clear use of the historical records of the day to create an alternative history within her fiction without straying too far from well known sources audiences would most likely be familiar with.

Brown's history through the genre of romance and by foregrounding the interracial character Winona, Hopkins indeed offers a speculative approach to the many unseen accounts that might very well permeate the hidden history of Brown's "intentions" and actions in Kansas during his anti-slavery cause.

Moreover, Hopkins's decision, as Hazel Carby points out, to focus her romantic history of Brown within Kansas as opposed to Harper's Ferry reads in line with De Witt's account of Brown's years in Kansas. As De Witt states, "The career of Brown in Kansas was more exciting and romantic than the fabulous history of many a famous hero of romance" (De Witt 14). Hopkins's romance, then, should not be slighted for using an "unconventional" genre form to enumerate the "exciting and romantic" events of Brown's life in Kansas. While W.E.B. Du Bois is often credited over Hopkins for providing the first African American vantage point towards the life and legacy of Brown in his biography *John Brown*, Hopkins's romance, narrated as tracing "negro life in the South and Southwest," offers not only a version of Brown's history through the lens of the struggles of "negro life," but her romantic vision is in keeping with even the most historicist of accounts of Brown from the nineteenth-century. Her romance, then, is perhaps all the more true to form than an avowedly historical appeal to the romantic legacy of John Brown's largely undocumented life in Kansas.

Hopkins's novel follows the character Winona, a young mulatta woman whose mother escaped slavery via the underground railroad, and settled in Buffalo New York with a white man, named White Eagle, who had been adopted in his later years by the Seneca Tribe. White Eagle married his wife in Canada, and soon after they moved back to Buffalo they had a child, Winona; yet childbirth brought the death of the mother. White

Eagle raised Winona along with an adopted mulatto boy, Judah, whose mother died trying to reach freedom in Canada. Aided by the help of “an old Indian squaw” Nokomis, this interracial family exemplifies Hopkins’s novelistic pursuit, to reveal that the “mixed community of Anglo-Saxons, Indians, and Negroes” stands as testament to anyone who will “try in vain to find the dividing line supposed to be a natural barrier between the whites and the dark-skinned race” (Hopkins 1).

Intervening into this world of interracial “romantic happenings” are two slave catchers. Looking for Winona’s now deceased mother who escaped slavery, the two men kill White Eagle and sell Winona and Judah “down on a Missouri plantation” (Hopkins 28). Caught in the midst of this dramatic action, a passerby, the novel’s white hero Warren Maxwell, and a neighbor, Mr. Maybe, set out to Missouri to retrieve Winona and Judah. Successful in their pursuit, they free Winona and Judah, yet Maxwell is caught and thrown in prison. Mr. Maybe, already acquainted with John Brown, joins his troupe in the bleeding border Kansas-Missouri region. John Brown and Winona devise an elaborate scheme in which Winona cross-dresses as a black man in order to free Maxwell from prison. The remainder of the novel continues with heavy, dramatic fighting against the pro-slavery “rough riders” of Missouri and Brown and his Free Soilers, who seek retribution for the wrongs done to Winona. In the end, we find that Maxwell was really a British agent, looking for White Eagle in order to hand over to him an enormous inheritance; at his death, then, Winona becomes his heir. Now free and an heiress to a large fortune, Winona moves to England with Maxwell and Judah.

While the dramatic action of the plot follows Winona from birth, to enslavement, to freedom, the geographic and historical mapping of the plot follows, quite pointedly,

John Brown's own movement from the New York/Canada border region, to the Kansas-Missouri border region, both of which plant the seeds for his later uprising at Harper's Ferry. Moreover, Hopkins's *Winona* also affords the opportunity to consider Brown's interraciality as not just a black-white affinity, but as a white-black-indigenous crossing. Indeed the trajectory of the novel, moving from Seneca lands in upstate NY, to Seneca removal lands in the Kansas border region which was also Indian territory, situates John Brown's geographical trajectory to mirror indigenous removal even while Brown's "cause" was avidly anti-slavery. That is, the racial harmony that Hopkins outlines between "Anglos, Indians, and Negroes" in the Buffalo region is a reflection of the period before Native removal in the 1830s-1840s, in which the Seneca and Oneida tribes, among others, occupied upstate New York. In Du Bois's biography (drawing from Sanborn's original *Life and Letters of John Brown*), we learn that as a boy, Brown "roamed in the forests of norther Ohio...the new world of wild beast and the wilder brown men...At first Indians filled him with a strange fear. But his kindly old father thought of Indians as neither vermin nor property and this fear 'soon wore off and he used to hang about them quite as much as was consistent with good manners.'"¹⁴⁰ Even later, Brown learned to "talk Indian" (Du Bois, 21-22). Hopkins layers this history with that of the later abolitionist causes in the region, in which "Buffalo was an anti-slavery stronghold, - the last most convenient station on the underground railroad" (Hopkins 2). John Brown, as well, lived in North Elba, in Essex County New York, which was "the scene of Gerrit

¹⁴⁰ W.E. Burghardt Du Bois, *John Brown* (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Company, 1909): 21.

Smith's abortive attempts at negro colonization" (DeWitt 9). John Brown lived in this region in the early 1850s, and quickly moved from New York to the Kansas-Missouri border to fight against the pro-slavery proponents who were moving into Kansas.

While Brown's move to Kansas is seen as declaratively anti-slavery, it is important to note that this same move from New York to Kansas territory was that of Indian Removal in the 1830s and 1840s. The Seneca as well as the Oneida, who were indigenous to the region near North Elba, were removed to Indian territory north of Oklahoma and significantly the Oneida occupied the land directly north of Pottawatomie, the site of Brown's infamous bloody battle against Missouri slaveholders. Thus, when Brown adopts the Anglicized, hybridized indigenous name of "Osawatimie Brown" (a combined name of the indigenous tribes Osage and Pottawatomie who were removed to Kansas), his anti-slavery cause is necessarily caught up in the parallel history of Indian removal to this territory.¹⁴¹ The racial harmony that Hopkins's establishes in the New York region is thus set in upended when the novel moves to the Kansas-Missouri territory. Bleeding Kansas, for Hopkins, is dually symbolic of anti-Native racism through Jacksonian removal policies, and anti-black racism through the Compromise of 1850, which repealed the Missouri Compromise opening up new land in Kansas to be the site of popular sovereignty struggle to either institute or eradicate slavery in the territory.

¹⁴¹ Additionally, John Stauffer provides a brief overview of Brown's "Indian influence" and his taking on of the native name "Osawatimie Brown" in his chapter "Learning from Indians" in *The Black Hearts of Men*.

Hopkins's strategic layering of these cross-racial histories thus situates another life of Brown within a joint discourse of Afro-Native-Settler racializations.¹⁴²

The historical displacements and spatial moves that align Afro-Native-Settler geography in the broader reach of *Winona* are made acute as the novel follows Winona from New York to Kansas. In one regard, then, the character Winona becomes the geographical double to Brown, just as Brown's geography is doubled by U.S. Native removal policies. These points of convergence emerge most forcefully in the story when Winona, who is born mulatto and culturally raised as Seneca, is "removed" to the Kansas-Missouri border not as a part of Andrew Jackson's Native removal policy, but as a slave. She is sold to Colonel Titus, owner of the large "Magnolia Farm" plantation and vehement border pro-slavery advocate for the Kansas territory. Mr. Maxwell and Mr. Maybe enlist the aid of John Brown and the members of his camp. Winona and Judah are freed when their owners are occupied by a rousing game of gambling and drinking while onboard a river boat. After they escape their captors and reach Brown's camp safely, the scene is described in precisely the same detail from De Witt's account, as here Hopkins's historical romance continues to blend fiction with the historical record: "Three or four armed men were lying on red and blue blankets on the ground, and two fine-looking youths -- grandsons of John Brown -- stood near, leaning on their arms. Old John Brown

¹⁴² For more on *Winona* and Hopkins's incorporation of indigenous histories, see Colleen O'Brien, "'All the Land Had Changed': Territorial Expansion and the Native American Past in Pauline Hopkins's *Winona*," *Studies in American Fiction* 41.1 (2014): 27-48.

himself stood near the fire with his shirt sleeves rolled up, a large piece of pork in his hands which he had cut from a pig, barely cold, lying near” (Hopkins 71-72).¹⁴³

After being received into Brown’s camp, Winona is taken “under the patriarchal care of Captain Brown,” who as “pastor, guide, and counsellor” often preached to the fugitive youth around him the gospel “of one blood all the nations of the earth” (Hopkins 87).¹⁴⁴ Echoing both Brown’s desire to father black children and “further mingle” his blood with the blood of enslaved millions, Hopkins situates the relationship between Brown and Winona as fulfilling these interracial (here Afro-Native-white) desires. Indeed, Winona “became Captain Brown’s special care and the rugged Puritan unbent to spoil and pet the ‘pretty squaw,’ as he delighted to call her...There was the touch of sympathy and comfort in the rugged Captain’s hand pressed upon her short-cropped curls. It gave her courage and robbed her heart of its cold desolation” (Hopkins 88). As Brown becomes symbolic father to Winona -- indeed “Captain Brown reminded her of her father” -- we find Brown finally fulfilling his dream of “obtaining” a “negro youth” as Brown steps in as the great white father to his “pretty squaw.”

This newly established interracial family formation is further made manifest by the “touch of sympathy” that Brown impresses upon Winona, giving her “courage” and

¹⁴³ From the De Witt, we find the same description of the camp: “three or four men were lying on red blankets on the grass; and two fine-looking youths were standing, leaning on their arms, on guard...Old Brown himself stood near the fire, with his shirt-sleeves rolled up, and a large piece of pork in his hand. He was engaged in cooking a whole pig” (De Witt 17).

¹⁴⁴ Interestingly, Hopkins’s next and final text would adopt this quote as the name of the novel, *Of One Blood*, published a year later in 1903. Additionally, Hopkins names the central character of the novel after John Brown’s first wife, Dianthe Lusk, further working to decenter Brown in the African American imaginary, replacing his prominence with the women and people of color who were central to this history.

hope in her time of despair. This “touch” of Brown’s is one that W.E.B. Du Bois describes in his biography as evidence of “the man who of all Americans has perhaps come nearest to touching the real souls of black folk” (Du Bois 8). “Touching the real souls of black folk” is, as Nahum Chandler argues, a touch that is “a mark of a passion, carried bodily, invoked by a call or gesture, a solicitation that is otherwise than a simple of passive invitation.”¹⁴⁵ Touch, as a bodily passion that circulates between John Brown and “the souls of black folk,” provides one means to read Brown’s interracial sympathies as “bodily passions” that invoke the sexual, moving us closer to a sexualized history of Brown that functions alongside his racialized one. While Hopkins does not create a fictionalized romance between Winona and John Brown explicitly, and instead keeps this relationship within the realm of the familial, there is room, I believe, to read these interracial “passions” and “touches” of sympathy between Winona and Brown as mirrored in the “real” romantic relationship between Winona and Maxwell. That is, the erotic charge that this touch incites and the queer cross-dressing plot-line that ensues from this passionate connection made between Brown and Winona should not be dismissed. While their relationship may not be substantively sexual, its sexual implications are fulfilled as Maxwell becomes a type of surrogate to John Brown in the remainder of the novel.

Rather than trace John Brown’s raid at Osawatomie and enlist characters from the historical record who participated in this history, Hopkins instead creates a speculative

¹⁴⁵ Nahum Dimitri Chandler, “The Souls of an Ex-White Man: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Biography of John Brown,” *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3.1 (2003): 184.

history of John Brown's time in Kansas. In this manner, pieces of John Brown's history from Harper's Ferry dissolve into various plot-lines and character formations throughout the novel. One significant displacement is through the framing of Maxwell's imprisonment. After freeing Winona and Judah and safely hiding them at Brown's camp, Maxwell sets out for Canada to ensure safe passage for Winona in the future. Along the way, Maxwell is caught by the nefarious slave catchers, he is brutally beaten, nearly burned at the stake, and thrown in jail. In prison awaiting his trial, Maxwell is left in a depleted state similar to that of John Brown, who, in the trial transcripts from Harper's Ferry we have seen described as "weak and haggard, with eyes swollen from wounds on the head" (De Witt 55). Maxwell, too, was left "burning with fever from his wound and his contact with the funeral pile, and fainting for want of nourishment" (Hopkins 94).

More than just physical similarities, Hopkins also seems to transpose exact incidents of Brown's trial onto Maxwell's. In striking similarity, Maxwell is left distraught because as a British subject, he was "not allowed to communicate with his consul [sic]," due to his expedited trial (Hopkins 95). Brown, as a northern subject being tried in the South, also sought to delay the trial until trusted counsel arrived from the North. As the trial transcript dictates, "Capt. Brown's object in refusing the aid of counsel is, that if he has counsel he will not be allowed to speak himself, and Southern counsel will not be willing to express his views" (De Witt 58). These impediments to a fair trial lead both Brown and Maxwell to exclaim that they are being subject to a "mockery of a trial" (Hopkins 97). Brown, in his opening speech to the court, imparts this exact phrase numerous times: "If you seek my blood, you can have it at any moment, without this

mockery of a trial. I have no counsel...I beg for no mockery of a trial - no insult - nothing but that which conscience gives, or cowardice would drive you to practise [sic]. I ask again to be excused from the mockery of a trial” (De Witt 55). Finally, the sentence delivered to Maxwell is the same that is given to Brown; both are convicted as guilty for “aiding slaves to run away and depart from their master’s service,” in Maxwell’s case, and in Brown’s, for “treason, and conspiring and advising slaves and others to rebel, and murder” (Hopkins 96; De Witt 93). The result of these verdicts reads that each man is sentenced to be hanged in public.

In return, both Brown and Maxwell as differing types of “foreign subjects” are denied proper counsel, both decry their trials as public “mockeries,” and both are subject to public execution via hanging. Displacing the language and sentiment of Brown’s trial onto that of Maxwell’s trial in Missouri, Hopkins establishes a corollary between the character Maxwell and that of Brown. As Hopkins anachronistically merges Brown’s trial at Harper’s Ferry with his earlier time spent in Kansas, Hopkins invents a multiplicity of lives that double back upon the history of Brown. Just as Winona’s geographical moves from New York to Kansas trace John Brown’s spatial trajectory, so too does Maxwell’s trial mimic that of Brown’s in Virginia. These doubles and displacements only work to further weave Brown’s history into the everyday lives of those such as Winona or Maxwell. If Maxwell serves here as a type of surrogate John Brown of the Harper’s Ferry trial, then I would like to suggest that the homoerotic desires surrounding Maxwell’s “bedside scene” in prison can be set in line with those erotically charged, sentimental

moments in which Lydia Maria Child desires to comfort and nurse Brown by his bed in prison.

The “touch of sympathy” that leads Brown to dote upon and pet Winona, his “pretty squaw,” also sets the stage for Brown and Winona to conspire a plan together that will help Maxwell escape from prison. Breaking the gender codes of conduct in which “the women listen but did not intrude their opinions upon the men,” Winona instead seeks out “an interview with Captain Brown” to devise an elaborate prison-break scheme (Hopkins 92-93). While at once adored for her beauty and also lauded for her courageous attributes that are in line with “the pluck of a man,” Winona’s gender ambiguity is in keeping with her racial ambiguity. In this regard, when Winona and Brown settle on the elaborate plan to have Winona sport men’s clothes and blacken her face to become “Allen Pinks,” a fugitive slave who comes to nurse Maxwell in prison, Winona’s dualistic ability to pass as the “young mulatto known as Allen Pinks” is feasible without question. Here, Winona’s mixed-race status is aligned with her mixed-gendered, cross-dressing stunt, further aligning the tie of the interracial to the queer.

Hopkins’s narrative presentation of Allen Pinks is significant, in that we are not introduced to Allen Pinks as the cross-dressed Winona. Rather, Allen Pinks enters the story simply as a new character, a “young mulatto” with a detailed history of escaping slavery and working as a cook on a boat, who was caught and landed in prison, now working his days away while awaiting to be sold back into slavery. During this time, Hopkins explains that “very soon Allen Pinks was a great favorite and allowed many privileges; hearing of Maxwell’s illness he asked to be allowed to nurse him, and the

jailer was more than glad to have him do it” (Hopkins 99). Volunteering to help nurse Maxwell in the months that Maxwell awaits his execution by hanging, Allen Pinks, like Lydia Maria Child, desires to nurse Maxwell to health, to speak soothingly to him, and to express his heartfelt sympathies to the prisoner. With the “soft hush of a tender voice,” Allen Pinks speaks tenderly to Maxwell and calms his “tumult” and distress (Hopkins 99). Calming Maxwell with his tender voice, the prisoner finally sleeps: “At last there came a day when the prisoner’s wild wide eyes were closed,¹⁴⁶ and the boy rose from his long watch by the side of the rude cot bed with hope in his heart” (Hopkins 99). The “hope” that fills Allen’s heart while waiting by Maxwell’s “rude cot bed” might be read at first as the hope of Maxwell’s survival.

Yet, Allen’s heartfelt sentiment, aligned with Lydia Maria Child’s “throbbing heart” that cannot rest while thinking of Brown’s precarious state in prison, is expressed just moments after as an erotically charged desire:

He [Allen] stood for some moments gazing down on the Saxon face so pitifully thin and delicate. The brow did not frown nor the lips quiver; no movement of the muscles betrayed the hopeless despair of the sleeper’s heart. The cot gave a creak and a rustle. The nurse was leaning one hand on the edge of the miserable pallet bed bending over the sick man. There was a light touch on his hair; a tear fell on his cheek; the nurse had kissed the patient! (Hopkins 100)

Lest this homoerotic gaze upon the sleeping body of Maxwell, and the queer kiss between the patient and his “male” nurse be read as unidirectional, in which Winona/

¹⁴⁶ The description of Maxwell’s appearance again reads similar to that of Brown’s in De Witt’s text. Of Brown’s eyes, specifically, it is said, “His eye was sharp, penetrating, and steady. Few men could look him steadily in the eye more than a breath” (De Witt 8). That Allen Pinks here is relieved to have a moment “at last” when Maxwell’s “wild wide eyes were closed” further aligns Maxwell’s demeanor with that of Brown.

Allen's racial and gendered crossings are the source of sexual deviance, we learn that Maxwell, too, was desirous of "the tender care of his nurse." In fact, "Maxwell was fascinated by his nurse; he thought him the prettiest specimen of boyhood he had ever met. The delicate brown features were faultless in outline; the closely cropped hair was like velvet in its smoothness" (Hopkins 101). The homoerotic gaze of Allen that intimately scans Maxwell's body before leaning in for a kiss is a homoerotic gaze that is returned in full by Maxwell, who swoons over Allen's fine skin and velvet hair, quite gallantly the "prettiest specimen of boyhood."

The only explicit moment in the text where a kiss or sexual embrace is had, the erotic charge that circulates in this scene is marked by the short distance between what the reader knows of Winona's cross-dressing and what Maxwell does not know of his male nurse. As Siobhan Somerville argues, "Thus while the reader may know that their kiss is 'really' heterosexual, to Maxwell the kiss is homoerotic, and significantly, self-consciously marked as interracial."¹⁴⁷ In either case, be the kiss made more erotic by Winona's increased sexualization through cross-dressing,¹⁴⁸ or through Maxwell's actual desire for his male nurse, the interracial desire of this kiss is indelibly charged by its queer element. In fact, desire seems to fall out of Winona and Maxwell's relationship completely when she returns to her normatively gendered dress. Becoming a woman again is unsettling to Winona: "During her weeks of unselfish devotion when she had

¹⁴⁷ Siobhan Somerville, *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000): 102.

¹⁴⁸ This is the case in *The Mysteries of New Orleans*, as I discuss in Chapter 2 in which Lucy and Emil's cross-dressing stunt only makes their desire for each other even more intense.

played the role of the boy nurse so successfully, she had been purely and proudly glad. Now, little by little, a gulf had opened between them which to her unsophisticated mind could not be bridged. There lay the misery of present time - she was nothing to him” (Hopkins 118). The “misery of present time” is contrasted with the pride and pure joy that Winona as Allen gained from being at Maxwell’s bedside while in prison. Not only was Winona able for once to cross gender boundaries and embody the “pluck of a man” that she possess, she was also able to indulge in her sexual desires. Significantly interracial desire in *Winona* can only find its fulfillment if it is manifestly queer: heterosexual interracial desire means “nothing” by way of erotic stimulation.

While Winona and Maxwell do end up together, and while the usual tragic ending of the interracial romance plot is eschewed, their romance is certainly left bereft of the sensational element of eroticism. Winona’s first instinct after becoming a woman again is to turn to the desexualized and ascetic life of a nun, because certainly a life of sexual fulfillment with a white man is an impossibility. Yet, after Maxwell assures Winona that England does not have the same racial restrictions for marriage, he and Winona traverse the Atlantic to remain together forever. Yet, the ending of this “romance” tale is far from enticing: “They [Winona and Maxwell] made no plans for the future. What necessity was there of making plans for the future? They knew what the future would be. They loved each other; they would marry sooner or later, after they reached England” (Hopkins 148). The future, here, seems rather bleak and boring in its all together knowability. Knowing of the future, of an interracial marriage taking place “sooner or later” is a deflated moment of sexual realization compared to the charge of forbidden queer interracial

eroticism that takes place in the prison bed. Romance, then, rests within the frame of the bedside prison scene, in the homoerotic moments when we are transported into the “romantic history” of John Brown’s story, that “famous hero of romance” as it were. John Brown becomes the catalyst to the queer interracial romance between Winona/Allen and Maxwell. Depleted in his jail-bed, nursed by the “prettiest specimen of boyhood” via an all-together healing queer kiss, this composite bedside scene collapses all hosts of erotic signifiers attached to the debilitated Old Man. That is, every possible attention that Brown could have desired at his jail bed, be it from Lydia Maria Child or his “gentleman nurse,” is here imagined by Hopkins as an interracial queer kiss on the cheek as the prisoner lies asleep on his rude cot bed.

With the same temper of nonchalance that Hopkins applies to her unromantic ending to her romance, in the very next paragraph, Hopkins also undercuts any pomp and fanfare that might find its way into her story about John Brown: “A long story full of deep interest might be written concerning the subsequent fortunes of John Brown and his sons and their trusty followers - a story of hardships, ruined homes and persecutions, and retribution to the persecutors, after all, through the happenings of the Civil War. But with these events we are all familiar” (Hopkins 148). In this type of endnote, Hopkins insists that her story is most definitely not about the “fortunes of John Brown,” nor of his death and retribution. This story is all too familiar. Instead, Hopkins provides us with the information that Judah, Winona’s warrior-like adopted brother, was “knighted” for “his daring bravery and matchless courage,” and that in England Winona is “worshipped [as] the last beautiful representative of an ancient family” (Hopkins 148). Moving away from

John Brown's martyrdom and towards the legacy of Judah and Winona, Hopkins insists upon a reading that positions Brown as a minor character to her novel. This oblique reorientation is a decisive rhetorical strategy that further instantiates the ideology that Browns' history can only be rendered significant if placed within the narrative of African American and Native American histories of struggle.

Death Bed

If John Brown's whiteness must constantly be produced in and against his desire to father black children, his desire to metaphorically mingle his blood with blacks, and likewise, if his straightness must always be buttressed by scenes of familial association and paternal governance, then Pauline Hopkins's oblique methodology of folding Brown into the realm of the interracial, into the homoerotics of the queer is a surreptitious yet sharp undercutting of Brown's long-standing stability as white masculine hero. In a manner, Hopkins's novelist pursuit to situate Brown's cross-racial identifications as part of the logic that renders queer nineteenth-century interraciality reveals the ruse of it all, of the labored production of whiteness and straightness that must be mapped onto Brown's body. Even as Hopkins works through literary methods of displacement, her oblique history of Brown in Kansas through the homoerotic, interracial, cross-dressing romance of Winona and Maxwell continues to be re-imagined, I suggest, by contemporary artist Kara Walker. While Hopkins stepped away from those iconic scenes of Brown's martyrdom to instead deliver the profound heroism and iconicity of Judah and Winona, it is Kara Walker who, to use Saidiya Hartman's phrase, "defamiliarizes the

familiar” when it comes to the familiar, mythologized scenes of Brown’s death bed, most specifically the infamous kiss he gives to a black child moments before he is to be hanged. Walker takes Brown’s place in African American history to task through turning the method of Hopkins’s displacement back onto Brown. Walker visualizes Brown’s death not as an instance of his so-called black redemption, but as an instance of the perverse theft and appropriation of black struggle for white triumphalism.

Both approaches by Hopkins and Walker, I believe, engage in what Dana Luciano in *Arranging Grief* calls a “countermonumental perspective.”¹⁴⁹ In her study of nineteenth-century public and private processes of mourning and grieving as biopolitical arrangements of bodily affect, or what she calls “chronobiopolitics,” Luciano suggests that the public process of grieving through the symbolism of the public monument is a type of instructive act for a nationalizing project. She argues, “the monument’s pedagogy of self-consolidation is facilitated by reductive, monologic, and imprecise versions of historical events; its task is not to *teach* history but to instruct people how to *feel* about it: inspired, reverent” (Luciano, 174). Echoing here the “affective reverence” that many felt/feel towards John Brown, the public grieving of an iconic figure who belatedly comes to stand in as a type of “father figure” for the nation is an instructive, pedagogical process that urges one to *feel* sentimental for John Brown, forgetting his actual historic reprimanding as a violent, radical abolitionist. Teaching Brown’s history, in effect, is not the impulse of his subsequent memorialization. “In this light,” Luciano continues, “we

¹⁴⁹ Dana Luciano, *Arranging Grief: Sacred Time and the Body in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2007): 174.

can understand the reverence for the nation's fathers encoded in the awe-inspiring pedagogy of the public monument as both complementing and supported by the reverencing of the family in sentimental culture" (Luciano 175). As a type of second-tier founding father on the eve of the Civil War as opposed to the Revolutionary war, John Brown is revered in a multiplicity of ways that situate him as spawning the interracial family par excellence, a sentimental family form that will break down racial barriers once and for all. Brown already gestured to this sentiment in his closing speech in court, assuring the nation that his blood already is, and forever will be "mingled" with the blood of millions of enslaved. And while Brown always wanted to father a black child through "obtaining" one by whatever means necessary, this wish, oddly, comes true postmortem through the monumentalizing tale and paintings of Brown kissing a black child while on his way to the gallows.

The "sentimental/monumental" dyad that Luciano outlines is one that, in the history of Brown, seeks to grieve this "national father" through remembering him as an arbiter of racial divisions through his very ability to become father to both blacks and whites. The myth of John Brown's kiss of the black child, as this final section will traverse, is just that monumental impulse to supplant "teaching" history with "feeling" history. On the other hand, Pauline Hopkins's and Kara Walker's perspective is a countermonumental one, a perspective largely rooted in African American cultural practices that seeks to "arrange matters to give that complementary formation a distinct shock through the recognition of slavery itself as an ongoing *interruption* to the mutually imbricated timelines of family and nation" (Luciano 183). Hopkins's defiant decision to

narrate Brown's history through the lens of "negro life in the South and Southwest," inserts just that "shock" of revealing the ongoing processes of slavery and slave life that often fall out of a narrowed focus on Brown's own fatherly heroism. Imparting such a countermonumental perspective, Luciano reveals, "is the work of ruination: the effort to dig up, expose, and, crucially, not erase by *redistribute* the buried foundations of the nation's self-image as it resonates across both public and private 'spaces' " (Luciano 182). In many ways, Pauline Hopkins employs the countermonumental method through her homoerotic "redistribution" of the romantic, sentimental legends of John Brown set alongside his interracial desires. Redistribution, then, might be another way to think through Hopkins's methodology of writing history through acts of displacement, not quite rendering John Brown queer per se, but exposing his racialized queerness by proxy.

While Hopkins indeed expresses ennui with all those "familiar" tales of Brown's final days, thereby keeping focus on the lives of the black and native heroes and heroines of her tale, her end result is not in the ruination of Brown's sacralized image as much as it is in displacing that image onto the lives of Winona, Judah, and Maxwell. In effect, Hopkins's oblique method is indeed cutting in its ability to offer a vision of Brown that is only to be understood through a black and native lens. Kara Walker's countermonumental paintings and sketches of John Brown, however, indulge in the pointed ruination of the sacralized figure not by erasure of the historical record, but through the exposing of the historical record's indulgence in sexualized racism alongside its sacralizing tout of Brown as anti-racist. Importantly, I do not intend to say that Walker and Hopkins cleave here, but rather that Walker's countermonumental vision is largely an extension of Hopkins's

displacement; in Walker, we find those queer, racialized displacements that Hopkins first puts into motion now mapped back onto the sacralized, sentimental, familial body of Brown. To do so is to expose the very imbedded nature of queer racialization that permeates the historic record of Brown. Thus Walker's methodology keeps intact the profound work it takes to expunge Brown of such signifiers in his continued sacralization, along with the homoeroticism, and queer interraciality that is rendered in Brown's embodiment.

The myth of "John Brown's blessing" imparted to a "colored child" moments before he is to be hanged is a widely embellished tale that secures Brown's interraciality from the days of his youth to the seconds before his execution. The origin of this monumental myth, of "John Brown's blessing," is somewhat of a dizzying newspaper chase. Nearly every paper within a week of Brown's death reported the execution uniformly. On December 10, for example, *Harper's Weekly* detailed Brown's procession from the jail cell to the site of execution as follows: "As he [Brown] came out [of jail] the six companies of infantry and one troop of horse...were deploying in front of the jail, while an open wagon with a pine box, in which was a fine oak coffin, was waiting for him. Brown looked around, and spoke to several persons he recognized, and, walking down the steps, took a seat on the coffin box along with the jailer."¹⁵⁰ The same details are reported in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated* as well as the *New-York Daily Tribune*. Brown quite pointedly has moved from his court room bed, to his prison bed, to his death bed, as

¹⁵⁰ "The Execution of Brown," *Harper's Weekly*, December 10, 1859: 794.

he takes a seat upon the pine box that stores his coffin while being transported to the gallows.

The rather eery and morbid spectacle of Brown riding atop his own coffin during the last moments of his life is a stark scene indeed, with little room for sentimental appeal. Perhaps in response to the morbidity of this final spectacle of Brown's now heroized life, on December 5 the *New-York Daily Tribune* ran consecutive reports of Brown's execution culled from papers and reporters from Cincinnati, Baltimore, and New York. The paper ran these reports side-by-side, presenting a type of litany of repetitive information gleaned from the execution. While the majority are identical to the above report of Brown stepping out from jail, looking about the scene, and mounting his coffin for execution, one report stands out in stark difference. In a column titled, "Incidents Connected with the Execution," we find the following aberration from the record:

On leaving the jail, John Brown had on his face an expression of calmness and serenity characteristic of the patriot who is about to die with a living consciousness that he is laying down his life for the good of his fellow-creatures. His face was even joyous, and a forgiving smile rested upon his lips....As he stepped out of the door a black woman, with her little child in arms, stood near his way. The twain were of the despised race, for whose emancipation and elevation to the dignity of children of God, he was about to lay down his life. His thoughts at that moment none can know except as his acts interpret them. He stopped for a moment in his course, stooped over, and with the tenderness of one whose love is as broad as the brotherhood of man, kissed it affectionately.¹⁵¹

As R. Blakeslee Gilpin details in *John Brown Still Lives*, "The scene was dramatic, but it never took place; [*New-York Daily Tribune's* correspondent Edward H. House] was not even in Charlestown for Brown's execution. He had fled to Baltimore after earlier

¹⁵¹ "Incidents Connected with the Execution," *New-York Daily Tribune*, December 5, 1859: 8.

dispatches prompted death threats. Henry S. Olcott, the *Tribune's* Southern agricultural correspondent, concocted the scene, and the story instantly grew wings."¹⁵² The appeal of Brown's interracial sentiment finding expression at every phase of his life is one that is hard to resist in the monumentalizing of Brown that ensues postmortem. Moreover, such an account of Brown kissing a black child fits in with his interracial desires to be the father to black children. From the moment Brown wrote to his brother Frederick in 1834 that he wanted to "obtain" a black boy to raise, to his courtroom monologue declaring that his blood is mingled with the blood of millions enslaved, Brown's cross-racial sentiments find full expression in this interracial kiss imparted at Brown's death bed.

The racializing logic that consistently (mis)genders blackness and queers interraciality throughout each account in this chapter -- from Annie Christmas in Cliff, to Winona in Hopkins -- finds full expression in this last embrace. As the journalist reports, Brown "stooped over" the black woman and her child, and with "tenderness," Brown "kissed *it* affectionately." The absence of the child's gender is made starkly apparent through the use of the word "it," which not only affixes gender ambiguity to the child, but also renders apparent the supposed inhumanity of the child. In this regard the unknown gender designation functions as a dehumanization through mapping queerness onto the body of the black child. As Michelle Wright argues, "the Black body is often imagined and deployed as if it were a uniform 'thing' [...] This mystique, which lifts the body up in the white imagination as an object d'art, also denigrates it to the animal status of pure

¹⁵² Gilpin, *John Brown Still Lives!*, 62.

instinct.”¹⁵³ While Brown’s own interracial sentiments produce such instantiations of gender queerness, the displacement of Brown’s queer interraciality onto the black body is a labored trope of sexualization. In effect, Brown’s “white imagination” is entangled with the racialized and sexualized “thinglyness” of the “it” that Brown kisses.

Within one year of the *New-York Daily Tribune*’s now infamous report of Brown kissing the black child, Louis Ransom creates, as Wright argues, the “object d’art” of blackness in the white imagination when he produces a lithograph of this scene. While Ransom’s original 1860 print was not widely reproduced and has since been lost, the work is re-issued by Currier and Ives in 1863 under the title, *John Brown / Meeting the slave mother and her child on the steps of Charleston jail on his way to execution / Regarding them with a look of compassion Captain Brown stopped, stooped, and kissed the child*. Perhaps with a sudden bout of amnesia, *Harper’s Weekly*, who previously had resisted taking up the myth of Brown’s kiss in their December 10, 1859 report of Brown’s execution, here details the unveiling of Ransom’s painting in New York. In the column titled “A Picture at Barnum’s,” the report goes as follows: “In the gallery with the Aquaria at Barnum’s Museum there is a large picture, painted by Louis Ransom, of John Brown on his way to execution. He is just leaving the jail under military escort and meets the negro woman and her child...It is one of the incidents that history will always fondly record and art delineate.”¹⁵⁴ Conscripting this scene as a “fond” moment in “history” is to

¹⁵³ Michelle Wright, *The Physics of Blackness: Beyond the Middle Passage Epistemology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015): 1.

¹⁵⁴ “A Picture at Barnum’s,” *Harper’s Weekly*, June 13, 1863: 371.

monumentalize John Brown's blessing through instructing the public how to feel about John Brown's last moments, rather than to know of his last moments as a gruesome display of morbidity and death. Thus, as the song "John Brown's Body" goes, while "John Brown's body lies a-mouldering in the grave, / His soul is marching on." When Brown rides a-top his coffin, we imagine him "a-mouldering in the grave"; yet when Brown indulges in an interracial, sentimental kiss of a black child, we can be certain "his soul is marching on."

The monumentalizing tactic of keeping Brown within the realm of the sentimental appeal of the imaginary interracial family, visualized by the triad of Brown, the black mother, and her (their?) black child, is necessarily a sanitizing method through its very sentimentality. That is, the long *durée* of Brown's imagined interracial family, of obtaining a black child, mingling his blood with the enslaved, and kissing the black child as his last earthly embrace, necessarily ignores the history of Brown's own anti-black racism that appends his anti-slavery agenda. As is well known, anti-blackness and abolitionism or the anti-slavery cause are not antithetical terms. Many abolitionists were for ending slavery while remaining deeply racist towards the inclusion of blacks into the public and private sectors of whiteness; this history is not surprising. Yet rarely is Brown, the lover of blacks, the friend of Frederick Douglass, ever imagined in such a realm.

One way to read the invented tale of Brown kissing the black child before his execution is that it is a storied version of a dying wish that Brown articulated in a letter to Mrs. George L. Stearns written during his final month in prison. On November 29th, 1859, Brown writes: "I have asked to be spared from having any mock or hypocritical

prayers made over me, when I am publicly murdered: & that my only religious attendants be poor *little, dirty, ragged, bare headed & barefooted, Slave Boys; & Girls*; led by some old *grey headed, Slave Mother*.”¹⁵⁵ Alongside the report of John Brown’s kiss, the *New-York Daily Tribune* ran a second column that presented a rather cleaned-up version of Brown’s desire to have “poor little, dirty, ragged” slave boys and girls at his execution. In their words, Brown said “that instead of any clergymen of Charlestown, if they would suffer him to be followed to the place of execution by a family of little negro children, headed by a pious slave mother, it would be all he would ask.”¹⁵⁶ But Brown did ask for more than the familial and the pious through his rhetorical indulgence of anti-black stereotypes. Sanitizing Brown’s desires for those prototypical images of dirty slave children and “some old greyheaded Slave Mother,” who in her aged state is still made to have and support children, the *New-York Daily Tribune’s* report along with the sentimental appeal of Brown’s kiss function to dissociate these embedded racisms of Brown’s desires. Indeed, this is not to say that the images themselves are not deeply rooted in racist tropes; the kneeling slave woman in Ransom’s image, genuflecting at Brown’s raised and erect body is none other than a replica of the well-known image of the supplicating slave asking “Am I not a man and a Brother?” However, keeping Brown sacralized on holy ground, as somehow the man to reverse such histories of a racist imaginary is to belie his own implication in such an imaginary.

¹⁵⁵ John Brown, “John Brown to Mrs. George L. Stearns,” November 28, 1859. Boyd B. Stutler Collection, Ms 78-1: West Virginia Archives and History Online Exhibit (emphasis original).

¹⁵⁶ “The Execution of Capt. Brown,” *New-York Daily Tribune*, December 5, 1859: 5.

In fact, even Brown's efforts to recruit free blacks to his anti-slavery cause was complicit with indulging in racist stereotypes. Consider, for one, Brown's short vignette written for the *Ram's Horn* in 1848, an African American newspaper out of Virginia, in which Brown took on the racist persona of the black minstrel figure "Sambo." Writing from the first-person perspective of "I, Sambo" in the publication entitled "Sambo's Mistakes," Brown, as Sambo, ventriloquizes his numerous mistakes that prevent him from joining the abolitionist and freedom fighting cause. Such racist stereotypical "mistakes" range from reading "silly novels & other miserable trash such as most of newspapers of the day & other popular writings are filled with, thereby unfitting myself for the realities of life." Along with reading ill-fitting newspapers, Sambo also squanders money on "expensive gay clothing, nice Canes, Watches, Safety Chains, Finger-rings, Breast Pins & many other things of a like nature."¹⁵⁷ Recalling the visual satires of E.W. Clay from the 1830s, "Sambo's Mistakes" reads like *Life in Philadelphia*, yet rather than ridiculing blacks for "acting white" as Clay does, here Brown "acts black" in order to convince blacks, paradoxically, to join the abolitionist cause.

Kara Walker, in her artwork on John Brown from 1997, keeps intact the racist entanglement of John Brown's minstrel performance, his desires for "little dirty, ragged, bare headed & barefooted, Slave Boys; & Girls," and the sentimental/monumental mythic kiss of a black child that functioned to distance the racist and violent realities of slavery as well as abolitionism from the scene of the great white savior. The first image, *Untitled*

¹⁵⁷ John Brown, "Sambo's Mistakes," in Oswald Garrison Villard, *John Brown, 1800-1859: A Biography Fifty Years After* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1910): 659-660.

(John Brown), is a black and white etching on paper, modest in size, just under a foot in length and width. The etching noticeably departs from Walker's most well-known medium, black silhouette cut-outs displayed in grand scale on white gallery walls. In the etching, Walker falls closer to her various reproductive studies of the nineteenth-century illustrated press, *Harper's Weekly*, in which Walker reconfigures various scenes that *Harper's* covered of the Civil War. Walker's turn to the nineteenth-century illustrated press, along with her tropological use of nineteenth-century sentimental fiction visualized through the medium of the silhouette, situates Walker's work as a direct commentary upon nineteenth-century ideologies of race and racism, and its inseparability from gender and sexuality. Reproducing nineteenth-century ideologies and methodologies, Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw argues, is a practice of "authorial function by the artist to rewrite the white voice of the nineteenth-century sentimental novel, the mediated voice of the slave narrative, and the twentieth-century historical romance novel...By signifying on the visual form of the silhouette and American literature in this way, Walker engages the long history of the representation of the African American body in the United States and strains against African American attempts to control negative images of blacks."¹⁵⁸

Placing Walker within a literary as well as an art historical tradition is significant not only for Walker's cutting take on sentimental novels such as Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but also for Walker's place within the trajectory of African American women writers. Like Hopkins's romantic fiction of the history of John Brown, in which her oblique

¹⁵⁸ Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, *Seeing the Unspeakable: The Art of Kara Walker* (Durham: Duke University Press: 2004): 26.

perspective redirects our attention away from Brown's singular martyrdom and towards the history of African and Native American struggle via a type of queer, aslant recasting, Walker too resurrects the historical record for divergent aims.

Untitled (John Brown) is arguably a reconfiguration of Ransom's 1860 print, in which we find Brown on his way to the gallows, flanked by military officers, and interrupted by a black woman holding her child up to Brown to be blessed. In *Untitled (John Brown)*, the Old Man is already at the gallows, with the noose around his neck, arms tied behind his back, and watched over by a military guard in the background. Here, the black woman, in white dress, simultaneously crushes a white girl underneath her dress while lifting a naked black boy up to Brown for his blessing. Subjugating the white child from the scene, from having any access to this moment of familial intimacy, the black woman offers up the black child's penis to Brown's blessing lips, as here the kiss that seals Brown's blessing is an act of queer, pedophilic fellatio. In a somewhat comedic gesture, Walker perhaps takes liberty with the report from *The New-York Daily Tribune*, that Brown "stooped over, and with the tenderness of one whose love is as broad as the brotherhood of man, kissed it affectionately." The "it" of the child is here rendered the penis, and in this act of "tenderness," John Brown performs fellatio for the "love" of the "brotherhood of man." This queer rendering of the infamous kiss is further reinforced through Walker's depiction of Brown's bulging manhood. Brown stands half-naked before his death bed, in only boots, pants, and a type of garter that accentuates his virility, outlining his own penis in definite form. Brown's elongated penis is rendered even more masculine through the super-human, heroic symbolism of his garter, making Brown

appear as a type of costumed comic-hero. Brown's erect penis, then, is matched by that of the child's, as the two figures remain stimulated by this act of queer, interracial fellatio. The black woman performs as a conduit to this act, offering up her child to inscribe this interracial family as one that is sexualized not via the hetero-eroticism between man and woman, but homo-incestuously between father and child. Here Brown is figured both as the child's father and lover, whereas, Shaw argues, in the iconic nineteenth-century renditions of Brown's blessing, "Brown may be symbolically read as the baby's father and the mother's lover," thus instituting the interracial family form Brown always dreamed of having (Shaw 82). Brown's endearing paternalism to the "little dirty, ragged, bare headed & barefooted, Slave Boys," in Walker's image, is instead enabled via Brown's devotion to "kiss it" for the sake of the queer cross-racial "brotherhood of man."

The interracial family formations invoked in the Ransom image, in the *New-York Daily Tribune's* column, as well as in Walker's piece, meditate upon the ways in which John Brown can be inscribed as a nationalized, monumental figure. Tellingly, the Ransom image chooses to leave out the instance of the interracial kiss, and instead Brown simply gestures towards the child. The removal of the sexual act thus ensures that Brown's whiteness remains "pure." However, even with the threat of racial mixing invoked in the *Tribune's* column, the threat of racial mixing and Brown's now nationalized, monumental whiteness being passed onto the black family is made null, as Alys Weinbaum argues, because "the maternal body [is] either a repository of racial identity or a racializing

force.”¹⁵⁹ In return, Brown’s kiss and even paternal status effectively does nothing for the black child or the slave mother, as she, not Brown, remains the “racializing force” wherein the child follows the line of the slave mother. In return, if race is attached to the woman, then Brown’s status as a white monumentalized, national figure in the Ransom image is a status that only functions for the masculinist purposes of white “brotherhood.” In this way, as Weinbaum further argues, the “gender-specific dissociation of paternity from the reproductive process is in this sense paradigmatic of the constitution of modern racial nationalism and national belonging,” in which Brown’s whiteness remains inalienable from his own body, as paternal whiteness cannot function as a racializing force (Weinbaum 23). Walker’s *Untitled* turns on these key contours of racial formation as it is attached to gendered status, what Weinbaum calls the “race/reproductive bind.” Walker forces these gendered distinctions of racial belonging and nation formation to fly in the face, quite literally, of Brown. If not given access to Brown’s possessive whiteness, then the black mother here works at least to make a mockery of such racial genealogies. Not only does she physically suppress the white child (perhaps Brown’s child, perhaps their child) from gaining access to this last blessing, but Brown must also submit and give his masculinity up to the masculinity that is denied of the black boy and the black man. By kissing or sucking the child’s penis, Brown is forced to reckon with this racial, gendered divide; and his queer, pedophilic obsession with little slave boys resounds throughout the national, monumentalizing force of this imagined scene.

¹⁵⁹ Alys Eve Weinbaum, *Wayward Reproductions: Genealogies of Race and Nation in Transatlantic Modern Thought* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004): 17.

Walker puts these gendered/racial binds under further stress in her second depiction of Brown's martyrdom. The virile, homoerotic masculinity that pulsates through Brown's erect penis in *Untitled (John Brown)* is inverted in Walker's second piece, *John Brown*. This watercolor and gouache on paper painting situates Brown in a feminized rather than masculine form. Unlike the clearly defined prominence of Brown's phallic masculinity in *Untitled*, here Brown is still figured as half naked, but his body is put to different use. Replacing the pantaloons and virile garter with a draped robe and dress-like fabric that is echoed in the clothes of the black woman, Brown's masculinity is entirely hidden. In this image, Brown's breasts are put to work, as his sagging nipple is suckled, stretched, and pulled on by the teeth of the black child. Here it is the child that works to suck on Brown's body in exchange for Brown's sucking action in the former painting. This act of titillation does not excite Brown's bulging penis, instead, "his belly bulges beneath the folds of fabric in a round, impregnated swell." Shaw continues, "his body is busy with both lactation and gestation. By revealing Brown as emasculated and sexually vulnerable, Walker denies him his masculine power" (Shaw 87). Indeed, as the maternal figure to the black child who sucks his breast for what appears to be dried up nourishment depleted in the wake of his failure and in the moments before his death, Brown is thoroughly emasculated. But not only is Brown emasculated, here Walker reverses the "race/reproductive bind" in which the mother is the "repository of racial identity." With Brown as the maternal figure, we are left to wonder if Brown's possessive whiteness and thus his national belonging will indeed be passed on in this queer gendered formation, or if Walker is indeed rendering Brown as a type of "black mammy" figure, as

Shaw argues. The indeterminacy of these divisions, through upending racial, national, and gendered distinctions, is one manner in which Walker puts pressure upon clear racial divides, upon who inheres whiteness and who inheres blackness. And moreover, Walker pointedly exposes the inherently queer formations of such ideologies of interraciality.

Brown's emasculation in this image must be read in tandem with the homoerotic, hyper-masculinity presented in *Untitled*. This pairing is necessary because Walker's joint images do not simply work to reject Brown's masculinity and whiteness in the historic record. As R. Blakeslee Gilpin argues, "Walker takes the dominant narratives of Brown's place in American memory and rejects them almost violently." Such a read, I believe, unnecessarily sets free and wipes clean the historic record from being implicated in this queer tradition. That is, I believe Brown's trajectory throughout the historic record is what allows for Walker's queer renditions in the first place. For example, when pairing these two paintings, Brown becomes the ungendered "it" that was originally left to mark the black child; yet such a displacement is not, I would argue, a violent rejection of the dominant narrative as much as it is a reorientation, a "redistribution" as Luciano calls it, that functions to expose the deviance of Brown's racist desires. Thus, it is through the very invocation of the dominant record, imbedded in its homoerotic obsession with Brown's affective memory, in his desire to father black children, in his racist performance of rhetorical black-face; it is from every manner of various bedside scenes, from Brown's emasculation in court, to Pauline Hopkins's oblique rendition of jail-bed homoeroticism, that Walker makes explicit what would otherwise be the implicit reading subtending Brown's whiteness and his hetero-masculinity, a reading that all too often has been forced

asunder, ever to remain hidden in plain view amidst Brown's monumentalized martyrdom. Instead, through Walker's "countermonumental perspective," she does not "deny the power of the sacralized image; rather, [she] seeks in effect to ruin that image," through exposing the very deviance, queerness, and racializing logics that lie embedded within the long history of Brown's sacralization. Walker's powerful exposure of Brown's queer sexualization through his very racialization shows us, in the end, that John Brown is our quintessential "Old Man" in drag.

AFTERWORD: Speculating Upon the Historical

Throughout this dissertation, I have sought to shore up the narratives of those conscripted in and beside the nineteenth-century U.S. slave economy, specifically the narratives of those who are often deemed undesirable because their interracial sexual engagements are entangled within the registers of racism, violence, and non-reproductivity, a situatedness that leaves these subjects turned away from in queer studies. Yet, the sheer attempt to gloss over or to strip desire from sexual scenes such as the love of a slave for his master in *Séjour*, or the gendered, interracial sexual inversions of John Brown re-imagined by Kara Walker, no doubt points to the “what if” of desire, to the possibility of a desire that must be negated. That is, such queer, interracial sexual scenes from the past are undesirable to whom? Hortense Spillers says this best: “Whether or not the captive female and/or her sexual oppressor derived ‘pleasure’ from their seductions and couplings is not a question we can politely ask...Under these arrangements, the customary lexis of sexuality, including ‘reproduction,’ ‘motherhood,’ ‘pleasure,’ and ‘desire’ are thrown into unrelieved crisis.”¹⁶⁰ While we might not be able to politely ask this question, there is still the need to make room for its possibility, for the possibility of pleasure and desire in exactly the place that such affects are said not to exist. Queer interracial desire in the antebellum period has remained “hidden in plain view” when viewed from the vantage point of so-called desirable desires. And as such,

¹⁶⁰ Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book,” *Diacritics* (Summer 1987): 76.

making room for these pleasures means rearranging and re-envisioning “the customary lexis of sexuality.” As José Muñoz argues, “to access queer visibility we may need to squint, to strain our vision and force it to see otherwise, beyond the limited vista of the here and now.”¹⁶¹ My focus in this dissertation has been to rethink and re-view interracial reproduction and the interracial subject as non-reproductively queer, and my insistence to keep intact the registers of racism that often produce pleasure, desire, and eroticism in histories of slavery is my response to just this call that Spillers puts forth.

What does shoring up such narratives do? What does it mean for those past figures and the resonances that remain of them? This afterword does not presume that there is one answer to these questions, or that *Hidden in Plain* is a study that rounds out nicely or even restoratively into a conclusion. Rather, my turn to the past and these contentious desires is to find a way to give room and possibility to pleasures that would otherwise be foreclosed. In an effort to articulate just what I mean by giving room to desire and thinking otherwise about what queerness has been and what it can be, I want to turn to the closing monologue delivered by the eponymous character in Toni Morrison’s 1973 novel, *Sula*. After not having spoken to each other in years, at word of Sula’s sickness and final approach to her life’s end, Nel comes back to see Sula, despite their painful severance. Nel’s love for Sula broke when Sula slept with Nel’s husband, Jude without feeling anything for the man, or remorse for what pain she had dealt to her friend. Nel’s forgiveness of Sula does not come when she finally visits her; as Nel says:

¹⁶¹ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009): 22.

“You laying there in that bed without a dime or a friend to your name having done all the dirt you did in this town and you still expect folks to love you?” Sula raised herself up on her elbows. Her face glistened with the dew of fever. She opened her mouth as though to say something, then fell back on the pillows and sighed. “Oh, they’ll love me all right. It will take time, but they’ll love me.” The sound of her voice was as soft and distant as the look in her eyes. “After all the old women have lain with the teen-agers; when all the young girls have slept with their old drunken uncles; after all the black men fuck all the white ones; when all the white women kiss all the black ones; when the guards have raped all the jailbirds and after all the whores make love to their grannies; after all the faggots get their mothers’ trim; when Lindbergh sleeps with Bessie Smith and Norma Shearer makes it with Stepin Fetchit; after all the dogs have fucked all the cats and every weathervane on every barn flies off the roof to mount the hogs...then there’ll be a little love left over for me. And I know just what it will feel like.”¹⁶²

The “when” of Sula’s monologue, in which she gestures to a speculative time and space for love, is a pressing temporal injunction. When will all the white women kiss all the black ones? When will all the faggots get their mothers’ trim? After what point do the old women lay with the teen-agers? In many ways, this gesture to a “when” figures as a future imperative, a time not yet come, lingering on the horizon. When all the interracial queer scenarios run their course, when all the unlikely desires that may be pleasurably existing within deviant, incestuous, intergenerational, interspecies sex comes to the fore, there will be some room for Sula to love. In some ways, Sula’s vision reads in line with what José Muñoz casts as a type of queer utopianism that lies in just this gesture of speculation: “Queerness as utopian formation is a formation based on an economy of desire and desiring. This desire is always directed at that thing that is not yet here, objects and moments that burn with anticipation and promise” (Muñoz 26). Lest this economy of

¹⁶² Toni Morrison, *Sula* (New York: A Plume Book, 1982): 145-146.

desire always be a future “moment that burns with anticipation and promise,” I want to ask here if Sula’s “when” is necessarily a “when” of the future. What if we redirect this as a past moment that we have just not yet come to know, or come to see because it has been hidden in plain view? If we finally come to see these past moments, will we have gathered up all the desires that Sula calls out to in such a way that Sula’s love can be had if we come to the “when” of the past?

My turn to the “when” of the past is not to hold up the prominence of history or empirical historicism as wielding more gravitas than the present moment, or more legitimacy than imaginaries of future potentials or utopian thought that Muñoz works towards. Rather, my turn to the “when” of the past is only insofar as we can render this “when” as already one than happened in some form, so that our speculations upon this historical “when” enables a shift to imagine not only what could have been, but what could be. In other words, if an understanding of the past alters, it does not do so simply for its own being, but for beings in relation now and in the future. In some ways, my hope here is to reorient Muñoz in such a way that we remember that the expansive “economy of desire” that Sula lays out is never one that is fully future oriented, but is always yoked to the past because “futurity becomes history’s dominant principle” (Muñoz 16). In line with this formulation, what I hope to have done in this dissertation is to offer up some past fields of possibility that gesture to new sexual futurities.

I invoke Sula’s “when” to also invoke the temporality of my process of coming to this dissertation project, and its somewhat disjointed formation. That is, *Sula* is where I started. *Sula* is the register of a history that is not only of Morrison’s 1973 moment, or of

the novel's 1919 turn of the century starting point, but also of a history located in the when and where of slavery. After all, the novel's opening chapter is the only one that begins without a date, and it does so by calling up the timeless space of the histories of slavery that will always continue to pulsate despite their elision from dated and recorded histories. The novel opens as Morrison turns to the arid, uneasy land of "the bottom" a place where "a good white farmer promised freedom and a piece of bottom land to his slave if he would perform some very difficult chores" (Morrison 5). The unmarked, unknown date of a deal that "promised freedom" forces us to reckon with its unknowability because it continues to make its effect now. In this continuation, *Sula* took me back to speculate upon the historical for those enclaves of desire in places like the depleted "bottom" that Sula searches for, that she believes will come.¹⁶³ By ending this dissertation, in part, where I began, I want to keep pressure on the following inquiry: what if these desires that one hopes will come have already been? Perhaps Sula knows "just" how this leftover love will feel because she is aware of its seething presence amidst its forced absence, and her last words to Nel are to get her to see this, to squint, to strain her vision so that she can reflect on their past together through a different register, allowing her to see their love and love otherwise.

¹⁶³ For an astute and provocative analysis of how the "bottom" signals as a queer space, see Kathryn Bond Stockton's reading of *Sula* in the chapter "Bottom Values: Anal Economies in the History of Black Neighborhoods," in *Beautiful Bottom, Beautiful Shame: Where "Black" Meets "Queer"* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

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