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# The Erotics of Race Suicide: The Making of Whiteness and the Death Drive in the Progressive Era, 1880-1920

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THE EROTICS OF RACE SUICIDE:  
THE MAKING OF WHITENESS  
AND THE DEATH DRIVE IN THE PROGRESSIVE ERA, 1880-1920

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
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by

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## ABSTRACT

My dissertation examines the frequent representation of suicide in Progressive Era American literature in light of a widely proclaimed socio-political concept of the time: “race suicide.” Coined by the sociologist Edward Ross, the term “race suicide” nominates a nativist fear over the racial enervation of indigenous white Americans. Ross and other commentators on race suicide, most notably Theodore Roosevelt, proclaimed that the diminution of the indigenous white Americans was caused by their unwillingness to breed, signaling the self-destructive, “suicidal” tendency of the race. Consequently, through such means as the enactment of immigration restrictions, the reinforcement of anti-miscegenation laws, and the policing of non-reproductive sexual behaviors, Progressive politics attempted to halt the metaphorical suicide of the “master race.”

While the specter of race suicide haunted the nation, Progressive Era literature saw the rise of a literary trend: characters who terminate their lives. My dissertation explores this concurrence between the self-willed deaths of the collective body and the individual body. By attending to the literary depiction of suicidal characters’ difficult negotiation of the twin discourses of race and sexuality in such works as Henry James’s *The Bostonian* (1886), Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* (1899), Jack London’s *Martin Eden* (1909), and Gertrude Stein’s *The Making of Americans* (completed in 1911, published in 1950), my dissertation argues that suicide in Progressive Era American literature forges a symptomatic resistance to Foucauldian biopower: the life administering power that sutures the individual into the “population” through the double discourses of race and sexuality. The vogue for suicide in Progressive Era American literature

represents the desire to thwart the very pro-natal and nativist politics that the Progressive Era seeks to maintain. In other words, it forms a countercurrent against both the era's calcification of what is now known as the object-choice system of sexuality and its biological conceptions of race as reproduced through heterosexual intercourse. By contending that suicides in literature of the Progressive Era exemplify an eroticism invested in the nullification not only of the object-choice system, but also of subject-object opposition, my dissertation poses a challenge to the dominant understandings of genitally-organized sexuality.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION: THE SEXUALITY OF POPULATION

### The Race that Kills Itself

In his preface to Marie and Bessie Van Vorst's reportage of the lives of factory girls, *The Woman Who Toils* (1903), the then president Theodore Roosevelt voices an alarming possibility for the future of the United States: working women and pleasure-loving effeminate men increasingly steer away from procreation. In their gender transgression and the pursuit of material comfort, they constitute "criminal[s] against the race," who should be "an object of contemptuous abhorrence by all healthy people." For ultimately their willful renunciation of the domestic bliss attests to "what is fundamentally infinitely more important than any other question in this country." The problem is, namely, "race suicide, complete or partial" ("Preface" vii).

*Race suicide*, the quirky trope Roosevelt favored and deployed repeatedly in his writings and speeches, gained wide currency against the backdrop of the shifting racial landscape of the turn-of-the-century United States. The term originally was coined by Edward Ross, who was one of the founders of American sociology and an ardent advocate of immigration restriction amidst the so-called New Immigration. In "The Causes of Race Superiority" (1901), Ross warned against the drastic decline in the birth rate of Anglo-Saxon Americans. Though the downswing of indigenous whites' fertility rate had been observed since the 1880s, Ross' was one of the first arguments that explicitly contrasted it with the rapidly increasing descendants of "new" immigrants from Asia and Southern and Eastern Europe. Native-born white Americans are being outbred by races capable of "multiply[ing] on a lower [economic] plane"; for the old stock Americans' proud racial traits of self-reliance and self-denial "overrule[ ] [their] strongest

instincts” (Ross 86). Refusing to beget offspring in erratic economic prospects resulting from the competition with immigrants, the old stock Americans skate close to a danger of extinction. Ross wagers: “For a case like this I can find no words so apt as ‘race suicide.’ There is no bloodshed, no violence, no assault of the race that waxes upon the race that wanes. The higher race quietly and unobtrusively eliminates itself” (88).

The specter of the noble race killing itself invoked by Ross and Roosevelt haunted the nation, making frequent appearances in newspapers and journals throughout the Progressive Era.<sup>1</sup> The term’s uncanny lyricism prematurely mourns the demise of “the Superior Race” and renders race suicide the cardinal shibboleth of the Progressive Era’s nativism (Ross 86), witnessing its apotheosis in Madison Grant’s white-supremacist gospel, *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916).<sup>2</sup> The apocalyptic scenario, of course, did not materialize. The old stock American did not die out, and the concept of race suicide has sunk beneath our contemporary critical radar, only occasionally mentioned in passing as a ludicrous signifier of the racial hysteria of the Progressive Era.

Yet the very ludicrousness of the concept, I argue, seems to offer a rich field of investigation for the way in which the concept of race is materialized in its relation to death. To belabor the obvious, race cannot literally commit suicide. If we were to follow the definition by Ross’s contemporary French sociologist Émile Durkheim, suicide is “*any case of death resulting directly or indirectly from a positive or negative act, carried out by the victim himself, which he was aware would produce this result*” (Durkheim 19; italics original). Race cannot knowingly and voluntarily kill itself, since “it” neither knows itself nor has the agency to

terminate “its” life. Put simply, under the elegiac cadence of the term race suicide, the collectivity of the concept of race jarringly annexes the singularity of a suicidal individual.

At the same time when the discourse of race suicide nominates white reproductive weakness metaphorically as “suicidal,” literature of the Progressive Era witnessed the proliferation of fictional characters who commit or attempt actual suicide. Hyacinth Robinson in *Princess Casamassima* (1896) shoots himself; Cho-Cho-San in “Madame Butterfly” (1898) cuts her throat; both Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* (1899) and the eponymous hero of *Martin Eden* (1909) drown themselves in the ocean; George Hurstwood in *Sister Carrie* (1900) and Godfrey St. Peter in *The Professor’s House* (1925) asphyxiate themselves by gas; Lily Bart in *The House of Mirth* (1905) overdosed (most likely) on purpose; Marion Lenoir in *The Clansman* (1905) jumps off the cliff; and David Hersland in *The Making of Americans* (1925) starves himself to death. Needless to say, American literary history has been, almost from its inception, colored by memorable self-inflicted deaths in such works as James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of Mohicans* (1826), William Wells Brown’s *Clotel* (1853), and Herman Melville’s “Bartleby, the Scribner” (1853).<sup>3</sup> Even in the modernist period, suicide continues to be an important leitmotif, one of the most salient examples of which would be the death of Quentin Compson in *The Sound and the Fury* (1929).<sup>4</sup> Yet the number of representations of self-immolation in the age of race suicide stands out unparalleled, forging a literary vogue that seems to demand a post-mortem.

“The Erotics of Race Suicide” focuses on the correspondence between the national discourse of race suicide and the literary trend of individual suicide. In so doing, my project asks: what warranted the slippery homology between the individual body and the collective

body in the rhetoric of race suicide? And how does suicide, the act of destroying “the body,” collide with this forged node between social and individual bodies? In asking these questions my project sees the discourse of race suicide as a fertile space for rethinking what Michel Foucault calls “biopower.” By biopower Foucault means the power of modern states that control the lives of individuals for the optimization of national force. In contrast to the older mechanism of sovereignty that exercised its power through the right to dispose the life of citizens, biopower fosters, manages, and disciplines life. In Foucault’s pithy terms, the power of the sovereign is “the right to take life or let live”; biopower is, in contrast, “the right to make live and to let die” (“*Society*” 241).

If one of the hallmarks of biopower is the thorough investment in the cultivation of productive forces and the calculus of their efficient uses, the turn-of-the-century United States exemplifies its managerial ethos through and through. The period known as the Progressive Era was, as its name suggests, deeply invested in the notion of progress, rationality, and efficiency. As epitomized by the rises of Taylorism, domestic sciences, and eugenics, the Progressives firmly believed in scientific technologies and their potential for the biological engineering of human resources. That is, the period conceptualizes humans as reproducible and perfectable.<sup>5</sup> Race suicide, with its resounding reproductive imperative, is one of the manifestations of Progressive belief in the statistical management of human bodies. At the same time, however, the trope’s ominous timbre counters the forward-looking ethos of the era. The suicidal impetus in race that Ross and Roosevelt presupposed seems to hint at a biopolitical anxiety that such control might have a fissure: what if subjects under the control of the life-administering power choose to throw away their lives? Ultimately, “The Erotics of Race Suicide” argues that literary

protagonists enamored by self-inflicted death in the Progressive Era perform personal enactments of race suicide, constituting a symptomatic resistance to the operation of biopolitics.

### The Reification of the “Social Body”

Though the corporeal figuration of the social itself has a long history,<sup>6</sup> the resuscitation of the timeworn trope at the turn of the century U.S.—albeit as a moribund one—was enabled through the proliferation of the cardinal instrument of biopower: the discourse of sexuality. To follow Michel Foucault’s classic formulation in *The History of Sexuality Vol. I* (1976), sex emerged as the suture between the individual and the collective, enabling the biopolitical control over both at once. On the one hand, under the discursive imperative of sexuality that urges modern subjects to confess and pursue the truth of sex, sex was crafted as *the* object of desire that would mark and warrant one’s singularity. Because its an eminently personal and corporeal mode of operation, sex imaginarily functions as something that demarcates the most private: it became “that secret which seems to underlie all that we are, and ... to reveal what we are and to free us from what defines us” (155). One’s use of sex became “the stamp of individuality,” understood as bespeaking the internal state of being rather than a set of acts (146). Each individual gains access “to his own intelligibility,” “to the whole of his body,” and “to his identity” only by surrendering himself to surveilling discourse of sexuality, and thereby rendering himself subject to the state’s disciplinary control (155-56).

While the discourse of sexuality thus administers the individual body, it also became a means of access to the collective life: that is, the life of “population.” Starting in the eighteenth century, Foucault argues, the term *population* entered into political lexicon overlaying—though not supplanting—“subjects” or “people.” At the core of economic and political concerns of the

modern state were “population as wealth, population as manpower or labor capacity, population balanced between its own growth and the resources it commanded” (25). Because of its procreative effects, sex emerged as the central venue to manage such demographic issues. The wellbeing of population demands regulation of individual subjects’ use of sex through the analysis of “the birthrate, the age of marriage, the legitimate and illegitimate births, the precocity and frequency of sexual relations, the ways of making them fertile or sterile, the effects of unmarried life or of the prohibitions, the impact of contraceptive practices” (25-26). In short, the effective management of copulation theoretically optimizes the life of population.<sup>7</sup>

At the discursive confluence of individual and collective sexuality, the figuration of the *social body* was given unprecedented credence. The social body itself is now sexualized: to use Foucault’s phrasing, “the organization of ‘erotic zones’ in the social body” becomes imaginable (151). It does not simply mean that the continual existence of the population is contingent on procreative acts that produce bodies; in the management of population, every use of sex—who should have sex with whom, when, how often, in what ways—counts. Not only will unchecked breeding lead to the Malthusian nightmare of a boundlessly expanding population starving to death. When a century had passed since Malthus’s ominous prophesy in *An Essay on the Principle of Population* (1798), the mere survival of population seemed to be promising enough.<sup>8</sup> What mattered instead was its level of health and energy. Discursively produced as a collective singular, population, came to have a life of its own at once vulnerable to decay and capable of improvement. The thriving social body is one that manages its use of sex for the optimization of life.

Precisely at the moment when the discourse of sexuality reified the social body as a biopolitical entity, race, in its modern biologized form, came to “matter.” That is to say, race not only gained discursive salience as something intelligible, but also was materialized as “a sign of irreducibility” (Butler *Bodies* 4). The modern imaginary of race, to the present, has often revolved around an assumption that it refers to a discrete group of people sharing a set of physiological traits that are biologically inheritable. Even though scholars have repeatedly discredited scientific groundings of race, genetic or otherwise, race has shaped and naturalized the modern cognitive patterning of human classification. This biologized notion of race, as has often been pointed out, did not gain discursive dominance until the turn of the the twentieth century. Since its first appearance in English, the referent of the term *race* had been blurry at best. Originally referring to stocks of animals or varieties of plants, *race* gradually began to be used as a descriptor of human groups from the seventeenth century. From then on, *race* “developed as a classificatory term in English similar to, and interchangeable with, *people*, *nation*, *kind*, *type*, *variety*, *stock*, and so forth” (Smedley and Smedley 37).<sup>9</sup> As such, *race* carried a range of reference, encompassing meanings that were occupational (the “race of bishops”), genealogical (the “race of Abraham”), national (the “British race”), tribal ( the “Teutonic race”), gendered (the “softer race”), religious ( the “Hindu race”), linguistic ( the “English speaking race”), geographical (the “European race”), universal (the “human race”), and/or morphological (the “white race”), according to given periods and contexts. By the second half of the nineteenth century, the variegated meanings of *race* had begun to collapse into some of the preexisting definitions, most notably national, tribal, special, and morphological groupings. Even by then competing taxonomies of race uneasily coexisted. As

late as in 1888, “the total number of races was a point of great contention” among experts, ranging from two to sixty-three (Scott-Childress 4).

However, from the last third of nineteenth century to the first decades of the twentieth century, the previously loose contours of *race* gradually yet steadily came to converge on the categorization based on innate, hereditary traits. In the United States, the convergence of meanings of *race* coincided with two events: the popularization of evolutionism and Reconstruction. In the first half of the nineteenth century, polygenists were still prevalent in the U.S., explaining different types of mankind as different species.<sup>10</sup> For polygenists, one of the major obstacles was the interfertility between different human types, particularly between whites and blacks. For, since Comte de Buffon’s definition in the mid-eighteenth century, species had been understood as a group capable of interbreeding. In this sense, the concept of species was “all about sex—all about who has sex with whom. A species consists of a collection of individuals who do or could have fertile sexual contact with one another” (McWhorter, 89).<sup>11</sup> The interfertility between different human groups was one of the cornerstones for monogenist arguments to claim the unity of human origin. In order to legitimate morphological difference as the marker of humanity, polygenists claimed the sterility and debility of the offspring of “hybrid” as a sign of reproductive failure between separate species.<sup>12</sup> The heated debate between polygenists and monogenists in the mid-nineteenth century was seemingly settled with the triumph of the latter by the publication of Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. While the wide acceptance of evolutionism on both sides of the Atlantic invalidated special divides in humans, the end of the Civil War blurred—albeit on a surface level—social distinctions among the citizens, now defined as “[a]ll

persons born or naturalized in the United States” by the Fourteenth Amendment. Previously obvious divisions between human groups, most notably that between whites and blacks, were now lost, demanding new devices for demarcation.

A biologized definition of *race*, at least in the U.S. context, began to gain wide currency at this moment. In one sense, we might see the rise of a biologized notion of race as a reincarnation of polygenism defeated in the midcentury; for, as much as species, race became a concept of “who has sex with whom.” Although laws prohibiting intermarriage had existed since the Colonial era, anti-miscegenation laws were increasingly reinforced in many states during the Progressive Era. Placed outside the sphere of civil rights protection guaranteed by the Reconstruction Amendments, state-sanctioned matrimonial regulations became one of the main loci where blurred lines between different human types could be redrawn. As one prominent authority on matrimonial laws in the Progressive Era writes in 1873, “[T]he manifest tendency of the day is toward removing all legal impediments of rank and condition, leaving individual tastes and social manners to impose the only restriction of this nature” (qtd. in Grossberg 139).

Yet anti-miscegenation laws were not enacted according to “individual tastes and social manners” alone, although the ostensibly personal nature of sex was deployed for the naturalization of bans on intermarriage. As the term *miscegenation* originally was coined in a polygenic context, anti-miscegenation laws were reinforced with the added emphasis on hereditary dangers of intermarriage.<sup>13</sup> The justices of the Kentucky Supreme Court, for instance, authorized the state’s right to ban intermarriage as miscegenation threatened to be “deteriorating to the Caucasian blood and destructive of the social and legislative decorum of

States” (qtd. in Grossberg 137). Initially targeting matrimony between blacks and whites, anti-miscegenation laws gradually extended its prohibition on intermarriage to unions between whites and Asians, as well as Native Americans. As a result, toward the end of the Progressive Era, twenty-eight states and territories enacted various forms of anti-miscegenation laws.<sup>14</sup>

### The Buried History of Race in *The History of Sexuality*

Race, seen in this light, was given substance as biological entity through sex: biological race was constructed as something that should be reproduced—and could be adulterated—by procreative sex. Of course the interconnectedness between race and sex I postulate here is by no means a new insight.<sup>15</sup> On one level, as Richard Dyer argues in *White* (1997), “All concepts of race are always concepts of heterosexuality,” regardless of how *race* is defined. For even when race is *not* strictly defined in terms of biology—meaning, even when it refers to some genealogical groupings, which includes older, national or tribal definition of race—race always is and has been a means of differentiation, and the supposed difference is fabricated and maintained through propagation of members belonging to the group. In this sense, race always is a process of racialization “realized through heterosexuality” (Dyer 20).

I would trouble Dyer’s anachronistic formulation that “all concepts of race” across time align with the historically specific construct of “heterosexuality.” Needless to say, Dyer uses the term *heterosexuality* as shorthand for different-sex procreative acts; pointing out the historical rootedness of the concept of heterosexuality, therefore, does not discredit his central argument. Yet Dyer’s casual juxtaposition of “all concepts of race” and “heterosexuality” seems to point towards the ways in which the latter was naturalized precisely through the modern discourse of race as an enabler of the reproduction of bodies. Initially coined as a clinical term for

different-sex eroticism that deviates from procreative sex, *heterosexuality* was normalized through its potential—if unrealized—relation to procreation. As Jonathan Ned Katz illuminates in *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (2005), when the term *heterosexuality* made its debut in the sexological lexicon in the late nineteenth century, it had, if any, only a tangential relation to procreative sex. At its inception the term *heterosexuality* is contrasted with procreative sex, heralding the coming of “the historic shift from the late-Victorian procreation ethic to the modern ‘pleasure principle’” (Katz 59). The tendency to pathologize heterosexuality dissociated from procreative sex prevailed in the United States well into the first decades of the twentieth century. Heterosexuality was, in *Dorland’s Medical Dictionary* published in 1901 defined as “Abnormal or perverted appetite toward the opposite sex” (86). It was only in the late 1920s when the term *heterosexuality* became a sign of normalcy that gave would rephrase here “vent to heteroerotic emotions” and thereby potentially enhanced “reproductive capacity” of the dwindling white middle class (87).

What I am driving at here is the strangely contiguous histories of two terms: that is, *race* as biological entity and *heterosexuality* as normative form of sexuality. The synchronicity seems to indicate the two terms’ joint-construction with its conceptual dependency on procreative sex as a node. Race was conceptualized as produced through heterosexual procreative sex; heterosexuality was constructed as the enabler of reproduction of race. It is not surprising, therefore, that race hovers around Foucauldian history of sexuality. Although seldom brought into a sharp focus, as Ann Stoler illuminates in *Race and the Education of Desire* (1995), “references to racism in *The History of Sexuality* are neither incidental nor perfunctory” (Stoler 21). The intersection between race and sexuality is mapped, though hazily,

in the final two sections in *The History of Sexuality Vol. I*, and later elaborated in Foucault's lecture series at the Collège de France given in the same year as the publication of *Vol. I*.<sup>16</sup>

The final parts of *The History of Sexuality Vol. I*—"Periodization" and "Right of Death and Power over Life"—elusively introduce the way in which "a state-directed racism" rose through the discourse of sexuality, particularly through the "theory of 'degenerescence'" (*History* 119, 118). Theories of degeneracy proliferated in the late nineteenth century to explain the sexual anomaly of individual bodies both as inheritable (producing more abnormalities) and infertile (not being able to produce fecund offspring). Though Foucault does not spell out its relation to racism, degeneracy was often invoked in the figure of racial others and in relation to miscegenation, as we have seen in the U.S. context. Hence, "[b]eginning in the second half of the nineteenth century," the discourse of sexuality incorporated a racist logic: "Racism took shape at this point (racism in its modern, 'biologizing,' statist form)" (149). Thus, Foucault locates the "last stage" of the development of the discourse of sexuality "at the end of the nineteenth century"—immediately after the birth of state racism according to his thesis—when "the juridical and medical control of perversions" was sanctioned to maximize its power "for the sake of a general protection of society and the race" (122).

Foucault's usage of the term *race* in *History* is frustratingly slippery. *Race* is often juxtaposed with—and almost interchangeable with—*population*, *species*, *society*, or *the social body*, as if to perform the historical mutability of the term *race* itself.<sup>17</sup> "*Society Must Be Defended*," Foucault's lecture series given at the Collège de France, unwraps the history of state racism enshrouded in *The History of Sexuality*, and elucidates the rhetoric in which one biologized race comes to be equated with population, species, society, and the social body

through the operation of biopower. In *"Society,"* Foucault delineates the historical transition of the concept of race as the shift from "the discourses of races" to "the discourse of race" (81). "The discourses of races," beginning in the sixteenth century, are constituted by multiple histories of confrontation between races: in essence, they are competing accounts of history by different tribal or national groupings against the dominant group, embodied most prominently by Roman sovereignty. From the late nineteenth century, in contrast, the discourse of race struggle is no longer waged by decentered peoples; it presupposes only "one true race, the race that holds power and is entitled to define the norm, and against those who deviate from that norm, against those who pose a threat to the biological heritage" (61). At stake for the new discourse of race struggle is the imperative to protect the purity of "the race." All other races—though termed as such—are but "the subrace, the counterrace" that poses biological threats of degeneration to "the race" (61-62).

It is at this moment when the sovereign right of death and the biopolitical power over life converge; or rather, biopower incorporates the function of the sovereign using racism as its interface, when it becomes "a 'biopolitics' of the human race" (243). If the modus operandi of biopower, "the power to 'make' live and 'let' die," is to discipline the individual body under the rubric of regulating the collective life so as to optimize its quality, how can it justify the act of mass murder, which is also a hallmark of modern power (241)? The answer is, for Foucault, "By using the themes of evolutionism, by appealing to a racism" (257). State racism, by postulating "the race" as equal to "the human race," renders mass murder a mode of protection, introducing "the break between what must live and what must die":

racism makes it possible to establish a relationship between my life and the death of the other that is not a military or warlike relationship of confrontation, but a biological-type

relationship: ‘The more inferior species die out, the more abnormal individuals are eliminated, the fewer degenerates there will be in the species as a whole and the more I—as species rather than individual—can live, the stronger I will be, the more vigorous I will be. I will be able to proliferate.’ The fact that the other dies does not mean simply that I live in the sense that his death guarantees my safety; the death of the other, the death of the bad race, of the inferior race (or the degenerate, or the abnormal) is something that will make life in general healthier: healthier and purer. (255)

In short, the death-function that characterizes the sovereign—the power to “take life or let live”—is not only “complemented by” biopower, as Foucault puts it; rather, it is hardwired in the structure of biopower (241). In this sense, as Achille Mbembe argues in “Necropolitics” (2003), “the notion of biopower is insufficient to account for contemporary forms of subjugation of life to the power of death” (39-40). Biopower and biopolitics are inseparable from what Mbembe calls necropower and necropolitics, “the power and the capacity to dictate who may live and who must die” (11). In order for biopower to make “the race”—conceptualized as coextensive with “humans”—healthier and purer, it must eliminate “the counterace,” those that deviate from the norm of “the race.”

But the causation also functions the other way around. By this I mean biopower does *not*, as Foucault and Mbembe seem to suggest, incidentally incorporate the power to take life for the sake of the protection of “the race.” Rather, in order for biopower to function in the sovereign mode, it requires a racist rhetoric—at least if we see it from the genealogy of biological race in the turn-of-the-century U.S. As we have seen, biological race gained its name, *race*, precisely at the moment when the previously taken-for-granted lines between different human types were blurred. Only by calling them *races*, and thereby discursively materializing biologically different groups, did the modern form of power reinstate the structure of dominance, justifying the oppression and ultimately the slaughter of other races. In this sense, as Alexander Weheliye critiques in *Habeas Viscus* (2014), Foucault’s delineation of biopower seems to mistakenly

“imagine an indivisible biological substance anterior to race.” Race is effected through what Weheliye calls “racializing assemblages”—“a set of sociopolitical processes that discipline humanity into full humans, not-quite-humans, and nonhumans” (4). Put simply, there is no race prior to racism: it is a structure of “differentiation and hierarchization, which are projected onto the putatively biological human body” that produces race (5).

In other words, even though the hermeneutic potency of the Foucauldian portrayal of biopower resides in its decentralized omnipresence that alters our habitual understanding of “power,” biopower does seem to have a center that resembles sovereignty. Foucault’s ventriloquist rhetoric in the quotation above narrated by “I—as species rather than individual” seems to bespeak the implied presence of the embodied center of biopower (*Society* 255). The racist rhetoric, in which “my life” becomes livable through the death of the counterrace, is enabled only when certain individuals identify with the life of “the race,” nominating it “my life.” In other words, in biopower the role of the embodied sovereign is enacted by the social body as an “I.” In order for biopower to function as omnipresent power, it needs to figure the social corporeally to be protected and nurtured by self-discipline of individual bodies, as well as the structural exclusion of what is perceived as the foreign body within.

### Death, the Most Private Thing of All

Race suicide, seen in this light, stands as the prototypical example of biopolitical rhetoric at least in the following four senses. First, though coming into being in the age when biologized race began to gain discursive dominance, the discourse of race suicide avails itself of the mutability of the term *race*. While race suicide specifically refers to the dropping birthrate of a certain racial group, namely, indigenous white Americans, in effect it becomes the problem of

“the race,” whose proliferation is equated with the life of the nation and the society. Thus, bodies of the old stock Americans were amassed and regimented as the social body. Second, by nominating the old stock Americans who refuse to breed the self-murderers of the social body, the discourse of race suicide reinforces the chiasmic relation between race and sex. While it forges and materializes race as something that could be reproduced only through procreative sex, it calcifies procreative sex as quintessential for the survival of “the race,” strengthening disciplinary control over the bodies of old stock Americans. In so doing, the rhetoric of race suicide fuses the individual life into the life of “the race,” so much so that the two are indistinguishable. In essence, race suicide urges individual old stock Americans to “procreate; otherwise *you* shall die.”

Third, through the figuration of the dying social body, the rhetoric of race suicide mournfully animates “the race.” For, to use Judith Butler’s evocative phrasing, “grievability is a condition of a life’s emergence and sustenance” (*Frames* 15): “Precisely because a living being may die, it is necessary to care for that being so that it may live. Only under conditions in which the loss would matter does the value of the life appear” (14). In the rhetoric of race suicide, “the race” gains the height of liveliness, enlivened through images of death. It constitutes a precarious subjecthood whose potential loss of life should be grieved and therefore must be prevented. Fourth, the creation of “the race” as the eminently grievable is, as Butler further argues, predicated on the production of “others whose loss is no loss, and who remain ungrievable” (24). The self-elegies of race suicide were deeply entangled with eugenics, as exemplified in Madison Grant’s *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916). To protect the race that is passing, the nation must weed out “the undesirables”: “an ever widening circle of social

discards, beginning always with the criminal, the diseased, and then extending gradually to types which may be called weaklings rather than defectives, and perhaps ultimately to worthless race types” (Grant 47). Unless those undesirable populations are eliminated by “segregation or sterilization” (49), indigenous white Americans will “entirely disappear” because of their “suicidal ethics” (81). The rhetoric of race suicide thus orchestrates the schemes by which the grievable would survive the ungrivable: the successive enactments of immigration restrictions culminating in Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, the sterilization of the immigrants and African Americans, and the reinforcement of anti-miscegenation laws. These nativist and white supremacist politics were legitimized by a necropolitical dictum: “eradicate the counterrace; or *you* shall die.”

Yet the genius of race suicide resides in its poetic irony. Constructed as a quintessentially biopolitical trope, race suicide incidentally manifests an anxiety over the agency it rhetorically bestowed on that fictive body: what if the social body determines to die for itself? What if “the race” begins to assert the power to take life over its own body, not over the undesirable counterrace? Death ferments, as Foucault notes, a biopolitical anxiety. If the alleged role of the modern form of power is to “ensure, sustain, multiply life,” giving death to its subjects emerges as “a limit, scandal, and a contradiction” of biopower. Biopower is only justified to take life when certain bodies are regarded as “a kind of biological danger” to the social body (as in racism) (*History* 138). In other cases, biopower cannot confer death on its subjects. Hence Foucault argues that death in the age of biopower has lost the ritual valence it had under sovereignty:

Power has no control over death, but it can control mortality. And to that extent, it is only natural that death should now be privatized, and should become the most private thing of

all. In the right of sovereignty, death was the moment of the most obvious and most spectacular manifestation of the absolute power of the sovereign; death now becomes, in contrast, the moment when the individual escapes all power, falls back on himself and retreats, so to speak, into his own privacy. Power no longer recognizes death. Power literally ignores death. (“*Society*” 248)

After all, biopower is not the power to “make live and let die” as Foucault terms it (241); rather, it is the power to make live and *disallow* death. For the power that establishes its dominion through the control of the body—be it individual or social—death, the loss of the body, marks the limit of its control that has to be avoided. Suicide, above all deaths, Foucault further notes in *The History of Sexuality*, is the utmost scandal for biopower; for the individual’s determination to kill oneself “testifie[s] to the individual and private right to die” (*History* 139). Suicide thus became “one of the first astonishments of a society in which political power had assigned itself the task of administering life”: as epitomized in Émile Durkheim’s *On Suicide* (1897), it was “one of the first conducts to enter into the sphere of sociological analysis” (138-39).

But the sudden appearance of suicide in *The History of Sexuality* seems to prompt us to push Foucault’s postulation a little further. Ever critical of “the promise of a ‘liberation’” given by biopower in exchange for the participation in the discourse of sexuality, Foucault’s view on death is uncharacteristically romantic (83). While the discourse on sex exploits “it as *the secret*” to be confessed and inscribed in the body of knowledge (35; italics original), death has become “the most secret aspect of existence, the most ‘private’” (138). In contrast to sexuality, contrived as the deepest reservoir of one’s private selfhood yet in fact always mediated by the social body, the singularity of death might cordon off the fantastical realm unmediated by the public: the most private, the most intimate, and the most unknowable. As such, we might see self-inflicted death as erotically cathected, just as sexuality is because of its status as *the secret*.

“The Erotics of Race Suicide” amplifies Foucault’s muted suggestion and explores the liberatory potential of suicide as imagined at the dawn of modern sexual regimes. Through a consideration of death-laden texts by Henry James, Kate Chopin, Jack London, and Gertrude Stein, my project maps the contour of the affective investment in the self-destruction prevalent in the age of race suicide. Suicides in these works, I will argue, evince the writers’ difficult negotiations with the pronatal racial-sexual discourse of the Progressive Era, becoming personal enactments of race suicide.

Suicidal characters of these literary texts are, by and large, favored members of “the race” situated at the heart of the social body: Olive Chancellor, James’s New England Brahmin heroine; Edna Pontellier, Chopin’s bourgeois wife coming from Roosevelt’s favorite “old Kentucky race”; Martin Eden, London’s literary self-made man heralding the new white manhood; and David Hersland, Stein’s representative man of the generic, rising American middle-class. In their own ways, these characters, as well as their creators, are embedded in—and in varying degree complicit with—the racial discourse of their time. With the procreative imperative of race suicide, their individual bodies are tightly mortised into the social body. Their use of the allegedly most private thing, sex, never is their own; but they seem to have some sort of desire that is not quite legible in the burgeoning discourse of sexuality based on the homo/hetero binary. The fastening between the two bodies—individual and social—is so inextricable that only through death, the ultimate disembodiment, it seems, could they claim their private selfhood and their desire. In this sense, their self-killing attests to the nightmarish realization of the biopolitical anxiety, which is ingrained in the trope of *race suicide* itself. They do not only, as the popularizers of race suicide admonished, betray the

nation's reproductive imperative to endanger the life of the social body; by their profligate act of wasting their lives, they become traitors to the power that makes live and disallows death.

At the same time, however, their endeavors are like an Icarusian flight, doomed from the outset. Their defiance against biopower through their exercise of the private right of death might cordon off their selfhood unmediated by the social body; but the moment they seem to achieve such singularity, it ceases to exist with their death. With this focus on—and affective investment in—their hopeless romanticism, my project aligns itself with the theoretical tradition called queer negativity, developed by such critics as Leo Bersani, Lee Edelman, Tim Dean, and Heather Love. In particular, in engaging with the exploration of the erotic valence of death as that which attempts to reclaim the individual body from the social body, “The Erotics of Race Suicide” joins Edelman’s polemical rejection of reproductive futurism in *No Future* (2004). By this I mean I share his skepticism about the “presupposition that the body politic must survive,” insofar as the trope of body politic necessarily invokes the capitalized figure of “the Child” as the embodiment of its futurity (3).

However, to borrow Love’s words in *Feeling Backward* (2009), “I do not follow him in calling for the voiding of the future” (22). Especially in the historical context of the Progressive Era, whose ethos is inseparable with the notion of progress, the suicidal characters considered in my dissertation represent what Love terms the backward turn, “turn[ing] their backs on the future” (8). If their suicide attempts to claim the singularity of their selfhood, which is destined to disappear the moment it is achieved, these figures are unfit for effecting any social change. Their death might attest to their singularity, but such singularity cannot achieve political agency to act for the future. Still, their erotic desire for which they destroy their bodies, I would argue,

prompts us to “imagine a future apart from the reproductive imperative, optimism, and the promise of redemption. A backward future, perhaps” (147).

### Undoing the Body, Remaking the Social Body

In the chapters that follow, I will attend to the ways in which various authors try to produce their versions of a “backward future,” reconfiguring the pleasure of the body politic in terms other than heterosexualization. “The Erotics of Race Suicide” opens with a chapter tracing the origin of the discourse of race suicide. Though the term *race suicide* was not coined until 1901, the 1880s already witnessed the first signs of the declining birthrate of the ingenious whites. In particular, New England emerged as the epicenter of the growing racial hysteria over the degeneration of Anglo-Saxon whites in the 1880s, and later it became the vanguard of the immigration restriction movement. As Nell Painter points out, the very idea of “New England” connoted more than a regional category: “New England stood for racial Englishness—vide *English Traits*” (Painter 207). As the cradle of the old American stock, the falling birthrate in New England presaged the national anxiety over white reproductive weakness that lasted throughout the Progressive Era. Analyzing Henry James’s *The Bostonians* (1886), Chapter 2 “The Sacrificial Ecstasy: *The Bostonians*, Neurasthenia, and the ‘Obscure Hurt’” investigates the way in which the reproductive weakness of New Englanders was forged as a nervous disease in period medical discourse. Neurasthenia, a newfangled disease of the fin-de-siècle United States, closely associated the suffrage movement with white women’s decreasing fecundity. Seeing the feminist protagonist of *The Bostonians*, Olive Chancellor, as well as James himself, as exemplars of the ethos of neurasthenia, I argue that James poses an alternative model of constructing “the social body.” That is, the body politic not incarnated

through reproductive heterosexuality but through bodily wounds as stigmata. When we read the novel side by side with James's much-debated account of his "obscure hurt" in *Notes of a Son and Brother* (1914), Olive Chancellor's "morbid" desire to die for the feminist cause will begin to emerge as a masochist *jouissance*—the self-shattering pleasure of quasi-religious ecstasy that refuses to register into the legible network of sexuality.

While the beginning of the Progressive Era understood Northern feminists to epitomize race suicide as it was developing, the 1890s witnessed another figuration of female unwillingness to breed: the New Woman. Chapter 3, "New Woman Breeding a New Race: Kate Chopin and the Aesthetics of Devolution" examines how the turn-of-the-century shift from the productive to the consumer economy spawned New Women invested in the pleasures of self-fashioning and consumption. The emergent economy centered on pleasure increasingly evacuated sex's reproductive imperative. I argue that consumption redirects the New Woman to non-reproductive and anti-teleological eroticism, providing them with the narcissistic pleasure of waste. Edna Pontellier's rejection of maternity that culminates in her suicidal swim in *The Awakening* (1899), in this context, heralds the consumptive erotic of the New Woman, which wastes her both financial and libidinal reproductive resources. In this sense, the pleasure of consumption in *The Awakening*, as well as Chopin's short stories published in *Vogue*, gesture toward the original meaning of the word *consume*: to devour, to make away with something, to the extent of its extermination. Situating the novel in its original historical moment—New Orleans at the time of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896)—further illuminates the racializing logic of Jim Crow, in which property reproduction and biological reproduction were inextricably intertwined. Edna Pontellier's erotic attraction to Creole whites — whose racial identity came to

signify the epistemological uncertainty of whiteness after *Plessy* — suggests her flirtation with the dangerous lure of miscegenation.

A decade after the New Woman's self-drowning in the Gulf of Mexico, another literary figure takes a suicidal swim into the ocean: Martin Eden, the eponymous hero of Jack London's 1909 novel. In contrast to the preceding two chapters focusing on female unwillingness to breed, the third chapter places the crisis of masculinity at the heart of the discourse of race suicide. Parting from neurasthenic New England and the Jim Crow South, Chapter 4, "The Spectral Lineage: Jack London, Teutonism, and Interspecies Kinship" takes the remote geographies of Alaska as the surrogate frontier. The closure of the frontier announced at the end of the nineteenth century also signified the impasse for the future of indigenous whites; for the westward expansion, figured as the "West cure," had functioned in American imaginary as a panacea for race suicide, revitalizing overcivilized white manhood. With the 1897 Klondike Gold Rush, Alaska offered a mirage of the last gasp of racial regeneration, in which young Jack London himself was thoroughly invested as a prospector. Reading London's works set in Klondike along with Madison Grant's *Passing of the Great Race*, this chapter argues that Alaska emerged as a mythical Northland for both writers; namely, the breeding ground for the Teutonic. I argue that Teutonism proliferated at the dawn of the twentieth century emanating from the desire to disown the neurasthenic, old American stock heredity and to mold the virile white manhood atavistically in the mythical image of the primeval Northern Europeans. Such atavistic return, for London, was enabled through the logic of totemic kinship, whose model was offered by Alaska Natives. By deploying the newfangled concept of kinship developed by his contemporary anthropologists, London claims, to use his words, "the kinship with the other

animals,” regimenting the new white masculinity as the “Sons of the Wolf.” Insofar as “race” at the turn of the century was, especially after *Plessy*, increasingly defined in hereditary terms, the concept of “kinship” has the potential to sidestep the pro-procreative discourse of race and sexuality. London’s affective investment in non-human animals, particularly in canine companions, I argue, offers an alternative model of erotically charged sociality contrasted sharply with the conjugal family as the breeding ground of the race.

Towards the end of the Progressive Era, the craze of race suicide began to subside, slowly giving way to an ascending, new racial discourse: assimilation. This shift in racial discourse signaled the incorporation of new immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe. At the dawn of the Progressive Era, new immigrants’ uncanny fecundity fueled the discourse of race suicide, regarded as a malignant growth devouring the social body. In forty years, the Progressive racial discourse found a way to reverse the process. That is to say, it is not the new immigrants who devour the nation; it is the social body that ingests vigorous foreign bodies into its system. As exemplified by Roosevelt’s fervent approbation of Israel Zangwill’s 1908 play *The Melting Pot* shows, the American body politics was now increasingly geared toward the integration of diverse European populations. Celt, Latin, Slav and Teuton, in the lexicon of Teutonism, were incorporated into a single master race under the rubric of whiteness. Chapter 5, “Gertrude Stein’s Melting Pot: The Excretory Pleasure of *The Making of Americans*,” situates Gertrude Stein’s massive semi-autobiography written intermittently between 1903 to 1911 in the context of immigrant assimilation. Stein’s 1000-page magnum opus, *The Making of Americans*, tries to incorporate “every one” in the alleged family saga as if to perform the ethos of the omnivorous social body. Focusing on Stein’s coprophillic poetics, I argue that the text reconfigures the

process of immigrant assimilation as the digestive assimilation, in which disembodied “Americans” are produced excretorily. Tracing the complex production history of *The Making of Americans* will illuminate the way in which Jewishness of the characters, as well as of the author’s, was erased during the process of making of the *ur*-modernist text, in a gesture similar to the American body politic’s dissolution of various ethnic markers of European immigrants in assimilation. Reading with and through Sigmund Freud’s theories of anal pregnancy, the excretory pleasure of *The Making of Americans* shows that anus becomes the eroticized site of propagation, which, in contrast to heterosexual procreation, nullifies racial and sexual difference. In this reading, the suicide of David Hersland at the end of the text marks the culmination of Stein’s relentlessly democratic endeavor entangled with excretory disembodiment. That is, he chooses to end his life in order to approximate the universal being that the text calls “one,” which he believes inhabits every differentially embodied being.

#### Penumbrae of White Heteronormativity

In tracing the suicidal characters’ attempts to undo the node between the social and the individual bodies, my project aims to probe into the very construction of the twin discourses of race and sexuality. Though such works as Siobhan Somerville’s *Queering the Color Line* (2000) and Roderick Ferguson’s *Aberrations in Black* (2004) have offered insightful arguments on the racialized nature of heteronormativity, the previous studies seem to revolve exclusively around the two axes of black and white, homo- and heterosexuality. Their works emphasize the imbrication of blackness and homosexuality, consequently leaving much of the rich terrain of sexuo-racial spectrum uncharted. One of my contentions is that the high-contrast binaries of black/white and homo/heterosexuality operated to eclipse amorphous otherness, thereby

constructing the black and/or homosexual body as the tangible counterpoint to the white, heterosexualized social body. Yet, as the following chapters will demonstrate, the Progressive Era is not only the age of the severe racial segregation against the African Americans. It was also a period of the marginalization of white Creoles, of the coercive assimilation of Eastern and Southern European immigrants, as well as of the unprecedented regulation of complex kinship systems of Native Americans. All of these, in addition to the Jim Crow, helped the biological engineering of the body politic as white and heterosexual.

Accordingly, instead of taking up the given categories and examining the marked halves of homo/hetero and black/white binaries, “The Erotics of Race Suicide” inquires into the very construction of normativity through the intertwined discourses of race and sexuality, focusing on the penumbræ of white heteronormativity. If, as David Halperin contends in *How to Do the History of Homosexuality*, “homosexuality” was invented as an umbrella term that absorbs “a number of different notions about same-sex sexual attraction,” such as a psychological condition (gender orientation), an erotic desire (sexual object-choice), and a sexual practice (sexual behavior), a similar process occurred in the realm of race (*How to Do* 131). “Whiteness” as a racial category slowly developed in the Progressive Era United States, combining different models of the “dominant race.” As an umbrella term, whiteness as biologized race incorporates groups such as Caucasians (geographical origin), Anglo-Saxons (national origin), Teutonic (tribal origin), and Aryans (linguistic origin), in order to reinstate the structure of dominance. The fuzzy contours of “whiteness” was drawn through a difficult negotiation of the uneasy coexistence of competing categorizations, as well as against the polychromatic background of racial others. Building on insights of critics of whiteness studies, “The Erotics of Race Suicide”

tries to capture “whiteness not as monolithic but as variegated,” visualizing the ways in which it has come to represent the normality mediated through heterosexuality (Jacobson 40).<sup>18</sup>

Likewise, although “The Erotics of Race Suicide” positions itself in the tradition of queer negativity, it does not focus on homosexuality as the primary form of queerness like other works of queer negativity. Rather, I read queer desires central to the suicidal characters as something that does not register in the legible sex-based object-choice system. That is to say, my project attends to desire akin to such sensual tendencies as masochism, narcissism, bestiality, and coprophilia, if we are to use the necessarily delimiting lexicon of the discourse of sexuality. But ultimately, “The Erotics of Race Suicide” seeks to establish a form of pleasure independent from the sexed body. By attending to the suicidal protagonists’ difficult negotiation of whiteness and the sex-based object-choice system, my project argues that the fundamental desire of the suicidal characters is to resist the individuation of bodies according to the axis of race and sexuality. Their self-killing, I will argue, gestures toward the desire for the nullification not only of the sex-based object-choice system, but also of the very concept of the subject-object opposition.

In this sense, “The Erotics of Race Suicide” broods on the implication of what Bersani calls the “self-shattering” nature of sexuality that divests a subject of “the sacrosanct value of selfhood” (“Rectum” 30). But it pushes it to its extreme and resuscitates the concept obliterated by the somewhat oversexed discourse of queer studies, “the erotic.” The erotic, in this context, emerges *not* as a euphemistic, enlarged, or unconsummated version of “sexuality” (as in “homoerotic” as a subcategory of “homosexuality”). Rather, it is an affective current that stands on its own and is directed toward unification with the object of desire at the cost of destroying

subjecthood. By this I mean the desire that, as David Halperin notes in his interpretation of Platonic eros, “ultimately aims not at bodily contact but at self-transcendence. It means more than human beings realize, and it exceeds what can be realized within the limits of any human life” (“Love” 52). In such a modality of desire, the physicality of sex manifests itself as “at once a vehicle and an obstacle” of the impossible yearning for a merging of subjectivities, “narrowing the field of . . . desire and gives . . . desire a focus, a bounded form, a local habitation” (53). Self-inflicted death, in this context, is imagined as a refusal of such localization of desire, a phantasmagoric enabler of the “impossibility of union through sex, the impossibility of a fusion of bodies” (51).

The vogue for suicide in Progressive Era literature, I argue, represents the thwarting of subjective boundaries which biopolitical reproduction attempts to maintain. Suicidal desire permeates the era, to use Mikko Tuhkanen’s evocative phrasing on homosexuality, marking out a territory “at once completely barren *and* intensely fecund; it signals the dying out of the race *and* a generation of unforeseen hybridities” (103). Ultimately, “The Erotics of Race Suicide” argues that the morbidity of the suicidal characters who desire to melt subjective boundaries is richly enlivening. By capitalizing on the conceptual slippage of the term, “race,” those morbid suicides forge spectral alliances with each other, breeding a race of its own that is not delimited by consanguinity.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> From Roosevelt’s first reference to the term “race suicide” in *Women Who Toil* in 1903 to 1925, there were at least 4,000 newspaper articles on race suicide found in *America’s Historical Newspapers* (of the 4,000, 1290 articles use “race suicide” in their headline). The subject also ignited debates in the nascent field of sociology. For major works on race suicide published in the Progressive Era, see, for instance, Robert Reid Rentoul *Race Culture; Or, Race Suicide? (A Plea for the Unborn)* (1906), Myre St. Walde Iseman, *Race Suicide* (1912), and Warren

Thompson's serial essays published in *The Scientific Monthly* "Race Suicide in the United States" I-III (1917).

<sup>2</sup> Madison Grant was a prominent member of the Boone and Crocket, a hunting club Roosevelt founded in 1887. Upon the publication of *The Passing of the Great Race* Roosevelt's passionate endorsement of Grant's ideas in his personal letter was used for promotion by Scribners: "The book is a capital book; in purpose, in vision, in grasp of the facts our people most need to realize. It shows an extraordinary range of reading and a wide scholarship. It shows a habit of singular serious thought on the subject of most commanding importance. It shows a fine fearlessness in assailing the popular and mischievous sentimentalities and attractive and corroding falsehoods which few men dare assail. It is the work of an American scholar and gentleman; and all Americans should be sincerely grateful to you for writing it" (qtd. in Spiro 154). I discuss *The Passing of the Great Race* in detail in Chapter 4.

<sup>3</sup> For an argument about the representation of self-willed death in nineteenth-century American literature, see Russ Castronovo, *Necro Citizenship* (2001), Chapter 1. In one sense, as Castronovo argues, there has been a trend of "fetishization of suicide" since the founding of the nation, as marked by Patrick Henry's 1778 "Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death" speech (1). Yet a large part of literary representations of suicide in the first half of the nineteenth century revolves around that of slaves and Native Americans. As Castronovo argues in the context of slave suicide in antislavery literature by white authors, the romanticization of suicides of racial minorities reflects "political necrophilia": "antislavery representations lovingly equate slave suicide to an emancipatory release from embodiment. As it touched the slave's body, death repressed the corporeality that barred the slave from abstract rights. Here lies the ecstasy of death: the body's demise places the citizens beyond repressive forms of embodiment. The social contract pivots on this macabre logic by disposing of bodies that threaten the blandness of generic personhood" (14). In one sense, my project's focus on the literary trend of white characters' self-willed death in the Progressive Era, exploring the underside of Castronovo's main argument: the disembodiment by death functions to domesticate and depoliticize subjects marked by racial and gender specificities by allowing them to enter into generic citizenship by annulling these identity markers.

<sup>4</sup> Although *The Sound and the Fury* was published in 1929, it is worth considering that Quentin Compson's death is set in 1910, at the height of the discourse of race suicide.

<sup>5</sup> For the technological advancements in the Progressive Era and their impact on views on humans as statistical, technologically reproducible beings, see Mark Seltzer *Bodies and Machines*, Martha Banta, *Taylored Lives*. Jennifer Fraissner's *Women, Compulsion, Modernity*, and Dana Seitler's *The Culture of Science in American Modernity* also provide important accounts of the counter narratives to the forward-looking ethos of Progressivism.

<sup>6</sup> As Castronovo points out, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for instance, repeatedly conceptualizes "the state as natural body that eventually dies" in *Social Contract* (1762), and Nicolo Machiavelli in *The Prince* (1513) also deploys the corporeal metaphor of the republic that can be sustained only when "the heart and vital parts . . . [are] protected and defended, and not the extremities" (Castronovo 7-8).

<sup>7</sup> I am deeply indebted to Henry Abelove's argument for the conceptualization of "sexuality of population." In an essay collected in *Deep Gossip*, Ableove correlates the population growth in England amidst the Industrial Revolution with the normalization of the "sexual intercourse so-called" (23). He argues: "the rise in production (the privileging of production) and the rise in the popularity of the sexual act that uniquely makes for reproduction (the privileging of intercourse so-called) may be aspects of the same phenomenon. Viewed from different perspectives, this phenomenon could be called either capitalism or the discourse of capitalism or modern heterosexuality or the discourse of modern heterosexuality" (26).

<sup>8</sup> Though in the imagination of sexologists, non-procreative sexuality sometimes was explained as a means to ensure the Malthusian survival of population. In a way similar to Malthus, who imagined "promiscuous [unprocreative] intercourse" in the aristocratic *Areoi* society, along with the "positive check" of "infanticide," as a way to inhibit the growth of population (Malthus 50), Havelock Ellis regards homosexuality as a sort of "negative check" to population in *Sexual Inversion* (1897): "One might be tempted to expect that homosexual practices would be encouraged whenever it was necessary to keep down the population" (Ellis 14).

<sup>9</sup> Classic discussions of the shifting and competing definitions of race include Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (1963) and Michael Banton, *Racial Theories* (1987). Audrey and Brian Smidley's *Race in North America* also traces the etymology of race in Chapter 2. Needless to say, before the conceptualization of race as a signifier of sets of biological differences, human classifications that *resemble* the biologized notion of race existed. For instance, German physician John Friedrich Blumenbach developed some of the racial lexicon used in nineteenth and twentieth centuries in *On the Natural Variety of Mankind* in 1775. Blumenbach presented the five-fold classification using the newly developed method of craniology: Caucasian, Mongolian, Ethiopian, American, Malayan. Also hierarchization of these "variations" of mankind, placing Europeans on the top and Africans on the bottom, already was prevalent in the early nineteenth century. However, in the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries, these "types" based on physiological differences were not regimented under the term *race per se*.

<sup>10</sup> Samuel Morton published *Crania Americana* in 1839, arguing that difference in cranial capacity of five human "races"—Caucasian, Mongolian, Malay, American, Ethiopian—is a sign of their innate intellectual ability resulting from special difference. Morton's theory found zealous heirs. Josiah Clark Nott and George Robin Gliddon's *Types of Mankind* (1854) spread the polygenic origin of races to a wider reading public.

<sup>11</sup> The definition of species has its own history of controversy since the eighteenth century. Though in the nineteenth century a general consensus was made that the term *species* refers to an interfertile group, the concept has been reevaluated since 1970s. For an overview of the checkered history of the term *species*, see, for instance, Ladelle McWhorter, "Enemies of the Species." I will examine further the intersection between the concepts of species and race in Chapter 4.

<sup>12</sup> For instance, Josiah Nott, one of the most ardent polygenists in the U.S., published in 1843 “The Mulatto a Hybrid—Probable Extermination of the Two Races if the Whites and Blacks Are Allowed to Intermarry,” claiming that mulatto women are “bad breeders and bad nurses” (253).

<sup>13</sup> The term *miscegenation* was invented in 1863 in the United States during the Civil War to promulgate genetic dangers of mixing of black and white. The term gained popularity immediately after the coinage, replacing *amalgamation*, which was used previously to designate intermarriage.

<sup>14</sup> For anti-miscegenation laws enacted in the Progressive Era, see, for instance, Grossberg pp. 135-141. The bans against intermarriage between black and white were strengthened and added in twenty states and territories between 1880-1920. The growing anti-Asian sentiment propagated under the rubric of yellow peril took its first target on Chinese women, who were believed to circulate sexually transmitted disease through prostitution. The Page Act of 1875, the first federal restrictive immigration law, was aimed at Asian women entering “under contract for ‘lewd and immoral purposes’” (Cott 136). In a similar vein, the longstanding tolerance for white-Native American matrimony gradually ebbed. Even though Indian-white marriage had even been upheld in the first half of the century as a means of assimilation, toward the end of the nineteenth century it met first legal prohibitions. By the end of the century, Arizona, North Carolina, Nevada, and Oregon banned Indian-white intermarriage.

<sup>15</sup> For the important works on the interconnectedness between race and sexuality, see, for instance, Ann Stoler *Race and the Education of Desire*; Alys Eve Weinbaum, *Wayward Reproductions*; Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*; Roderick Ferguson, *Abberations in Black*; Siobhan Somerville, *Queering the Color Line*; Julian Carter, *The Heart of Whiteness*; Mason Stokes, *The Color of Sex*. In particular, my work builds on Weinbaum’s insightful argument about what she calls “race/reproduction bind.” I will look at this concept closely in Chapter 3.

<sup>16</sup> According to Stoler, the final sections of *The History of Sexuality vol. I* was to be developed in the final volume of the six-part *History of Sexuality*, which was advertised at the publication of the first volume as “Population and Races” (Stoler 21). With Foucault’s death in 1984 the last three volumes of *The History of Sexuality* were never materialized, and “*Society Must Be Defended*,” Foucault’s Collège de France lectures in 1976, remained as virtually the only piece that directly dovetails with references to race in *The History of Sexuality vol. I*. The intersection between race and sexuality in Foucault’s work has rarely been discussed, and Stoler’s *Race and the Education of Desire* is one of the very few works that extensively talks about “*Society Must Be Defended*.” While Foucault’s focus, though not clearly stated, is on the intra-state racism, Stoler’s emphasis, throughout the book, is on the latter, the colonial order, in accordance with such critics as Daniel Pick and Anna Davin (Stoler 30-32). Stoler posits imperialism and colonialism as a blind spot in *The History of Sexuality*’s rendition of sexuality as emanating from bourgeois order.

<sup>17</sup> For instance, Foucault writes: “power is situated and exercised at the level of life, the species, the race, and the large-scale phenomena of population” (137); “Through the themes of health,

progeny, race, the future of the species, the vitality of the social body, power spoke of sexuality and to sexuality” (147).

<sup>18</sup> In its emphasis on the interconnectedness between whiteness and heterosexuality, my project owes particular debt to such works as Julian Carter, *The Heart of Whiteness: Normal Sexuality and Race in America, 1880-1940*, Mason Stokes, *The Color of Sex: Whiteness, Heterosexuality, and the Fictions of White Supremacy*, as well as Richard Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture*. While their works offer brilliantly nuanced accounts of whiteness, when it comes to analyze sexuality, they seem to depend too much on the homo/hetero binary like Ferguson’s *Aberrations in Black* and Somerville’s *Queering the Color Line*. For the production of whiteness with the particular emphasis on the Progressive Era racial politics, see, for instance, Mathew Jacobson’s *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race*, Reginald Horsman, *Race and Manifest Destiny: The Origins of American Racial Anglo-Saxonism*, and Thomas G. Dyer *Theodore Roosevelt and the Idea of Race*.

CHAPTER 2  
THE SACRIFICIAL ECSTASY:  
*THE BOSTONIANS*, NEURASTHENIA, AND THE “OBSCURE HURT”

“Poodle Henry James”

On October 19, 1884, the *New York Times* reported that a “self-invited guest,” who had just returned from the West, mounted the platform of the inaugural meeting of the Brooklyn Young Republican Club, filling the room with loud applause (“Mr. Roosevelt” 2). The return of the former Assemblyman of New York was dramatic enough, for 1884 had proven a year of trial for the twenty-five-year-old Theodore Roosevelt. Bereaved of his young wife and his mother in the same house on the same day in February, Roosevelt refused re-nomination as a New York assemblyman in April. Immediately after the presidential nomination of scandal-tainted James Blaine at the GOP national convention in June, Roosevelt declared his intention to leave the state of New York and the world of politics. Upon leaving for his ranches in Little Missouri, Dakota, he confided to an editor of the *New York Evening Post* that “rather than vote for Blaine, he would give ‘hearty support’ to any decent Democrat.” He wrote to the editor of the *Utica Morning Herald*: “I have very little expectation of being able to keep on in politics . . . I will not stay in public life unless I can do so on my own terms; and my ideal, whether lived up to or not, is rather a high one” (Morris 259, 248). Devastated by the loss of his closest female companions and exasperated by the spoils system of political patronage, Roosevelt sought solace in hunting in the West, leaving his political career indefinitely suspended.

Rather unexpectedly, however, the former Assemblyman returned to New York in four months. In an even bigger surprise to many, his aim was to support Blaine despite his

manifested abhorrence of the politically corrupt candidate. In his support of Blaine, moreover, Roosevelt was to confront his former allies, Republican reformists known as “mugwumps,” who now backed the Democratic candidate Grover Cleveland against party politics. In his feverish speech at the Brooklyn Young Republican Club, Roosevelt “scoffed at the idea of electing Gov. Cleveland,” receiving acclamation from the audience (“Mr. Roosevelt” 2).

Taunting mugwumps as those who were “willing to complain of the evils of [the] system of the politics but were not willing to lift a finger to remedy them,” Roosevelt, out of nowhere, referenced a prominent novelist:

Mr. Roosevelt said that his hearers had read to their sorrow the works of Henry James. He bore the same relation to other literary men that a poodle did to other dogs. The poodle had his hair combed and was somewhat ornamental, but never useful. He was invariably ashamed to imitate the British lion. In Mr. Roosevelt's opinion there were many traits in the “Poodle Henry James” that the independents of the Henry James order of intellect had in common. These men formed quite a number of the bolters this year. They were possessed of refinement and culture to see what was wrong, but possessed none of the robust virtues that would enable them to come out and do the right. (“Mr. Roosevelt” 2)<sup>1</sup>

Roosevelt had seen Henry James only once before the speech. Their first meeting was, as Philip Horne documents, in Boston in January 1883, of which Roosevelt wrote, tersely: “The Bostonians were awfully kind to us . . . I was introduced to James, the novelist, and had a most pleasant time” (qtd. in Horne 237). Their encounter was agreeable enough, if not spectacular. As Horne opines, therefore, “[j]ust why James strayed into Roosevelt’s line of fire” in his 1884 speech against mugwumps remains a vexed question (293).

Bracketing the oddness of invoking a man of letters in a political speech for the moment, Roosevelt’s attack on James is understandable in relation to their oppositional postures towards manhood: one relentlessly erect, the other adamantly crooked. James, whom Roosevelt reportedly dubbed in an 1887 letter a “little emasculated mass of inanity,” was the antipode of

hypermasculinity associated with the future president (Morris 425).<sup>2</sup> However, the young politician who rode roughshod over the “Poodle Henry James” in his 1884 speech was not the fearless Rough Rider that he was to be in thirteen years. Rather, Roosevelt’s vexation bespeaks his urgency in attempting to overhaul his political persona, which would, like the two hundred pounds of muscle he had obsessively built in his college years, enable him to cover the innate frailty betrayed by his absurdly small hands and feet.

Born in the first circle of New York aristocracy as a son of the descendant of the oldest Dutch settlers and a Southern belle mother with rococo beauty, Theodore “Teddy” Roosevelt was stricken from a young age by asthma and congenital nervous diarrhea, along with numerous minor ailments. Even after the bookish boy made over his physique during his Harvard days, relinquished his aspiration to become a historian, and started to climb the political ladder as a rising star of New York Republicans, Roosevelt was anything but the symbol of turn-of-the-century American masculinity that he is remembered as today. In fact, newspapers “lampooned Roosevelt as the quintessence of effeminacy,” heaping scorn on his “high voice, tight pants, and fancy clothing” in his early political career. “Weakling,” “Punkin-Lily,” and “Jane-Dandy” were some of the softer epithets attached to Roosevelt during his first term as a Republican Assemblyman of New York in 1882 (qtd. in Bederman 170). On the day he made his debut at the Assembly, the young politician clad in “trousers . . . as tight as a tailor could make them” was even dubbed the Legislature’s “Oscar Wilde” (qtd. in Morris 144). The appellation of the British aesthete carried an undertone of sexual invective. The *New York World*, for instance, reported in overtly phallic language that “other dudes took the tops of their canes out of their mouths” when Roosevelt finished his speech (qtd. in Murphy 54).

In short, “Poodle Henry James” presented an abject mirror image for the twenty-five-year Roosevelt that he must dissociate himself from: bookishness, European aristocratic sensibility, and effeminacy. This latter was associated with same-sex desire in the sexological discourse of the time, especially with the trope of “sexual inversion” that conflated gender nonconformity with same-sex sexual object-choice.<sup>3</sup> However hackneyed its symbolism, his 1884 expedition to the West, in which he reportedly killed his first grizzly, functioned as a rite of passage that catalyzed this dissociation. As he stated in an interview with the *New York Tribune* in July 1884, those who “have accused [him] of representing the kid-glove element in politics” would be “electrif[ied]” “if they could see [him] galloping over the plains, day in and day out, clad in a buckskin shirt and leather chaparajos, with a big sombrero on [his] head” (qtd. in Bederman 175). To the young politician who was soon to advocate himself as the “Cowboy of the Dakotas” upon running for mayor of New York, the celibate novelist’s delicate sensitivity informed by European high culture would have offered a handy doormat to wipe off the smear of effeminacy.<sup>4</sup>

Yet still unclear is what James’s alleged effeminacy has to do with Roosevelt’s renewed political agenda, especially that of supporting James Blaine against his former allies. In order to answer this question, we must understand the gendered construction of political discourse of the time, particularly that surrounding the Republican reformers, mugwumps. As Kevin Murphy argues, against the backdrop of the rise of sexual science, “state politics served a crucial site for the creation of modern sexual typologies.” Starting in the late 1870s, opponents of mugwumps denounced their disavowal of party loyalty as “a threat not only to the binary structure of the two-party system but also to essentialist distinction between men and women”

(Murphy 14). Initially aligned with Republicans for the abolitionist cause during the Civil War, the mugwumps in the postbellum period “positioned themselves as defenders of culture, seeking to lift the masses through education,” dedicating themselves to various social reforms (Makemson 180). While mugwumps used such literary magazines as the *North American Review*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper’s Weekly*, and the *Century* as the main venues for their reformist missions, the popular press harshly ridiculed their idealism. Elite, college-bred Northeastern political reformers were often represented as embodying an infamous fin-de-siècle male type, “the ‘dude,’ who was most often upper-class, English in manner, obsessed with eccentric sartorial style, and somewhat ambiguous in his sexuality” (Makemson 183).

Party politicians took advantage of the mugwumps’ effeminate image when they attacked the implausibility of the mugwumps’ agenda of civil service reform, calling them “political hermaphrodites,” “political epicenes,” and “third sex reformers.” In March 1886, Republican Senator John J. Ingalls stated:

[T]he neuter gender is not popular in nature or society. ‘Male and female He created them.’ But there is a third sex, if that can sex be called which sex has none, resulting sometimes from a cruel caprice of nature, at others from accident or malevolent design, possessing the vices of both and the virtues of neither; effeminate without being masculine or feminine; unable either to beget or to bear; possessing neither fecundity nor virility; endowed with the contempt of men and the derision of women, and doomed to sterility, isolation, and extinction . . . . These political epicenes, without pride of ancestry or hope of posterity, chant in shrill falsetto their songs of praise of non-partisanship and civil-service reform. (qtd. in Murphy 28)

As Murphy argues, the sexological rhetoric infusing political discourse enabled party politicians to criticize the fruitlessness of mugwump politics through the trope of breeding. The political epicenes, associated with same-sex desire, was unable to “beget or bear” political progeny and “doomed to sterility, isolation, and extinction,” and thus disqualified to lead—or even find a proper place in—the heterosexualized American body politic.

Read in this context, Roosevelt's performance of masculinity was both a personal and political survival strategy. Once having aligned himself with mugwumps to prevent Blaine's nomination, Roosevelt, in 1884, must divorce his former allies if he were to shirk the charge of political impotence associated with the mugwumps. The figure of "poodle," connoting artificial breeding for enhanced ornamentation, underscores his former allies' political impotence, especially when combined with the name of the well-known celibate novelist.

James did hear the rumor of Roosevelt's condemnation, and wrote to his Boston friend from London in November 1884: "What was Roosevelt's allusion to, or attack upon, me, in his speech?" (*Life* 164). Yet in 1884, little did he know that the young politician he had primarily known as a former student of his brother at Harvard would obsessively lambaste him over a decade. On 15 February 1887, Roosevelt wrote in a letter to Henry Cabot Lodge: "Thank Heaven Henry James is now an avowedly British novelist" (*Letters* 1: 123). In a letter to Brander Matthews on 29 June 1894 he wrote, "What a miserable little snob Henry James is. His polished, pointless, uninteresting stories about the upper social classes of England make one blush to think that he was once an American" (*Letters* 1: 390). In the same year he publicized his invective against the novelist in "True Americanism": "it is with the undersized man of letters, who flees his country because he, with his delicate, effeminate sensitiveness, finds the conditions of life on this side of the water crude and raw . . . he will never do work to compete with that of his brother, who is strong enough to stand on his own feet, and do his work as an American" (40).<sup>5</sup>

James's frequent childhood moves undoubtedly raised the question of national identity for James beginning from a young age. Roosevelt's attacks must have hit a soft spot for James had

he known them. And yet how might we imagine that James was reacting, in 1884, to Roosevelt's charge that he should not deserve the name of an American novelist? For, in the same year James was writing a novel, in which he aspired to make "the whole thing as local, as American, as possible," in an attempt to "show that [he] *can* write an American story" (*Notebook 47*; italics original). His 1886 novel *The Bostonians* occupies a peculiar space in the Jamesian oeuvre as one of the very few works whose settings, characters, and themes are exclusively American.

*The Bostonians*, the work that he designed as "a very *American* tale, a tale very characteristic of our social conditions," found a perfect outlet when it was serialized (*Notebook 47*; italics original). The novel was first published from February 1885 to February 1886 in the *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, which, under the editorship of a prominent mugwump, Richard Watson Gilder, advocated the creation of a genuine American culture in the postbellum period. As James wrote in "Anthony Trollope," which he also published in the *Century* in July 1883, no English writers—even Trollope, whose American portraits James believed were more sympathetic than those of most of continental writers—had yet discovered the way to portray "the American heart"; even still, "we ourselves have not yet learned to represent our types very finely—are not apparently even very sure what our types are" ("Trollope" 391).

James's own answer to what defines "our types," the subject he chose for his "very national, very typical" novel, was "one of those friendships between women which are so common in New England" (*Notebook 47*). Much has been discussed on the nature of the relation of Olive Chancellor and Verena Tarrant in *The Bostonians* criticism. Over the years, a tacit consensus has been formed to regard Olive Chancellor as "the first fully conceived lesbian

protagonist in modern fiction,” regardless of whether her erotic attraction to Verena is of a physically sexual nature or not (Leer 93).<sup>6</sup> On the other hand, there is a strong critical trend to read the novel as an “American tale,” especially by focusing on the novel’s preoccupation with the Civil War as a quintessentially American incident.<sup>7</sup> The *Century*’s heavy focus on the memory of the Civil War made the novel a good fit. After it started to publish its popular Civil War memoirs, *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* in 1884, the *Century*’s circulation reached its pinnacle of around 250,000 (Bond 55). Tellingly, the first installment of *The Bostonians* was followed by seven articles of *Battles and Leaders*, including Ulysses Grant’s “The Battle of Shiloh.” James’s narrative was apt for the *Century*’s Civil-War fascination. For, in one sense, *The Bostonians* is a metaphorical Civil War narrative, which revolves around a house once-again-divided between two cousins, a battle between a Confederate veteran Basil Ransom and his New England-bred feminist cousin Olive Chancellor.

Not enough critical attempts have been made, however, to fill the lacuna between the queer readings and the Americanist readings of the novel: why did James choose a same-sex relationship between two feminists in order to portray the American body politic in his Civil War narrative? This chapter investigates the way the celibate novelist, “Poodle Henry James,” rewrites the narrative around the American body politic through the portrayal of a reproductively sterile yet erotically fecund relation between two women. In this reading, Olive Chancellor—about whom her nemesis Basil Ransom wonders, “what sex” she belongs to—begins to appear as a female counterpart of the mugwumps as third-sex reformers, who dedicates her life to the cause of reformist feminism (*Bostonians* 1108). In the first section, I will examine the heterosexualized political discourse of the 1880s, in which Americanism was

defined through virility both in terms of physical strength (measured in relation to fitness for combat) and strong sexual drive (as a metric for multiplying the “American race”). By focusing on the discourse of neurasthenia, I will argue that Henry James provided a counternarrative to the increasingly heterosexualized rhetoric of Americanism when he set his “American tale” in New England, where the dropping birth rate of old stock Americans caused by the nervous malady had already begun to cast an ominous shadow of race suicide. The second section re-reads *The Bostonians* as a Civil War narrative, especially in its relation to Henry James’s own account of the famous “obscure hurt” in *Notes of a Son and Brother*, which has often been interpreted as the cause of his perennial back pain, that is, one of his neurasthenic symptoms. In creating a neurasthenic heroine who is enchanted by sacrificial death for the feminist cause, I will argue, James imagines a way that masochistic pleasure and its concomitant investment in wounded attachments can suture individual bodies to the body social. Thus, he formulates a logic of suture different from the heterosexual union of the body politic. By foregrounding the neurasthenic feminist who is unable to breed the “American race” yet trying to reform the American body politic, James produces a vision of America incorporating third-sex reformers at the center of its national ideology.

### The Decay of the American Race in New England

Roosevelt’s denunciation of mugwumps with the trope of effeminacy and sterility mirrored his nationalist racial agenda, which dates to around 1880. The 1882 publication of *The Naval War of 1812*, which immediately followed his graduation from Harvard, did not mark the closure of Roosevelt’s line of work as a historian. In fact, his historiographic aspiration now worked in tandem with his political career. During the late 1880s, Roosevelt published in rapid

succession *Thomas Hart Benton* (1887), *Gouverneur Morris* (1888), and the four-volume epic of the American frontier, *The Winning of the West* (1889-1896). As Thomas G. Dyer maintains, through these works of history Roosevelt advanced “his racial explanation of American history, posited the existence of a distinct American race, and philosophized about the political and racial future of the nation” (Dyer 50). Roosevelt’s trope of the “American type,” which he called “a race of masterful spirit” marked by “virile, strong character,” enabled the politician-historian who bore predominantly Dutch ancestry to reclaim a legitimate racial status in the United States at the height of Anglo-Saxonism (*Benton* 3, 19).

Though the American race is commonly thought to be similar to “the English stock” in genetic composition, Roosevelt maintains, “it is well always to remember that at the day when we began our career as a nation we already differed from our kinsmen of Britain in blood as well as in name.” With a re-injection of “the new blood”—Dutch, German, Irish, and Scandinavian, which had been existent in the English blood but was attenuated over the time—the American race retained all the superior racial traits of the older British stock and still surpassed its parent race (*Winning* 17). What enabled the American race to beat its English counterpart, Roosevelt argues, was the experience of virile conquest of the wilderness and racial conflict with the “savages.” As Bederman argues, “Roosevelt’s desire for imperial dominance had been, from the first, intrinsically related to his views about male power. As he saw it, the manhood of the American race had been forged in the crucible of frontier race war; and to abandon the virile power of that violence would be to backslide toward effeminate racial mediocrity” (Bederman 194).

Roosevelt's emphasis on virility as crucial to the prosperity of the "American race"—figured in the abilities both to win the racial struggle and to make the virgin land reproductive—presages his obsessive fascination with the specter of race suicide. Though the term *race suicide* itself awaits its genesis in 1901, the 1880s saw the first signs of racial anxieties over what Roosevelt later called "the diminishing birth rate among the old native American stock" in the rapidly changing landscape of the U.S. population (*Letters* 2:1053). The "warfare of the cradle" between the American race and immigrants, as he put it in 1894, had already started in the 1880s ("National Life and Character" 312). Prior to his Presidential nomination, James Blaine, for instance, had firmly established his position against Chinese immigration, aiding the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882. The trope Blaine deployed to pass this first major federal immigration law was the race war between old stock Anglo-Saxon Americans and new Asian immigrants: "either the Anglo-Saxon race will possess the Pacific slope or the Mongolians will possess it" (Blaine 119).

While the West Coast witnessed racial conflict associated with the increasing Asian population in the 1880s,, the East Coast quivered with an equally disquieting racial transformation: the decline of the American Stock. The epicenter was New England, the region that Roosevelt referred to as "where the English stock was purest" and thus designated as the place of origin of the American race (*Winning* 36). It is no wonder, then, that Roosevelt's battle against race suicide, which Thomas Dyer has characterized as a "twenty-eight-year obsession with the maintenance and preservation of the racial integrity of old-stock Americans," started with his 1892 discovery of the dropping fertility rate in New England (Dyer 143).

A decade prior to Roosevelt's discovery, physicians had already started to express alarm at the declining birthrate of native New Englanders. Nathan Allen, in "Changes in New England Population," published in August 1883, referred to the 1880 census and warned of the ongoing displacement of the native born American population by the European immigrants in New England states. As the foreign-born populations increasingly replaced old stock Americans as agricultural workers, the indigenous population worked indoors more. As a result, they were understood to suffer a "loss of physical vigor and character," which led them to a "physical degeneracy" that prevented the procreation of healthy offspring (Allen 435). Likewise, in 1884, John Ellis published *Deterioration of the Puritan Stock and Its Causes*, deploring the decay of the "glorious old state" brought forth by the "degeneracy of the native stock" (Ellis 3, 16). The "moribund condition of the puritan stock" is especially ascribed to the rise of the suffrage movement, which led native-born New England women "into a fatuous struggle to compete with man in masculine pursuits, overtaking her powers of endurance and debilitating her nervous system"(6).

The declining birthrate of the New Englanders—brought on by the loss of virility of indoor workers and the loss of fertility of suffragists—signaled a fatal weakening of the best blood in the American race. New England, once celebrated as the cradle of the American race and American civilization, now became a burial mound of the old stock Americans. Numerous New England intellectuals—James Hosmer, John Fiske, Henry Adams, Brooks Adams, to name a few—elegized the collapse of the region and the atrophy of old stock Americans. As Roosevelt gravely observes in his review of Brooks Adams's 1896 *The Law of Civilization and Decay*, New Englanders, "the most highly civilized races, and . . . the most highly civilized

portions of all races,” started “to lose the power of multiplying, and even to decrease” (“The Law” 354). The ambience of loss and decay pervaded the region in the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As Barbara Solomon writes, by the beginning of the 1880s, “a steady increase in divorces and suicides as well as a lowering birth rate” darkened the future of New England (Solomon 43). So much so that a New England intellectual Barrett Wendell writes in his diary for May 1884: “I wonder if anybody ever reached thirty-five in New England without wanting to kill himself” (Wendell 47).<sup>8</sup>

When Henry James set his “American tale” in Boston, he might well have responded to the atmosphere of decay in the region that once had embodied glorious Americanism; for the heroine of *The Bostonians* reifies a distinct type of the old American stock, both its august singularity and its melancholic destiny. Bereaved of her parents and her brothers, Olive Chancellor—whom her sister Adeline Luna habitually calls by “her whole name”—is the sole bearer of the name of the Chancellors, the family “belonged to the *bourgeoisie*—the oldest and best” in New England (*Bostonians* 887, 832). As her cousin Basil Ransom observes, “[her] white skin had a singular look of being drawn tightly across her face; but her features, though sharp and irregular, were delicate in a fashion that suggested good breeding” (817). Yet the proud Boston Brahmin lineage is destined to vanish with her, since Olive Chancellor is a “signal old maid. That was her quality, her destiny . . . She was so essentially a celibate” (816). The perpetuation of the name of the Chancellor is not her fate. She is “a female Jacobin,” ready to “reform the solar system if she could get hold of it,” solely dedicated to the cause of reformist feminism (805, 806).

Upon his first encounter with the heiress of the Chancellors, furthermore, Basil immediately senses her seemingly secret nature lurking behind the signs of good breeding:

But this pale girl, with her light-green eyes, her pointed features and nervous manner, was visibly morbid; it was as plain as day that she was morbid. Poor Ransom announced this fact to himself as if he had made a great discovery; but in reality he had never been so 'Bœotian' as at that moment. It proved nothing of any importance, with regard to Miss Chancellor, to say that she was morbid; any sufficient account of her would lie very much to the rear of that. Why was she morbid, and why was her morbidness typical? Ransom might have exulted if he had gone back far enough to explain that mystery. (*Bostonians* 810)

Olive Chancellor is "peculiarly . . . constituted" by her "nervous and serious" nature (872).

Olive's nervousness verges on morbidity, forcing her to become subject to "fits of tragic shyness, during which she was unable to meet even her own eyes in the mirror" or occasional "tears, headaches, a day or two in bed, acute emotion" (809, 813). Yet the moment Basil is thrilled at his "great discovery" of Olive's morbid nervousness, the narrator checks his obtuseness. Olive's morbidness is writ large; in itself it is no secret and "prove[s] nothing of any importance." Rather, at issue here is why her morbid nervousness is "typical" and how it constitutes an American "type."

Olive Chancellor's morbid nervousness indeed epitomizes a famous fin-de-siècle American type, especially in the context of the medical discourse of the time. Many physicians argued that both the decline of the fertility rate and the flirtation with a death wish rampant among elite New Englanders were caused by the same factor: neurasthenia, a disease roughly translated as "lack of nerve energy" (Schuster 2). In the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, neurasthenia suddenly gained wide currency as a common diagnosis for various symptoms—depression, insomnia, indigestion, anxiety, headaches, and loss of sexual appetite, to name a few. Those symptoms that formerly had had no name were, by the 1880s,

increasingly understood as caused by a deformation of the nervous system. Popularized by a New York nerve specialist George Beard and later by the initiator of the “rest cure” Silas Weir Mitchell, neurasthenia was first and foremost understood as a disease of civilization.

Significantly, neurasthenia was understood, more specifically, as a disease unique to American civilization, gaining the status of “one great national malady,” to use the words of another prominent neurologist of the time (qtd. in Schuster 7). As a national disease, neurasthenia imagines complex interactions between individual bodies and America’s social body, especially in the Northeastern industrial cities. In his magnum opus, *American Nervousness* (1881), Beard claimed that neurasthenia was caused by overstimulation of the nerves by such factors as steam power, the periodical press, the telegraph, the sciences, and the intellectual activities of women—all of which, he asserts, made modern America distinct from the past civilizations: “All this is modern, and originally American: no age, no country, and no form of civilization, not Greece, nor Rome, nor Spain, nor the Netherlands, in the days of their glory, possessed such maladies” (Beard viii). In his explication of the causes of the illness, as David Schuster argues, “Beard infused his discussion of neurasthenia with a powerful nationalist sentiment that supported the idea that America was an exceptional country in the history of nations” (21).

As commentators such as Schuster and Julian Carter argue, the nervous disease not only inscribed the national ethos into individual bodies, but intrinsically racialized the national and individual body; for neurasthenia was imagined as endemic primarily to the old American stock. When Beard catalogues the physiognomic features of the average nervous invalid, he clearly envisions an archetypal patient as an upper-class white: “The fine organization is distinguished

from the coarse by fine, soft hair, delicate skin, nicely chiselled features, small bones, tapering extremities, and frequently by a muscular system comparatively small and feeble . . . It is the organization of the civilized, refined, and educated, rather than of the barbarous and low-born and untrained” (Beard 26). As Schuster points out, Beards explained that “Catholics, southerners, Indians, blacks” were unsusceptible to neurasthenia, thus framing the disease as “a white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, Yankee condition” (Schuster 22). Susceptibility to neurasthenia—if not the disease itself—was believed to be hereditarily transmitted, and the proclivity to the disease created a “natural American aristocracy of nerves” (Carter 47). The nervous disorder thus became an emblem of the dilemma the old American stock faced. On the one hand, it was a marker of good breeding, as neurasthenia was found primarily in the upper class old stock Americans. On the other hand, it was an indication of their inability to breed, for one of the chief manifestations of neurasthenia was sexual exhaustion. Thus Beard wails: “All our civilization hangs by a thread; the activity and force of the very few make us what we are as a nation; and if, through degeneracy, the descendants of these few revert to the condition of their not very remote ancestors, all our haughty civilization would be wiped away” (Beard 97).

Henry James most likely would have been familiar with the medical language surrounding neurasthenia. The Jameses definitely belonged to what Carter calls the “natural American aristocracy of nerves,” notorious for its line of weak nervous systems. As commentators such as Ruth Bernard Yeazell and Wendy Graham document, the James family history is colored by frequent nervous breakdowns—Henry Senior in 1844, Alice in 1868 and 1878 (and numerous minor “attacks”), William in 1870, Robertson in 1881, and Henry Junior in 1910 (Yeazell 3, Graham 38): “neurasthenia, like intelligence, seems to have run in the family. Medical reports

and advice fill their letters to one another: insomnia, digestive disorders, backaches, and headaches came and went among them in rapid succession” (Yeazell 3). Many of the family members went through either Mitchell’s rest cure or Beard’s galvanic treatments. William consulted Beard for medical advice from 1879 to 1883, immediately before Henry Junior wrote *The Bostonians*, and later famously dubbed the disease as “Americanitis” (Graham 159).<sup>9</sup>

Yet particularly germane to Henry James’s characterization of the morbidly nervous heroine of his American tale would be the case of the only daughter of the Jameses. From her youngest age Alice James was bedridden with various nervous disease—nervous hyperaesthesia, spinal neurosis, and hysteria—until she died of breast cancer at the age of 44 in 1892. Unlike William’s and Henry’s neurasthenia, “hers was not a case with any obvious compensations: for all her nervous intelligence, the youngest James child produced no works of philosophy or psychology, no fiction or criticism or drama” (Yeazell 4). Instead, as Yeazell suggests, “dying had become Alice James’s chief vocation,” as she constantly inscribed her contemplations on and desire for death in her diary (3). Her breakdown at the age of 30 in 1877 in particular became a clear manifestation of her keen fascination with death, as her father writes in a letter to Robertson: “Alice is half the time, indeed much more than half, on the verge of insanity and suicide.” Asking her father for permission to kill herself and granted it, Alice told him that now that “she could perceive it to be her *right* to dispose of her own body when life had become intolerable . . . she was more than content to stay by [his] side” (qtd. in Yeazell 15-16). After the 1877 breakdown, what Alice herself called her “mortuary inclinations” were subdued to some extent, when she met Katherine Peabody Loring. The Boston social reformer became Alice’s lifetime companion, declaring to Henry once that it was her desire “quite as strongly as

Alice's, to be with her to the end." Henry, Alice, and Loring lived under one roof for a while both in Cambridge and London when the novelist was composing *The Bostonians* (qtd. in Edel, *Diary* 13).

In view of the James family's checkered history of neurasthenia as well as Henry James's physical proximity to his neurasthenic sister at the composition of the novel, as Wendy Graham argues, it would be no accident that the ever-nervous Olive Chancellor "strongly resembles Beards's representative nervous invalid" (Graham 160). Her pale skin, cold hands, and painfully angular yet exquisitely delicate frame constitute her as "a nervous organization," representing "something very modern and highly developed" (*Bostonians* 817).<sup>10</sup> Simply put, her morbid nervousness heralds the ethos of race suicide: she is an epitome of the old American stock, representing simultaneously its haughty breeding and its gloomy prospect with regard to breeding offspring. Like Alice James, who called herself a "flaccid virgin" and remained celibate all her life (qtd. in Yeazell 12), Olive Chancellor is "so essentially a celibate," indisposed to perpetuating the old American stock (*Bostonians* 816).

As Graham notes, the "parallels between Alice James and Olive Chancellor" are evident, especially in the light of "their shared sexual nonconformity" (Graham 149). Yet when Graham explicates Olive Chancellor's, and by extension, Alice James's nervous affliction as a consequence of sexual repression—in particular their "repudiation of lesbian possibility"—she misreads the nature of sexual nonconformity shared by Alice and Olive (152). As Benjamin Kahan argues, rather than the repressions of lesbianism "Olive's celibacy glows with eroticism, exemplifying a sexuality without a normative aspiration to sexual acts" (Kahan 44). By

understanding the desire exclusively under the rubric of a legible sexual object-choice, one would miss the structure of Olive Chancellor's erotic economy.

At stake here is the efficacy of using the term lesbianism as a name of female same-sex intimacy, the concept reportedly was invented at a certain historical moment postdating the novel written and set prior to its "invention."<sup>11</sup> I would, however, hasten to add that it is not simply to replicate a "naïve historicist argument, which would have it that Olive Chancellor cannot be a 'lesbian' because lesbian did not exist in Boston in the 1880s" (Stevens 93). Needless to say, even before the crystallization of the concept that enabled and necessitated the individuation of the subject according to the axis of its sexual-object choice, there existed affective and erotic investments, as well as sexual acts, between same-sex subjects. If we are to deem the gender of the object-choice the definitive axis of sexuality, Olive Chancellor will certainly be rendered a lesbian subject: to use Hugh Stevens's words, "the novel can be read more richly if we think of Olive as (some kind of) a lesbian," foregrounding her passionate relationship to Verena (93). However, to focus on Stevens's bracketed remark and ask *what kind of lesbian Olive is* could productively complicate the "place in a discourse in which there [is] a homosexual meaning, in which all homosexual meaning mean[s] a single thing" (Sedgwick 204; italics original).

Clearly, the relationship between Verena and Olive is charged with desire, if we mean by the word an intense affective force that sometimes overlaps with, but is not coextensive with the drive for sexual gratification. For the novel's insistence on Olive's "feverish cult of virginity," as Stevens notes, seems to indicate that "James wants his reader to understand both that Olive Chancellor is passionately—and *erotically*—attracted to Verena, but that there is no sexual

relationship between the women” (Stevens 97; italics original). Granted that Olive’s desire is directed toward Verena, whose gender is identical with Olive and thereby making her a proto-lesbian subject from the modern perspective, the absence of their physical relationship is not a sign of Olive’s repression. On the contrary, I would argue, the non-physicality is central to the aim of her erotic passion, albeit it is not readily intelligible in the current parameters of sexuality.

The shape of Olive Chancellor’s erotic economy is not readily decipherable, but perhaps it is not exactly because the author and the protagonist fail to—or even refuse to—find a proper articulation for her sexuality. Rather, it is because her eroticism cannot be adequately framed in terms of our current concept of sexuality rooted in the physicality of sex in one way or another. Olive’s passional economy, I will argue, centers on a quasi-religious ecstasy, which dislocates the stable subject-object relationship through identificatory desire, and thereby demands the reconfiguration of the then-ongoing formation of sexuality along the line of gender of the object-choice.

#### Wounded Attachments to the Social Body

To locate the definitional core of Olive Chancellor’s celibate eroticism as one divorced from the physicality of sex, it would be helpful to go back to the scene where Basil Ransom perceives her morbid nervousness. Her neurasthenic morbidity stares Basil in his face; it is no secret and “any sufficient account of her would lie very much to the rear of that.” Were he to “explain that mystery,” the narrator enigmatically says, Basil Ransom should have “gone back far enough.” The narrative immediately takes the reader to the “rear” of Olive’s morbidity to which Basil has a potential access, by going back to Basil’s place of origin. For “the blighted

South” that Basil has come from is in fact associated with Olive’s own past (*Bostonians* 810): her “vivid remembrance” of the “blood and tears” of the Civil War, in which she lost her two brothers (811). Instead of loathing her brothers’ former foe, however, Olive unexpectedly finds herself trembling with “a kind of tenderness of envy” upon her realization that Basil, as an ex-Confederate veteran, had once “offered his own life, even if it had not been taken.”

Her tender envy discloses the secret lurking in the rear of her undisguised morbidity: “The most secret, the most sacred hope of her nature was that she might some day have such a chance, that she might be a martyr and die for something” (811). Before Olive and Basil meet Verena Tarrant, who mediates and visualizes their erotic rivalry, Olive already envies her cousin, designating him as her competitor. The prize at stake between them is, for Olive, the privilege to die as a burnt offering of sacrifice, which would compensate her failure to offer her life during the War. Captivated by sacrificial death, Olive Chancellor is, in the word’s primordial sense, morbid: she is, like Alice James who longed for death for her life, enamored by *mori*.

Olive’s enchantment with sacrificial death figured in her envy for the Confederate veteran points to the thematic centrality of the Civil War in James’s American tale. Various critics have commented that *The Bostonians*, which culminates in a heterosexual union between Verena and Basil, enacts what Nina Silber has famously called the “romance of reunion” in her 1993 book of the same title. As Silber argues, the marriage plot between a Northern hero and a Southern heroine boasted popularity in the Reconstruction era, symbolizing the national reconciliation that would placate the sectional rancor still prevalent in the period. Highlighting the sinister overtone in the final sentence of the novel, however, commentators of *The Bostonians* have

stressed the cynicism in James's oblique deployment of the conventional romance-of-reunion plot. Going away from the Boston Music Hall with Basil and finally released from Olive Chancellor's influence, Verena utters, "Ah, now I am glad." However, beneath the hood Basil thrust on her, Verena is in tears: "It is to be feared that with the union, so far from brilliant, into which she was about to enter, these were not the last she was destined to shed" (*Bostonians* 1218-19). The reunion between the North and the South is purchased in the form of matrimony between Basil and Verena, yet not without dire consequence.

Simply put, *The Bostonians* "exudes a melancholy acceptance of reunion's failures" (Ryan 271). The reversed gender assignments of the regions in *The Bostonians*—the Southern male with slave-holding past "liberating" the Northern female from the nerve-debilitating suffrage movement—problematizes the reunion between the North and the South: it is structured in such a way that in order to celebrate the national reconciliation, readers must "overlook not only Basil's misogyny but his contempt for and rage against the North" (Hotchman 275). Put differently, by the gender reversal, *The Bostonians* brings into relief the controversial issues such as "woman question" and racial strife after the emancipation, which would be glossed over in the heterosexualized narrative of reunion as long as the Northern "civilized" hero rescues the Southern heroine from the savagery of the region.

Furthermore, *The Bostonians* underscores the troubling logic of the construction of national identity conflated with virility. In the crucial scene in which Verena and Basil's erotic bond is forged at the Harvard Memorial Hall—a "temple to youth, manhood, generosity" where deceased student soldiers are consecrated (*Bostonians* 1024)—Basil gains access to "a foothold in his post-bellum struggle for citizenship" simply by his past of "shared personal manly

sacrifice” (Brigman 14). By rewriting the Civil War into what Leland Person aptly phrases as “a civil war of the sexes,” *The Bostonians* charts the way in which a Southerner emasculated by the Civil War attempts to “resurrect his manhood within a similar Reconstruction triangle in which gender can be substituted for racial mastery” (Person 295, 296). As Ann Brigman persuasively argues, “[i]n suggesting the ways a disenfranchised figure like Basil gains the status of individual, which in turn enables him a to attain a civic identity, the novel links not only constructions of nation with gender, but further suggests how this connection is rooted in a politics of sexuality, specifically, the heterosexual contract”(15).

Doubtlessly Person’s and Brigman’s argument that *The Bostonians* disrupts the postbellum regeneration narrative of the heterosexualized social body is incisive. Yet what seems to be left unexamined is the question of how Olive Chancellor’s same-sex intimacy with Verena figures in James’s critique of the popular reconstruction narrative, and how it “typifies” the American body politic. The exclusion of Olive Chancellor—a “signal old maid” in her late twenties who is “unmarried by every implication of her being”—from the heterosexualized social body probably echoes with the novelist’s own (*Bostonians* 816). But it is not simply because of their shared celibacy and ambiguous gender positions. James’s peculiar sense of distance to the American body politic, like that of his heroine, was constituted by his nonparticipation in the Civil War.

Like Olive, who lost two brothers in the War, James remained a civilian during the War while witnessing his two younger brothers, Wilky and Robertson, enlisted and get wounded. Two of his favorite cousins, Gus Barker and William Temple, died in the War. Further, immediately before composing *The Bostonians*, Henry was bereft of Wilky in 1884, who had

been “vastly attached to the negro-soldier cause” and had served in the 54<sup>th</sup> Massachusetts, “the first body of coloured soldiers raised in the North” (*Notes* 194). Wilky was severely wounded in the attack on Fort Wagner, and never fully recovered from the permanent damage of the injury. Much like the morbid heroine of his oblique Civil War narrative, the novelist himself bemoans his nonparticipation in the war and is enchanted by bloody sacrifices that he could ill afford to make.

James’s recounting of his experience of the War—or the lack thereof—in his second autobiography *Notes of a Son and Brother* (1914) is characteristically vague, yet marked singularly by “a horrid even if an obscure hurt” (*Notes* 240). The nature of the much-discussed wound—which reputedly disqualified him from participating in the War, caused his perennial backache, and rendered him celibate for life—was deliberately obfuscated in James’s dense narrative. What exactly happened to eighteen-year-old James is never entirely made clear in his autobiography. All we can know from his account is that what he calls “a private catastrophe or difficulty, bristling with embarrassments” ostensibly occurred at the outbreak of the War, “during the soft spring of ’61 by the firing on Fort Sumter, [and] Mr. Lincoln’s instant first call for volunteers” (239). In “twenty odious minutes” in the midst of “a shabby conflagration,” James says, he was “[j]ammed into the acute angle between two high fences, where the rhythmic play of [his] arms, in tune with that of several other pair, but at a dire disadvantage of position,” trying to operate “a rural, a rusty, a quasi-extemporised old engine to work and a saving stream to flow” (240).

What probably happened was, as many commentators have speculated, James injured his back while working as a volunteer fireman at a Newport fire, crushed against fences in an

attempt to run a rusty water pump. When exactly the accident happened is, though, still a subject of debate. Some argue, as James himself hints at, he was involved in the fire on the night of 17 April, 1861 (Hoffman 533); many more—including Leon Edel, Paul John Eakin, and John Halperin among others—suspect that his injury happened *not* in April, when Lincoln recruited volunteers, but on the night of 28 October 1861, six months after the Civil War began. Equally obscure is the severity of the hurt. That James’s health was debilitated to the degree that he was deemed unfit for enlistment was, most likely, true. As Tess Hoffman and Charles Hoffmann chronicle, James’s exemption due to physical disability was documented in the *Newport Mercury*, on September 5, 1863. This date was two months after his name was found on the list of Newport youth drafted by lottery, though James never mentions the drafting anywhere in his writing (Hoffman and Hoffman 529).

But whether or not the exemption was due to the injury at the fire is not entirely clear. While James’s narrative amply dramatizes the injury as catastrophe, he also narrates how he concealed it from everybody for as long as “three or four months” without causing any suspicion. He further complains that, when he eventually confessed it to his father, the Boston surgeon his father took him to made “quite unassistingly light of” the injury. The surgeon refused “either to warn, to comfort, or to command,” treating his injury as if it were “a comparative pooh-pooh” (242). Therefore, whether the injury from a Newport fire was actually as severe as to prevent James from responding to Lincoln’s initial call for volunteers, or not, is still a mystery, and “[t]he obscure hurt remained obscure,” perhaps as James designed it to be (Edel, *Untried* 176).

Precisely because of its obscurity, however, the obscure hurt has become a potent metaphor for his sexual impotence, non-normative manhood, and queerness in James criticism. Regardless of when, how, and what exactly happened, this incident was singled out in *Notes of a Son and Brother* as the defining moment of James's life, as that which "disqualified him not only from participation in the Civil war but also, forever, from the normal physical exertions of life, including sexual exertions, and rendered him a sort of invalid, permanent spectator of life, passive and celibate" (Halperin, J 24). James's apologia for his nonparticipation in the War, amply charged with shame and self-deprecation, seems to endorse the reading that the obscure hurt constituted for him a failure in "the trials of masculinity"—that is, a figurative, if not literal, castration (Graham 12). When read this way, the language narrating the accident itself begins to sound distortedly phallic, likening itself to a failed masturbation: forced into a "dire disadvantageous position," he was injured in an attempt to activate "a rusty . . . old engine" with the "rhythmic play" of his hands in order to pump out "a saving stream to flow," but in vain (240).

The cosmopolite youth missed the single most important event for the future of his native land that would have enabled him to claim the national identity conflated with virility. His nonparticipation in the War, particularly at the side of "the stretcher on which [his] young brother was to lie for so many days," was felt "a sore and troubled, a mixed and oppressive thing" (*Notes* 196). His injury was an "infinitely small affair in comparison" to Wilky's wounds (239). Amongst "the willing youths, all round, [who] were mostly starting to their feet," for James "to have trumped up a lameness at such a juncture could be made to pass in no light for graceful" (240). He was painfully aware that he could lay no claim to the "common

Americanism” endowed to his younger brothers, when he unenthusiastically entered Harvard Law School in search of what he calls “any particular thing I might meanwhile ‘do’” during the War (236).

Yet, at the same time, the obscure hurt did constitute what the novelist would call “at the risk of any apparent fatuity . . . my ‘relation to’ the War” (236). The relation is, for sure, of a nature that could only be allowed to exist in scare quotes. It is too precarious to straightforwardly call a relation. Still, in the very pain of the awareness of his non-relation to the War and the pettiness of his own wound, James “flushed with emotions . . . with peculiar sharpness in the generalized pang of participation, that were all but touched in themselves as with the full experience” (197). Paradoxically enough, his nonparticipation in the War and the pang it inflicted on him comprises something akin to the “full experience” of the War, forging “a relation to everything occurring round [him] not only for the next four years but for long afterward—that was at once extraordinary intimate and quite awkwardly irrelevant” (240).

As such, the obscure hurt offered James, through what he calls “queer fusion or confusion,” an access to the vexed identification with the American body politic (239). The obscure hurt of his individual body, with the gnawing shame that its pettiness inflicts, opens up a conduit for James to establish a chimerical relation to the “huge comprehensible ache” of the “enclosing social body, a body rent with a thousand wounds.” Such attachments catalyzed by imaginarily shared wounds “thus treated [him] to the honour of a sort of tragic fellowship” (240). The Civil War and the stinging sense of inadequacy that the nonparticipation in it provided James with a sense of belonging: “He was now for the first time in presence of matters normally, entirely, consistently American,” being able to “rinse [his] mouth of the European

after taste” (244, 246). In short, the obscure hurt functions doubly as a stigma. The castratory wound surely marks James’s disgrace for his nonparticipation in the War. At the same time, it splices his individual body to the lacerated social body—like *stigmata*, holy wounds supernaturally impressed by divine favor for the redemptive identification with the savior’s lacerated body in crucifixion.

The obscure hurt as *stigmata*, with the wound’s crucial role in identity formation, immediately reminds us of Wendy Brown’s trenchant critique of identity politics in “Wounded Attachments” (1993). By “wounded attachments,” Brown means the ways in which the particularized “I” deploys its pangs of exclusion as leverage for its appeals to and demands for inclusion in the abstract and universalized “we” of the state. Yet politicized identity, constituted by such identitarian categories as race, gender, sexuality, becomes invested in its own wounds, exclusion, and subjugation, because “it is premised on this exclusion for its very existence” (406). Since it is predicated on exclusion as its basis of identity, politicized identity necessarily is tethered to the very structure of normalizing and disciplinary discourse. For in trying to legitimize their claims for exculpation, politicized identities retain “the real or imagined holdings of its reviled subject—in this case, bourgeois male privileges—as objects of desire.” In measuring its injuries by “bourgeois norms of social acceptance, legal protection, relative material comfort, and social independence,” politicized identity substantiates and becomes complicit with “the humanist ideal—and a specific white, middle-class, masculinist expression of this ideal” produced by disciplinary society (394, 398). Thus, fueled by Nietzschean *ressentiment*, or “the moralizing revenge of the powerless,” politicized identity perpetuates “its own impotence” (400, 403).

When James woefully writes, “measuring wounds against wounds, or the compromised, the particular taxed condition, at the least, against all the rest of the debt then so generally and enormously due, one was no less exalted than wastefully engaged in the common fact of endurance,” it has a distinct similitude with Brown’s formulation of wounded attachment (*Notes* 255). Obvious are his investments in the castratory wound, his attachment to the impotence, and his pathetic claim for the inclusion in the universalized “we,” that is, the masculinist U.S. citizenship that excludes the effeminate, celibate novelist. Yet what James’s wounded attachment sorely lacks is a Nietzschean resentment, its debilitating vengefulness and rancor. Rather, his version of wounded attachment reconfigures the pain of the wound as a site generating erotic pleasure. For the imaginarily shared wound enables James to identify with “the American soldier in his multitude . . . in his depression, his wasted melancholy almost,” who constitutes for the writer the “most attaching and affecting withal the most amusing figure of romance conceivable” (*Notes* 252). James’s obscure hurt does not signify his “passional death” (Rosenzweig 88). Rather, it equips the writer with a “romance of a more confused kind”: eroticism oozing with pain and mediated by a gaping castratory wound, which displaces genital sexuality (*Notes* 252).

The eroticism of pain enables James to conjure up a relation to the social body “at once extraordinarily intimate and quite awkwardly irrelevant,” which complicates Brown’s formulation of wounded attachments (*Notes* 240). One of Brown’s critiques of wounded attachments derives from how politicized identity constituted by wounds “posits a sovereign and unified ‘I’ that is disenfranchised by an exclusive ‘we,’” and thereby bolstering the “fiction of an inclusive/universal community” (Brown 398). James’s obscure hurt, I argue, points to a

different mode of relationality between the individual and the social body. His is not structured by what Brown calls “the language of ‘I am’—with its defensive closure on identity, its insistence on the fixity of position, and its equation of social with moral positioning.” Rather, James’s attachments to the wound—or the desire for the shared wound—mobilizes “fixed and sovereign identity,” almost to the extent that his selfhood becomes shattered by masochistic *jouissance* (Brown 407). If identity means, as Brown envisions, the distinguishability of the self from the imagined whole, James refuses to base his identity on the wound; instead, his wound becomes a site of identification to the imagined whole. In other words, James embraces the castratory wound, situating it at the center of the national narrative, in which he could potentially submerge himself in the collective pain.

#### “The Ecstasy of the Martyr”

Olive Chancellor’s erotic economy is, like her creator’s, constituted by the obscure hurt as stigmata: she desires for sacrificial pain that would interweave her individual body in the body politic. Her nervous afflictions, like James’s obscure hurt that became the source of his neurasthenic backache for the rest of his life, might function as one of the sources of much desired pain. Yet her hurt is even more obscure than that of the novelist. She was, from the outset, foreclosed from the opportunity to make any “sacrifice” for the nation building, unlike her brothers consecrated in the “temple to youth, manhood, generosity” (*Bostonians* 1024). If Olive Chancellor, who is “unmarried by every implication of her being,” were to be admitted into the American body politic without consigning to the narrative of heterosexual union or breeding the old American stock, she would need a new wound that enables her to splice her body to that of the nation.

For that purpose, she starts her own version of Civil War, in order to be wounded and ultimately to die in sacrifice. Her conflation of racial and sexual liberation is obvious: her mission is to unshackle the “whole enslaved sisterhood” from the hand of “the brutal, blood-stained, ravaging race,” that is men (937, 835). In her vision of reformist feminism as a Civil War of the sexes, “[t]he sacrifices, the blood, the tears, the terrors” become “theirs,” not men’s (970). Much like Henry James, who was enthralled by the “romance of a more confused kind,” Olive Chancellor is preoccupied with the equally confused kind of “romance of the people” (832). She is devoted to the feminist cause body and soul, “asking no better fate than to die for it.” She needs sacrificial pain, even though it is “not clear to this interesting girl in what manner such a sacrifice (as this last) would be required of her” (835).

Victimization of women, for Olive, is a source of religious ecstasy. As epitomized in her use of “priesthood” for the troping of her feminism, Olive’s morbid enchantment with sacrifice for a feminist cause is “so religious as never to be wanting in ecstasy” (927, 948). Insofar as “to be ec-static means, literally, to be outside oneself . . . to be transported beyond oneself by a passion” (Butler *Undoing* 20), in creating the heroine trembling with the desire for “the ecstasy of the martyr” (*Bostonians* 935), the text points to a mode of passional relationality that complicates our habitual understanding of desire moored by the stable object-subject relationship. When she says “I want to give myself up to others. . . . I want to enter into the lives of women who are lonely, who are piteous” she aspires to lose herself into the creation of common humanity through feminism (*Bostonians* 833).

Such a mode of identificatory desire that destabilizes the subject-object relation bears a striking resemblance to George Bataille’s theorization of religious eroticism. Bataille’s *Erotism*

describes the way in which “the being loses himself deliberately, but then the subject is identified with the object losing his identity. If necessary I can say in eroticism: *I am losing myself*” (31; italics original). What ultimately stages the dispossession of the self, for Bataille, is the ritual of sacrifice:

Erotic activity, by dissolving the separate beings that participate in it, reveals their fundamental continuity, like the waves of a stormy sea. In sacrifice, the victim is divested not only of clothes but of life . . . . The victim dies and the spectators share in what his death reveals. This is what religious historians call the element of sacredness. The sacredness is the revelation of continuity through the death of a discontinuous being to those who watch it as a solemn rite. A violent death disrupts the creature’s discontinuity; what remains, what the tense onlookers experience in the succeeding silence, is the continuity of all existence with which the victim is now one. (22)

At the beginning of the novel, however, Olive finds herself unable to offer herself in sacrifice.

Olive’s sacrificial eroticism instead finds its medium when she meets Verena Tarrant.

Immediately after Mrs. Burrage’s insinuation of her suspicious intimacy to Verena, Olive says:

“I am surprised at your not perceiving how little it is in my interest to deliver my—my victim up to you” (*Bostonians* 1088). Olive’s peculiar diction in describing Verena’s relationship to her, “my victim” (preceded by the hesitant stammer), takes on a particular significance because it occurs directly after her indictment of the public misrecognition of their relationship. If “victim”—a living creature killed and offered in sacrifice—is the name that Olive gives to her partner, the act of sacrifice seems to open a new way to interpret the passion that marks their singular relationship: that is, their relation is *passional* in the word’s original sense, replete with the suffering of martyrdom. Put differently, the erotic potential of the “ecstasy of the martyr” reconfigures the subject/object relationship through sacrifice. It requires the nullification of selfhood as a firmly established subject that desires an object, urging instead the passional subject to identify with the object at the cost of losing subjectivity through sacrificial death.

Verena is her model “victim,” who would enable Olive to “los[e] herself” through the ritual of sacrifice (*Bostonians* 1088, 873). Olive trembles with “a nervous ecstasy of anticipation” at her first private meeting with the celebrated mesmeric medium. Growing up in the Cayuga community—a barely fictionalized name for John Humphrey Noyes’s Oneida community—where there is no notion of private property based on monogamous family relations, Verena sorely lacks the concept of possession: she is, by birth, dispossessed, disposed for sacrifice. What defines Verena’s character is this mode of dispossession, or what the novel terms her “singular hollowness” of self (857). Due to the emptiness of her interiority, Verena Tarrant becomes one of the most un-Jamesian characters in his oeuvre. The narrator confesses the impossibility of describing her consciousness in a tragic-comical manner:

it was so singular on Verena’s part, in particular, that I despair of presenting it to the reader with the air of reality. To understand it, one must bear in mind her peculiar frankness, natural and acquired, her habit of discussing questions, sentiments, moralities, her education, in the atmosphere of lecture-rooms, of *séances*, her familiarity with the vocabulary of emotion, the mystery of ‘the spiritual life.’ . . . [H]er essence was the extraordinary generosity with which she could expose herself, give herself away, turn herself inside out, for the satisfaction of a person who made demands of her. (1153; italics original)

It is precisely because of the void of her interiority, in which everything is generously given away and nothing is left uncovered for the narrator, that she successfully functions as a medium for Olive’s feminism. She is an empty vessel: her eloquence comes from “some power outside—it seemed to flow through her. . . . it wasn’t her—she had nothing to do with it” (851). Because she is empty, her body becomes the ideal vessel for women’s voices.

Verena’s “unlimited generosity” (874), her disposition to give herself away for sympathetic identification with others, is repeatedly referred to as a “gift”: a thing simply endowed outside the logic of exchange. For Olive, Verena is “the very type and model of the

‘gifted being;’ her qualities had not been bought and paid for” (908). As Verena herself describes the mesmeric trance as “giv[ing] out,” the whole purpose of her being is to be given out to the other like “some brilliant birthday-present, left at the door by an unknown messenger, to be delightful for ever as an inexhaustible legacy, and amusing for ever from the obscurity of its source.” Such a marker of dispossession, “giftedness” (964), makes Verena for Olive a model “victim,” a sacrificial offering submitted to the altar (1088). From the moment of their first interaction, Verena is susceptible to Olive’s own ecstatic desire for sacrifice, ready to offer her life: “[Verena] flushed a little at this appeal, and the deeper glow of her eyes was the first sign of exaltation she had offered. ‘Oh yes—I want to give my life!’ she exclaimed, with a vibrating voice” (879).

For Olive, who has “so little of” the “giftedness” (964), Verena’s generous selflessness seems to enable her own dispossession of self, for Verena’s void swallows and assimilates Olive. Verena becomes one with Olive by identifying with Olive’s feminist philosophy which she memorizes as if it was “part of a catechism” (936). Olive is now ecstatic—beside herself—for she dislodges herself and inhabits Verena. Olive’s quaint epistolary metaphor exemplifies the absorptive, identificatory logic of their relation: “I should like to be able to say that you are my form—my envelope. But you are too beautiful for that!” (946). Like a letter folded in a beautiful envelope, Olive is incorporated into Verena. When Verena confesses to Olive that without her presence she wouldn’t be able to feel the suffering of women so intensely, Olive replies: “you have never yet said anything to me which expressed so clearly the closeness and sanctity of our union” (946). For Olive, total correspondence of their feelings—or more precisely, Verena’s subsumption of her—attests to the consummation of the “union of soul,” an

ultimate form of consummation of her metaphysical erotics (873). As Verena is stunned to realize, Olive is completely “wrapped up in her,” and she would “suffer from the least deviation” (1069).

The deviation, however, becomes inevitable. What endangers their relationship is Verena’s growing possession of her own interiority. Her envelope-like essential hollowness, which I have been arguing is so crucial to Olive’s ecstatic eroticism of sacrifice, dissolves when it is occupied by its own “secret.” Verena’s excursion to the Harvard Memorial Hall with Basil—the temple of “sacrifice” and “generosity” that commemorates the student soldiers—begins to bear an erotic meaning when Basil asks her to keep it a secret (1024). When confronted by Olive, Verena realizes that it is “the only secret she had in the world—the only thing that was all her own” (1067). For Verena, who grew up in Cayuga, where she was educated to expose herself so thoroughly that there was no boundary between the private and the public, her little secret becomes her first private property. The sweetness of her private possession makes her conscious that “the moment her secret was threatened it became dearer to her” (1067). It is easy to be generous when one owns nothing; it is quite another thing when one possesses something, albeit trivial. Olive’s presentiment of the loss of Verena’s generosity, by which the mesmerist’s daughter enthusiastically promises to give her life, is to be proven valid: “I wonder if you know what it means, young and lovely as you are—giving your life!” (879). Knowing finally what it means to give up something she possesses, Verena starts to wonder “how far it was necessary to go in the path of self-sacrifice.” Verena is now ready to dispossess Olive of the gift she has given to her, the life of her own: “She had lent herself, given herself, utterly, and she ought to have known better if she didn’t mean to abide by it” (1158).

The language of the heated conversation between the two women embodies the way in which Verena reclaims her gift from Olive:

She said to her again and again that she had utterly changed since that hour she came to her, in New York, after her morning with Mr. Ransom, and sobbed out that they must hurry away. Then she had been wounded, outraged, sickened, and in the interval nothing had happened, nothing but that one exchange of letters, which she knew about, to bring her round to shameless tolerance. Shameless, Verena admitted it to be; she assented over and over to this proposition, and explained, as eagerly each time as if it were the first, what it was that had come to pass, what it was that had brought her round. It had simply come over her that she liked him, that this was the true point of view, the only one from which one could consider the situation in a way that would lead to what she called a *real* solution—a permanent rest. On this particular point Verena never responded, in the liberal way I have mentioned, without asseverating at the same time that what she desired most in the world was to prove (the picture Olive had held up from the first), that a woman *could* live on persistently, clinging to a great, vivifying, redemptory idea, without the help of a man. (1153-54)

The passage that narrates the tête-à-tête between the two women is exceptionally resistant to reading, standing out in the overall language of a novel that has little resemblance to the serpentine complexity of James's later works. The passage becomes dense precisely because both Verena and Olive are referred to with the same personal pronouns, "she" and "her," due to the sameness of their gender. Read contextually, many of the referents seem to be settled. For instance, the first sentence should be read as "[Olive] said to [Verena] again and again that [Verena] had utterly changed since that hour [Verena] came to [Olive], in New York, after [Verena's] morning with Mr. Ransom, and sobbed out that they must hurry away." Yet, in terms of syntax, there is no clear distinction between the two women: they are one and the same, "she" and "her." In this sense, Olive's identificatory metaphysical erotic is consummated in the verbal intercourse with Verena. However, the moment Olive proposes "what she called a *real* solution—a permanent rest," the two women are separated by proper nouns; for Verena cannot

concede to “this particular point,” double suicide as a solution, insisting instead that they have to “live on persistently, clinging to a great, vivifying, redemptory idea” (1154).

### Still Waiting

Robbed of Verena by Basil Ransom, Olive stands alone in the Music Hall. Olive Chancellor can no longer dream of that impossible, transcendental ecstasy of sacrifice that Verena’s victimhood seemed to promise her. Yet, her self-dissolution—“the ecstasy of the martyr”—is consummated only when she is dispossessed of the gift once endowed to her (935). Having lost her victim, Olive is now ready to offer herself to the altar. Going away with Verena, Basil Ransom casts a backward glance at his cousin. Now, the morbidity he saw in the “pale girl, with her light-green eyes” at the moment of encounter bears a clearer meaning to him (835): “her pale, glittering eyes straining forward, as if they were looking for death” (1226).

When Olive walks toward the platform to expose herself in the face of the agitated audience, “Ransom had a vision, even at that crowded moment, that if she could have met it there and then, bristling with steel or lurid with fire, she would have rushed on it without tremor, like the heroine that she was” (1216). For at last she is to “find the fierce expiation she sought for” from the beginning of the narrative (1217). We must remember, “The most secret, the most sacred hope of her nature was that she might some day have such a chance, that she might be a martyr and die for something” (811). Like the “sacrificial figure of Hypatia, whirled through the furious mob of Alexandria,” she yields herself “to the thousands she had disappointed and deceived,” waiting to be “trampled to death and torn to pieces” (1217). Olive’s “nervous ecstasy of anticipation” (875), her repeated utterance of “[w]e must wait—we must wait” is now to be fulfilled with the final dispossession of her own life (874).

Her desire for sacrificial death is, however, not consummated. As Basil observes, “even when exasperated, a Boston audience is not ungenerous” (1218). When Olive stands on the stage, “[e]very sound instantly dropped, the hush was respectful, the great public waited . . . . [I]t was not apparent that they were likely to hurl the benches at her” (1218). Unlike the mob that lacerates Hypatia, the ever-civil Boston crowd does not desire Olive’s sacrifice. With the consummation of her sacrificial erotics thus once again deferred, Olive will have to repeat her incantation, “as if it were the solution of everything, as if it represented with absolute certainty some immense happiness in the future—‘We must wait, we must wait!’” (877).

Olive Chancellor’s deferred ecstasy of sacrifice, however, marks “the decisive beginning of Olive’s feminist speaking career” (Kahan 52). Standing in for Verena, Olive now has to become a conduit for the voice of women. Earlier in the novel, Verena has pointed out to Olive: “Why, Olive, you are quite a speaker yourself! . . . You would far surpass me if you would let yourself go” (*Bostonians* 930). In the pain of letting Verena go with Basil, Olive is finally able to let herself go. Hankering after the coming of the ecstasy of the martyrdom, she begins her public career as a feminist, trying to speak for the reconfiguration of the heterosexualized body politics. It is an act of “a suspension, a waiting, an attending to the world’s arrivals . . . not as a guarantee or security for action in the present, but as the very force from the past that moves us” (Freccero 207). The as yet to be determined future of race suicide is thus transferred to the next generation of women: the arrival of the “New Woman” in the 1890s, which we will witness in the next chapter, albeit in a form quite different from Olive Chancellor’s reformist feminism would expect it.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See Philip Horne, p.239. I am indebted to Horne's "Henry James and 'the forces of violence'" for my use of Roosevelt's references in this section. Horne's article traces the decade-long relationship between James and Roosevelt. Underscoring James's ambivalence to the hyper-masculine President, he sees Roosevelt as an inspiration for the protagonist of James's 1908 story, "The Jolly Corner."

<sup>2</sup> According to Philip Horne, this remark was scribbled in blue pencil, and deciphered only by Edmund Morris. The existent collection of Roosevelt's letters by Cambridge does not record it. See Horne, p. 240.

<sup>3</sup> For the concise and brilliant account for how the "sexual inversion" model was transformed into the "object choice" model of homosexuality, see George Chauncey, "From Sexual Inversion to Homosexuality."

<sup>4</sup> I owe my understanding of Henry James as a "celibate novelist" to Benjamin Kahan's *Celibacies*. In his chapter on *The Bostonians*, Kahan rearticulates James's life-long celibacy both as a response to the vocational call as an artist, as well as sexuality in its own right, rather than suppressed homosexuality as understood in the dominant James scholarship. See Kahan 52-55.

<sup>5</sup> See Horne p.240.

<sup>6</sup> For some examples of lesbian readings of *The Bostonians*, see Phillip Rahv, Terry Castle, Peter Coveiello, Hugh Stevens, and Wendy Graham. There has been a lively argument as to how to interpret Olive's "sexuality." At the time of the novel's publication, the intensity of her relation to Verena was strangely disregarded. In the words of Phillip Rahv, who first nominated Olive as a "Lesbian" in his introduction to the 1945 reprint of the novel (ix), the absent reference to Olive's sexuality at the novel's publication bespeaks the contemporary reviewers' incapability of "seeing a relationship of this kind in a clear clinical light" and "approach[ing] it in their minds with any degree of candor" (vi). Critics after Rahv have almost unanimously adopted the repressive hypothesis, regarding the contemporary imperceptions of Olive's sexuality as a sign of unconscious refusal to know. Accordingly, the lack of explicit articulation of their sexual relationship in the novel that could potentially preempt lesbian readings has often been reframed in terms of the double-fold unrepresentability. On the one hand, the invisibility is ascribed to the author's strategic conformation to the literary decorum of his time. Terry Castle's insightful reading, for instance, places *The Bostonians* in the French literary tradition of "Sapphic love," shedding light on the palimpsestic rhetoric by which James subtly inscribes the corporeal dimension of lesbianism as a "kind of intertextual ghost effect" (169-70). On the other hand, the non-representationality also seems to arise from the lack of the name for same-sex desire itself at the publication of the novel that precedes sexological discourse. Peter Coviello reads the "earliness and expectancy" of Olive's non-heteronormative love, which misrecognizes reformist feminism as "the closest approximation of a language" for her passion for Verena (171). Although my argument highlights the same-sex intimacy between Olive and Verena without physical consummation, I contend in the sections that follow that Olive's erotic

attachment to Verena is neither repressed or unrepresented; rather, like Kahan, who reads the celibate eroticism in *The Bostonians*, I argue that her eroticism is metaphysical.

<sup>7</sup> For some examples of Civil-War readings of *The Bostonians*, see Susan M. Ryan, Aaron Shaheen, and Barbara Hotchman. Hotchman's argument in particular situates the novel's Civil-War theme in the context of its publication medium, the *Century*.

<sup>8</sup> For the pessimism surrounding New England in the late nineteenth century, see Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America*, Chap. 12-13, and Barbara Solomon, *Ancestors and Immigrants*, Chap 3-5.

<sup>9</sup> For neurasthenia as "Americanitis," see, for instance, Paul Stephens. According to Stephens, although William James is credited for this epithet, there is no printed record he used this term (131).

<sup>10</sup> In contrast, Basil's complexion is marked as "brown" (1031), and he himself is conscious of his "Southern complexion" causes "a prejudice" among his clients (973).

<sup>11</sup> As David Halperin chronicles, the term "lesbian" itself is "by far the most ancient term in our current lexicon of sexuality," whose emergence dates back to the pre-classical period of Greek civilization (49). The history of the deployment of the term in relation to female sexuality is therefore long and entangled, associated with excessive sensuality, gender deviance, or tribadism, in a given time and place. Yet it was sometime around the early twentieth century that "the word 'lesbian' came to mean . . . a standard designation of 'female homosexual'" (49-50).

CHAPTER 3  
THE NEW WOMAN BREEDING A NEW RACE:  
KATE CHOPIN AND THE AESTHETICS OF DEVOLUTION

“A New Race of Beings”

Awakened from a long slumber at Chênrière Caminada, the heroine of Kate Chopin’s 1899 novel quizzically tells her romantic companion: “The whole island seems changed. A new race of beings must have sprung up, leaving only you and me as past relics. How many ages ago did Madame Antoine and Tonie die? and when did our people from Grand Isle disappear from the earth?” (37). Nurtured in the “snow-white” bed of an Acadian household (35), Edna Pontellier’s fairy-tale like reverie of the supersedure of her “people” by a “new race of beings” strangely resonates with the apocalyptic scenario of race suicide. With her revolt against motherhood, Edna becomes a prototype of what Theodore Roosevelt called “a criminal against the race . . . an object of contemptuous abhorrence by all healthy people,” who refuses to “recognize that the greatest thing for any woman is to be a good wife and mother” (Roosevelt viii). At the end of the novel, Edna drowns herself in the Gulf of Mexico to elude her children, “who had overpowered and sought to drag her into the soul’s slavery” (108). Her suicidal swimming into the ocean, in this context, can be read as a clear manifestation of personal enactment of race suicide: she destroys the reproductive capacity of her “white body” (109).

But what is the “new race of beings” Edna dreams of, which has suddenly “sprung up” to supplant her people? Edna’s odd phrasing—a new race of *beings*—suggests the possibility of a pregnancy with a new mode of breeding that potentially unsettles the concept of race as we know it. Yet, of course, there is no doubt that “race in *The Awakening* is no small matter” in the conventional sense of race as well, especially in terms of the dichotomy between black and

white (Dyer, Joyce 142). *The Awakening* is obsessed with whiteness, almost heavy-handedly reflecting the Progressive Era's nativist politics; the word "white," appears as many as 43 times in the relatively short novel. Likewise, the heroine's past inscribes her in a stereotypical Southern whiteness. Edna was born in the year before the termination of the Civil War in the "old Kentucky bluegrass country" (*Awakening* 6). Financially and culturally invested in slavery in the antebellum period, Kentucky allegedly remained neutral in the War, thereby becoming a benign, if caricatured, emblem of the Old South myth from the Reconstruction Era onward.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, Edna's quintessential whiteness is highlighted by the fact that she is raised Presbyterian by an ex-Confederate Colonel on a Mississippi plantation after moving from Kentucky. At the same time, her whiteness is shot through with the romance of the South. Edna marries a Catholic Creole in New Orleans against the opposition of her Presbyterian family. In the city once known as the Southern Babylon, colored by the lurid literary imagination surrounding its quadroon balls, she pursues her sexual freedom through erotic liaisons with sensuous Creole whites. Put simply, Edna Pontellier is shorthand for Southern whiteness—romantic, exotic, and irretrievably lost.

In the light of the novel's preoccupation with whiteness, Edna's fantasy of race suicide seems to indicate her oft-criticized colonialist desire to "go native" (Berg 74). As Allison Berg points out, in the era in which the white racial enervation was decried, a healthy dose of primitive sexual energy was designated a potential antidote for the ills of overcivilization. The spoiled bourgeois housewife, it is often said, fancifully longs for abandoning her racial and class privilege in order to appropriate the "sexual license that she attributes to 'backwards' races" (73). Accordingly, Chopin's deployment of primitivism, or what Michele Birnbaum calls

“the racial midwifery of Edna’s sexual awakening,” has long been a thorny issue in Chopin criticism (Birnbaum 307). In this context, the heroine’s discovery of her new identity, both existential and sexual, has been understood to be purchased at the cost of the racial other, exemplifying the author’s “‘soft’ but nonetheless white supremacist position” (Shaker 34).

In this sense, as Joyce Dyer and others have shown, *The Awakening* emerges as a textbook example of Toni Morrison’s delineation of the white imagination in *Playing in the Dark* (1993). The “blinding whiteness” of *The Awakening* is, as Morrison opines about the last scene of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*, oppositionally defined by the contours of “serviceable and serving black figures” (Morrison 32, 33). *The Awakening* abounds in shadowy figures who feed the heroine with both material and imaginative services. These figures consolidate the playground of “sweet, half-darkness” for the wealthy white housewife’s quest of personal freedom (*Awakening* 50). Such figures include the anonymous quadroon nursemaid with a “faraway, meditative air” (4), a “little black girl,” servant at the Lebruns (21), the “Griffe” nurse helping Adèle Ratignolle’s childbirth, and coquettish Spanish-speaking Mariequita with “ugly brown toes” and “pretty black eyes,” (33). When the heroine calls maternity “the soul’s slavery,” therefore, her conflation of gender and racial servitude becomes a telling sign of a wealthy white woman’s problematic appropriation of racial others as “surrogate selves for meditation on problems of human freedom” (Morrison 37).

Yet when situated in the setting of the novel—the greater New Orleans area between the summer of 1892 and the early spring of 1893—Edna’s equation of motherhood with slavery becomes more than just a misappropriated allegory of human subjugation. Rather, it stages what Alys Eve Weinbaum calls “the race/reproduction bind”—the notion that the production of

race is inextricably tied to biological reproduction for both white and non-white (5). The knot of race and reproduction became further entangled by the notion of property in the fin de siècle U.S, especially in Louisiana. This is made especially clear in relation to the landmark Supreme Court decision *Plessy v. Ferguson*. On June 7, 1892, a New Orleans “octoroon” and a son of French speaking free people of color Homer Adolph Plessy, nee Homère Patris Plessy, declared his racial heritage upon boarding a white-only coach. Dragged from the train, Plessy was arrested for violating the Louisiana Separate Car Act. At the time when Edna Pontellier mediates on maternity as slavery on the Gulf coast, in early 1893, the visibly white Creole’s case involving the constitutionality of Jim Crow was taken to the highest court.<sup>2</sup>

The notorious 1896 ruling cementing the “separate but equal” doctrine, as has often been pointed out, endorsed segregation based on so-called colored and white blood as the invisible but nonetheless objective signifier of race. More significantly, however, as Cheryl Harris propounds, the case marked a watershed moment in the conceptualization of race—especially that of whiteness—as “status property” (Harris 1714). In pointing out the arbitrariness of the color line, one of Plessy’s attorneys Albion Tourgée strategically claimed that the Separate Car Act visibly damaged “white”-skinned Plessy’s “reputation of belonging to the dominant race, in this instance the white race,” and as “property in the same sense that a right of action or of inheritance is property” (qtd. in Davis and Graham 51). The Court rejected Tourgée’s argument that Plessy’s optical whiteness should merit the reputation of being racially white: Plessy was “deprived of no property, since he is not lawfully entitled to the reputation of being a white man,” while “[i]f he be a white man and assigned to a colored coach, he may have his action for damages against the company for being deprived of his so-called property” (51). In contending

that the morphologically white octoroon was unlawfully claiming racial whiteness, Harris argues, the Court “lent support to the notion of race reputation as a property interest that required the protection of law through actions for damages” (Harris 1749). Through *Plessy*, whiteness was transfigured into property, legal entitlements to possess and enjoy the social privileges and the full-citizenship.

*Plessy*’s transfiguration of race into “property” has at least two major implications when we think about Edna Pontellier’s fantasy of “a new race of being.” First, insofar as whiteness is defined by exclusively white ancestry figured by so-called white blood, whiteness is imagined not simply as property, but more specifically as family property. In this sense, race is not just “reproducible” (Weinbaum 16); rather, it can *only* be reproduced from the supposed original—unable to be produced, acquired, or alienated unlike other forms of property—inherited exclusively by means of heterosexual reproductive intercourse.

The socio-political valence of the white maternal body as hereditary vessel was heightened with the reification of whiteness as family property. As Weinbaum argues, the case marks “the postbellum replacement of the black maternal body . . . by the white maternal body” as the primary site of reproduction of family property infused with race (21). Under slavery, the conflation of race and property was the issue mainly associated with blackness, for slavery molded the enslaved as property taking the form of the human body. Since the children of black female slaves assumed the status of the mother regardless of the race of the father, the reproductive capacity of female slaves was rendered a means of production and subsumed under the owner’s scheme of property accumulation. After abolition, however, the emphasis on protecting the nexus binding race/reproduction/property shifted from propertied interest in

slavery to propertied interest in white women's bodies. As the growing cases of lynching and the reinforcement of miscegenation laws in the 1890s attest, white women's bodies were regarded as the receptacle of whiteness as property to be protected from the damages of interbreeding.

Read in the context of *Plessy*, Edna's seemingly naïve conflation of maternity with slavery points to the new status allocated to the white female body: an apparatus reproducing racialized property contingent on procreative sex. When Léonce Pontellier scrutinizes his wife's complexion and remarks "You are burnt beyond recognition," Edna Pontellier is rendered "a valuable piece of personal property" (*Awakening* 4). Edna's status as Léonce's "personal property" does not simply suggest her economic dependency as his wife. Rather, Edna is also a vessel of the whiteness of family property, kept in place by the ideal of companionate marriage as "a decoy to secure mothers for the race," as the Pontelliers' family doctor puts it (105). Yet I would hasten to add that the structural similarity between antebellum black women and postbellum white women around the reproductive obligations of racialized property does not license the heroine's appropriation of slavery as a metaphor. For, the problem of the white imagination that Morrison points out lies in the very rhetoric of abstraction, in which black subordination is readily dissociated from its historical specificity. At the same time, situating New Orleans as the epicenter of the contestation of racial heritage and the discursive constellation of race/reproduction/property provides us with a new optic for the protagonist's fantasy invested in race suicide and the emergence of a "new race of beings."

Edna Pontellier's suicide, I would argue, ravishly squanders the whiteness as family property that she inherits through heterosexual reproduction and works in tandem with the

burgeoning consumer economy of the fin-de-siècle United States. Her consuming desire leads her to imagine the breeding of a race that evades the convoluted logic of property and inheritance, terms loaded simultaneously with hereditary and capitalist discourses. In the first section, I will attend to the evolutionary tenor of Edna's fantasy about the "new race of being" surpassing her people, focusing especially on Charles Darwin's aesthetic rendition of racial difference in *The Descent of Man*. The racial aesthetic that Chopin borrows from Darwin, I will argue, corresponds with the cultural politics of one of the novelist's major venues of publication, *Vogue*. *Vogue's* embrace of the New Woman ideal under the cloak of aestheticism enables Chopin to envision the parthenogenesis of the "New Woman" as a "new race of beings," whose consumptive mode of desiring flirts with death as the ultimate consummation of desire.

#### Darwin and the Aesthetic Mattering of Race

The Darwinian echo resounding in Edna's dreamy conception of "new race of beings" is no accident. The evolutionary theme sets the tone for the novel from the beginning, when the heroine, laying her eyes on the ocean, contemplates the "beginning of things, of a world especially": "How few of us ever emerge from such beginning! How many souls perish in its tumult!" (*Awakening* 14). The world of *The Awakening* is one in which physical and mental traits "ha[ve] become dwarfed by disuse," resonating with the law of natural selection Charles Darwin propounded in his 1859 *On the Origin of Species* (12). The novelist herself was, in fact, attuned to the evolutionary language. In an 1894 newspaper article, Chopin's contemporary William Schuyler portrayed the novelist as invested in "the subjects . . . almost entirely scientific," especially those concerned with "the department of Biology and Anthropology."

Chopin was preoccupied with the “study of the human species.” In particular, “[t]he works of Darwin, Huxley, and Spencer were her daily companion” (qtd. Seyersted 117).

Chopin’s Darwinian influence has drawn some critical attention, especially in terms of Darwin’s theorization of sexual selection. In *The Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin presented sexual selection as a process complementing natural selection he had theorized in *On the Origin of Species*. Operating together, the two forms of selection determine patterns of species evolution: while natural selection is concerned with the struggle for survival and species’ adjustment to their environments, sexual selection highlights the struggle over reproduction. Darwin describes sexual selection as a dual process: “in the one it is between the individuals of the same sex, generally the male sex, in order to drive away or kill their rivals, the females remaining passive; whilst in the other, the struggle is likewise between the individuals of the same sex, in order to excite or charm those of the opposite sex, generally the females, which no longer remain passive, but select the more agreeable partners” (Darwin 683). For Darwin, it is the latter process that explicates the morphological variations within a species, especially flamboyant ornamentations, that seemingly baffle the scheme of natural selection: in order to propagate, creatures have to be conspicuously ornamented, so that they may attract the opposite sex, even at the risk of attracting the attention of their predators as well.

Chopin’s reaction to Darwin’s gender assignments in sexual selection—especially the female as the selector of the mate—has been a subject of limited but lively critical discussions. Bert Bender argues that Chopin embraced Darwin’s basic premises of sexual selection, molding *The Awakening* as the protagonist’s gradual self-recognition as “an animal and therefore as a creature empowered to participate fully in the sexual reality as a self-conscious selector” (468).

At the same time, Bender further contends that Chopin enlarges the capacity of female sexual selection, endowing her heroine with an active sexual desire that surpasses the gender boundary that Darwin prescribed for human beings, in addition to romantic love that overrides species need. Similarly, John Glendening maintains that Edna's conundrum resides in "the incompatible claims on her of sexual selection and romantic love" (42): Chopin represents Edna's "pathological narcissism," which fuels her romantic involvement with Robert Lebrun, as an arrested psychological development that hinders sexual selection. As a sign of her maladjustment to the social and biological obligations to reproduce offspring, the heroine's death ultimately marks "the non-survival of the less fit" (69).

Though Bender and Glendening rightly locate a Darwinian cadence in the protagonist's quest for, and split between, romantic love and sexual desire, I contend that *The Awakening* reverberates more strongly with *The Descent of Man*, especially in terms of the authors' shared preoccupation with race. For *Descent* itself is, on one level, shot through by the question that *Origin* left unexplored: the origin of, and the divergence within, the human race as a species. As James Moore and Adrian Desmond argue, though seemingly split into two separate parts—"The Descent or Origin of Man" and "Sexual Selection"—the text's "growth within Darwin's own abolitionist context shows that the *Descent* has a single overarching subject—race" (xvi). As shown in the brief third section, "Sexual Selection in Relation to Man, and Conclusion," the second section that presents massive data corroborating the theory of sexual selection in non-human animals in fact serves to substantiate his claim at the end of the first section: "the differences between the races of man, as in colour, hairiness, form of features,

&c., are of a kind which might have been expected to come under the influence of sexual selection” (Darwin 230).

Darwin’s theorization of sexual selection as the principle agent of the morphological variations among human races is designed to counter polygenism—a theory often employed to license slavery that explained different human races as separate species. A grandson of two of the prominent abolitionists in his country, Erasmus Darwin and Josiah Wedgwood, Charles Darwin himself was invested in abolitionism. Of course, the author’s abhorrence toward slavery does not obviate *Descent* from racial prejudice; for the language of evolutionism itself is constituted by the developmental hierarchy between “lower” and “higher” races. Alongside this teleological perspective on species development Darwin offers a more radical account of racial differences: namely, an aesthetic understanding of race. The main trope Darwin repeatedly employs to explicate the development of morphological divergence between races, for both humans and non-human animals alike, is each group’s idiosyncratic “standard of taste” or “standard of beauty.” Creatures of the selecting sex in each subgroup of a species, often female, choose their mates according to their local aesthetics. It is the difference in aesthetic standards, Darwin explains, that generates morphological variation within the same species for both human and non-human animals.

Significantly, Darwin explains the difference in skin color—the master trope of human races—with the same logic of aesthetic standard. As in the case of many birds, wherein “the head and neck had been divested of feathers . . . to exhibit the brightly-coloured skin,” comparative hairlessness of humans functions for sexual selection (669): “It seems at first sight a monstrous supposition that the jet-blackness of the negro should have been gained through

sexual selection; but this view is supported by various analogies, and we know that negroes admire their own colour” (673). Chinese, Africans, and Native Americans’ aversion to white skin leads the author to a radical conclusion: there exists no “universal standard of beauty with respect to the human body”(651); each race has its own aesthetic standard, by which they unconsciously determine with whom they should breed.

Darwin’s quixotic understanding of racial difference based on each group’s local aesthetic not only destabilizes the hierarchy of races; it unsettles the concept of race itself, which he repeatedly refers to as “so-called races” in *Descent* (18, 194, 202, 206, 210). According to Darwin, the aesthetic standard of a racial group is defined by two factors. On one hand, “the men of each race prefer what they are accustomed to; they cannot endure any great change”; on the other hand, “they like variety, and admire each characteristic carried to a moderate extreme” (652). It is the latter principle, desire for variety, that mobilizes the concept of race in *Descent*.

When Darwin speaks of the desire for variety, his language becomes uncharacteristically poetic:

As the great anatomist Bichat long ago said, if every one were cast in the same mould, there would be no such thing as beauty. If all our women were to become as beautiful as the Venus de’ Medici, we should for a time be charmed; but we should soon wish for variety; and as soon as we had obtained variety, we should wish to see certain characters a little exaggerated beyond the then existing common standard (652).

As a general rule, a creature selects a mate according to the principle of familiarity. However, since “the then existing common standard” is constantly updated by the desire for variety, there exist various morphological types even within a supposedly homogenous racial group. As a result, “[i]t may be doubted whether any character can be named which is distinctive of a race and is constant” (203). Accordingly, “there is the greatest possible diversity amongst capable judges” as to how many races exist in humans as a species, ranging from two to sixty-three, according to the observer. Moreover, such “diversity of judgment” attests that races “graduate

into each other.” The merging of races occurs, Darwin speculates, chiefly because of interbreeding, for the desire for variation is sometimes met by a specimen of other races. Ultimately, “the crossing of distinct races has led to the formation of *a new race*” (222; italics added). In Darwin’s aesthetic understanding of racial difference, race is never a stable entity, since “a new race” constantly emerges as a result of desire for variation that often leads to cross-breeding of races.

In this sense, Darwin envisions race as a group that shares a transient standard of beauty rather than as a given biological unit, and sexual selection as an *aesthetic* object choice, in which a certain morphological trait of a creature becomes a fetish. At issue here is not the theoretical validity of sexual selection as an explanatory apparatus for racial divergence; what matters more is that in thinking about sex relation, Darwin’s focus strangely slides from species needs to individual desire, as if to reflect the shift in the economic structure of his time from the productivist to consumerist economy. The shift of focal point in *Descent*, as Lawrence Birken argues in a slightly different context, attests that “Darwin discovered desire as the fundamental ground of both sexes. By making this discovery, he became the real founder of sexology” (Birken 7).<sup>3</sup>

Focusing on the simultaneous development of sexual science and the so-called marginal revolution in economics, Birken argues that sexology is a byproduct of the emergent consumer-oriented culture of the turn into the twentieth century. The paradigm shift from production-oriented classical to consumption-oriented neoclassical economics in the last quarter of the nineteenth century parallels an alteration of the meaning of sex from universal need for propagation to individualized desire for pleasure. Just as neoclassical theory underscored the

law of diminishing marginal utility—that the desirability of a commodity decreases as the supply increases in proportion to the demand—sexology discovered that “the desire (marginal utility) for a perverted sexual object might be greater than the desire (marginal utility) for a normal sexual object” (48). Insofar as sexology undertakes to catalogue the variations of human desire as a massive inventory of perversions, sexology, though perhaps unwittingly, “emphasized the multiplicity of individual preferences and thus the uniqueness of each person’s ‘consumption bundle’ or ‘case’” (49).

Likewise, when Darwin presumes that humans “wish for variety” (Darwin 652), he “began with the assumption that individuals were fundamentally consumers” (Birken 60). The analogy Birken draws between consumerism and Darwin’s theory of sexual selection is not merely a figuration; for Darwin himself envisions fashion as a counterpart of bodily modification as a result of sexual selection: “In the fashions of our own dress we see exactly the same principle and the same desire to carry every point to an extreme; we exhibit, also, the same spirit of emulation” (Darwin 651). Desire for variation constantly updates the existing common standard of taste within a group, just like fast-changing fashion, and a creature selects his or her mate according to the fad, thereby creating a “new race” representing a new aesthetic.

### Creole Chic

Edna’s fantasy of a “new race of beings” in *The Awakening* may, when seen in light of Chopin’s Darwinian influence, point to a desire for a shift in aesthetic order with regard to human bodies. Though highly aesthetic, Edna Pontellier is designed not as an artist. Edna lacks the “absolute gifts—which have not been acquired by one’s own effort,” and is instead deeply embedded in the market economy of buying and selling (*Awakening* 61). Her aesthetic

consummation is not achieved by the amateurish sketches that she sells as fashionable commodities; it is the extravagant party she throws before moving into the pigeon house that makes the culmination of her aestheticism. In short, she is not an artist, but an aesthete: the most refined sort of consumer, who understands and viscerally reacts to beauty. Her aesthetic is eclectic, just as her own “charm . . . of physique” is not discernible for a “casual and indiscriminating observer” who is easily satiated with “the trim, stereotyped fashion-plate” (15). In order to appreciate the “noble beauty of [her body’s] modeling, and the graceful severity of poise and movement,” one needs “more feeling and discernment,” like the connoisseur of all things erotic, Alcée Arobin. Marked by “a sensuous susceptibility to beauty,” Edna’s sensuality is inextricable from her aesthetic (14). As the pleasure-seeking Creole dandy senses, Edna’s “latent sensuality” intertwined with her aesthetic can only “unfold[ ] under his delicate sense of her nature’s requirements,” not under her philistine husband, with whom Edna mistakenly “fancied there was a sympathy of thought and taste” when she married him (99).

Edna’s “sensuous susceptibility to beauty” is often drawn to morphological variations of human races, inspiring her to study and paint such subjects as a “Bavarian peasant” (53) and a quadroon nursemaid sitting “before Edna’s palette, patient as savage” (55). But above all, it is the “excessive physical charm of the Creole” that Edna is most drawn to reproduce on the canvas (14). Although the white Creole has been largely precluded in the critical examination of race relations in *The Awakening*, presumably because of the race’s optical whiteness, Edna’s fetishization of the Creole, whom she finds “very French, very foreign,” attests to a necessarily racialized status within *The Awakening* (52). Coming from an “old Presbyterian Kentucky stock,” Edna Pontellier does not belong to the “old Creole race” (63, 62). Despite “a small

infusion of French which seemed to have been lost in dilution,” Edna is “an American woman” through and through (6): to use Adèle Ratignolle’s words, “She is not one of us; she is not like us” (20).

The subtle racialization of white Creole identity is significant in thinking about the complicated logic of racialization in the Progressive Era. For the kernel of the Progressive Era nativist politics lies in the question of how whiteness should define its fuzzy contours, not only against visible racial others of distinct colors, but also in its relation to the otherness within. Creole identity was one screen onto which whiteness projects its internal otherness. In Lothrop Stoddard’s *Rising Tide against White World-Supremacy* (1920), for instance, the white Creole becomes an embodiment of the “increasing signs of degeneracy” afflicting whiteness: they are marked by “an idle and vapid existence, disdain[ing] work as servile and debarred from higher callings by his European-born superiors” (Stoddard 107).

The white Creole emerged in the Progressive Era as an embodiment of contested meanings of whiteness intertwined with Americanness. Having striven to differentiate their Gallic origin from newly immigrating Anglo-Americans in antebellum Louisiana, white Creoles began to yield to Americanization in order to secure their “whiteness” after the War. The abolition of slavery took white Creoles “out of power,” as they were “economically decimated” and rendered “numerical minority” (Domínguez 134). Moreover, the emancipation of the formerly enslaved Creoles of color dissolved the preexisting social boundary between white Creoles and Creoles of color. As Joseph G. Tregle observes, “[w]hereas once the danger confronting [white Creole] had been humiliating loss of Gallic identity to a devouring Anglo-Saxon homogenization, now it was the infinitely more horrible possibility of being consigned to a

debased status in the ‘inferior’ race, identified as half-brother to the black” (Tregle 173). After the Civil War, in an effort to divorce themselves from Creoles of color, white Creoles began to fervently embrace Anglo-American cultural mores. As a result, at the time of the publication of *The Awakening*, the white Creole culture of Gallic origin was gradually being rendered a relic of the past, admired and mourned precisely as it was disempowered. Chopin’s choice of Grand Isle as the novel’s setting in itself suggests another token of mourning over the dissipation of white Creole culture. According to Barbara C. Ewell, Chopin deliberately set her novel in the year before the 1893 Great October Storm, which “swe[pt] away the Creole Community that had flourished on its shore” (Ewell 7). The hurricane utterly destroyed the idyllic locale of white Creole culture, making it a relic of the past.<sup>4</sup> In short, in *The Awakening*, the sensual Creoles function as a race facing extinction—a racial curio that has become a fetish because of its rarity.

White Creoles became the borderline case of whiteness in the Progressive Era not only because of their Gallic and Catholic heritage, but because, as Stoddard contends, their whiteness was deemed threatened by “contact with the colored races”: “Despite legal enactment and social taboo, colored strains percolated insidiously into the creole stock.” (107). As Alys Weinbaum puts it, in the wake of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, in which a visibly white Creole with one-eighth “colored blood” claimed racial whiteness, Creole whites were transformed into “racial ‘wild card[s]’” (16). Their morphological whiteness did not necessarily guarantee the purity of their “white blood,” but potentially cloaked the miscegenetic past in their genealogy.

In writing *The Awakening*, Chopin consciously deployed white Creoles’ ambiguous racial status to contest Progressive Era’s nativist politics over the color line. This hypothesis would be

corroborated especially when we consider that she published “*Désirée’s Baby*” in January 1893, immediately after *Plessy* was brought to the Supreme Court. As Weinbaum’s brilliant reading shows, the story stages Progressive nativism’s vexed “genealogical quest for information about descent, whose failure allegorizes the difficulties of securing racial identity in a past that cannot be accurately known” (Weinbaum 16). Though set in the antebellum era, “*Désirée’s Baby*” enacts the Progressive Era’s obsession for pure white genealogy by featuring a marriage between an orphaned woman with fair complexion, *Désirée*, and a Creole planter of “the oldest and proudest in Louisiana,” Armand Aubigny (“*Désirée*” 242). The dark complexion of *Désirée*’s newborn immediately has Armand determine his wife’s “obscure origin,” which he initially did not doubt as anything other than white: “the child is not white; it means that you are not white” (245). However, the story ends with Chopin’s signature ironic twist, which reveals that it is not *Désirée*, but the ostensibly white Creole planter, who “belongs to the race that is cursed with the brand of slavery” (247).

The story shows that the possession of pure white blood as family property, after all, depends precariously on the assumed knowledge of one’s genealogy. As evidenced by Homer Plessy’s declaration of his black ancestry as proof of his “unlawful” possession of whiteness, a visibly white subject’s race could be determined only through his or her knowledge of their racial heritage. In the cases wherein there was no official record available—which often happened—the withholding or even the lack of knowledge of one’s black ancestry made one white. Creole whites, with their fabled past of miscegenation luridly colored by the legend of quadroon balls, thus became tokens of the epistemological uncertainty of whiteness in the Progressive Era.

In this context, Edna's fetishization of white Creoles can be thought of as caused by at least two factors: their status as racial curios, whose rarity enhances their desirability, as well as their potential possession of "colored" blood, which becomes the object of miscegenetic desire for "variety" that Darwin proposed. Read in this way, though often interpreted as the attestation of Edna's romantic love for Robert, her answer to Mademoiselle Reisz's question—why she loves Robert Lebrun—might be better understood in a framework of sexual selection based on her eclectic aesthetic invested in the white Creole: "Because his hair is brown and grows away from his temples; because he opens and shuts his eyes, and his nose is a little out of drawing; because he has two lips and a square chin, and a little finger which he can't straighten from having played baseball too energetically in his youth" (78). On the surface, Edna's answer cataloguing Robert's apparently nondescript physical features showcases the inevitability of love. As Reisz interprets it, there is no reason for loving somebody other than a tautological one: "Because you do, in short." (78). Yet if we take Edna's words at face value, her materialistic listing of Robert's physical features bespeaks the operation of sexual selection, desire directed toward a variance within familiarity. She loves Robert because the Creole has brown hair grown away from temples, a nose a little out of drawing, a little finger that cannot be straightened; in short, because Robert fits her quirky aesthetic.

#### *Vogue* and the Parthenogenesis of Consumerism

Yet if Edna's sexual object choice is inextricable from her aesthetic object choice, the object of desire can never be stable; for the aesthetic renews itself with the desire for "variety," as Darwin puts it, updating the "common standard" as soon as it is established as a norm (Darwin 652). When Edna realizes on the Gulf coast that "the day would come when [Robert],

too, and the thought of him would melt out of her existence,” what she perceives is the instability of the object-desire (*Awakening* 108). After all, what a Darwinian creature desires is not an object; desire is, instead, directed toward variety itself, the constant movement from one object to another that has no apparent teleology other than diversifying the species. When the aesthete says “To-day it is Arobin; to-morrow it will be some one else. It makes no difference to me,” *The Awakening* gestures toward the ephemerality of the object-desire inherent in Darwinian sexual selection (108).

I will argue that this Darwinian sexual selection is akin to the newly-formed consumerist economy of the fin de siècle. Another name for the volatility of the object-desire is vogue; so named is the magazine that published as many as nineteen of Chopin’s short stories, “the largest numbers of short stories published by any single periodical in Chopin’s life time,” including “*Désirée’s Baby*” (Shaker 10).<sup>5</sup> As *Vogue*’s first editor-in-chief Josephine Redding declared in the first issue, the magazine was named after a French word that simultaneously means “mode or fashion prevalent at any particular time” and the “swaying motion of a ship, the stroke of an oar” (*Vogue*, December 17, 1892, 2). Among the numerous women’s magazines inaugurated in the last quarter of the nineteenth century,<sup>6</sup> *Vogue* was launched in 1892 by a prominent New York socialite Arthur Baldwin Turnure. Unlike other periodicals where Chopin habitually published her works, *Vogue* was established as a social gazette dedicated predominantly to create fleeting fashion trends, standing as the aesthetic vanguard for New York’s elite known as “the four hundred,” as well as for those who aspired to join it.

Kate Chopin’s stories met *Vogue*’s elastic aesthetic. After publishing “A Visit to Avoyelles” and “*Désirée’s Baby*” in *Vogue*’s second issue in January 1893, the magazine

became the primary outlet for Chopin's short stories. *Vogue* published Chopin's stories that baffled other periodicals expecting more conventional local color sketches, including one of her now most widely-read short stories, "The Story of an Hour." Of Chopin's nineteen *Vogue* short stories, ten were to be collected in her third book, *A Vocation and a Voice*, which would have marked a departure from her career as a local colorist with works largely dedicated to more "American"—read, non-Creole and non-Acadian—characters. The book, however, did not see the light of day until 1991. In February 1900, Herbert S. Stone & Co. cancelled the contract of its publication, presumably because of the commotion *The Awakening* had caused. While most of other periodicals turned their back on the author, *Vogue* remained receptive to Chopin's fiction even after the marketing fiasco of *The Awakening*, until Redding was made to resign the post in 1900.

To revisit Chopin's *Vogue* connection may provide a key to reframing Edna Pontellier's racial fantasy, particularly its entwinement with her aesthetically informed sexual object choice. By this I mean *Vogue* enabled Chopin to conceive the desire for the creation of "new race of beings" outside the logic of property inheritance; for *Vogue* advocates consumption divorced from labor, both in terms of economic production and biological reproduction. Productivism and accumulation of property are passé for *Vogue*. Instead, what is chic is a potlatch-like squandering that ravishingly dissipates a bourgeois women's husband's property, not unlike Edna Pontellier's legendary party. As Dianne Bunch astutely points out, in the party, which Arobin calls "the *coup d'état*" against her husband (*Awakening* 81), "Edna flagrantly consumes resources from their monotonous marriage and flaunts his attempt to crown her as a possession" (Bunch 56). The magazine's education of aesthetic consumption directly echoes Thorstein

Veblen's theorization of consumer culture in his 1899 work, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*. As Veblen expounds, upper-middleclass wives bore the role of ceremonial practitioners of conspicuous consumption, which is paired with "[c]onspicuous abstention from labour" (30). Veblen designates expenditure on women's dress as an exemplar of conspicuous waste, wherein "the high heel, the skirt, the impracticable bonnet, the corset, and the general disregard of the wearer's comfort" manifest their wearers' abstinence from productive labor (120).

Women's decorative clothes bespeak abstention not only from economic labor, but also from reproductive labor. In the year before the publication of *The Theory of the Leisure Class* and *The Awakening*, Charlotte Perkins Gilman attacked an understanding of women as "non-productive consumers" as severing them from economic production, systematically trapping them in the private family (*Women* 23). "[T]he human race," Gilman decries, "are the only animal species in which the female depends on the male for food, the only animal species in which the sex-relation is also an economic relation" (5). Alienated from economic production and having little means of living other than marriage, "woman's economic profit comes through power of sex-attraction" (63). As commodities exchanged in the market of "sexuo-economic relations," women are forced engage in consumption of "sensuous decoration" that reinforces their sexual desirability, whereas maternity is deemed to diminish "the personal charms" of women (120, 171): "It is through the sex relation minus its natural consequence that she profits most; and, therefore, the force of economic advantage acts against maternity instead of toward it" (171). Women's consumption, in Gilman's view, evinces their alienation from labor both in terms of economic production and biological reproduction.

In Gilman's logic race binds economic and biological (re)production. Denouncing consumption, Gilman's productivist feminism upholds the maternal capacity not only as a possible means for women to regain the power of production, but also as a fulcrum of "racial progress" (59): "Human motherhood must be judged as it serves its purpose to the human race. Primarily, its purpose is to reproduce the race by reproducing the individual; secondarily, to improve the race by improving the individual" (178). It should be noted that, as Allison Berg points out, "while Gilman frequently uses the term *race* to refer to a putatively universal human race, her own racial attitudes suggest that the race she had in mind was the white race" (Berg 57).<sup>7</sup> Among other Progressive maternalists—Margaret Sanger, Victoria Woodhull, and Lester Ward, to name a few—Gilman situated women's reproductive capacity at the center of the heightened nativist politics of the era, deploying motherhood as a collateral for elevating women's social status. The quality of women's biological reproduction is the key to improve the race; therefore, in order to improve the race, women should be allowed to participate in the civic-national space so that they may be better educated for consciously selecting the fathers of the next generation. For that purpose, Gilman argues, women should be unfettered from the private family where they are consigned to unpaid sexual labor and compulsory consumption; instead they should form collective household wherein domestic labor—including the reproductive one—is shared in order to increase, and improve the quality of, the race as public property.<sup>8</sup>

Gilman's proto-socialist feminist critique of consumerism led her to conceive of an all-women utopia in her science fiction, *Herland* (1915), which shares, albeit obliquely, Edna Pontellier's fantasy of "new race of beings." The eponymous gynocentric community thrives in

a hidden plateau, where citizens live harmoniously without the concepts of gender norms, market economy, monogamous households, and private property. Herland is devoid of all the ills of the “sexuo-economic relations” the author critiqued in *Women and Economics*, for the nation is “[o]ne family, all descended from one mother,” who “had founded *a new race*” by parthenogenesis (*Herland* 58, 59; italics added). Significantly, Gilman names the parthenogenetic new race the “New Women,” referring to the fin de siècle cultural icon that embodied women’s sexual and economic autonomy (58). It is important to note that Gilman envisioned the abolition of the heterosexual private family as a prerequisite for the emergence of the New Woman, against the backdrop of the Progressive Era’s legal buttressing of the monogamous household.<sup>9</sup>

Seen in this light, Gilman’s quixotic fantasy of the New Woman as a parthenogenetic new race, reflects the inextricability of the race/reproduction/property bind in the Progressive Era. In Gilman’s view, the heterosexual monogamous household functions to secure the patrilineage of property, both economic and racial, by undergirding the market economy. By engendering women as consumers deprived of economic and sexual autonomy, it hedges them within the domestic space as hereditary vessels to be protected from the damages of interbreeding. In contrast, in *Herland*, the racial property of “Aryan stock” is already secured by parthenogenesis from the damage of interbreeding (*Herland* 55). The singularity of the bloodline obliterates not only the necessity for the domestic confinement of women that would safeguard them as hereditary vessels, but also the notion of private property itself, since citizens share all family property, both racial and financial.

While Gilman's fantasy of the "New Woman" as a "new race" thus demanded the wholesale dismantling of private property as the basis of capitalism, *Vogue* upheld the New Woman ideal from deep within consumer capitalism. Positioned between a front cover that ostensibly celebrates traditional feminine beauty and the "Society" page announcing the latest weddings and engagements of New York socialites, *Vogue's* editorial penned by Josephine Redding straightforwardly embraces the ideals of the New Womanhood: the editorial of February 7<sup>th</sup> 1895 issue claims that "[p]ersonal freedom is more precious to them [women] than the protection (?) [*sic*] of the best of man"; the May 24<sup>th</sup> issue of the same year declares that "maternal instinct theory is largely a myth": the myth is fabricated, she continues "to beget and train children for the sake of the race, for perpetuation of the species." Redding is clearly aware of sexuo-economic relations, as she states in the March 15<sup>th</sup>, 1900 issue, wherein "women were created for man's pleasure," a condition maintained "from time immemorial until recently, when the arrogance of man met its Waterloo in the self-assertiveness of the New Woman."

*Vogue's* critique is, like Gilman's, directed toward the private family that prevents the emergence of the New Woman. At the same time, however, *Vogue* cloaks its sexual politics under an eccentric aestheticism flowering in the nascent consumer culture. In this sense, *Vogue* was in sync with the life that the protagonist of *The Awakening* has led: "the dual life—that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions" (*The Awakening* 14). But the aesthetics of the "outward existence" advocated by *Vogue*, which apparently conforms to what Gilman called the "sexuo-economic relations," does not quite function to bolster and sell women's sexual desirability as Gilman predicted. In *Vogue's* second issue published on December 24<sup>th</sup>, 1894, Redding's editorial subtly but ironically puts forward the magazine's

self-conscious mission as a vanguard of bourgeois women's aestheticism. "Those jesting paragraphers whose lively pens score the vanities and foibles of the butterfly sex," Redding mockingly states, "seem to have overlooked a most promising subject—women's passion for humps." Redding's tongue-in-cheek remark goes on to defend the craze for "humps," namely, enlarged head, shoulder and hips in women's clothes:

The persistent recurrence of these uncanny growths makes it doubtful whether, after all, it was quite worth while ever to have put the spelling book into woman's hands. For what value is mental development if one outcome of it is physical distortion? . . . Before so peculiar a practice as this of the humps, theory stands non-plussed. For what plausible reason can possibly be assigned for a nineteenth century woman pretending, at intervals, to the possession of big head, enlarged small of the back, abnormal growth of hip, exaggerated breadth of shoulder? . . . Impossible to account for on the ground of comfort, expediency, morality or beauty, the humps of woman's fancy must be added to the list of insoluble Whys? that forever vex the spirit of the philosopher and baffle his curiosity.

Redding's cataloguing of the "uncanny growth" of humps as "physical distortion" resembles Darwin's list of uncanny decorations in *Descent*. Just as Darwin built his theory of sexual selection around the question of morphological features that apparently counteract the law of natural selection, Redding's male philosophers are baffled as to why women are fascinated by "feminine costume eccentricities" that disfigure their bodies. Seemingly, women adorn themselves with uncanny humps for sexual selection at the cost of vandalizing their bodies—like the birds that decorate themselves with flamboyant crowns for propagation, even at the cost of being devoured by the predators.

Yet Darwin's explication of sexual selection—that women decorate themselves in order to be selected as mates—no longer holds in the face of the humps. Clearly the bizarre humps willfully fail to attract male attention, operating against the purpose of propagation for species evolution. On the contrary, women's humps flout the evolutionary logic. Redding further states: "The hump defies classification. Each variety is unique and owns no kinship to its predecessors.

A collection of them would contribute nothing to the theory of evolution.” Their sudden emergence defies the linear genealogy; each specimen is a mutant, which “owns no kinship to its predecessors.” It springs up out of nowhere as a new race of beings, leaving behind predecessors as past relics and disappearing without breeding offspring.

Tellingly, one of the big trends in *Vogue* in the mid-1890s was inter-species dressing, as can be observed in the fashion plate and various animal- and insect-shaped hats featured on the covers. One such example is the cover illustration of the April 18<sup>th</sup>, 1895 issue, which presents a woman wearing a bunny-shaped hat (or more precisely, wearing a bunny as a hat), enclosed within an Easter egg with a garland of lilies as if awaiting extrication. As the title of this cover—“Natural History Series of Head Adornment Prophecy for Autumn of 1895”—suggests, *Vogue*’s fascination with inter-species dressing is informed by the evolutionary discourse. But the mode of evolution they envisioned is not the one based on the hereditary descent. In January of 1895, a cover presents a woman clad in a butterfly-like dress with the waistline maximally tightened by a corset, who has just sprung out from the pupa of a baggy overcoat. The cover is titled “An Evolution.” *Vogue*’s volatile aesthetic modality creates no linear narrative of “evolution” through the heterosexual reproduction of the species. Instead, transient fashion trends come and go. The New Woman impregnates herself as an emblem of pluralistic evolutions of new aesthetics that defy the linear temporality of the reproductive familialism, or a “generational time within which values, wealth, goods, and morals are passed through family ties from one generation to the next” (Halberstam 5).

In this sense, *Vogue*’s cultural strategy is simultaneously opposed to and in sync with Gilman’s vision of the emergence of the New Woman as a new race; though *Vogue*

wholeheartedly embraced the consumerism as fertile soil for the birth of the New Woman, the magazine envisioned its breeding as a form of parthenogenesis, a mode of conception outside the straight time of the property inheritance of monogamous households. The New Womanhood, for *Vogue*, is essentially an aesthetic mode that the readers should emulate and mold themselves into: as Jennifer Fleissner succinctly puts it, the New Woman is “a virtual invention of the burgeoning mass magazine” (Fleissner 136): the sudden emergence, the massive upsurge, and the precipitate disappearance of articles on the New Woman in mass magazines around the turn of the century—including but not exclusive to *Vogue*—evinces that “the New Woman *is* a fad” (143).

The New Woman’s mode of propagation in faddish consumerist culture is contagion. As shown in the cover illustration of May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1896 issue titled “The Young Woman Has ‘Arrived’” that featured a woman clad in the typical New Woman attire—codified by a cigarette, a monocle, a waistcoat, and a tuxedo-jacket “humped” to the fullest on its shoulders—*Vogue* advocated New Womanhood as a new aesthetic modality of hybrid androgyny that suddenly appears on the scene out of nowhere, free-standing from any genealogy. As a textbook of consumption, *Vogue* inculcates the reader to desire and buy into New Womanhood as an aesthetic ideal. By consuming the signifiers of New Womanhood, the magazine enticingly tells the reader, one can become a New Woman. In this sense, as Kathy Psomiades argues, in consumerism, “heterosexual femininity might be seen less as something that sells itself or is sold to men” to be selected as their mates for propagation than as femininity constructed in magazine culture as “something that must somehow be sold to women, promising the female consumers a gratification that might inhere as much in her narcissistic

pleasure in her painted and scented self as in masculine appreciation of her efforts” (Psomiades 113). Instead of making a woman an ideal mate for heterosexual reproduction, such a pleasure in consumption enables a parthenogenetic creation of a new race of beings in a contagious reproduction of fashion.

The suddenness of the emergence of the New Woman as a cultural fad, as Fleissner argues, “run[s] counter to the dictates of evolution” (146); at the same time, “fatally aligned with such consumer ephemera” as bloomer outfits and bicycles, the New Woman was destined to disappear within a decade, consuming itself to extinction (144). In this sense, the New Woman’s historical fleetingness—colored by the sudden emergence and rapid disappearance in the seething cauldron of emergent 1890s’ consumerism—gestures toward the original meaning of the word *consume*: to devour, to make away with something, to the extent of its extermination. One can hear the residue of the word’s earlier usage in the association of consumption with economic activity in the 90s, especially considering the novelty of its derivative meaning at that time. As Rachel Bowlby points out, “one of the first instances of ‘consumer’ used in its modern sense, and ‘consumption’ . . . makes its appearance” in Alfred Marshall’s 1890 *Principle of Economics* (Bowlby 14). The parthenogenetic creation of the New Woman through narcissistic consumer pleasure is death-laden, signaling the “female resistance to futurity” even at the cost of her own consumptive death (Fleissner 159).

One of Chopin’s *Vogue* stories, “An Egyptian Cigarette,” captures the consumptive drive toward pleasure flirting with death inherent in the New Woman discourse. Published in the same issue as the cover that features a New Woman figure with a cigarette in her mouth, the story revolves around a nightmarish hallucination of the female narrator, who is given a box of

cigarettes by her male friend as one of the “various curios which he had gathered during a visit to the Orient” (“Cigarette” 894). “Having escaped for a while the incessant chatter of the women,” the New Woman enters the ornate smoking room of his house, and inhales the intoxicating fume that her friend obtained in Cairo. The cigarette wrapped up in “glazed yellow paper” turns out to be a hallucinogen, bringing the narrator to an arid desert in ancient Egypt where she crawls on the blistering sands, left alone by her lover. Dragging herself on all fours in the desert for hours in search of water, she drowns herself in the Nile, like the heroine of *The Awakening* who submerges herself in the Gulf. Her death fulfills the prophecy of the stars that told her, “after the rupture of life [she] would open [her] arms inviting death, and the waters would envelop [her]” (895). Awakened from the fifteen-minute nightmare that bears “the weight of centuries,” the narrator crumples the cigarettes left in the box (896), musing that their “mystic fumes” might have brought her “a vision of celestial peace,” “a dream of hopes fulfilled,” and “a taste of rapture, such as had not entered into my mind to conceive” (897).

As seen in the illustration of a woman smoking a cigarette in the April 4<sup>th</sup> 1895 issue, which is accompanied by a caption saying, “Lord Goring, in Oscar Wilde’s new play, *An Ideal Husband*, says, ‘Half the women in London smoke, but for his part he prefers the other half,’” the cigarette was an emblem of gender transgression by the New Woman. Yet, “An Egyptian Cigarette” is associated more closely with Wilde’s other famous epigram on cigarettes in his 1890 play: “A cigarette is the perfect type of the perfect pleasure. It is exquisite, and it leaves one unsatisfied” (Wilde 236). As Bowlby succinctly puts it, the core of Lord Henry’s aphorism lies in the ethos of consumerism that “pleasure entails *non*-satisfaction” (Bowlby 8): “The enjoyment of the ‘perfect pleasure’ results not in satisfaction but in a lack of it, leaving open the

demand for more, the search for the next (or the same) short-lived and necessarily incomplete pleasure” (Bowlby 7-8). The consuming desire for pleasure never settles on one object; it immortalizes itself by transferring itself from one object to another, never being consummated, except in the death of the subject of desire: the ultimate pleasure that consumes the subject in “the sweet rapture of rest” (“Cigarette” 896).

### Edna Pontellier’s Consuming Desire

Marked by the instability of her object-desire, Edna Pontellier’s mode of desiring is consumptive, like that of the New Woman who created, multiplied, and consumed herself in the fadmongery of the fin de siècle. Edna’s erotic economy operates against the economy of utilitarian production and accumulation, both in terms of economic production and biological reproduction of racialized property. As Dianne Bunch astutely maintains, “Edna’s erotic transgressions lead to extravagant spending habits”: “If she participates in eroticism outside marriage, sends her children away, spends money extravagantly, or throws a feast for friends, Edna is living within the luxurious economy of excess: she produces nothing, and her actions are purely for pleasure” (Bunch 49). More significantly, however, Edna’s desiring mode is consumptive in that it knows no consummation, immortalizing itself by being relayed from one object to another, until at last she consumes herself, at the very end.

The master trope for such all-consuming, non-productive desire that knows no consummation in *The Awakening* is “touch”—the mode of sensuality that seeks “short-lived and necessarily incomplete pleasures,” one after another, and experiences no orgasmic discharges of genital sex (Bowlby 8). Tellingly, the first seed of Edna’s sensuality is sown not by any male characters, but by the touch of the Creole “sensuous Madonna,” Adèle Ratignolle

(*Awakening* 12). One morning on Grand Isle, Edna and Adèle Ratignolle go to the beach, carefully avoiding Robert's interference. By the seductive touch that "muddled her like wine," Edna "flushed and . . . felt intoxicated," yielding her body to the new sensation (19):

Madame Ratignolle laid her hand over that of Mrs. Pontellier, which was near her. Seeing that the hand was not withdrawn, she clasped it firmly and warmly. She even stroked it a little, fondly, with the other hand, murmuring in an undertone, '*Pauvre chérie.*' The action was at first a little confusing to Edna, but she soon lent herself readily to the Creole's gentle caress. (17 italics original)

The scene's unmistakable same-sex seduction by "the Creole" has been left underemphasized in *The Awakening* criticism, probably because of the novel's apparently heterosexual narrative trajectory. Yet it is undeniable that Chopin designates the Creole white women's community on Grand Isle as the setting for Edna's loosening of the "mantle of reserve that had always enveloped her" (14). It is the Creole women's "entire lack of prudery"—which connotes their primitivized and racialized status in fin de siècle U.S.—that catalyzes the sexual awakening of the "American woman" (10, 6).<sup>10</sup>

Adèle's sensuous touch proves to be "at once completely barren *and* intensely fecund," leading Edna to crave more touch (Tuhkanen 103). The way Edna yields herself to "the Creole's gentle caress" clearly anticipates the scene where Edna accepts her other Creole suitor Alce Arobin's sexual advance: "His hand had strayed to her beautiful shoulders, and he could feel the response of her flesh. . . . He did not answer, except to continue to caress her . . . until she had become supple to his gentle, seductive entreaties" (88). Although the scene is often cited as the crucial moment of Edna's first sexual transgression of her matrimony with Leonce and her romantic involvement with Robert, what matters for Edna is not the "sexual intercourse so-called" (Abelove 23);<sup>11</sup> rather what she desires is the caress of his "soft, magnetic hand" that makes her soporific. The disparity between the gender of the initial arouser of Edna's sensuality

and the objects of her romantic and sexual investment in the latter half of the novel evinces the gender indifference of Edna's erotic attachment to caressing.

Yet what ultimately satiates her erotic attachment to the sensual touch is not a human being, regardless of gender, but the Gulf of Mexico. More than anything else, it is the sea in *The Awakening* that is repeatedly referred to as "sensuous" and "seductive." As the heroine's first successful attempt at swimming in the Gulf coincides with her initial denial of sex with her husband, the Gulf is the symbolic site of her non-genital sexuality, "whose sonorous murmur reached her like a loving but imperative entreaty" (13). From the beginning of the novel, "[t]he touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace" (14). Though Edna instantly recoils at her first "encounter with death" when she swims far out in the ocean, what she will find when she yields herself to its embrace is "the unlimited in which to lose herself" (28).

At the end of the narrative, Edna finally yields her naked body to Gulf of Mexico, whose "touch . . . is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace" (109). Significantly, the moment that triggered Edna's suicide is the vision of Adèle Ratignolle in childbirth—the very figure who makes non-productive sexuality conceivable for Edna. Adèle's childbirth haunts Edna as a return of the repressed, as the reproductive body she tries to evade. Adèle, once depicted as "the embodiment of every womanly grace and charm" (9), transforms into a monstrous figure in her reproductive labor, vehemently groaning in pain. Adèle's body, whose "excessive physical charm . . . attracted [Edna]" (14) to awaken Edna's sensuality toward consumptive mode of desiring, turns out in effect to have an extremely teleological function of reproducing a diminishing number of white Creoles.

The scene of Adèle's childbirth, besides its crucial function as that which aborts the consummation of romantic love between Edna and Robert, marks a fatal moment in terms of the structure of the novel, for, from the beginning, the timeline of the novel is organized alongside the period of Adèle's pregnancy. In the early part of the novel, Adèle has just become pregnant with her fourth child. It is worth noting that Edna's consumptive sensuality in its initial stage, which is instigated by Adèle's touch, is rendered in the figuration of pregnancy, as if echoing Adèle's fetus: "No multitude of words could have been more significant than those moments of silence, or more pregnant with the first-felt throbbing of desire" (30). Seen in this light, Edna's desire conceived simultaneously with Adèle's baby is destined by the novel's structure to come to its end with Adèle's childbirth.

In contrast to "the scene of torture" of Adele's labor (104), the way in which Edna destroys her precious "white" procreative body in the Gulf of Mexico by the newly born desire vibrates with the frisson of sensual joy and gentle touch: "The water was deep, but she lifted her white body and reached out with a long, sweeping stroke. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace" (109). Edna Pontellier's consuming desire is never satisfied by a given object; knowing no orgasmic consummation, it aims at prolonging itself, transferred from one object to another. It is only the oceanic touch that appeases it, for, as Jacques Derrida says, to touch is to lose yourself, trespassing the subject/object boundary:

For to touch, so one believes, is touching what one touches, to let oneself be touched by the touched, by the touch of the thing, whether objective or not, or by the flesh that one touches and that then becomes touching as well as touched. This is not true for all the other senses: one may, to be sure, let oneself be "touched" as well by what one hears or sees, but not necessarily heard or seen by what one hears and sees, whence the initial privilege of what is called touch. (Derrida 136)

Swimming far out into the Gulf, Edna chooses to "lose herself" in "the unlimited" (*Awakening*

28); she is touched by the ocean as she touches it, becoming a touching subject and a touched object simultaneously. Such an amalgamation of subject/object enables the parthenogenesis of the New Woman: instead of giving birth to a child, she imaginatively goes back to her childhood in the blue-grass meadow of Kentucky, becoming “some new-born creature,” a daughter of her own (109).

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> As Barbara Ewell and Pamela Glenn Menke chronicle in detail Chopin sets the novel in the period from the summer of 1892 to the early spring of 1893. Grand Isle and Chênrière Caminada were thoroughly destroyed by the Great October Storm of 1893, and the passing mention of “the meeting of a branch Folk Lore Society” (*Awakening* 72) attests that the novel was set the year before the Storm, since the New Orleans Association of the American Folklore Society was founded in February 1892. As Edna is twenty-eight at the beginning of the narrative, her birth year is set in 1864. Also, for the ambiguous status of Kentucky’s southern identity, see Maguire.

<sup>2</sup> On November the 18<sup>th</sup>, 1892, the Judge John H. Ferguson handed down the ruling against Plessy’s claim for *Homer Adolph Plessy v. The State of Louisiana*; immediately the Citizen’s Committee took the case to the Louisiana Supreme Court, which upheld the original decision of John H. Ferguson on November 22nd. In January 1893, they took the case, which came to be known as *Plessy v. Ferguson*, to the highest court, but the case was to be suspended for a long time.

<sup>3</sup> Though Birken situates Darwin as a precursor of sexology, his argument is based on Darwin’s concept of the originally bisexual and hermaphrodite human ancestry.

<sup>4</sup> Mary L. Shafter’s 1892 article “Creole Women” tellingly shows that white Creole identity during Chopin’s time was representative as a relic of the past. According to Shafter, “New Orleans, in reality, is two cities” (137): Uptown, “the home of American population,” is “a progressive, a self-made, a new city,” while Downtown, “the French or Creole Quarter,” is “the old town, with little improvement since the days when the houses were first built. . . Not much wealth remain there, but the people still possess what money cannot buy—the chivalry of their men and the grace and beauty of their women” (137).

<sup>5</sup> The list of the short stories published in *Vogue* is as follows: “Désirée’s Baby” (January 14<sup>th</sup>, 1893), “A Visit to Avoyelles” (January 14<sup>th</sup>, 1893), “Caline” (May 20<sup>th</sup>, 1893), “A Lady of Bayou St. John” (September 21<sup>st</sup>, 1893), “Ripe Figs” (August 1893), “Doctor Chevalier’s Lie” (October 5<sup>th</sup>, 1893), “La Belle Zoraïde” (January 1894), “A Respectable Woman” (February

15<sup>th</sup>, 1894), “The Story of an Hour (originally titled “The Dream of an Hour”)” (December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1894), “The Kiss” (January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1895), “Her Letters” (April 18 and 25, 1895), “Two Summers and Two Souls” (August 7<sup>th</sup>, 1895), “The Unexpected” (September 19<sup>th</sup>, 1895), and “The Recovery” (May 21<sup>st</sup>, 1896), “A Pair of Silk Stockings” (September 16, 1897), “The Blindman” (May 13, 1897), “Suzette” (October 21<sup>st</sup>, 1897), “An Egyptian Cigarette” (October 21, 1897), and “The White Eagle” (July 12, 1900). Ten stories published in *Vogue* after “A Respectable Woman” were to be collected in *A Vocation and a Voice*, with an exception of “A Pair of Silk Stockings.” After Josephine Redding was let go from her post as the chief editor of *Vogue* in 1900, *Vogue* ceased to publish Chopin’s works. Other than *Vogue*, only *Youth’s Companion* printed her works after *The Awakening*. “The Wood-Choppers” and “Polly” were published respectively on May 29, 1902 and July 3, 1902.

<sup>6</sup> Hill points out three factors—fashion journalism, ready-to-wear manufacturing, and fashion advertising—that enabled the inauguration of those magazines. “During the last quarters of the nineteenth century, numerous women’s magazines made their debut: *Delineator* (1873), *McCall’s* (1876), *Ladies’ World* (1880), *Ladies’ Home Journal* (1883), *Good Housekeeping* (1885), and *Cosmopolitan* (1886), to name a few” (Hill 4).

<sup>7</sup> Gilman and other maternalist feminists, most notably Sanger, aligned themselves with eugenics. Gilman’s investment in eugenics can be seen, for instance, in the following passage. “So largely is this true that it may be said in extreme terms that it would be better for a child to-day to be left absolutely without mother or family of any sort, in the city of Boston, for instance, than to be supplied with a large and affectionate family and be planted with them in Darkest Africa” (*Women* 180). For the interrelation between eugenics and Progressive maternalism, see, for instance, Fleissner pp.233-274 and English *Unnatural Selections* pp. 141-170.

<sup>8</sup> Biographically, Gilman’s liaison with Marxism per se was tangential at most. Gilman did frequently contribute articles to *American Fabian*, a journal championing the Fabian Society’s socialist agenda that promoted “cooperative collectivism” based on gradual social change (Lane 230); yet, just as the Fabian Socialist rejected the notion of revolution, Gilman strictly distanced herself from Marxist circles of her time, writing in a letter to her husband George Houghton Gilman: “Can you read Marx? . . . I can’t now. Maybe never could” (qtd. in Lane 203). However, Gilman’s 1898 work *Women and Economics* as well as the all-women world she envisaged in *Herland* clearly reverberates both with Engels’s communist vision and with the subsequent aspiration of the full-fledged socialist feminism in the late twentieth century. In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884), Friedrich Engels’s traces the history of family in order to demonstrate the historical contingency of monogamous household. Drawing on his contemporary anthropological works such as Lewis Henry Morgan’s *Ancient Society* (1877) and Johan Jacob Bachofen’s *Das Mutterrecht* (1861), Engels propounds a theory that monogamy is a recent construct established with the rise of private property as a foundation of capitalism, wherein patrilineal inheritance secures itself for the accumulation of capital through the abolition of group marriage associated with matriarchy: “The overthrow of mother right was the *world historical defeat of the female sex*. The man took command in the home also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude; she became the slave of his lust and mere instrument for the production of children” (Engels 87 italics original). Engels’s

proto-feminist condemnation of capitalist-patriarchy, above all, allowed socialist feminists an insight that both biological and cultural reproduction operating in the supposedly private spheres should be understood as a mode of production in a capitalist political economy, as shown in the oft-quoted passage from the preface to the original edition of *The Origin of the Family*:

According to the materialistic conception, the determining factor in history is, in the final instance, the production and reproduction of immediate life. This, again, is of a twofold character: on the one side, the production of the means of existence, of food, clothing and shelter and the tools necessary for that production; on the other side, the production of human beings themselves, the propagation of the species. (36)

As long as women are restricted to household management, they remain exploited by the social system that reproduces sexual inequity for the sake of the expansion of capital. Gilman's envisioning of communal household clearly reflects Engels's vision as follows: "it will be plain that the first condition for the liberation of the wife is to bring the whole female sex back into public industry, and that this in turn demands that the characteristic of the monogamous family as the economic unit of society be abolished" (105).

<sup>9</sup> As Elizabeth Freeman notes, one of the most eminent instances of "governmental crackdown on affinal forms" can be found in the abolition of polygamy practiced both by Native Americans and Mormons ("Family" 637). Native Americans "were allocated 'federal' (stolen) property only if they formed monogamous male-headed households" (638). Likewise, the nation-wide accusation against Mormonism's practice of plural marriage culminated in *Reynolds v. United States* in 1878, wherein the Supreme Court ruled that religious duty was not a suitable defense for practicing polygamy (Bushman 97). As a result of the repeated seizure of church assets by Congress, Mormons officially renounced polygamy in September 1890, which finally allowed Utah to enter into U.S. statehood.

<sup>10</sup> Tellingly, the Creole as the lost race constitutes its society as a form of primitive matriarchy. The Grand Isle Creole society is structured in such a way that Robert, the eldest son of the matriarchal figure of white Creole society who owns the main house of the summer resort in which women live as "one large family," promiscuously flirts with the Creole women and figuratively functions as the node of female homosociality (10). Through sharing Robert as a lover, the women at Grand Isle form erotic bonds with each other, and in that summer, it is Edna who receives his adoration to enter into the female homosociality. The idea of primitive matriarchy permeated the era, deployed primarily in the heated discussions over evolutionary legitimacy of patriarchy, as can be seen in John McLennan's *Primitive Marriage* (1865), Lewis Henry Morgan's *Ancient Society* (1877), and Friedrich Engels's *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884). In the United States, primitive matriarchy especially was associated with the atavistic tendency of the New Womanhood. For instance, an anthropologist contemporaneous with Chopin, James Weir, warns the atavistic power of matriarchy in his 1895 "The Effect of Female Suffrage on Posterity." Arguing against the anticipated progress of female suffrage, Weir attacks the New Woman movement as a disastrous retrograde into primitive matriarchy. Observing the Nair in India as one of the last form of matriarchy, Weir argues that as is the case with the Nair, matriarchy is destined to disappear, replaced by monogamous patriarchy. He concludes his argument with the dire warning: "The danger comes . . . [w]hen woman, owing to her increased degeneration, gives free rein to her atavistic

tendencies, and hurries ever backward toward the savage state of her barbarian ancestors. I see, in the establishment of equal rights, the first step toward that abyss of immoral horrors so repugnant to our cultivated ethical tastes—the matriarchate.” (825). As Kathy Psomiades maintains, however, the theory of primitive matriarchy in effect works at cross-purposes: while it functioned for the theorists as a hypothetical counterpoint that served to buttress patriarchal succession of private property, primitive matriarchy unwittingly opens up the imagination for the new kinds of feminine sexuality conceived apart from reproduction. In contrast with patrilineage where women become the “link between sex partner and child,” in matrilineage, where a child’s identity is determined by who his/her mother is, women’s “sexual act and sexual object choice is separated out from the reproduction” (Psomiades 107). Weir’s following statement exemplifies the fear for the threat of promiscuous feminine sexuality: “As far as the children are concerned, the power of the mother is absolute; for they know no father, the maternal uncle in his stead. Property, both personal and real, is vested in the woman; she is the mistress and the ruler” (Weir 817). For Weir, “the ‘free love’ of some advanced women” is a modern version of the nightmarish polyandrous matriarchy, in which the patrilineal succession of property is threatened (824).

<sup>11</sup> Henry Abelove argues that “cross-sex genital intercourse (penis in vagina, vagina around penis, with seminal emission uninterrupted)” might become the dominant form of what we conceive as “sex” only in the late eighteenth century (23). He sees the correlation between the Industrial Revolution and the population growth in the eighteenth-century England as a manifestation of productivism. Accordingly, he hypothesizes diverse sexual acts such as “mutual masturbation, oral sex, anal sex, display and watching” were “reconstructed and reorganized in the late eighteenth century as foreplay..., relegated and largely confined to the position of the preliminary” (27). Read in this context, Edna’s attachment to “foreplay” rather than the sexual intercourse so-called could be seen as a sign of the decline of productivism in the dawn of consumerist economy.

CHAPTER 4  
THE SPECTRAL LINEAGE:  
JACK LONDON, TEUTONISM, AND INTERSPECIES KINSHIP

Wolf v. Bear

A decade after the New Woman's self-drowning in the Gulf of Mexico, another literary figure takes a suicidal swim into the ocean: Martin Eden, the eponymous hero of Jack London's 1909 semi-autographical novel. Rising from obscurity to literary fame with Franklin-esque self-discipline and "the primordial vigor of life" emanating from his magnificent physique, Martin Eden, modeled largely after his creator, is an antipode not only of the bourgeois wife in *The Awakening*, but also of Chapter 2's "poodle" Henry James (*Martin* 106). He is an untamed "bulldog," "tugging hard, and showing his teeth, and threatening to break loose" (211). And yet, the underside of the ex-seafarer's bronzed arms untouched by the tropic sun is "very white," as fair and smooth as any "pale spirits of women": as Martin realizes by looking at the mirror, "he was a white man, after all" (68). To enter the upper-class whiteness embodied by Ruth Morse—Martin's love interest, "a pale, ethereal creature, with wide, spiritual blue eyes and a wealth of golden hair"—he remolds himself, ultimately gaining access to the bourgeois world by literary success (35). In short, Martin Eden is "a man in a thousand—in ten thousand" (474): combining the blazing virility with the indomitable will to ascend, he is a model of white manhood that Theodore Roosevelt would emblazon as the savior of the enervated race.

But the celebrated self-made writer chooses death over the preservation of the race, as if to prognosticate the drug-induced death of London himself at the age of forty in 1916.

Disillusioned by “the white glare of life,” the grandeur of bourgeois life that his fame and Ruth’s marriage proposal promise him, Martin Eden dives into the Pacific from a Tahiti-bound steamer (479). Subduing his body’s mandate to survive, he descends deeper and deeper in the water, until the spasmodic movements of “his willful hands and feet” finally cease: “he had fooled them and the will to live that made them beat and churn. He was too deep down. They could never bring him to the surface” (482). For him, the suicidal dive is the endmost, flamboyant assertion of his individual will that has so far characterized him as a paragon of new white manhood: “The will to live, was his thought, and the thought was accompanied by a sneer. Well, he had will—ay, will strong enough that with one last exertion it could destroy itself and cease to be” (481). Thus, the would-be redeemer of the dying race, like Edna Pontellier, wastes his reproductive resources in the ocean, wielding his private right to die over his body that attempts to make him live.

Whether the willfulness of the “bulldog” enraged Roosevelt or not, as the poodle did in thirty years ago, is unknowable. Although he described himself as a reader of London’s fiction in the 1890s, most likely, Roosevelt did not read *Martin Eden*. What is certain is that, at the publication of the novel, the President’s rancor was directed against Jack London himself, with the still open sore that London inflicted on him in the previous year amidst the so-called “nature faker controversy.” The contention between Roosevelt and London dates back to 1903, when a leading figure of the wilderness protection movement, John Burroughs, published an article titled “Real and Sham Natural History” in the *Atlantic Monthly*. Burroughs railed against the trend of animal stories in vogue, especially their anthropomorphizing tendency. Animal writers, Burroughs argues, “put[ ] too much sentiment, too much literature” into their descriptions of

nature: animals in their writings are “simply human beings disguised as animals; they think, feel, plan, suffer, as we do; in fact, exhibit almost the entire human psychology” (Burroughs 299).

A long-time reader of Burroughs’s work, Roosevelt wrote to him immediately after reading his *Atlantic* article, quickly striking up a friendship with the venerable nature writer. As the responses sparked by Burroughs’s criticism built into a nation-wide controversy in the ensuing four years, to the surprise of many, the incumbent President himself joined this apparently literary argument. In 1907, Roosevelt published an article titled “Nature-Fakers” in *Everybody’s Magazine*, with the intention to have the final word in the controversy. In “Nature-Fakers,” Roosevelt entirely endorsed Burroughs’ view, fiercely condemning the “grave wrong” committed by animal writers, in whose works “[t]he animals are alternately portrayed as actuated by motives of exalted humanitarianism, and as possessed of demoniac prowess and insight into motive” (266, 263).

But Roosevelt was soon to find himself sorely bitten back by one of the writers he attacked in the article. Without having been named as such, London evidently was one of Roosevelt’s “nature-fakers.” London was indebted to two canine heroes for the beginning of his literary success: one named Buck, a Scotch shepherd-St. Bernard mix who becomes the leader of a wolf pack in *The Call of the Wild* (1903), the other a wolf-dog hybrid, the eponymous hero of *White Fang* (1906). In “Nature-Fakers,” Roosevelt not only mockingly refers to “wolves ... as gifted with all the philosophy, the self-restraint, and the keen intelligence of, say, Marcus Aurelius,” insinuating London’s canine heroes, but also directly criticizes scenes in *White Fang*: “a doubtful contest between the wolf and a lynx or a bulldog, in which the latter survives twenty

slashing bites” (“Nature-Fakers” 262).

In his 1908 “The Other Animals,” London launched his all-out attack against Roosevelt and Burroughs, entirely rejecting their central belief that “Man is a voluntary agent. Animals are automatons” (“The Other” 112). For London, their view that non-human animals lack reason—“[w]rapped up in its heredity” and operating solely on “fore-ordained rules” (112)—is purely “homocentric” (110). Unfolding his interactions with two dogs in his boyhood, Rollo and Glen, London continuously argues that non-human animals have agency and the capacity for reason like humans. There are “no impassable gulfs” between humans and animals as Roosevelt and Burroughs presuppose (120); repeatedly using the phrase “Kinship with the other animals,” London foregrounds the continuity between non-human animals and “the animal man” (118, 114). London admonishes Burroughs that to “deny your relatives, the other animals,” is simply a manifestation of “egotism” and “stiff-necked pride” (120). As for Roosevelt, after pointing out his misreading of *White Fang*, on which Roosevelt’s attack on London was based, London simply brushes him off as “an amateur”: “No, President Roosevelt does not understand evolution, and he does not seem to have made much of an attempt to understand evolution” (110).

While Roosevelt made no public response to “The Other Animals,” he could not let London’s accusation stand unchallenged. Immediately after the publication of the essay, he wrote to the editor of the *Collier’s*, impugning the magazine for publishing London’s essay. Roosevelt vindicated himself from London’s charge, arguing that he, unlike Burroughs, did not deny the reasoning capacity of non-human animals; he believed that “the higher mammals and birds have reasoning powers, which differ in degree rather than in kind from the lower

reasoning powers of, for instance, the lower savages” (*Letters* 1221). After further demonstrations of the inefficiency of London’s defense against his original charge in “Nature Fakers,” Roosevelt concludes: “Now mind you, I have not the slightest intention of entering into any controversy on this subject with London. I would as soon think of discussing seriously with him any social or political reform” (1223).

This odd concluding remark—about London’s stance on “social or political reform”—seems to suggest the political, or rather biopolitical nature of the President’s argument. By the time Roosevelt interposed himself into the debate, numerous commentators had expressed displeasure in the President’s participation in a debate which, considering his office, appeared rather frivolous.<sup>1</sup> Despite these period objections, I understand Roosevelt’s intervention in the nature faker controversy to be precisely about the nature of his political leadership. Roosevelt had long regarded big-game hunting as a ritual that regenerated weakened old American stock through the ferocious confrontation with untamed animals, bolstering his cowboy persona in his early political career in such works as *Hunting Trips of a Ranchman* (1885), *Ranch Life and the Hunting-Trail* (1888), and *The Wilderness Hunter* (1892). Amidst the rapidly growing wildlife protection movement at the dawn of the new century, Roosevelt’s “reputation as a big game hunter did not always endear him” to the public (Lutts 1). He saw the necessity of refurbishing his public image: namely, from “Great White Hunter” to a “mythical humanitarian” (Varga 98). Boone and Crockett, a hunting club Roosevelt founded in 1887, for instance, became one of the main vehicles for conservationist movement during Roosevelt’s presidency, aiding the passage of laws protecting natural resources and successively establishing National Parks.

One episode that marked the symbolic transformation of Roosevelt's political persona in particular happened in November 1902. During Roosevelt's hunting trip to the South, a renowned African-American bear hunter, Holt Collier, tethered an adult female bear to a tree to arrange the terminal shot for the President. Roosevelt dismissed Collier's request, as the *Washington Post* reported, commanding him to "put it out of misery" by knife (qtd. Varga 99). As Donna Varga argues, Roosevelt's refusal to shoot the bear was "not motivated by compassion for a tormented wild animal. . . . The problem facing Roosevelt on the Mississippi hunt was that the bear had been clubbed unconscious by Collier" (100). Shooting a paralyzed bear assisted by a renowned African-American hunter would violate the sacramental performance necessary for a white man's revivification; thus, Roosevelt ordered the knifing of the bear, whose meat was to be consumed in three successive meals of the hunting team. In a series of ironic twists, however, the President's order to mercifully kill the female bear was eventually made into a fable about his redemption of a captured male cub, culminating in the 1903 birth of that most famous of stuffed animals: the "Teddy" bear. Though having famously repudiated the diminutive "Teddy," Roosevelt would never miss "a political opportunity" courtesy of the teddy bear (Varga 114). Garbed often in "a cowboy hat, hunting rifle and axe," or "a Rooseveltian riding boot and belt with 'U.S.' engraved on its buckle," the stuffed bear strangely fused the identities of the hunter and the hunted, creating an avatar of the President at once capably virile yet pathetically lovable (Varga 108). The furry form of the teddy bear softly blanketed the slaughter and consumption of the actual bear, transforming Roosevelt into the fierce yet benevolent guardian of national life and the wild.

Put differently, what the “Wolf,” as London calls himself occasionally, confronted in the nature faker controversy was “Teddy Bear Patriarchy”—Donna Haraway’s apt moniker for the power administering not only human lives but also natural life.<sup>2</sup> Through her kaleidoscopic account of the development of the American Museum of Natural History in the Progressive Era, in which Roosevelt played a vital role, Haraway throws into relief the way in which the founders of the Museum constructed a unified narrative of evolution. The evolutionary narrative not only requires inter-species hierarchies, in which “the Age of Man” marks the apex of evolution; it is inextricably interwoven with the establishment of “a 20<sup>th</sup>-century primate order, with its specific and polymorphous hierarchies of race, sex, and class” (Haraway 42-43). Just as Roosevelt’s benevolent “Teddy Bear” persona meant to secure the welfare of citizens and wildlife was constructed with the help of, and the erasure of, the African-American hunting guide Holt Collier, “Teddy Bear Patriarchy” needed a naturalized logic of intra-species dominance. As epitomized by Roosevelt’s words in his letter to the editor of the *Collier’s*—reasoning capacities of “the higher mammals and birds” are similar to those of “the lower savages”—the “primitives,” read, African Americans and Native Americans in the U.S. context, were deployed as “the proper interface of the Age of Man and the Age of Mammals” in the Museum’s construction a naturalized teleology of evolution (53). In short, Roosevelt’s participation in the nature faker controversy was furtively yet intimately related to Progressive racial politics: the head of the United States must also be positioned as the unchallenged master of the natural order that controls inter- and intra-species hierarchies. The two ladders were tethered to each other, and to disturb one by “humanizing” other species would disturb the other, on which the security and the future of the nation would rely.

Seen in this light, London's insistence on "kinship with other animals" and the self-willed death of his fictional counterpart in *Martin Eden* begin to mark a potential subversion to the life administering power of Teddy Bear Patriarchy. In this chapter, I will investigate the way in which London's works garble the inter- and intra-species dominance. While Jack London was deeply enmeshed in the race ideology of his time and infamous for his endorsement of white supremacy, his early writings offer a countercurrent to conceptions of race understood as a heritable biological substance. Instead of the conjugal family as the primary site of hereditary succession, London takes up the new-fangled anthropological concept of kinship to articulate race. This enables him to create an alternative method of breeding other than genitally-organized biological reproduction. In the first section, I will examine London's early works set in the Yukon and Alaska, arguing that London's whiteness is reconfigured under the rubric of the "Teutonic" as a mythical tribe that displaces the infertile old American stock. By a spectral alliance with primeval Northern Europeans, London bypasses the biological reproduction of his weakling progenitors. Such sidestepping of biological reproduction was, I will argue in the second section, enabled through his contact with Alaska Natives and their practice of totemic kinship. Examining the fervid anthropological discourse around totemism in London's time, I argue that totemic kinship formation emerged for London as a model of sociality that contrasted sharply with the conjugal family. That is to say, totemic kinship, in which a member of the clan is regarded as a descendant and an incarnation of a totemic animal, literalizes London's insistence on "kinship with other animals." In the final sections, I re-read London's animal stories in relation to Deleuze and Guatarri's notion of "becoming animal," in order to explore his wistful longing to evade the body politics' decree to survive.

### “The Man from Nowhere”

Jack London was deeply invested in ideologies of whiteness in his own way. Born in San Francisco in 1876 and raised in a Bay area working-class household, London fully imbibed the racial tension of the West Coast at the end of the nineteenth century. A city born of the chaos of the mid-century gold rush, San Francisco and its vicinity still were the teeming center of the ongoing development of the West in London’s time. Ever since the Londons first moved to West Oakland when Jack London—nee John Griffith London—was two years old, the family habitually relocated themselves in the Bay area, undergoing severe competition with immigrants who were equally magnetized to the city energized by the legend of the Forty-niners.<sup>3</sup> London’s stepfather John London was one of the numerous Civil War veterans who moved to the West Coast following the lure of fertile farm land and growing business opportunity, and eventually found themselves betrayed by that dream. London grew up in an environment in which “white working men, particularly after the Panic of 1893, attacked and lynched Asian immigrants, who they perceived as taking their jobs” (Reesman 4). Having once been valued as a source of cheap labor for the mining and construction of the transcontinental railroad, Chinese immigrants were regarded as unwanted remnants of the days of gold, and their continued entrance into the United States was terminated by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882.

Asian immigrants, however, were only one of several racial groups subject to racial tension; a new wave of immigrants of Southern and Eastern European origin overflowed the East and headed West. As London recalls in his autobiography *John Barleycorn* (1913), when the family was farming in San Mateo, the area was crowded by New Immigrants: “In all our

section there was only one other old American family” (*John* 22). His mother Flora Wellman London, proud of her “Welsh ancestry and pioneer heritage,” was particularly vocal about her antipathy toward their neighbors (Reesman 22). For her, “brunettes and all the tribe of dark-eyed humans were deceitful,” and “the Latin races were profoundly sensuous, profoundly treacherous, and profoundly murderous” (*John* 26); in short, she and her family were “old American stock,” superior to their newly immigrated neighbors (22).

London apparently inherited his mother’s race pride, notoriously liable to endorse nativist white superiority. But in his case, the master trope of white superiority was not his mother’s pet phrase, the “old American stock”; nor was it “Anglo-Saxon,” as many critics have claimed. London’s sense of white superiority, especially in his early career, would be better understood as Teutonism.<sup>4</sup> Though the term “Teutonic” in London’s works has often been treated as synonymous with “Anglo-Saxon” in London criticism, it represented a set of values distinct from Anglo-Saxonism for London, as well as for his contemporaries.

In a June 12, 1899 letter to one of the earliest supporters of his works, literary critic Cloudesley Johns, London corrects Johns’ claim on his “pure Anglo-Saxon” lineage that can be “traced back to the Welsh Kings.” London, though without disclosing his own matrilineal Welsh heritage, tells Johns “the Welsh are farther away from the Anglo-Saxon, than are the French, Germans, Dutch, Belgians, Scandanavians [*sic*], Switz” (*Letters* 86). Yet, London continues, the Welsh and the Anglo-Saxon, as well as other Northern Europeans, belong to “the same family”: they are “the Teutonic,” “the dominant race of the world.” In the language redolent with social Darwinism espoused from his late teens, London continues to voice his belief in a survival-of-the-fittest triumph of the Teutonic: “The negro races, the mongrel races,

the slavish races, the unprogressive races, are of bad blood—that is, of blood which is not qualified to permit them to successfully survive the selection by which the fittest survive, and which the next centuries, in my opinion, will see terribly intensified” (*Letters* 87).

London’s use of “Teutonic” in his 1899 letter evinces a significant reconfiguration of the term that had traditionally been used as a synonym for “German” against the backdrop of New Immigration. In 1899, a leading Progressive economist William Zebina Ripley adopted the term in *The Races of Europe* as the name of one of the three “races” in Europe. Amidst the turbid argument as to what “race” should refer to, Ripley proclaimed that “race” was neither a national, tribal, linguistic, nor religious grouping: “Race denotes what man *is*; all these other details of social life represent what man *does*” (Ripley 32). In contrast to such “superficial product[s]” as national boundaries or shared language, Ripley defines race as an invariable entity responsible for “peculiarities, mental or bodily, which are transmitted with constancy along the lines of direct physical descent from father to son,” as if to mirror the landmark decision of *Plessy* made three years before the book’s publication (32, 1).

Deploying a purely morphological language buttressed by his ample usage of anthropometric data and photographs, Ripley classified the European populations into three distinct races: tall, blond, blue-eyed “Teutons” with large skulls and fair skin, originated in Northern Europe; also large-skulled, but short in stature, southern European “Mediterraneans” with dark hair and eyes; while in-between them were the round-headed “Alpines” of Central Europe with brown hair, hazel-colored eyes, and intermediate skin color. Though *The Races of Europe* is ostensibly free of blatant racism and concerned exclusively with the European races, Ripley’s tripartite typology provided the U.S. nativists with scientific grounds for separating

New Immigrants as racial others. The pure whiteness of the Teutonic skin nurtured in the Northern climate, together with “tall stature and blondness,” “constitute[s] insignia of noble decent” (457), an heirloom that marks the honor of “the splendid military and political expansion of the Teutons” from the Viking age (470). Ripley soon turned from the European to the American racial landscape after the publication of *The Races of Europe*, voicing alarm concerning the mixing of the different European races: it would result in the disappearance of pure Teutonic heritage, the original race that had founded the United States.<sup>5</sup>

Yet the full-fledged manifestation of scientific racism against the new immigrants implicit in *The Races of Europe* was to come to fruition in Madison Grant’s *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916). As Jonathan Spiro points out, Grant adopted Ripley’s tripartite racial theory, fusing it with Houston Steward Chamberlain’s ideologically charged Teutonism in *The Foundation of the Nineteenth Century* (*Die Grundlagen des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts*), originally published in Germany the same year as *The Races of Europe*. Unlike *The Races of Europe*, *The Foundation* emphasizes a common racial origin of all Europeans with the Aryans, as well as their superiority to the Jews, directly mirroring the growing anti-Semitism in Europe. The Teutonic branch of the Aryans represents the finest ethos of the race, and “‘Teutonic’ blood,” “binds” apparently different races of Europe as an “organic unity.” This blood flows in the population of every northern European nation in varying proportion (Chamberlain 257). Though Chamberlain deploys an anthropometric methodology similar to Ripley’s, the emphasis of *The Foundation* rests more on the Teuton’s “idealistic spirit, a virile sense of loyalty, and an enduring love of freedom” (Spiro 109): the Teuton is “the poet warrior, the thinker, the freeman,” the ultimate antithesis of the Jew (Chamberlain xlvi).

In order to proclaim the racial superiority of native-born Americans over the new immigrants, rather than over just the Jews, Grant synthesized two languages surrounding the Teuton, one scientific and the other ideological. Following Ripley's three-race theory, Grant classifies the European population into "Mediterraneans," "Alpines," and, to avoid the Germanic overtone attached to the Teutonic, renames the last one as "Nordics." Yet Grant's "Nordics" clearly inherit Chamberlain's Teutonism, placed at the pinnacle of European racial hierarchy and invested with "overwhelmingly masculine attributes" (Spiro 148): "They brought with them from the north the hardihood and vigor acquired under the rigorous selection of a long winter season, and vanquished in battle the inhabitants of older and feebler civilizations" (Grant *Passing* 155). In short, with its "absolutely fair skin" that symbolizes survival in the harsh Northern climate without the comfort of the sunshine, the Nordic for Grant stands for "the *Homo albus*, the white man par excellence" (23). Once having been "the nursery and broodland of the master race" (187), America is now facing "serious injury" to its Nordic heritage through "reckless breeding" and the "multiplication of inferior types," the Alpine and the Mediterranean, under the guise of "altruism, philanthropy, or sentimentalism" (44).

London's fascination with the newfangled racial term "Teutonic," first appearing in his 1899 letter as if to prefigure Grant's celebration of the Nordic race, saw a steady growth in his oeuvre. Though scarcely commented upon, for instance, the Nordic origin of "Wolf" Larsen in *The Sea-Wolf* (1904), London's twentieth-century recast of *Moby-Dick*, should be understood in the context of Teutonism-Nordicism. Instead of a big white whale, the Ahab-esque captain of the *Ghost* represents absolute whiteness for himself. Wolf Larsen's whiteness is otherworldly, of the nature possessed only by a "ghost." His symbolically laden "satiny skin," the whiteness

by which the narrator Van Weyden is captivated, is “thanks to his Scandinavian stock,” reflecting the significance of Teutonic regional origin as emphasized by Ripley, Chamberlain, and Grant (*Sea-Wolf* 593). With his pure Danish heritage, Wolf Larsen incarnates the “old Scandinavian myths,” personifying Grant’s white man par excellence (557). Equipped with perfectly toned muscles that are “made to grip, tear, and destroy living things,” the Teuton’s body manifests the virile masculinity that would torpedo the fear of race suicide (593-94). To use Scott Derrick’s phrasing, the narrative teleology of *The Sea-Wolf* “aim[s] at the construction of heterosexual masculinity,” imbuing lost potency to the weakling stock through the contact with the legendary Teuton (Derrick 111). Larsen saved the narrator “‘Sissy’ Van Weyden,” not only from a shipwreck but also from degeneration (*Sea-Wolf* 552). Wolf Larsen stands as “a magnificent atavism” for the over-civilized literary critic (557), awakening Van Weyden to the “primitive deeps of [his] nature” and his “remote and forgotten ancestry” of “hunting days and forest nights”: through Larsen’s discipline, the effete literary critic becomes a “protector of the weak, the fighting male,” and ultimately wins possession of a woman over Wolf Larsen himself (712).

While London deploys the white supremacist vocabulary *au courant* in his time, London’s representation of Teutonic ancestry resurrected in Van Weyden as “atavism” seems to suggest a modality of racial construction different from the one defined by heredity.<sup>6</sup> As Dana Seitler argues in *Atavistic Tendencies*, atavism represents a fin-de-siècle “theory of biological reversion emerging out of modern science” (Seitler 1). Derived from the Latin term “*atavus*, ‘great-grandfather’s grandfather,’” atavism is a wraithlike reemergence of the prehistoric past that “skips generations” (2). In other words, while Ripley’s original theorization of the Teutonic

in *The Races of Europe* relies on the hereditary definition of race—physical and psychological traits linearly “transmitted with constancy along the lines of direct physical descent from father to son” (1)—London’s atavistic construction of the Teutonic heritage operates not by a process of continuity, but by an uncanny reversal of temporality. While turn-of-the-century discourse on atavism, as Seitler demonstrates, signals a fear of “infinite regress” into the primitive past with which Progressive modernity sought to make a clean break, such reversion provided also a vital refuge for those who were threatened by race suicide (3). The old American stock’s loss of sexual potency meant that they could no longer sustain the line of heredity. By negating their closest filiation to the old American stock, native-born white Americans could claim their atavistic, spectral affiliation with the remote past. The ghostly whiteness represented by the mythical tribe was the only potential recourse for the survival of the indigenous white population.

Fittingly, London’s Teutonism as an atavistic return to the primeval Viking age derives, at least partially, from his personal abrogation of immediate filiation. In May 1897, two years prior to his discovery of the enabling, “master race” trope, twenty-one-year-old London was informed of his illegitimacy by relatives of John London, the husband of his mother Flora, whom London had believed to be his biological father. Excavating newspaper articles archived in the Oakland Public Library, London discovered the details of the dispute over his paternity between his mother and his putative biological father William Chaney, an itinerant astrologer and spiritualist. The dispute reportedly culminated in Flora’s two suicide attempts following Chaney’s demand for abortion, which was sensationally covered in the *San Francisco Chronicle*.<sup>7</sup> Tracking down the current residence of Chaney in Chicago, London wrote to him

and shortly heard back. Chaney opens his bitter response with a straightforward disavowal of paternity: “I was never married to Flora Wellman, of Springfield, Ohio, but she lived with me from June 11<sup>th</sup> 1874 till June 3<sup>rd</sup> 1875. I was impotent at that time, the result of hardship, privation & too much brain-work” (qtd. Kingman 18).<sup>8</sup> It is difficult to fathom which troubled London more deeply: Chaney’s blunt denial of paternity, or his unabashed disclosure of neurasthenic sexual impotency as a means of the denial. Proud yet eccentric offspring of old New England families, Chaney probably personified for young London the degeneracy of the native stock, and their increasing eclipse by fertile immigrants.

The young writer, as well as other native-born white Americans, needed a new trope for the master race that would replace the neurasthenic “old American stock”; an atavistic return to the Teutonic, “white-skinned, fair-haired savages” that had survived the harshest environment in Europe, answered the call from mythical, far northern lands. A decade earlier, the cry for a new figuration of the virile race would have been sufficiently answered by the allure of the West. As Theodore Roosevelt’s own revitalization by the “West cure” proved, the frontier spirit was imagined as a panacea for the weakening stock. Yet as Frederick Jackson Turner famously declared in “The Significance of the Frontier in American History” (1893), such “perennial rebirth,” enabled by the “continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society,” was put to a halt by the closure of the frontier in the last decade of the nineteenth century (Turner 2-3). In the impasse of halted westward continental expansion, the year 1898 witnessed the nation thrusting itself further west by taking a sea route. With the outbreak of the Spanish-American War in April 1898, the U.S. officially annexed Hawaii as a naval foothold under William McKinley, and in December of the same year, Spain ceded the Philippines, Guam, Puerto Rico,

and Cuba U.S. military victory, in which Roosevelt's Rough Riders played the vital role. Yet immediately before the dawn of U.S. oversea expansion, America experienced a last gasp regeneration within the continent, which would rehash the legend of the days of gold, not in the West, but in the Northland. On July 15 1897, San Francisco heard the news of the discovery of gold along the Yukon River valley, a Canadian federal territory adjacent to Alaska. Ten days after the news reached San Francisco, Jack London was on the *Umatilla* leaving San Francisco for Alaska. His departure to the Northland was only a month after he had heard back from Chaney.

The hype of the frontier regained was short lived; the Arctic climate proved too harsh for many prospectors even to reach the gold field, and for those who found their way, including London himself, the land yielded a modicum of the riches forty-niners had basked in. As fascination with the Klondike ebbed quickly in the national consciousness, London's journey to the Northland was interrupted in the summer of 1898, when, having contracted scurvy, he reluctantly headed back to Oakland. As many critics have argued, however, it was the barren soil of the Klondike that engendered the writer Jack London to become the Progressive Era's iconic literary self-made man. Achieving his first breakthrough with the publication of a series of sketches and short stories set in the Yukon, London from then on proved himself a prolific writer, setting a strict agenda for his daily writing practice and almost maniacally producing work after work.<sup>9</sup>

Yet London was not merely a literary self-made man in the sense that he was an autodidactic, working class writer who paved his road to financial success through laborious disciplined writing. In doing so, he figuratively sired himself, emerging as a representative

white man despite the absence of a stable genealogy. One reviewer commented on the success of his collection of Klondike stories: “We cannot pay Mr. London a higher compliment than by calling him ‘The Man From Nowhere,’ for that was the original sobriquet of Kipling” (qtd. Reesman 62). As Rudyard Kipling came from the British India and rose to fame by his symbolic gesture of bearing “The White Man’s Burden” (1899), London became the representative white conqueror of the untrodden territory of the Yukon by claiming a spectral Teutonic lineage via the snowbound landscape of the mythic North: the Yukon and Alaska. It was the “Nowhere” of American cartography, or what London himself symbolically calls “the Barrens, the bad lands of the Arctic, the deserts of the Circle, the bleak and bitter home of the musk-ox and the lean plains of wolf” (*Children* 3).

Many of London’s early works superimpose the image of Viking-age Scandinavia onto the Yukon as the symbolical homeland of the Teutonic, who would redeem the declining fate of the weakling old American stock. One such instance occurs in his first published novel, *A Daughter of the Snows* (1902). Set in the Yukon at the time of the Klondike gold rush, *A Daughter of the Snows* revolves around a spirited young, Alaskan-born American woman, Frona Welse, whose name and proud Welsh heritage are strongly reminiscent of the novelist’s mother, Flora Wellman London. The novel traces a triangular relation centering Flora/Frona within a process of the Darwinian “sexual selection,” in which she seeks the ideal mate to pass on the legacy of “the Teuton spreading over the earth as no other race has ever spread” (*Daughter* 86, 146). The bleak climate of the Northland becomes an apt setting for Frona’s sexual selection: “The north wants strong men,” as she “speak[s] for the race” (38). Like the Scandinavian landscape Grant envisioned as the site of the “rigorous selection” that enabled the

“hardihood and vigor” of the Nordic (Grant 155), the Arctic climate would weed out “the weak and effeminate males” for Frona, and the “history of the race, and of all races,” would “seal[ ] her choice with approval” (*Daughter* 87).

One of Frona’s suitors, Vance Corliss—a New England-born, Yale-graduate prospector with a Freiberg mining engineering degree—checks Frona’s blatant Teutonism as “race egotism and insular prejudice” in his early days in the Yukon (89). Yet, like Van Weyden in *The Sea-Wolf*, Corliss soon finds himself undergoing an atavistic reversion to the Teutonic heritage of “the sea-king who never slept under the smoky rafters of a roof” (146). As he acclimates to the Yukon, he finds “caverns of his being” gradually filled with the vision of archaic “bellowing of storm-winds and crash of smoking North Sea waves. . . and the sharp-beaked fighting galleys, and the sea-flung Northmen, great-muscled, deep-chested” (148). His fervid imagination amalgamates the landscape of the Yukon with the Norse mythology, transforming the trails to the gold field into “the path of Hel,” and Frona into “a furred Valkyrie” (147).

In the face of the Alaskan Valkyrie unified with the Arctic wilderness choosing who will be slain in the battlefield of sexual selection, recollection of his old stock American mother begins to personify the decay of the race: “his mother’s women came back to him, one by one, and passed in long review—pale, glimmering ghosts, he thought, caricatures of the stock which had replenished the earth” (259). As opposed to neurasthenic New England women, the Alaskan-born heroine becomes “the genius of the race” (111), the reification of “the tradition of the blood” of the Teutonic, which runs through Scandinavian miners in the Yukon (147). Familiar with the Northern climate, Scandinavian miners thrive in the Arctic environment: for them, the toil of carrying a heavy sack on the icy trail is but a “child’s play,” and “the joy of life

was in them” (32). Scarcely understanding English, these “blond-haired giants” have little to share with Corliss and other American miners. Even in morphological terms, with his “hazel-brown” eyes and “chestnut-brown” hair, Corliss is closer to what Ripley and Grant would call the “Alpine” rather than to the Teutonic (45, 46). Nonetheless Corliss realizes that the shared endurance of the Northern climate makes him feel “strangely at one with the white-skinned, yellow-haired giants of the younger world,” the direct descendants of the Teutons in the Viking Age (147). His spectral alliance of “race heredity” to the Teutonic is, Corliss deliriously says, what “[t]he north has taught me, is teaching me” (146).

#### Kinship in Alaska

The New Englander’s visionary claim of romantic brotherhood with Scandinavian miners in *A Daughter of the Snows* mirrors London’s own family romance, and it was to be shared by Madison Grant’s Nordicism in *Passing of the Great Race*. Both disown the neurasthenic, old American stock heredity instead atavistically molding a new white manhood in the image of the mythic Teutons. It is no coincidence that Grant himself—of old American, patrician stock, who produced no offspring in his lifetime—frequented Alaska for big-game hunting in the late 1890s to the early 1900s. Fascinated by the unsullied wilderness of Alaska and its potential promise of revivification of the white race, Grant, as a prominent member of Roosevelt’s Boone and Crockett club, drafted the Alaska Game Bill in 1902 to prohibit commercial hunting.

The region was, he argued, the only remaining place in the U.S. that “maintain[ed] primitive conditions approximating those of the whole country when first settled” (qtd. Spiro 24).<sup>10</sup> In lieu of New England and the Great West, the Northland became the surrogate frontier and enabling site of fertile whiteness, splicing old American stock into mythic Teutonism. As

such, the Northland would provide indigenous white Americans with a “meeting point between savagery and civilization,” which Turner believed to have defined the national character until the closure of the frontier (Turner 3). Just as the wilderness at the frontier line divested the settler of his “European ... dress, industries, tools, modes of travel, and thought” to make “a new product that is American,” the Northland wilderness would re-produce the vigorous master race cleansed of its over-civilized and thus degenerating Anglo heritage (4).

The metamorphosis of old stock Americans into Northland Teutonism was, much like the frontier itself, to be effected by contact with American Indians. In the West, Turner argues, American Indians acted as vital “consolidating agent[s]” (Turner 15): in order for the European settler to become an American, he must first be stripped of the “garments of civilization,” and then learn how to “shout[ ] the war cry and take[ ] the scalp in orthodox Indian fashion,” “fit[ting] himself into the Indian clearings and follow[ing] the Indian trails” (4). The same is true for the Northland miners in London’s Klondike cosmology. The Teuton of London’s Northland tales is a strange hybrid of Native Alaskan and old stock American. Frona Welse, “genius of the race” in *A Daughter of Snows*, incarnates one such example of the Teutonic ethos. Born daughter of a “sturdy Welsh stock” father (56) and a “[f]air and flaxen-haired, typically Saxon” mother (82), Frona Welse also possesses a different lineage, one signified by her other name: “Tenas Hee-Hee” (27). Her childhood is marked by the death of her mother and she was raised under the care of the Dyea people, a fictive Alaska Native tribe, versing herself in their native tongue. Even after being sent to the mainland for the education in her teens, “[t]he years of her culture had not weakened her” (71). Having “nursed at the breast of nature” (24), embodied by her Dyea godmother Neepoosa, Frona boasts herself being capable of

“mother[ing] the natural and strong,” of becoming a Teutonic race mother in place of the infertile “hot-house breeds” of New England (111).

Needless to say, contact with the “primitive” as a revitalizing force for an over-civilized population itself is a colonialist cliché. Yet what is significant about London’s conception of North American Indians as the catalyst for the genesis of the Teutonic is his adaptation of totemism, rather than heredity, as the organizing logic of racial mattering. London’s atavistic construction of whiteness as modern-day Teutonism, emanates from his appropriation of and claim to, what Jonathan Auerbach brilliantly calls, a “complex fictional system of totemic kinship” with North American Indians (Auerbach 48). The titular story of *The Son of the Wolf* (1900), London’s first published collection of short stories, depicts the conflict between a white settler “Scruff” Mackenzie and Alaska Natives over the possession of a daughter of the chief of the Raven clan. The chief of the Raven, Thling-Tinneh, declines Mackenzie’s offer to marry his daughter Zarinska, designating white settlers a totemic clan irreconcilable with his own: “O White Man, whom we have named Moose-Killer, also known as the Wolf, and the Son of the Wolf!” (*Son* 30). Mackenzie, well-versed in their tongue, willfully accepts the designation, and the subsequent battle between the Alaska Native tribe and the white man becomes one between Raven and Wolf, in which “men fought, each to his totem” (37).

London’s deep investment in the totemic designation “the Son of the Wolf” is, as Auerbach argues, evident in his choice of book title, meant to “unify and establish kinship” among the apparently non-related tales of white men’s survival in the Northland (Auerbach 57). With the trope of the “Wolf,” the book becomes a short-story cycle hinging loosely on the figure of a fabled white settler, “Malemute Kid,” who Thling-Tinneh calls “the first of all the

Wolves” (31). Sometimes appearing as an actual participant in stories and sometimes only reverently referred to in rumors, Malemute Kid, as his Eskimo tribal moniker suggests, elicits an archetypal representation of Northland white men as a totemic clan. Thus the Teutonic, “all-conquering race” gains its totem, the “Wolf,” and is renamed as the Son of the Wolf in London’s Northland mythology, creating a spectral genealogy that “Wolf” Larsen is to share (26).

According to Auerbach, “intimate contact with native women” plays an especially important role in enabling London to envision the solidification of white settlers as a totemic clan (Auerbach 58). Mating between white settlers and Alaska Native women, as in the title story, indeed recurs throughout the stories collected in *The Son of the Wolf*. In this sense, as Auerbach argues, the homosocial “traffic in women” with Alaskan Native males, not the biological product of miscegenation itself, seems to be crucial for London’s totemic construction of whiteness defined in relation to “red men” (60, 57). Yet, I would argue, London’s totemic reconfiguration of whiteness seems to point to a mode of racial mattering more directly averse to the heterosexualizing logic of racial construction. At stake here is the ideological valence assigned to the concept of “kinship” around the turn of the century. For, totemic kinship was increasingly understood as a social organization that does not necessarily require procreative relatedness.

The term “kinship” gained an increasingly wide currency in London’s time with the rise of anthropology, conceived to explicate certain non-Western social formations.<sup>11</sup> North American Indians, including Alaska Natives, constituted one of the densest sites of investigation of such alternative socialities. As David Schneider documents in *A Critique of the*

*Study of Kinship*, the definition of the term “kinship” was murky when it originated in the mid-nineteenth century. It referred alternately to “the biological system of relations,” something akin to reproductive connections of consanguinity and “sociocultural aspects,” and contrasted sharply with strictly blood-based family relations (Schneider 97). Yet by the end of the nineteenth century, a vague consensus was reached among anthropologists to differentiate the two: as Emile Durkheim put it in his 1898 studies of Omaha and Choctaw social formation, kinship is “something completely different from the relation of consanguinity” (Durkheim qtd. Sahlins 17). Even when certain forms of kinship function in similar ways as the Euro-American consanguine family—that is, as the primary site of child caring, sense of belonging, or shared economy, and so on—it has an organizing logic different from procreative relatedness.

This difference from consanguinity is especially true with respect to totemism. Durkheim notes that to be recognized as a member of certain totemic kinship, “it is necessary and sufficient that one have in oneself something of the totemic being” (qtd. Sahlins 18). The question is what makes one possess “something of the totemic being.” In certain cases, it could “result from reproduction (generation),” but biological connectedness in itself does not guarantee sharing of the totemic being; it could also “be obtained in many other ways: by tattooing, by all forms of alimentary communion, by blood contact, etc” (qtd. Sahlins 18). To reproduce such “totemic being,” in other words, involves different theories of reproduction than those propounded by Euro-American anthropologists. In the words of French anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep, in 1906, “*procreation is not necessarily and uniquely the consequence of coitus*” in native theories of conception as a basis of their kinship formations (qtd. Schneider 104 original emphasis). Such dissociation between “conception and the sexual act,” as Sigmund

Freud hypothesizes in *Totem and Taboo* (1913), often stems from “the long interval which is interposed between the fertilizing act and the birth of the child or the sensation of the child’s first movements” (*Totem* 193, 194). In the conception theory of the Aruntas, an Aboriginal Australian people, for instance, “the animal, plant, stone or other object” which the mother of a child senses “at the moment when she first felt herself pregnant” is believed to have “penetrated into her and was being born through her in human form” (193).

To gauge the specific impact of turn-of-the-century theories of totemism on London’s writing is not within the scope of my current argument; nor would it be possible to argue the actuality of diverse totemic formations of North American Indians in the Yukon area that London might have witnessed.<sup>12</sup> London’s rendition of Alaska Natives’ kinship structures in his Northland tales itself is, for the most part, anything but innovative, even though such expressions as “the daughter’s daughter,” “mother that bore me,” and “the son of my mother” signal London’s vague perception that Native people possess organizing logics of relatedness different from that of Western families (*Children* 37, 79, 126). Even still, when London adopted the totemic designation “the Son of the Wolf” as a name for the new Teutonic in the Northland, and later embraced that totem as his own to call himself “Wolf,” he might well have been drawn to a version of native theories of conception, in which what he calls “kinship with the other animals” is literalized.

In totemic organizations of kinship, a totemic animal—however metaphorical it may seem to the Western theory of reproduction—literally is one’s progenitor. When an Alaska Native exclaims in London’s work, “I am the Bear—the Silver-Tip and the Son of the Silver-Tip!” he does *not* mean that he is the son of a person called the Silver-Tip from whom he

inherits his name (*Son* 41); he is the offspring and the incarnation of his totemic animal, the Silver-Tip Bear, and in that he literally *is* the Silver-Tip, the grizzly bear albeit in human form. Likewise, Jack London is the Wolf and the Son of the Wolf, not the son of William Chaney, his putative biological father. If London's Teutonism, as I have argued so far, emerged from his desire to disown his filiation to the neurasthenic old American stock and his father in particular, the Alaska Native's totemic logic of kinship formation would have facilitated such an act of self-disinheritance. Insofar as "race" at the turn of the century was, especially after *Plessy*, increasingly defined in hereditary terms, and figured as "blood" transmitted through the procreative "family," the concept of "kinship" has the potential to disrupt such intertwined, pro-procreative discourses of race and sexuality. When London required a generative logic for the Teuton independent of its hereditary relation to sterile Old American stock, the Northland's idea of totemic kinship answered that demand.

London's adaptation of totemic kinship from North American Indians operates against turn-of-the-century conceptualizations of race relying heavily on a biological imaginary. As Mark Rifkin argues in *When Did Indians Become Straight?* (2011) the Progressive Indian politics bespeak the ways in which "race and kinship are dialectically entwined" through "processes of heteronormalization" that seek to buttress the privatized procreative family household (Rifkin 36). Heteronormalization, as Rifkin forcibly argues, means more than just the institutional standardization of procreative opposite-sex sexual relations and the stigmatization of erotic tendencies that are deviant from, or illegible in relation to, the norm. It is "an ensemble of imperatives that includes family formation, homemaking, private property holding, and the allocation of citizenship, a series of potential 'detachable parts' fused to each

other through discourses of sexuality” (37). The legible bequeathal of racial heritage through the procreative union of one man and one woman, especially since *Plessy*, was one such imperative of heteronormativity. In other words, even when native subjects did participate in opposite-sex sexual acts that sometimes resulted in impregnation, their formation of sociality based on kinship rather than consanguinity was still perceived as an object in need of regulation. For kinship, as opposed to consanguine family, could obscure the genitally-organized genealogy of property succession, of which racial heritage was a vital component.<sup>13</sup>

Composed during the period in which London wrote his Northland fiction series, *The Kempton-Wace Letters* (1903) signals London’s conflict between these two models of sociality: namely, the familial imperative of propagation of race and kinship relations that would enable him to transcend the hereditary limitation. *The Kempton-Wace Letters* occupies a singular space in London’s oeuvre not merely for its epistolary nature, but also as his only collaboration with another writer. The co-author, Anna Strunsky, was a Stanford-graduate and socialist activist whom London met in San Francisco in 1899, whose Jewish family had emigrated to the U.S. from Russia when she was nine years old. London fell in love with Strunsky and intended to propose marriage three months later; equally attracted to London, Strunsky nonetheless evaded the question of marriage, ostensibly due to her devotion to the revolutionary cause. Less than a week after his foiled marriage proposal to Strunsky, London married one of his friends, Bessie Madden, whom he reportedly forewarned that their marriage would be only for “‘breeding’ potential” (Reese 50).

In the still glowing embers of tangled mutual attraction, London and Strunsky co-authored *The Kempton-Wace Letters* as a collection of letters exchanged between two men:

London as Herbert Wace, a Berkley student of economics, Strunsky as Dane Kempton, a British poet who fostered Wace after his parents died. As if to vindicate his own marriage, London, in the voice of Wace, declares to Kempton his intention to marry Hester Stebbins for “the perpetuation of the species” (*Kempton-Wace* 7). Succeeding letters become an overwrought argument between Wace, a zealous believer of the scientific breeding for the conservation of the race, and Kempton, a defender of romantic love as the kernel of every marriage.

Though seldom receiving serious attention from London critics, Wace’s letters composed by London seem to gesture exemplify his conflicted attitude regarding race ideology, especially given the twisted roman-à-clef nature of the novel.<sup>14</sup> On the one hand, Wace, like London’s Northland heroes, feverishly ventriloquizes the genius of the Teutonic race: “I conquered peoples, and organised nations and knit empires, and gave periods of peace to vast territories . . . and I multiplied myself” (46). Stebbins proves the ideal “Mother Woman” for Wace (210), as she represents an amalgamation of the Northern European peoples, with “the Norman” inside her controlling her inner conflict between other heritages, “[t]he Saxon” and “the Celt” (9).

While Wace thus plays the part of a willful agent for propagation of the race, on the other hand, his service to the biological mandate was based on a fatalistic sense of resignation shared by Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening*: “nature tricks her creatures and the race lives on” (123). Love, which Kempton calls the “prerogative . . . high in the scale of existence,” is nothing for Wace but “*a means for the perpetuation and development of the human type*” (27, 67 original emphasis). Whereas Chopin’s heroine drowns herself in her awakening to the biopoliticality of romantic love, refusing to become a vessel of racial heredity, Wace willfully accepts the role

ordained by the race after the same realization: he attempts to “master” the “yearnings and desires, promptings of the ‘abysmal fecundity’” disguised as love by replacing it with eugenics. If romantic love is nothing more than “an institution necessary for the perpetuation of the species” (67), he would outwit it by his intellect to better serve the purpose of “sav[ing] the races from self-murder” by choosing his mate not based on romantic attraction but on the principle of scientific breeding (157).

In having his fictional persona speak of the instrumentality of romantic love, on which the Progressive ideal of procreative conjugality rests, in *The Kempton-Wace Letters*, London strictly delimits family as a venue for the inheritance of racial property, and nothing more. The conflict between Wace and Kempton in the novel was to be rehashed in person between their creators as they were completing the book. In two letters to Strunsky, on August 25 and 28, 1902, London responds to Strunsky’s accusation that despite his continued proclamations of love to her, he impregnated Bessie for the second time.<sup>15</sup> While vindicating Bessie’s pregnancy as a “[w]ork back nine months,” London also acknowledges that “[l]ong, long after a child is conceived, a man may know his wife,” insinuating the possibility that he had sexual intercourse with Bessie while she was pregnant (*Letter* 307). Yet, for London, fathering a child with Bessie and having an active sexual relationship with her has little to do with his love for Strunsky. He “may bribe [himself] to continue being” “by duty or desire, or both, & by these only,” but his relation to Strunsky is “the last clean, pure warming I shall ever receive” (309). London’s words, while surely a pathetic apologia, evince the degree to which he was entrapped in race ideology: propagation of the race with an indigenous white American is a “work” and a “duty” he is trained to “desire,” and the continuation of his “being” hinges on his service to the preservation

of the race. Adherence to these decrees of race perpetuation is sharply contrasted with his emotional investment in a “Russian Jewess,” as he refers to Strunsky repeatedly in his letter to his friends, with whom he could only sire a book wherein she is disguised as his foster father.

#### Unnatural Nuptials in *The Call of the Wild*

For Herbert Wace, the “[p]recise value and use of this erotic phenomenon, this sexual madness, this love” is nothing but the propagation of the race (*Kempton-Wace* 68). In a work published in the same year as *The Kempton-Wace Letters*, London again talks fervidly about the madness of love—“love that was feverish and burning, that was adoration, that was madness” (*Call* 60). The “great love” in *The Call of the Wild* (1903) is similar to the one Wace is wary of, which “usurp[s] . . . reason,” and makes one “los[e] his head” (79). Yet this erotic phenomenon, love that is akin to madness in *The Call of the Wild* sabotages the precise value and use Wace presupposes, having nothing to do with the propagation of the race, or even with the perpetuation of the species. The love in *The Call of the Wild* is destined to be infertile, because it is conceived between a man and a dog. By definition, interspecies relations are biologically sterile; beings divided by species lines, a man and a dog cannot mate each other to procreate offspring.<sup>16</sup> But this sterile love, in London’s imagination, has breeding potential. In the formation of interspecies kinship, a dog named Buck and a man named John Thornton become the forebears of the Son of the Wolf. In tracing the dog’s atavistic transmogrification into a wolf through his love for a man, I will argue, *The Call of the Wild* recounts a mythical genesis of the Wolf, totem of the Sons of the Wolf.

Not unlike London’s other over-civilized heroes, Buck, a St. Bernard-Scotch shepherd mix who had “lived the life of a sated aristocrat” in California, was brought into the Northland,

undergoing the atavistic process of “decivilization” for the revivification (6, 21). Just as his human counterparts discover their phantasmal Teutonic heritage in the Northland, Buck reclaims “the old hunting days of the primordial world” he has never experienced (79). In the “ruthless struggle for existence” in Alaska (21), his immediate filiation to “domesticated generations fell from him”; instead, “his ancestors, dead and dust” spectrally come alive in Buck (22). His “forgotten ancestors . . . quickened the old life within him,” as if to uncannily impregnate Buck, and the life that quickens inside Buck is given birth to as a “primordial beast” (22, 24). Like men in London’s Northland tales who forge their mythical Teutonic heritage to create the lineage of the Sons of the Wolf, the dog metamorphoses into a wolf. At the end of the novel, Buck does not merely become the head of a wolf pack; he becomes more wolf than any other specimens bred between wolves. He reigns over the pack as “a gigantic wolf, larger than the largest of the breed” because of the size and weight inherited from his dog parents (77). While Buck is biologically a dog, “[w]hen he was made, the mould was broke,” having him become a creature other than dog (78). *The Call of the Wild* thus depicts the way in which a dog transcends his biological heritage and becomes the capitalized Wolf, who is placed at the highest notch of “the totem-pole of Alaskan fame” to lead his clan (66).

Yet in becoming a totem of the Teutonic, the dog has to fall in love with a human. Kidnapped by a Mexican gardener from Judge Miller’s household in Santa Clara Valley and sold as a sled dog for the Klondike gold rush, Buck undergoes a couple of different human ownerships before his fateful encounter with Thornton. He has experienced “a working partnership,” “a sort of pompous guardianship,” and “a stately and dignified friendship” with his previous owners; yet “love that was feverish and burning, that was adoration, that was

madness, it had taken John Thornton to arouse” (60). Interpretations of Buck’s relation to Thornton in London criticism, as Michael Lundblad succinctly summarizes, “tend to choose between either an emphasis on human sexual allegory dressed up as animal representation or an assertion of ‘realistic’ animal stories devoid of interspecies sexuality” (Lundblad 49). Critics such as Jonathan Auerbach and Scott Derrick see the passionate relationship between a male dog and a male human as a disguise of London’s homoerotic desire, following Mark Seltzer’s famous designation of London’s canine heroes as “men in furs” (Seltzer 166). To read Buck as a male human wearing a canine mask is tempting, especially in the light of the term *wolf* as fin-de-siècle sexual slang referring to a working-class man who plays a dominant role in male-male sexual acts.<sup>17</sup> Doubtlessly, London’s rendition of the relationship between Buck and Thornton, both referred to by male gender pronouns, constitutes one of the most explicit male-to-male erotic attachments in works of twentieth-century American literature. Their physical intimacy, in which, for instance, Thornton’s “caressing hand” puts Buck’s “[e]very part, brain and body, nerve tissue, and fibre, . . . keyed to the most exquisite pitch” and makes “each hair discharge[ ] its pent magnetism at the contact” (*Call* 77-78), sometimes approximates a “come-hither excerpt from the back cover of a torrid work of gay fiction” (Garber 120).<sup>18</sup>

As Lundblad forcibly argues, however, such readings risk missing the erotic possibilities that London’s rendition of interspecies intimacy offers, which resist “the condensation of [sexual] meaning within the homosexual/heterosexual binary” (Lundblad 66). Sensual pleasure exchanged between Buck and Thornton, in contrast to the genital-centric organization of object-choice based sexuality, relies heavily on “the pleasure of touch or contact,” such as

“petting, stroking, snuggling, kissing, scratching, touching in nongenital areas, etc.” (Lundblad 70, 68). Lundblad’s reading of Buck and Thornton’s mutual embrace eloquently articulates London’s description of the interspecies relation as something that object-choice based sexuality fails to take into account.<sup>19</sup> Considering that London unabashedly calls Buck and Thornton’s definitionally infertile relationship “love” in the same year as the publication of *The Kempton-Wace Letters*, we must understand *The Call of Wild* to forge a counter narrative to turn of the century pro-procreative family ideology and to claim its own erotics. In other words, London could yield to the concept of love only in the absence of its procreative potential: inter-species love for London constitutes an antithesis to intra-species love as an instrument for racial propagation.

Precisely because of its infertility, love between a dog and a man provides London an idyllic model of relatedness unmediated by racial obligation. Through interspecies intimacy dissociated from procreative conjugality, London conceives an alternative sociality akin to totemic kinship: the relationality in which a non-human animal and a human obliterate the species lines as members belonging to the same clan, constituting one entity. Thornton becomes “the ideal master” for Buck, as well as for his other dogs Skeet and Nig, because “he saw to the welfare of his [dogs] as if they were his own children, because he could not help it.” For Thornton, the dogs constitute his familial kin, even though they are not his kind. As such, he communicates with them transcending the species line: “He never forgot a kindly greeting or a cheering word, and to sit down for a long talk with them (‘gas’ he called it) was as much his delight as theirs” (60). Though such intercourse, Thornton and his dogs, especially Buck, develop what London calls a “communion,” in which a strong affective current magnetizes and

synchronizes them both (61). Even when Buck sits at a distance, “the strength of Buck’s gaze would draw John Thornton’s head around, and he would return the gaze, without speech, his heart shining out of his eyes as Buck’s heart shone out”: “such was the communion in which they lived” (61).

Through such an interspecies communion, London points to a mode of inter-subjective belonging that Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari theorize as “becoming-animal,” laying the groundwork for totemic kinship between humans and non-human animals. In *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980), Deleuze and Guattari conceptualize becoming-animal as “a different order than filiation,” a mode of coming into being that “concerns alliance,” which emanates from “the domain of *symbioses* that bring into play beings of totally different scales and kingdoms” (Deleuze and Guattari 238). Through a shared affective current, Thornton is, in one sense, becoming-dog, attuning himself into a mode of being other than the one that shapes his kind. Yet, his becoming-dog is *not* his becoming a dog; Deleuzo-Guattarian becoming-animal is not a human being actually becoming, or physically transforming into, a non-human animal. Divided by the species line, “it is clear that the human being does not ‘really’ become an animal” (238). Nonetheless, Deleuze and Guattari argue, “[t]he becoming-animal of the human being is real, even if the animal the human being becomes is not” (238). Deleuze and Guattari’s apparent emphasis on the Barthian reality-effect of becoming-animal seduces the reader to understand it as a mode of desire displacing human-identity through imitating or play-acting a non-human animal. Yet they sharply distinguish becoming-animal from mimesis: “A becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit,

an identification” (237). Put differently, becoming-animal is not framed by mimetic desire, for mimesis presupposes discernible entities exchanging their identities.

What, then, is a becoming-animal? Deleuze and Guattari further argue: “a becoming lacks a subject distinct from itself: but also that it has no term, since its term in turn exists only as taken up in another becoming of which it is the subject, and which coexists, forms a block, with the first” (238). In short, Deleuzo-Guattarian becoming-animal happens in-between distinguishable subjects. It points toward an ever-transitional mode of being that has no settled term to it. As they further argue, such states of indifferenciation of becoming-animal, where “one is no longer a definite being distinguished from other beings,” are effected by what they call an “*unnatural participation*” (240 original emphasis). Unnatural participations, alternately called “unnatural nuptials,” have their own erotics: the unnatural participation of becoming-animal has a generative potential, constituting a different modality of “a peopling, a propagation” other than “filiation or hereditary production” (240, 241). Instead of “the great molar powers of family, career, and conjugality” that attempt to consolidate beings as autonomous subjects, becoming-animal entails the decomposition of subjectivity; yet the decomposition of subjectivity generates a mode of inter-subjectivity through the “circulation of impersonal affects” (233). What is at stake in becoming-animal is “affectability that is no longer that of subjects” (258). Put differently, becoming-animal entails a willingness to be affected, to be infiltrated, and to be reconfigured by other beings.

Interspecies intimacy in *The Call of the Wild* is figured in terms of such unnatural participations. Thornton and Buck are affected by each other to alter themselves, the former becoming-dog and the latter becoming-man, forming a communion that appears to other

humans “uncanny” (*Call* 63). As Thornton is gradating into a canine mode of being, communicating with his dog companions and joining in their “all sorts of ridiculous games,”

Buck also comes “into a new existence” (59):

Buck knew no greater joy than that rough embrace and the sound of murmured oaths, and at each jerk back and forth it seemed that his heart would be shaken out of his body so great was its ecstasy. And when, released, he sprang to his feet, his mouth laughing, his eyes eloquent, his throat vibrant with unuttered sound, and in that fashion remained without movement, John Thornton would reverently exclaim, “God! you can all but speak!” (*Call* 60)

At stake is not only Thornton’s perception of Buck’s approximation to his own, just short of the capacity for speech. What is remarkable about this passage is that Buck’s sensual joy, generated by the Thornton’s magnetic caress, is figured in terms of “ecstasy” that shakes his “heart . . . out of his body.” Like Olive Chancellor’s coveted “ecstasy of martyr[dom],” Buck’s ecstasy is marked by a shade of death—or a modality of being beside oneself—which used to happen to him only in the bloody chase of other animals. While hunting inspired “the cry of Life plunging down from Life’s apex in the grip of Death,” now Thornton’s caress evokes “an ecstasy that marks the summit of life, and beyond which life cannot rise” (34, 33). “This ecstasy, this forgetfulness of living” constitutes “the paradox [of] living,” for it is an ecstasy that marks the acme of life achievable only in the total oblivion thereof. Replacing hunting with Thornton’s caress, Buck, in his love for Thornton, becomes ecstatic, ceasing to be himself. Thus a man becoming-dog and a dog becoming-man forge an unnatural nuptial, inaugurating a “peopling” free of hereditary production. Such interspecies communion, becoming-animal, proffers a model for the totemic organization of white men as Teutonic “Sons of the Wolf.” Put differently, London’s conflicted attitude toward racial propagation finds its utopian vision in a biologically sterile, yet affectively charged, interspecies love.

To recapitulate the argument, London's search for an enabling trope for white breeding's potency emanates from a desire to disown his own father and more importantly the hereditary relation degenerating old American stock. In so doing, he seeks recourse to an atavistic reversion to the mythic Teutonic, using the Northland as its medium. In the process of activating such atavism and unifying vigorous white men of diverse origins under Northland Teutonism, London takes up Alaska Natives' totemism as a non-hereditary logic of human generation and organization, in which man becomes the "Son of the Wolf." Still, the virile race conceived as such needs to prove itself capable of self-propagating; for that was, after all, the very purpose of the regimentation of a new white race in lieu of the weakling old American stock. Eugenic breeding of the fittest could be one answer, in which conjugality is nothing other than the instrument of racial propagation; yet London was hopelessly romantic, unable to give up on the affective intensity that is called love. As a result, London imaginatively takes up interspecies kinship as a venue of conception that displaces reproductive genealogy even more radically than atavism already does in its disruption of continuity while retaining love's possibility. Such is the genesis—or rather "becoming"—of the Son of the Wolf.

Yet London's utopian vision implodes. In order for London to have Buck become the Wolf, the totem of the Teutonic, he must prove Buck capable of conquering all other races like the people he is to lead. This conquest means that Buck must destroy Alaska Natives, from whom London has adopted the very method of totemic peopling. In one sense, London structures Thornton's aptitude for becoming-animal, his affectability to the modes of being other than that of his own kind, through his close likeness to American Indians: "John Thornton asked little of man or nature. He was unafraid of the wild. . . . Being in no haste, Indian fashion,

he hunted his dinner in the course of the day's travel; and if he failed to find it, like the Indian, he kept on travelling, secure in the knowledge that sooner or later he would come to it" (71). Because of his idealized proximity to the wild and Indian-ness (which are synonymous in the fin-de-siècle public imagination), Thornton could be freely affected by Buck and become the forbearer of the totemic Son of the Wolf clan. At the same time, such resemblance to American Indians mean that he, too, must be slain. London could not quite have Buck kill Thornton; hence a fictive Alaska Native tribe, the Yeehats, vicariously kills Thornton, and Buck annihilates them in revenge, wallowing in the blood of "the noblest game of all" (83).

As John Bruni argues, in this sense, Buck's massacre of the Yeehats stages "the violence of United States history, the conquest of the frontier restaged in London's novel by the slaughter of the native inhabitants of the land" (Bruni 25). Just as the West functioned as the breeding ground for the "Americans" shedding its Anglo heritage through their bloody contact with American Indians, the Northland spawns the Teutonic Wolf through the reenactment of Indian massacre. In the process, the dog becoming-man loses his human mate who was becoming-dog; yet, it is the loss of Thornton that consummates Buck's unnatural nuptial with him. The death of Thornton "left a great void in him, somewhat akin to hunger, but a void which ached and ached, and which food could not fill" (83). To fill the void in his body, he howls, joining the "mournful howl" of the wolf packs (76). For the dog to become the Wolf and conduct "a song of the younger world, which is the song of pack," a strain that is "pitched in minor key, with long-drawn wailings and half-sobs," he has to learn the sorrow of the breed, and he internalizes it only through the loss of his love (86, 31).

### “If the Writer Is a Sorcerer”

The Wolf fights back the Bear, when the Bear accuses the Wolf of nature-faking, taunting him for humanizing his canine companions. London writes: “I have been guilty of writing two animal-stories—two books about dogs. The writing of these two stories, on my part, was in truth a protest against the ‘humanizing’ of animals” (“The Other Animals” 109). Becoming the Bear by appropriating the identity of the bear he slaughtered, Teddy Roosevelt could not understand London’s becoming-Wolf other than in the limited framework of mimesis. London writes: “He may know something of statecraft and of big-game shooting; he may be able to kill a deer when he sees it and to measure it and weigh it after he has shot it” (110). Roosevelt might know about the danger of race suicide, and he might attempt to breed a renewed vigorous white race, revivifying the weakling old American stock by re-inculcating them with the intra- and inter-species hierarchies through hunting; but he does not understand what it means to be affected by other beings to the extent that one is thoroughly remade. Roosevelt does not know the nuptial blessing of unnatural participation that has its own breeding potential: “No, President Roosevelt does not understand evolution, and he does not seem to have made much of an attempt to understand evolution” (110).

London knows something about evolution; or rather he seems to know what Deleuze and Guattari call the “involution” (Deleuze and Guattari 238). If “hereditary filiative evolution” means a lineality in which beings “go from something less differentiated to something more differentiated,” involution signals a haunting liminality effected “between heterogeneous” entities (238). Involution requires beings “to involve” with each other, “form[ing] a block that runs its own line ‘between’ the terms in play and beneath assignable relations” (239). A dog

does not evolve into a man; affected by Thornton, involved with and in him, Buck is becoming-man and later becoming-Wolf, hollowed out of his existence and remaining in ever-transitional states of inter-species being. Such is the ecstasy of interspecies love, a “complete forgetfulness that one is alive” (*Call* 33).

But Buck is not the only being that is torn asunder by that ecstasy. Channeling the ecstasy coming to Buck when he is “leading the pack, sounding the old wolf-cry,” London abruptly says: “This ecstasy, this forgetfulness of living, comes to the artist, caught up and out of himself in a sheet of flame” (33). Merging into Buck, London is also ecstatically becoming-Wolf. But in such a becoming the writer fatally flirts with death. Deleuze and Guattari say:

If the writer is a sorcerer, it is because writing is a becoming, writing is traversed by strange becomings that are not becomings-writer, but becomings-rat, becomings-insect, becomings-wolf, etc. We will have to explain why. Many suicides by writers are explained by these unnatural participations, these unnatural nuptials. Writers are sorcerers because they experience the animal as the only population before which they are responsible in principle. The German preromantic Karl Philipp Moritz feels responsible not for the calves that die but before the calves that die and give him the incredible feeling of an unknown Nature—*affect*. For the affect is not a personal feeling, nor is it a characteristic; it is the effectuation of a power of the pack that throws the self into upheaval and makes it reel. Who has not known the violence of these animal sequences, which uproot one from humanity, if only for an instant, making one scrape at one’s bread like a rodent or giving one the yellow eyes of a feline? (Deleuze and Guattari 240)

If becoming requires the willingness to be affected, that is, to be infiltrated by other beings so much so that one is thoroughly remade, the writer betrothed in such unnatural nuptial of becoming is ready to dispossess himself, even to the degree of death.

As I mentioned earlier, Jack London died at the age of forty of a morphine overdose in 1916. He had long suffered from uremia by the time he died. Whether it was a suicide or not is unknowable.<sup>20</sup> But Martin Eden, modeled largely after London himself, was one such writer, for whom writing is a becoming—a becoming flirting with death. The “bulldog,” as he is

nicknamed in the novel, surely is of the spectral lineage of the Sons of the Wolf. He is an exemplar of the Teutonic ethos of “the poet warrior, the thinker, the freeman,” and his ascent into bourgeois whiteness would imbue the enervated race with renewed vigor (Chamberlain xlviii). At the same time, like John Thornton in *The Call of the Wild*, Martin is “a good Indian,” as his friend Joe calls him (*Martin* 206). Just as Thornton’s romanticized proximity to American Indians enabled him to be affected by Buck, Martin is marked by the extreme affectability: “[u]nder that muscled body of his he was a mass of quivering sensibilities” (*Martin* 34). What distinguishes him as a writer is “the gift of sympathy,” an ability to channel with beings beside himself (33).

With his “fluid organism, swiftly adjustable, capable of flowing into and filling all sorts of nooks and crannies,” he undergoes myriad becomings (60). He is irresistibly magnetized by “saints in slime,” re-producing in his writing the lives of those who live in the midst of “cesspools of iniquity” (168): “the savage taskmaster, awful of punishment and awful of reward, faithless and whimsical, demanding terrible patience and heartbreaking days and nights of toil, offering the blazing sunlight glory or dark death at the end of thirst and famine or of the long drag and monstrous delirium of rotting fever” (170). Through writing, Martin Eden becomes ecstatically in sync with those who are uprooted from humanity, those who are trodden under the ethereal bourgeois whiteness he once coveted and finally achieves. And so Martin Eden kills himself, because, for a sorcerer-writer, being affected means to be held responsible for that incredible feeling engendered in the face of the death of others. But in his death he is felicitously pervaded by “a power of the pack that throws the self into upheaval and makes it

reel” (Deleuze and Guattari 240); such was the power of the wolf pack that the Wolf of the Progressive Era attempted to wield against the Teddy Bear the Patriarch.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> For instance, the author of the editorial of *New York Times* expressed his disfavor after the publication of Roosevelt’s “Nature Fakers”: “Thinking it, as we do, something less than becoming for the, or, rather, for a, President of the United States thus to start what he must have know would be a bitter personal controversy over a matter of no great importance” (qtd. in Lutts 109). In the words of Lyman Abott, at stake was not whether or not Roosevelt is right in his argument; rather, “[i]t is much more material that the president of the United States should not add to the controversies which are essential to his political leadership other controversies which have nothing to do with that leadership” (qtd. in Lutts 121).

<sup>2</sup> On London’s Wolf-identification, see Reesman, 61-62, Auerbach 9, Lundblad 49. As is well known, the figure of the “wolf” assumes an unparalleled significance both in London’s oeuvre and his private life. London adopted the nickname, “Wolf,” which was given by one of his most intimate friends, George Sterling. He signed his letter as “Wolf” to Sterling and his second wife Charmian. He called his dream house in Beauty Ranch “Wolf House,” creating a custom-made wolf-head insignia to mark his literary property.

<sup>3</sup> Though he was called “Johnny” at home, London adopted “Jack” as his penname from his nursemaid Virginia Prentiss’s pet name for him. The Prentisses were African American neighbors of the Londons, and Virginia, or “Aunt Jennie” as London called her, became particularly close to young London. For detailed accounts of London’s relation to Virginia Prentiss, see, for instance, Reesman Chapter 1.

<sup>4</sup> London’s alignment with scientific racism has been understood almost exclusively as a manifestation of his Anglo-Saxonism. For instance, even in Jeanne Reesman’s extensive and insightful reading of London’s conflicted attitude towards the race ideologies of his time in *Jack London’s Racial Lives*, London’s complex identification with white supremacy is understood in the framework of Anglo-Saxonism.

<sup>5</sup> For the detailed analysis of Ripley’s impact on Grant, see Spiro Chapter 5.

<sup>6</sup> John Bruni also focuses on the concept of atavism in his analysis of *The Call of the Wild*, arguing that atavism in the novel functions as “the nostalgic desire for recovery of the lost frontier and a hope that the ‘frontier spirit’ might be resurrected” (Bruni 27).

<sup>7</sup> For London’s discovery of his illegitimacy, see Joan London, 134-135. The incident was covered in an article published in *San Francisco Chronicle* June 4, 1875, titled “A Discarded Wife: Why Mrs. Chaney Twice Attempted Suicide,” which is reprinted in Kingman 15-17. Chaney gives his own account on Flora’s alleged suicide attempts in his second letter to London, suggesting that these were Flora’s imposture (Kingman 20).

<sup>8</sup> Chaney wrote twice to London, suggesting London's potential fathers in the first letter (June 4, 1897) and detailing Flora's "loose character" and promiscuity in the second (June 14, 1897). Both of letters are reprinted in Kingman 18-21.

<sup>9</sup> London's strict discipline about his writing quota has often been pointed out by critics, discussed often in the framework of mass-producing ethos of the Progressive Era. Auerbach, for instance, reads it as "a kind of literary Taylorism," arguing that London's mechanical writing habits represent his conflicted attitudes toward capitalism (Auerbach 22). Mark Seltzer sees London's mechanical production of literary works as a form of "nonbiological and autonomous reproduction" that attempts to replace heterosexual biological reproduction, analyzing "an erotics of discipline" in London's works (33, 169).

<sup>10</sup> The bill was passed shortly with the strong support of the then-President and Grant's old friend, Theodore Roosevelt, and became one of the earliest instances of the wilderness protection acts.

<sup>11</sup> The first usage of the word "kinship" in *OED* is in 1833 and is used in the following sense: "Relationship by descent; consanguinity." The second definition is more closely related to anthropological discourse, "The recognized ties of relationship, by descent, marriage, or ritual, that form the basis of social organization" and sees its first usage in 1866.

<sup>12</sup> Though it is unclear which Alaska Native people London encountered in the Northland and to what degree he was familiar with their kinship structures, some Alaska Natives, especially the Eskimo-speaking people and the Inuit were "[n]otoriously flexible as well as inventive" about their postnatal kinship practice, which may be repeatedly constructed as well as deconstructed over the course of their lives. (Sahlins 9).

<sup>13</sup> Progressive Indian policies performed just such a regulatory impulse of heteronormalization, in which racial identity and property holding were inextricable. As epitomized in the Dawes General Allotment Act in 1887, passed under the presidency of Grover Cleveland and amended repeatedly in 1891, 1898, and 1906, Progressive Indian politics strove to end the native practice of collective landholding and inculcate the notion of private property in American Indians. Dividing native territory into plots and allotting them to American Indians as private properties, the Dawes Act endowed American citizenship to those who abided by the arrangement. Yet citizenship was conferred upon them only in exchange for the dissolution of their traditional kinship network; for the allotments were "parceled out to each 'head of a family'" (Rifkin 153). In the same way as their territory was divided into smaller plots, tribal kinship was atomized into "families" defined by consanguinity. Instead of the traditional name shared by their people, each family was assigned an individual patronymic surname "to keep identification and property succession clear" (Cott 121). In the wake of *Plessy*, racial heritage figured in "blood" was one such component of property succession. As exemplified in the series of anti-miscegenation laws against American Indians enacted in the Progressive Era, American Indians were increasingly quarantined for racialization in the Progressive discourse of race that fused patrilineal property succession and blood line. Put differently, insofar as the Progressive concept of race "definitionally relies on the couple-centered notion of identity/inheritance that

always-already depends on the image of conjugal domesticity,” it proscribed alternative modes of collectivity based on kinship as that which disturbs the definitional contour of race (Rifkin, *When* 36).

<sup>14</sup> As Auerbach writes, *The Kempton-Wace Letters* is “probably the least-read work” of London (149). Auerbach’s *Male Call* is an important exception, dedicating a chapter to the book.

<sup>15</sup> Strunsky’s letter to London itself “presumably no longer survives” (Auerbach 271). According to Auerbach, it was Flora Welse who informed Strunsky of the impending birth of London’s second daughter, Bessie “Becky” London, who was born in a month and a half after London’s letter.

<sup>16</sup> As I noted in Chapter 1, since the mid-eighteenth century, “species” was in many cases largely defined by interfertility. Although there are cases of inter-species breeding like mules, their sterility was often regarded as a sign of reproductive failure.

<sup>17</sup> For a detailed account of the “wolf,” see George Chauncey *Gay New York* pp. 65-98. Both Jonathan Auerbach and Michael Lundblad referred to this sexual figuration, relating it to London’s fascination with the wolf. For Auerbach’s reading of the “wolf” in relation to Wolf Larsen in *The Sea-Wolf*, see *Male Call* p.198. Lundblad’s reading of the “wolf,” also drawing on Chauncey (50), becomes a little more nuanced in his overall argument, putting an accent on the wolf’s non-identitarian figuration before the calcification of “homosexual” identity, using it as a springboard to theorize a form of sexuality that does “not depend upon the object choice” (68).

<sup>18</sup> Though Garber’s reading of London’s canine stories is rather brief (pp.120-121), her *Dog Love* takes the position that interspecies love between a human and a dog “is not an evasion or a substitution” for intra-human relationship (14). For Garber, “loving” a canine companion complicates our “conventional assumption about ‘love,’ ‘sex,’ and the nature of desire,” begging a question: “In *human* society, why should it be the case that love and sex are presumed to be part of the same relationship”? (Garber 124).

<sup>19</sup> Such an organization of sensual pleasure, the embrace by which Buck and Thornton reach “communion” (*Call* 61), Lundblad terms as “mutual folding,” drawing on Darwin’s theorization of sensual pleasures of non-human animals: “Mutual folding could be suggestive in many aspects: first, a coming together, a desire on the part of two beings to *enfold* or encircle each other by touching, with a recognition that neither can completely enfold or encompass the other; second, a mutual desire to fold oneself *into* each other, to be folded into a new entity that is more than simply the combination of two essentialized beings; third, a giving up of oneself, a folding, as in a card game, suggesting a willingness to surrender to the course of the game without needing to win; fourth, an openness to being folded or changed in potentially dramatic ways through contact with another; and fifth, a readiness or a desire for the “music” of this mutual folding to provoke pleasure, even to the point of yelling out in delight” (Lundblad 71)

<sup>20</sup> London prescribed the self-willed death for the hero of his semi-autobiographical novel, according to the fashion he attempted to kill himself in his youth. *John Barleycorn* (1913), London's autobiographical account of his long-term alcoholism, describes his attempt at self-drowning at the age of seventeen. It was caused by what London calls "the pitiless, spectral syllogisms of the white logic" that John Barleycorn—satanic personification of alcohol that keeps seducing London—sends to him (*John* 940): "The water was delicious. It was a man's way to die. John Barleycorn changed the tune he played in my drink-maddened brain. Away with tears and regret. It was a hero's death, and by the hero's own hand and will" (993).

CHAPTER 5  
GERTRUDE STEIN'S MELTING POT:  
THE EXCRETORY PLEASURE OF *THE MAKING OF AMERICANS*

The *Pot Au Feu* of New Immigration

When Henry James returned to the United States in 1904 for a lecture tour, he recognized the familiar the specter of race suicide in his home country, which otherwise little resembled his youthful recollections. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the epicenter of the collective hysteria over the extinction of the “American race” shifted from neurasthenia-infested New England to the immigration hub of Ellis Island. In *The American Scene* (1907), James recounts his stopover at Ellis Island, imagining that it would give any visitor a “new chill in his heart” as if he saw a “ghost in his supposedly safe old house” (83). The two hours at Ellis Island fills James with “a haunting wonder as to what might be becoming of us all, ‘typically,’ ethnically, and thereby physiognomically, linguistically, *personally*.” What he witnessed was a “ceaseless process of the recruiting of our race, of the replenishment of our huge national *pot au feu*, of the introduction of fresh—of perpetually fresh so far it isn’t perpetually stale—foreign matter into our heterogeneous system” (62 italics original).

James’s *pot au feu* metaphor, in which the old American “stock” is simmered with a “hotch-potch of racial ingredients,” immediately reminds us of Israel Zangwill’s 1908 play that popularized the term, *the melting pot* (184). In itself, the national figuration of a crucible that homogenizes miscellaneous human materials was nothing new, dating back its origin at least to the early nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Yet *The Melting Pot*’s invocation of the large cauldron with which the “great Alchemist” fuses “Celt and Latin, Slav and Teuton, Greek and Syrian—black and yellow” assumed a new potency for the nation seething with the controversy over the

so-called new immigration (Zangwill 184).<sup>2</sup> The beginning of the new century saw the unprecedented influx of immigrants, totaling 8,795,386 people in the first decade alone. In 1905, immigration passed the million mark per year, and each inspector at the Ellis Island station reportedly “examined between 400 and 500 immigrants” a day (Barkan and LeMay, 47). Indigenous white American’s relation to new immigrants in this period was very different than it had been in the 1880s. By the end of the nineteenth century, Chinese immigration that had first provoked the racial panic was effectively put to a halt by the successive enactments of the Chinese Exclusion Acts. The termination of Chinese immigration, however, did not bring peace for native-born Americans. 1896 marked a demographic watershed: for the first time southern and eastern European immigrants exceeded those immigrants belonging to the “Great Gothic family”—namely, British, German and Scandinavian—the group that supposedly constituted the old American stock (Zolberg 187).

The faces of newcomers looked familiar enough for the natives when compared to the physiognomically foreign “Asiatics.” The presence of new European immigrants felt uncanny nonetheless; they looked familiar on the surface yet culturally, linguistically, felt so alien. In the words of a leading education reformer of the time, Ellwood Cubberly, newly immigrated “southern and eastern Europeans are a very different from the north Europeans who preceded them. Illiterate, docile, lacking in self-reliance and initiative and not possessing Anglo-Teutonic conceptions of law, order and government, their coming has served to dilute tremendously our national stock, and to corrupt our civic life” (qtd. in Roediger 19). The great mass of southern and eastern Europeans thus prompted the creation of what David R Roediger calls “intrawhite racial divisions” (Roediger 50). Fierce controversies occurred whether the census should divide

European immigrants into “Teutonic, Iberian, Celtic, and Slavic ‘race or peoples, or more properly subdivisions of race’” (Roediger 17). Beginning with the publication of Jacob Riiss’s *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), the ghastly living conditions of racialized white immigrants was recurrently documented, fueling heated debates over whether they could—and should—be integrated into the American racial and social body.

James’s narration of his encounters with immigrants attests to the way in which the age-old trope of the body politic acquired a new tactile verisimilitude around the turn of the century. With the sense of a vehement foreign-body reaction, James’s culinary take on the melting pot imagery leads him to conceive assimilation as a “visible act of ingurgitation on the part of our body politic and social” (*American* 82). Once the voracious social body ingests “gross aliens” into its system, the supposed American self is constantly threatened by the “affirmed claim of the alien, however immeasurably alien, to share in one’s supreme relation,” or “the idea of intimacy of relation” to his country (83). What happens to the formerly “privileged person,” the one who once firmly believed in his American identity, is a “sense of dispossession” (84): “Who and what is an alien, when it comes to that, in a country peopled from the first under the jealous eye of history?—peopled, that is, by migrations at once extremely recent, perfectly traceable and urgently required. . . . Which is the American, by these scant measures?—which is *not* the alien, over a large part of the country at least, and where does one put a finger on the dividing line . . . ?” (121). The placement of new immigrants proved grueling, for they did not merely live in abject poverty; they were the *abject* of the body social—neither subject nor object, as Julia Kristeva theorizes it, “a piece of filth, waste, or dung” which disturbs the border of the self and the other (Kristeva 4). The foreign matter the

American body social swallowed thus threatens to melt down the definition of the American race from within: “the abject permeates me, I become abject” (Kristeva 11).

Gertrude Stein’s *The Making of Americans: Being a History of a Family’s Progress* is, much as James’s *The American Scene*, animated by the questions of American identity amidst the New Immigration. Written intermittently from 1903 to 1911 in Paris, the text stares back at the author’s native land she had recently left behind, wherein American race is made anew through the gluttonous ingurgitation of the body politic as a process of abjection. “The old people in a new world, the new people made out of the old, that is the story that I mean to tell,” the narrator declares in a deceptively artless manner on the first page of the narrative, and the manifested attempt seems easily achievable. For in the land made out of immigrants from its outset, the history of “a real American, one whose tradition it has taken scarcely sixty years to create” will be complete if “[w]e . . . realise our parents, remember our grandparents and know ourselves” (*Making* 3).

Stein’s 1000-page magnum opus that supposedly chronicles the three-generation histories of two immigrant families, the Herslands and the Dehnings, betrays the initial premise. As Ernest Hemingway wryly puts it, *The Making of Americans* “began magnificently, went on very well for a long way with stretches of great brilliance and then went on endlessly in repetitions that a more conscientious and less lazy writer would have put in the waste basket” (Hemingway 40). Starting as a nineteenth-century narrative of “a family’s progress,” *The Making of Americans* gradually destroys the narrative trajectory it sets for itself. Instead, it self-defeatingly aspires to become “the history of every one,” “every one who ever can or is or was or will be living” (*Making* 191, 171). Purportedly engineering the system of the universal typology of

what the narrator calls the “bottom nature,” which consists of two character types “dependent independent” and “independent dependent,” *The Making of Americans* endlessly digresses from the family saga, trying to encompass every being in this characterlogy.

Several critics have read the text’s dismantling of the traditional narrative of “progress” by the idiosyncratic typological project in relation to new immigration. For instance, Priscilla Wald reads the text as an assimilation narrative, explicating its deliberately frustrating incomprehensibility as that which performs “the need to accommodate the immigrants within a familiar narrative of cultural identity and the eagerness of many immigrants to be thus accommodated” (Wald 239). With a similar gesture, Sarah Wilson argues that with its totalizing impetus to include “every one” in the characterology, *The Making of Americans* “represents a paradigmatic melting-pot text: in it, a story of immigration becomes the occasion for Stein’s radical modernist deformation of conventional narratives” (Wilson 165). Stein’s stylistic experiment reflects the shifting conception of selfhood in the midst of the violent change in the American social body, which James recounted in *The American Scene* as the blurring of the American identity.

While critics compellingly situate *The Making of Americans*—and by extension, the making of American modernism—within the fin-de-siècle immigration debates, they are strangely reticent about Stein’s own liminality in this discourse. That Stein was “a white, middle-class woman” who writes about immigrant experience “self-consciously from within her limitation” is, technically, not a misnomer (Wald 242). Born in Allegheny, Pennsylvania in 1874, Stein was an American by birthright even though her family moved to Vienna when she was eight months old and stayed in Europe for five years. Being a granddaughter of

German-Jewish Mayer Stein who immigrated to the United States in 1841, she was a “white” American woman under the eye of U.S. census, which “counted the foreign-born and the children of the foreign-born as white, but in separate categories from whites whose parents were U.S.-born. However, the third-generation immigrant disappeared into the ‘white American’ census category” (Roediger 20).<sup>3</sup> Stein’s Jewishness is, as Mary Damon rightly suggests, “a topic that is best approached obliquely” (Damon 492).<sup>4</sup> Coming from a relatively well-to-do, successfully assimilated German-Jewish family, her affiliation with Jewishness—whatever it signifies—seems tangential, especially when compared with the first-generation Jewish-American authors of her time: Belarusian-born Abraham Cahan and Mary Antin, Polish-born Anzia Yezierska, to name a few. With a few exceptions, Jewishness rarely became a visible subject matter in Stein’s writing.<sup>5</sup> As Amy Feinstein points out, even in Alice Toklas’s fictional autobiography Stein wrote, “despite its account of both their family histories, their Jewish roots are conspicuously absent” (Feinstein, “Looking,” 48).<sup>6</sup>

Still, I will contend that the absent presence of Jewishness constitutes a leitmotiv in Stein’s writings, especially in *The Making of Americans*, which situates her within the genealogy of Jewish authors of the Progressive Era. While the official narrative of the U.S. census made Stein’s Jewishness invisible, the three decades she lived in the United States did not, and Stein was positioned in-between visible and invisible Jewishness. By the time the Steins returned from Europe and settled in Oakland, the massive arrival of Jews from Czarist Russia and Eastern Europe slowly started with the beginning of government-sponsored pogroms in Russia in 1881. As a result, the “Jewish population rose from around 270,000 in 1877 to over million by 1927” (Barkan and LeMay 41). Though many Jewish immigrants

imagined America as a safe haven, their “Promised Land”—to use the title of Mary Antin’s 1912 novel—was not unaffected by Europe’s renewed anti-Semitism. As John Higham documents, violence against Russo- and eastern-European Jewish immigrants in the United States started as early as in the 1880s and became rampant at the end of the century. Significantly, the revival of the Shylock stereotype in the midst of the gold-standard controversy “tended to obscure distinctions between the relatively well-to-do German Jews and the newcomers,” creating a national hysteria that the country “lay at the mercy of the Jews” of whatever national origins (Higham 93). One factor that exacerbated the national unease toward Jewish-Americans was their semantic instability as a group. As Jonathan Freedman points out, the so-called “Jewish question” indeed was a question, a definitional one: “If they were members of a religion, why were so many freethinkers or converts? If Jewishness was defined by language, why did they speak so many different tongues? If they were members of a race, why did they look so different from each other? If a nation, how to think of them as citizens?” (Freedman 336).

In the turn-of-the-century American context, this lack of nation-state fueled anti-Semitism, as Jewish immigration was imagined as a form of Zionism to some, including Henry James, who describes what he witnessed on the Lower East Side as “the Hebrew conquest of New York” (*American* 129). For James, more than immigrants of any other ethnicity, it was Jews that embodied the fear of race suicide: the “dominant note” of the “dense Yiddish quarter” was “multiplication, multiplication of everything,” and in particular, “the children swarmed above all—here was multiplication with a vengeance” (127). The “ubiquity of children” assumed an

“excess of lurid meaning” for James as one of the sterile old American stock: “they were all there for race,” becoming automatons working for “Israel mechanically pushing through” (128).

“Multiplication, multiplication of everything” is the dominant note also of *The Making of Americans*. But the nature of multiplication in Stein’s epic characterology is not the biological propagation of the Jewish race that James fear. Rather, with its massiveness both in terms of its physicality and of its ambition, *The Making of Americans* exemplifies the ethos of the huge melting pot, which tries to assimilate the multitudes by dissolving various ethnic markers, including the writer’s own. In this sense, Stein’s imagination is not unlike that of Anglo-Jewish Israel Zangwill, whose melting-pot rhetoric of assimilation was located at the center of the national imaginary.<sup>7</sup>

Yet, I will argue, Stein’s version of melting pot is neither an alchemical nor a culinary one: it is an excretory pot filled with abject *merde*. In what follows, taking the cue from Lisa Ruddick’s insightful reading that the repetitive style of the text enacts “the primitive pleasure people take in filling up with and excreting matter,” I will contend that *The Making of American* stages the process of immigrant assimilation as the narrative act of digestive assimilation, by which “Americans” are produced excretorily (Ruddic 81). In one sense, Hemingway was right in his wry commentary that the major part of the book belongs to the “waste basket” and Stein, so to speak, “shit out” half a million words that constitute *The Making of Americans*. Yet what he probably did not understand was that Stein makes *The Making of Americans* wasteful with a vengeance, as Stein’s coprophilic poetics rescripts Americans as the waste matter produced out of gluttonous body politics. Stein’s erotic investment in the abject waste stems not only from her insidiously racialized status, but also from her same-sex desire; for “queer bodies are often

degenerate and wasteful by definition, differentiated from the reproductive telos of . . . body politics, and produced by the purgative movements of a heteronormative social order”

(Stockton xix). By sabotaging its manifested genealogical endeavor to recount the national history through “a history of a family’s progress,” *The Making of Americans* envisions the production of Americans enabled not through heterosexual reproduction, but as an excretory production through an ungendered pleasure organ: the anus.

In the first section, I will trace the novel’s complicated production as that which reflects Stein’s ambivalence toward her Jewishness and same-sex desire. While Stein initially equated Jewishness with the heterosexual family system, her growing awareness to her same-sex desire leads her to dismantle the original 1903 narrative of “a family’s progress.” Instead, in the final version completed in 1911, she envisions excretion as an unsexed production. non-contingent of the reproduction of race . Stein’s excretory imagination is, I argue, best understood within the context of the rise of psychoanalysis, which is contemporaneous to the production of *The Making of Americans*. Paying particular attention to Sigmund Freud’s conceptualization of anal pregnancy as a disavowal of the castration complex, my second section investigates the fin-de-siècle double-formation of “homosexuality” and Jewishness as “race.” By examining a parallelism between Freud’s and Stein’s expurgation of Jewish racial markers from their works, I will argue that Stein’s conception of Jewishness departed from understanding blood relation as its basis. Instead, I contend that she takes definitional instability as the source of Jewishness. In the final section, I will examine how the excretory pleasure of *The Making of Americans* culminates in the death of David Hersland III. In killing himself by “deciding to be eating only one thing,” I will argue, David aspires to become a disembodied and thus universal being

(*Making* 865). With this suicide, David Hersland becomes a true American, who exemplifies the ethos of “race suicide.”

### Jewishness and the Making of an American

When Stein started to work on the embryonic form of *The Making of Americans* in the early 1903, she had just begun what she later describes in the book as the “fateful twenty-ninth year” of her life. The beginning of her twenty-ninth year was indeed a “tumultuous” one, in which “all the forces that have been engaged through the years of childhood, adolescence and youth in confused and sometimes angry combat range themselves in ordered ranks” (*Making* 436-37). Having left Johns Hopkins Medical School in 1901 and loitering around in London and New York, she was about to move in to 27 rue de Fleurus, Paris, to join her brother Leo Stein.

As Leon Katz and others have speculated, her initial ambition to become a psychologist—as her former mentor at Radcliffe College William James hoped for her—was aborted at least partly because of her triangular relationship with May Bookstaver and Mabel Haynes at Johns Hopkins.<sup>8</sup> Stein was desperately trying to end her relationship with Bookstaver at the time she scribbled the short story revolving around the life of the Dehnings in her notebook in 1903, which was posthumously published in 1972 as “The Making of Americans.” The frustrated love affair was dramatized in *Q.E.D.*, Stein’s first completed novel written a few months after “The Making of Americans.”<sup>9</sup> Trying to suppress her amorous feelings, Stein’s fictional persona in *Q.E.D.*, *Adele*, tells a Bookstaver figure, Helen: “You have a foolish notion that . . . to cherish the ideals of respectability and decency is to be commonplace and that to be the mother of children is to be low” (*Q.E.D.* 56). What prevents

Adele from acknowledging her attraction to Helen—a pleasure-loving, individualistic, “blooming Anglo-Saxon”—was “the failing of [Adele’s] tribe,” that is, a belief in “strong family affection and great respect for ties of blood” (80, 57, 74).

Though Stein ascribes her fictional counterpart’s initial denial of the same-sex desire to the sense of “the Calvinistic influence that dominates American training,” the roots of Stein’s early alliance to the reproductive familialism would probably be found closer to her understanding of Jewishness (*Q.E.D.* 103). Stein’s 1896 essay written at Radcliffe College—titled “The Modern Jew Who Has Given Up the Faith of His Fathers Can Reasonably and Consistently Believe in Isolation”—advocates for the Jewish “race-feeling,” fiercely condemning Jewish “intermarriage with alien” as “the death-blow of the race” (“The Modern Jew” 423). In order for the Jewish “race” to fulfill its original “great destiny in the sense of being a great power,” that is, to aspire to effect “a nation standing by itself, ethical, civilizing, blessing other nations but apart from them,” Jews in America should not embrace assimilation on a private plane, even if they comingle with Gentiles in the social life (425): “in the sacred precincts of the home, in the close union of family and of kinfolk he must be a Jew with Jews; the Gentile has no place there” (423). Her “race-feeling” is equated with “an enlargement of the family tie,” and it grew as she entered Johns Hopkins, where she encountered anti-Semitism revived and grown rampant in the 1890s (426).<sup>10</sup> In London in 1902, immediately before writing “The Making of Americans” and *Q.E.D.*, she was to be befriended by one of the most prominent spokesmen of World Zionist Organization at that time, Israel Zangwill, who she had praised as an inseminator of “a strong revival of Jewish feeling” in her college essay (424).<sup>11</sup>

In this context, Stein's manifest aim in *The Making of Americans* to chronicle "a family progress respectably lived" will cease to appear to be a mere veneer designed for her modernist dismantling at the outset of her project ("Making" 144, *Making* 33).<sup>12</sup> Rather, it probably was an unfeigned desire to endorse Jewish familialism, what she describes in *Q.E.D.* as "the ideals of respectability and decency" in which "to be the mother of children" would be valued as a means of the preservation of race-feeling. Set in the 1880s, "[t]wenty years" before "the fever to be an Anglo Saxon and a gentleman" had "broken over the land and sport the royal road to this goal was still the pursuit of the scorned few," the 1903 version reflects her anti-assimilationist views ("Making" 137). The original short story opens with an almost identical passage to that in the completed 1911 version: "It has always a rare privilege this of being an American, a real American *and yet* one whose tradition it has taken scarcely sixty years to create" ("Making" 137; italics added). The phrase "and yet" that was to be replaced with a comma in the 1911 version ("a real American, one whose tradition") implies that originally she envisioned a distinction between native-born Americans and Americanized immigrants, and the story to be told is a history of an immigrant family whose Americanization was believed to be achieved in three generations in the official narrative of the nation (*Making* 3).

As Katz points out, the history of the Dehnings originally concerns the experience specifically of European-Jewish immigrants. Stein's notebooks indicate that the Dehnings were modeled after her paternal uncle's family in New York: "the description of 'German' Americanism bore all the features originally attributed to Stein's German-Jewish grandparents" and their descendants, although the word "Jewish" was deleted from her notebooks and the family was described simply as "German" immigrants in the completed draft of the 1903

version (Katz “The First Making” 207).<sup>13</sup> In “The Making of Americans,” the sense of the civilizing mission of the Jewish race observed in Stein’s Radcliffe essay now centers on Jewish familialism. The narrator declares “in the heart of individualistic America” that “straightened bond of family is the one thing always healthy, human, vital,” and for such familialism the Dehnings would provide a model (“Making” 144-45):

we need not turn Chinese but till some more effective method proves itself some process more successful than any we Americans have yet discovered for remaining simple honest and affectionate I recommend you all to laud the bourgeois family life at [the] expense if need to be of the individual and to keep the old world way of being born in a middle class tradition from affectionate honest parents whom you honor for those virtues and so come brother Americans come quickly and for your own soul’s sake and listen while I tell you farther of the Dehning family (145)

Referring to Chinese immigrants, whose fertility and loyalty to their ancestors had caused racial panic in the 1880s, Stein offers the Dehnings’ Jewish version of familialism as a viable alternative to American individualism that had lost “simple honest and affectionate” ways of living. In one sense, her belief in the heterosexual family system grows even stronger in the second version written in the summer of 1906. The second version attempts to novelize the 1903 short story by expanding it into a record of three generations in two families instead of one, with the addition of the Herslands, which is, as Stein herself admits, modeled after her immediate family in East Oakland.<sup>14</sup> In a gesture reminiscent of nineteenth-century narrative convention, the 1906 version links the histories of the two families by marriage in the third generation, Julia Dehning and Alfred Hersland, giving each character a realistic psychological depth.<sup>15</sup>

Yet what was completed in 1911 as *The Making of Americans* is, as has often been pointed out, a total dismantling of such familial narrative.<sup>16</sup> Not only is it the fate of both families to end dismally in divorce—one between Alfred Hersland and Julia Dehning, the other

Martha Hersland and Phillip Redfern— but also in the self-inflicted death of young David, namesake of the Herslands. Diagetic details developed realistically in the 1906 version, including the characters’ ethnic markers, are thoroughly omitted to the degree that the histories of two families are made unintelligible. Moreover, the stories of the Herslands and the Dehnings are dislodged by the narrator’s prolonged explications of two different types of beings—“independent dependent” and “dependent independent”—as well as by inexhaustible case studies of these character types in those outside the two families.

That Stein’s dismemberment of the generational continuity of family narrative constitutes a “critique of the Oedipal narrative” is unmistakable (Watten 98). The relentlessly democratic endeavor to include “every kind and of every individual human being” in an alleged family saga itself demands a radical reconfiguration of family as a socially sanctioned, closed unit of intimacy defined by inheritance, both symbolical and biological.<sup>17</sup> Also unmistakable is that it is “a lesbian ‘deviance’” that most likely drives Stein to pull apart the master plot of biological reproduction constitutive of genealogical narrative (Doyle 263). The beginning of the revision of the 1906 version in 1908, which finally culminated in *The Making of Americans* after three years, coincided with that of Stein-Toklas alliance. In one sense, it was the encounter with Toklas that enabled Stein’s characterological project that bulldozes the generational narrative of inheritance. Given that it was Toklas who first recognized the value of *The Making of Americans* and started to type its manuscript, to say that *The Making of Americans* is a product of the literary symbiosis of “Gertrice/ Altrude,” as Stein calls their alliance, is more than a tired cliché that romanticizes their relationship.<sup>18</sup>

But probably what is not stressed enough would be the extent to which this rejection of the generational, and thus procreative plot reflects Stein's growing ambivalence toward her own Jewish "race-feeling" that she formerly conflated with the family system. That Stein's destruction of the family narrative is relevant to the concept of race is unmistakable, for, after all, heterosexual reproduction and racial production are inseparable from each other. As Laura Doyle succinctly puts it, "[r]ace is a narrative concept. Whether or not it becomes the basis for social hierarchy or gets configured in binary oppositions, 'race' is at its base the idea that characteristics are passed from one generation to the next through time; it is the claim that behavior in the present and future is predictable because it is based on characteristics inherited from ancestors who lived in the past" (Doyle 250).

For Stein, however, "racialized heterosexual reproduction" is a logic probably less relevant to "Anglo-American virtue and sensibility," than Doyle surmises, and more relevant to the Jewish familialism Stein advocated in earlier versions of *The Making of Americans* (Doyle 263). Critics have often cited Stein's anti-patriarchal maxim in her commentary on *The Making of Americans* in *Everybody's Autobiography*—"fathers are depressing," repeated five times in the text—as a textual evidence for their claims that *The Making of Americans* stages her search for non-Oedipal mode of subject formation. While this reading is largely accurate, little attention has been paid how her complaint, "[t]here is too much fathering going on," is linked to Jewishness in her account of the creative process of *The Making of Americans*: "The Jews and they come into this because they are very much given to having a father and to being one and they are very much given not to want a father and not to have one, and they are an epitome of

all this that is happening the concentration of fathering to the perhaps there not being one” (*Everybody’s* 142).

The symbolic preeminence and anxiety-laden absence of the paternal figure in Jewish culture that Stein describes here should be read in a particular historical context, in which paternity and masculinity assumed an increasing ideological valence in turn-of-the-century Jewish culture. As many historians have pointed out, in its modern formulation, Jewishness was conceived as much a category of gender and sexuality as of race. Sander Gilman, for instance, argues that the construction of the “Jew” as a scientifically determined racial group coincided and overlapped with the invention of the “homosexual” as a sexual type in sexual science, as observed in the simultaneous origination of the terms “homosexuality” and “anti-Semitism,” in 1869 (*The Jew’s Body* 126).<sup>19</sup> Jewishness was discursively imbricated with same-sex desire by the feminization of the male Jew: a Jewish male was often regarded as a male invert, understood as a male body containing female soul. As Daniel Boyarin documents, in the traditional Talmudic culture there was a strong presence of male ideal called *Edelkayt*, which loosely translates as “delicacy and gentleness,” oppositionally defined by “the prevailing ideology of ‘manliness’ dominant in Europe” (*Unheroic* 23). Yet with the rise of sexology *Edelkayt* came to be stigmatized in Europe as a sign of male inversion, which resulted in “the recoding of the Jew as a ‘woman,’ the opposite of the ‘manly’ Aryan” (Garber 32).

The pathologization of effeminate male Jews as hereditarily degenerated inverts gained wide currency in both popular and scientific discourse, partly because newly-minted “terminologies of sexual perversion could provide a definition for a Jewish identity that was increasingly understood as pliable, metamorphic, ambiguous” (Freedman 336). As a reaction to

the stereotyped discourse of Jewish effeminacy, the end of the nineteenth century saw an effort towards the masculinization of the Jewish male arising from within Jewish community. Such an endeavor would be best exemplified by the figure of Max Nordau, a cofounder of the World Zionist Organization and the primary advocator of “Muscle Jew” ideals, who also is known for his sexological attack on fin-de-siècle decadence (*Degeneration* 1892). Nordau’s call for the remaking of the male Jewish body as that which is integral to the erection of a Jewish state was, as Boyarin maintains, “literally a body politics” (*Unheroic* 246). Conflating the individual and social bodies, turn-of-the-century Zionism “was considered by many to be as much a cure for the disease of Jewish gendering as a solution to economic and political problems of the Jewish people” (277). As such, modern Zionism was a “heterosexualizing project” of Jewish maleness, in which feminized Jews attempted to adapt to the dominant masculine model of the Aryan and become “physically strong and active, the head of the family, dominant in the public world of politics at home and abroad” (231).

Though anti-Semitic discourse about Jewish effeminacy in the U.S. was ostensibly less atrocious than in Europe, assimilation for Jewish immigrants in the United States was no less a “heterosexualizing project” than Zionism. For new immigrants in general, as many scholars have pointed out, monogamous marriage and heterosexuality were primary organizing structures for their formation of American identity. Margot Canaday, for instance, documents the way in which the Bureau of Immigration, established simultaneously with the rise of sexual science, became the national vanguard for the regulation of sexual perversion. The use of the “public charge” clause in immigration laws allowed inspectors to screen aliens suspected of sexual perversion, who “exhibited gender inversion, had anatomical defects, or engaged in

sodomy” (Canaday 21).<sup>20</sup> With the popularization of degeneration theory that associated sexual perversion with “‘primitive’ races and lower classes,” new immigrants from eastern and southern Europe became the primary suspects of carriers of the supposed hereditary disease. Jewish immigrants came under a strict scrutiny at ports of entry, partly because of the specter of Jewish effeminacy was coded as gender inversion, leading immigration officers to note “the frequency with which . . . hidden sexual complexes among Hebrews” were detected (qtd. in Canaday 31).<sup>21</sup>

Seen in this context, Stein’s remarks about the Jewish cultural investment in “father” figures can be understood as part of Jewish-American immigrants’ assimilation efforts. As Wald points out, in the works of other turn-of-the-century Jewish-authors, such as Cahan’s *Yekl* (1896), Antin’s *The Promised Land* (1912), as well as Zangwill’s *The Melting Pot* (1908), marriage becomes the central narrative device that enables the protagonists’s assimilation, “the means to the forgetting” of their ethnic origin (Wald 279). To use Warren Hoffman’s words, the preeminence of marriage and the procreative family values headed by a strong father figure in turn-of-the-century Jewish-American literature was “not the product of heterosexuality but [an] enabling device and centrally defining act that would make sure that Jews could pass as straight,” and by extension, pass as desirable “American” citizens (Hoffman 8). In this context, what Stein describes in *The Making of Americans* as “the right kind of marrying,” wherein “decent well to do fathers and good mothers are always existing who have a decent loyal feeling of the right kind of loving and they have their children and so they keep on going,” begins to appear as a device integral to the production of Americans out of immigrants, particularly those with Jewish heritage (*Making* 69). Especially given the endogamous marital

patterns in the Jewish community of her time, procreative nuptial practice, in which “a decent loyal feeling of the right kind of loving” produces offspring, functioned as a procedure that would insure the production of legitimate Americans with a Jewish “race-feeling.”

At the same time, Stein’s umbrage at the prescriptive force of “the right kind of marrying” is evident in *The Making of Americans* (21). Deploring the middle-class sensibility “that has within it a little of the fervor for diversity,” the narrator addresses “Brother Singulars”:

Brother Singulars, we are misplaced in a generation that knows not Joseph. We flee before the disapproval of our cousins, the courageous condescension of our friends who gallantly sometimes agree to walk the streets with us, from all them who never any way can understand why such ways and not the others are so dear to us, we fly to the kindly comfort of an older world accustomed to take all manner of strange forms into its bosoms (21)

“Singular,” as Lisa Ruddick speculates, would be best understood as “a cover term” for Stein’s same-sex desire that displaced her from the generational narrative contingent on the conjugal family (Ruddick 63). With a reference to Joseph, the third Hebrew patriarch’s favored son, who was sold into slavery by his brothers, the narrator bemoans the failed incorporation of the fellow “Brother Singulars” in the American—Jewish-American, in particular—family plot: “No brother singulars . . . there is no place in an adolescent world for anything eccentric like us” (*Making* 47). Dislodged by the generational narrative of procreation integral both to assimilation in the new world and to the preservation of race-feeling, brother singulars flee back to the old world that offers them a “kindly comfort” and embraces “all manner of strange forms” of intimacy, not unlike Stein who exiled herself to Paris, in 1903. It was not only the liberal atmosphere of the Left Bank intellectuals that neutralized the “singularity” of her same-sex intimacy with Toklas. The distance from her home country enabled Stein to “play the part of an eccentric, patriotic American abroad,” not a Jewish-American who failed to participate in the generational narrative to produce Americans (Nixon 45). Even against the backdrop of the

Dreyfus affair that fueled France with anti-Semitism, Stein and Toklas were “most often described as Americans, never as Jews” (Feinstein, “Looking,” 48).

Stein herself repeatedly asserts her Americanness, and remained an American citizen while she spent her life in Paris from the age of twenty-nine until her death: “After all I am American all right. Being there does not make me more there” (*Everybody* 112). Put differently, *The Making of Americans* is the making of an American, insofar as the eccentric Americanness Stein donned in Paris enabled Stein to become an un-hyphenated American: only by self-expatriation and losing of her home country, was Stein able to lay claim to America as her home. The expurgation of ethnic markers as well as the dismantling of the family narrative in the completed version of *The Making of Americans*, enacts Stein’s own disowning of family-based Jewishness, which she deemed essential for her claim to “Americanness.”

One book in particular transformed Stein’s conception of Jewishness rooted in blood relation: Otto Weininger’s *Sex and Character* (1903). She read Weininger for the first time in the winter of 1907, around the same time she met Toklas, evincing “mad enthusiasm” for it according to Toklas (qtd. in Will *Modernism* 62).<sup>22</sup> *Sex and Character*, notorious for its blatant misogyny and anti-Semitism, became wildly famous in Europe after the twenty-three-years-old Jewish-Austrian author’s suicide that immediately followed the book’s publication.

Weininger’s suicide is a result of a self-directed anti-Semitism in which he saw Jewishness as the embodiment of the ideological force of the procreative family. Rehearsing the conflation of Jewishness and femininity predominant in the contemporary discourse, Weininger argues that Jews and women are both excessively “sexual” beings. Reportedly homosexual himself, Weininger repudiates the “sexual,” which is synonymous with the “procreative” in his book,

and condemns the Jew and the woman as those whose sole existence is invested in biologically reproducing offspring, instead of establishing moral individuality. Especially troubling for Weininger is the excessive form of maternalism in Jewish family, or “[t]he wide-spread and exclusive honouring of the motherly woman, the type most upheld as the one and only possible one for women,” in which she is rendered “the sole advocate and priestess of the race” (Weininger 227, 224). Seen in this light, his dramatically choreographed suicide with a gun in Beethoven house begins to appear a staged resistance to the preservation of Jews and the heterosexual family system that he thought was the hallmark of Jewishness.

Weininger’s critique of the racialized valence of reproductive familialism in *Sex and Character* finds resonance in Stein’s work, especially in her endeavor to construct a universal typology independent of the categories of gender, sex, and race. As Toklas notes, Stein praised Weininger as “the only modern whose theory stood up and was really consistent,” and thought he “divided people up so completely into parts . . . trying to get down to the bottom nature,” like the work Stein herself was working on (qtd. in Wills “*Genius*” 62). *Making of American’s* “completed system of kinds of men and women” (*Making* 334), which consists of “bottom natures” is arguably influenced by Weininger’s characterlogy of “M” and “F.” Weininger posits “a permanent bisexual condition” in every human being, whereby “M and F (maleness and femaleness) are distributed . . . in every possible proportion” in each being (*Weininger* 7, 26). For Weininger, maleness and femaleness are “sexual types,” ideal constructions that do “not actually exist” (7). In this sense, all existing beings are “[s]exually intermediate forms” combining maleness and femaleness in varying degrees (79). Any erotic magnetism between two beings is, for Weininger, based on the law of opposite attraction, by which each being’s

maleness and femaleness is complemented by those others, so that “there come together a complete male (M) and a complete female (F)” (29).

Undoubtedly, it is Weininger’s dissociation of character traits from the grounding of the body that prompted Stein’s universal typology, as Stein writes in her notebook after reading *Sex and Character*: “[t]hat thing of mine of sex and mind and character all coming together seems to work absolutely” (qtd. in Katz “Weininger” 17). Against the hereditary determinism inherent in the medical discourse of her time, Stein conceives of “the matrix of a potentially infinite taxonomic system of all conceivable types of individuals” divorced from the contingencies of race and sex (Farland 128). Virtually every being that appears in *The Making of Americans* is assigned one of the fundamental constituents of the seemingly bipartisan matrix, “dependent independent” and “dependent independent,” regardless of their biological sex.<sup>23</sup> The major part of *The Making of Americans* is spent delineating the “dependent independent” and “independent dependent” as distinct types, and the narrator does offer the basic definition for each type, albeit in a characteristically abstruse way: the “dependent independent” ones “always somehow own the ones they need to love them” and “loving them give to such of them strength in domination,” whereas “independent dependent” ones “have it in them to love only those who need them, such of them have it in them to have power in them over others only when these others have begun already a little to love them” (*Making* 165). Alternatively, the narrator describes, for the dependent independent, “resisting . . . is the natural way of fighting,” while the independent dependent has “attacking as their natural way of fighting” (224). The law of the opposite attraction is at work in Steinian typologies, like Weiningerian “M” and “F,” but even more radically so since “dependent independent/ resisting” and “independent dependent/

attacking” are themselves independent of gender construction in any way: “Mostly for successful living two living together, man and woman or two women or two men, there should be in them two kinds of them, one independent dependent the other dependent independent, one with attacking as the natural way of fighting, the other resisting as the way of being” (228). Thus, Stein creates a characterology divorced from inheritance and heterosexual reproduction that would accommodate those who do not participate in the hereditary narrative.

#### Mr. Pottie and the Fantasy of Anal Pregnancy

“It takes time to make queer people,” the narrator of *The Making of Americans* wistfully observes; for “machine making does not turn out queer things like us” (21, 47). The prolixity of the text attests to the way Stein does take time—tremendous time—to make queer people out of the matrix of her idiosyncratic characterlogy, rejecting procreative marriage as the central machinery of assimilation that fails to foster the narrator’s fellow brother singulars. In that regard, Zangwill’s version of the melting pot is not inclusive enough, as his is also predicated on the trope of marriage as the device of the ultimate union of the supposedly irreconcilable. If same-sex desire is, as Guy Hocquenghem puts it, “the ungenerating-ungenerated terror of the family, because it produces itself without reproducing,” Stein needs to summon up an alternative pot that could produce brother singulars without the biological reproduction (Hocquenghem 107). For Stein, the ultimate melting pot was the “pot,” on which she would find her Baby Precious, as Stein called ever-constipated Toklas in private notes, “sit[t]ing on” every morning (*Baby Precious* 86). As indicated by one of Toklas’s pet names for Stein, “Mr. Pottie,” Stein becomes a huge excretory pot for her home country to rescript an assimilation

plot capacious enough to embrace every body, even those who were excluded by the procreative narrative (Turner 4).

To read *The Making of Americans* as a text rejoicing in excretory pleasure is not as labored a joke as one would imagine, especially in light of Stein's own fascination with Toklas's daily bowel movement. The collection of love notes exchanged between them, a portion of which was published as *Baby Precious Always Shines* by Kay Turner in 1999, is filled with an enigmatic repetition of the word, "cow."<sup>24</sup> Against dominant understanding, especially in relation to the poem "As a Wife Has a Cow: A Love Story," that "cow" in Stein's works is a code word for female orgasm, Turner presents a new interpretation of "cow" from her reading of the notes: "More than a third of notes demonstrate unequivocally that 'cows' are Toklas's feces or stools, as Stein defines them in one example: 'And/ what is a stool. That was/ the elegant name for a cow' (Turner 25).<sup>25</sup> Infamously chain-smoking, Toklas seems to have tried every stimulant on top of cigarettes for her bowel movement—coffee, warm bath, enemas, and so on. Stein tries to invoke Toklas's defecation with her incantatory language: "a cow ahoy, a cow now sweet smelly and complete" (*Baby Precious* 67). Written after Stein's habitual midnight writing and then hidden in various places for Toklas to find when she awakes and starts typing her partner's manuscript, Stein's notes fuse her literary production and Toklas's excretory production:

Baby precious, the pen seems to  
be writing beautifully and not  
blotting at all, I thought it was  
because it was not full enough,  
I think it blots when it needs filling,  
and my baby needs filling with love  
every second and she is she is

she is filled up full every  
second, and a cow comes out (98)

In order for the smooth coming out of a literary/fecal production, a pen/body needs to be “full enough.” The act of filling up becomes equivalent with the act of making love for Stein, and her love for Toklas becomes the best laxative: “I/ am so full of tenderness and delight in/ my blessed wife that it must overflow/ in a cow out of she” (64). In Stein’s imagination, her love that fills Toklas’s body would “overflow” in Toklas’s fecal production, just as Toklas’s love would overflow in Stein’s literary production. Clearly, Stein regards Toklas’s excretion as a product of her act of insemination, that is, breeding prompted by her writing, when she calls her own literary product a “cow”: “His cow/ will make her cow” (74). For Stein, who apologizes for her literary prolificacy that could burden Toklas’s typing process as “I made so many babies and I am/ so sorry I was naughty,” literary production is imagined as the act of breeding, and is associated with Toklas’s fecal production.

It is only natural that *The Making of Americans*, the work that Toklas’s loving act of typing enabled Stein to produce piecemeal, exemplifies the same logic of the literary/fecal production as Stein’s love notes. As Lisa Ruddick’s radical and yet attentive reading shows, the dominant mode of pleasure in *The Making of American* is clearly an excretory one. Decentering the time-honored metaphor of literary maternity associated with the narrative act, Ruddick likens the controlling narrational pattern of *The Making of Americans* to defecation, marked by the rhythmic repetition of retention and expulsion: for the narrator, “[t]o tell is to enjoy the feeling of filling up with material and then excreting it” (Ruddick 77). Countless examples can be found in the text to support Ruddick’s reading, in which a plethora of sensory data about various beings—both with and without names—enters through the narrator’s “ears and eyes and

feelings and the talking,” filling up the narrator until verbally discharged as a “whole one,” or an explanation of either of the two abstract character types (*Making* 300).

For instance, in trying to explain the nature of one of the main characters, Alfred Hersland, as a specimen of “dependent independent,” the narrator begins to be filled up by countless beings that belong to his group: “I am full up very full up now with a whole large group who are all more or less connected in kind with him, . . . I have then so many men and women in me now who are of his kind in men and women and they are in me now, I am completely full up with them now, completely filled up with them filled up with them as men and women” (507-508). The large group of beings incorporated in the narrator’s body in such a manner often constitutes “a depressing solemn load inside” (321). For the narrator, “the only way to loosen” the grip of the inhabitants inside the body is “to tell it” (313). In a most successful case, it will “come out completely from me leaving me inside me just then gently empty, so pleasantly and weakly gently empty” without the narrator’s “straining” and “pressing” it (586); in other cases, the narrator says, it comes out “very slowly,” “sharply,” “to amuse me,” “as a way of doing a duty for me,” “brilliantly,” “as a way of playing by me,” “repeatingly,” “willingly,” or “not very willingly,” but “always then it comes out of me” (327). Yet sometimes the narrator finds that the data is not quite large enough for the pleasure of expulsion: “I will wait again and soon then I will be full up with him, I am not then not completely full up with him” (*Making* 513). The “waiting” itself constitutes a pleasure of retention: “all this is in me in waiting and I like very well doing waiting and now perhaps a little more I will be waiting and I like well doing waiting and now perhaps a little more I will be waiting but always I am a little near to beginning and now once more again I am waiting and now I am contenting myself again with

waiting and that is a very pleasant feeling a pleasant thing for any one content inside them with it in them” (*Making* 514).

Just as in Stein’s notes for Toklas, *The Making of Americans* fuses literary production, fecal production, and procreation. The narrator conceptualizes the self as a huge digestive organ, which contains the miscellaneous multitude and discharges it into a single mass of abstract character type, reinscribing the heteronormative plot of the dominant melting pot trope. Unlike the marriage plot prevalent in immigrant literature of her time, Stein’s fecal imagination dislodges the clearly defined sexual difference integral to the production of offspring. By this negation, the characterology of *The Making of Americans* simultaneously disavows what Stein calls “the science of heredity” in the original version (“Making” 147). If the procreative logic of heredity prescribes a linear succession of genetic traits that differentiate one family, or race, from others, Stein’s excretory production radically levels such differences. For the combination of “independent dependent” and “dependent independent” that Stein says is necessary for any successful marriage does not entail succession of inborn difference; they are merely “types,” and the combination of the two results simply in more proliferation of “independent dependent” and “dependent independent” offspring. Thus Stein’s fecal production of a universal characterology in *The Making of Americans* not only dislodges the straight temporality of the patriarchal family, but also dislodges the concept of hereditary difference inherent in racial discourse of her time.

I understand Stein’s fecal imagination negating hereditary difference to draw on the work of Sigmund Freud, who theorized the child fantasy of anal pregnancy. There is little doubt that Stein was made conversant with Freudian concepts through her brother Leo Stein, who became

an avid reader of Freud when his sister was working on the final version of *The Making of Americans*.<sup>26</sup> Yet my aim here is not to establish the Freudian influence on *The Making of Americans*. Rather, what is at issue is that Stein and Freud—both “assimilated” Jews, one in America, the other in Austria<sup>27</sup>—attempt to erase the racial marker from their works in order to establish a universalizing logic, and that their interests seem to meet at the same bodily site, the anus.

Harold Bloom’s question about Freud’s Jewishness—“What is most Jewish about Freud’s work?”—would be relevant here. To this question, Bloom answers neither Freud’s own Oedipal conflict with his father Jakob, nor the influence of cryptic Talmudic traditions would provide any sufficient account. “And yet,” Bloom remarks: “the center of Freud’s work, his concept of repression, as I’ve remarked, does seem to me profoundly Jewish, and in its patterns even normatively Jewish. Freudian memory and Freudian forgetting are a very Jewish memory and a very Jewish forgetting. It is their reliance upon a version of Jewish memory, a parody-version if you will, that makes Freud’s writings profoundly and yet all too originally Jewish” (Bloom 43). What I suggest here is that we could replace “Freud” with “Stein” in this passage: for both of them, “repression”—or erasure—of Jewishness from their works for the sake of the establishment of an all-embracing theory of human nature becomes a quintessentially Jewish gesture; and the central site of their “forgetting” of Jewishness is the intimate vacuum of the rectum, in which the erased Jewishness is preserved as a triumphant return of the repressed.

Like Stein who erased the racial marker of Jewishness in her Icarusian endeavor to establish a psychology of every body, “throughout his adult life Freud endeavored to distance psychoanalysis from the label ‘Jewish science’” (Geller 93).<sup>28</sup> At its apex, racial science

constructed the “Jew” as a biologically defined, hereditarily pathological “degenerate” group. In response, Freud’s theorization of the human psyche claims “a universalization of human experience and an active exclusion of the importance of race from its theoretical framework” (Gilman *Freud* 6). One of the most salient examples of the universalizing logic of psychoanalysis can be found in the paradigm shift of same-sex desire from the theory of “inversion” to that of “homosexuality.” As George Chauncey argues, by introducing the concepts of sexual object and aim in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), Freud, albeit inconsistently, dissociates sexuality from the realm of “sexual roles and gender characteristics” (Chauncey “From Sexual Inversion” 93). While the inversion theory is predicated on what Chauncey terms the “heterosexual paradigm,” which postulates the law of attraction between a male “soul” and a female “soul” housed in bodies sexed in “improper” ways, the homo/hetero binary of Freudian psychoanalysis founded the distinction between the desire for the sameness and that for the difference (94).

Though Freud’s developmental narrative from homosexuality to heterosexuality often has been criticized as a normalizing discourse, by postulating the primal desire for the sameness rooted in autoeroticism universally existent in every being, Freud resisted the racializing logic inherent in inversion theory, by which the male Jew was regarded as a hereditarily tainted invert. Perversion from procreative sex is, Freud repeatedly asserts, “something innate in *everyone*, though as a disposition it may vary in its intensity and may be increased by the influences of actual life” (*Three Essays* 171; italics original). Thus, the universalizing logic of psychoanalysis directly confronts the speciation of racial science developed simultaneously with sexual science: “Psycho-analytic research is most decidedly opposed to any attempt at separating off

homosexuals from the rest of mankind as a group of a special character” (145).

If Freud’s rejection of inversion theory is rooted in, at least partly, his desire to detach degeneration from Jewishness, so is his theorization of castration complex. As Daniel Boyarin and Sander Gilman have demonstrated, Freud’s initial conceptualization of the castration complex in *Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy* (1909) is inextricably linked with the specter of Jewish effeminacy.<sup>29</sup> The story of a boy with a horse phobia, “Little Hans,” is known as a foundational case for the development of the Oedipal model, as it revolves around Little Hans’s traumatic discovery of the absence of penis in his mother’s body.<sup>30</sup> At a critical moment where he narrates Hans’s horror that his penis might be taken away to make him a “woman,” that is, a penis-less being that his mother is, Freud makes a strange interjection:

I cannot interrupt the discussion so far as to demonstrate the typical character of the unconscious train of thought which I think there is here reason for attributing to little Hans. The castration complex is the deepest unconscious root of anti-semitism; for even in the nursery little boys hear that a Jew has something cut off his penis—a piece of his penis, they think—and this gives them a right to despise Jews. (*Analysis* 36)<sup>31</sup>

Though Freud does not mention it explicitly, “Little Hans,” or Herbert Graf, was also Jewish, and had his own penis circumcised. It is not difficult to imagine that the elision of the racial marker from Little Hans was motivated by Freud’s desire to establish the Oedipal complex as a universal model, instead of one informed by specifically Jewish experience. Nevertheless, as Daniel Boyarin speculates, Freud projects his “fear and loathing” of his circumcised—interpreted as “damaged”—penis onto Little Hans, and then projects it again onto gentile boys who hear about the fearful ritual of circumcision.

Describing the child’s fear of castration as the root of the anti-Semitic discourse of Jewish effeminacy—and the circumcised penis actually was the utmost sign of feminization of the Jew in the public imagination<sup>32</sup>—Freud seems to claim that “antisemitism is only a childhood

illness”: “If both male Jews and women are castrated only from the standpoint of infantile complexes, it would appear from the logic of Freud’s position that in the ‘healthy’ adult neither ought to be perceived as castrated or, . . . each should be recognized as equally castrated as all subjects” (Boyarin “Homophobia” 170). Insofar as Freud’s castration complex is a fantasy universally held by all infants, and insofar as their relinquishment of the desire for the mother amounts to their symbolic castration by the father, the circumcised penis of the Jew no longer stands as the overdetermined marker of racial anomaly that defines their psychopathology: everybody is psychically castrated, just as the Jew is.

Though left unremarked by critics, Freud’s universalization of Jewish experience in the case study of “Little Hans” goes even further. If the circumcised penis functions in medical discourse simultaneously as a racial marker (a specifically Jewish phenomenon) and a sexual marker (quasi-femininity as the absence of phallus), the sexual difference inscribed in the circumcised penis should also be excised. Freud remarks that Little Hans, or “the Little Oedipus” as he calls Hans, finds a “happier solution” to his castration complex than to submit himself to symbolic castration and to relinquish his desire for the mother (*Analysis* 97). It is to envision himself as giving birth to a child, just as his mother has recently done to his sister Hanna, and the orifice for Hans’s imaginary child is a “behind-hole,” as Hans calls it (96). Hans’s approach to identification with the mother through understanding “the subject of childbirth by way of the excretory complex” (106), by which he envisions a baby as a “lumf”(68)—that is, feces—is closely related to Freud’s theorization of an infantile fantasy with respect to anal pregnancy, which he calls a “cloacal theory.”

While Freud's attention to the anus was already evident in the conceptualization of the anal stage in *Three Essays* (1905) and of anality as a character type in "Character and Anal Erotism" (1908), *The History of an Infantile Neurosis* is especially relevant to Hans's case particularly the chapter "Anal Erotism and the Castration Complex" (1914). In this case study Freud ascribes the chronic intestinal troubles his parsimonious patient has suffered from his youth—diarrhea, constipation, intestinal pain, and fear of having blood in his feces—to a notion the patient unconsciously has held onto: "one which in any case completely contradicts the dread of castration—the notion, namely, that sexual intercourse takes place at the anus" (*History* 78). In Freud's interpretation, the patient's traumatic witnessing of the "primal scene" led him to believe that "women are castrated, that instead of a male organ they have a wound which serves for sexual intercourse" (78). As in Hans's case, "the ritual circumcision of Christ and of the Jews in general" fueled his castration fear that originated in his discovery of the mother's vagina (86). The patient's solution resembles Hans's: "He rejected castration, and held to his theory of intercourse by the anus" (84).

By clinging to the fantasy that the anus is the only orifice in human bodies, regardless of gender, which functions trebly for excretion, coitus, and parturition, the patient dispels the fear of castration, albeit at the cost of assuming the pain of childbirth in his intestinal pain as well.<sup>33</sup> In other words, the rectum—to follow Leo Bersani's lead—becomes the grave, a locus in which the sexual difference is buried along with the castration complex.<sup>34</sup> If the castration complex results, at least partly, from sighting the circumcised penis of the Jew, the anus in the cloaca fantasy as the site enabling the rejection of the castration complex becomes the locus wherein the racial difference is clumped together with the sexual difference. As Hocquenghem puts it,

the anus creates “a loss of identity”: “Seen from behind we are all women; the anus does not practice sexual discrimination,” nor does it practice racial discrimination (Hocquenghem 101). Tellingly, Freud concludes this case study by describing the patient’s marked empathy with those “sickly or Jews (which implied circumcision),” suggesting that the patient identifies with them by the operation of the cloacal theory (*History* 88).<sup>35</sup>

I have been arguing that Freud’s attempt to dissociate racially marked Jewishness from psychoanalysis as the universal explicatory apparatus of the human psyche ultimately leads him to the theorization of the anus as the archaic vacuum that cancels out the racial and sexual difference. I want to assert Stein’s anal propagation through the characterological matrix in *The Making Americans* functions in a similar way. To put it in Freudian language, being Jewish and a woman, Stein is discursively formulated as a doubly castrated subject deployed for the purpose of the establishment of the phallic identity. In the turn-of-the-century U.S. context, the phallic identity becomes synonymous with the status of being a legitimate “American” differentiated from abject un-Americans. Such a stable identity is only endowed to those who, be they indigenous or immigrant Americans, participate in the stabilization of racial and sexual identity through heterosexual procreation. Dislodged from such a procreative narrative, even more forcibly than Little Hans marked by his circumcised penis, Stein rejects castration, or the phallic logic of castration itself, and holds on to the cloacal theory with a vengeance.

For Stein, the anus as the enabling site annulling castration becomes the fecund organ with a ternary function of coitus, excretion, and partuition, by which she produces Americans in *The Making of Americans*, together with Toklas who types its manuscript. In the narrator’s imaginary body of *The Making of Americans*, the human materials with diverse identitarian

markers signifying racial and sexual differences are categorically devoured, digested, and merged into universal oneness, and excretorily spawned into the abstract characterology. As Melanie Taylor puts it, Stein's matrix of the bottom nature ultimately renders "symbolic notions of difference . . . meaningless through a proliferation of increasingly nonsensical categories and types" (Taylor 30). From the outset, as suggested by their very names, "dependent independent" and "independent dependent" themselves are interdependent categories, ultimately representing how "dependent" and "independent" portions exist to varying degrees in each being. As such, despite the narrator's invocational utterance—"sometime oh sometime, really truly sometime there will be a description a complete description of every one"—the narrator's attempt at the complete description of these types becomes inevitably self-defeating (*Making* 549).

The implosion of her characterology is inexorable since the combination of degrees of "dependent" and "independent" in one being is literally infinite. Even in one category of "independent dependent," alternatively called "attacking" beings, there are variants such as "sensitive attacking," "trembling attacking," "piercing attacking," "cowardly attacking," "withdrawing attacking," "steady attacking," "enthusiastic attacking," "narrow attacking," "dutiful attacking," "wobbling attacking," while the "dependent independent" or "resisting" being also has variations like "vacant resisting," "solemn resisting," "intermittent resisting," "confused resisting," and even "attacking resisting" (605-06). To conclude the necessarily incomplete list of the variations of the two bottom natures, the narrator artlessly presents a truism that undercuts her explanatory device that differentiates the two categories: "in short there are very many kinds of ways of having loving feeling in men and women" (606). With the

multiplication of sub-types, the difference between the two categories becomes exponentially murky, so much so that the concept of difference itself becomes annulled.

As such, the universal typology of *The Making of Americans* stages the instability of the types itself: the two come to resemble each other making it impossible to differentiate between them. Ostensibly deploring this approaching implosion of the typological endeavor, the narrator finds a solace in the undifferentiated oneness inadvertently created: “It is a very wonderful thing” after all “to be all loving and certain that they are really all loving,” despite the surface difference in the way they love (605). The narrator suddenly realizes that to be filled with beings for the project of the universal typology itself constitutes the act of love: “Loving being, I am filled just now quite full of loving being in myself and in a number of men and women. Loving is to me just now an interesting, a delightful a quite completely realised thing. I have loving being in me more than I knew I could have in me. It was a surprising thing to find it so completely in me” (*Making* 604). In the intimate void that is the anus, which disavows the phallic logic of difference between the circumcised and the intact penis (as a racial marker) and the existent and the absent penis (as a sexual marker), every one lovingly becomes one, discharged as a single mass of disembodied feces.

#### “Each One Is One”

Stein’s paean for the universal oneness reaches its climax in the final chapter titled “David Hersland.” The chapter narrates the life of the youngest child of David Hersland II, named also David Hersland. With David Hersland the third, the history of the Herslands closes, as he “was a dead one before he was a middle aged one” (*Making* 725). From his youth he was “interested in dying, in loving, in talking, in listening, in ways of eating, in ways of being going on being in

living,” and ultimately ends his life by “going on eating almost only one thing” (899). By passive suicide, he terminates the successive line of the name “David Hersland,” inherited from his father and grandfather, as “David Hersland was never really wanting to be needing to have much feeling about having babies in being one being living. He did not have any of them” (792). By concluding the history of the family with the death of the name bearer of the Herslands, *The Making of Americans* does seem to insist on “putting an end not only to history but the ideology of family as the basis for all that is good, human, and American,” aligning with what Lee Edelman theorizes as “queer negativity” in *No Future* (McCallum 236). At the same time, however, the “David Hersland” chapter performs the birth of a true American through David Hersland’s death.

Though endowed with the name of “David Hersland,” the final chapter is decisively *not* about David Hersland himself. In itself, the dissociation of titles from contents has been observed in preceding chapters that bear the name of the characters, such as the fourth chapter “Martha Hersland” and the fifth chapter “Alfred Hersland and Julia Dehning” which are also characterized by the narrator’s habitual digression from the plot into the explication of the bottom natures. Yet what distinguishes the “David Hersland” chapter is its abstractionism pushed to the extreme. Not only does the chapter retain no resemblance to preceding chapters that, albeit nominally, describe some life events of the titular characters; even the now-familiar terms, “independent dependent/attacking” and “dependent independent/resisting” cease to appear in the “David Hersland” chapter, along with gendered pronouns, “she” and “he.” What controls the chapter instead are general pronouns, “some,” “any,” and “one.” A typical passage of the chapter reads:

Some one is one to whom some one is regularly teaching something. Some one is one whom some one is teaching. Some one is one whom some one is regularly teaching something and that is in the middle of the young living of that one, is quite in the beginning of the middle of the young living in that one and that one is then one in the middle of the middle of the young living of that one and is then in the ending of the middle of the young living in that one and is always quite certain that the one regularly teaching that one something is one knowing anything about the thing that one is teaching. (767)

Though the narrator never tells what brings David Hersland to end his life, the inevitability of his death is strangely understood in the deadening effect of the iterative repetition of “some” and “one” that ultimately signify nothing with their extreme generalization.<sup>36</sup> In the figure of David Hersland, disembodied fecal mass that negates any markers of difference and individuation—be it racial, sexual, or otherwise—is incarnated as general nothingness. David Hersland “was completely certain that being existing is not anything,” since existing as a being signifies not any particular thing in Stein’s rhapsody of universal oneness (810).

Ultimately, through his abdication of life, David Hersland comes to personify the “oneness” produced by Stein’s melting-pot imagination. As Tanya Clement argues with her quantitative analysis of the use of “I” and “one” in *The Making of Americans*, the use of first-person pronoun that represents the narrator “declines precipitously in the middle of the text,” exponentially replaced by “one” as “a new primary character”: “*one* encompasses all the characters in the text, proving Stein’s supposition that everyone is *one*” (Clement 438, 443). David Hersland fully understands this maxim: “Each one is one. David Hersland was completely remembering that each one is one, he was completely remembering this thing that each one is one. He was then loving one of them and he was then completely remembering that each one is one.” (*Making* 872). For David Hersland, even in loving someone, the felt singularity that usually differentiates the object of love from others dissolves into the

universalization of “each one is one.” Loving one being is not different from loving other beings, and the loved one loses its privileged uniqueness.

This axiom applies to himself: “He was one. He was very often not telling anything about that thing about being one. He was not ever telling any one he was almost needing telling about his being one. He was one” (868). He is one, just as each one is one, so much so that the incommensurability of his own being is annulled. That is why he ends his life: “Some love themselves so much immortality can have no meaning for them, the younger David Hersland was such a one” (*Making* 505). This sentence seemingly is paradoxical, as when some people love themselves it usually means they do “not want to lose themselves,” and “immortality can to them mean nothing but this thing” (*Making* 480). Yet as David Hersland believes in the universal oneness in himself that represents anybody else that exists in the world, his own immortality has no value; even if he dies, “one” that is himself continues to exist in “each one.” He loves himself because he is “connected with every other one,” and “it was a pleasant thing to him to know then that everything means something, that he was a part of every one who was a part of him” (862). Hence “it was to him then that he was certain then that being living was a queer thing” (*Making* 743). If being is, pared to its core, nothing but the ubiquitous presence of disembodied oneness, it is not questioning the life, but the living as a concrete being itself, that is “a queer thing.”

His way of dying—“not eating anything but one thing”—epitomizes the paramount form of disembodied oneness that Stein’s excretory melting pot produces. If the anus nullifies the racial and sexual difference by negating the logic of castration, its product still retains a trace of bodiliness with its stench. David Hersland’s olfactory sensitivity detects his own effluvium that

reminds him that he has an individual body: “David Hersland was sometimes smelling something, he was sometimes interested in smelling something, he was sometimes smelling himself when he was smelling something, he was not completely interested in smelling himself when he was smelling something” (850). In order for him to attain a completely universal existence, the odor that reminds him of himself must be extinguished. Thus he eats minimally so that he excretes minimally, and approximates a rarified being that ubiquitously exists in every one.

Such disembodiedness, Stein says through the mouth of the Alice Toklas that inhabits her fictional autobiography, was quintessentially American: “She always says that americans can understand spaniards. That they are the only two western nations that can realise abstraction. That in americans it expresses itself by disembodiedness, in literature and machinery, in Spain by ritual so abstract that it does not connect itself with anything but ritual” (*Autobiography* 123). Stein became a disembodied American herself, when she left America to become a “completely and entirely american” in Paris, instead of a Jewish-American in the homeland (20).

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a brief history of the origin of the “melting pot,” see Gleason 22-23

<sup>2</sup> Among the audience of the first performance of *The Melting Pot* in Washington D.C. in October 1908 was the then president Theodore Roosevelt, who reportedly “leaned over his box and shouted to Zangwill: ‘That’s a great play, Mr. Zangwill, that’s a great play’” (Szubela 3).

<sup>3</sup> The disappearance of the marker of “nation-race” in the third generation in the census was probably one of the reasons why the narrator of *The Making of Americans* remarks “being an American, a real American” requires three generations, or “sixty years to create” (3).

<sup>4</sup> As Barbara Will and Maria Damon point out, there is a long tradition of critical foreclosure of “the Jewish question” in Stein studies (Will 437, Damon 492). As notable exceptions, see Will’s analysis of Stein’s ambivalence toward Zionism, Damon’s examination of Stein’s

Jewishness as a language practice, and Amy Feinstein's analysis of Stein's staging of modern Jewish identity as a theatrical performance in *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*.

<sup>5</sup> There are only a few pieces in which Stein directly writes about Jewishness. The most notable are her college essays written in 1896, "The Modern Jew Who Has Given Up the Faith of His Fathers Can Reasonably and Consistently Believe in Isolation," which I will discuss in the first section, and her 1920 poem, "The Reverie of the Zionist." For an excellent reading of "Reverie," see Barbara Will. Also Will argues that *Melanctha* represents "Stein's early complex projection and displacement of the Jewish question onto blacks" (Will 443).

<sup>6</sup> In contrast, Stein and Toklas's friends often commented on their "Jewishness" as marked in their appearance. For instance, Hemingway describes Stein as having "a strong German-Jewish face" with "lovely, thick, alive immigrant hair" (Hemingway 37). Stein's friend Mabel Dodge portrays Toklas as "slight and dark, with beautiful gray eyes hung with black lashes—and she had a drooping, Jewish nose, and her eyelids drooped, and the corners of her red mouth and the lobes of her ears drooped and the black folded Hebraic hair, weighted down, as they were, with long heavy Oriental earrings" (qtd. in Hobhouse 64).

<sup>7</sup> Sephardic-Jewish Emma Lazarus's "The New Colossus" would be another example of Jewish author's representation of assimilationist ethos amidst the New Immigration. "The New Colossus" was written in 1883 and posthumously engraved on the base of the Statue of Liberty in 1903.

<sup>8</sup> For Stein's relationship to Bookstaver and Hanes, see Katz, "Introduction."

<sup>9</sup> Like "The Making of Americans," *Q.E.D.* was also restored from Stein's notebooks and published by Katz in 1974 (originally titled "Quad Erat Demonstrandum" in the notebooks). Before the 1974 publication it had been published under the title *Things As They Are* with slight modifications of names and phrases in 1950, four years after Stein's death. For the detailed record of the novel's production, see Katz, "Introduction."

<sup>10</sup> For Stein's experience at Johns Hopkins, see Wagner-Martin 49.

<sup>11</sup> For Stein's friendship with Zangwill, see Will's "Gertrude Stein and Zionism," (446).

<sup>12</sup> The phrase is repeated in the 1911 version, but with a slight modification: "a record of a decent family progress respectably lived by us and our fathers and mothers, and our grand-fathers, and grand mothers" (*Making* 33-34).

<sup>13</sup> As Katz notes, in the 1906 version, even the word "German"—the ethnic marker that had been allowed in the 1903 version in lieu of the word "Jewish"—"was expunged and the distinction between the cohesive traditions of the family she was describing and those of the American community in which they were living lost its descriptive particularity" (Katz "First Making," 207).

<sup>14</sup> In *Everybody's Autobiography* (1937), Stein says “[i]n *The Making of Americans* I wrote about our family... in the beginning I did give a real description of how our family lived in East Oakland, and how everything looked as I had seen then” (*Everybody's* 69).

<sup>15</sup> Unlike the 1903 version (“The Making of Americans”) and the 1911 version (*The Making of Americans*), there is no printed manuscript available for the 1906 version. My argument about this version relies on Katz’ laborious and careful reconstruction from materials “scattered in bits and scraps” in Stein’s notebooks in his dissertation, “The First Making of *The Making of Americans*” (160). Chapter VII, “The Buried Narrative” charts the full diagenetic trajectory of the 1906 version (159-94). Katz (unofficially) promised to other Steinians to publish Stein’s notebooks with his annotations, but to this day it has not been actualized. For some speculations on Katz’s hesitation about the publication of Stein’s notebooks, see Janet Malcolm.

<sup>16</sup> Discussions on Stein’s disruption of the linear narrative in *The Making of Americans* are numerous. For a classic example, see Clive Bush’s 1978 essay.

<sup>17</sup> Stein’s radical endeavor of inclusion is often compared with that of Whitman. See, for example, Miller and Watten.

<sup>18</sup> As Stimpson points out, “Gertrice/Altrude” appears in Stein’s manuscript (Stimpson 136). Stimpson examines the critical ambivalence about Stein-Toklas alliance in queer studies, as their relation is ostensibly heavily prescribed in the traditional gender binary; Stein plays the role of the “husband” and a capricious genius, whereas Alice performs the dutiful “wife” and helpmeet.

<sup>19</sup> For instance, Gilman argues that in the 1840s, the basis of the definition of the Jew was still religious one. Sometime in the 1870s, the “Jews” become a biologically defined racial category, an antithesis of the “Aryan.” (Gilman *Freud* 9-10, 12-36)

<sup>20</sup> Though the explicit statement of the exclusion and the deportation on the basis of homosexuality was first inscribed in immigration law in the early 1950s, since its establishment the Bureau of Immigration policed sexual perversion, relying on “the ‘likely to become a public charge’ clause of the immigration law” (Canaday 21).

<sup>21</sup> The other factor that made Jewish immigrants particularly prone to intense investigation was the custom of arranged marriage. As Nancy Cott argues, along with Asians, Jews were “more easily accused of masking prostitution as marriage” because of the popular belief of matchmaking as “overt economic bargaining” (Cott 149). The charge of prostitution was not exclusively directed toward Jewish women. The Lower East Side, the nation’s largest Jewish quarter, and the Bowery in particular where Yiddish theater flourished, was reported as the “principal resort in New York for degenerates,” populated by male prostitutes (qtd. in Chauncey *Gay* 33).

<sup>22</sup> For Stein’s encounter with *Sex and Character*, see Katz, “Weininger and *The Making of Americans*,” 8-9. According to Katz, in her notebooks Stein “speaks of Weininger as a genius” and “quotes fragments of his book at length” (10). Katz in this article, as well as Barbara Will

in *Gertrude Stein, Modernism, and "Genius"* (62-66) examine Weininger's influence from the standpoint of the concept of "genius." Maria Farland's "Gertrude Stein's Brain Work" situates Weininger's influence in relation to Stein's ambivalence toward the medical discourse she was trained in at Johns Hopkins.

<sup>23</sup> For instance, to list the types of a portion of those having names in the text, in the "independent dependent" categories are David Hersland the second, Martha Hersland, Julia Dehning, Phillip Redfern, Mabel Linker, Mary Maxworth, and in the "dependent independent" categories are Fanny Hersland, David Hersland the third, Alfred Hersland, Cora Dounor, Minnie Mason, and the narrator.

<sup>24</sup> As Turner notes, the complete collection of love notes—totaling over three hundred—is kept at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. These notes most likely were donated by mistake by Toklas to the Beinecke, and made unavailable to the public by Toklas's request until 1981. None of these notes are dated, but Turner speculates that they were written in the last decade of the Stein-Toklas alliance (6-7).

<sup>25</sup> "As a Wife Has a Cow" was originally published in Paris 1926, and reprinted in *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein* edited by Stein and Toklas's friend Carl Van Vechten in 1945, immediately before Stein's death. For readings of "cows" as female orgasm, see, for example, Stimpson.

<sup>26</sup> Ruddick 93. Leo and Gertrude lived together in rue de Fleurus, and Toklas joined them there in 1910. They lived there until Leo left the house in 1913. Ruddick comments on Freudian undertones in *The Making of Americans* in arguing the connection between Stein's repetitive style and repetition compulsion theorized in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, rather than in the context of anal eroticism. Also, there is a seeming reference to Freud in Stein's note in Toklas collected in *Baby Precious*. Sometimes Stein finds that her literary production is not stimulating enough to make Toklas "cow." In such cases, Stein wishes that "he could be as stimulating as a cigarette for his wifey" (96). She implores: "smoke/ me instead of cigarette and that/ will do," because "she's got me like the jewish gentleman/ said" (100). It is probable that the "jewish gentleman" Stein abruptly refers to as the one who made the association between the "cigarette" and something that brings about the breeding—that is, phallus—will be Sigmund Freud, whose proliferation of phallic symbols was made famous after *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899).

<sup>27</sup> Freud was born in Freiberg, Moravia in 1856 as Sigismund Scholomo Freud. His family moved to Vienna when he was three, and they lived in Leopoldstadt district, populated by the lower-class Viennese Jews emigrated from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. For the "assimilation" of Freud, see, for instance, Geller.

<sup>28</sup> For the most comprehensive work on Freudian psychoanalysis's relation to Jewishness, see Gilman, *Freud*, which itself has a four-page footnote that catalogues the previous works on this topic. For other accounts, see Geller, Boyarin *Unheroic* (189-220) and Boyarin "Homophobia."

<sup>29</sup> Boyarin, "Homophobia" (167-173), Gilman *Freud* (77).

<sup>30</sup> Though the actual term “Oedipus complex” appears for the first time in “A Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men” (1910), Freud calls Little Hans “little Oedipus” twice in this case study, when he describes Hans’s desire to sleep with his mother and the accompanying fear of being castrated by his father as a punishment for his desire (97, 111).

<sup>31</sup> Freud further comments on the dominant association between femininity and Jewishness, referring to Weininger: “And there is no stronger unconscious root for the sense of superiority over women. Weininger (the young philosopher who, highly gifted but sexually deranged, committed suicide after producing his remarkable book *Geschlecht und Charakter* [1903]), in a chapter that attracted much attention, treated Jews and women with equal hostility and overwhelmed them with the same insults. Being a neurotic, Weininger was completely under the sway of his infantile complexes; and from that standpoint what is common to Jews and women is their relation to the castration complex” (*Analysis* 36). For detailed analysis on Freud’s reference to Weininger, see Gilman *Freud*, 77-92 and Gilman “Otto Weininger and Freud.”

<sup>32</sup> Sander Gilman explains the association between the circumcised penis and the clitoris in the public imagination as a “truncated penis”: “The clitoris was known in the Viennese slang of the time simply as the ‘Jew’ (*Jud*). The phrase for female masturbation was ‘playing with the Jew.’ . . . This pejorative synthesis of both bodies because of their “defective” sexual organs reflected the fin de siècle Viennese definition of the essential male as the antithesis of the female and the Jewish male” (Gilman *Freud* 39). Daniel Boyarin also maintains that the “myth of Jewish male menstruation” is also based on circumcision, “an operation which causes genital bleeding and within which the bleeding is in fact a primary motif” (Boyarin *Unheroic* 211).

<sup>33</sup> Freud develops the concept of the anus displacing the vagina via the passivity of mucous membrane of the rectum in *The History of Infantile Neurosis* and “Transformation of Instinct as Exemplified in Anal Erotism” (1917). Freud argues that if the passivity of mucous membrane is envisioned as something similar to the vaginal in cloacal theory, it is “the column of faeces” that “behaves just as the penis does” (*Infantile* 84). At the same time, since the cloacal theory bequeaths the functions of excretion, coition, and childbirth to the anus, the fecal mass becomes simultaneously equivalent both with penis and baby. Further, as Freud elaborates in “Transformation” and “Character and Anal Erotism,” as excreta function as the infant’s first gift to those he loves, it is translated also into something valuable, gold and money (and thus his famous theorization of “anal” character as “parsimonious” in “Character”). Ultimately, therefore, the excrement comes to represent three things: penis, baby, and money. As David Hillman suggests, the link between feces and money—and the anal character as “parsimonious,” as presented in “Character”—seems to point toward the unconscious associating with Jewishness in Freud’s conceptualization of anality. Not only did the “medieval and early modern anti-Semitic fantasies associated Jews with both faeces and anal intrusiveness,” the age-old association between the Jew and usury regarded usury as the “unnatural breeding” of money not unlike fecal production (Hillman 15-16).

<sup>34</sup> See Bersani, “Is the Rectum a Grave?” Written amidst the height of AIDS crisis, Bersani’s grave metaphor for the anus largely concerns itself with male homosexuality. My argument,

however, posits the anus not as the privileged site for male homosexuality, but the site where sexual identity is entombed.

<sup>35</sup> The anus's nullification of identity goes even further than the purging of racial and sexual difference. The anus for Freud becomes the foundation for the character development of human psyche, in a way similar to Stein's character matrix, as I will argue later. In fact, "the concept of character entered the field of psychoanalysis via anality" (Green 20). In *Three Essays*, Freud presents the concept of the anal stage, a pregenital stage of erotic pleasure. In this phase, the anus is envisioned as embodying opposite characteristics, the "active" and the "passive," which later develop into the "masculine" and the "feminine": "The *activity* is put into operation by the instinct for mastery through the agency of the somatic musculature; the organ which, more than any other, represents the *passive* sexual aim is the erotogenic mucous membrane of the anus" (*Three* 198). In the autoerotic pleasure of the anal phase, the active and the passive, as precedents of the masculine and the feminine, coexists in the form of the control of defecation (expulsion and retention) by the anal sphincter and the receptive sensation of the rectum stimulated by the fecal column. With this biphasic nature, the anus has a "quite peculiarly archaic colouring," becoming the seat of various dichotomies derived from the active and the passive, as André Green catalogues (*Three* 198):

the relation container-contained (mucous membranes and feces); the contradictory desire between retaining and expelling, the status of internal (proper to oneself)/external (proper to the other), the existence of an object with two aspects to it (the object of anal production and the object which requires release), the dialectic of possessing and of giving, the attraction to dirtiness and the reaction-formation of cleanliness, the tendency to sadism and the repression of aggressivity. (Green 142-43).

The anus thus becomes the breeding ground of character types that eventually are differentiated from each other through heteronormative logic. Yet as the archaic organ that precedes and thus escapes such genital binarism, the anus converges binary oppositions that heteronormativity attempts to keep separate, resisting the stabilization of identity through mutual differentiation, and thereby becoming the site of homo-ness, or the desire for the sameness.

<sup>36</sup> In the 1906 version, David Hersland's death was explained as a result of his disillusionment in his love for Julia Dehning, and he dies by the operation of cancer as Stein's colleague at Radcliffe, the co-author of "Normal Motor Automatism," Leon Solomon did.

CHAPTER 6  
CONCLUSION:  
THE AFTERLIFE OF RACE SUICIDE IN THE AGE OF TERROR

The Broken Apocalypse

Thrown into the temporal middle of nowhere, as Frank Kermode says, we hanker after the sense of an ending. Jittery anticipations of the capitalized End looming large allow us to make sense of our lives in the nebula of the present. The imaginary end forges our relation to the unknown beginning that fatally preceded us and leaves us behind. It restores the illusory order of things, “a wholly concordant structure” in which “the end is in harmony with the beginning, the middle with beginning and end” (Kermode 6). But every apocalypse is a broken apocalypse: “the great crises and ends of human life do not stop time” (90). We unfailingly survive the much-trumpeted Age of Crisis, suspended once again in the unmeaning here and now. In the disjointed aftermath of circumvented calamities, apocalyptic feeling perpetuates itself, carried on by weary survivors. “The tragedy of sempiternity,” as Kermode calls it, ever keeps the desire for the End alive without fulfilling it (82).

The turn-of-the-century craze of race suicide was one manifestation of the apocalyptic feeling that structured the *fin de siècle*, whose cultural identity, as its name suggests, hinged on the sense of an ending. The national hysteria of the passing of the master race forged its relation to an unknown beginning, creating mythic origins of “the race.” The dying race was materialized and vivified through generational narratives that reinstated a system of dominance, be it New England Anglo-Saxonism, Jim Crow, or Teutonism. At the same time, some dreamed of an escape from the tragedy of sempiternity, enacting their desire for the End. Suicidal protagonists of Progressive literature refused to become mediums of perpetuation of the race

situated at the heart of the American body politic. Through their personal enactments of race suicide, they attempted to evade the biopolitical control that sought to suture their individual bodies to the social body.

Yet the apocalyptic scenario of race suicide, as with any narratives of calamity, did not materialize. The hype of the master race killing itself was subsumed under the assimilationist discourse of the twentieth-century's second decade. The deaths of suicidal Progressives neither stopped time nor undid the all-devouring racial purity agenda of the body politic. The American social body survived its crisis by absorbing what had been regarded as foreign bodies, appropriating the new immigrant's fertility to regenerate itself. Since the anti-climactic closure of the race suicide crisis, we have survived another *fin de siècle*, which coincided with the end of millennium no less. No race has, of course, killed itself. Race suicide sounds outlandish in the twentieth-first century. After all, we are living in an age wherein the concept of race itself is radically put into question. Scientific studies have repeatedly undermined the biological and genetic grounding of racial difference. No race can kill itself, one would argue, not merely because race has no agency to terminate its life, but because there is no such thing as race to begin with.

As scholars of critical race studies have amply demonstrated, however, even when race has theoretically lost its bodily existence—or perhaps precisely because race has ostensibly lost its corporeal moorings—race haunts us as the undead. As Sharon Holland argues, “Even as we pronounce the death of race, we cannot overlook the fact that our attempts to articulate it into oblivion, to pronounce the last word on race, simply have not worked” (Holland 96). Though the call for planetary humanism prompts us to believe that we can get beyond race and racism,

“moving *beyond* looks a lot like getting *over*” (17). Displacing material effects of racist practice to the temporal and spatial elsewhere blinds us from quotidian settings wherein everyday racism reproduces race and systems of social inequality.

Just as the concept of race has ghosted itself, shedding corporeal moorings, thereby permeating the quotidian life without being pinned down, race suicide has nonetheless discovered its own afterlife. By this I mean biopolitical anxiety over suicide—when understood as the individual and private right to die in order to evade the network of biopower—is still actual, and its nightmarish specter visits our everyday life. The apocalyptic scenario of our time does not have a prophesized date of the End, but inheres in a beginning indelibly marked on the “perpetual calendar of human anxiety” (Kermode 11). Ever since the beginning of the Age of Terror was announced to the world on September 11, 2001, suicide bombing has been singled out as the preeminent signifier of the ultimate culmination of globalized militancy. In one way, it has supplanted, as Mike Davis argues, other “apocalyptic threats of nuclear or bioterrorism” that preoccupied the twentieth century *fin de siècle*, even though the peril of those is by no means the thing of the past (Davis qtd. in Thomas 432).

In what follows, by way of conclusion, I will briefly contemplate suicide bombing as an afterlife of race suicide. To begin, echoing Jacques Derrida in dialogue with Giovanna Borradori in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror* (2003), to try to understand the nature of the singular trepidation with which we approach suicide bombing is not to qualify the “compassion for the victims and indignation over the killings; our sadness and condemnation should be without limits, unconditional, unimpeachable” (89). Even in our unmitigated outrage and grief, we can—and should—still wonder what makes suicide bombing reify so potently the Age of

Terror when there are other acts of violence—historically proven or anticipated—that target noncombatant civilians with equally, or quantitatively more, destructive degrees.

There have been, of course, numerous critical attempts to explain the terror that suicide bombing inspires, and mapping them effectively to reach a clear understanding is necessarily beyond the scope of this brief conclusion. And yet, this project undertakes the exploration of suicide bombing as an afterlife of race suicide because shadows of suicide bombers were, however dimly, already cast on suicidal characters examined in this study. If their self-willed deaths aim to assert the individual right to dispose of one's life against the life administering power, their suicides render them traitors to that biopower. As such, their suicidal desires are aimed at the reconfiguration of heterosexually organized body politics, even at the cost of its demolition.

Olive Chancellor's desire to die for the feminist cause and her coveted ecstasy of martyrdom, for instance, remind us of jihadist martyrs who sacrifice their lives to achieve eternal existence. Though Henry James did not allow Olive Chancellor to offer herself as a sacrifice, the novelist immediately returned to the theme of sacrificial death and martyrdom in *The Princess Casamassima* (1886). Published in the same year as one of the first manifestations of terrorist violence in the U.S., the Haymarket bombing in Chicago, the novel revolves around Hyacinth Robinson—bastard son of an English aristocrat and the French prostitute who murdered him—who becomes involved with anarchist socialism and takes an oath to give his life for the revolutionary cause. James once again thwarts the protagonist's desire to become a redeemer for the oppressed. With the gun consigned to assassinate a duke at a party, Robinson takes his own life concluding the novel. Yet *The Princess Casamassima* in many ways

represents a preliminary sketch of the confluence between suicide and terror which was to be fleshed out by Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907). Such turn of the century literary representations of suicide seem to point to the troubling relation between the act of self-killing and the violent shattering of the body politic.

### Necropolitical Suicides

Progressive race suicide discourse was the prime example of U.S. nativist biopolitical rhetoric. Its double imperative to re-create white American-ness, while suppressing other races, bespeaks the operation of life administering power within one nation state. In contrast, suicide bombing stages the conflict engendered in the global operation of biopower. By this I mean that suicide bombing, as an instantiation of race suicide in the twenty-first century, conceptualizes the race that kills itself as no longer referring to one selected race, but the human race. For, as Derrida comments on September 11, suicide terrorism is “[d]oubly suicidal.” It performs not only the self-immolation of the terrorist’s individual body, but also a self-destruction of “the prevailing world order” represented by the U.S. since the end of Cold War. Contrary to popular imagination that the terrorist attack came out of nowhere, Derrida argues that the hijackers of September 11 came “*from inside*”: they “[i]mmigrated, trained, prepared for their act in the United States by the United States,” and with through hypermodern technoliteracy they “g[ot] hold of an American weapon in an American city on the ground of an American airport” (95). In this sense, to use Slavoj Žižek’s oft-cited phrases, suicide terror debunks “the opposition between ‘liberal’ and fundamentalist’ societies, ‘McWorld versus Jihad,’” revealing the “embarrassing third terms” that it is engendered within and by the uneven development of global late capitalism (Žižek 52).

Such aggression coming from within Derrida figuratively names “an autoimmunitary process”: “that strange behavior where a living being, in quasi-*suicidal* fashion, ‘itself’ works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself *against* its ‘own’ immunity” (95; italics original). Like the confused immune system that damages normal cells that it otherwise protects from infection, terrorists attack the globalized body politic in which they are embedded. Derrida’s biological metaphor economically captures the uncanniness—in a Freudian sense—of suicide terrorism and rightly invalidates the “with us or against us” rhetoric of the war on terrorism. At the same time, the cogency of the metaphor symptomatically shows the degree to which corporeal figuration, the “body politic,” scripts our perception of the social and the political to this day. If, as I have argued, the corporeal imagination of the political is the organizing grammar of biopolitics, which incorporates individual bodies in the calculus of the population, Derrida’s deployment of the autoimmunity metaphor points toward an inextricability of suicide terror from biopolitics.

Seen in this light, it is no coincidence that Achille Mbembe contemplates suicide bombing at the end of his rearticulation of Foucauldian biopower. In “Necropolitics,” Mbembe argues that if biopolitics functions through the differentially allocated desirability of human lives, as Foucault suggests in “*Society Must Be Defended*,” the unexplored underside of life administering power is what he terms necropower: the calculated destruction of human existence by the modern state. The power to decide “who is *disposable* and who is not” asserts itself most potently in the colonies, “the zone where the violence of the state of exception is deemed to operate in the service of ‘civilization’” (27, 24 italics original). Taking Gaza and the West Bank as the manifestation par excellence of necropower, Mbembe forcefully argues that

late-modern colonial occupation combines biopolitical and necropolitical controls.

Orchestrating a systematic control of lifelines of the colonized, along with a highly mechanized means of killing, the late-modern colonial occupation not only disposes a large number of victims, but also keeps the colonized in a constant state of injury, “a form of death-in-life” (21).

In this context, we can read Mbembe’s sudden—and rather disorienting—turn to suicide bombing in Palestine, toward the end of “Necropolitics,” as portraying suicide bombing as a colonial mimicry of necropower and its corollary, biopower. Doing so articulates one of the reasons why suicide bombing has come to function as a potent signifier of the crisis of our age: that is to say, suicide bombing petrifies us because it appropriates the power—necro and bio—that instrumentalizes human existence for the calculus of population. First, like the process of late-modern colonial occupation, it intends to rupture “the spaces of everyday life,” indiscriminately targeting unarmed civilian populations (36). In so doing, suicide bombing circulates the colonial affect of death-in-life within globalized body politics. For, though the aim of suicide bombing might be political, the act itself never accomplishes its manifested aim. Rather, its “consequence is less political than affective and emotional: installing fear and disseminating terror” (Gana 22). The terror that suicide bombing inspires permeates and controls our quotidian life, refusing to be quarantined in the extremities of the globalized social body.

Second, suicide bombing transforms the “body” itself—the very site of biopolitical control—into a weapon, “not in a metaphorical sense but in the truly ballistic sense” (Mbembe 36). The explosive strapped onto the body of the suicide bomber become “so intimately part of the body that at the time of detonation it annihilates the body of its bearer, who carries with it

the bodies of others when it does not reduce them to pieces” (36). Literally instrumentalizing his/her own body, the suicide bomber explodes the façade of biopower that seductively consigns autonomy, agency, and privacy to the body. The body, both of his/her own and that of the victims, is reduced to “the status of pieces of inert flesh, scattered everywhere, and assembled with difficulty before the burial” (36-37): it bares no trace of the sanctified basis of human subjectivity.

Suicide bombing does not only disintegrate bodies into scattered pieces of flesh indistinguishable from one another, but it also makes death “not simply that which is *my own*, but always goes hand in hand with the death of the other” (Mbembe 37). Perhaps, the horror that suicide bombing arouses resides in, above all, this capacity to violate the boundary between the self and the other in death. Both suicide and homicide at the same time, as Jasbir Puar argues in *Terrorist Assemblage* (2007), suicide bombing effects “a death not of the Self nor of the Other, but both simultaneously, and perhaps more accurately, a death scene that obliterates the Hegelian self/other dialectic altogether” (Puar 216). According to Puar, the suicide terrorist constitutes “a queer assemblage,” a queerness that resists identity as a seamless entity (218). The penetrative energy that radiates from the synthetic body of a suicide bomber, “machined together through metal and flesh,” does not only undermine the presumed organicity of the body (216); in its dispersion of the boundary of bodies, the suicide bomber foregrounds the messy medley, the mutually implicated coming-together that we are, thereby forcing “a completely chaotic challenge to normative conventions of gender, sexuality, and race, disobeying normative conventions of ‘appropriate’ bodily practices and the sanctity of the able body” (221).

Puar's provocative reading of suicide bomber as an embodiment of queer assemblage seems to urge us to flip the unmarked versos of this project. That is, in its collapse of the self/other boundary, suicide bombing seems to menacingly approximate itself to the erotics that my dissertation has sought to chart in representations of suicide in the Progressive Era. Progressive suicidals, as I have argued, phantasmagorically seek the hand of the utopian erotics through such means as the quasi-religious ecstasy of martyrdom, the seductive touch of the ocean, or the affective intercommunion with non-human animals. Their self-willed death points to the desire for the transcendence of subject/object boundaries, which refuses to register itself in the object-choice based system of sexuality inextricable from the operation of biopower. By disposing their white bodies, instead of re-producing them for the nation, they surely mount resistance, albeit an unavailing one, to the racializing discourse of the Progressive era U.S. dovetailed with the discourse of sexuality. Their erotics of race suicide, instead, seek the eros that oversteps the boundary of the body. As I have argued in Chapter 4, the suicidal disembodiment of David Hersland in *The Making of Americans* consummates this erotics of race suicide in one sense, in its staging of a relentlessly democratic endeavor to effect the fusion of differentially racialized and sexualized beings. At the same time, such disembodied oneness could simulate the melting pot rhetoric, which incorporates and merges "every one" into generic Americanness, glossing over ineradicable differences of livability among subjects incorporated into the social body. If suicide bombing is, as Mbembe and Puar suggest, an attempt of those subsumed into and deemed disposable in the globalized body politics to liquidate differentially allocated livability, does a queer assemblage of suicide bombing consummate the desire for disembodied oneness that David Hersland dreamed of?

## Temporality of Paradise

Hany Abu-Assad's 2005 film, *Paradise Now*, seems to obliquely explore the precarious erotic economy that suicide bombing invokes from within the underside of biopower. Set and shot in Nablus in the West Bank, the film pictures the last two days of two Palestinian childhood friends, Said and Khaled, who face an impending mission of joint suicide attacks in Tel Aviv. Tracing the way in which Palestinian-born young car mechanics are confronted by the oath they took two years ago, *Paradise Now*, to use Nouri Gana's words in her brilliant reading of the film, "treads the fine line between interpreting and understanding suicide bombing, ensuring that these independent complementary and simultaneous tasks do not slither accidentally into the moral abyss of justifying 'terrorism'" (Gana 21-22). Abu-Assad's visual narrative of suicide bombers, despite its necessarily polarizing theme, resists the Manichaean dramatization of the Israel-Palestine relation. Instead, with its restrained yet eloquent narrative attempt to chart the unrepresentable terrain of the psyche of suicide bombers, it brings into relief "the differential allocation of humanity" that undergirds the horror of "humaniz[ing] suicide bombers," which the film sometimes invokes for the viewer (25).

As Gana's reading suggests, *Paradise Now* is, in many ways, an instantiation of lives under necropower, the power to decide who is disposable and who is not. The devastating effects of occupation are seldom focalized; what permeates the film instead is death-in-life, the desensitizing matter-of-factness of affliction that shapes the everyday life of Nablus. The thoroughbass of the film is muffled sirens, distant sounds of bomb and firefight echoing in daytime city that do not disrupt the progress of Palestinian commuters except for having them stoop over a little; demolished buildings, the nighttime city deserted under the curfew, constant

roadblocks, and a mechanic with a prosthetic hand are fused in the background. Even when Said receives the suicide mission, asked if he was ready, the young car mechanic answers forthright with neither trepidation nor enthusiasm, as if he was asked to repair a car: “Yes, of course.” The question—“Are you ready for death?”—is mistimed; for, to use Said’s partner, Khaled’s words, “Under the occupation, we are already dead.”

Capturing the operation of necropolitical death-in-life, *Paradise Now* gives a subtle critique of the biopolitical instrumentalization of intimacy. The film overlaps Said’s growing skepticism toward the mission with a conventional romance plot between Said and the daughter of the renowned martyr, Suha. Born in Paris and grown up in Morocco, Suha returns to Nablus at the opening of the film as a human rights activist, who vocally denounces the ineffectuality of suicide bombing as a means of resistance. The culmination of their romance is portrayed in a scene wherein Said kisses Suha in a parked car—Said is already on his way to the mission, with explosives strapped onto his body underneath the white shirt, without Suha’s knowing it. The scene, as Michael Aaron points out, adheres to “a conventional vignette of romance” with a vengeance, framed with “the pink-tinged sky beyond their silhouetted figures [that] invokes the iconic sunset of the love narrative.” The framing of their kiss exemplifies, Aaron further argues, “the film’s dialectical relationship to conformity and mass (read Western and/or Westernized) audiences, as well as to its own self-conscious self-defeat” (Aaron 88). For the kiss occurs only after Said rejected Suha’s appeal to disclose his past—as a son of a collaborator to Israel executed by his fellow Palestinians. Said rebuffs her entreaty: “Why talk? To get your pity? To entertain people whose life is a bit better?” Said’s refusal echoes Suha’s earlier reply to Said’s remark that life bores him: “I’m sure that your life is not boring. Look, I believe your life is like

a minimalist Japanese film.” In this context, Said’s kiss to the cosmopolitan elite, whose status as a stranger to the West Bank necessarily provides a point of identification with the audience, simultaneously caters to the filmic expectations of tragic romance, and denigrates the supposed singularity of their intimacy into mass-produced cliché.

While Aaron rightly names Suha as “the film’s notional ‘love interest’” and thereby locates the film’s oblique relation to a mass-produced narrative of intimacy, it is questionable whether “[t]he film’s denial of romance and intimacy is concomitant with its denial of the male gaze, with desire-bound structures of looking” (86, 89). Though overlooked by critics to a surprising degree, the film oozes with homoerotic intimacy, structured by a desire-bound gaze that fetishizes the bodies of suicide bombers. The audience is implicated within this gaze, voyeuring the process in which Said’s and Khaled’s bodies are transformed into living weapons: the long sequence captures the way in which their bodies are, with a ceremonial tranquility, bathed, lain naked, shaved, towed head to tow, and finally strapped with explosives, whose metallic rigidity contrast sharply with their supple skin. Shedding off the ethnic markers and clad in the black suits and white shirts, they appropriate Tarantino-esque “stylized images of consumable violence,” indistinguishable not only from each other, but also from Israel settlers (Thomas 444). After all, their transformation is intended for their infiltration into Tel Aviv without looking like Palestinian others. Their bodies approximate what Puar calls queer assemblages, machining together flesh with metal, blurring the self/other boundary of ethnic identification. It attracts the fetishizing gaze of the spectator, male or female, who do not know what they are made to desire by that gaze.

In short, suicide bombing in this film is structured as an erotic act, whose consummation the viewer is compelled to desire to witness at the end. Symbolically, the two would-be martyrs clad in sharp black suits are told by Jamal, one of the organizers of the mission, how to conceal their mission: "In Tel Aviv, you are from Jerusalem and you are going to a wedding." The pretense of wedding is to be repeatedly referred to in the rest of film, framing suicide bombing as an erotic union. But "Whose wedding?" Khaled asks, met with Jamal's blunt answer: "it doesn't matter." And yet for Khaled, if not for his childhood friend, the erotic union of suicide bombing is prepared for Said and him. To a surprising degree, critics are silent on Khaled and Said's intimate bonding, highlighted throughout the film. Their joint suicide attack is, as Jamal makes explicit when he hands down the mission toward the beginning of the film, planned according to what *they* wished; knowing the impending mission, Khaled embraces Said, with an unexceptional degree of intimacy in this otherwise affectively drained film, says under his breath with a radiant smile, "It's our turn." The film does not provide any rationale for Khaled's enthusiastic determination for the suicide attack, unlike Said's, which is explained as a vindication for his father exploited by Israel to become a collaborator. Committed neither to politics nor religious fundamentalism, Khaled still hankers after death in suicide bombing, but not without his partner, encouraging Said when he is in doubt, holding him tight: "I'm with you." In the film's longest sequence, Khaled and Said are separated in their first attempt to cross the Israel border and desperately seek each other like star-crossed lovers. What is at issue is *not* whether Khaled sexually desires Said or not, *nor* if Khaled envisions their simultaneous death as the only possible solution for his erotic desire. Rather, *Paradise Now* frames their suicide bombing as doubly suicidal, but not between the individual body of the suicide bomber

and the globalized body politics; it is a double suicide of two childhood friends. Like a joint suicide pact, suicide bombing would reverse the marriage vow of “till death do us part,” uniting them in death.

The moment of their wedding comes closer. Khaled finds Said, who dispels his skepticism about the mission and renews his commitment to the cause, and the two cross the Israel border, entering the city of Tel Aviv, this time without fumbling. But the sanctity of their wedding, for Khaled, is to be lost. From the car window the camera captures the affluent ease of the city thriving on foreign capital, riveted onto two billboard ads. The giant youths, half naked, one captivatingly looks down on them holding a Samsung cell phone, the other flaunts his biceps in the basketball uniform. Immediately after the brief shots of two images, the camera moves toward the beach swarming with tourists, some walking down the street in bikinis. Their bodies glare with opulence verging on obscenity, oblivious of death-in-life pervading the city just forty miles away. Getting out of the car, Khaled urges Said to abandon the mission: “Come back with me, I won’t leave you here. I won’t let you die, I won’t allow it.”

Suicide terrorism, after all, never liberates the individual from the tight grip of the social body but instead intensifies it, with what Terry Eagleton calls the ethos of Dionysian “orgy of un-meaning” (Eagleton 8): “In massacres as in mass orgies, everyone is just a stand-in for everyone else. Both kinds of event exemplify the abstract logic of modernity” (26). Instead of becoming the headstone of one’s singularity unmediated by the life administering power—bio or necro—death through suicide bombing reproduces the system the bomber holds in contempt (Foucault *History* 138). Mass-produced deaths by suicide bombing would anerotically decompose the irreducible particularity of the intimacy between Khaled and Said into the

unmeaning flesh, interweaving it to the bodies interchangeable to their eyes.

Khaled's desperate attempt to dissuade Said does not prevail. Thrusting Khaled into the car, telling the driver to go back to Nablus, Said remains in the city, getting on a bus crowded with Israeli soldiers. In the film's final sequence, the camera slowly moves toward Said sitting in the middle of the bus, zeroing in on his eyes. His eyes, with a strange mixture of blankness and intensity, gaze forward, as if to echo Jamal's instruction: "Do not be afraid of the soldiers. Look them in the eyes, without blinking. Remember that you control them. Their lives are in your hands." The viewer is made to realize that the coveted consummation of double suicide is to be brought not between Said and Khaled, nor between Said and Israeli soldiers. The erotic potential of suicide bombing is transferred to the relation between Said and the spectators who are unwittingly sutured into the position of the soldier and petrified by his gaze. The present tense of Paradise invoked by the title of the film seems to approach.

Yet the capitalized End once again eludes us. After the close shot of Said's eyes lasting over twenty seconds, the screen silently dissolves into blinding whiteness. With the film's withholding of the spectacular calamity, the spectators are suspended in the tragedy of sempiternity as weary survivors. But if, as Mbembe says, the suicide bomber's approximation of death and freedom from the life under necropower is driven by "an *ecstatic* notion of temporality and politics," erotically implicated by Said's gaze, we could, at least, desire what he desired: a modality of ecstatic time in which the present is evacuated, becoming "a moment of vision—vision of the freedom not yet come" (39).

Such vision of the as yet to be seen future of the body politic is, perhaps, akin to what the Progressive suicides this study has examined urge us to envision: stepping out of the

genealogical time of sempiternity sustained by the double discourses of race and sexuality, breeding a race of its own undelimited by consanguinity. When enlivened by the morbid erotics of race suicide, we find “[w]hat makes for a livable world is no idle question” (Butler, *Undoing* 17). If, to be “ec-static means, literally, to be outside oneself” and thereby “to be transported beyond oneself by a passion ... to be *beside oneself* with rage or grief,” the ecstatic erotics of race suicide demands us to be affected by rage and grief through and through: rage and grief for the line drawn between who is disposable and who is not (22). And then the brood of the Progressive suicides will keep resisting the tragedy of sempiternity, agreeing to be affected by each other, to the degree that the notion of self will have been forever transformed, even when “a transformation of the full result of which you cannot know in advance” (18).

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