

“Going to Meet the Man”:
Scripting White Supremacist Eros

In order to be utilized, our erotic feelings must be *recognized*. The need for sharing deep feeling is a human need. But within the european-american tradition, this need is satisfied by certain proscribed *erotic comings-together*. These occasions are almost always characterized by a simultaneous *looking away, a pretense of calling them something else*, whether a religion, a fit, *mob violence*, or even playing doctor.

—Audre Lorde, “Uses of the Erotic: The Erotic as Power” (emphasis mine)

If we think of “flesh” as a primary narrative, then we mean its seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship’s hole, fallen, or escaped overboard. —Hortense Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe”

All attempts to explain the malicious standard operating procedure of the US white supremacy find themselves hamstrung by conceptual inadequacy; it remains describable, but not comprehensible.

—Steve Martinot and Jared Sexton, “The Avant-Garde of White Supremacy”

Introduction

In 1931, Raymond Gunn was burned to death, his still living body dragged to the top of a Maryville, Missouri schoolhouse, bound to the ridgepole by a horde of unmasked local men, and doused in gasoline (Kremer 359). Before the schoolhouse collapsed in a billowing inferno, leaving Raymond’s body to disintegrate in a manner of minutes, spectators confirmed the presence of the mob leader, an outsider in a red coat who led the lynch mob and who was ultimately responsible for throwing a flaming piece of paper into the gasoline-soaked building (Kremer 360). Despite the outsider’s eponymous red coat, the identity of the mob leader remains anonymous to history, yet I argue that “the man in the red coat,” far from being ‘unknown,’ is an all too overt and present amalgam for the civil roots of the eroticization of the color line in the United States. In being unmasked, he represents the public and a brutal sense of *civitas*, a bald sociality that is locatable and consistent across the topology of black-subject formation and control. In being anonymous, the man in the red coat signifies a rampant normalization of white

supremacy within state and civil settings to the point where an event as highly documented and attended as the lynching of Raymond Gunn, with crowds of 2,000 to 4,000 and massive press coverage, could still operate as a space for anonymity within the mob, whereas other perpetrators were well known by locals and law enforcement alike. Such normalization indicates what theorist Frank B. Wilderson III calls America's "structuring irrationality: the libidinal economy of white supremacy, and its hyper-discursive violence that kills the black subject so that the concept, civil society, may live" (Wilderson 231-32). Wilderson contraposes the libidinal economy of slavery, wherein the black body was coveted, consumed, and ontologized as "things becoming *being for* the captor" through despotic force, with America's political economy of slavery, the "structuring rationality" that prizes labor over race as such and constitutes blackness as emanating from capitalist subjects of class difference (Wilderson [Spillers 1987] 231-32). In my line of argument, which borrows its frame from the historical and theoretical work of Michel Foucault, Hortense Spillers, and Frank B. Wilderson, I align with the founding notion that the constituent element of slavery is the lust for and accumulation of black bodies, that the libidinal economy as such de-centers issues of labor and reorients desire and consumption as the base for black subject formation under supremacist hegemony (Wilderson 239). If we accept the libidinal economy of slavery as the base irrationality for analyzing the ontology of blackness, we can come to see how structures of desire and consumption extend past the origins of slavery and constitute the biopolitics of civil life in the United States in the present: "in other words, [I wish to examine how] from the incoherence of black death, America generates the coherence of white life" (Wilderson 232).

In wading into submerged libidinal state of U.S. civil society, we are confronted with the history of lynching, as it arose in the postbellum context of black individuals' initial entrance

into white civil life, supposedly unconstrained by former slave structures. However, if, as stated previously, the coherence of white civil society emanates from libidinal renderings of black being, which is itself based on an ordering conception of blackness *qua* excess, then an analysis of “white coherence” and “black incoherence” is incomplete without attention paid to the *eros* of white supremacy. When the color line was laid down, the white supremacy that underpins civil society, which had already generated eroticized conceptions of black being, in turn fundamentally eroticized racial difference in the civil setting, crystallizing the black body as its *sui generis* ordinal and material image. At the heart of this erotics is a constant rendering of the black body as excess, and from that excess comes an ontology of blackness as constantly accessible. Returning to lynching, we can then come to script lynching as a specular reorientation of white desire through a raced prism of domination, torture, and consumption. Yet, white supremacist *eros* configures differently when emanating from civil, as opposed to slave contexts, generating new forms of sexual violence and hegemonic desire that cannot be read as fully contingent and linear erotic developments. Framing my analysis around the short stories of James Baldwin and Ralph Ellison, specifically “Going to Meet the Man” and “The Birthmark,” I aim to present different or shifting methods of reading lynching that are at the same time deeply historicized and trading in an antebellum nostalgia of eroticized consumption and access, while also situating a pervasive, but widened homoeroticism of white authority in the current relationships between white men and black men.

Moving away from certain reigning tropes and stereotypes of lynching, both Baldwin and Ellison offer cutting, if sometimes submerged, insights into the homosexual desiring and consumption that white men of authority enact on black men in the civil contexts of lynching. I argue that their accounts in turn broaden the analytic frame for understanding the social fact of

lynching by illuminating an entrenched homoerotics within white masculinity, one that is constituted in the way in which white supremacist authority enacts its desires on the black phallus through socially-sanctioned and overtly erotic events of immense brutality, which are in turn moments of erotic comings-together (Lorde 5). In elucidating a homoerotic dimension to an erotics of the color line through the work of Baldwin and Ellison, I hope to extend the way in which white supremacy is iterated through the sexual violence of lynching, as well as speak to the continuation of the libidinal economy of blackness-as-excess that originated in slavery, expanded in the postbellum developments of the “black problem” for white civil life, and remains operative in civil society up to the present moment.

*Historicizing the White Imaginaire:
Castrated Flesh, Bodily Territory, and “The Birthmark”*

Before delving into my chosen texts, it is at first necessary to provide a background of forms of scripting lynching that operate within the immediate postbellum context of black entrance into civil society. Historicity becomes integral as it iterates an operative if not always overt context for Ellison’s and Baldwin’s writing that renders “The Birthmark and “Going to Meet the Man” as deeply situated texts filled with traces of older “forms” of lynching that are concurrently being undone, extended, or excoriated as to uncover a new homoerotics within an old act, as well as link texts 25 years apart from ideologically distinct authors.

As historian Amy Louise Wood argues, lynching came to prominence in the South during a crisis of modernity, wherein pushes towards urbanization, the flooding of transient and migrant workers into unexpected or unwelcoming sectors, and the issue of black inclusion under the anxious category of freeman poised to dissolve any remnants of Southern tradition and structure (Wood 5). The white *imaginaire* felt itself to be at its most challenged and most vulnerable, as

dissatisfaction with the juridical encroachment of the state and the threat of shifting and irrecoverable sociality made it such that “white supremacy and white solidarity were thus not certainties—they were ideologies that needed to be constructed and established and that required constant replenishing and constant re-envisioning” (Wood 8). The white public, abjectly disenfranchised with the postbellum state for illegalizing public executions and thus excusing black criminality in toto by removing the only truly justified (capital) punishment, sought to wrest the power of arbitration of the color line back into unrestrained white hands, with lynching as the ritualistic and undeniably ‘civil’ recuperation of a white power not adequately reflected in state-derived constellations (Wood 23). Lynching’s ritualism, in turn, makes the constitutive elements of the act decidedly non-modern, as the spectacular aspects of celebration, witness, community that came to define the white construction of black death are direct carryovers from the practice of public execution itself (Wood 14). Articulating the white community experience of execution reflexively, Wood argues that “public executions were the reward to white southerners who refrained from lynching and yielded to the authority of the state,” acting as a visceral and more importantly specular enactment of transitive solidarity between white polity and white state (Wood 38). As the push towards modernity necessitated the privatization of executions, explicitly due to state anxiety over crowd chaos in quickly urbanizing centers, lynching emerged as the guarantor for true black punishment, a reflective and regenerative moment, legitimated by custom and contra federal inadequacy (Wood 23). Lynching in turn extended consequences of spectatorship and witness as learned through public execution to their most brutal and warped ends by collectively advocating the crowd to participate as active executioners (Wood 38). When the white civil base could no longer see its supremacy and mode of control manifest in the state, lynching provided a regenerative moment of certainty by starkly

and brutally enforcing a racial divide, a somatic field wherein supremacy was construed to be overt and reflective.

If lynching, in all of its custom, self-assigned legitimacy, and horror enacts itself as representation, in turn positing a need for an emergence of something to be represented for and of its ontologically uncertain and epistemologically re-envisioning participants, the medium of representation, the black body in its stark and accessible excess materiality, must be constituted as generative, inscriptive, and renewable. The libidinal economy, as defined above, requires a body of multiplicity to counteract the unitary white subject it becomes contraposed to, an ethnic and raced body that, a la Hortense Spillers, is inscribed as “a scene of negotiation...[or] a metonymic figure for an entire repertoire of human and social arrangements” (Spillers 66). But how does a body become lynchable, not only from a point of access, but also from a point of ascriptive ontology? For Spillers, it begins with a distinction between body, a sign of liberated subjectivity, and flesh, as the “zero degree of social conceptualization” that signals captivity, becomes the concentrated site of ethnicity, whose aforementioned scenes of negotiation are scripted and enshrined through primary material narratives of wounding: “if we think of “flesh” as a primary narrative, then we mean its seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship’s hole, fallen, or escaped overboard” (Spillers 67). These woundings in turn come to define the semantic possibility of what one could be called, and in turn what could to be done to one who is capable of being marked in this way, which becomes a process of crystallization under hegemony that paralyzes the agent within confines of skin and melanin (Spillers 68). From all of this, Spillers offers us a means of interpretation for scripting the black experience from the New World to modernity: “relatedly, we might interpret the whole career of African-Americans...in light of the *intervening, intruding* tale, or the tale... “between the lines,” which are already

inscribed, as a *metaphor* of social and cultural management” (Spillers 79). Just as Spillers speaks of the lines-read-between as the managing and ordinal boundaries of dominant meaning, so too is the color line, dripping in psychic relations, to be read for what it orders us normatively to know, either through writ and ascription, as well as for what the eroticized spaces and demarcations that emerge in relief reckon us with: the topos of black life in the U.S. as an intruded, scarred, and fleshy text.

Ralph Ellison’s “The Birthmark” provides one such text, as its tag line already suggests the massive tensions of legibility and sites of definitional control between white authority and “the career of African-Americans”: “the police insisted it was an auto accident...but Matt and Clara called it something else” (Ellison 16). The basic premise is that two black siblings, Matt and Clara, are called to the highway to potentially identify the corpse of Clara’s brother Willie, whom law enforcement claim had been killed by a car. Unbeknownst to the patrolman and the coroner, Willie has a distinct birthmark that sits right below his navel that Matt and Clara have used to signify him since childhood. The body is so terribly beaten that Matt can only think to locate him by his birthmark, and as he goes to strip away the matted newspaper, he is beaten by the patrolman. When he is finally allowed to inspect Willie’s navel by peeling away the newspaper covering his genitals, Matt and Clara come to the realization that Willie had been lynched but are overwhelmed by the coercive threat of police retribution and forced to submit to the official account for fear of violence.

Ellison’s description of the site and treatment of the corpse already substantiates it within a genealogy of lynching. As Matt and Clara come upon the body in a pine-covered clearing, the entirety of Willie’s corpse is covered in “colored comic sheets” that have been soaked through with blood (Ellison 16). Even before close physical inspection, the trappings of the corpse, in

being wrapped in newspaper, signals itself already to be within the historico-semiotic field of lynching, as many victims of burnings were set alight with newspaper pages, as well as the fact that media representation through periodicals, postcards, and photographs allowed for lynching-as-spectacle to be transmitted across the U.S. (Wood 3). Furthermore, the placement of Willie in an open clearing locates the act within a lineage of rural lynchings that occurred in forests or against other natural backdrops, absent from their usual urban or central locus, which in turn connotes a return to an older, private form of vigilante violence, signifying Willie's lynching as an anachronism of archaic supremacist desires that had not emerged for some time (Wood 43). Returning to Spillers distinction between body and flesh, Willie, through the act of lynching, had been so mutilated as to no longer resemble an embodied subject, as Matt's first impressions of the corpse indicate:

The flesh was hacked and pounded as though it had been beaten with hammers. Worse than a stuck hog he thought. (16)

Without knowing that Matt had thought similar, Clara voiced the same disgust at the destruction Willie's subjectivity: "Now look at my brother, he's laying there looking like something ain't even human" (Ellison 16). Willie's body had been so thoroughly undone through its subjection to an untapped supremacist desire, that the primacy of flesh, as signified by his birthmark, became his only sign of differentiation and the last glimmer of his former life. The site of the birthmark itself became immediately blurred and disjunctive as it was forced against the adjacent site of castration, pulling Matt into the same psychosexual field that had been enacted with the lynching and castration of Willie:

It was just below his navel, he thought. Then he gave a start: where it should have been was only a bloody mound of torn flesh and hair. Matt went weak. He felt as though he had been castrated. (16)

For Matt, Willie's birthmark and absent genitalia act as opposing "hieroglyphics of the flesh," in that one comes to serve as a sign of life, personal subjectivity, and identification, while the castration site serves as extending manifest threat, a vacant signpost for potential futures that corrals Matt into a structure of racing that had supposedly been abolished (Spillers 67). In turn, the reversed reading of the patrolman, whose response, "Okay, but I don't like it," when ordered to allow Matt to inspect Willie's genitalia, signals precisely Spillers' portrayal of such hieroglyphics as "undecipherable markings...[and] severe disjunctures [that] come to be hidden to the cultural seeing by skin color," in so far as the patrolman remained blind to the birthmark while simultaneously ascribing his own signs of lynching into the corpse through a refusal to have it be witnessed by non-whites (Spillers 67).

Even further, the silent assumption of the patrolman and the coroner that the two siblings would be able to identify Willie based on skin color alone, as evinced by repeated hesitance and direct physical intervention whenever Matt attempted to remove the newspaper as to actually identify Willie, speaks further to the hidden nature and illegibility of embedded codes of the flesh, especially those not iterated or contextually disrupted (Spillers 67). The red-faced insistence of the patrolman that "We don't allow lynching around here no more" dictates conclusively that the act of lynching had enacted a semiotic field of asymmetrical negotiation around readings of flesh, which in turn enacted hierarchies of subject positioning for all involved (Ellison 17; Spillers 66). However, the erotic visibility of Willie's castration is not realized until the story's conclusion, as Matt's last sight is of the "towering patrolman" standing erect with Willie's corpse situated directly between the patrolman's legs, depicting not only a *prima facie* position of domination, but a further "prosthetic motion" of replacement or surrogacy that speaks to the centrality of black masculinity for enlivening or defining white supremacy (Spillers 77). Is

it possible that only by superimposing himself upon the castration site, directly on top of the disembodied phallus, that the patrolman settles into unchecked authority, or does this act point to the existence of an interpenetration or transference between white supremacy and subjugated black masculinity?

Due to the more subdued context and conservative leanings of Ellison's style, we are nonetheless left with an incomplete answer to the above and following questions: how does the eroticism of white supremacy settle itself into lynching and castration acts? Or perhaps, what about the artifice of lynching and castration, when set within the dynamics of naming and writing bodies outlined by Spillers, makes visible homoerotic relations? Following Wood's history of lynching as spectacle, Robyn Wiegman's "Anatomy of Lynching" offers one path of reading lynching as specular that acts as a guide for parsing out more of the embedded or peripheral contexts of Ellison's piece, though it will remain incomplete for an analysis of Baldwin's story later on. Wiegman, in some sense, sits at an intersection of Wood and Spillers, as she posits first, that "lynching is about the law," and second, that the normativity that underlines the discursive deployment of the law in lynching contexts is undergirded by a deeply sexual economy (Wiegman 445-446). Just as the black body itself is marked as excess, "lynching marks the excess of discourses of race and rights," in that it both concretizes the centered-nature of black corporeality, while simultaneously enacting as discipline against it (Wiegman 451, 453, 455). The artifice of terrorism in the form of lynching, which for Wiegman, Spillers, and Wood generally constitutes a crystallization of power dynamics that (falsely) securitizes white supremacy, becomes decidedly Foucauldian as its get situated within a sexual economy of which race as an ordering discourse comes to serve as constitutive of its production (Young 11). As an excessive subject position, the black masculine is predefined corporeally as distanced "from the

privileged ranks of (potential or actual) citizenry,” but true, substantial security of that distance is enforced primarily through lynching:

Lynching figures its victims as the culturally abject, monstrosities of excess whose limp and hanging bodies function as the *specular* assurance that the threat has not simply been averted, but thoroughly negated, dehumanized, and rendered incapable of return. (Wiegman 446) (emphasis mine)

However, the “specular assurance” is only complete through the castration of the mythical black rapist, the essential and typified iteration of black excess for white supremacy. Arising from the inclusion of freeman into white civil society, a rhetoric was constructed that pulled from earlier medicalized slave stereotypes of the phallic endowment and unending sexual desire of black men and came to serve the clarion call for white supremacy *qua* black male subjugation. The black masculine is thus constructed as exceedingly hypermasculinized and constantly desirous for virginal white flesh; as a means of heroic recuperation, the white masculine hero intervenes and severs the phallus, feminizing the black masculine while masculinizing whiteness in a discursive manner only possible through such a mythos (Wiegman 454). Though the black rapist mythos is not voiced, its ends are nonetheless deployed in “The Birthmark.” Returning to Willie’s castration, the patrolman thus acts as the arbiter of patriarchal borders, and in the negation of a monstrous black masculinity, the process of lynching and castration comes to feminize Willie as unequivocally emasculated, with the position of the patrolman acting as the uniformed signpost for the sole elevated status of white supremacy (Wiegman 450).

“*Totus Homo Semen Est*”:

“*Going to Meet the Man,*” *Towards a Reproductive “Anatomy of Lynching”*

Whereas Ellison’s earlier piece was more subdued and necessitated a more extricable kind of interpretation based on Weigman’s notion of castration-cum-feminization and Hortense

Spiller's dynamic readings of flesh, Baldwin's "Going to Meet the Man" situates itself in a psychosexual field that is devoid of the postbellum black rapist mythos, thus entreating us to shirk the process of feminization that comes from a solely phallogocentric lynching analysis. With that in mind, I seek to present Baldwin's text, through both Matt Brim's analysis in "Papa's Baby: Impossible Paternity in "Going to Meet the Man" and Robert J.C. Young's work on Michel Foucault, as a revision or re-envisioning of Robyn Wiegman's "Anatomy of Lynching" outlined above that places white-black male relations within a paternal realm of reproduction and generation, shifting the discussion white supremacist eros to testicular and seminal exchanges, as a means of expanding the excess realm of lynching past the severing of the phallus, lending new dimensions to the excess at the heart of the libidinal economy.

"Going to Meet the Man" centers around sheriff Jesse's impotence and the retreat into often brutal and heavily sexualized accounts of his own abuse of black bodies, specifically male bodies, as a means of recuperating his sexual capacity. It is shown from the outset that heterosexual eroticism is insufficient for Jesse: "the image of a black girl caused a distant excitement in him...the excitement was more like pain...it made action impossible" (Baldwin 201). Instead, the first moment of recollection which signals sexual arousal for Jesse is an earlier moment of brutality with an imprisoned black man, which reads as highly violent moment of foreplay. After he cattle prodded the younger man, "he began to hurt all over with that peculiar excitement which refused to be released;" subsequently, sweat pouring into his face from further assaults on the boy, he then cattle prodded the boy in the testicles, leading to an elusive and undefined erotic feeling within himself that leads to his unexpected, knee-jerk grabbing of his privates when addressed by the boy (Baldwin 205). Within the first instance of white supremacist violence, Jesse already finds himself in a deeply erotic space defined by specular

instances of sexual contact with black men, one masturbatory and the other brutal molestation, that seem to link and make an inescapable and uncontrollable affective circuit: “to his bewilderment, his horror, beneath his own fingers, he felt himself violently stiffen” (Baldwin 207). Upon return from his immediate memory, Jesse is in turn lulled deeper into an earlier erotic moment: his witnessing of a lynching. Baldwin chose to flip the memory, giving the process of regression its full weight, as Jesse is first entranced and then aroused by the recollection of mournful black voices:

He began to sweat. He felt an overwhelming fear,
which yet contained a curious and dreadful pleasure.
I stepped in the river at Jordan.
The water came to my waist. (211)

The focus on fluid, specifically on the fluid of purification as are the waters at Jordan, that greets Jesse at the onset of his memory had begun to be iterated back in the cell, during his own outburst of purified speech in response to the imprisoned boys’ singing: ‘You lucky we *pump* some white blood into you every once in a while—your women!’ (Baldwin 207) Set against Jesse’s subsequent disgust at his young self for wrestling in the dirt with his black friend Otis, the overlapping contexts that Baldwin provides gives pause to an analysis of white supremacist eros that focuses solely on phallic material, and instead forces a reorientation towards fluid, especially semen, and the testicular as a new locality for supremacist erotic focus (Baldwin 212). In turn, we can come to add a seminal aspect to the erotics of white supremacy, a dimension of purification that privileges not only the blood quantum, but seminal fluid itself as “the purest extract of blood” (Young 14). Returning to the lynching scene, we find a primacy given to living, fresh blood that remains absent from Ellison’s account. Whether in Jesse’s first sight of the “kinky, sweating, bloody head,” the luminous sweat that poured into the victim’s navel and groin, or the “blood bubbling from the mouth,” Baldwin pays special attention to privilege

reproductive fluid, generative fluid, and purifying fluid as constitutive loci for understanding Jesse's eroticism (Baldwin 218-219). The hanging body was erotic and beautiful to Jesse because it was gleaming, just as his father's face was "full of sweat...at the moment Jesse loved his father more than he had ever loved him"; at the moment of castration, the crowd itself was incited by the "roaring" fount of blood that undoubtedly rained on them all as they enacted further violence upon the lynched man. (Baldwin 218-219).

Matt Brim frames "Going to Meet the Man" firmly within the bounds of the seminal, as he focuses his analysis on the confrontation and explication of white paternity in the context of whitewashing America, in which the paternal order will always ultimately fail to reproduce itself in full (Brim 173). In seeking to "dramatize the failure of normative biological narratives of reproduction to grapple with the crisis of racemaking," Brim further substantiates the white crisis of homoerotics as constitutive of the "between the lines" as cited by Spillers above, as the "erotic dependence" on black masculinity necessary for sexual and then racial reproduction in turn produces "a state of racelessness" founded on the impossible paternal project of white purity (Brim 174-175; Spillers 79). Brim situates white supremacist masculinity within the fundamentally impossible task of making America white, which is also the task of lynching in some sense, thus the issue of paternity becomes the very constitutive issue of whiteness that lynching reflects (Brim 186). Yet, rather quixotically at first, Brim focuses his analysis on the creation of the black eunuch, thus centering "the role of the unwilling [castrated] black man within the white paternal struggle" as the catalyst of white paternity," in turn de-centering the white female from paternity itself, at least in terms of impotence, as well as privileging the testes over the penis (Brim 183).

Returning to Wiegman's discussion of the black rapist mythos, conventionally, "the white woman serves, in the ethos of nineteenth-century racialism, as a pivotal rhetorical figure for shaping the mythology of the black rapist," and in turn the very performative borders of white supremacist eroticism (Wiegman 461). The white woman is instrumentalized by white masculine authority as a means to approach and control the black phallus as a means to access the virgin, not only in postbellum acts of heroism and domination of a newly free but still sexually over-constituted black threat, yet Grace does not serve this purpose in Baldwin's account. Baldwin's sheriff Jesse, when the sexual nostalgia of his lynching memory cures his impotence, instead enacts the specter of the black man to enter the bedroom:

'Come on, sugar, I'm going to do you like a nigger, just like a nigger, come on, sugar, and love me just like you'd love a nigger' (221).

The parallel structure of Jesse's voiced desires places a material black sexuality at the point of reproduction, instrumentalizing Grace's body as an intermediary vessel in order to access the excess of the black hyper-productivity that Jesse could not otherwise make material (Brim 186). Though Brim does not mention this connection explicitly, it is necessary to remember that the preceding lines explicitly limn Grace by invoking the significant instances of testicular or seminal encounter that Jesse experienced, in turn configuring her as "the transfer point between the literal and the figurative, between reproduction and production, between man and race man:" (Brim 193)

Something bubbled up in him, his nature again returned to him.
He thought of the boy in the cell; he thought of the man in the fire;
He thought of the knife and grabbed himself and stroked himself... (221)

Framing the final sex act between Grace and Jesse as one of procreation, which is nonetheless asymmetrical between a dominant promise "to do" Grace like a black man and a more submissive request to be erotically "loved" by Grace as if he were black, Jesse's vocalization

points to greater fixations within certain realms of white supremacist eros that decenters the objectified female from the psychosexual nocturne, as in the case of paternity, and replaces her with the black testes (Brim 185; Baldwin 221). Citing Wiegman's invocation of Trudier Harris, if "the white male maintains a position of "superiority...especially in keeping black people, particularly black men, in the place he had assigned for them," then Brim intends Baldwin to suggest that rather than drive the black male out of the white marriage bed, he is the only medium through which white procreation can be achieved (Wiegman 461; Brim 190).

"In this destruction of the phallic black beast, the white male reclaims the hypermasculinity that his own mythology of black sexual excess has denied him," yet the white male could in turn consign himself to impotence (Wiegman 464; Brim 187). Wiegman, by way of Paul Hoch, is right in the sense that the construction of black male phallic excess and its domination by white masculine authority through sexual violence upholds "tenuous masculine and white racial identities" (Wiegman 464). But viewing lynching as only a transfer of phallic sexual power, of a binaristic acquisition of a taboo form of sexuality as defined by transgressing white female virginity, is rendered incomplete by Baldwin's focus on the seminal and Brim's analysis of "impossible paternity (Wiegman 464; Brim 173). Whereas Wiegman construes lynching and castration as the delimiting of white male hegemony over masculine totalities through a feminization and confinement of the black male body to the excessive and then disembodied phallus, Baldwin through Brim provides an account that are nonetheless tethered to a brutal dynamics of white masculinity, but sidestep the issue of sexual difference between male and female, and instead deal directly with the repressed homoerotic and homoproductive desires that constitute the reproduction of white supremacy. Wiegman, a la Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick,

approaches this when she states that lynching could represent the dissolving border of the “homosexual/heterosexual binary:”

That point at which the oppositional relation reveals its inherent and mutual dependence, and the heterosexuality of the black male “rapist” is transformed into a violently homoerotic exchange. (Wiegman 466)

However, Brim’s analysis pushes against a direct transfer from heterosexual to homosexual fields, going so far as to say that “repressed homosexuality becomes an imprecise interpretation of Jesse’s impotence..., the libidinal dynamic at play in “Going to Meet the Man” is homoerotic without being traditionally homosexual” (Brim 185). Instead of enacting a “gender-switch on homoerotic relations” that necessarily does violence solely on the victim without in turn equalizing the perpetrator, Brim situates castration in the testicular sense as a dual distancing of the kind Wiegman discussed earlier: “castration in America takes on the double meaning of physically mutilating the black man, and simultaneously, cutting off the white man from his own race, invisibly cleaving whiteness from itself” (Brim 192; 194). Precisely to Foucault’s point, the dual cleavage occurs because the discursive constellation of racemaking situates itself primarily in the “overlappings of blood and sex” (Young 12).

In voicing Baldwin’s refusal “to locate race fears in the flesh,” Brim pushes the linguistic violence of white supremacist discourse into an uncharted “queer imaginative wilderness” that precludes an analysis that resides solely in the postbellum context that configures Jesse as heterosexual and racemaking under white supremacy as a solely phallic process (Brim 13; Young 2). Instead, an erotics of white supremacy, devoid from its heterosexualized trappings and convenient masculinist rhetorics, must confront the crisis of its own paternity: “the realization that race is metaphor and thus cannot be located” (Brim 194). With the realization of

the metaphorical form of race, lynchings can be scripted instead as spectacles that seek to materialize contra this fear, to write dominantly the reality of race while simultaneously figuring “between” the race concept its very unreality, thus signaling white supremacy’s unreal paternity in the lie that is black excess.

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