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“Love in Terms of Hate”: Interracial Intimacy in the Works of Peter Abrahams and Chester Himes

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Abstract

Throughout the twentieth century, interracial intimacies have been an especially dense and contentious theme in protest writing by authors of color. These relationships are often represented as indicative of the race problem of society at large. As such, the theme is commonly politicized for purposes of social critique and for advocating social change. This paper seeks to explore the use of this theme in the works of two pivotal yet often neglected black writers of the mid-twentieth century: Chester Himes (1909-1984), an African American author, and Peter Abrahams (1919-2017), a biracial South African author, both of whom explore the theme of interracial intimacies to formulate their respective positions on racism and racial identity. To identify the writers' positions, the paper will perform a historicized, comparative close reading of two novels: *If He Hollers Let Him Go* by Himes (1945), and Abrahams' *The Path of Thunder* (1948). While Himes proposes that interracial intimacies are detrimental to the mental and physical wellbeing of the African American man, Abrahams shows how interracial intimacies have an inherent potential to function as vehicles for social change. The paper will show how each author's contribution to the theme, while unique, equally promotes non-racialist identities; furthermore, the paper will show how both authors are in an intertextual discursive dialogue with each other's works and with global formations of black identity.

תקציר

אינטימיות בין-גזעית היוותה תמה מרכזית ומעוררת מחלוקת בכתיבת מחאה על ידי מחברים לא-לבנים במהלך המאה העשרים. מאחר שמערכות יחסים אלה נתפסות לעתים קרובות כמייצגות את בעיית הגזע של חברה בכללותה, הנושא משמש למטרות ביקורת חברתית, בדגש על שינוי חברתי. עבודה זו מבקשת לחקור את השימוש בנושא זה ביצירותיהם של שני סופרים שחורים מרכזיים, אך מוזנחים לעתים קרובות במחקר: צ'סטר היימס (1909-1984), מחבר אפרו-אמריקאי, ופיטר אברהמס (1919-2017), מחבר דרום אפריקאי ממוצא בין-גזעי, משתמשים בנושא זה ביצירותיהם על מנת לגבש את עמדותיהם בנושאי גזענות וזהות גזעית. על מנת להתחקות אחר עמדות אלו, העבודה תבצע קריאה קרובה והשוואתית בעלת יסוד היסטורי של שני רומנים: *If He Hollers Let Him Go* מאת היימס (1945), ו- *The Path of Thunder* מאת אברהמס (1948). בעוד אברהמס מראה כיצד לאינטימיות בין-גזעית יש פוטנציאל אינהרנטי לתפקד ככלי לשינוי חברתי, היימס טוען שאינטימיות בין-גזעית הינה בהכרח פוגענית והרסנית כלפי הסובייקט השחור. העבודה תראה כיצד תרומתם הייחודית לנושא של כל מחבר, אשר לכאורה נראות מנוגדות, מקדמות במידה דומה אידאלים של זהות אל-גזעית. בנוסף, העבודה תראה כיצד המחברים נמצאים בדיאלוג אינטרטקסטואלי בין יצירותיהם ועם תצורות גלובליות של זהות שחורה.

Contents

Abstract 1
תקציר 2
Acknowledgements 4
Introduction 5
Chapter I: Peter Abrahams – “Above and Beyond Colour” 16
Chapter II: Chester Himes – “Race Trouble” 36
Conclusion 64
Works Cited 69

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Introduction

In 1956, the first Congress of Negro Writers and Artists was held in Paris. The congress was organized by the pan-Africanist journal *Présence Africaine*, and included delegations from some twenty-four countries (Von Eschen 174). Among the participants, influential intellectuals such as Franz Fanon, Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor presented their ideas on African culture, anti-colonialism and Négritude. The congress was closed by Richard Wright, the famous African American author, who presented an ambiguous attitude towards a global diasporic African culture. While Senghor promoted the "underlying spiritual affinities among all peoples of African descent," Wright's paper "strongly opposed retaining the African cultural heritage" (King 211; Fabre, *From Harlem* 191). Instead, Wright emphasized his position as an American first and a person of African descent second. These two opposing views on African American culture and identity in relation to Africa would become central themes not only in Wright's work but in the African American and pan-African intellectual milieu at large.

Wright's participation in the congress and his unique positions on black American identity serve as an entry point to this paper's exploration of two literary works by two central yet often forgotten black authors of the time: Chester Himes (1909-1984), an African American author, and Peter Abrahams (1919-2017), a colored (biracial) South African author, both of whom participated in the congress, and enjoyed close personal, intellectual and professional relationships with Wright. As Ntongela Masilela notes, there was "a deep affinity between Abrahams and Wright [that] resulted in an intimate political and intellectual friendship" ("Modern World" 35). Moreover, the relationship had far reaching effects beyond the personal. Abrahams' reading of Wright's work early in his career, as Masilela notes elsewhere, "brought literary modernism to South Africa," and therefore left a significant aesthetic impression on

future writing in the continent (*New African Movement* 297). In a similar manner, Himes' personal relationship with Wright facilitated Himes' emigration to Paris in 1953, where Wright introduced him to the local black intelligentsia and assisted in establishing Himes' career in Europe (Fabre, *From Harlem* 218). These relationships, forged early on through the national and transnational circulations of texts and ideas, converged at the 1956 Congress in Paris. Though it is impossible to determine with any measure of certainty that Abrahams and Himes came into direct contact in Paris, their attendance speaks to a significant convergence of cultural production among black intellectuals from across the world.[1] The Congress provides a useful venue where the intersection between what Louise Bethlehem terms the "itineracy" of works of expressive culture and the displacement of political exiles or dissidents from South Africa and the broader African diaspora can be evaluated.[2] Abrahams' and Himes' respective positions within this framework offer an interesting look at what each author brings to the "transnational literary and cultural relationships between black South Africans and African Americans across the 20th century" (Robolin, "Black Transnationalism" 80). As Stéphane Robolin notes, "[frequently] fueled by their struggles against notoriously entrenched racist regimes, these two constituencies were in search of sustaining intellectual discussion, creative expression, and political solidarity beyond their restrictive borders" (ibid.).

Though there was no official delegation from South Africa at the Congress, Abrahams was able to attend as he was living in London at the time, after his self-imposed exile from South Africa in 1939. Abrahams was by that time a well-known figure at international Pan-Africanist conferences, and indeed was also on the organizing committee of the second Congress of black writers which would take place in Rome in 1959 (Jules-Rosette 63). In a similar manner, Chester

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[1] Though, I would argue, that given both authors' close relationship with Richard Wright, such a meeting is not beyond the bounds of possibility.

[2] See Bethlehem, "Restless Itineraries," 2018.

Himes attended the conference in an unofficial capacity as well. As Himes' biographer Lawrence P. Jackson notes, though he was not officially invited, Himes could be seen "padding around the seminars, 'grave' and taciturn" (Jackson 366). Himes was insulted not to be officially invited, yet, as Jackson further notes, he was done "a small favor by being left off the official American delegation," as most other participants consequently found themselves on a CIA watch list (ibid.). Regardless, Himes was able to attend the Congress because, like Abrahams, he was no longer living in his birth country, the United States. Instead, by 1956, as mentioned above, Himes had already emigrated to Europe, first to Paris, then to Spain. Both authors exhibit analogous forms of migration from their respective countries that facilitated their creative and intellectual careers. That this paper chooses to focus on representative authors from South Africa and the United States is not coincidental.

South Africa and the United States "have functioned imaginatively and rhetorically as powerful geopolitical frames of reference for each other" throughout the 20th century (Robolin, "Remapping" 128). Granted that each has their own unique historical and cultural backgrounds and traditions, similarities in both historical and cultural contexts are clear nonetheless. As Robolin notes, "from their very inceptions, these two polities shared more than loosely corresponding historical phases, [namely] frontier history, racial slavery, miscegenation, and modern racial segregation" ("Remapping" 133). Peter Abrahams' growth as a writer exemplifies the claim that "[widely] circulated cultural treatises and political texts by African Americans were studied by the urban South African intelligentsia from the dawn of the twentieth century" and had tremendous effects on their philosophical, intellectual and creative production (Robolin, "Remapping" 134). Indeed, in 1937, when Abrahams was eighteen, he recounts picking up a book at random from the shelves devoted to American Negroes in the library of the Bantu Men's

Center. The book was W.E.B. Du Bois' *The Souls of Black Folk*. Reading the book had the "impact of a revelation," as until then Abrahams "had no words to voice that knowledge" that the "Negro is not free" (*Tell Freedom* 193). Du Bois famously determined that the problem of the twentieth century was that of the color line, and Abrahams felt as if "for all the thousands of miles, for all the ocean, between the land and people of whom he wrote and my land, Du Bois might have been writing about my land and my people" (ibid). Abrahams experienced a deep affinity with the global black community, reveling in the discovery that "the world could never again belong to white people only" (194).[3]

This revelation proved formative and awakened in Abrahams the need for freedom of the mind as well as igniting a vision of freedom from racial domination for South Africa at large. In 1939 Abrahams self-exiled from South Africa to the United Kingdom, some nine years before the official apartheid state came into being. In his 1954 autobiographical novel *Tell Freedom*, Abrahams writes that he had to leave South Africa in order to find a life that "transcended race and colour," and that he had the "need to write, to tell freedom, and for this [he] needed to be personally free" (311). Though writing from afar, Abrahams continued to focus his creative energy on South Africa and the problem of the color bar. Writing in English for a Western, Anglophone audience, he attempted to shed light on the situation in apartheid South Africa. It is interesting to note that while Abrahams served as an inspiration for future generations of South African writers, he did not leave a lasting aesthetic imprint upon a more radical African literary tradition but was seen as "the champion of Western liberalism" (Ogungbesan, "Long Way" 187-

[3] Along with Du Bois, Abrahams also discovered the literary works of Langston Hughes, with whom he would maintain a decades-long friendship, a friendship that would later facilitate Abrahams' first visit to the United States in 1955. During that visit Abrahams spoke at a gathering sponsored by the American Committee on Africa about the "Timetable for Freedom in South Africa," thus productively connecting the civil rights struggles of African Americans to those of the South Africans.

188). Ironically, Kolawole Ogungbesan, one of the few critics to engage extensively with Abrahams' work, notes that the Western readership for which Abrahams was writing remained unimpressed, since Abrahams did not provide it with a much coveted, and expected, sense of exoticism in his works (ibid).

A similar revelation is detailed by Chester Himes in his autobiography *The Quality of Hurt* (1972). Where Abrahams was emboldened and elevated by the works of the African American writers he encountered, Himes felt disconnected from both white and black America:

> I decided to leave the United States forever if I had the chance . . . I could not be a revolutionary, even if I had wanted to, because they wouldn't have me. The whites rejected me, the blacks didn't want me. I felt like a man without a country, which in fact I was. (103)

Himes' sense of isolation would become a recurring motif in his works at large. Instead of finding comfort in a global, pan-Africanist identity like Abrahams, Himes would continue to struggle with the meaning of being a black in America. Believing that a "distance from America would benefit his craft and allow him to understand American life in more perceptive ways" (Garcia 81), Himes continued to write about the race problem in the United States throughout his career, although he never returned to the country of his birth.

It is important to note, however, that although Himes is working against notions of pan-Africanism in the 1940s, he is nevertheless in a discursive dialogue with global formations of black identity. Later in his career, he would purposefully turn to Africa, specifically to South Africa, in order to articulate his protest and understanding of the problem of American blacks. In response to the Newark race riots of 1967, which lasted for five days and resulted in 26 deaths, Himes wrote that African Americans are "never seen until they lie bloody and dead from a

policeman's bullet on the hot dirty pavement of a Ghetto street"; significantly, he also added that this Ghetto looked "shockingly similar to that in large cities in South Africa," and further commented that the "police manhandled African American citizens with the same techniques as the apartheid regime" (Himes, "On the Use of Force" in Jackson 466). If the discursive circulation of ideas seemed often to be one-sided from the United States to South Africa, we now see how "for black Americans, 'apartheid' became the borrowed term of reference for their own American condition; South Africa lent African Americans a lexicon and critical terminology" with which to assess and respond to their specific situation (Robolin, "Remapping" 145). Given the genesis of this project, it is worth noting that Louise Bethlehem's paradigm of the "global itinerary" of anti-apartheid expressive culture generalizes the itineracy of the signifier "apartheid," as well as of works of expressive culture beyond bi-directional comparison. The outward movement of texts, musical performances and visual culture from South Africa, and their modification in local contexts of reception elsewhere becomes, for Bethlehem, a means to assess Cold War responses to situations of racial contestation more globally.[4] Of course since this circulation occurs both in time and in space, it is important to understand that the deployment of South Africa itself needs to be historicized (Bethlehem, "Restless Itineraries" 50). This is true for Himes as well. If in 1945 he seeks to reject his African ancestry, as will be shown later in the paper in the discussion of his novel *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, by the 1960s, when the American Civil Rights Movement was at the height of its activity, he would proceed to forge transnational bonds of solidarity among African Americans and South African blacks through himself offering a comparative perspective on the plight of the two peoples in his essay "On the Use of Force" published in 1967 and cited above.[5]

[4] See Bethlehem, "Scientific Proposal," 2013.
[5] For more on the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s see Newman, 2004.

Richard Wright, conversely, already recognized in the 1940s the potential for, and indeed strongly felt, transnational solidarity between the United States and South Africa. In a short piece about *The Path of Thunder*, a 1948 novel by Abrahams that will be analyzed in this paper, Wright notes that to read Abrahams is "to be haunted by the feeling that he is writing about our own problems," and further adds that "[Abrahams'] art is powerful enough to bridge the gap of oceans and cultures, and make you feel and think" (Wright in Fabre, *Books and Writers* 3). Significantly, as Fabre mentions, Wright had read the novel in manuscript form in 1947 and had himself recommended it for publication to Harper's (ibid.), and in doing so, actively promoted the transnational circulation of Abrahams' work and ideas from South Africa, via England to the United States. Wright's recommendation and the subsequent first publication of the novel in the United States, may offer an explanation for Abrahams' choice of title. The novel, in manuscript form, was initially titled *Quiet Valley*, presumably the literal translation from Afrikaans of the name of the invented township of Stilleveld in which the story takes place. Yet, Abrahams chose intertextually to connect the novel to the United States by borrowing from a famed Harlem Renaissance poet, Countee Cullen. Whether the titling was a conscious decision to pander to American tastes or simply showed Abrahams' appreciation for Countee Cullen's poem, the end result expresses a national, cultural and spatial collapse between South Africa and the United States, ultimately "[participating] in a black transnationalism that undoes the isolationism that white state nationalism espouses and, in its stead, fashions a mode of black belonging no longer bound to or by state power" (Robolin, "Remapping" 146).

Yet, if for Abrahams reading the works of Du Bois served as a lexicon to understand his own situation in South Africa, Himes' perception of race relations in America was individually determined by personal traumas in his early life in the American South. Born in Missouri, Himes

experienced the stifling Jim Crow laws on a daily basis. When Himes was a child, his brother was badly wounded while playing with gunpowder. The family rushed Joe Jr. to the biggest hospital in the area where "the doctors summarily declined to treat him because he was black" (Jackson 43). Himes would experience the same negligent treatment when he himself was injured while falling into an elevator shaft. He recalls that like his brother, "[he] too as turned away, because there was no space, no empty bed, but [he] was given a massive injection of morphine" (*Quality* 25). Interestingly, Himes recalls that he fell down the elevator shaft while attempting to flirt with his white female coworkers. Their rebuff caused Himes to lose sight of his surroundings and his footing. As a result, physical harm and rejection by white women would become inextricably linked for Himes throughout his life (Simpson II 237).

Though seemingly anecdotal, Himes' experience is representative of the problematic relationship between race, sex and violence in American culture and history at large. In the United States, some form of prohibition on interracial intimacies existed from its colonial days, through the Civil War and until the late 1960s. In this respect, anti-miscegenation laws "provide a virtual road map to American legal [and cultural] conceptions of race" (Pascoe 2). Matters of race and sex, then, had a large influence on the American imaginary (Kennedy 14). As this thesis will show in depth below, the prohibition on interracial sex was perhaps initially seen as stemming from religious or "natural" sources but soon became politicized and "[served] as the bottom line of white supremacy and the most commonsense justification for all other forms of race discrimination" (Pascoe 1). The need to maintain white "purity" gave rise to fear of so-called miscegenation and the consequential birth of a race that was neither wholly black nor wholly white. Since "[fears] of interracial intimacy . . . constituted an emotional and psychological seedbed from which sprouted all manner of efforts to distance blacks and

subordinate them" (Kennedy 23), it is no wonder that interracial intimacies served as "a pervasive element in writing by African Americans," and especially in African American protest fiction (Sollors 9).

Similar prohibitions and fears regarding interracial intimacies were commonplace in South Africa from its colonial days and throughout the 20th century. The specific problem of miscegenation, Peter Blair notes, "was twofold: that of the sexual act between white and nonwhite and that of the hybrid or 'colored' population in which it resulted" ("Miscegenation" 583). Much like in the United States, while the sexual act among people of different races may have been perceived as unnatural according to religious and natural law, the strict prohibitions on interracial sex were more concerned with maintaining a "pure" white bloodline in order to maintain the control of a white minority over a black majority. Indeed, as Lucy Graham writes, "[in] colonial and apartheid-era South Africa, sexuality came to be a field under severe surveillance and regulation [and] protecting the white body from sexual threats became synonymous with safeguarding the purity and health of the white nation" (9). Thus interracial intimacies became a feared occurrence and a "horror of 'miscegenation,'" Graham further comments, created a "phobic inability to think of interracial sex in any other than violent and abased terms," as interracial sex became necessarily interracial rape (7). The topic of interracial intimacies, consequently, became a common trope in South African literature and was "compulsively fictionalised" by white supremacists and liberals alike with different political purposes (Blair, "Liberal Tradition" 80).

Given the predominant preoccupation with the theme of miscegenation or interracial intimacies in both South Africa and the United States, the paper will explore Chester Himes' and Peter Abrahams' own contributions to the genre. Abrahams' novel *The Path of Thunder* (1948)

tells of a love story between Lanny and Sarie, a colored man and a white woman in South Africa. The novel is set in a small township at an unspecified time. As was common with novels of this theme, the story ends in tragedy. Yet, despite the tragic ending, the paper will show how Abrahams composes an “unflinchingly antiracialist” novel (Blair, “Miscegenation” 582), which promotes universal humanist ideals by presenting a productive model of interracial love that transcends the color line. By contrast, the paper will explore Himes’ representation of the dangers of interracial intimacy in *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945). The novel is set in Los Angeles during World War II, and shows how the national war effort brought together Americans of different races and backgrounds into one location where, consequently, race troubles come to the fore. Racial tension is mainly represented in the novel in the fraught interracial encounters between Bob Jones, a black American from the North, and Madge Perkins, a white American from the South. Throughout the novel Himes exposes the psychological burdens that a racist society bears on the African American man, and shows how interracial intimacies enhance these burdens rather than relieve them.

The potential meeting between Himes and Abrahams at the 1956 Congress, then, points to the cogency of reading these authors as having produced interlinked analyses of the place of racial purity and interracial sex in the black imagination at the time. The paper will begin with a literary analysis of Peter Abrahams’ *The Path of Thunder* and will then discuss Chester Himes’ *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, independently and in relation to Abrahams’ work. Though Abrahams’ novel was published after *If He Hollers*, it speaks to and is representative of a specific hopeful moment in time in pan-African history. In 1945 the fifth Pan-African Congress took place, and notions of an internationalist, assimilative, non-racialist Pan-African identity were brought to the fore. In this respect, the *Path of Thunder* articulates Abrahams’ political activism which was

significantly influenced by the Congress. Against this background, Himes' novel can be read as a contemporaneous yet oppositional response to these conceptions. Accordingly, this research essay does not offer a genealogy of formulations of race and sex in the black imagination in South Africa and the United States in the mid-twentieth century rather seeks to perform a historicized, comparative close reading of the texts to draw from them outward articulations of racial identity.

Chapter I: Peter Abrahams – "Above and Beyond Colour"

"*She can't love me, I can't love her /'Cause they say we're the wrong color*
[…] Calling us names too bad to mention /But we pay them no attention
For color blind are inner feelings /If we feel happiness
And know our loves the best, forget their mess"

"Jungle Fever," Stevie Wonder (1991)

In his novel *The Path of Thunder*, Peter Abrahams explores the theme of miscegenation through the tragic love story of Lanny, a colored man, and Sarie, an Afrikaner white woman. As a consequence of the motif of miscegenation, criticism on the novel has noted that it sets the stage for "a familiar tragedy that is recognizable across cultures and readerships, socially stymied love" (Mafe 51). However, the novel bears more significant political implications with respect to its subject matter and readership. For Abrahams, writing in exile after having escaped South Africa and its oppressive regime, the issue of love and race is literally a matter of life and death. Abrahams, then, struggles to present a love that is at once untainted by color, but is nonetheless unique because of racial differences; a love that in its very existence breaks free of political and racial boundaries and creates new colorless subjectivities.

The Path of Thunder, Abrahams' third novel, was published in 1948 and dealt with the rousing topic of miscegenation, exploring and exposing an interracial love story. Peter Blair notes that miscegenation, as a common theme in South African literature, was "intrinsic to the elaboration of the biological fiction of racial identity in South Africa" and that novels examining this trope were, at times, both "complicit in and resistant to this elaboration" ("Miscegenation" 582). Working within this tradition, Abrahams' novel aims to "[redeem] the representation of both the 'coloreds' and the sexual act of miscegenation" (Blair "Miscegenation" 602). As Zoë

Wicomb notes in her chapter “Shame and Identity: the Case of the Coloured in South Africa,” miscegenation and its consequences are inherently connected to shame, thus the need for redemption. As she writes:

> Miscegenation, the origins of which lie within a discourse of ‘race,’ concupiscence, and degeneracy, continues to be bound in shame, a pervasive shame exploited by apartheid’s strategy of the naming of a Coloured race. (92)

The specific category of “colored” was applied to people “defined negatively as ‘not a White person or a Black’” (Wicomb 101). The origin of this population, as Diana Mafe notes, is traced to the “seventeenth century and interracial sex between white male settlers and their imported nonwhite slaves or indigenous black women” (7). As such, the shame inherent to the colored person and the act of miscegenation itself resides in the “colonization and violation of the [black] body” (Wicomb 93).

Furthermore, the colored person served as a particular site of contention and anxiety for the white Afrikaner both during the period before the official inception of apartheid and beyond. In his chapter “Apartheid Thinking,” JM Coetzee traces the significance of the colored person and the danger of blood mixing in apartheid imaginary. In studying the writings of Geoffrey Cronjé, whose texts served as the ethical and legal basis for the South African National Party, Coetzee shows how

> It is mixture and the desire for mixture that is the secret enemy of Geoffrey Cronjé and his fellow-knights of apartheid, the baffling force that must be thwarted, imprisoned, shut away. Apartheid is a dream of purity, but an impure dream. It is many things, a mixture of things; one of the things it is, is a set of barriers that will make it impossible for the desire to mix to find fulfillment. (165)

Coetzee reads the fear of mixing in terms of obsession and madness, showing how apartheid's concern with segregation came from an inherent desire for and fear of blood-mixing. On the forefront of the battleground against mixedness is the white Afrikaner woman who "keeps the blood-strain pure" by "confining [herself] to men of pure blood" (168). Herein lies the problem of the colored person according to Cronjé: since "[the] child takes on the racial classification of the mother," if it is born of interracial intercourse, "it will grow up a secret bastard, an insidious, weakening force within the nation" (168-169). Because the colored person is by definition a mixture, "[mixed] fluids run in his veins; his nature is to trigger the mixing of all fluids . . . what the colored threatens is the end of things kept apart at every level: sexual, social, [and] conceptual" (177). It is no wonder, then, that Abrahams chooses for his protagonist a first-generation colored man to portray his criticism of racism in South Africa as well as to propose a solution for its pathologies.

Lanny's lineage is discovered relatively late in the novel, after Lanny and Sarie have already come together. Though Lanny is defined as colored from the onset, it is only during a revealing conversation with his mother that he discovers that his biological father was Old Gert Villier, a white Afrikaner, whose son, Gert Villier, is Lanny and Sarie's adversary after their affair is discovered. Though Lanny is distressed by the revelation that he is Villier's son, his concern has less to do with the inherent shame of being a colored person and more to do with his future with Sarie. Lanny is now worried that they cannot be together due to blood relation. Once Sarie dismisses this fear (revealing that she is only Villier by name, not by blood), Lanny returns to his mother to alleviate her of her own guilt and shame. For when Lanny first questions his mother about his parentage, she breaks down into sobs, apologizing for the affair (234). Indeed, as Mafe notes, the discovery of an "immediate and typically illicit white parent adds to the

disgrace and isolation of the tragic colored character" (19). But as I have noted, Abrahams strives to undermine this sense of shame, disgrace and isolation. Instead, Lanny assures his mother that "it's [her] business … [she doesn't] have to explain to [him]" (264). Mrs. Swartz's personal source of shame, as Wicomb suggests, lies in her position as a colored woman who had "mated with the colonizer" (92). However, Lanny does not question her motives or the affair, and in return his mother reacts with "relief, pride and love" (265). Here Abrahams dispels the notion that "shame is identified as the recognition of being the object of another's shame" (Wicomb 97) by having Lanny show compassion and understanding towards his mother. Lanny, then, is no longer the embodied site of miscegenation in its negative guise. Instead, the discovery of his origin sheds a positive light on Old Gert. Earlier in the novel Lanny also discovers that it was Old Gert that had paid for his education in Cape Town. Following the revelation that Old Gert is his biological father, the implication behind Gert's bewildering generosity is made clearer. Abrahams suggests that through the affair and the birth of a biracial child, Lanny, instead of suffering from the condition of shame, has instead advanced in life. His education was available to him because he is colored, because of the illegal act of miscegenation. We may now read Wicomb's statement that "racial hybridity . . . is somehow itself responsible for a necessary subversiveness" from a constructive perspective (102). For Abrahams, this inherent subversiveness is attributed not only to the illicit act of interracial intimacy, but to the political potential of the colored character as it serves as the "radical embodiment of possibility and [as] a vehicle for social critique" (Mafe 4). In this, Abrahams shows a possible productive aspect of interracial love: in a deeply ironic turn, Lanny is capable of achieving social mobility by virtue of his illegal existence.

Yet, and importantly, Lanny's advancement is decidedly removed from and precedes his affair with Sarie. As I will show later, Abrahams is careful not to parallel upward social mobility to whiteness and must therefore present Lanny and Sarie's love as blossoming from an equal ground. Accordingly, Abrahams engages with the longstanding South African literary and social preoccupation with miscegenation in a novel manner. In a calculated move, the narrative presents Sarie and Lanny's first meeting as occurring in complete darkness, thus eliminating immediate recognition of racial differences on the part of the two protagonists, and therefore prejudice, based on skin color. Consequently, their initial connection is founded on love at first *sound* and not love at first *sight*. When Sarie first speaks to Lanny, asking him to identify himself, he detects "a mixture of arrogance and fear," but then decides that her "voice was nice" (44). When she threatens to set her dog on him if he does not identify himself, Lanny retorts that he knows she will not "because [she is] not afraid and [she is] not cruel. [Her] voice tells [him] all that" (ibid.). Sarie similarly becomes "friendly" and trusting. She is certainly shocked when she discovers that Lanny is colored, but she is encouraged, not dismayed that he speaks to her like an "equal… like a European" (45). From this point onwards, Lanny and Sarie struggle with their colors, but not their souls; Sarie insists on reminding herself that Lanny is colored, admitting that "it was hard, though, to remember it all the time" (65). Lanny, similarly, tries to shift his attentions back to Celia, his colored ex-girlfriend from Cape Town, but instead like a "damned fool," he longs for Sarie (97).

Essentially, Lanny and Sarie learn all they need to learn about one another from their voices, which are better indicators of their natures than the color of their respective skins. Later, when Lanny and Sarie meet face to face, Lanny describes her as "ordinary and sturdily attractive with high cheekbones and loose corn-colored hair combed back" (61). Lanny clearly does not

wax poetic about her beauty, or lack thereof. In this gesture, Abrahams secures their connection on a spiritual level, assuring the readers that Lanny's attraction is not based on Sarie's beauty, and makes a tongue-in-cheek ethical statement: white is not necessarily more beautiful. Sarie's looks are also contrasted with Celia's, who, ironically, is said to be so beautiful that she is "like a white girl" (30). However, this evaluation of Celia's beauty is spoken by Mabel, Lanny's younger sister, whose consciousness is dominated by a racist-inflected vocabulary. Mabel, it is interesting to note, is the counter representative of racially-inflected love in the novel. She is in love with Tony, an English anthropologist, but confuses love with servitude, offering her cleaning services in return for the promise of a better life. For Mabel, and for the rest of the Stilleveld community, this is the only possible relationship between whites and coloreds. This, however, is not a slippage into stereotypical conventions on Abrahams' part. Rather, Abrahams uses these stereotypes to further his argument for a love that transcends race and color by first acknowledging racial difference, then sweeping it aside. It is with direct reference to the embodied nature of Lanny and Sarie's affair that Abrahams begins to elucidate his positive message about interracial relationships.

Throughout the novel, Mako, a young black teacher, and Isaac, a young Jew, serve as mouthpieces for Abrahams. It is through their polemic discussions that Abrahams weaves his political/philosophical manifesto on love and race into the textual fabric of the novel. During one such discussion, Mako and Isaac discuss the problematic attachment formed between Lanny and Sarie. For Isaac, initially, their attachment would only make sense if it were for the benefit of alleviating Sarie's boredom, and for the sheer exoticism of the act: Isaac "could understand if she had made eyes at him for the excitement" (169). Here, Isaac emphasizes the embodied aspect of the attraction; "made eyes" implies flirtation and an appreciation for the physical attributes of the

other. On the other hand, in response to Mako's claim that this "fatal, inevitable love is nonsense," Isaac offers a more forgiving and comprehensive position on the affair:

> You and I know one way. You look at a woman. She has a pretty face and figure, her legs are just the right shape . . . all these things you admire and what you see urges you to fall in love . . . But there is another kind too. By that love people are just drawn together without looks or anything else mattering. (169-170)

Isaac, then, poses two kinds of love: one driven by the body, and one driven by the soul. This, of course, echoes Plato's *Symposium*. What Lanny and Sarie achieve is a pure form of Platonic love, which is not dependent on physical appearance, but rather facilitates connection on a spiritual level. We can also see that Sarie's plain appearance when compared to Celia's beauty exemplifies Isaac's theory on love. In Lanny and Sarie's model of love, color is swept aside and Sarie is able to see Lanny as "just a person" rather than a person of color (121). Similarly, as Mafe notes, Lanny "has learned to 'see' with his heart rather than his gaze," which is "automatically tainted by virtue of living in South Africa" with its imposing color bar (54).

On a different occasion, earlier in the novel, Mako expounds on the problematic politicized aspect of interracial affairs. Mako is against Lanny and Sarie's affair, not because he is against interracial marriage as such, but because the current political situation in South Africa cannot allow such relationships to take place on even grounds. As Mako puts it,

> Now [black and colored people] try to grade toward the white man because he has the power. They accept the inferior position and try to escape it by trying to become white themselves. You see, it is slavery of the mind that is even worse than the slavery of the body. (91)

Mako is suspicious of the productive potential of interracial love. The underlying assumption is that blacks and coloreds, who are by law inferior to the white hegemonic ruling class, will only seek to be with whites to better their social position. This is not love – it is a transaction made on unequal grounds. Yet, Mako does offer a silver lining. If a man and a woman can step "above and beyond color," then their love is pure and, therefore, productive and possible (ibid). Moreover, though Mako is suspect of interracial marriage, he nevertheless positions it as the locus for global social change. Local, private intermarriage, says Mako, "is a mirror to . . . nationalism on a higher plane" (93). Mako suggests that "national intermarriage" will create "world nationalism," and will, in turn, end the subjugation of one nation by another. This, essentially, is Abrahams' utopian ideal of a racism-free world. Through the private love of two people, entire nations will come together in a mixing of races and nationalities.

Though the novel does not generically belong to utopian/dystopian literature, some key aspects of the genre are nonetheless useful in the understanding of Abrahams' message as a whole, and his exploration of miscegenation in particular. Utopian fiction, commonly, depicts an invented good society that is presented to the readers through the personal accounts of the protagonist who encounters it. The protagonist most commonly belongs to the time and place of the author's readership, and his or her travels to the good society represent the move from reality to fiction within the novel (Vieira 6-8). In a similar move, Abrahams sets the novel in the made-up township of Stilleveld (literally, silent field), and, while it is certainly not a good society, it stands in opposition to Cape Town, where Lanny has spent the majority of his life. Abrahams by no means invents the township as a construct, whether, he displaces Lanny from his path towards upward mobility in the city into the dominant feature of social engineering in South Africa, the repressive township. Cape Town, where Lanny has spent many years as a student and made a life

among both black and white intellectuals, is contrasted to Stilleveld where intellectual life is sparse, and the color bar is far stricter. Though Lanny is aware of the strict rules in the township since he grew up there, it is still starkly different from Cape Town, and he is confronted with a reality that functions as a form of dystopia, given the social engineering in South Africa. The novel, then, is both allegorical and realistic in its depictions of the moral and mortal stakes at play as it employs generic elements derived from utopian/dystopian literature alongside a faithful portrayal of the current state of affairs in South Africa in order to imagine a better future. In fact, as Bill Ashcroft notes, the function of utopian literature, and what he terms the "utopian impulse," is "not to construct a place, but to enact the utopian desire for freedom in the engagement with power" (11). Abrahams' utopian impulse, then, specifically engages with what he considers the most pervasive and problematic representation of the repressive power of the state – the ban on interracial love.

Though the novel was written some three years before the official formation of the apartheid state, many of its apparatuses were already in place. While pass laws and land acts were already in effect, Abrahams deems the Immorality Act of 1927 as the epitome of dystopian elements, and rightfully so. As we have seen, Coetzee marks the fear of miscegenation as the core element of apartheid imaginary. In addition, interpersonal relationships, and sexual ones in particular, are also commonly explored in utopian/dystopian literature as especially dense signifiers for the power of a specific regime. As Lyman Tower Sargent and Lucy Sargisson note in "Sex in Utopia: Eutopian and Dystopian Sexual Relations," sexual relationships in particular were perceived by authors of the genre to "characterize the good or bad place" (300). Therefore, any representations of sexual behaviors and relationships in utopian or dystopian texts also carry with them significant moral implications for the society as a whole. These could range from

highly regulated sexual encounters to complete sexual freedom, depending on the position of the utopian author. In dystopian fiction, however, Sargent and Sargisson note that both restrictive attitudes and liberal allowances of sexual behavior are “manipulated for social control” (304) and that ultimately sexual behavior becomes the battleground of resistance, as classic dystopias “suggest that sex is more powerful than the state” (305). In the South African context, the regulation of sexual behavior through strict anti-miscegenation laws and the propagation of the construct of “black peril” created a fertile ground for many literary works dealing with this topic in both positive and negative terms.[6] In *Path of Thunder*, Abrahams utilizes miscegenation to expose the dystopian elements of pre-apartheid South Africa, while simultaneously signifying it as a solution to the present dystopian state.

It is difficult, however, to draw a clear diametrical opposition between utopia and dystopia, for the “simple fact that what one person considers an ideal dream might to another person seem a nightmare” (Booker 3). Indeed, and especially relevant to the discussion of South Africa and apartheid as an actually existing dystopia,[7] Sargent notes elsewhere that “South Africa has a deeply divided utopian tradition in that most utopian literature well into the twentieth century depicted the system of racial division or apartheid in positive terms, and after that the same system was depicted almost universally in dystopian terms” (209). The shift in perspective, Sargent suggests, took place between the early sixties and late seventies. Historically, these years were marked by watershed moments that received global coverage such as the Sharpeville massacre in March of 1960, the Rivonia Trials that were held between 1963

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6 According to Lucy Graham, “black peril” in South Africa represented the anxiety and fear of black-on-white rape, and “typically refers to the period of social hysteria in South Africa from 1890 to 1914,” but has nevertheless been a “recurring strategy in South African politics throughout the twentieth century” (4).

[7] The term “actually existing dystopia” is derived from Nancy Fraser’s influential work “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy” (1990). I am indebted to Prof. Louise Bethlehem for this reference.

and 1964, and the Soweto uprising of June 1976. Following those turbulent years, as Ralph Pordzik notes in his book *The Quest for Postcolonial Utopia*, came two decades of prolific utopian/dystopian fiction produced by postcolonial authors from Africa, Australia, Canada and India. Pordzik suggests that the "active participation of postcolonial writers in the . . . utopian genre provokes the idea that for many of them the imaginative exploration of the future of their societies has a distinct meaning and value" (*Quest* 2). Indeed, Abrahams' work anticipates these later developments in the genre of postcolonial utopian literature in his treatment of interracial love. In a study devoted specifically to utopian/dystopian fiction published in and by South African authors between 1972 and 1992, Pordzik finds that

> [a] generic pattern reveals itself in these writings that leads from the construction of a closed utopian locus towards assertions of more dynamic systems of change trespassing the established boundaries between fantasy and social planning, determination and ambiguity, utopia, anti-utopia, and dystopia. ("Nationalism" 178)

Ashcroft similarly concludes that utopianism is a form of "social dreaming" that "[opens] up a space for political action that is buoyed up by the possibility, indeed, the probability, of social change" (4, 8). This possibility and probability is clearly already present in Abrahams' imagining of a racially unbiased love between a colored man and a white woman.

Though Abrahams emphasizes the connection of Lanny and Sarie's souls as the foundation of their love, he does not ignore the embodied element of their affair. Exploring the physical aspects of their love, however, runs an ethical risk. As Graham shows, narratives dealing with miscegenation were commonly depicted through the rape of a white woman by a black man, essentially creating and perpetuating the "colonial nightmare *topos* – the violation of white women" (McDonald 326); the white woman's body, then, "[became a] synecdochical

[figure] for the white nation under attack" (Graham 51). Abrahams' work stands out in this respect because not only does it depict a consensual relationship, it also reverses conventional gender roles for such a relationship to potentially exist, as Michael Wade notes (50). Traditionally, novels that depicted consensual relationships between the races regularly depicted black, hypersexual women in the throes of passion with semi- to fully-consenting men. Indeed, while anti-miscegenation laws in South Africa were implemented as early as 1927, up until that year the only cases of interracial intercourse that were outlawed were those involving white women with black or colored men.[8] As Lynne Hanley writes, in order to "sustain and reproduce its white ruling class, the apartheid state must impose and enforce a ban on sexual intercourse between white women and black men" (496). Therefore, sex became, particularly in the South African context, "an especially dense transfer point for relations of power," to use Foucault's terminology (Foucault, in Graham 6). And, as Wade further notes, Lanny and Sarie's love is a "prefiguration of the coming mass struggle for freedom, which will be motivated by love" (59).

Lanny and Sarie's lovemaking scene, therefore, must be approached with great care lest Abrahams falls into the pit of the *topos* out of which he is struggling to climb. The scene takes place on a grassy hill at night, after Lanny and Sarie had gone to visit Old Tante, who tells them of the tragic history of Mad Sam and his own Sarie, a pair who serves as both a literal and figurative parallel to Lanny and Sarie in the novel. Following the devastating discovery that Mad Sam had been brutally beaten by Gert Villier, who wanted the Old Sarie for himself, Lanny and Sarie decide to leave Stilleveld and migrate to Portuguese East Africa where the color bar is not as strong. It is then, upon making the decision to escape, that Sarie points out that Lanny "[has] not loved [her]" yet, evoking a sense of urgency born out of past and, possibly, imminent

[8] See G. Findlay, *Miscegenation: A Study of the Biological sources of Inheritance of the South African European Population* (1936) referenced in Michael Wade's *Peter Abrahams*, p. 51.

violence (261). Lanny argues that they are not yet married, and Sarie retorts that "marriage is a form," that they are "as married as it is possible for any two people to be, with or without form" (ibid.). Sarie's insistence is significant here. Her words reaffirm and parallel the previous claim made by Mako that race itself is a form, a social construct, not a natural phenomenon (41). Sarie now uses the same argument to persuade Lanny to make love to her; she shows her complete transformation and abandon of biased color consciousness in her willingness to be intimate with Lanny by at once acknowledging the existence of the color bar, which forbids them from legally marrying, while simultaneously recognizing its inherent fallacy.

This is a crucial point for Abrahams. For even if Sarie is truly eager, he cannot allow her to be passive and let Lanny take the lead. As Graham notes, scenes of this kind within miscegenation literary tradition commonly represent white women as being mute, or muted, especially women who exhibit liberal views such as Sarie's (50-53). Lanny's reservations, then, save him from even the mere suggestion of sexual violence. Furthermore, if we return to Lanny and Sarie's second encounter, we see Abrahams directly corresponding with the *topos* of "black peril" but in reverse. When Lanny leaves the House on the Hill, after having seen Sarie for the first time, he is suddenly and brutally attacked by two men who assault him in complete darkness.[9] The scene reads as follows: "Then, quite suddenly two *dark* figures rose in front of him. Something hard sank into the pit of his stomach. The wind *wheezed out* of his body" (63, my emphasis). In this scene we see a parallel between the attack on Lanny and the literary tradition of imagined attacks on white women. He is attacked by dark figures and is rendered mute by the force of the blow. It is Sarie who speaks first when she rescues him, it is Lanny who struggles to find his voice; and it is Sarie, yet again, who speaks first after they make love:

[9] This is a direct structural parallel to Lanny and Sarie's first meeting. Here, however, darkness does not facilitate a meeting without racial markers, but instead exhibits the very real dangers of interracial encounters. I am indebted to Prof. Bethlehem for this observation.

> They got off and walked some distance, holding hands. And the moon was high and the night enchanted. A time for love. They sank to the warm, welcoming earth, and under the stars and the moon on the soft grass in the open they said with their bodies what was too deep and strong for human language. And as she lay spent and uplifted in his arms she whispered: "I feel holy, Lanny." (261)

The imagery of the scene emphasizes their spiritual connection rather than their physical one, though it was essentially facilitated by sexual intercourse. It is also the first time in the novel, in the construction of their relationship, in which speechlessness is positive and allows their bodies to speak instead. Furthermore, in setting the scene in nature, Abrahams once more alludes to the unnatural aspect of the color bar. Indeed, facilitated by their love, Lanny has found a new subjectivity that is not tainted by the color bar.

Significantly, Lanny becomes a full "human being" *before* Sarie and he make love (239). While it is Sarie who "[makes] a full human being out of him," it is not by virtue of her body, but by virtue of her soul, as Kolawole Ogungbesan notes (*Writing* 63). Moreover, Lanny's connection with Sarie is founded on equality and not on a desire for advancement by being attached to a white woman, a common perception with regards to interracial relations (Blair, "Miscegenation" 603). Accordingly, after Lanny and Sarie confess and exchange declarations of love they are distilled to their very human essence:

> Forgotten was the ugly word 'miscegenation' that would be used to label their love. Forgotten were the stupid fears and prejudices that hemmed in and enchained the minds of men. They were alone and free and happy and in love. *A boy and a girl in love.* (179, my emphasis)

While this scene clearly reinforces and illustrates Mako's decree, this moment of unity also performs an interesting double movement of negation by recognition. In acknowledging the "ugly word," Lanny and Sarie are able to forget it; recognition of the color bar, and actively defying it, becomes a conscious decision rather than acceptance of consequences. And forgetting, therefore, becomes an act of rebellion. For Abrahams, this movement is at the very core of the struggle of the black man in South Africa. As Ogungbesan notes, "true freedom is of the spirit and is more difficult to achieve than political freedom . . . [therefore] in order to regain his dignity, the black man must transcend the color situation and live on the highest plane, as a man" ("Long Way" 198).

The novel, however, is constructed as a tragedy, and the couple's happiness is short lived. The final scene shows Lanny and Sarie barricading themselves in Sarie's home, engaged in a shooting battle with their attackers, which results in their inevitable deaths. The novel then ends with an Orwellian epilogue that summarizes Lanny and Sarie's story by simply stating that "one Lanny Swartz, had run amok," killing several people, including Sarie herself (279); thus obfuscating the truth regarding the affair and, as Mafe notes, "with the lovers unable to tell their side of the story, the interracial romance is expunged from the record," to be replaced with more racist propaganda (55). Mafe further suggests that Lanny is the epitome of a star-crossed lover at the end of the novel "because of external forces beyond his control, much as the feuding families of Verona facilitate the demise of Shakespeare's famous lovers." She concludes, then, that the novel is essentially an adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* (51). This is a useful intervention, and indeed, Abrahams writes for a Western audience, utilizing Western tropes of tragic love. However, in *Romeo and Juliet*, the Prince closes the play by admonishing both houses that "[a] glooming peace this morning with it brings" and to "go hence, to have more talk of these sad

things" (V. III. ll. 305, 307). The Prince's words suggest that a resolution has now been reached, albeit brought about by tragic circumstances. Moreover, there will be "talk of these sad things," which will keep the memory and tragedy of the lovers alive and, theoretically, help maintain that resolution. Abrahams' novel, however, does not allow for this kind of resolution to occur, and therefore also denies its readership any sense of catharsis that is expected from the tragic form. Interestingly, for Ogungbesan, Abrahams' conception of the novel as a tragedy marks its greatest failure, yet he does not attribute this to the ending, but to Lanny's character: "the situation between Lanny and Sarie has tragic potentialities but they are unrealised, because it is impossible to make a tragic hero of a puppet"; he further stresses that "Lanny is too mechanical to be a full human being" (*Writing* 61). But, perhaps, Lanny and Sarie's deaths are misrecognized by Ogungbesan as the novel's principal tragedy.

Importantly, it is not only Lanny and Sarie, representing Abrahams' utopian ideal, who suffer from the dystopian township; it is also Gert Villier, the very representative and agent of the dystopian powers, who suffers as well. We are first introduced to Gert when Lanny is summoned to the Big House to discuss his plans for building a school in the village. Remarkably, Lanny's first impression of the *Baas* is one that inspires compassion and even pity rather than authority or fear:

> A big man sat at a table at the far side of the room. His pointed beard was as red as the carroty mop on his head. His big, freckled hands were pressed palms downward on the table . . . [He] did not move or look up . . . He sat like a statue carved in human flesh, motionless and impersonal. *Neither a positive nor a negative force seemed to flow from him*. Like somebody dead, a deep recess of Lanny's mind whispered. (61, my emphasis)

This image does not present Gert Villier as an active agent of oppression. On the contrary, Gert's image is one of defeat. In fact, Gert seems lost as to how to begin the encounter: while Lanny sees his prolonged silence as an act of oppressive domination (62), Gert appears to be waiting for his cue in order to assume his *Baas* persona. When Lanny eventually engages in conversation, Gert utters "that's better," as if finding his footing (ibid.). During their clipped conversation, Gert steps up from the desk and paces across the room to the window. It is at the window that he delivers his "half-expected" lines against Lanny and his school: "We like things the way they have always been . . . We don't like the way things are run in Cape Town" (63). Immediately after his speech, Gert returns to his desk and "[takes] up his original position" (ibid). Gert's outburst seems rehearsed and uncomfortable, as though he was following a script. Though this further illustrates Abrahams' critique of the color bar or racist rule as unnatural, Gert's seemingly vacant character that is lacking a life force is not an indictment of the white ruling class. Instead, Abrahams suggests that all races, all people, suffer in a racist society. He does not only promote an ideal that will benefit the coloreds and blacks, but an ideal that will benefit all races in South Africa. And yet again, at the core of this multiracial suffering is the prohibition of interracial relationships.

Towards the end of the novel Gert reveals his own desire for interracial intimacy during a conversation with Fieta, a colored woman who used to work for Gert year ago. After many years of absence, Fieta returns to the house seeking permanent work in order to support Mad Sam, her fatherless children, and her mother (175-176). She chooses to build a future in Stilleveld whereas in the past she would become restless and travel to the large cities to find solace in the arms of strange men (172).[10] The source of Fieta's restlessness lies in her unrequited love for Sam.

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[10] It also interesting to note that Fieta represents the female version of the commonly used trope in South African writing: "Jim comes to Jo'burg." This theme, Blair notes, "stemmed from a domestication of the European 'social-

Though there are no racial boundaries preventing their love, Sam's current state of "madness" is a direct result of his interracial affair with Old Sarie. And as he confesses to Fieta, "what they've done to me has tied me to [Old Sarie] with something stronger than love. You I love, but she will always be there" (174). While Fieta suffers because she cannot be with Mad Sam, Abrahams suggests that Gert may be suffering the same love pangs for Fieta. An intimate conversation between Fieta and Gert takes place:

> Gert walked into the kitchen and stood facing Fieta.
>
> "A long time," he said with fierce intensity.
>
> Fieta smiled quietly and walked over to the stove. Gert's intent stare seemed not to affect her at all.
>
> "You are older," he went on.
>
> "So are you," Fieta flung over her shoulder.
>
> "And fatter," he said studying every line of her body.
>
> "The children did that," she said lightly and laughed.
>
> "Whose are they?"
>
> She shrugged and turned to face him. Her teeth flashed in a broad, happy, lighthearted grin.
>
> "Are you jealous?"
>
> He flushed and looked away. She laughed.
>
> "Still the same Gert Villier," she said. "Still looking for the same thing . . ." (220-221)

Though the exchange seems to emphasize Gert's physical attraction to Fieta, with Gert's studying of her body and questions about her children (and consequently, sexual partners), the

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problem' novel, race being substituted for class," and the black migration to the cities took center stage in white imaginary and anxiety ("Liberal Tradition" 480).

conversation progresses to more intimate, sentimental tones. Gert implores Fieta to come back later that evening to talk about the past. Fieta refuses on the same grounds that she refused him before, for her love of Sam (222). Gert is described as "hoarse," "pleading" and "dazed," when Fieta speaks, betraying his inner turmoil and broken heart. During the denouement it is revealed that it was Gert himself who had attacked Sam and turned him mad, as we have seen. Yet, with this conversation in mind, Gert's initial motives for attacking Sam are put into question: did he attack Sam in retribution for his interracial affair with Old Sarie, or did he attack Sam as a scorned, jealous lover? Both scenarios may be equally true. Gert must maintain his superior position and enforce the ban on miscegenation, while at the same time harboring feelings for Fieta, feelings that he is seemingly never able to fulfill. Here, perhaps, lies the novel's true tragedy, which then better exemplifies Abrahams' desire for a "national intermarriage . . . when man will really be free" (93).

Essentially, Abrahams is attempting to present interracial relationships in a positive, even revolutionary way, by exposing and utilizing the trope, but never fetishizing the inherently taboo aspect of the relationships. Abrahams creates a tragedy that successfully negotiates the lines between the publicly reviled and privately revered love affairs, and shows that the political situation in South Africa is far more dangerous and real than the West's canonical tales of love conquering all, yet it bears the hope for, and promotes the quest for global social changes. It is important to note, however, that Abrahams' utopian ideal is not merely an exercise in imaginative thinking. Abrahams' model is deeply rooted in and informed by contemporary political activism revolving around notions of Pan-Africanism. The novel, in a sense, represents the culmination of political resolutions ensuing from the fifth Pan-African Congress held in Manchester in 1945. The Congress, in which Abrahams served as public secretary, was

"*integrationist*" at its core, and "called for the absolute *equality of all races*" (Masilela, "Modern World" 37, emphasis in original). Not coincidentally, it also "advocated *inter-racial* contact," as Masilela stresses (ibid. 38, emphasis in original). The Congress' resolutions, however, also stood in opposition to conceptions of Pan-Africanism stressing Black Nationalism and separatism. Accordingly, Abrahams' position on interracial intimacies was not globally shared among people of color facing similar prohibitions and battles for social justice. Abrahams, significantly, borrowed the title of his novel from American Harlem Renaissance poet Countee Cullen's "Tableau" (1925). The poem speaks of a white and black boy walking "[locked] arm in arm" as "Oblivious to look and word /They pass, and see no wonder /That lightning brilliant as a sword/ Should blaze the path of thunder" (ll. 9-12). Clearly, the poem promotes the same productive, if violent, potential of interracial intimacies; here, however, in the form of a seemingly innocent friendship between two children.[11] Yet, Cullen's progressive position in this poem was not collectively shared by his contemporary writers, or by the generation of African American writers who followed the Harlem Renaissance. What, then, was the African American perceptive on interracial intimacies, and does Abrahams' utopianism endure crossing the Atlantic?

[11] The friendship is only seemingly innocent, since Cullen's personal history lends itself to queer readings of his work; as Charles Molesworth notes, "it is necessary that Cullen's life as a deeply closeted homosexual African American male not be distorted or falsely described" (77). While same-sex interracial intimacies are not the concern of this paper, it is worth and important to note the potential unique source of Cullen's writing, and not to conflate it with representations of heterosexual interracial affairs.

Chapter II: Chester Himes – "Race Trouble"

"*Enter the kingdom/ But watch who you bring home*
They see a black man with a white woman
At the top floor they gone come to kill King Kong"

"Black Skinhead," Kanye West (2013)

Though Abrahams' *The Path of Thunder* was written in the United Kingdom and takes place in South Africa, the novel was first published in the United States because, as Kolawole Ogungbesan notes, "it was felt that a book about interracial love would receive more attention in the United States than in Britain" (*Writing* 53). The novel was first published by Harper's in 1948 and only later by Faber and Faber in London in 1952. Indeed, some of the reviews of the novel upon its publication suggest a particular fascination with the topic of interracial love. The literary magazine *Common Ground*, for example, whose board members included Langston Hughes, wrote of the novel that "the story of a white girl and a colored . . . man in South Africa will strike a familiar note to Americans" (Shimano 106). *The Journal of Negro Education* similarly notes that though the novel suffers "some weaknesses of style, of diction, and of extreme sentimentality . . . its message will be understood by Americans especially" (Watkins 54). Though the famous ruling in the case of *Loving vs. Virginia* would not occur until 1967, it is clear that questions about the nature, validity and legality of interracial romantic relationships were already part of the public discourse in the United States in the 1940s.[12] What, then, was the

[12] By the time Himes publishes *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, there is already a tradition of American novels dealing with interracial intimacies by both white and African-American authors, including Faulkner's *Light in August* (1932), Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) and Lillian Smith's *Strange Fruit* (1944). The latter two are addressed directly in Himes' novel.

cultural ground on which Abrahams' novel was published in the States, and what implications does this have for a consideration of the work of Chester Himes?

Laws forbidding marriage or sexual relations among different races were prevalent in the United States from the 17th Century until the nation-wide repeal of any and all anti-miscegenation laws following the case of *Loving vs. Virginia* in 1967. The term "miscegenation" was first coined in America in 1864 with the publication of an anonymously authored pamphlet titled "Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro." The pamphlet stood at the center of an anti-Lincoln post-war campaign that focused on the dangers of integration and abolitionism (Kaplan 221). Though the term would later evolve to encompass intermarriage and sex among all different races, it originated in response to the fear of white and black mixing, specifically. Indeed, as Cornel West writes in *Race Matters* (1993), "white fear of black sexuality is a basic ingredient of white racism" (86); this fear was employed as a tool to reestablish white supremacist rule after the Civil War. The same fear of interracial mixing was again employed during the 1948 presidential election against Truman's civil rights program by some of his opponents, claiming that his progressive politics "'[threat] to make Southerners into a mongrel, inferior race by forced intermingling with Negroes'" (*New York Times* July 18, 1948 qtd in Kaplan 220). Yet, in the same year, California became the first state to repeal its anti-miscegenation law after the ruling in *Perez vs. Sharp*, wherein the California Supreme Court found that the law violated the Fourteenth Amendment, thus making it unconstitutional (Pascoe 206). It is not surprising that the first ruling repealing anti-miscegenation laws came during the post-war era. As Alex Lubin notes in his book *Romance and Rights: The Politics of Interracial Intimacy*, this historical ruling came at a time when

> Interracial intimacy . . . sparked an important debate over the relationship of intimate matters to civil rights activism in the public sphere. In framing interracial romance and sexuality as matters of private choice and not as rights to be demanded in the public sphere, mainstream American culture limited the kind of political transformation interracial intimacy could engender. At the same time, civil rights leaders and activists struggled to move the presumably private matter of intimacy into the realm of the public sphere and, in doing so, threatened to expose previously obscure layers of racism in America. (xi)

The issue of interracial intimacy, then, gained new political power in post-war America, now employed by civil rights activists who saw it as the focal point of their struggles. Black magazines such as *Jet* and *Negro Digest* had "regularly featured stories about interracial intimacy" to celebrate it and make it a public sphere matter (Lubin *xix*). Similarly, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, or the NAACP, who "focused on the right to work without discrimination and to serve in the armed forces" during the war (*xiv*), now cooperated with the U.S. Department of War to recognize and legalize the interracial relationships forged between black soldiers serving overseas and their European and Asian wives (*xix*).

Yet, the focus on interracial intimacy by civil rights activists was not unanimously accepted among the African-American community. As Lubin further notes, some critical writers of the time, Chester Himes among them, "challenged liberal optimists who viewed racial intimacy as racial uplift," and instead used interracial intimacy to "explore the contradictions of racial belonging in postwar America" (125). Interracial intimacy became a contested topic among black intellectuals and activists as the civil rights movement at times both advocated and

admonished the act. As for Himes, he was quite outspoken against mixing of whites and blacks, and is cited by Lubin as stating that parties of intellectuals meant to bring blacks and whites together were "primarily springboards to interracial sex" (141). Apart from criticizing the motives behind these parties, Himes, following the literary footsteps of Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940), criticizes the very desirability of interracial relationships and poses them as necessarily detrimental to the black man. Himes, then, is not interested in the outcome of miscegenation, the birth of a mixed-raced child, but instead focuses on the road to ruin that results, in his view, merely from the potential of desire between a black man and a white woman. If miscegenation as a term arises in relation to its political utility, Himes would also reflect a politically utilitarian view of interracial intimacy, arguing that any and all acts of interracial intimacy are politically motivated and therefore the possibility of true interracial connection is nonexistent.

In his novel *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945), Himes utilizes the theme of miscegenation as a device to expose American racism at large. Interracial relationships, as we have seen, are again at the frontline of racial tension and politics during this period. If Peter Abrahams presents an alternative to racism in the form of interracial love, Himes, contrarily, explores interracial relationships in order to depict a divide between the races that does not afford bridging. For Himes, no form of interracial love could ever transcend the color-line; instead, interracial relationships only strengthen the divide and mistrust between blacks and whites. Additionally, though Himes, like Abrahams, shows how race and racism are socially constructed, his particular focus on the performative aspect of race, as I will explore in greater detail below, serves only to further the gap between the races instead of offering a bridge. Furthermore, Himes suggests that the gap between the races should never be crossed through the supposed bridge of interracial

intimacy, for any attempt to do so will inadvertently harm the black man, whose psychological and physical wellbeing are already at stake by virtue of living within a racist society.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, Abrahams constructs the first meeting of his protagonists by placing them in utter darkness, preventing them from falsely recognizing each other through the external markers of their respective races. Their voices when they speak, then, serve as indicators of their shared humanity and similarity. Himes, however, does not allow Bob, the black protagonist and Madge, his white counterpart, to speak, but bases their first meeting solely on sight instead, thus foregrounding the immediate recognition of racial differences. If Abrahams focuses on shared essence, Himes, on the other hand, focuses on the false and the performative. Bob and Madge's first meeting is depicted as accidental and immediately follows Bob's musings on the general relationship between white female workers and black male workers in the shipyard. Bob asserts that "[whenever he] passed the white women looked at [him], some curiously, some coyly, some with open hostility," and even though some of the younger white women seemed to invite his attentions, neither he nor any of the other black workers ever took the pass because "the coloured workers seemed as intent on protecting the white women from the coloured men as the white men were" (22). Here Himes presents white and black attitudes to interracial intimacy, both of which are a product of the assumption that black men will always attempt to "make it" with white women. Bob is well aware of this, as he further comments that black workers never approached white women "because they wanted to prove to the white folks they could work with white women without trying to make them" (ibid.). While white men are concerned with maintaining the "myth of pure white womanhood" (Klotman 93), black men must participate in safeguarding this purity lest they are blamed for besmirching it. This state of mind is what Calvin Hernton calls "rape consciousness": a notion

that did not only entail the knowledge that all black men were rapists, but that "it was equally imperative that the white woman accept this image as a means of proving to herself that she was sexually attractive, if not to the white men . . . at least to black 'savages'" (Hernton qtd in Klotman 105). White women, though ambivalent about black men and the danger they supposedly pose, are presented as needing not only white but black protection to maintain their virtue and purity, a need that they both flaunt and reject, as is clearly exemplified in Madge's conflicting reactions to Bob.

With the nature of the relationships between white women and black men in the workplace set in place, Bob now encounters Madge, and offers a detailed description of her physical appearance:

> She was a peroxide blonde with a large-featured, overly made-up face, and she had a large, bright-painted, fleshy mouth, kidney-shaped, thinner in the middle than at the ends. Her big blue babyish eyes were mascaraed like a burlesque queen's and there were tiny wrinkles in their corners and about the flare of her nostrils, calipering down about the edges of her mouth. (22)

Madge's description is far from flattering, but it reveals much about her performance of white femininity as well as Bob's reaction to it. Her being a "peroxide blonde" indicates that she dies her hair in order to be blonde, covering up her natural color. Similarly, her face is "overly made-up" in what is seemingly a futile attempt to hide her wrinkles that are nonetheless clearly visible. Here, Madge plays into the archetypical role of the "white bitch," to use Phyllis Klotman's term. Madge, Klotman asserts, is not a unique character, but another example in a long tradition of similar white females used as symbols of "repressive white society which denies complete manhood to the black male" (99). She is a woman who is not only white but wields her

whiteness as both shield and weapon against black men – "luring [Bob] with her body and daring [him] with her colour" (*Hollers* 156).

Madge, however, is not actually alluring. Bob's gaze, moving from Madge's face downwards, notes that "[s]he looked thirty and well sexed, rife but not quite rotten. She looked as if she might have worked half those years in a cat house, and if she hadn't she must have given a lot of it away" (22). Bob does not only cast aspersions on Madge's appearance, but on her moral decency as well, insinuating that she had possibly worked as a prostitute. Madge, in comparison to Alice, Bob's light-skinned girlfriend, is by far less appealing and does not live up to the notion of pure white womanhood. In fact, Madge is described in hypersexual terms, more fitting of stereotypical portrayals of hyper-sexed black women than of chaste white women. For example, her "kidney-shaped" lips echo similar descriptions of black lips in shape and color.[13] Accordingly, along with musing about black/white male/female relationships, Bob notes that he does not approach white women because "white chicks didn't interest [him]; [he] thought Alice was better than any white woman who ever lived" (22). Yet, Bob, as Klotman observes, is so "conditioned by the myth [of rape consciousness] that he is, in spite of himself, sexually drawn to Madge" (98). Indeed, Bob's visceral response to Madge's gaze on him seems completely involuntary. As Lubin notes, through these involuntary performances, "racial and sexual identification . . . fixes identity such that it ceases to be an act of self-making but instead is proscribed and limiting" (142).

The scene between Bob and Madge clearly illustrates the tension between socially accepted or prohibited reactions and authentic, self-chosen reactions to an interracial encounter. Bob and Madge stand silent, observing each other closely, until Madge, as if on cue,

[13] For an in-depth discussion on the historical and cultural representation of black female bodies, see Guy-Shetfall, 2012.

"deliberately put on a frightened, wide-eyed look and backed away from [Bob] as if she was scared stiff" (23). Bob is not surprised, since "[he] was used to white women doing all sorts of things to tease or annoy the coloured men," and he is also aware that Madge would "put on that scared-to-death act" each time she sees him on deck (ibid.). Madge is clearly playing along with the myth of "rape consciousness" and acts frightened of Bob as she ought in terms of the scripts it provides, again emphasizing the performative and prescribed aspect of interracial interactions. Himes further explores this theme in a later scene in which Bob, the following day, has a drink at a hotel bar, where a group of two white soldiers and one white woman are having drinks as well. The woman, whom Bob identifies by sight as an "Arkansas slick chick," flaunts herself and flirts with the black men in the bar. Her physical attributes, like Madge, are unappealing, but during this encounter Bob is more consciously attuned to her power when he describes her as a "rife, loose, teenage fluff, with broad face and small eyes and a hard mouth and straggly uncombed hair . . . she looked like she got off an S.P. freight – but she was white" (91). Accordingly, and despite her unattractiveness, the black women in the bar resent her while the non-white men either "studiedly [ignore] her" or look at her with "hot burning eyes" (ibid). The unnamed Arkansas woman is well-aware of the effect her flaunting achieves, getting a "frisky white-woman feeling of being wanted by every Negro man in the joint" (ibid). Tensions rise as the scene progresses, until the bar manager asks the soldiers to take the woman out with them when they leave – she refuses. At this point Bob thinks that

> All she's got to do now . . . is to start performing . . . She could take those two black chumps flirting with her outside and get them thirty years apiece in San Quentin; in Alabama she could get them hung. A little tramp – but she was white. (93)

The consequences for the colored men whom white women interact with are fatal.

Indeed, Madge is acutely aware of the power she wields over Bob, and she readily uses it when she refuses to work with him, the catalyst for their second meeting. Interestingly, Madge's refusal to work with Bob on racist grounds is perceived by Lubin as a sign of Himes' hitherto unrecognized feminist stance: Madge, he argues, asserts power over a superior male figure in the workplace. She is merely a welder, Bob is the leaderman.[14] Reading the shipyard as a "queer space," Lubin notes that "Madge's racist response gives her power over a male" (142). Yet, Lubin does not fully address the context in which Madge performs this supposed feat befitting a suffragette. Madge is not only a female, she is a white female, and in this instance, she is a white female not simply interacting with a superior male, but a black male. Expanding on the work of Judith Butler on gender performativity, Catherine Rottenberg applies the theory to the American sphere, claiming that "subjects have been both *compelled* and *encouraged* to emulate dominant U.S. norms . . . [of] gender, class, race, or ethnicity," all of which are "crucial components constituting Americanness" (3, emphasis in original).[15] In this interaction between Bob and Madge, not only matters of gender and gender performance are at play. Madge's superiority over Bob is her due as a white woman from the South, a dominant norm, regardless of their clearly defined professional positions. Indeed, when Bob is called to his superior's office, Mr. MacDougal, Mac tells him that "[Bob knows] how Southern people talk, how they feel about working with . . . coloured boys. They have to get used to it, [he has] gotta give them time" (*Hollers* 35). The fault is shifted from Madge, who not only refused to work with Bob but also called him a "nigger," to Bob for his use of the term "cracker bitch," a derogatory term that

[14] The professional term used in the novel to describe Bob's position of foreman in the shipyard.

[15] Himes' use of the words "act" and "performance" lend themselves to both literal and metaphorical analysis. While there is a significant difference between performativity as methodology, and the intentional performance Madge is putting on, Himes seems to collapse the two together. Though Madge seems to deliberately perform her fear of Bob, she nevertheless subconsciously performs her racialized gender. Her vacillation between calculated performance and seemingly authentic self will be explored later in the chapter in correlation with Himes' perception of whiteness.

encompasses both gender and racial identifiers. Though Madge is undoubtedly lesser for being female in a heteronormative society, she is nonetheless superior to Bob by virtue of her whiteness. As Rottenberg puts it, “while there have been two idealized genders under heteronormativity [male and female], historically there has been only one hegemonic and ideal race under the United States’s white supremacist regime” (12). It is clear, then, that hierarchy between the races takes precedence over hierarchies in the workplace. Yet, as Rottenberg notes, “the attempt to embody a norm is always incomplete – norms are *ideals* that can never be embodied or accomplished once and for all” (11, emphasis in original). Accordingly, and to apply Rottenberg’s work to the novel, we can note that Madge’s “race performativity . . . [shapes her] identity and [her] preferences,” as she is unable to suppress her apparent desire for Bob (Rottenberg 36). Consequently, the struggle between her seemingly inherent lust and socially prescribed disgust concludes in a violent outburst with disastrous results.

Indeed, barring one instance during a lunch break at the shipyard, all encounters between Madge and Bob foreground and play out both Bob’s and Madge’s individual oscillations between lust and disgust. Returning to their first encounter, before they ever speak, Bob reacts to Madge’s feigned fear with sudden rage that quickly turns sexual:

> It came up in my eyes and burned at her; she caught it and kept staring at me with that wide-eyed phoney look [sic]. Something about her mouth touched it off, a quirk made the curves change as if she got a sexual thrill, and her mascaraed eyelashes fluttered. Lust shook me like an electric shock; it came up in my mouth, filling it with tongue, and drained my whole stomach down into my groin. And it poured out of my eyes in a sticky rush and spurted over her from head to foot. (23)

Though Madge is the first to introduce this new sexual facet in response to Bob's rage, Bob, inadvertently, responds in kind. His gaze is no longer tinted with rage, but by uncontrollable lust. Now, Bob does not merely gaze upon Madge and casts judgment on her appearance, instead, as the passage suggests, his gaze pours out of his eyes like semen during sexual climax. Though it is unclear whether Bob responds with lust to Madge's phony look of fear or to her seemingly genuine sexual excitement, the result is the same: rage is morphed into desire and the two emotions become inseparable and each other's only form of expression – desire will be expressed through rage, and rage through desire.

This inevitability can be traced back to the well-founded literary tradition of the Othello myth, as explored in *Racism, Misogyny, and the Othello Myth*, by Celia Daileader. The work specifically examines the trope of Othellophilia in American novels dealing with interracial intimacy. The term, drawn from Shakespeare's play, denotes the "critical and cultural fixation" on the play's theme of "inter-racial eroticism" (6). Daileader writes that *Othello* came to be seen as a "cautionary tale for white women who might besmirch either their own (sexual) 'purity' or that of their race" (9). Accordingly, white women who are Othellophiles, desiring black men, "[justify] racist violence" and are punished for their actions along with their black male counterparts (ibid). Though Madge is not punished for her actions by white society, Bob nevertheless punishes her himself. When Bob visits Madge in her home in order to sleep with her, a physical altercation ensues, in which Bob wreaks his power and resentment on Madge. Indeed, as Daileader notes, "white female bodies were appropriate targets for violence" since they were the "best means of revenge" for the black man (172). As Bob himself notes in the novel:

> I was going to have to have her. I was going to have to make her as low as a white whore in a Negro slum . . . I was going to have to so I could keep looking the white folks in the face . . . all I could see was her standing there between me and my manhood. (153)

Madge, then, is both the cause and means for relief of his rage. And again, what is made clear in this instance is Bob's seeming lack of choice—he does not want to have her, he *has* to. Bob is compelled to adhere to the "performance of a socially scripted meta-narrative" (Daileader 171), in which his only possible action is to assault Madge: "What I ought to do is rape her, I thought. That's what she wanted" (*Hollers* 156). Bob notes that Madge is "dangerous because she thought about Negro men . . . [she] wanted them to run after her," and the only conclusion to her desire is the fulfillment of what Bob perceives as her rape fantasy (155). Here, Himes anticipates what Franz Fanon will later address as the problem of Negrophilia among white women in his book *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952). In fact, Fanon cites *If He Hollers* directly in his chapters "The Fact of Blackness" and "The Negro and Psychopathology."

For Fanon, white women who are Negrophobes, who fear black men, experience and live the fantasy of "a Negro is raping me" as an expression of their female sexuality and Oedipus complex (137). Fanon also claims that "all the negrophobic women [he had] known had abnormal sex lives," conflating racism and desire for black men with supposed sexual perversion at large. (122). Therefore, white women who fantasize about being raped by a black man are exhibiting their desires for control, "[they] wish the Negro would rip [them] open as [they] would have ripped a woman open" (138). Essentially, white women project their own sexual perversions on to the black man. Diana Fuss notes that for Fanon "the white woman's fantasy . . .

[is] an expression of either a violent lesbian desire or a wish for self-mutilation" (155).[16] As for Madge, Fanon clearly sees her as a woman exhibiting these characteristics:

> [Does] this fear of rape not itself a cry out for rape? . . . Can one not speak of women who ask to be raped? In *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, Chester Himes describes this type very well. The big blonde trembles whenever the Negro goes near her . . . In the end, she and the Negro go to bed together. (120)

These assumptions about female sexuality are undoubtedly disturbing, yet Fuss, despite her reservations, reminds us that "Fanon constructs his reading of this particular fantasy during a period when fabricated charges of rape were used as powerful colonial instruments of fear and intimidation against black men" (156). Indeed, as the novel clearly shows, Bob, despite his musings, makes no attempt to rape Madge, and is in fact repulsed and scared by the very notion.

During a lunch break at the shipyard, Madge addresses Bob, ostensibly extending an olive branch. Bob, however, is ambivalent, reflecting that "after all the crazy, wild-eyed, frightened acts she had put on, the white armour plate she'd wrapped herself up in, here she was breaking it down . . . treating [him] as casually as an old acquaintance," for Bob it was "simply too much . . . for one person to be able to do" (161). Yet, he suggests that they "stop clowning and get together"; Madge does not refuse (162). Though she was able to treat him like an equal at the shipyard, as soon as they are alone in an intimate space, when Bob comes to visit her, Madge begins her deliberate performance of fear again, seemingly attempting to make true her rape fantasy. While she opens her door and lets Bob in, as soon as he attempts to touch her, she runs away, and they struggle for power. Madge's behavior now turns erratic, fluctuating between

[16] Interestingly, Himes seems to suggest the same about black women who are attracted to white men. Alice often spends her time around whites, both male and female. Bob suspects that she may be dating a white man, with whom Bob cannot compete. Alice is then further suspected of being a lesbian following an evening gathering in which Bob witnesses her kissing or otherwise touching her friend Stella. In this, Alice's character is unreliable to Bob on both counts: her dating a white man and her questionable heterosexuality.

desire and disgust. One moment Madge dares Bob to touch her, threatening that she will get him "lynched right here in California," while in the other she "[begins] acting coy," asking him to take off her shoes for her (180-181). Madge then opens her robe, exposing her naked body to Bob asking: "Ain't I beautiful? . . . Pure white," following up her display with the threat that Bob merely looking at her would have gotten him lynched in Texas (181). Bob reaches for her and Madge escapes yet again, taunting that "'[Bob] can't have none unless [he catches her]'" (181-182).

In what follows, Himes writes his most damming portrayal of white women and whiteness. Though Himes "[challenges] the limited discourse of racial belonging" within the African-American community through his portrayal of his black co-workers at the shipyard (Lubin *xix*), his focus is not on the performativity of blackness, but the contrived artifice of whiteness. Indeed, noticing the particularly belligerent looks from whites he passes on the way to work, Bob notes that "[the] white folks had sure brought their white to work with them that morning" (*Hollers* 18). Indeed, as Jay Garcia puts it, Himes portrays "whiteness as something that entails *activation*, a process that involves contingencies personal and historical, [and in turn] producing real effects" (80, my emphasis). Bob's observation implies that whiteness is not an inherent, integral part of their being, but rather an additive with particular characteristics, namely, racism against people of color.

A similar project of debunking whiteness is taken by Richard Dyer in his aptly titled book, *White*. In the work, Dyer delves into the self-making of whiteness in the Western world, in an attempt to make whiteness strange (10). Dyer contextualizes his discussion on the "embodiment of whiteness" within Christian tradition, in which the Western dualism of body/spirit emerged and where "whiteness took on a dynamic relation to the physical world,

something caught by the ambiguous word 'spirit'" (15). While blacks, in white hegemonic society, could be "reduced . . . to their bodies and thus to race," whites transcended the same kind of classification (14). Dyer then adds that whiteness bears different expectations from white men and white women, especially with regards to sexuality and reproduction. Since sexuality itself is often perceived as "bestial," as negatively carnal, "[there] are special anxieties surrounding the whiteness of white women vis-à-vis sexuality" (29). White women must embody purity and chastity, while at the same time they must also perform sexual acts in order to procreate and further the white race. Purity, then, is "white women's duty but it is what white women are least able to do and still be white" (ibid). From here derives the dilemma of whiteness, wherein whites must reproduce, "yet they must also control and transcend their bodies. Only by (impossibly) doing both can they be white" (30). Though Dyer does not focus on interracial intimacies, he does note that the fear of non-white-on-white rape was perceived as "bestiality storming the citadel of civilisation" (26), and even when "reproduction [did] not . . . enter directly into the representation of inter-racial sexuality . . . it is what is at stake in it" (25). In this sense, though Himes does not directly address the issue of miscegenation like Abrahams, the underlying, if unspoken, concern of interracial sex is the risk to the purity of the white race. A purity, again, that is to be maintained by white women. This purity, as Dyer further shows, is embedded in the color of whiteness itself, particularly with regard to the body of the white woman: if whiteness is associated with cleanliness and purity, "idealised white women . . . glow" with purity (122).

Madge, however, is dirt; she portrays her own self-made perception of whiteness though it clearly contradicts her physical attributes and her conduct. When Bob does manage to grasp her again in her apartment, following her command to catch her, she yells at him to rape her.

Bob's response is immediate, visceral and harsh: "I let her loose and bounced to my feet. *Rape* – just the sound of the word scared me, took everything out of me, my desire, my determination, my whole build-up" (182, emphasis in original). Bob escapes but Madge follows him outside to the street and asks him to let her into his car. Bob refuses, and hurt and scared he tells her that she "looks like mud to [him] . . . like so much dirt," in what can be seen as a belated response to her questioning him about her white beauty (183). She is not "pure white," she is dirty and corrupt. By exposing Madge's erratic and inconsistent behavior towards Bob, Himes reveals the inherent fallacy of whiteness as embodied in his portrayal of Madge. His characterization of Madge resonates with Dyer's claim that only by "seeing the racing of whites" will we be able "to dislodge [them] from the position of power" (2).

But while Bob is able to escape Madge's clutches and does not fulfill her fantasy of rape that evening, as Stephanie Brown notes, "from the moment Madge opens her door to Bob, the novel begins its ineluctable descent into the specific tragedy associated with the presence of a black man and a white woman in an intimate space" (72). Though Bob wishes to avoid Madge the following day and is planning his leave from the shipyard and his future with Alice, he is again accidentally forced to interact with her. Bob finds Madge sleeping in a room on deck as he enters it as part of his work duties. Madge locks Bob in the room with her and does not let him leave, aggressively making advances at him by grabbing him and "[pulling his] face toward hers" (221). Bob does not want to be caught with her, "sacred any moment she might start to perform" (ibid). Madge becomes enraged with Bob for denying her, and in retaliation she starts screaming that she is being raped by a black man. Men form outside quickly come to her aid though Bob still tries to escape her. In a reversal of roles, Bob now becomes prey to Madge's bestial behavior:

> I saw the stretch and pop of her lips, the tautening of her throat muscles, the distortion and constriction of her face, the flare of her nostrils and the bucking of her eyes with a weird stark clarity as if her face were ten feet high. (222)

Madge is purely physical, lacking white spirit as she now represents full embodiment, and therefore the negative, in the body/spirit division. For Dyer, whiteness disintegrates because "[whiteness] as an ideal can never be attained, not only because white skin can never be hue white, but because ideally white is absence: to be really, absolutely white is to be nothing" (78). For Himes, however, whiteness collapses when it becomes strictly embodied. In reversing traditional representations of black and white by depicting Madge as a predatory beast, Himes shows how the ideal indeed cannot be attained, not because "whiteness aspires to *dis*-embodiedness" (Dyer 39, emphasis in original), but because whiteness is as embodied as blackness. To illustrate this point, I might note that while Madge, and other white characters, are described in detail, Himes never provides a physical description of Bob, only of his attire. His clothes are meant to grant Bob a sense of sophisticated style, of class, but do not mark him as racially black. Yet, there is no indication in the novel of Bob's skin tone, facial or bodily features. This is not merely because the narrative is in first-person but is in fact an intentional choice. Himes avoids any image that will fetishize the black male body or present it as a threat.[17]

The image Himes endeavors to avoid is the image of the "black beast," as Andrew Leiter terms it. The image, Leiter claims, characterized black males as "sexually aggressive, only slightly removed from savagery, and particularly lustful toward white women" (3). Leiter traces

[17] In contrast, Himes, unfortunately, has no qualms about fetishizing the black female body. Ella Mae, Alice, and numerous other black females are extensively described and heavily scrutinized. As Lubin notes, Himes' misogyny is hard to ignore (150), but Himes' concern is not with women of color (indeed, as Daileader shows is traditionally the case in narratives dealing with interracial intimacy) but with men of color. Giving that Bob is the protagonist haunted for his color, his lack of physical representation speaks more to Himes' racial politics than does his apparent interest in the female form.

the image in American writing to *The Clansman*, a 1905 American novel by Thomas Dixon Jr. The novel depicts the rape of a white woman by a black man in decidedly bestial terms, and Leiter shows how the image prevailed as a segregationist tool until the works of William Faulkner (*Light in August*) and Richard Wright (*Native Son*) adapted the image to their own critical needs. Faulkner and Wright, Leiter notes, presented the stereotype of the black beast as reality, but contextualized it as the "psychological product of segregation rather than the justification for it" (6). Himes, it seems, agrees with Leiter's reading of *Native Son*. During an impromptu gathering at Alice's, Bob offers his opinion on Wright's novel, stating that, although Bigger Thomas seems to portray and prove white fears of black men, "you couldn't pick a better person than Bigger Thomas to prove the point [of racism]" (107). Yet, Bob complicates this assertion and Wright's novel by stating that "most white people [he knows] are quite proud of having made Negroes into Bigger Thomases" (ibid.). Though Wright "presents a black beast revenge narrative and gives America a monster of its own creation" (Leiter 15), Himes suggests that this is not enough in order to resolve, or even acknowledge, the race problem in America. Indeed, though Bob plans his own revenge narrative, his musings never come to fruition. Bob envisions and plans to take revenge on Johnny Stoddart, a white man who accused him of cheating in a dice game, on three different occasions. A particularly gruesome fantasy occurs when Bob follows Johnny to his workstation, imagining that he could already see "the blond boy's bloody body lying half across his machine, blood all over the floor . . . his face all cut to pieces, one eye hanging out and wrinkled like an empty grape skin" (43). While these are the kinds of images that caused one reviewer to write that Himes could have done "without the realism that makes [the novel] revolting" (Tracy 110), Himes' insistence on this unsettling graphic depiction of violence against a white man places Bob's ultimate lack of action in sharp

contrast. After leaving Stoddart at his workstation unharmed, Bob follows him home with a loaded gun, but again, Bob does not act. Though Bob claims that "the only solution to the Negro problem is a revolution" by force his revolt is always forestalled (109). Revenge, it seems, is not simple or even desirable. That is not to say that Bob wishes to continue subjugating himself to white hegemonic racism, but he is inherently incapable of taking arms against it. Similarly, as Bob prepares himself to confront Madge at the shipyard, he finds himself frozen: "But when I got to her I lost my nerve. I couldn't say a word. I just couldn't do it, that was all . . . She was pure white Texas. And I was black . . . I never knew before how good a job the white folks had done on me" (153-154). Here, Bob confronts his internalized sense of inferiority when compared to whites and to white women in particular. His inability to speak with Madge causes him "physical torture," as he recognizes that he "never felt so cheap, so small and inconsequential, so absolutely subhuman" (154).

In a similar moment earlier in the novel, Bob again contemplates the power that white women hold over black men. However, in this scene, Bob does not experience "physical torture" or so clearly defines his sense of inferiority; instead, Bob is overcome by a "cold scared feeling" (93). This "cold scared feeling" is repeated throughout the text in different variations at different times, but always directly related to feelings of impotence and inadequacy brought on by white people. The first mention of the feeling seeps slowly into Bob while waking up from a dream in which he was denied work by two white men: "I began feeling scared . . . It came along with consciousness . . . It came into my head first . . . cold and hollow" (3). Later, when Bob plays dice on the shipyard and is about to be attacked by Johnny Stoddart, "that sick, gone feeling" flashes again (40). The iteration "sick, gone" is especially poignant as it implies both a strong sense of embodiment and disembodiment at the same time. This, as Franz Fanon suggests in his

book *Black Skin, White Masks*, is the essence of the black experience. As Greg Thomas notes, Fanon and Himes exhibit "uncanny textual connections" as their "most salient themes pivot around matters of psycho-sexual racism" (219-220). While Himes explores the black experience in fiction, Fanon uses Himes' writing in his "reflections on consciousness, the consequences of the mind/body split . . . and sexual ideologies of colonial racism" (221). When addressing the mind/body split, the embodied and disembodied experience of the black man, Fanon notes that the black man is "overdetermined from without," such that his body and skin color are his immediate markers of identification (87). At the same time, he notes that with that experience also comes a "feeling of nonexistence" (106). In the novel, this dual existence is also unconsciously reflected in Bob's dreams, a recurring motif in the text. Dream sequences open four of the novel's chapters, in them, Bob is either asked to perform physical tasks or is brutally assaulted by white figures: both instances stress his embodied experience. In the final dream sequence, Bob dreams that he has killed Johnny Stoddart, seemingly reclaiming power and gaining revenge, but is immediately caught by a white Marine soldier,[18] who shoots at Bob to kill, which in turn wakes Bob from his dream/nightmare. Even in his dreams, then, Bob is unable to escape "the subjugation of segregation," since his consciousness is an "alienated consciousness, a self-aversive, auto-phobic consciousness for which blackness is experienced as a curse" (Thomas 221).

This curse of blackness, moreover, weighs on his relationship with Alice and their potential joint future. Alice, a light-skinned, wealthy social worker, represents both the possibility and impossibility of Bob's future in white racist America. According to Alice, Bob's "only trouble is maladjustment [… He doesn't] try to adjust [his] way of thinking to the actual

[18] This is a symbol of not only the white state but of the white army, into which Bob will be drafted if he loses his job deferment.

conditions of life" (205). In a pivotal moment in the novel, Bob converses openly with Alice about their joint future and his anxieties about the race issue in the States. While Bob asserts that "[he doesn't] want to always be thinking about [his] race . . . the white people make [him] think about it in every way" (208). Alice, in response, suggests another way of living:

> Love and marriage, children and homes. Those we control . . . And there are many other values that you are not taking into consideration – spiritual values, intrinsic values . . . Honesty, decency, respectability. Courage – it takes courage to live as a Negro must . . . Every person, no matter of what race, creed, or colour, is the captain of his soul. (209)

But while Alice's suggestion to focus on the private and spiritual is undoubtedly positive, she also stipulates that this ability depends on conformity: "As long as we conform to the pattern of segregation we do not have to fear the seizure of our property or attack upon out persons" (209). Herein lies Bob's problem: he knows that he will "have to give in, both to Alice and the white folks," in order to have a future (202). Yet, at this point, after his violent encounter with Madge and the aborted attempts on Stoddart's life, Bob is ready to accept Alice's advice. Bob notes that "[he] knew [he'd] been pushed, but it really jarred [him] to know that [he'd] been pushed that far. It gave [him] a funny feeling of having been drawn outside of [himself], of having been goaded beyond [his] own control" (201). Now, however, with Alice's guidance, Bob finds that he has an active choice to make in his own fate and future, beyond the malevolent reach of white supremacy (209).

However, in a frustrating turn of events, as soon as Bob finds a way to live his life comfortably, white society in the form of Madge quickly shatters his dreams. As we have seen, Madge and Bob are locked together in a room on deck when she begins screaming that he is raping her. Bob attempts to placate the white men standing outside the room, but to no avail.

When Bob opens the door, he is swiftly and brutally attacked by a white mob. After managing to escape for a short while, Bob is arrested, knocked unconscious, and wakes in custody at the jailhouse. Bob is taken to see the Judge to receive his sentencing. Bob is informed that a Mr. Houghton, the president of the shipyard, has agreed to intervene on his behalf. Mr. Houghton makes a case of Bob, telling him that he had been hired as leaderman because he was considered the "highest type of Negro," but instead, his crime was one of "uncontrollable lust – the act of an animal" (250). With these reprimands in mind, the Judge offers Bob a "choice": he is willing to drop the charges if Bob joins the Army and will give his word that he "stay away from white women and keep out of trouble" (251). Bob, reluctantly, agrees. Two hours later, Bob is drafted into the Army. From the Judge's perspective, this is a better outcome for Bob than attempting to make his case in court. For Bob, however, conscription to the Army is adding insult to injury. Bob knows that he was "at the bottom of it all," that unless he could have the same exact rights as white citizens, then "there'd never be anything in this country for [him] anyway" (190). And while he would have been willing to join the Jim Crow Army, he would have at least wanted to not be afraid of Madge in the process, would have wanted to be her equal (153). However, Bob is now forced to perpetuate hegemonic white supremacy by of serving in an Army that is entrusted to uphold white, racist American values.

At the end of the novel, then, Bob has exhausted his avenues to achieving the American dream, limited as they are. As Bob notes, "[anyone] who wanted could be nigger-rich, nigger-important, have their Jim Crow religion, and go to nigger heaven," yet all he ever wanted was

> just to be accepted as a man – without ambition, without distinction, either of race, creed, or colour; just a simple Joe walking down an American street, going [his] simple way, without any other identifying characteristics but weight, height and gender. (189-190)

This fantastic life without distinction, however, is threatened and finally destroyed by the symbol of the white, racist hegemonic regime – Madge. Though Bob seems to accept his restricted position as a black man, providing that his private life with Alice remains intact, Himes ultimately shows that no sphere is safe for the black American. As Lubin notes, "[in] the span of a brief conclusion, the terror of racial and sexual violence collapses that private space of the bedroom, the workplace, and the transnational space of the military" (143).

Here, Himes most clearly diverges from Abrahams' treatment of interracial intimacy. Abrahams' utopian model does not hold in the American sphere as Himes portrays it, especially in the novel's particular World War II setting. Not only does Himes not offer a solution through interracial intimacies, he is suspect of any model of transnational unity among the races, which Abrahams promotes, and is staunchly resistant to the emerging concept of a transnational black identity. Instead, Himes shows an impasse in racial relations that is not only fundamentally inherent to American culture and history, but is further exacerbated by the supposed national, unifying effort of winning the war. As Jay Garcia notes, Himes' novel "[makes] the freighted wartime setting the occasion for a meditation on the complex emotions generated by the impulse toward national identification within a society organized by race" (80). Though the period marked a significant rise in awareness and activity towards social justice, for Himes it only foregrounded the already unbearable position of the black *American*. While Penny Von Eschen notes that the "African American anticolonial activists of the 1940s forcefully argued that their struggles against Jim Crow were inextricably bound to the struggles of African and Asian peoples for independence" (2), Himes forcefully calls for a distancing from Africa.

Towards the end of the novel Bob reflects on his difficult position as black in America, commenting that

> [The whites] kept thinking about me in connection with Africa. But I wasn't born in Africa. I didn't know anyone who was. I learned in history that my ancestors were slaves brought over from Africa. But I'd forgotten that, just like the aristocratic blue bloods of America have forgotten what they learned in history – that most of their ancestors were the riffraff of Europe – thieves, jailbirds, beggars and outcasts. (187-188)

Bob rejects identifying as African in origin, insisting that he is neither physically nor culturally a product of Africa. He is not willing to remember the historical fact of his ancestry, just as the white Americans happily forget their less than savory origins. Instead, Bob focuses on national identity, based on democratic notions of citizenship rather than racial or international affiliations. Indeed, in "Dilemma," Himes emphasizes this idea yet again: "The American Negro, we must remember, is an American; the face may be the face of Africa, but the heart has the beat of Wall Street" (77). Again, the emphasis here is on *American*, not defined by color but by equity in citizenship. "Wall Street," here, symbolically stands for the American dream at large and to the promise made in the Declaration of Independence which states that all men are created equal and can equally pursue life, liberty and happiness. Yet, Wall Street, as well as other avenues, is denied to the African American, again, due to white anxieties of interracial intermingling.

Randall Kennedy shows how white anxieties about interracial intimacies denied African Americans entry to many public spheres in American society, and therefore thwarted any attempt to advance the legal status of American blacks. Calls for equal housing, job opportunities and education were all reduced to one secret motive held by the black community – to marry with whites in general, and specifically with white women. Kennedy notes that "[in] the middle years of the twentieth century, segregationists consistently linked sex and marriage as their political trump card," and that one example of this "antimiscegenation demagoguery" was the publication

of the book *Separation or Mongrelization: Take Your Choice* authored by a Mississippi senator in 1947 (24). The title of the book alone clearly exemplifies the fear of social intermingling: if American blacks will be allowed to study, work or live with whites, the result will necessarily be "mongrelization," that is, white and black interbreeding. Consequently, all black activity and calls for social justice were reduced to their already stereotypical raw sexuality and inherent desire to racially assimilate with the white population. Recognizing these deeply ingrained prejudices, Himes opposes interracial intimacy on these grounds. This, of course, resonates with Mako's decree in *The Path of Thunder*, in which he similarly claims that if a black man desires to be with a white woman for purposes of social advancement then the affair is neither tolerated nor desired. This was a position that was common in African American circles, as Kennedy further shows, so much so that even the NAACP did not battle anti-miscegenation laws as fiercely as other areas affecting African American lives, for fear that advocating for interracial marriage would only prove white anxieties of interracial intermingling and the blacks' inherent desire to become whites themselves (25). Consequently, as a counter reaction, some African Americans perceived interracial mixing as a form of racial betrayal (26). Though Himes rejects interracial intimacies as a springboard for social advancement, he does not, on the other hand, promote a racially separatist attitude.

Himes, though exploring the unique position of an African American man, does not feel connected to Africa nor to his racial classification as a black person, as we have already seen. In fact, Himes seems to be equally removed from the rest of the African American community, though they share the same burdens. Notably, there is a stark lack of racial communal reciprocity among the black characters in the novel: Bob constantly fights with his black coworkers about petty matters (14), and later, although they are upset, they do not stand up for him when he is

demoted (127-128); he feels distant from Alice and her family due to both their lighter skin color and higher social class—the two obviously interconnected and result from one another (59-56); and his black landlady, Ella Mea, accuses him of race desertion because he dates Alice, but at the same time refuses his advances on her (56-57). And through all of these the narrative always circles back to Madge as her direct actions and very essence frustrate and foil Bob at every turn. Her physical and psychological reach seem boundless: at work, on the street, at home, in his sleep, with Alice or with Ella Mea, Madge is a constant specter of desire and anxiety. The narrative, along with Bob, reaches a dead-end.

It is this unsettling ending that inspired some of the harshest criticisms of the novel. As Robert A. Bone commented in his book *The Negro Novel in America* (1958), *If He Hollers Let Him Go* is "an impressive failure" (173): "At bottom, the trouble is ideological: neither revenge nor accommodation is acceptable to Himes, and as a result, the novel flounders to an inconclusive finish" (176). Himes was well-aware of such criticism, and while he did not welcome it, he understood it as an integral part of writing, truthfully, about race trouble in the United States. In fact, in his lecture-cum-essay "The Dilemma of the Negro Novelist in the United States" (1948), Himes notes that the novelist who writes honestly about black life in America "must be prepared for the hatred and antagonism of many of his own people, for attacks from his leaders, the clergy and the press; he must be ready to have his name reviled at every level, intellectual or otherwise" (77). The inconclusive ending of the novel, therefore, is not a failure but an intentional statement. Himes aims to show how

> [This] plumbing for the truth reveals within the Negro personality, homicidal mania, lust for white women, a pathetic sense of inferiority, paradoxical anti-Semitism, arrogance, uncle-tomism, hate and fear and self-hate, this then is the effect of oppression on the

> human personality. There are the daily horrors, the daily realities, the daily experiences of an oppressed minority. ("Dilemma" 79)

And for all these ailments, the "daily experiences of an oppressed minority," there is no easy fix, nor does Himes aim to propose one.

After living in Los Angeles for some time, Himes became "saturated with hate," and began composing this "bitter novel of protest" (*Quality* 74). To the complaints he received about writing such a frustrated, bitter, hateful protest novel without offering a way out, he responded:

> [To] ask me, an incidental black writer with a limited education and no status whatsoever, to solve [America's] internal race problem was preposterous. "Let the white people solve it their own goddamn selves." (*Quality* 77)

The race problem in America, according to Himes, is a white problem, not a black problem; therefore, black people should not be expected to solve it. Though this may read as defeatist, Himes presents a radical position on race for the time. Instead of relying on an international, Pan-Africanist community, instead of relying on a national black community, Himes yearns for a full American citizenship in which race will not be a determining factor, for better or worse. This seemingly naïve desire only serves to emphasize its inherent hopelessness. While Peter Abrahams utilizes the theme of miscegenation to promote social change through the imagining of a utopian ideal, Himes presents a stagnant tableau of a dystopian American society whose obsession with imagined black concupiscence seeped into all layers of society and to both black and white consciousness, so much so that is it simply impossible to imagine an alternative present or future. Moreover, unlike Abrahams' star-crossed lovers who grow, adapt and change together, and consequently and significantly die together with freedom of race consciousness already gained, Bob suffers all the consequences of the entanglement with Madge in isolation.

Madge, of course, is left unscathed. Despite its high sense of drama and violence, the novel seemingly ends where it began. With nothing gained, or changed, Himes concludes with an uneasy certainty that Bob's story – indeed, the story of the black American man – is destined to be repeated.

Conclusion

Richard Wright was, as we have already observed, a pivotal figure in both Abrahams' and Himes' lives and careers. Revisiting the short pieces he composed about their works enables us to offer some concluding remarks on that which binds the two writers and that which distinguishes them from one another. Wright remarks that Abrahams' *Path of Thunder* "rises to bitter passions, and implicit in every poetic word . . . is [Abrahams'] belief in life and humanity" (Wright in Fabre, *Books and Writers* 3); he also comments that Himes writes with an "honest" and "elementary passion," which significantly marks him as not a black writer, but "a new kind of writing man" (Wright in Fabre, *Books and Writers* 212-213). To this extent, Wright emphasizes both writers' universal appeal and broad potential on the basis of their profound understanding of human suffering. Looking back at the novels, however, there is a more specific formation that we might access, that of racial melancholy, which provides one final possible point of comparison between the two works.

Specifically, I would like to borrow from Anne Anlin Cheng's work *The Melancholy of Race* (2000) in order to suggest an articulation of a productive process of racial mourning that is present in both novels. Simply put, melancholy, as defined by Freud in his seminal work on "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917), is a pathological state in which a person grieves for an undefinable loss of a love-object, and is therefore unable to acknowledge the loss and mourn it in a productive manner, resulting in depression and other neurotic symptoms. Mourning, on the other hand, is a conscious process in which the loss of a love-object is recognized, processed and

accepted. In terms of melancholy and race, and to borrow Tyrone Simpson II's succinct summary of Cheng's work,

> Melancholia is a condition in which both white and nonwhite subjects participate . . . because both subject positions take on the other as an ambivalently desired object that is destined to be lost through the uneven distribution of racial privilege and power. (234)

For the black subject, the condition expresses itself in an "internalization of being ambivalently desired" by white society wherein the black subject "is forever defrocked of whiteness by means of phenotype and (legal) discourse, regardless of how vigorously he or she pursues this ideal" (Simpson II 234). Racial melancholia, then, is first and foremost a condition defined by mental stasis, which forecloses any possibility for progress, acceptance and therefore peace.

In Himes' novel, however, Simpson II suggests that Bob's melancholic perception is a "necessary strategy for endurance and engagement within spaces defined by white supremacy" (233). He posits that racial melancholia begets racial paranoia, which in the novel manifests itself in Bob's violent dreams of revenge, which in turn force Bob to consciously recognize the loss of full citizenship and begin his process of mourning (243). This is marked in the novel by Bob's comments towards the end that he felt "relived and kind of half-way clever, as if [he'd] gotten out of a trap the white folks had set for [him]," after deciding to live within the boundaries of Jim Crow laws with Alice (174). Despite the novel's ending, then, Bob appears to have reached a new understanding of his position and is seemingly ready to accept it and live with it instead of against it. But while Simpson II stresses the productive possibilities of racial melancholia, the process is only partially completed by the end of the novel. Since Chen stresses that racial melancholia is experienced by both whites and blacks, the process of mourning should be equally taken by both in order for the loss to be resolved. Madge, as we have seen, has remained

unchanged. White society has likewise not changed. At the end of the novel, though Bob may have successfully mourned the loss of white America, we, the readers, remain with a deeply rooted sense of melancholy.

Abrahams' novel, on the other hand, despite its violent ending, is not mired in melancholy nor does the ending erase the existence of the interracial affair and its temporary duration as a progressive space where new social imaginaries might be articulated. The narrative supports the affair to the end, and Lanny and Sarie both become better for it, enlightened even. The violent end is importantly not a failure on their part to maintain the prohibited love, but a failure of racist society in accepting it. It is this which allows the novel to resonate and remain a positive treaty for interracial intimacies. If Himes' novel closes in a dead-end of racial melancholy transferred to the readers, Abrahams creates a model which supports a successful process of mourning, both for its characters and readership. If, as Judith Butler notes, melancholia is "love foreclosed by discourse," then speaking of love, and of interracial love especially, is to break the prison of melancholy and of racial exclusion (Butler in Graham 10). By exploring and expressing Lanny and Sarie's love, therefore, Abrahams allows us to recognize in them a specific love-object that has been lost due to hate and bigotry, and as such their loss is experienced in a conscious process of mourning. In grieving, the novel reaches its political peak and expresses the saliency of interracial intimacy for the South African constituency. As we can see, then, Abrahams utilizes interracial intimacies as vehicles for social change in and of themselves, while Himes uses the theme in order to present the unique and troubled position of the African American man. Yet, in doing so, both novels essentially promote non-racialist identities – Himes by focusing on national identity; Abrahams by envisioning a multi-racial society without discrimination. Their core understanding of the fallacy of race as a social,

cultural or historical determinant is similar and essential to their works. Both, eventually, stress the necessity of transcending race consciousness, perhaps even racial identity, in order to achieve a truly democratic world as well as personal, emotional equanimity.

Studying the works of Peter Abrahams and Chester Himes in conjunction with one another thus offers a unique look at ideas about race and identity elaborated by seemingly marginal writers at a time when such discussions were nevertheless coming to the fore among the black intelligentsia in transnational settings. That their works did not leave a lasting impression and did not earn them a central spot in the annals of what we might call, following Paul Gilroy, the black Atlantic,[19] can be attributed to their seemingly ambiguous positions on racial identity that were often misaligned with more popular notions of the time, namely Pan-Africanism and Black Nationalism. Historically, Abrahams has been commonly remembered for his influence on the *Drum* generation of South African writers. Himes, alternatively, is best remembered for his contribution to Fanon's work, and for his pulp Harlem Detective series, composed during the mid-1950s and the late 1960s, which gained popularity in France due to its *noir* atmosphere, and later in the United States in the 1970s during the emergence of Blaxploitation cinema. Yet, as I hope this paper has revealed, the two authors in question have much to offer in their own right for the consideration of more encompassing articulations of race, identity and interracial intimacies. Moreover, future research into the work of these two authors may reveal deeper affinities and similar artistic/political development in their later works. For example, Himes' most politically charged Harlem Detective novel, *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1965), coincides with the publication of Abrahams' *A Night of Their Own* (1965), an equally political novel that is, interestingly, of the same detective genre and that has hitherto been neglected in Abrahams scholarship. Such research may further our understanding of historical

[19] See Gilroy, 1993.

variations in the representation of race and identity in black literary culture on the part of two seemingly minor but by no means unimportant writers, and will undoubtedly enable us to consolidate Abrahams' and Himes' rightful position as key figures of black writing and thought in the 20th century.

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