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I, Walter M Bosse, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English & Comparative Literature.

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Breaking the Iceberg: Ernest Hemingway, Black Modernism, and the Politics of Narrative Appropriation

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Breaking the Iceberg: Ernest Hemingway, Black Modernism, and the Politics of Narrative Appropriation

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Abstract

This project redresses the scarcity of literary criticism that deals with the fictions of Ernest Hemingway in relation to black cultural productions of the twentieth century. Building from a postcolonial theoretical framework, it establishes a historicized dialogue in which African-American authors such as Langston Hughes and James Baldwin strategically confront, appropriate, and repurpose Hemingway’s modernist narratives. This dialogue dramatizes my conviction that black writers of the Harlem Renaissance and post-Renaissance decades were tactically reading and resisting Modernism’s central texts in ways that can be seen to anticipate critical deconstruction. Reading Hemingway through minority discourse thus gives this project a new purchase on his aesthetic choices, at the same time that it complicates and augments existing theories about influence, ingenuity, and power in twentieth-century African-American literature.
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Introduction

A strikingly small number of literary critics have attempted to place the work of Ernest Hemingway in conversation with the cultural productions of twentieth-century black artists. This dissertation addresses this gap in the criticism, and takes it as a historical and theoretical imperative to spotlight, describe, and analyze intertextual moments where Hemingway’s fiction converges in fascinating and problematic ways with the expressive realm of African-American culture. Far from an investigation of literary “influence,” this study proceeds from a methodology that recognizes a complex network of strategic appropriations taking place between mainstream modernist writers and emergent voices in the black tradition.

I have decided to place Hemingway at the center of this study for a number of reasons. The first obtains from the historical reality that his fiction was wildly successful and widely published during his career, and has remained readily available since his death in 1961. Under these conditions, his work has always been materially accessible, a prime resource for up-and-coming writers during and after the period of cultural Modernism. Given the increasing production and consumption of cultural objects in black communities in the early decades of the twentieth century, I find it intriguing that so few critics have explored Hemingway’s work in that context.

Secondly, Hemingway’s literary aesthetic is in large part dictated by a deliberate minimalism that involves omission, elision, and erasure. Thus, his narratives supply fascinatingly complex material for other writers seeking to use them for their own distinct purposes. More than perhaps any other modernist author, Hemingway’s narrative craft is one of absence. His stripped-down prose provides for an “illusion of clarity,” though it
remains highly ambiguous and uncertain (St. Pierre 364). Therefore, in the chapters that follow, moments of semantic and aesthetic ambiguity in Hemingway’s texts figure as the primary points of appropriation; in the process of rewriting those moments, the black authors give them real political weight. The appropriations thus illustrate that African-American writers were actively practicing a kind of critical reading and reconstruction of Modernism’s central texts. In a sense, they politicize the apolitical narrative – making something out of nothing, as it were.

Third, in my critical estimation, the field of Hemingway studies has remained largely committed to an exceptionalist view of the author’s modernist craft. In other words, barring a number of important studies that I build upon in this dissertation, there has persisted a troubling tendency amongst scholars to perpetuate Hemingway’s own assertions about his work – that it is clear, concrete, and objective, and that these attributes set him apart from the complex and uncertain culture of Modernism in which he lived and wrote.1 Referring to the limited number of poststructuralist approaches to Hemingway, critic Scott St. Pierre has recently and rightly pointed out that “many readers take Hemingway’s transparency for granted” (364).2 In this dissertation, I hope to cast suspicion on this prevailing myth of transparency. Reading through a historicized intertextuality, this study seeks to enhance the current conversation about Hemingway by locating and analyzing a set of appropriations that involve his fiction, which occurred decades before the critical industry surrounding his work.

It is important to clarify that in their use of Hemingway’s fiction, these black authors can be seen, in part, to practice what Henry Louis Gates, Jr. calls “signifyin(g)”: revising with “a compelling sense of difference based on the black vernacular” (xxii).
Since I rely upon “appropriation” as an operative term throughout this study, it is also important to distinguish the forms practiced by Langston Hughes and James Baldwin from the prevailing forms of modernist-primitivist borrowing practiced by white artists, which – as I will discuss in a moment – often involved racist and Imperialist gestures. However, I would also contend that Hughes’s and Baldwin’s methods of interpreting and redeploying Hemingway’s fictions go beyond the act of signifyin(g) that Gates describes in *The Signifying Monkey*. To varying degrees, “the black vernacular” is indeed vital to their social and artistic ethos; however, their engagement with Hemingway’s work has far more than linguistic implications. For example, given Hemingway’s stature as a literary celebrity in his own time, and given the values that his author-image alone would invoke, to signify on his work is also to infiltrate and unhinge such discursive constructs as hypermasculinity, heteronormativity, and nationalism, among others.

Thus, my approach recognizes that African-American modernists were performing poststructuralist theories about identity and resistance many years in advance of their explication by critical theorists. In a sense, their narratives constitute a variant on the deconstructionist imperative: they reveal the inherent instability of Hemingway’s texts by targeting and destabilizing the privileged terms that dictate the structure. However, their readings and rewritings of Hemingway’s texts go beyond merely demonstrating the aesthetic and semantic uncertainties that constitute them. Hughes and Baldwin use Hemingway’s ambiguities as opportunities: they tactically usurp the textual contradictions, and use them to expose the inherent instabilities within prevailing structures of power, structures that are predicated upon notions of racial and sexual difference.
The African-American texts in my study become avenues that offer new access to the problematic politics of representation in Hemingway’s prose, and therefore allow us to gain a different critical purchase on the author and his fiction. Their narratives play on the semantic and aesthetic ambiguities in his work; they transform those textual moments, and they give them political valences. Prescient commentators on modernist art in their own historical moment, Hughes and Baldwin circumvent the myth of transparency that has beguiled so many of Hemingway’s critics. They point up the fascinating and confounding complexities in his narratives, and fashion politically active art from politically inert ambiguity. Thus, this study redresses the scarcity of criticism that deals with Hemingway in relation to his black contemporaries, at the same time that it enhances our understanding of influence, ingenuity, and power in the African-American literary tradition.

In the ever-expanding field of modernist studies, much ink has been spilled on the cultural politics of “Primitivism.” This complex phenomenon became increasingly prevalent in Europe and the United States in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, when white artists, writers, and thinkers began turning their attention to the productions and performances of non-white cultures. To be sure, “the cultural fascination with blackness” was not wholly unique to any particular locale or movement, nor was primitivism confined to any one mode; indeed, as critic Carol Sweeney shows, it “reverberated through high, popular, and mass culture” (2). Known in France as nérophilie, this cultural turn toward racial difference as a subject of both interest and appropriation signaled a profoundly significant shift in Western Modernism at large.
Fueled in part by material and theoretical developments in anthropology, the prevailing cultural interest in racial Otherness that continued through the 1920s and 1930s can be witnessed in the work of artists as diverse as Pablo Picasso, William Faulkner, Gertrude Stein, Carl Van Vechten, and Eugene O’Neill, among many others. To be sure, the soaring popularity of American jazz, perhaps most famously exemplified by the iconicity of Josephine Baker, further attests to the popular cultural appeal of minority aesthetic practices.

Given the breadth and complexity of the cultural field in which primitivism became a central term, there are of course myriad different interpretations of its emergence, impact, and politics. However, most scholars will generally agree on its primary function within Anglo-American Modernism: by invoking and appropriating forms of representation recognized as racially Other – discursive, visual, musical, etc. – white modernists were able to “make it new” at the same time that their embrace of specifically racial forms enabled them to challenge what they felt to be the outmoded and stifling values still lingering in the late-Victorian air. Race, and racial signifiers, thus possessed of a unique cultural cache, which, when appropriated by the white artist, imparted to him a rhetorical force, an energy borne of novelty and intercultural exchange.

Of course, as scholars have shown, modernist primitivism was, in part, coextensive with the longer history of imperial conquest; it often sprang from and perpetuated racist stereotypes; it existed alongside dominant modes of production and within political structures that actively suppressed the sociopolitical lives of racial minorities. Thus, on one hand, these cultural borrowings enabled aesthetic developments as rich and influential as, for example, Pablo Picasso’s “Les Demoiselles d’Avignon” and
Gertrude Stein’s *Three Lives*; on the other hand, these appropriations can be seen as stylizations of the late Empire, aesthetic performances that signify as secondary forms of cultural looting.

In her article, “Periodizing Modernism: Postcolonial Modernities and the Space/Time Borders of Modernist Studies,” Susan Stanford Friedman acknowledges that the prevailing critical view of this history is itself implicated in a political structure that “stage[s] Western artists as the innovators and the cultures of the rest as tribal and traditional, as the raw material for creative appropriation and transmutation into modern art” (428). Indeed, such a view perpetuates divisive and limiting dichotomies that give spatial priority to “Western” (read: white) artists who inhabit the cultural “center,” with the rest existing somewhere in the primal margins, where their rudimentary productions await discovery and enhancement in the hands of better craftsmen. Not only does this perception reinforce a racialized high art/low art binary that undermines the creative agency of the minority artist, it is also historically inaccurate. It ignores the reality, which is that “intermixing cultures are not unidirectional, but multidirectional; not linear influences, but reciprocal ones; not passive assimilations, but actively transformative ones, based in a blending of adaptation and resistance” (Friedman 430).

Therefore, I believe that it is both possible and necessary to acknowledge that the writing of a modernist such as Ezra Pound, for example, evinces many different cultural imperatives than the work of Zora Neale Hurston, but also to explore their texts as intercultural contact zones, as sites of reciprocal exchange. To this end, I want to follow critic Michael North and echo his claim that while we can and should recognize “two
different modernisms,” we must also recognize that black and white modernists are “tightly linked by their different stakes in the same language” (11). North continues, it is impossible to understand either modernism without reference to the other, without reference to the language they so uncomfortably shared, and to the political and cultural forces that were constricting that language at the very moment modern writers of both races were attempting in dramatically different ways to free it. (11)

Thus, when Amy L. Strong claims that “Hemingway’s early short stories consistently relied on the presence of native Americans and African Americans as a driving force behind the narrative tension,” she is not wrong, but she is missing an entire piece of the dialectic: the minority response (12).

As Strong and others have made clear, Hemingway’s fictions do at times bear the trace of modernist primitivism. 3 However, this study seeks to build upon and depart from the criticism that focuses on race strictly within his fiction, letters, and manuscripts. I am thus interested in exploring Hemingway’s politics of representation by way of an intertextual approach, and propose that his texts became objects of appropriation and rewriting in the hands of African-American artists. Given this emphasis on creative confrontation and ideological resistance, this study employs a postcolonial theoretical framework in constructing the dialogue between Hemingway’s texts and the black modernists who actively read and repurposed them.

In his essay, “Modernism and Imperialism,” Frederic Jameson recognizes that “in the United States itself, we have come to think and to speak of the emergence of an internal Third World and of internal Third World voices” (49, emphasis in original).
Postcolonial theory thus prioritizes what Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* calls “contrapuntal reading,” which requires that we not only acknowledge and listen to these voices within “mainstream” Western texts, but that we also see them as primary and constitutive (66). While the field of Hemingway studies has gained some ground with scholars like Strong, and more recently Marc K. Dudley, exploring the racial presence in the author’s texts, the imperative of postcolonial theory demands that we push even further. Jameson suggests that texts composed by canonical modernist writers can “no longer be grasped immanently,” and that “the internal evidence of First World data” remains insufficient when viewed in isolation, unable to account for the “radical otherness of colonial life” (51). In this view, modernist literature is fundamentally predicated on a lack, an absence. Hence the necessity of spotlighting the creative intervention practiced by “internal Third World” agents such as Langston Hughes and James Baldwin. The “reinterpretive zeal” that dictates their appropriation of Hemingway’s work should be seen as “intellectual and figurative energy reseeing and rethinking the terrain common to whites and non-whites” (Said 212).

Yet, still, the question remains: why Hemingway? Wyndham Lewis claimed in 1934 that “it is difficult to imagine a writer whose mind is more entirely closed to politics than is Hemingway’s” (17-18). So, why would Hughes and Baldwin turn to his work when their own artistic pursuits were so deeply invested in the sociopolitical conditions of modernity? There are, I believe, many answers to this question. The first seems obvious: Hemingway was a famous writer, and his fiction was widely available to anyone with a desire to read it. Self evident as this claim might seem, it nonetheless merits some exploration, if only to establish the larger context for Hemingway’s popularity. During
his own lifetime, his first novel, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), sold over one million copies (Beegel 269). His short stories were published in an array of periodicals before making their way into collected volumes and anthologies. Critic John Raeburn notes that Hemingway “published five books between 1925 and 1930, and all save *The Torrents of Spring* (1926) received enthusiastic notes” (12). Indeed, the availability of Hemingway’s fiction in the first half of the twentieth century is perhaps exceeded only by the availability of his image in the popular media.

Speaking to the same year in which Lewis issued the above critique, biographer Michael Reynolds acknowledges that by the time Hemingway was thirty-five, he “was a newsworthy figure whose every public act was grist for the media; his broad shoulders, and his round, mustached face with its pronounced widow’s peak [had become] as widely recognized as some movie stars” (171). Reynolds goes on to point out an interesting reversal that further evidences the power of Hemingway’s persona: “Where once his fiction drew attention to his active life, now that life drew attention to his writing” (171). It would certainly understate the claim to say that Hemingway was a celebrity in his own time. However, in spite of the deliberateness with which the author managed that celebrity image, his legacy as a pop icon is not at all dictated by a singular, unifying ethos. To be sure, Hemingway’s author-image has multiple, often contradictory faces. In his study of “Hemingway himself as a fiction, as a popular representation,” David M. Earle sees the shifting registers of the author’s identity as a consequence of the popular genres that featured him:

He appears as a blood-and-guts soldier in the adventure magazines and as an expert and lusty sportsman, drinker, and traveler in the bachelor
magazines; and as a celebrity, he filled the pages of the tabloids. This popular representation of Hemingway as both serious author and public figure, sensitive artist and masculine ideal, has often been overlooked in both biographies and critical studies. But his reputation has as much, if not more, to do with the construction of Hemingway as a masculine role model in the popular press as it does in his work. (4)

Thus, Hughes and Baldwin would have encountered Hemingway’s fiction at the same time that they, and every other American, would have experienced the development and evolution of his mythos in the popular media. This is not to belabor the de facto claim that they would have read his work as a matter of course. Rather, it raises the stakes of their appropriations. Given Hemingway’s iconic status as a living legend, and given the cultural values and “ideals” attached to him, to signify on his work is also to access and potentially disrupt such discursive constructs as masculinity, heteronormativity, and nationalism, among others. Tracing these appropriations thus reveals that we are not dealing with one writer “influencing” others; to the contrary, this intertextuality has more to do with iconoclasm than it does with influence.

Whether or not Hemingway’s “mind” was “closed to politics,” as Lewis would have it, is a somewhat different matter. However, what is central in each of the following chapters is the critical recognition that Hemingway’s modernist aesthetics are driven by contradictory impulses, and that at the center of the aesthetic contradiction there exists a moment of profound sociopolitical significance. Miriam B. Mandel shrewdly observes that the “contradictory needs to affirm and deny, to reveal and conceal” show that Hemingway’s texts are as unstable “as any postmodern work” (2). I would of course
concur with Mandel’s observation, but I would also add that she is not the first reader to discern this instability. This returns us to the original question – why would black writers choose to appropriate Hemingway’s work?

Before exploring this question through Hughes and Baldwin’s specific responses to Hemingway, I focus on a moment in *The Sun Also Rises* where minority discourse emerges, and brings with it a racial subtext that I reveal and situate in dialogic relation to the novel’s primary narrative. Chapter One, “‘Aggravatin’ Papa’: Race, Omission, and Discursive Liminality in Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*,” establishes that black masculinity and the threat of interracial sex within the novel’s content lead to fascinating aesthetic consequences in the narrative’s style. The scene that I study occurs early in *Sun*, in Zelli’s jazz club, located historically in the Montmartre district of Paris. There, the text suggests that the female protagonist, Lady Brett Ashley, may have had a sexual encounter with the club’s unnamed black drummer. Perceived through the narrative gaze of *Sun*’s white protagonist, Jake Barnes, interracial sex becomes a subject of both intense interest and fear; the text suppresses much of the musician’s speech by depicting his utterances in ellipses, as blanks within the dialogue (i.e. “‘……’ the drummer chanted”). In a way, the nuances of the scene dramatize Toni Morrison’s claim that, whether “[e]ncoded or explicit, indirect or overt, the [white] linguistic responses to an Africanist presence complicate texts, sometimes contradicting them entirely” (66).

Initially, I focus on this particular moment to demonstrate the aesthetic contradictions that emerge from Hemingway’s encounters with blackness. This allows me to stage, early on, the kinds of narrative complexities and conflicts that readers such as Hughes and Baldwin recognize and respond to in Chapters Two and Three. However,
I also utilize the intertextual makeup of the scene to go beyond Morrison’s assessment, and to push past the critical methods of scholars such as Strong and Dudley, whose critical visions remain focused on Hemingway’s texts alone. By exhuming the drummer’s omitted lyrics and analyzing them in view of the novel’s *mise-en-scène*, I not only provide a deeper look into the text’s troubling formal contradictions, I also make a case for the critical potential that those moments hold.

To this end, I draw from Gayatri Spivak’s postcolonial inquiries in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” and bring the drummer’s lyrics to bear upon the mainstream modernist novel in which they appear. The song he sings is called “Aggravatin’ Papa (Don’t You Try To Two-Time Me),” written in 1922 by jazz composers Roy Turk and J. Russel Robinson. Read against the novel’s racial and sexual anxieties, as well as its racially insensitive portrayal of the drummer, the song’s lyrics carry a rhetorical force that cuts across the narrative. As an intertextual moment, the song imparts an agency to the black voice, and thus performs what Sweeney recognizes historically as a type of “counterprimitivism that constructed an anti-allegorical mode for the racial other and affirmed *real* spaces of difference” (Sweeney 4, emphasis in original). Chapter One seeks to establish minority discourse as a constitutive element of Hemingway’s fiction, and to sustain the critical potential within those moments of aesthetic irresolution. As Marianne DeKoven claims, such moments of “unresolved contradiction or unsynthesized dialectic . . . makes modernist form exemplary of the best hope for aesthetic politics in our time” (679). Chapters Two and Three proceed from my argument that African-American writers – as *readers* and *tactical users* of texts – acknowledged this ambiguous potential within Hemingway’s work.
The structure of these chapters necessarily shifts and expands to accommodate the textual dialogues, and to follow the dialectic from Hemingway’s texts through their interpretation and reinvention by Hughes and Baldwin. I want to emphasize that though this framework places Hemingway’s narratives in a position of historical primacy, I do not intend to posit a unilateral structure of influence, nor to suggest that their secondary uses of his work are in any way acts of artistic homage. To this end, my critical goal partly resembles Michel de Certeau’s imperative in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, which is “to bring to light the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical, and makeshift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of ‘discipline.’” Pushed to their ideal limits, these procedures and ruses of consumers compose the network of an antidiscipline” (xiv-xv). Consuming, appropriating, and redirecting the cultural objects “disseminated . . . by the ‘elites’ producing the language,” black modernists were strategic *readers*, who carved out their aesthetic and sociopolitical subjectivities from the materials that were ready to hand (de Certeau xiii). In this way, their acts of reading and rewriting can here be seen as moments of both artistic and political opportunism. Their interpretations qualitatively transform Hemingway’s narratives and in the process displace the authority of the text: “A different world (the reader’s) slips into the author’s place” (de Certeau xxi).

Chapter Two, “‘When the boy came back’: Nation, *Nostos*, and the Politics of Style in Hemingway’s ‘Soldier’s Home’ and Langston Hughes’s ‘Home,’” reconsiders Hemingway’s response to the Great War by placing his 1925 short story about a disaffected veteran in conversation with war-homecoming narratives by black writers. More specifically, I explore the manner in which Hughes’s short story, “Home” (1934),
reconstructs Hemingway’s text. In my analysis, I illustrate that Hemingway’s “Soldier’s Home” develops a familial metaphor through which the Krebs household represents nationalist interests and authority. The development of this figure in the text initiates a potential confrontation with the discursive forces that fueled the war. However, the narrative arc falls shy of the confrontation: the story disengages its critique and falls back upon formal experimentation as a kind of diversion tactic that covers over what is potentially volatile. Indeed, the text’s political impulse to disclose Krebs’s severe psychological wounding as the result of nationalist discourse is contradicted by its aesthetics, which close off entirely the story’s political register.

In Hughes’s rearticulation, “Home” appropriates rhetorical strategies from the earlier text in order to launch a more engaged and more direct critique of power structures, a critique that “Home” radically recontextualizes to focus on racial conflict. Critics have noted that “Home” bears a direct relation to Hemingway’s story, but no one has explored the intertextuality at any length. There is, I believe, a reason for this lack in the criticism, which I attribute to the fact that Hughes chose to appropriate a text that contains no black characters, nor deals in any way with issues of race. Thus, Hughes’s reading and rewriting of “Soldier’s Home” is incredibly complicated. It forces us to look beyond racial content or characters as points for appropriation, and to follow Hughes’s interpretation and redeployment of Hemingway’s formal strategies.

In “Home,” Hughes replaces Harold Krebs with a protagonist who is an international black musician. This character returns to his Southern hometown at the story’s beginning; at the end, he is brutally lynched. By transforming Hemingway’s soldier-protagonist into a gifted musician, Hughes reflexively connects politics with art,
and reflects upon that relationship through the perspective of an African-American artist figure. The story also reworks many of the stylistic components central to “Soldier’s Home,” and which Hemingway’s story relies upon to deflect its political content. In Hughes’s hands, narrative framing devices and moments of psychological interiority – lifted from “Soldier’s Home” and transmuted – perform the psychosocial processes of racial identification later articulated in postcolonial theory by Frantz Fanon. Despite the story’s grim conclusion, Hughes’s appropriation illustrates his ability to transform Hemingway’s sterilized and ultimately innocuous narrative about war, he recharges the social potential of the text, and showcases the highly problematic connection between aesthetics and politics.

In dramatically different ways, both stories turn upon a fundamental contradiction: acknowledgement and refusal. In “Soldier’s Home,” the contradiction is enacted by the story’s aesthetics. The metaphor of the Krebs family figures and acknowledges that the patriarchal discourses of nationalism perpetuate war and destroy the people who fight in them. However, at the same time, the story’s other aesthetic maneuvers refuse to allow that critique to come to fruition in the narrative. For Hughes, the contradiction between acknowledgement and refusal occurs as context, and perhaps as motivation for the story itself. Put differently, the lived contradiction of “separate but equal” established by Plessy v. Ferguson, and the continued status of partial citizenship for African Americans through mid-century, were open acknowledgements of racial injustice to those who suffered them but were refused a voice.

Thus, Hughes enables Hemingway’s aesthetic contradiction to assume new life; he infuses it with political possibility. Jameson discusses some of the well-known
stereotypes about modern art, including “its apolitical character, its turn inward and away from the social materials associated with realism . . . and, not least, its aestheticism and its ideological commitment to the supreme value of a now autonomous Art as such” (45). While this description approximates “Soldier’s Home” in the final analysis of that story, I think that Jameson’s later claim in “Modernism and Imperialism” has perhaps more direct relevance to Hughes’s modernist art: “it is only that kind of art which reflexively perceives this problem and lives this formal dilemma that can be called modernism in the first place” (51, emphasis added).

Chapter Three, “Something Rich and Strange: Hemingway’s ‘The Sea Change’ and Reflections of Racial and Sexual Difference in James Baldwin’s Giovanni’s Room,” builds from the critical methodologies of the first two chapters, and goes beyond the temporal parameters of the Lost Generation and Harlem Renaissance eras. As with Chapter One, Hemingway’s narrative contains a sexual transgression, a moment that appears as a subject of both profound interest and profound fear. I begin by illustrating that mirror images and characters’ interpersonal gazes suggest and, at the same time, conceal the story’s central content – male homosexuality. Following the critical research of Comley and Scholes in Hemingway’s Genders, I refer to manuscript evidence that shows Hemingway to have deliberately omitted words explicitly identifying the male protagonist’s nascent attraction to homosexual behavior. However, Chapter Three takes this archival evidence in a different direction than previous scholars have done; it speculates that Baldwin had already discerned and made use of the textual anomalies in “The Sea Change” (1931) by refashioning them in his 1956 novel, Giovanni’s Room.
One of the first openly gay texts in American literature, *Giovanni’s Room* features a Hemingwayesque cityscape: it is set in Paris and narrated from the first-person perspective of a white American expatriate. Indeed, the novel’s milieu is reminiscent of the real and imagined worlds of Hemingway and Fitzgerald during the interwar era; yet, of far greater interest than its allusive *mise-en-scène* is its strategic appropriation of aesthetic figures from “The Sea Change.” Like the protagonist of Hemingway’s story, the main character of *Giovanni’s Room* is in conflict with his own growing homosexual desires. Fascinatingly, in revealing and exploring David’s sexuality in the novel, Baldwin utilizes the very same narrative techniques that Hemingway uses in his story, where they operate to conceal and displace the male-homosexual center. Thus, the appropriation instantiates a reversal of revolutionary proportions. Hemingway’s homophobic short story sets the stage for Baldwin’s homosexual novel, a text that not only made waves within the African-American literary tradition, but which opened up an entirely new conversation about sexuality and subjectivity in American letters at large.

In addition to the postcolonial theoretical framework it takes from the overall study, this chapter also incorporates queer theory, most notably the work of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Hemingway’s long-standing, iconic representation of white heteromasculinity certainly serves as a counterpoint to Baldwin’s subject position; as an openly gay black writer, he was twice removed from the “center” on the scale of cultural difference. Perhaps Baldwin even had this in mind when mining Hemingway’s work, for as Earle’s study of Hemingway in popular culture illustrates, the author’s image was everywhere by the 1950s. As with the previous chapter, Chapter Three illustrates that as black writers confronted and reshaped Hemingway’s narratives, they were responding to
far more than the author’s depiction of blackness, and therefore their dialogue with his work pushes beyond the terms of “primitivism” and “counterprimitivism” (Sweeney 4). Though the appropriations derive from specific and discrete aesthetic moments, they open up into vast and complex territories that allow us to theorize about race and representation in light of such discursive constructs as nation and sexuality, “terrain common to whites and non-whites” (Said 212).

When contemporary critics such as Aliyyah Abur-Rahman assert that “Giovanni’s Room was doomed to fail,” there exists an implicit recognition of the writer’s cultural context and the racism and homophobia that prevailed there (478). Early critics, both black and white, disparaged the text and pointed to the whiteness of the characters, the overt homosexuality, and expatriate milieu as indicators that Baldwin failed to embrace an authentic and affirmative black experience. It is, of course, the notion of “authentic” identity that Baldwin opposes in his novel, along with the power that proceeds from such abstractions. He therefore radically reinterprets the categories of race and sexuality, “whose intersection becomes a productive space in which to interrogate identity itself” (Rohy 219).

Baldwin’s craft develops as a crossover tactic, and takes its full measure from conventions and experimental modes set forth by both black and white modernists. Baldwin occupied a unique position within the history of American letters at mid-century, and “wrote with the acute consciousness of a stranger who struggles to adopt, or adapt to, parts of the culture that preceded him” (Miller 625). If, as I argue, Baldwin borrows from two traditions that critics have consistently viewed as distinct and mostly unrelated, then he must have recognized a useful compatibility between certain
characteristics in black modernist writing and the aesthetic maneuvers in Lost Generation text by writers such as Hemingway. Addressing the impact of this upon the black tradition, Dwight McBride asserts that Baldwin’s work thus “provides a challenge to traditional modes of analysis for African American literary production and suggests a broadening of what African Americanist critique might mean” (68). By the same token, Baldwin’s radical interpretation and redeployment of “The Sea Change” challenges traditional modes of analysis for canonical expatriate texts as well.

In *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African-American Literary Criticism*, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. is primarily interested in defining and describing the “web of filiation” connecting African-American writers (xxii). However, he makes an important historical recognition concerning crosscurrents of influence and interracial exchange:

> Black writers, like critics of black literature, learn to write by reading literature, especially the canonical texts of the Western tradition.

> Consequently, black texts resemble other, Western texts. These black texts employ many of the conventions of literary form that comprise the Western tradition. (xxii)

Said phrases the situation somewhat differently, emphasizing that these textual resemblances are in fact modes of cultural resistance. He acknowledges that there is a certain pathos within the processes of intercultural exchange, processes that invariably involve different gains and losses: “That is the partial tragedy of resistance, that it must to a certain degree work to recover forms already established or at least influenced or infiltrated by the culture of empire” (210). To be sure, the multiple forms of appropriation and rewriting that I explore in this dissertation use Hemingway’s fiction as
far more than source material. The rearticulated texts – here, “Home” and *Giovanni’s Room* – constitute new forms of literary expression that borrow from Hemingway’s narratives at the same time that they point out the aesthetic contradictions within them, so that “what results is not simply a reclamation of the fictive territory, but an articulation of some of the discrepancies and their imagined consequences” (Said 212).

Articulating the discrepancies in Hemingway’s texts, Hughes and Baldwin’s engagement with mainstream Modernism thus registers as both creative and critical work. In a sense, their narratives perform according to a specific deconstructionist imperative: to demonstrate the inherent instability of a text by revealing and subverting the privileged terms that dictate its structure. However, as my chapters show, their creative deconstructions involve *more* than a demonstration of textual uncertainty. As critical enterprises, “Home” and *Giovanni’s Room* use Hemingway’s ambiguities as opportunities: they tactically usurp the textual contradictions, and use them to shed light upon the inherent instabilities within prevailing structures of power, structures that are predicated upon notions of racial and sexual difference.

Proceeding from the view that black Americans inhabited an internal Third World, and that their subjectivities were constrained by political and juridical forces, we necessarily sustain the sense of sociopolitical urgency that motivated Hughes and Baldwin to create art that engaged the operative power structures in the US. Appropriating Hemingway is thus a means to an end; theirs are deconstructions that extend beyond the act of analysis, because they actively critique the sociopolitical discourses they confront. As Gates and Said both establish, there are always particular resemblances that manifest in the minority or colonized text as it responds to First World
cultural productions. Indeed, the resemblance is itself constitutive of the act of resistance. In this way, the appropriations operate similarly to the “colonial mimicry” that Homi K. Bhabha describes as both resemblance and menace: “The menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority” (126, emphases in original). In disclosing the troubling ambivalences in Hemingway’s aesthetics, the minority voices in this study actively and performatively engage in critical projects that theorize about identity and enact forms of ideological resistance.

In spotlighting these transactions, this study is in part an alternative reconception of Hemingway’s critical legacy as well as an alternative reconception of black modernist writing in the twentieth century. Indeed, Said writes that the act of resistance itself offers another way of interpreting human history, and that “[i]t is particularly important to see how much this alternative reconception is based on breaking down the barriers between cultures” (212). In my view, the dearth of criticism dealing with Hemingway in relation to black artists is evidence that just such a barrier continues to linger in the academy.

When Toni Morrison marvels at “how much apart [Hemingway’s] work is from African Americans,” she inadvertently perpetuates this racialized division within the study of modernist American literature. Like many Hemingway scholars, she takes something for granted – not only in the purview of his aesthetics and body of work, but also in the larger dialogic context where twentieth-century minority writers were consistently and strategically responding to his fiction. This study thus seeks to build upon the vision of inclusivity and exchange set forth in the work of such scholars as Ann Douglas in her Terrible Honesty, Michael North in The Dialect of Modernism, and
George Hutchinson in *The Harlem Renaissance in Black and White*. Though the titular objects of study include Hemingway and black modernist writers, I want to argue for the continued, contemporary relevance of this study’s critical framework. If Morrison’s attention to Hemingway is any indication, his “influence” still looms large, to say the least. Houston Baker, Jr. defines “renaissancism” as a transhistorical term describing twentieth-century African-American literature: “‘renaissancism’ connotes something quite removed from a single, exotic set of ‘failed’ high jinks confined to less than a decade. It signals in fact a resonantly and continuously productive set of tactics, strategies, and syllables that takes form at the turn of the century and extends to our own day” (91-92). From Hughes, to Baldwin, to Morrison, Hemingway’s fictions occupy a fascinating position within the set of tactics and strategies that black writers used – and have continued to use – to carve out artistic and sociopolitical subjectivities. In what follows, I articulate these exchanges, and theorize their impact on the study of American literature.
Chapter One

Aggravatin’ Papa: Race, Omission, and Discursive Liminality in Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*

In a short note titled “Who Was That Black Man?: A Note on Eugene Bullard and *The Sun Also Rises,*” Hemingway scholar Frederic Svoboda extends the critical tradition of reading the novel as a *roman à clef.* He identifies that the unnamed African-American drummer at the end of Book One is based upon the historical personage of one Eugene Bullard. Svoboda suggests that, “as a personage of some distinction,” Bullard would have been recognizable to Hemingway’s expatriate contemporaries (106). Thus, knowing more about Bullard’s life and career illuminates the novel’s literary history, and provides yet another key to understanding “what we readers feel in the unwritten iceberg” (Svoboda 108). Indeed, this does contribute to a fuller understanding of *Sun*’s context, and it may enable greater awareness of racial demographics in American expatriate communities in the 1920s. However, the specific method of Svoboda’s approach here mitigates the significance of racial ideologies in Hemingway’s work at the very same time that Svoboda attempts to recognize and resituate a black character.

For one, the short note genre does little to accommodate the potentiality of such a discovery. Second, and much more importantly, despite his stated efforts to plumb the depths of the narrative and retrieve omitted details, Svoboda never attempts to confront the lyrics of the jazz song he identifies. Following critic James Hinkle, he shows that the song played by the drummer – to which Lady Brett Ashley and Jake Barnes dance in Zelli’s – is titled “Aggravatin’ Papa (Don’t You Try to Two-Time Me)” written by Roy Turk and J. Russel Robinson in 1922 (106). Yet, in Svoboda’s work and in other criticism that analyzes this scene, we still get no sense of what that song is about: the
voice of the minority artist remains silenced. This ready acceptance of Hemingway’s omissions exemplifies the degree to which the “iceberg theory” has been unreflectively accepted and, indeed, taken for granted in critical discourse about the author. Throughout his career, Hemingway continuously wrote about the aesthetics of his own prose. In his treatise on bullfighting, *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), the author first named his now famous and much celebrated “iceberg theory” of writing:

> If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an ice-berg [*sic*] is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. A writer who omits things because he does not know them only makes hollow places in his writing.

(192)

To be sure, Hemingway’s metaphor has profoundly influenced generations of writers. Discussions of omission-as-technique in the literary arts poorly represent the topic if they neglect to address the significance of Hemingway’s precedent. However, far too often, those critics who do explore the author’s process of omission only succeed in valorizing its aesthetic effects and touting its innovation. While this type of criticism purports to substantiate the iceberg theory as a subject that still merits our attention, it also tends to overlook the most fascinating and problematic component of the technique: the actual content that gets silenced.

Moreover, readings such as Svoboda’s illustrate the misdirection of inquiries that fail to address moments of ideological crisis within high modernist experimentation.
Critics who fail to confront the minority presence are themselves implicated in a process of marginalization, whereby the aesthetic and social impact of those voices gets continually covered over. As Amy L. Strong rightly points out, “[t]he critical response to issues of race in Hemingway’s works, beginning with the earliest biographies and ending with the most recent critical essays on native Americans and African American characters, reveals patterns of marginalization, disavowal, and outright dismissal” (4).

The scene from *Sun* identified above suggests that the white female protagonist may have had a sexual encounter with the black drummer, and thereby provides an opportunity for us to perform a more critically engaged reading of race and race relations in Hemingway’s texts. I am less interested in the facts of Bullard’s biographical connections to the text, and remain primarily concerned with the intertextual potential I see in the lyrics of the song that his character performs.

Hemingway’s appropriation of “Aggravatin’ Papa” is evident in the lyric “you can’t two time,” a sexually suggestive phrase that the drummer manages to vocalize during the scene, and one that is apparently directed toward Brett. During the interaction, the narrative suppresses much of the musician’s speech by depicting his utterances in ellipses, as blanks within the dialogue – for example, “……’ the drummer chanted” (*Sun* 70). Hemingway thus displaces Jake’s racial anxieties about miscegenation to the level of style. So, by appropriating the song and then repressing the drummer’s voice, Hemingway’s minimalism – his theory of omission – derives in this instance from fears over racial mixing.

As my analysis will show, the song is primarily about female resistance to patriarchy, to male hegemony. It is figured as a domestic dispute between a black
woman named Mandy Brymm and her unfaithful lover, Triflin’ Sam. The lyrics are mostly spoken from her perspective, and convey a sense of a violent opposition to his two-timing ways. Thus, composers Turk and Robinson – two white men – write a song that “brings into being that very situation to which it is also, at one and the same time, a reaction” (Jameson 82). In other words, the song attempts to resolve the threat of female opposition by textualizing it, differentiating it as a black drama, and circumscribing it within the American South. Indeed, the lyrics of “Aggravatin’ Papa” play out within a regional geography specifically identified as an African-American community in Birmingham, Alabama. With the 1920’s directly on the heels of the racial nadir in that region, it is impossible to ignore the political implications of this lyrical space.

Recognizing the hegemonic production of difference within the song does not, however, completely preclude the potential for opposition that it stages. In his study of jazz and social theory, Burton W. Peretti explains how the music performs artistically the oppositional register later articulated discursively by postcolonial theorists:

African-American creators of jazz, descended from victims of colonization, displacement, and enslavement, belonged themselves to generations which continued to suffer from injustice and to seek healing . . . By mediating between alienation and tradition, [jazz] has worked to strengthen the bond between artistic modernism and folk culture which has energized much postcolonial writing. (90-91)

As a jazz production, “Aggravatin’ Papa” signifies both at the level of written text and as a live, dramatized performance. The vocal enunciations of a black female singer enact the resistance, and potentially disrupt the patriarchy inscribed in the song’s composition.
In this way, the voice of Mandy Brymm occupies a space that Homi Bhabha describes as a “discursive liminality”; here, she can exert a realized power that “may be both politically effective and psychically affective because the discursive liminality through which it is signified may provide greater scope for strategic manoeuvre and negotiation” (208, Bhabha’s emphasis).

To be sure, this rhetorical push-and-pull between containment and potentiality plays out within Hemingway’s novel. He appropriates the song textually, and then suppresses the drummer’s voice. This move produces and then displaces the “threat” of miscegenation, which is at least in part the result of Brett’s transgressive sexuality. Transgressing the color line, Brett’s involvement with the drummer represents an implicit challenge to white male hegemony; by textualizing this social contradiction, Sun perpetuates “the illusion that the situation did not exist before it, that there is nothing but a text, that there never was any extra- or con-textual reality before the text itself generated it in the form of mirage” (Jameson 82). However, by virtue of the song’s discursively liminal position in Sun, Hemingway’s high modernist attempt at aesthetically controlling, resolving, and displacing the social contradiction via minimalism shows his dependence upon the minority voice and upon the imagined peripheral space of the U.S. South. Bringing the social implications of Turk and Robinson’s imaginary Southern vista to bear upon Hemingway’s expatriate narrative provides a unique look into what Paul Giles terms “a transatlantic imaginary,” which involves “the interiorization of a literal or metaphorical Atlantic world in all of its expansive dimensions” (1). This is not simply to suggest that the African-American South serves as a counterpoint to the Europe experienced by white expatriates. Nor
should this imply that Hemingway’s expatriation gave him a privileged distance from which to reflect upon the politics of race in the U.S. Rather, given the complex narrative response to the black drummer and his uncertain relationship with Brett, the song’s fictional Southern geography functions as a significant allegorical space within *Sun*.

In a sense, Hemingway riffs off of the power play at work in “Aggravatin’ Papa.” Mandy Brymm and Brett thus function as parallel threats to male hegemony. Just as Turk and Robinson displace the sexuality and anti-patriarchal voice of Mandy to an imagined, racially-marked South, so too does *Sun* attempt to isolate and contain Brett’s racially transgressive sexuality, at the very same time that it produces it. Thus, in this instance, the novel’s aesthetics have almost nothing to do with submerged feelings or knowledge, or iceberg-like principles. Instead, the textual contradictions have almost everything to do with the poststructuralist argument that texts cannot use discourses without in turn being used by them. Once the discourse is allowed in, it can and will counter and subvert every effort to contain it – even when those efforts involve outright omission.

This critical vision and the intertextual makeup of this chapter thus allow us to see the space of the South emerging in the mind of the white expatriate writer. As Lori Robison suggests, “the American cultural investment in region, specifically in the South, can serve larger ideological projects” (67). The institutionalized racism of Jim Crow segregation “resulted in a culture that made blackness highly visible” (Robison 69). Deployed subtextually, the space of the South confers an evident political dimension to the text, producing racial difference and setting up a power play: blackness is made visible and gets repressed, and whiteness, in turn, is made invisible and remains
powerful. The appropriation and suppression of the song within the novel thus allows us to interrogate a whole a pattern of narrative relationships that rely on different levels of containment: the stylistic and semantic politics of Turk and Robinson’s lyrics in *Sun*; the racial and sexual politics of the drummer’s involvement with Brett; the racial and spatial implications of Birmingham in Paris. In short, different elements of the *comme on dit* cultural “low” – shot through with sociopolitical conflict – inhabit and constitute “high” modernist aesthetic experimentation, and complicate the “pure form” ethos underlying that project.

By exhuming the lyrics of “Aggravatin’ Papa” and setting them against Hemingway’s narrative in my analysis, I illustrate the complex racial politics that inform his stylistic innovation. To this end, my method partially follows from Edward Said’s call for “contrapuntal reading”; by giving voice to the muted element within Hemingway’s canonical text, we can make advances toward a more inclusive vision of the ideological underpinnings of its composition (66). However, I take heed of Gayatri Spivak’s caveat against wholesale celebration of the black voice, and remain wary of perpetuating a form of critical exoticism. I am interested in this profoundly charged intersection because it provides an opportunity for opening up potentiality in these narrative spaces and examining the manner in which race and gender are imbued with geopolitical significance in this modernist intertext.

I.

Provided below, “Aggravatin’ Papa” elaborates a tale of male promiscuity and infidelity. An unidentified, third-party witness to the song’s drama narrates its introduction, also known as the pre-chorus, and the remaining verses come from the
perspective of the betrayed woman. I have transcribed the following lyrics directly from
the sheet music to “Aggravatin’ Papa,” published by Waterson, Berlin & Snyder Co. in
1922:

[First Pre-Chorus]
I know a triflin’ man,
They call him “Triflin’ Sam.”
He lives in Birmingham,
’Way down in Alabam’.
Now the other night,
He had a fight
With a gal named Mandy Brymm,
And she plainly stated she was aggravated,
As she shouted to him:

[Chorus]
“Aggravatin’ papa, don’t you try to two-time me,
I said, ‘don’t two-time me!’
Aggravatin’ papa, treat me kind or let me be,
I mean, ‘just let me be.’
Listen while I get you told
Stop messin’ ’round, [with my] sweet jelly roll,
If you step out with a high brown baby,
I’ll smack you down and I don’t mean ‘maybe.’
Aggravatin’ Papa, I’ll do anything you say

30
Yes, anything you say.

But when you go struttin’, do your struttin’ ’round my way.

[First Coda]

So papa, just treat me pretty, be nice and sweet,

’Cause I possess a forty four that don’t repeat,

Aggravatin’ papa, don’t you try to two-time me!” (Turk and Robinson 3-5) 10

Clearly, the voice of Mandy Brymm stands in violent opposition to her male love interest and his licentious behavior. The first verse serves to preface Mandy’s “solo,” and is articulated by a narrative voice seemingly uninvolved in the dispute. Though it lacks the lyrical personality and rhetorical force of the second and third verses, this prefatory component is vital to the song’s efficacy because it situates the conflict within a specific geographical milieu.11 Significantly, the drama takes place “’Way down in Alabam’”; depending on one’s method of lyrical transcription, this line can potentially register two different ways of locating Birmingham, both of which place it at a cultural extreme. Read simply as “way down in Alabama,” the line recognizes that a significant distance separates the narrator from the scene she sets up; if we retain the apostrophe and read “’Way” as “away” in dialect, then the song’s narrator further accentuates the distance and alterity of Birmingham, rendering it not only at a significant geographical remove, but also imparting to it a sense of isolation and regional closure. In The Nation’s Region: Southern Modernism, Segregation, and U.S. Nationalism, Leigh Ann Duck illustrates how the imaginative space of the American South often served as a regional counterpoint to the “progress” of the North; as a spatial metaphor, the South functioned as a barometer
that allowed Northerners to index their own advanced temporality. Viewed as historically “backward,” the South assumed certain metaphorical properties and became a way for “enlightened” writers to justify the “modernity” of Northern cities (Duck 3).

However, it is also true that perceiving the South as a relic, or site of temporal alterity, fractures the stability of “the modern” as a national descriptor. By showing there to be multiple temporalities in the so-called “United” States, the concept of national “progress” – upon which the concept of “the modern” depends – is destabilized.

Bhabha’s vision of narrated national space emphasizes the contradictions within such a figure:

The recurrent metaphor of landscape as the inscape of national identity emphasizes the quality of light, the question of social visibility, the power of the eye to naturalize the rhetoric of national affiliation and its forms of collective expression. There is, however, always the distracting presence of another temporality that disturbs the contemporaneity of the national present . . . National time becomes concrete and visible in the chronotope of the local, particular, graphic, from beginning to end. The national structure of this historical surmounting of the ‘ghostly’ or the ‘double’ is seen in the intensification of narrative synchrony as a graphically visible position in space. (205, Bhabha’s emphasis)

In Turk and Robinson’s song, the South serves as a regional signifier informing listeners that Mandy’s Brymm’s sexual desires, frustrations, and hostility take place in “another temporality,” in a realm out of sync with the linear movement of nation-time. Thus, the prefatory verse can be seen as an attempt to displace the threat of female resistance, to
remove and defuse her anti-patriarchal maneuvers – her “distracting presence” – to a marginalized location. Controlling the threat to this internal Third World in the US allows for the image of national synchrony and white hegemony to remain intact.

As Robison states, literary genres such as local color fiction emerged in the post-bellum years as a way of “containing the threat of regional and racial difference,” and thereby attempted to produce “a stable sense of regional, racial, and therefore national identity” (61). Though “Aggravatin’ Papa” is a jazz song and thus adheres to conventions different than local color, it remains shot through with rhetorical patterns that distance, isolate, and contain the threat of cultural difference and resistance. The song clearly stages the conflict in a region marked by both ethnic and chronological distance, far removed from an imagined, invisible, and normative “center.” This rhetorical removal “has persistently shaped traditional representations of the other,” and here the neutral voice within the prefatory verse enhances that effect (Robison 63).

Writing for black performers but imagining a mostly white audience, Turk and Robinson were involved in an incredibly complex rhetoric of racial representation. Subsequently, both Mandy Brymm and Triflin’ Sam can be seen as constructs of a white racial imaginary, and specific elements of the song then resemble certain racist stereotypes. For example, the overtones of domestic violence that permeate the song convey an amoral home space, a fictionalized barbaric counterpoint to the familial values of a white middle class. Mandy’s line in the chorus, “Stop messin’ ’round, [with my] sweet jelly roll,” casts her as a fetish object, as an overly sexualized black woman whose subjectivity gets elided by a one-dimensional stereotype defining her by her sexuality. Triflin’ Sam, too, constitutes a social “type” by virtue of his sexualized nature, and so
perpetuates a racist vision of black masculinity. Such textual evidence, read against Turk and Robinson’s positions as white composers of jazz, demonstrates what Michael North intends when he maintains that “Anglo-American modernism is dangerous in its very relevance” to forms of black cultural production (11).

The performance of such stereotypes by African-American musicians does present a major problem, but the compositional history of the song does not necessarily preclude its efficacy as a black text. Mandy communicates her resentment toward the patriarchal arrangement by enacting a subjectivity outside the constraints of societally prescribed “femininity.” She wields a gun, and is apparently ready to use it. Her performance beyond the boundaries of expected gender roles has an analogue in Brett, who wears her hair short, dons men’s hats, remains promiscuous throughout the novel, and “is dangerously close to overturning the categories upon which male and female identity, and patriarchal power, depend” (Moddelmog 247). In short, the lyrics assume profoundly new semantic properties when they register at the level of performance, and – as we shall see – the jazz presence in Hemingway’s text communicates this.

Considering these performative challenges to patriarchal power, what are we to make of the perpetually silent object of Mandy Brymm’s anger, the titular figure of the song? Identified both as an “Aggravatin’ Papa” and as “Triflin’ Sam,” this shadowy presence might best be read as representative of a repressive national patriarchy. Indeed, combining “Papa” with “Sam” conjures up a familiar authority figure (one known more commonly by the title “Uncle,” and usually complete with patriotic regalia). Considering this in light of the regional implications of the first verse, it then becomes possible to read Mandy Brymm – “‘Way down in Alabam” – as articulating an oppositional narrative.
from the margins against what Bhabha terms the “pedagogical,” hegemonic narrative of the nation (222). This interpretation of the song ascertains a real potentiality within the margins of social experience, here located in the black cultural milieu of Birmingham, and so challenges the discursive containment exercised by the rhetorical distance of the song’s preface. It shows the song to possess a political consciousness, and a violent antipathy toward centuries of slavery and decades of post-bellum policies that allowed for regional neglect, racial inequality, and white terror.

So, the lyrics of “Aggravatin’ Papa” can be seen to contain evident traces of this long history. Far more complex than protest literature, the song approaches American racism through the dramatic framework of domestic turmoil, cast in a decidedly Southern geography, and channeled by one of the most politically dispossessed subjects of the time – a black woman. Chela Sandoval’s theoretical application of “oppositional consciousness” clarifies the song’s sociopolitical registers; though she discusses opposition in the historical context of critical theory, her claims are directly applicable to this textual situation. For Sandoval, third-world minority discourses constitute “internally colonized communities” that exist within the context of the so-called First World of the U.S. As a consequence, such a scenario creates forms of consciousness keyed into the machinations of the dominant social order, but that work against those ideologies to change them.

At this level, Sandoval terms such an operation as one of “differential consciousness [which] is the expression of the new subject position . . . [and which] permits functioning within yet beyond the demands of dominant ideology” (77, emphases mine). As an expression of a differential consciousness, “Aggravatin’ Papa”
strategically negotiates the geopolitical contours of its internal-third-world milieu. Sandoval’s reliance on spatial figures helps to substantiate the political valences underpinning the song’s regional setting. Furthermore, her recognition that a minority subject can signify “within and yet beyond” the constraints of the dominant ideology allows us to continue to recognize oppositional potential in a song written by two white composers. Indeed, the compositional history of a text and its performative value can be assessed on two entirely different levels; here, the black female vocals operate on “an altogether different register,” and enact the strategic beyond-ness that gives agency back to Mandy Brymm (Sandoval 77).

In the song’s chorus, Mandy asserts that “If you step out with a high brown baby,/ I’ll smack you down, and I don’t mean ‘maybe’” (Turk and Robinson 3). Her anger derives from his infidelity, but the force of the emotion is apparently concentrated in the fact that his other love interest is “high-brown” – that is, a light-skinned African-American woman. As critics and historians have thoroughly shown, the hierarchical structure of the white/black binary infiltrated the cultural imagination of African-American communities, where a lighter skin tone was often seen as more desirable than a darker one. Thus, by calling out Papa for his preference of a light-skinned girl, she aligns him with the oppressor, and thereby makes of him a suitable substitute to target.

The song therefore attempts to negotiate the crisis of racial and sexual politics in America, and it does so by deploying an imaginative geography attuned to the ideological discourses of racial, regional, and national identity. It is not merely a reflection of social discontent, but a conscious and active confrontation with totalizing national discourses that perpetuate racist ideologies. Thus, the cry “Aggravatin’ Papa, don’t you try to two-
time me!” represents a potentially revolutionary sentiment. Directing her anger against the nation-state – figured in the song as an unfaithful womanizer – Mandy Brymm’s voice sounds from the marginal space of an abject South. Cutting across the privileged space of the nation, the song crafts a performative subjectivity.

Bhabha’s focus on discursive liminality bears special relevance not only to the aesthetic and ideological nuances within “Aggravatin’ Papa,” but also to the manner in which the song appears in *The Sun Also Rises*. Deployed by Hemingway as a subtext within the novel’s Parisian cityscape, the song performs where U.S. regional modernity and expatriate international modernism intersect. Demonstrating “the importance of locality to modernism’s world-imaginary,” the regional, racial, and sexual dynamics of the jazz tune profoundly impact Hemingway’s international vision and craft (Herring 3). Critics like J. Gerald Kennedy have done much in the way of explicating “the primacy of place in the [expatriate] writer’s conception of self” (11). Observing the moment of the song in *Sun* expands such critical readings, and provides new insights about the primacy of race in modernist conceptions of self, power, and aesthetics.

II.

As readers of the novel have often recognized, *Sun*’s narrative milieux and wayward expatriates enact an implicit commentary about the changing face of the interwar West. Drawing on the backdrop of the Great War, critic Michael Reynolds asserts that the “stable values of 1900 had eroded beneath the feet of this generation: Home, family, church, and country no longer gave the moral support that Hemingway’s generation grew up with” (46). In many ways, the actions of Jake Barnes and company
formulate a set of responses to this modern condition. Set upon a European stage, Hemingway’s expatriates play out a drama whose vicissitudes point up their moral shortcomings and, by proxy, the degeneration of the national cultures that nurtured them.

Yet, despite the fact that elements of the narrative reflect certain social attitudes, it would miss the mark to suggest that *Sun* sets up a direct confrontation with structures of power. Kenneth Kinnamon approximates the veiled presence of all things political in Hemingway’s early work: “In his imaginative writing of this first major period of his career, political issues appear more often than has generally been noticed or acknowledged, though they seldom become a major theme” (151). Somewhat problematically, Kinnamon suggests that “major themes” serve as the primary feature by which a text conveys sociopolitical ideologies. For Hemingway and his high modernist peers, however, style was the central concern and driving force of aesthetic innovation, and thereby provides us with the best tool for investigating the ideological underpinnings of a text.

In order to approach the racial politics of *Sun*, then, it is necessary to go with the novel’s protagonists to Montmartre, the Parisian district that drew and supported the greatest number of African-American expatriates during the interwar years, many of whom were jazz artists. Here, the technical virtuosity of Hemingway’s minimalist prose gets staged in Zelli’s jazz club, a space where black musicians performed to entertain mostly white tourists. Played out during an evening of nocturnal revelry, the scene dramatizes the tensions between representational style and cultural context, a conflict that Jake invokes earlier in the novel during a moment of self-reflection: “It is awfully easy to be hard-boiled about everything in the daytime, but at night it is another thing” (42).
Indeed, the scene constitutes a pressure point within the narrative that performs this ambivalence: it brings the writer’s turn to minimalist form into extreme focus at the same time that it evidences an apparent ideological crisis at the root of the novel’s response to race, and to the “threat” of a biracial sexual encounter. Close readings of the Zelli’s episode reveal the intimate link between race and the novel’s stylistic innovation. Reading this section in light of the omitted lyrics not only illuminates the intertextual relationship between Hemingway’s craft and that of his African-American contemporaries, it opens up specific power relations constructed by literary-lyrical discourses of nation, sex, and race.

Upon entering Zelli’s club, Jake’s narration suggests the immediate and literal impact of the scene: “[t]he music hit you as you went in” (69). The diction in this sentence suggests the overwhelming quality of the band’s sound, but – more importantly – serves as a jarring narrative signal. The experience of simply entering the club indicates a profound shift; the enveloping sounds of jazz presage the impact of the chapter’s impending interactions. The heightened level of anxiety in Jake’s narration corroborates the active and powerful influence of the music and the musicians. As “the first [club] in the area of feature jazz after the war,” Zelli’s was an extremely popular location for Americans seeking out good music and dancing (Stovall, Paris 42). Brett and Jake have stopped in for precisely this reason.

During the course of their initial dance (there are several that occur in this relatively brief scene), Brett and the African-American drummer exchange what appear to be quick cordialities. Hemingway’s minimalist prose nearly conceals the crux of the meeting: namely, that Brett and the drummer may well share a sexual history.
Examining the stylistic shifts that occur within the prose keys us in to the novel’s aesthetic treatment of miscegenation. The link between style and politics becomes increasingly clear. The dynamics of the prose point up the fact that the text, through Jake’s narration, struggles with the relative permissibility of interracial affairs in different national contexts. As historian Tyler Stovall maintains, “[b]ecause no aspect of American bigotry had harsher consequences than did the prohibition against miscegenation, one could easily view the ability to engage in interracial sex as the ultimate liberation from racism” (“Gender” 24). The drummer’s relationship with Brett thus stages an intimacy between the New Negro and the New Woman. In this intersubjective experience, “liberation from racism” is only part of the dialectic. Because their sexual encounter has, quite literally, nothing to do with Jake (except force him to pay witness to it), the relationship can be seen as a resistance to white American patriarchy. Jake’s sexual impotence underscores this in the narrative. Where Mandy’s resistance is voiced openly and directly, the drama of the dance in Zelli’s performs the oppositional gesture. When reading the following scenes from *Sun*, it is imperative to consider the ambience: the lines from “Aggravatin’ Papa” permeate the space, and Jake is made to dance to its rhythms.

The two dancers move toward the band. Wedged claustrophobically amongst the others on the floor, they drift into the drummer’s sphere:

Brett and I danced. It was so crowded we could barely move. The nigger drummer waved at Brett. We were caught in the jam, dancing in one place in front of him.

“Hahre you?”

40
“Great.”

“Thaats good.”

He was all teeth and lips.

“He’s a great friend of mine,” Brett said. “Damn good drummer.”

(Sun 69)

Immediately, a simple gesture – the “nigger drummer waved at Brett” – initiates an exchange between her and the musician, the nature of which gets suggested by Jake’s reliance on racial epithets, and the narrative’s unflattering, even clumsy, use of dialect. The manner of Jake’s perception here emphasizes implicit racial and sexual boundaries; in the organized chaos of dancers in a late-night jazz club, Jake’s focus on a single wave is extremely significant. In fact, it would require quite a bit of effort to maintain such a focus in this setting. So, it is not only what he sees that it is of importance, but how he sees it. The sharpness of his gaze here is rather telling; he is undoubtedly on edge, uncomfortable. In this particular passage, Hemingway’s prose works impressionistically. Here, it is not so much the sparseness of the language that achieves Jake’s visceral response, as the provision of purely external data in the form of scenery and dialogue. The process by which he perceives the interracial experience in Zelli’s is brought into relief; in lieu of direct depictions of Jake’s consciousness, the observational data pushes the reader to supply much of the affective response attributed to him. Furthermore, the spatial restrictions that he and Brett encounter on the dance floor work to enhance his feeling of vulnerability: “[i]t was so crowded we could barely move.” The mash of bodies provides for a sense of nervous claustrophobia, and metaphorically captures the intense and potentially transgressive level of social contact in play.
Within the density of this contact, Hemingway complicates and inverts the observing that takes place, which suggests that the narrative does not strictly operate according to the conventions of literary impressionism. Jake is not the only character with some perceptual agency, as he becomes subject to the gaze of another: that is, his observation of the drummer undergoes a reversal during the dance. Though Jake remains the first-person narrator throughout, Hemingway artfully introduces the drummer in such a way that actively involves him in the mise-en-scène. Jake’s anxiety indicates an awareness that racial divisions have seemingly – if only temporarily – dissolved in Zelli’s. The non-verbal and literally dehumanizing claim that “[h]e was all teeth and lips” exhibits just how threatened Jake feels as the object of the drummer’s scrutiny. “[C]aught in the jam” and “dancing in one place in front of him,” the subject-object relationship gets rearranged. On one hand, the drummer constitutes just another object of Jake’s perception, a part of the scenery; on the other, the musician watches them both and interacts with Brett. Jake’s perception disassembles the drummer and renders him in terms of corporeal fragments: “He was all teeth and lips.” Under the threat of the drummer’s gaze, Jake retreats into racist discourse, attempting to salvage some sense of an upper hand – and all this even before the sex he suspects is made apparent.21

In his important study of interracial networks in the City of Light, Stovall claims that “[i]n 1920s Paris, white Americans observed blacks with interest and sympathy but ultimately . . . as outsiders” (80, emphases added). By allowing Jake to become an object of observation for the black drummer, the text complicates the patronizing white gaze recorded by Stovall. The drummer briefly moves out of his objectified role; though Jake’s narration relies on synecdoche to tear him to pieces – “all teeth and lips” – there is
apparently enough of him left to look back, to smile, and to engage Brett. Jake’s disgusted reaction at the possibility of Brett’s transgression functions as the baseline of American moral and racial “propriety.” In part, the anxiety and anger he expresses in this passage evinces a desire to uphold conventional, segregated attitudes about race and sex. Increasingly, as the chapter works toward its conclusion, the narrative gives greater attention to Jake’s internalization of the scene; though external details still permeate the text, the direct references to Jake’s psychological stress convey more of an expressionist aesthetic. As we will see, this slightly shifted focus onto Jake’s inner turmoil – that is, his anxieties about miscegenation – sets up the potential for a direct commentary on racial ideology. However, whether incapable or unwilling to process such a direct confrontation, Hemingway ultimately turns to formal omissions, and mutes the drummer’s voice. The following passage performs these tensions, and is worth quoting at some length:

“Come on. Let’s dance,” Brett said.

We danced. It was crowded and close.

“Oh, darling,” Brett said, “I’m so miserable.”

I had that feeling of going through something that has all happened before. “You were happy a minute ago.”

The drummer shouted: “You can’t two time –”

“It’s all gone.”

“What’s the matter?”

“I don’t know. I just feel terribly.”

“. . . . .” the drummer chanted. Then turned to his sticks.
“Want to go?”

I had the feeling as in a nightmare of it all being something repeated, something I had been through and that now I must go through again.

“.,.,.,.” the drummer sang softly.

“Let’s go,” said Brett. “You don’t mind.”

“.,.,.,.” the drummer shouted and grinned at Brett. (Sun 70-71)

The companion piece to the initial dance, this passage follows the general pattern set forth in Brett and Jake’s first movement through the club. Where the first interaction with the drummer suggests Brett’s intimacy with him – by way of Jake’s reaction and her subtle recognition of their “great” friendship – this second dance makes it much more explicit in the line “You can’t two time.” This common sexual innuendo would be well known to any reader; the drummer’s oblique, recurrent presence within the dialogue strengthens the sexual implications of two-timing, and his final appearance shows him grinning at Brett. The exchange exhibits what Kennedy identifies as Hemingway’s “preoccupation with innuendo, body language, glances, clothing – with what might be called the semiotics of desire” (87). The nuances of the exchange are complex, as the text performs a kind of stylistic gymnastics in an attempt to resolve and defuse the volatility of the racial and sexual transgression.

Indeed, Hemingway employs more of a stylistic mélange in this passage than in the previous one. He retains some of the impressionism in such sentences as “[I]t was crowded and close,” and amplifies the teeming and congested atmosphere by splicing the drummer’s vocals into the Jake-Brett dialogue. The suddenness of Brett’s mood swing implies that the content of these vocals – mostly omitted in the text – is at the root of the
narrative’s inward turn. The text turns partially expressionistic, both in Brett’s admission that she is “so miserable” and, perhaps most prominently, in Jake’s internal narration: “I had that feeling of going through something that has all happened before . . . I had the feeling as in a nightmare of it all being something repeated, something I had been through and that now I must go through again.” The drummer – in the background, and mostly denied his voice – still permeates every nuance of the dialogue between Brett and Jake. There is something of a sustained contradiction in this, much like in the first quoted passage featuring the drummer, when the musician gets fragmented bodily yet retains a potent degree of observational agency. On one hand, the scene in Zelli’s becomes “an emotional and intellectual complex in an instant of time,” whereby the writer exerts “concentration, vivid sensory evocation of scene, implication without authorial comment, [and] artistic control”; on the other hand, Hemingway’s ostensible “control” appears jeopardized by the complete suppression of language evidenced in the drummer’s elided “speech” (Nagel 22). Such a move goes far beyond a selective omission of details, and exemplifies, in DeKoven’s words, how the politics of modernist form “inhabits and perhaps describes the space of unresolved contradiction or unsynthesized dialectic” (679). The possibility of biracial intercourse violates Jake’s exported, segregationalist value system, and consequently generates the distress that the novel’s impressionist and expressionist style artfully attempts to convey and assuage. The experience of race, then, becomes a flashpoint in the epistemological framework of Hemingway’s aesthetics.

Jake’s “feeling as in a nightmare of it all being something repeated” potentially suggests his emasculation on the dance floor. That is, perhaps, the passage resonates with the physical trauma of his war wound, which rendered him sexually impotent.
Intuiting that the drummer has achieved an intimacy with Brett that he cannot, Jake can be seen to relive the loss of his “manhood” in Zelli’s. This interpretation will be incredibly tempting to readers familiar with the “Hemingway code,” in which such values as loyalty, valor, grace-under-pressure, and masculinity figure largely; however, as Nancy R. Comley and Robert Scholes show in *Hemingway’s Genders*, “looking for The Code . . . is an attempt to reduce a complex textual phenomenon to an excessively simple formula” (8). While “decoding” the crisis of Jake’s masculinity might satisfy those interested in rehashing and simplifying the writer’s ethical imperatives, such a reading nonetheless remains critically limited and blind to the fascinating intertextual complexities introduced by the song. Amy Strong attenuates the racial objectification involved in such criticism, arguing that “[s]cholars have noted the presence of native Americans, Africans, and African Americans in his work, though few have viewed these characters as anything more than scenery; for most, the racial elements in Hemingway’s works have served primarily as a backdrop to more central issues of manhood, courage, and stoicism” (4). So, we must bring this backdrop forward, and resituate that which has been omitted and marginalized in the text and in the criticism.

Reflecting on editor Maxwell Perkins’s early influence on his craft, Hemingway – in a 1958 interview with George Plimpton – vaguely references certain “unpublishable” moments that the “wise friend and wonderful companion” urged him to remove: “Blanks were left, and anyone who knew the words would know what they were” (227). Though the writer does not directly reference *Sun* at this moment in the interview, his description seems to match up with the scene in Zelli’s. His oblique acknowledgment of self-censorship certainly informs our reading of the passage and provides some alternative
insight into the effect of public opinion upon the novel’s compositional and publication history. Ultimately, however, this explanation only goes so far, and does little to address the manner in which this apparent omission relates to Hemingway’s minimalist project. Interestingly, this reference to the “blanks” occurs in the interview during a discussion about the aesthetics of his formal omissions; yet neither Hemingway nor Plimpton makes any direct connection between “the blanks” and this aesthetic theory. Instead, Hemingway relies on a statement of tautological proportions, saying of the blanks in the dialogue, “anyone who knew the words would know what they were” (227). If he had Sun in mind here, it is quite possible that his cryptic explanation suggests a hesitancy to confront the lyrics and their racial and sexual connotations, even after thirty years.

As I acknowledge at the beginning of this chapter, Hemingway experimented with the technique of omitting descriptive matter in his prose throughout his career, and he concurrently reflected on such experimentation in letters, nonfictional works, and interviews. In Death in the Afternoon, he asserts that “[i]f a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them” (192). The memoirs of A Moveable Feast – published posthumously by Scribner’s in 1964 – shows the writer making similar claims: referencing the end of “Out of Season,” a story from In Our Time, Hemingway states that “I had omitted the real end of it which was that the old man hanged himself. This was omitted on my new theory that you could omit anything if you knew that you omitted and the omitted part would strengthen the story and make people feel something more than they understood” (75). Given the number of occasions when Hemingway issued such
reflexive commentaries, and the apparent variation in kinds of omissions that we see in his work, there has been some “critical confusion over what Hemingway meant” (Smith 277). Nonetheless, instead of simply categorizing the different levels of his minimalism, the racial politics of Hemingway’s style are best serviced by bringing the available lyrics to bear upon the novel.

The Zelli’s scene in *Sun* provides a unique opportunity to reconsider the theory of omission as an aesthetic performance of social conflict. The voice of a black character and the words of a popular jazz song are omitted; yet, as my analysis makes clear, the sociopolitical implications of the scene are far from repressed. What we see in Hemingway’s stylistic experimentation is a struggle within the act of mediation, a struggle that evinces the capacity of language to exert – and not merely reflect – an active social force. Thus, readings that rely upon censorship as the final explanation for the stylistic anomaly remain insufficient. Though they attempt to give the aesthetics of the work a historical public context, they also, in the words of Steve Giles, “render virtually impossible the task of clarifying the complex and contradictory set of relationships between (artistic) modernism and (societal) modernity” (175). Indeed, the relationship between Brett and the drummer can be seen as “a positive demonstration of modernity” on both of their parts; yet the text’s attempts to defuse the potentially revolutionary nature of the act signals a moment of ideological crisis (Stovall, “Gender” 26).

This vacillation between containing a transgression on the one hand, and resisting white patriarchal norms on the other, is evident in both *Sun* and “Aggravatin’ Papa.” The textual contradictions therefore perform a theory of discursive power decades ahead of poststructuralist arguments about subjectivity, arguments that describe the manner in
which language speaks us. In The History of Sexuality (1976), Michel Foucault points up constructions of power in ways that bear direct relevance to this textual situation. Tracing the long history of sexual discourse in the West, Foucault references “instances of muteness” wherein specific prohibitions functioned to repress and control certain sexual behaviors (17). Of course, he argues against the repressive hypothesis of power, and only makes reference to “muteness” in order to display its active participation within written and spoken language structures in the production of knowledge and the dissemination of power. The following description of silence, of words carefully omitted, bears an almost uncanny resemblance to Hemingway’s reflections on craft, and helps elucidate the extent to which his aesthetic agenda operates alongside discourses of social power:

Silence itself – the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers – is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies. There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed, which type of discourse is authorized, or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses. (Foucault 27)
If we apply Foucault’s understanding of silence to the drummer’s elided voice, it becomes possible to open up dramatically new ways of reading Hemingway’s “iceberg principle.” Read here in view of the muted content of “Aggravatin’ Papa,” the device of formal economy participates within a vast network of discourses about race, gender, and sexuality. Furthermore, the above analysis of the song illustrates the significance of both real and imagined spaces in the construction of such discourses. Black Birmingham appears as a kind of Third World space within the song, and Mandy Brymm’s voice represents a minority discourse speaking within and against the constraints of the First World; that is, her enunciations contend with the patriarchal forces within the context of the song, as well as the constraints of Hemingway’s appropriation. Gyan Prakash offers a vision of this arrangement in a way similar to that set out by Sandoval: “third world voices . . . speak within and to discourses familiar to the ‘West’ . . . . The Third World, far from being confined to its assigned space, has penetrated the inner sanctum of the ‘First World’ in the process of being ‘Third Worlded’” (qtd. in Bhabha 354). In the very process of being silenced in Sun, of being written over, the minority presence emerges within a liminal space from which it “can intervene in the unifying and totalizing myths of national culture,” myths that perpetuate fantasies about racial and sexual difference (Bhabha 358).
Chapter Two

“When the boy came back”: Nation, Nostos, and the Politics of Style in Hemingway’s “Soldier’s Home” and Langston Hughes’s “Home”

A year after Hemingway’s 1961 suicide, Langston Hughes composed a brief tribute to the author in the Mark Twain Journal:

Ernest Hemingway was a highly readable writer, one whose stories lost no time in communicating themselves from the printed page to the reader, from dialogue sounding in one’s own ear and carrying his tales forward as if the characters were alive and right there in person. The immediacy of Hemingway’s reality conveys itself with more than deliberate speed, and with an impact few other writers so quickly and so compactly achieve. Some commentators said years ago that Hemingway was a writer’s writer. He turned out to be a reader’s writer as well. (19, emphasis in original)

In the note, Hughes respects Hemingway’s work. Interestingly, he focuses solely on the subject of craft. Valorizing the author’s style, the tribute effectively links the two writers and strongly suggests that Hemingway’s aesthetics had an impact on Hughes’s own artistic development.22

Indeed, Hughes appears to have spent an ample amount of time in the early sixties paying homage to his influences. At this point, he was not only reflecting about Hemingway, but also about W.E.B. Du Bois; as I will show, this is not the first time that he brought the two together. A year and a half after Du Bois’s death in 1963, Hughes published a tribute to him in Freedomways, a journal that Du Bois had recently founded. In that piece, Hughes identifies that “[s]o many thousands of my generation were uplifted and inspired by the written and spoken words of Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois,” and that his
“earliest memories of written words are of those of Du Bois and the Bible” (556). Stating that “[t]hrough his work, he became a part of my life,” the tribute strikes a much more personal chord than the earlier appraisal of Hemingway’s style (556). Of course, my purpose in bringing these tributes together is not to quibble about which of the two writers was more or less significant for Hughes. Rather, his reflections in the 1960s are remarkable because, taken together, they offer unique access to a moment much earlier in his career when he strategically appropriated and combined the work of both Du Bois and Hemingway.

That moment occurred in 1933 when Hughes penned “Home,” a short story about a young black musician named Roy Williams who returns to his birthplace in the South after traveling extensively through Europe for six years. While abroad, he developed and refined his musical talents, though he also became severely ill. With the premonition that his death is near, he returns to Missouri to see his mother. He does indeed perish at the story’s end, but not due to his sickness; instead, Roy is brutally lynched by a mob of white townspeople. The story’s grim content made it difficult for Hughes to place it with a magazine for its initial publication. Biographer Arnold Rampersad cites five different rejections before Esquire finally accepted it in 1934 (282). Nonetheless, Hughes felt strongly enough about the piece to incorporate it that same year in his collection titled The Ways of White Folks.

Based upon the structural trope of a return, “Home” develops from the narrative arc of the nostos, which has a long-established historical presence in Western literature. However, Hughes did not need to look back to antiquity for the textual precedents that would inform his depiction of Roy’s return to a veritable race war. Fourteen years
earlier, in the spring of 1919, Du Bois published a brief and highly oratorical note in *The Crisis* magazine recognizing the homeward trajectory of black soldiers from the trenches of Europe. Titled “Returning Soldiers,” the note is both a celebration and an invective, and its primary force obtains from the explicit irony that these soldiers were returning from one bloody conflict overseas to another in their own backyards. Indeed, Du Bois embraces the homecoming of “tens of thousands of black men” from the violence of the front, but instantly turns to the harsh realities that these veterans would face now that they were stateside once again (91). His list of grievances against the US home front includes “lynching, disfranchisement, caste, brutality and devilish insult,” expressions of an institutionalized racism that stripped the soldiers of their dignity and, in many cases, cost them their lives (91). Historically, the end of the Great War occasioned an increase in racial antagonism in the US; as critic David A. Davis describes, “racial tensions that had been sublimated to sustain the war effort erupted,” and both uniformed black veterans and civilians were targeted (478).²⁵ Building toward his powerful conclusion, Du Bois writes,

This is the country to which we Soldiers of Democracy return. This is the fatherland for which we fought! But it is our fatherland. It was right for us to fight. The faults of our country are our faults. Under similar circumstances, we would fight again. But by the God of Heaven, we are cowards and jackasses if now that that war is over, we do not marshal every ounce of our brain and brawn to fight a sterner, longer, more unbending battle against the forces of hell in our own land.

We return.
We return from fighting.

We return fighting. (91, emphases in original)

Using the Great War to continue and embolden the fight against racism in the US, Du Bois develops a martial metaphor that establishes political urgency, and rhetorically performs the vigilance he would require of oppressed African Americans. By asserting that black soldiers were returning from a war to a war, Du Bois illustrates the brutal irony of “home” that these veterans experienced, and uses it as a way to confront and scrutinize racist violence. In the years following Du Bois’s “Returning Soldiers,” a number of black writers took up the storyline of the veteran’s homecoming in their fiction.

In 1925, Hemingway also addressed the aftermath of the Great War in his first major collection, In Our Time. At the center of that book is a story titled “Soldier’s Home,” in which an American marine returns from the Great War to his small Oklahoma town. Though very little happens in terms of plot and action, the protagonist, Harold Krebs, exhibits a strong post-combat disaffection with his domestic environment. To be sure, it would be impossible to over-emphasize the historical and cultural significance of World War I, and “Soldier’s Home” is very clearly an attempt by Hemingway to respond to its intense psychological aftermath. In “The Leaning Tower,” Virginia Woolf famously described the war as a sudden “chasm in a smooth road,” an event that “stung” an entire generation “into consciousness” as no war had before it (136, 147). In many ways, Hemingway and his work have come to emblematize the so-called “lost generation” that lived and wrote in the wake of the conflict. His name and his fiction have served as touchstones for critics and historians alike when they discuss how the war changed perception, history, and values:
The Great War was perhaps the last to be conceived as taking place within a seamless, purposeful ‘history’ involving a coherent stream of time running from past through present to future . . . It took place in what was, compared with ours, a static world, where the values appeared stable and where the meaning of abstractions seemed permanent and reliable. Everyone knew what Glory was, and what Honor meant. It was not until eleven years after the war that Hemingway could declare in A Farewell to Arms that ‘abstract words such as glory, honor, courage, or hallow were obscene beside the names of rivers, the numbers of regiments and the dates.’ In the summer of 1914 no one would have understood what on earth he was talking about. (Fussell 21)

In both scholarly and general views of Hemingway, the prevailing notion is that World War I was integral in shaping the author’s life and aesthetic project. In 1966, the literary critic Philip Young cited the author’s wounding on the Italian front in 1918 as a formative trauma responsible for certain stylistic anomalies across his oeuvre. Biographer Kenneth Lynn challenged Young’s thesis fifteen years later by asserting that childhood trauma, rather than the war, accounts for the aesthetic complexities of Hemingway’s work. Despite their critical dispute and the age of their work, both Young and Lynn are valuable here because they demonstrate the distinct and persistent interpretive challenges of reading Hemingway’s fiction: both critics illustrate the need to “read into” the narrative in order to fill textual gaps, which they accomplish via biographical research and theories of trauma.
Young, Lynn, and the legions of critics writing after them have amply addressed the various stressors in Hemingway’s life that influenced his craft. I build upon this scholarship, but take a different methodological track. Instead of using the author’s biography to approach the often-problematic gaps and contradictions in his fiction, I read Hemingway’s treatment of the war and its psychosocial aftermath vis-à-vis the aesthetics of “Soldier’s Home,” a story whose deep ambiguities complicate the reader’s perception of its seemingly high-stakes political content. The first section of this chapter wrestles with this conflict and raises the question: is it legitimate or acceptable for a writer to bestow upon his readers the responsibility of filling in narrative holes and resolving textual contradictions, especially when those holes and contradictions constitute the residual effects left behind by a vacated or otherwise hidden political crisis?

In part two of this chapter, I place Hughes’s “Home” in conversation with Hemingway’s text, because I see “Home” as a creative response to the above question. Hughes is such a fascinating reader because he actively appropriates and politicizes Hemingway’s text, which is so deeply ambiguous. Of course, I am not the first to recognize the connections that exist between “Soldier’s Home” and “Home.” In their introduction to a recently published collection of critical essays titled Hemingway and the Black Renaissance (2012), editors Gary Edward Holcomb and Charles Scruggs assert that “Hughes . . . expressed his admiration for Hemingway by rewriting his brilliant short story ‘Soldier’s Home’ from In Our Time” (10). Yet neither the editors nor the contributors to the volume attempt to grapple with the complexities of Hughes’s appropriation.
In my analysis, I hope to show that Hemingway’s story is in fact motivated by a political impulse, by a desire to confront and lay bare the nationalist discursive structures that fueled the war, urged Krebs to enlist, and, ultimately, caused his psychological scarring. The story initiates this critique first through the protagonist’s hometown. Viewing Krebs’s homecoming as belated, the community serves as a framing device that illustrates the incongruous nature of ideology: the community takes him in and subsequently marks him as Other, in order to constitute its own autonomy as a “home.”

The text proceeds to concentrate its critical potential within the Krebs household, and the political weight of the story comes to rest on the symbolic order of the family. Through this figure, the Krebs household represents the interests and authority of patriarchal nationalism. The development of this figure in the text initiates a potential confrontation, but the story ultimately pulls back and hides behind its own aesthetic form in order to dodge the volatile matter of critique. Art in Hemingway’s text thus disrupts its political potential. Krebs’s detached and innocuous preoccupations with things such as women’s fashion dramatize the text’s own reflexive turn to form; the protagonist’s easy and casual evasion of his father at the story’s end enacts the text’s movement away from deeper political structures.

There are also a number of narrative gaps and moments of dissimulation that accompany the development of the familial metaphor. For instance, Krebs lies about the war, but it is never clear why, nor does the text present the actual content of these falsehoods. Such moments force upon the reader an interpretive weight that requires us to imagine the war and Krebs’s experiences there. In this way, the reader of “Soldier’s Home” partakes of an interpretive process best described by Frederic Jameson in
“Beyond the Cave: Demystifying the Ideology of Modernism,” when he argues that we are able perceive the content of such narratives “indirectly only, by way of the relay of an imaginary realistic narrative of which the symbolic and modernistic one is then seen as a kind of stylization” (183). Thus, “Soldier’s Home” exhibits a privatization of experience, which, Jameson also indicates as central to certain high modernist aesthetics, “is felt as an increasing (structural) incapacity to generalize or universalize private or lived experience” (185). Jameson continues to describe this “dilemma,” in which the writer is reduced to the telling of the truth of a private situation alone, that no longer engages the fate of a nation, but merely a single locality; and no longer even for that, but a particular neighborhood . . . So little by little the writer is reduced to so private a speech that it is henceforth bereft of any public consequences or resonances, so that only symbolic recoding holds out the hope of saying something meaningful to a wider and more heterogeneous public. (185-86, emphases added)

Following Jameson, I argue that Hughes not only rewrites “Soldier’s Home,” he symbolically recodes its rhetorical strategies and dialogically recontextualizes it in the 1930s in order to confront and protest the continual and institutionalized oppression of African Americans in the US. My method in the second part of this chapter is thus to read Hughes’s “Home” as a text that follows Hemingway’s stylistic clues and obfuscations, and which subsequently recodes them by supplying Roy Williams’s narrative of return, sickness, terror, and death. Indeed, “Soldier’s Home” offered Hughes a readymade template for describing Roy’s alienation, both because Hemingway’s story suggests a critique of the home front, and because it ultimately defers
that critique. “Soldier’s Home” and “Home” can be seen as aesthetic representations of subjects acting under ideological constraints; they are, in effect, character studies of a “modern man” at odds with either the domestic aftermath of the Great War, or the enduring legacy of racialized violence. Both texts recognize the irony of “home” for their protagonists, and both utilize narrative framing strategies to stage the social problem of being at once inside and outside of a community. As critic Brian Richardson points out, “[literary] frames in fact are inherently unstable” (330). Both Krebs and Roy are inside and outside the framework of “home”; in one sense or another, the community must place each character outside in order for it to constitute itself as a “home.” This instability points up the contradictory nature of ideology.

However, Hemingway’s frames ultimately contribute to the story’s narrow preoccupation with aesthetics as such. The technique thus participates in the text’s turn to form, a turn that un hinges its potential critique of nationalism. In contrast, Hughes radically experiments with narrative frames when he introduces Roy; “Home” alters the inside/outside dichotomy implicit in the frame. The text presciently recognizes that “the marginal becomes central by virtue of its very marginality,” thereby embracing the instability and using it as a source of empowerment (Culler 196). In doing so, “Home” establishes a deeply reflective interiority within the black protagonist. The technique thus affords Roy a narrative subjectivity over and against that of the whites in his town. The access to Roy’s interior life cuts across the oppressive and superficial discourse of color politics, and performs the psychosocial processes of racial identification later articulated in postcolonial theory by Frantz Fanon. In its rearticulation, “Home”
repurposes framing techniques from Hemingway’s story to fold outward and recharge
their erstwhile inert function.

In my estimation, Hughes viewed “Soldier’s Home” as ripe for appropriation,
perhaps because the intended target of Hemingway’s story – US nationalism – also
perpetuated the alienation of African Americans, albeit in a more direct and institutional
manner. Indeed, it should be acknowledged that the post-combat alienation of Harold
Krebs is historically and qualitatively different than the “lynching, disfranchisement,
caste, [and] brutality” that black Americans faced under Jim Crow (Du Bois 91).
Nevertheless, Hughes rearticulates Hemingway’s story and, in the process, reignites its
suppressed sociopolitical potential.

In her book, *Modernism, History and the First World War*, Trudi Tate claims that
the Great War “is often perceived as a complete break with the past. Yet it also
represented a kind of imaginative continuity” (4). This assertion helps contextualize
Hughes’s turn, in the 1930s, to Great War narratives from the previous decade. His
appropriation shows him “signifyin(g),” to use Henry Louis Gates, Jr.’s term, upon
earlier texts about the international conflict that yet loomed large in the world’s
imagination (xxi). Although Roy is not a veteran, his narrative can be seen as an
imaginative continuation of the black soldiers’ homecoming as described by Du Bois.
The wars *of* and *against* racism were still raging in the US, and Roy’s *nostos* illustrates
that he is an unfortunate participant in the fight. Thus does “Home” achieve its
sociopolitical urgency. However, “Home” is far more complex than Du Bois’s
“Returning Soldiers,” for the story seeks not only to expose and contest the pressing
reality of racist violence, it also explores the psychology of alienation, the contradictory
structure of ideology, and the efficacy of art in mediating and disrupting systems of oppression.

I.

In addressing the structural features of In Our Time, Michael Reynolds provides a vivid assessment of its overall aesthetic effect: “At its more accessible level, the book is a series of long and short takes, close-ups and wide angles, creating a visual scrapbook of the age that spawned it” (47). To his recognition of the text’s technical and imagistic dynamism, I add and emphasize its spatial range. It is a text of international proportions; some of the settings it invokes include Italy, France, Spain, and Switzerland. Hemingway thus provides an international mise en scène, which points to the massive political and social transformations occurring within the Western global community in the early decades of the twentieth century. Coextensive with this effect, however, is a recurring appeal to the concept of home, an appeal that questions the viability of the term as a signifier for stability within an otherwise unstable world. Given the collection’s trans-Atlantic, trans-Continental reach, it is telling that Hemingway grounds the middle of the book in Middle America, at home in Oklahoma with the young war veteran, Harold Krebs.

Told from the perspective of a palpably distant third person narrator, “Soldier’s Home” depicts his return and reception by the community, which is lukewarm, at best. While the text spends more time characterizing Krebs than developing action and plot, the narrative does retain a slight dramatic trajectory: Krebs returns from the war; he spends time reading and playing pool, watching neighborhood girls, arguing with his
mother; and he finally makes plans to leave home again. The lack of action performs Krebs’s post-war worldview: “He did not want any consequences. He did not want any consequences ever again. He wanted to live along without consequences” (71). Despite this assertively negative desire, Krebs cannot avoid the consequences of returning to an unwelcoming and unsympathetic community.

Krebs’s service in the trenches of Europe presents the most evident example of how national politics has, quite literally, constrained his personal agency and adversely affected his psychological constitution. Yet, the story’s potential critique is directed not against the event of the Great War itself, but against the discursive constructs of nationalist hegemony that permeate into progressively more localized cultural arenas, down to the levels of local community and family. As Anthony D. Smith asserts, “military factors are vital in shaping the emergence and course of modern nationalism” (80). As a marine in the Great War, it can be argued that Krebs himself is complicit with a nationalist agenda. However, in the text, it his community and his family that figuratively represent national interests. To this point, his homecoming is met with a sense of antipathy from the residents of his hometown. Returning from the war in 1919, Krebs is characterized by his belatedness. In the story’s third paragraph, the narrator tells us that, “[b]y the time Krebs returned to his home town in Oklahoma the greeting of heroes was over. He came back much too late . . . People seemed to think it was rather ridiculous for Krebs to be getting back so late, years after the war was over” (69). Absurdly, the terms of heroism are predicated on a quick homecoming; to linger in another country after the conflict is to risk slipping outside of the interests of national solidarity. Krebs served at “Belleau Wood, Soissons, the Champagne, St. Mihiel and in
the Argonne,” yet his community’s derisive interpretation of his “late” return mitigates
the significance of his service and – more profoundly – positions him at odds with his
hometown (69). Even though the European front brought about his psychological
scarring, “[h]e did not want to leave Germany. He did not want to come home” (72). His
sense of belonging is disrupted by temporality, by the fact that his return is untimely.
This conception of temporality is itself a product of nation-time, further circumscribing
his subjectivity within an institutional – not personal – sense of time and space. By
setting these social obstacles over and against Krebs, the story suggests that his particular
situation at home is, in Bhabha’s terms, rather “unhomely” (15).

His place in the community is profoundly unstable. Krebs is at once inside and
outside; the social organism overdetermines and subsumes his subject position at the
same time that it places him outside, marks him as Other. The inherent contradiction of
this framework points up the contradictory operations of ideology. Occurring at the
beginning of the story, the community framework thus initiates a potential critique. It
suggests some real political possibility within Krebs’s “unhomely” situation, and that the
story intends to relate “the traumatic ambivalences of [his] personal, psychic history to
the wider disjunctions of political existence” (Bhabha 15). Indeed, his return from the
war signals a crossing of the national narrative with the homeplace.

Initially, Krebs’s town generally represents this homeplace in the text, and his
return to that social structure instantiates the conflict between the protagonist and his
environment. Within the framework of the community, however, the individual family
constitutes a structure that is internal (with relation to the town), at the same time that it
operates as a discrete figure. The social logic of “Soldier’s Home” can thus be read as a
series of narrowing frames. The narrative begins with the communal framework and then moves inward, in a sense, to that of the Krebs family. The protagonist is situated ambivalently in both and represents, to quote Derrida, “an outside which is called to the inside of the inside in order to constitute it as inside” (qtd. in Richardson 330). Krebs is central to the community because of the marginality it imposes upon him; it is able to constitute itself as the privileged locus of control by ascribing to him a mark of qualitative difference, which it accomplishes by interpreting his return as belated. His subject position in the text thus exposes the inherent instability of ideological constructs such as “home,” “community,” and “nation.” In its latter half, the text attempts to push this notion further, as it metaphorizes national power through the Krebs family.

As Anne McClintock asserts in Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest, “[n]ations are frequently figured through the iconography of familial and domestic space,” a historical phenomenon which suggests Hemingway’s prescient awareness that patriarchal structures of family participate in discursively constituting the nation (357). The narrator proffers very few details about Krebs’s father, a textual economy that contributes to the shadowy nature of his presence within the story. Other than the fact that he is particular about his morning newspaper – he “can’t read his Star if it’s been mussed” – all we know of his character is that he is “non-committal” and works as a real estate agent (70). Such an occupation places the father in direct relation to systems of land capital. Given the highly selective and minimalistic method of representation within the narrative, these moments that provide depth of character signify immensely:
His father was in the real estate business and always wanted the car to be at his command when he required it to take clients out into the country to show them a piece of farm property. The car always stood outside the First National Bank building where his father had an office on the second floor. (70-71, emphasis added)

The father both inhabits and represents the institutional structures that dress economic systems “in national drag” (Anderson 87). If ever a figure held potential for political commentary, the elder Krebs – standing at the intersection of multiple national and economic apparatuses – is indeed such a figure.33

Though the father remains behind the scenes for the entire story, he still exerts a particular force within the narrative by indirectly dictating the plot. Apparently unhappy with his son’s lack of productivity, Krebs’s father communicates his displeasure through Krebs’s mother. She tells her son at breakfast that his “father is worried . . . He thinks you have lost your ambition, that you haven’t got a definite aim in life” (75). She also relays that the father has conceded to let his son use the car, and that he wishes to speak with him personally at his office later that day. Though Krebs ultimately ducks the meeting – a circumstance to which I will return in a moment – it nonetheless sets up the expectation of a possible encounter between the alienated veteran and the story’s representative of patriarchal power. The story’s development of nationalism in the familial figure collapses the public into the private, a structure that would seem to set up the potential for a meaningful encounter between Krebs and his father, with the father enacting the role of the patriarchal forces responsible for his son’s involvement in the war, as well as his subsequent psychological disaffection.
It is, however, Mrs. Krebs who serves as the primary mouthpiece for the father’s interests; she alone communicates the parental concern. She is, in a sense, the flag-bearer, the intermediary between her son and her husband. Again, McClintock’s reading of nation-making as a gendered activity is instructive here: “Women are typically constructed as the symbolic bearers of the nation, but are denied any direct relation to national agency” (354). Conveying the father’s messages, she acts as a go-between and maintains the patriarchal order of the home.

During her dialogue with Krebs, she is brought to tears by Krebs’s negative response to her question, “[d]on’t you love your mother, dear boy?” (75). He flatly says, “No . . . I don’t love anybody,” a statement he quickly and dutifully retracts; this nonetheless inspires her to drop to the floor in prayer, where she implores him to join her. Responsible for the moral welfare of her family, Mrs. Krebs here performs the Victorian ideal of Christian motherhood. Earlier in their exchange, she naggingly tells her son that “[t]here can be no idle hands in His Kingdom,” to which he responds, “I’m not in his Kingdom” (75). This particular nuance of the dialogue attests to a feeling of self-exile, and to a self-conscious alienation within Krebs.

In a politically charged letter to John Dos Passos composed on October 14, 1932, Hemingway wrote with particular fervor, “[t]o hell with the Church when it becomes a state and the hell with the State when it becomes a church” (qtd. in Kinnamon 162). Indeed, such a statement expresses scorn for the ideological collusion of social institutions, but it also rehearses a specifically American idealism about the separation of powers, one writ large in the constitutional framework of the nation. The mother-as-Church actively stands in for State patriarchy within the story’s national metaphor, a
process that demonstrates the fluidity of power. The home of “Soldier’s Home” can thus be read as a hostile force field of subjugating power structures that alienate the war-veteran son beyond the physical and psychological estrangement incurred in the trenches.

An internal exile in multiple senses, Krebs is estranged in his own community and house of origin; he exists outside of the Nick Adams arc that readers commonly recognize as the book’s unifying narrative; he expresses a religious disaffection by existing outside of “His Kingdom” (75). He inhabits a complex diasporic reality, and thereby contains potential for disrupting and reconstituting “home” as a signifier for national identity. His internally exilic condition is best approximated by Bhabha’s description of what it means to be “unhomed”:

To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the ‘unhomely’ be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life into private and public spheres. The unhomely moment creeps up on you stealthily as your own shadow . . . The recesses of domestic space become sites for history’s most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting. (13)

Bhabha offers a vision of displacement as a lived condition, one that destabilizes the rigid categories of public and private, of social and domestic spheres. In this way, the “unhomed” occupy a space of both perplexity and possibility; there is potential for reclaiming and remaking cultural identity and agency outside of the discursive and political constraints of the national project.
The communal and familial features of the story thus constitute the “pedagogical,” master narrative of nationalism (Bhabha 208). Circumscribed within the terms of such a narrative, Krebs – as a soldier – is shown to be a product of national interests at the same time that his individual subjectivity is leveled by that very same project. Following Bhabha, the potential in this otherwise overdetermined scenario depends on Krebs’s articulation of an individual, “performative” narrative that vocalizes a subjective agency against the totalizing power structure (208).

However, even as the text establishes the familial space of the home as a figure for the nation, it does so with an apparent diffidence. Through Mrs. Krebs, the story sets up the expectation that the son will engage the shadowy patriarch, and that the climax of the narrative will take place in the father’s office. Despite these expectations, Krebs never confronts his father. He skips out on the meeting with him at the story’s end: “He would not go down to his father’s office. He would miss that one. He wanted his life to go smoothly” (77). Krebs chooses instead to watch his little sister play indoor baseball.

We can thus begin to recognize a seemingly irresolvable contradiction at the core of “Soldier’s Home.” The protagonist returns to a community that at once takes him in and reacts against him, which establishes the text’s interest in exploring the machinations of ideology. The protagonist returns to a household that figures as a metaphor for the nation, a structure that actively sets up the opportunity for him to confront it. The pieces are all in place for a textual critique. However, Krebs dodges his father and fails to engage State patriarchy, thereby nullifying the possibility that his own performative agency might cut across the pedagogical narrative that has done such violence to his subjectivity. “Soldier’s Home” constructs the possibility for confrontation, and for Krebs
to assert his subjectivity against overdetermining power structures, but such an encounter never occurs. The dramatic arc of the story thus shies away from the same ideological contradictions it frames with the community, and the same institutional problematic that it metaphorizes via the Krebs family.

In place of a confrontation – an event that would require of the protagonist both resolve and substantial investment in his circumstances – the narrative continues to emphasize Krebs’s lack of investment. In this way, the text functions according to a logic of negation, loss, and absence. The narrative voice emphasizes this when describing the protagonist’s decision to evade his father: “He would not go down . . . He would miss that one” (77, emphases added). Krebs attests to a void within his own capacity for emotion when he tells his mother, “I don’t love anybody” (76, emphases added). Even his parents acknowledge it: “‘Your father is worried, too,’ his mother went on. ‘He thinks you have lost your ambition, that you haven’t got a definite aim in life” (75, emphases added).

There is indeed a great deal of weight contained in the text’s evocation of ideology, and in the family-nation metaphor. Clearly, then, the prevailing emphasis on Krebs’s inherent lack at the story’s denouement signals an inability for “Soldier’s Home” to account for the gravity of its own content. Right before Krebs decides to miss the meeting with his father, the narrator tells us of his plans to go to Kansas City, though “[t]here would be one more scene maybe before he got away” (77). This conflict, this “scene,” is purely speculative; the succeeding qualifier “maybe” underscores the uncertainty of the imagined altercation. Furthermore, here at the end of the story, the posited “scene” is deferred beyond the realm of the text, further mitigating the story’s
sociopolitical potential and forcing the reader to imagine the nebulous event. As critic Thomas Strychacz eloquently states, ambiguity alone “is pressed into service . . . to define and respond to a terrifyingly denatured and devitalized landscape of alienation, lostness, and emptiness” (57).

Not only does the story’s action defer the confrontation – thus canceling the critical potential – its stylistic features also participate in defusing the potency of the text’s figures. Throughout “Soldier’s Home,” the narrative exhibits a persistent reflexivity; time after time, the text focuses upon different forms of representation to such an extent that representation per se becomes a significant subject in the narrative. Take, for instance, Krebs’s musings about pursuing romantic relationships with girls in his town: “Now he would have liked a girl if she had come to him and not wanted to talk. But here at home it was all too complicated. He knew he could never get through it all again. It was not worth the trouble” (72). His desire for intimacy is stymied by the prerequisite of verbal courtship. Nonetheless, the narrator repeats that Krebs “would like to have one of them” (72). Yet an association between these young women and a particular style hedges his desire: “He liked the round Dutch collars above their sweaters. He liked their silk stockings and flat shoes. He liked their bobbed hair and the way they walked . . . They were such a nice pattern. He liked the pattern. It was exciting” (71-72). Krebs’s turn to style and form, his aesthetic appreciation of patterns and manners of dress, performs the same turn that Hemingway stages in his own textual performance. That is, the hyper-conscious attention to the style of minimalism and repetition anchors the narrative in the surfaces of things, thus counteracting the critical depth suggested by the family-nation metaphor.
Moreover, this so-called turn to form – evidenced most clearly in Krebs’s appreciation of women’s fashion – is part of a larger strategy designed to suppress the eventuality of experiencing the “consequences” of his conflicted subject position. Focusing on clothing and hairstyles allows him to act upon “a process of management through deflection” (Kastely 188). Significantly, the clothes represent far more than “a nice pattern” (IOT 72). Women’s fashion here constitutes a whole other semiotic code, a discrete and alternative sign system that is innocuous and that permits Krebs to displace what is potentially damaging. The narrator explains the protagonist’s ultimate apathy toward women by stating that Krebs “did not want to get into the intrigue and the politics” of courtship (71). He is able to negate any real, substantive investment in women by focusing exclusively on surface patterns. In much the same way, his author effectively negates the political investment of the story by turning to formal experimentation with reflexive techniques, and away from the substance of the potential critique.

Several times, “Soldier’s Home” describes Krebs’s frustrated attempts to discuss his experiences at war. By pointing up both the affective and epistemological complications of narrative, these moments further emphasize the reflexive dynamics of the text. Each time “Soldier’s Home” invokes Krebs’s war stories, it establishes an apparent disconnect between him and his audience. We learn that when the protagonist first returned, he “did not want to talk about the war at all. Later he felt the need to talk but no one wanted to hear about it” (IOT 69). Notably, even his mother fails to give him a proper audience: “She often came in when he was in bed and asked him to tell her about the war, but her attention always wandered” (70). The rhetorical impasse between Krebs
and his listeners reinforces his precarious existence inside and outside of his own town, and inside and outside of his own family; people “had heard too many atrocity stories to be thrilled by actualities” (69).

The general lack of interest that people have in hearing about Krebs’s real experiences compels him to lie about the war. Given the significance of this dissimulation to the narrative’s reflexive bent, it is worth viewing the following passage in its entirety:

Krebs found that to be listened to at all he had to lie, and after he had done this twice he, too, had a reaction against the war and against talking about it. A distaste for everything that had happened to him in the war set in because of the lies he had told. All of the times that had been able to make him feel cool and clear inside himself when he thought of them; the times so long back when he had done the one thing, the only thing for a man to do, easily and naturally, when he might have done something else, now lost their cool, valuable quality and then were lost themselves.

There is an implicit argument about discursive representation in the above exposition of Krebs’s lies. The thesis of this argument suggests that lies not only distort the truth, they in turn distort and disrupt the speaker’s relationship to the external world of lived experience. As the passage continues, Krebs’s “distaste” and “nausea” underscore this:

His lies were unimportant lies and consisted in attributing to himself things other men had seen, done or heard of, and stating as facts certain apocryphal incidents familiar to all soldiers. Even his lies were not sensational at the pool room. His acquaintances, who had heard detailed
accounts of German women found chained to machine guns in the Argonne forest and who could not comprehend, or were barred by their patriotism from interest in, any German machine gunners who were not chained, were not thrilled by his stories.

Krebs acquired the nausea in regard to experience that is the result of untruth or exaggeration. . . . In this way he lost everything. (69-70)

Thus, if willful misrepresentation is to be disparaged for its deleterious impact on “truth” and on the speaker’s relation to the world, then it follows that this passage valorizes a specific kind of realism. Read as a kind of *ars poetica*, it is possible to view the passage as a reflexive consideration by Hemingway, in which he attempts to make a case for his own aesthetic project. Unlike the stories about “German women found chained to machine guns” that fascinate Krebs’s pool-room friends, Hemingway’s narrative is stripped of the rhetorical excesses and exaggerations that not only distort the truth about war, but which also perpetuate nationalist ideologies.

However, in spite of its appeal to realism and to narrative accuracy, the text never makes any attempt – neither in this passage nor elsewhere in the story – to provide real details about Krebs’s real experiences overseas. Not only does this leave a gaping hole in the narrative generally, it also illustrates a glaring contradiction between, on the one hand, the realism valorized in the passage on Krebs’s lies and, on the other, the story’s actual mode of abstraction, ambiguity, and deferral. In fact, the story does not even fully describe the lies that Krebs tells. As with the posited-but-deferred confrontation with the father, the reader is left to invent and project “an imaginary realistic narrative” about his war experiences, and his subsequent lies, onto Krebs (Jameson 183).
Characters struggle with the process of narrating traumatic experience throughout *In Our Time*; so, narrative reflexivity is not exclusive to “Soldier’s Home.” The theme of not talking is introduced in the story preceding Krebs’s, titled “A Very Short Story,” in which the unnamed narrator – presumably Nick Adams – undergoes a spinal surgery to correct an injury incurred on the front: “He went under the anaesthetic holding tight on to himself so he would not blab about anything during the silly, talky time” (65). The subsequent vignette, “Chapter VII” of the collection, provides a glimpse into the trenches of the Great War. Interestingly, much of the vignette has a highly expressive quality, as it features a soldier under heavy shelling. The evocative rhetoric of the piece thus conjures the type of scene that the reader can only imagine in “Soldier’s Home,” where it remains blanketed by Krebs’s lies and the text’s refusal of depth. I have provided “Chapter VII” in its entirety:

> While the bombardment was knocking the trench to pieces at Fossalta, he lay very flat and sweated and prayed oh jesus christ get me out of here. Dear jesus please get me out. Christ please please please christ. If you’ll only keep me from getting killed I’ll do anything you say. I believe in you and I’ll tell every one in the world that you are the only one that matters. Please please dear jesus. The shelling moved further up the line. We went to work on the trench and in the morning the sun came up and the day was hot and muggy and cheerful and quiet. The next night back at Mestre he did not tell the girl he went upstairs with at the Villa Rossa about Jesus. And he never told anybody. (68)
While we are not explicitly told that this soldier is Krebs, the matter of character is insignificant. What matters is that it resonates with Krebs’s situation and articulates horror as a private intensity, a matter that calls forth both revelation and containment. His promise of evangelism – “I’ll tell everyone in the world that you’re the only one that matters” – registers another level of articulating experience, of “spreading the Word,” as it were. For all of its expressive rhetoric and its emphasis on speaking and narrating, however, the vignette’s punctuating sentence nullifies the potentiality that language professes throughout most of the short piece. Not only does he not tell the prostitute about Christ, “he never told anybody.” Like Nick in “A Very Short Story,” the affected soldier here holds “tight onto himself,” retreating from intersubjective communication, and into a state of isolation.

Indeed, “Soldier’s Home” preserves an essential irony in Krebs’s discursive dilemma. The incessant talking about not talking that we get through the narrative voice brings the issues of expression and repression to the surface, but this formal play undermines the potency of the family-nation metaphor. There is an apparent conflict between the depth-model that structures the familial metaphor and the grammar of the story’s actual representation. In his own application of deconstructive methodologies within a postcolonial paradigm, Bhabha writes that “the narrative and psychological force that nationness brings to bear on cultural production and political projection is the effect of the ambivalence of ‘nation’ as a narrative strategy. As an apparatus of symbolic power, it produces a continual slippage of categories . . . in the act of writing the nation” (201). Despite the story’s initial, ostensible effort to expose and subvert nationalist discourse, the text falters under the weight of the nation’s symbolic power; once invoked,
the discourse of the nation unhinges the story, and causes the once-charged narrative strategies to slip into inertia.

Hemingway illustrates the desire to extend the implications of Krebs’s lived experience to a wider political horizon. The story’s frames and familial metaphor approach what Bhabha describes as the “wider disjunctions of political existence” (15). However, the emphasis on style renders the narrative autotelic, unable to “universalize private or lived experience” (Jameson 185). The story “no longer engages the fate of the nation,” to borrow Jameson’s phrasing, nor even the fate of the individual (185). The turn to form becomes an end in itself. Turning his attention to phenomena such as women’s fashion and indoor baseball, Krebs’s reenacts the technical preoccupations of his author and leaves untouched his post-war trauma, his discontent with nation, and sense of displacement. The national metaphor constitutes Hemingway’s attempt at allegorizing “the truth of our social life as a whole,” but the method by which that “truth” gets conveyed shows it to be “increasingly irreconcilable with the aesthetic quality of language or of individual expression” (Jameson 185). In a 1958 interview, Hemingway reflects on the evolution of his own style and admits that “unavoidable awkwardnesses” affect any writer striving for originality (Writers at Work 231). Indeed, such a phrase speaks directly to the aspiring artist’s struggle with the demands of craft. However, these essential “awkwardnesses” also emerge as effects of the phenomenal world that the writer inhabits, including the multiplicity of social discourses that surround him and pervade his work.

Jameson asserts that the modernist writer is “reduced to telling the truth of a private situation,” and the domestic milieu of “Soldier’s Home” reflects Jameson’s
assessment; but the private situation that the text provides is saturated with public, political implications. The home space of the story is intensely private, but the story’s treatment of plot, character, and metaphor participates “in redrawing the domestic space as the space of the normalizing, pastoralizing, and individuating techniques of modern power and police: the personal-is-the-political; the world-in-the-home” (Bhabha 15).

Ihab Hassan identifies a relevant aspect of Hemingway’s rhetorical ethos that speaks to this occasion: “the ethic of Hemingway’s characters is not only reductive but also solitary. What they endure, they can never share with others” (287). Though Hassan makes an important distinction regarding male characters across Hemingway’s oeuvre, such a statement dismisses the potential for meaning and social engagement within these characters and their experiences. It is not enough to assert that they remain existentially detached, laconic, and independent by choice.

Rather, we must look at the subtle approaches or in-roads Hemingway makes in opening those characters up to the possibility of social critique. The vignette of the imperiled soldier makes such an approach, as does the fact that Krebs “felt the need to talk but no one wanted to hear about it” (69). The family’s metaphorical representation of nationalist patriarchy also indicates a move toward explicit critique, but Krebs avoids his father and makes plans for a future departure. By identifying these moments where Hemingway approaches then withdraws, evokes social critique then retreats into form, we get a better sense of the modernist struggle to conceptualize an alternative to the dominant narratives of nationalism and patriarchal power structures. To be sure, full critique is absent; engagement with the sociopolitical sphere is deferred. However, it is the manner in which this lack presents itself that merits investigation. As Bhabha
explains, our object of scrutiny “is not simply what the house of fiction contains or ‘controls’ as content,” but also the methods that convey those fictions, fictions that provide insight into the capacity of art to engage, reflect on, or submit to totalizing modes of discourse (18).

Presently, I want to suggest that Hughes acknowledged both the rhetorical ambivalences and critical potential within “Soldier’s Home.” “Home” rearticulates Hemingway’s modernist rhetoric of alienation as a way to reflect upon the deeper psychosocial structures of racial identification and the politics thereof. The text accomplishes this by re-framing the protagonist. Of course, the event of the homecoming itself links these texts, but as the opening scene of “Home” reveals, Hughes signifies on the grammar of Hemingway’s story as well as its content, which further cements and complicates the intertextual bond. In a manner of speaking, he mimes Hemingway’s moves and, in turn, mines the inert potential of “Soldier’s Home” to construct a socially active text.

II.

At the very beginning of the story, “Soldier’s Home” introduces Krebs by way of multiple perceptual frames. The third-person narrator gives us the basic historical fact of his service, stating that “Krebs went to the war from a Methodist college in Kansas” (69). Then, descriptions of two different photographs mediate this initial introduction to the protagonist. One of these photographs was taken stateside before Krebs’s deployment, and the other in Germany:
There is a picture which shows him among his fraternity brothers, all of them wearing exactly the same height and style of collar. He enlisted in the Marines in 1917 and did not return to the United States until the second division returned from the Rhine in the summer of 1919.

There is a picture which shows him on the Rhine with two German girls and another corporal. Krebs and the corporal look too big for their uniforms. The German girls are not beautiful. The Rhine does not show in the picture. (69)

Both photographs describe the clothing style of Krebs and his companions, anticipating his own fixation on women’s fashion later in the story. Further, the second picture exhibits an evident failure in its representational purposes. As J. Gerald Kennedy and Kirk Curnutt point out, the second photograph seems “[i]ntended as a generic war photo of victorious troops posing with comely women in a vivid foreign setting”; however, the men seem absurd in their ill-fitting uniforms, the women are not attractive, and the view of the Rhine is obfuscated (1). This representational conflict sets up the protagonist’s own personal struggle to discuss the war. It is also important to recognize that the girls are German, the women of the defeated soldiers. The narrator repeats their nationality twice in the description of the photograph, which would seem to emphasize further the significance of their identity. Krebs’s town is already uneasy about his belated return to the States, so we might imagine that a photograph of him dallying with the women of the vanquished enemy would exacerbate the disapproving view of him. If the townspeople were to interpret his fraternizing with Germans as non-normative, and many of them certainly would, then the photograph would effectively place Krebs at a further remove
from the hegemonic center. While all of this suggests that the text is observing and critiquing the mechanics of ideology, this interesting photographic detail is ultimately left to signify of its accord without any further explanation. Ambiguity prevails, and the reader is put upon to imagine why, to begin with, do these German girls accompany Krebs. The text’s experimentation with minimalism leaves too many epistemological gaps, raises more questions than it answers, and fails to carry the political potential to completion. I would also argue that the pre- and post-war contexts of the pictures skip over the event of the conflict entirely, which contributes to the story’s ultimate hesitation to confront its own sociopolitical *raison d'être*.

A third framing device in the text’s characterization of Krebs appears in the community’s response to his return. Following the description of the photographs, the narrator reveals that “[t]he men from the town who had been drafted had all been welcomed elaborately on their return,” but by the time Krebs gets back, “the reaction had set in” (69). As I discuss in the first section of this chapter, the town is unjustly skeptical of his belated homecoming, a sentiment that further alienates Krebs. Hughes’s story also incorporates a number of specular frames when introducing the homeward bound protagonist, but its framing devices construct a more immediate and more deliberate social commentary than do the frames of “Soldier’s Home.” Beginning with Roy’s arrival, the story delineates a complex process of identification:

> When the boy came back, there were bright stickers and tags in strange languages the home folks couldn’t read all over his bags, and on his violin case . . . They made the white people on the train wonder about the brown-skinned young man to whom the baggage belonged. And when he got off
at a village station in Missouri, the loafers gathered around in a crowd, staring. (32)

The “tags in strange languages” on Roy’s luggage present an interpretive dilemma to the crowd at the train station, which parallels the prevailing representational uncertainty during the initial characterization of Krebs in “Soldier’s Home.” Krebs’s community cannot understand his late return; Roy’s “home folks” cannot seem to process his appearance at all. The narrator’s choice of words with the phrase “home folks” is of course ironic, as it refers to the whites at the station whose regard for Roy is nothing short of malicious.

By framing Roy via the crowd’s perception of him, the text effectively figures identification as a deep and complex structure within the larger problem of racial conflict. In the first two paragraphs of the story, the description of the protagonist moves from anonymity to nominal recognition, thereby performing the perception of the white crowd as they regard him. At first, the narrator only refers to him as “the boy”; the text then describes him as “the brown-skinned young man.” It is not until the beginning of the second paragraph that the reader learns his name: “Roy Williams had come home from abroad to visit his folks” (32). The diminutive male pronoun, “boy,” has of course a long and problematic history as a racial slur used to degrade African-American men. Given the story’s content and setting, there is no doubt that Hughes chose this word strategically, especially as the second descriptor, “the brown-skinned young man,” identifies him as black. Appropriating the epithet allows the text to frame Roy’s appearance via the white “loafers”; one of them uses this racist form of address again in dialogue in section II of the story. Subsequently, the appropriation sets up the critique.
The crowd’s view of Roy begins with its inability to “read” him and the circumstances of his arrival; in part II, this failure to interpret gives way to racist hostility. The first words of the second section come from the spectators at the station: “‘An uppy nigger,’ said the white loafers when they saw him standing, slim and elegant, on the station platform in the September sunlight, surrounded by his bags with the bright stickers” (35, emphases added). Fascinatingly, the voice of the story’s third-person narrator begins to intervene in the perceptual framework of the whites at the station. In this first sentence of part II, the text describes the exact same scene as in part I, and uses much of the same unique language – “white loafers,” “bright stickers.” The racist remark that begins the sentence tells us that we are still reading from the perspective of the crowd. Thus, the grammar of the text is structured according to a narrative repetition, but it is a repetition with an extremely significant variation. Set off by punctuation, the narrative voice describes Roy as “slim and elegant, on the station platform in the September sunlight” (35). This view of the protagonist valorizes his appearance, and can be seen to constitute an alternative perceptual frame that intervenes in the structure of the sentence and disrupts the view of the white crowd.

Standing at the station, Roy recognizes “an old playmate, Charlie Mumford, from across the alley – a tall red-necked white boy in overalls” (35). He makes the mistake of removing a glove to shake hands with him, a faux pas that the narrator immediately points out by way of interjection: “The white man took [Roy’s hand], but he didn’t shake it long. Roy had forgotten he wasn’t in Europe, wearing gloves and shaking hands glibly with a white man! Damn!” (35). Indeed, the crowd at the train station foreshadows the lynch mob at the story’s end, and – as I will discuss later – this specific act of interracial
familiarity prefigures his public interaction with the white Miss Reese, which ultimately causes the mob to descend on Roy. Here, at the story’s beginning, hostile dialogue enacts Roy’s alienation:

“Where you been, boy?” the white fellow asked.

“Paris,” said Roy.

“What’d yuh come back for?” a half-southern voice drawled from the edge of a baggage truck.

“I wanted to come home,” said Roy, “to see my mother.”

“I hope she’s gladder to see yuh than we are,” another white voice drawled. (35)

The dialogue imparts a regional vernacular to the white voices, and the narrator describes them as “half-southern” and drawling. Set against Roy’s speech, which bears no dialect and comes across as “standard” English, the text suggests that the white voice is different, a deviation from linguistic norms. By stylistically othering the voices of the white men, this facet of the dialogue works in concert with the shifting and conflicting perceptual frames. Hughes’s narrative tactics thus cut across the privileged subject position occupied by the whites at the station.

The latent violence in this interaction with the crowd is concentrated most vividly in the closing lines of section II: “The eyes of the white men about the station were not kind. He heard someone mutter, ‘Nigger.’ His skin burned. For the first time in half a dozen years he felt his color. He was home” (36). Profoundly complex and affectively charged, these lines portray Roy’s homecoming as a synaesthetic experience. “The eyes of the white men” frame his arrival as an unwelcome visual spectacle; he hears one of
them “mutter, ‘Nigger,’” which in turn causes an intensely visceral, tactile response as he feels his skin burn, feels his blackness. Critic Houston Baker, Jr. points out that “the framing of black being toward anything suitably called ‘modernity’ has its primary locus south of Mason-Dixon. In Dixieland, black Americans had no choice but to take their stand . . . their performances framed in signifying relation to the mind of the South” (24, emphasis in original). The Southern white perspective at the beginning of “Home” thus provides a narrative frame that constrains Roy’s subjectivity. In this way, the constraint of the white perspective in “Home” operates similarly to Krebs’s hometown, which frames the protagonist by simultaneously taking him in and placing him outside, marking him out as Other. In his appropriation of Hemingway’s frames, Hughes recodes the strategy by imprinting it with black sociopolitical concerns.

Indeed, both Krebs and Roy are constrained by the framing that occurs through their respective hometowns; in both stories, the constraint of the frame manifests as “an interpretive imposition that restricts an object by establishing boundaries” (Culler 196). However, Hughes’s frames achieve a much more explicitly critical function than Hemingway’s, because “Home” illustrates that these boundaries are not only arbitrary, but also highly unstable. The force of the white gaze attempts to impose itself upon the black musician, and so “acts as a sign of qualitative difference”; but, at the same time that the white loafers mutter epithets about Roy’s blackness, the narrative shows Roy to be, in a sense, “more white” than they, which it accomplishes by distinguishing his polished speech from the whites’ regional vernacular (Frow 333). While the community-as-frame in “Soldier’s Home” suggests an ideological contradiction in the reception and alienation of Krebs, Hughes unhinges the frame’s structure to display the inherent instability within
racist logic, and to topple the racial hierarchy by giving rhetorical agency to Roy. Under the constraints of his community and, later, his familial home space, Krebs nurses an atrophied subjectivity and remains hermetically sealed off from “consequences” (IOT 71). He and his author both turn to surface play as a recourse, an avoidance strategy that necessarily fails to confront the larger discursive forces at work. In contrast, “Home” explores the ambiguity of the frame, and uses its intrinsically unstable nature as an opportunity to provide Roy with an interior life and agency.

Hughes’s rhetorical performance here at the beginning of “Home” anticipates Frantz Fanon’s articulation of the black man’s “bodily schema” in Black Skin, White Masks:

And then the occasion arose when I had to meet the white man’s eyes. An unfamiliar weight burdened me. The real world challenged my claims. In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. Consciousness of the body is a solely negating activity. It is a third-person consciousness. The body is surrounded by an atmosphere of certain uncertainty. (110-11, emphasis added)

As Bhabha explicates further, this “‘atmosphere of certain uncertainty’ that surrounds the body certifies its existence and threatens its dismemberment,” a conflict within the process of racial identification that goes beyond Du Boisian double consciousness (64). Hughes’s experimentation with perspective, via the text’s numerous framing devices, performs Fanon’s schema. Perhaps Fanon was reading The Ways of White Folks as he was writing “The Fact of Blackness,” for even the minutiae of his descriptions recall
Roy’s arrival: “In the train it was no longer a question of being aware of my body in the third person but in a triple person. In the train I was given not one but two, three places. . . I existed triply” (Fanon 112).

Thus, these perceptual shifts and interventions within “Home” not only enhance the racial tension of the story, they also afford the reader a deep and intimate view of Roy’s interior life, of his ontological struggle to be black in a white world. The perspectival frames establish an inside/outside dialectic, through which the story represents his psychic responses to the external realities of racism and social conflict. In “Soldier’s Home,” Krebs too is placed at a remove from the community. As discussed in the previous section, the people in his town view his late return as an absurdity; their collective view of the young man places him outside of the group, and outside of national interests. The third-person narrator of “Soldier’s Home” conveys this, but the reader never experiences it through Krebs’s perceptions nor through those of the community. In Hughes’s appropriation of the homecoming narrative, the hostile reception of his returning protagonist is brought into vivid relief. The text provides the white crowd’s acerbic language; it then subtly undercuts the crowd’s perspective and subject position; and it endows Roy with an interiority that performs the phenomenology of racial identification.

Hughes makes full use of Roy’s interior life, pushing further into his psychology so that the reader can access not only his responses to his immediate environment in Missouri, but also his memories of Europe. Roy’s internal, first-person musings provide some of this in the text, but much of his European past is conveyed through a uniquely stylized and omniscient narrative voice that directly accesses the protagonist’s thoughts.
and emotions. Interestingly, the content of his European memories is rather conflicted. Some involve the richness of his cultural experiences and the value of his musical education, but for the most part he recalls the socioeconomic turmoil he witnessed amongst the lower classes. In these descriptions, the reader also learns more about his sickness, which – alongside his artistry – is his most defining feature:

He had a feeling that he was going to die, and he wanted to see his mother again. This feeling about death had been coming over him gradually for two or three years now. It seemed to him that it must have started in Vienna, that gay but dying city in Central Europe where so many people were hungry, and yet some still had money to buy champagne and caviar and women in the night-clubs where Roy’s orchestra played.

But the glittering curtains of Roy’s jazz were lined with death. It made him sick to see people fainting in the streets of Vienna from hunger, while others stuffed themselves with wine and food. (32-33)

The view into Roy’s memory exposes his personal view of social anguish, while it also lifts the lid on how the other half lives in interwar Europe. The narrative continually returns to these memories of suffering he witnessed on the Continent:

But it was even worse when the orchestra moved back to Berlin. Behind the apparent solidity of that great city, behind doors where tourists never passed, hunger and pain were beyond understanding. And the police were beating people who protested, or stole, or begged. Yet in the cabaret where Roy played, crowds of folks still spent good gold. (33-34)
Within these descriptions of social strife, an intense empathy springs from Roy and his recollections. As a black American from the South, Roy understands first-hand the material consequences of social inequality. The text fulfills this sense of empathy in Roy by directly associating the onset of his disease – presumably tuberculosis – to the social ills he has witnessed: “It was in Berlin that the sadness weighed most heavily on Roy. And it was there that he began to cough. One night in Prague, he had a hemorrhage” (34). Roy’s “sadness” for the poor of Europe literally manifests as a physical disease. Hughes thus creates a protagonist who exemplifies empathy, who so fully broods over the pains of other people that he partakes bodily of their suffering.36

The above passages detail the inception of his disease in Europe, and his return to the US provides little relief. Again, the voice of the omniscient narrator steps in to provide some of this back-story as it describes Roy’s homeward itinerary, all of which takes place prior to the narrative present in Hopkinsville, Missouri. Upon landing in New York, he visited some friends in Harlem:

Most of his old friends there, musicians and actors, were hungry and out of work. When they saw Roy dressed so well, they asked him for money. And at night women whispered in the streets, “Come here, baby! I want to see you, darlin’.”

“Rotten everywhere,” Roy thought. “I want to go home.” (34)

Thus adding New York to the list of diseased cities, the text establishes a transatlantic milieu of suffering, which becomes most profoundly concentrated in the story’s southern setting. Europe makes Roy sick, but the South kills him.
Critic Gene Andrew Jarrett has discussed what he calls Hughes’s “literary geopolitics” in the author’s memoir, *I Wonder as I Wander*; in his study, Jarrett describes Hughes’s “opinions on how literature could communicate and inflect formations of social activism within and across regions” (102). Given Roy’s worldly experiences, the story’s Southern context, and the politically forward nature of the text, Jarrett’s insights about the geopolitical in Hughes’s work bears direct relevance to “Home.” Referencing the author’s own personal journeys, Jarrett writes,

> Traveling through the U.S. South, though initially designed to earn
> Hughes money and commercial esteem, ends up exposing him to the deeper issue of how literary expression could correlate with racial-political action and how literature could influence the emotional, spiritual, and even material well-being of African Americans . . .

Hughes’s understanding of Jim Crowism in the U.S. South informed the language he needed to interpret the social, class, or racial inequalities outside the United States. (116-17)

Jarrett’s view of Hughes’s overtly political aesthetic is an instructive one, which I will return to in greater detail. In the present analysis, however, the transatlantic framework that the critic recognizes in Hughes’s writings is more significant.

“Rotten everywhere,” sums up Roy’s interpretation of sociopolitical life, a view that emerges from his time in Europe, his homeward trajectory via New York City, and finally his arrival in Hopkinsville. His critique comes about by means of a localizing strategy that Hughes appropriates from “Soldier’s Home.” The homecoming provides the overarching structure for this localization. To be sure, the Krebs household figuratively
localizes national power and nationalist discourse; yet, the extreme privatization of
Krebs’s lived experience precludes the story’s ability to critique the ideological structures
that its figures evoke. In contrast, “Home” pushes further in localizing the consequences
of social strife. Roy’s physical disease constitutes a moment of extreme localization; his
embodiment of decay imparts a depth of experience to the text’s critique. His living
illness performs what Fanon articulates as a “slow composition of my self as a body in
the middle of a spatial and temporal world” (111, emphasis in original).

Of course, Krebs is also a body under various pressures, most notably the
discursive forces figured in the story’s familial metaphor; but as my analysis of
“Soldier’s Home” makes clear, neither Krebs nor the text itself owns or confronts the
severity of his situation. There is an emphatic resistance to such a confrontation in that
story:

He did not want any consequences. He did not want any consequences
ever again. He wanted to live along without consequences. (71) . . .

He had tried to keep his life from being complicated. Still, none of it had
touched him. (77)

This sense of wishing against “consequences” is a recurring theme for Krebs, and the text
enables this negative volition by rerouting the moment of crisis through style and surface.
“Krebs did not want to leave Germany,” but in the first four pages of “Home,” the text
tells us three times that Roy actively desired to return: “He had a feeling he was going to
die, and he wanted to see his mother again” (32-33, emphasis added); “‘Rotten
everywhere,’ Roy thought. ‘I want to go home.’” (34, emphasis added); “‘I wanted to
come home,’ said Roy, ‘to see my mother’” (35, emphasis added).
Unlike Krebs, Roy’s ultimate confrontation with the violent forces of white hegemony is inevitable. Unable to sleep, he goes for a night walk in town, where he runs into an acquaintance – the white music teacher, Miss Reece. Their exchange is brief: “The movies had just let out and the crowd, passing by and seeing, objected to a Negro talking to a white woman – insulting a White Woman – attacking a WHITE woman – RAPING A WHITE WOMAN . . . so they knocked him down” (46-47). Thus commences the brutal assault on Roy that ends with his hanging:

The little Negro whose name was Roy Williams began to choke on the blood in his mouth. And the roar of their voices and the scuff of their feet were split by the moonlight into a thousand notes like a Beethoven sonata. And when the white folks left his brown body, stark naked, strung from a tree at the edge of town, it hung there all night, like a violin for the wind to play. (47-48)

The false accusation of rape is clearly a fiction produced by the white crowd, a fiction that literally “frames” him for a nonexistent transgression. The line, “[t]he little Negro whose name was Roy Williams,” recalls the initial introduction of the protagonist, along with the textual framing devices that set up the process of identification at the beginning of the story. John Frow points out that “[f]or a narrative, the most intensive frame is that constituted by the beginning and, especially, the end of the narration,” and such seems to be the case with “Home” (334). Here at the end of the story, Roy is physically stripped of all agency in the lynching, which of course precludes any chance of resistance, rhetorical or otherwise. Needless to say, this ending stands in stark contradiction to that
of “Soldier’s Home,” where Krebs casually avoids his father and makes plans to leave town. Krebs exercises a freedom of mobility; Roy is forever immobilized.

It can be argued that Roy’s violent death occurs, at least in part, as the result of his own naivety. He is an international figure, and while his time abroad cultivated his talents, it also nurtured a sense of equality that supplanted the social conditioning of his childhood in the US. The narrator gives special attention to moments when Roy crosses social boundaries without reflecting upon the rigid code of conduct that would dictate his behavior as a black man in the Jim Crow South. At the beginning of the story, he shakes hands with a white man; throughout, he wears ostentatious dress clothes in the European style; at the end, he publically addresses a white woman at night.

Also, he performs several times for audiences that are either interracial or entirely white, which establishes a complex *mise-en-scène* wherein Roy is the direct object of mass spectatorship. The spotlight precludes the anonymity that would otherwise afford him some degree of safety from the ever-present possibility of mob violence. Furthermore, these performances literally stage his struggle to act according to social (read: racist) expectations. As a cultured African American performing classical music in 1930s Missouri, Roy is definitely out of step with such expectations. His very existence explodes racial norms.

Thus, through Roy, Hughes articulates the precarious subject position of black artists in the early-twentieth century. Like his author, Roy is an international Modernist, whose cultural and artistic hybridity has potential for aesthetic innovation and sociopolitical change. However, Hughes makes it clear that it is indeed a dangerous game. During Roy’s first performance – Jules Massenet’s *Meditation from Thaïs* – the
narrative accesses Roy’s consciousness as he, in turn, observes the audience. When he sees Miss Reese for the first time, he thinks to himself as he plays,

You sure don’t look like Thaïs, you scrawny white woman in a cheap coat and red hat staring up at me from the first row. You don’t look a bit like Thaïs. What is it you want the music to give you? What do you want from me? . . . This is Hopkinsville, Missouri. . . . Look at all those brown girls back there in the crowd of Negroes, leaning toward me and the music. First time most of them ever saw a man in evening clothes, black or white . . . First time they ever heard one of their own race come home from abroad playing a violin. (41)

To some extent, in his internal monologue, Roy contemplates the racial complexities of his performance, as well as the cultural peculiarity of its occurrence within a provincial Southern town. Indeed, this bit of awareness alone shows that he is not guilty of a blasé indifference to the racial dynamics of the situation. However, the tone and diction of the passage do reveal that his self-concept is at odds with a racist power structure that would require him to act inferior, subservient, and restrained. He critiques a white woman’s appearance as “scrawny” and cheaply dressed, and he even notes Miss Reese “staring up,” a description that emphasizes her adoration, as well as his position on a higher level.

He later accepts an invitation from her to perform at the all-white high school where she teaches. Instead of giving us Roy’s point of view during this second performance, Hughes depicts it retrospectively via the students’ reaction:

The students went home that afternoon and told their parents that a dressed-up nigger had come to school with a violin and played a lot of
funny pieces nobody but Miss Reese liked. They went on to say that Miss Reese had grinned all over herself and cried, “Wonderful!” And had even bowed to the nigger when he went out! (43)

In their perceptions of Roy, the students not only marvel at his appearance and his music, they also supply a sexual fantasy that involves Miss Reese. This fantasy emerges again, later, when the lynch mob overtakes the protagonist. By bringing Roy into the school and giving him public praise, Miss Reese challenges the strictures of segregation, and the racism undergirding the system. While this is surely commendable, it is also incredibly risky. When her students relate the performance to their parents, their description reveals and perpetuates the prevailing cultural myth that white women were under a constant threat of violation by black men. Of course, this myth has a long history, and gained in strength during and after Reconstruction when it served to substantiate white supremacy and justify segregation laws. Miss Reese, who “had grinned all over herself” and “had even bowed to the nigger,” either discounts or disregards entirely the abiding power of the racist myth over her students’ imaginations. Given the fact that this performance directly presages Roy’s death, the text suggests that Miss Reese shares in the protagonist’s naivety, and is thus partly complicit in his demise.

As an international artist, Roy is an incredibly complex figure. On an aesthetic level, his international experiences allow him to learn classical European music, which adds to his existing performative repertoire of the American vernacular forms of minstrelsy and jazz. On a social level, his time abroad impacts his performance of personal identity. While this is liberating for him in Europe, it makes his return to the US incredibly difficult, and impairs his ability to navigate the racist space of Hopkinsville.
In view of Hughes’s appropriation of “Soldier’s Home,” it becomes possible to read Krebs’s many complexities and contradictions through Roy. In this way, it can be argued that Krebs’s conflicted silence about the war, and his innocuous preoccupations with fashion, billiards, and indoor baseball, are part of a self-preservation strategy. Perhaps Krebs is presciently aware of national power in a way that Roy is not. The narrator of “Soldier’s Home” reveals that “no one wanted to hear about it” when Krebs first tries to tell of his war experiences, and his mother’s “attention always wandered” whenever he would attempt to discuss the war with her (IOT 69, 70). While these strained interactions do little to appease his general sense of alienation, they can also be seen as subtle yet potent reminders to the protagonist that he need not articulate a personal story about the war that might depart from the accepted national narrative. So, ultimately, he remains silent, and he survives. In the end, he slips the knot; Krebs escapes the confrontation with his father and quietly plans to move out. Roy, on the other hand, experiences a far different fate. As an international black musician, his subject position and survival in Hopkinsville are compromised not only by his blackness, but also by the particular demands of his profession, in which keeping silent is not an option.

Interestingly, the concluding passage that narrates Roy’s death utilizes musical metaphors and similes to describe the brutality of the crowd and Roy’s lifeless body. This aestheticization of violence does not displace the gruesome nature of the event; to the contrary, it works to enhance it. Furthermore, the musical figures call direct attention to the representational process. In the first section of this chapter, I discuss textual reflexivity as it appears in “Soldier’s Home,” asserting that the self-conscious turn to form in Hemingway’s story stylistically precludes the efficacy of the family-nation
metaphor. In “Soldier’s Home,” aesthetic self-reference ultimately brings out the text’s discursive inability to account for its content.

In Hughes’s story, however, this final reflexive moment functions much differently, and manages to sustain the sociopolitical urgency of the text. To use Bhabha’s terms, “Home” is indeed a “hybrid moment,” as it effectively splices the aesthetic preoccupations of mainstream modernist texts with the sociopolitical force of postwar African-American literature (41). Lynching narratives from the latter tradition, for instance, constitute a generic precedent that can clearly be seen to influence the end of “Home.”

In those narratives, white characters lynch black veterans in an attempt to sustain racial hegemony, because the uniform of the black veteran symbolizes a threat to the white-supremacist social order. Consequently, in much postwar protest fiction by black writers, “the figure of the African American soldier became a powerful signifier in the literary campaign against lynching” (Davis 479). Thus, by transforming the homeward-bound protagonist from a soldier into an artist figure, and by aestheticizing the violence at the end of the story, Hughes suggests that art and aesthetics constitute a cultural and political threat to the racist social order on par with – if not exceeding – the veterans’ class A uniform.

In this way, “Home” is a scathing portrayal of American racism in the vein of Du Bois’s “Returning Soldiers,” at the same time that it experiments with stylistic reflexivity to make a case for the role and efficacy of art in mediating and disrupting systems of social oppression. In refashioning Hemingway’s text, Hughes reorients the function of aesthetics; he spotlights art as an active and problematic component of political
discourse, discourse that consequently shapes notions of citizenship, racial identity, and
social agency. Indeed, the story’s recurrent emphasis on Roy’s music is central to its
sociopolitical commentary, and suggests a complex intimacy between political conflict
and artistic representation. As literary historians have made abundantly clear, the central
debates of the Harlem Renaissance centered on the issues of race, representation, and
political struggle. To be sure, Alain Locke and Du Bois entertained a prolonged dispute
about whether “Beauty” or “Propaganda” should motivate black cultural production. In
Du Bois’s own words, it is “a controversy as old as the world,” and one that far exceeded
the ambit of the Harlem Renaissance (qtd. in Watts 119).

Like Hughes, and the text itself, Roy evinces a modernist hybridity, and performs
according to the black modernist trope of the “New Negro [which] drew into its
gravitational field forms of discourse that could be reinvented and rearticulated as, in
essence, not existing before, as the arrival of the unfamiliar that promised rebirth and
renewal” (Watts 3). In its appropriation of “Soldier’s Home,” “Home” pulls into its
gravitational field a story whose aesthetic priorities are at odds with the potential for
sociopolitical critique. By virtue of its inherent contradictions, “Soldier’s Home” makes
itself available to radical revision and rearticulation. In the next chapter, I apply this
critical approach to a different set of texts, which deal with a different form of
Difference: homosexuality. Not only do these chapters, taken together, illustrate that
black writers were persistently looking to and appropriating Hemingway’s short fiction
during and after the Harlem Renaissance; my analyses also, and much more importantly,
suggest that Hemingway’s fictions were, however ironically, formative to the evolution
of identity politics and radical subjectivity in the expressive realm of African-American literature.
Chapter Three

Something Rich and Strange: Hemingway’s “The Sea Change” and Reflections of Racial and Sexual Difference in James Baldwin’s Giovanni’s Room

It’s a kind of literary archaeology: on the basis of some information and a little bit of guesswork you journey to a site to see what remains were left behind and to reconstruct the world that these remains imply.
Toni Morrison, from “The Site of Memory,” 1987

In the 1959 typescript to “The Art of the Short Story,” Hemingway emphasizes the importance of narrative omissions within his craft: “If you leave out important things or events that you know about, the story is strengthened. If you leave or skip something because you do not know it, the story will be worthless. The test of any story is how very good the stuff is that you, not your editors, omit” (3). He proceeds to give “Big Two-Hearted River” as his first example of this practice in his own work; then, interestingly, Hemingway also refers to the 1931 story titled “The Sea Change,” which has been much overlooked and undervalued in the history of scholarship on the author. He upholds the story as a major triumph in the technique of narrative omission: “In a story called ‘A Sea Change,’ [sic] everything is left out. I had seen the couple in the Bar Basque in St.-Jean-de-Luz and I knew the story too too well, which is the squared root of well, and use any well you like except mine. So I left the story out. But it is all there. It is not visible but it is all there” (3). The veracity of his claim about observing an actual couple in the Bar Basque is of little consequence to the present exploration; what really matters is that a queer sexuality is suggested and a homophobic politics might be inferred from the story’s representation strategies. Taking into account earlier versions of the text, “The Sea Change” is clearly a narrative that involves both female and male homosexuality. However, the text figures these experiences differently, which invites us to look further into the power dynamics contained in its aesthetics. As we shall see, the lesbian affair of
the female protagonist drives the action of the story; her queer identity gets emphasized, while that of her male counterpart is muted and – as manuscript research reveals – subjected to a rigorous process of revision and omission. If we consider Hemingway’s stylistic criterion in “The Art of the Short Story” to “leave out important things or events that you know about,” then his aesthetic displacement of male homosexuality in “The Sea Change” suggests some level of familiarity with that subject. Nonetheless, critics have only just begun to follow this thread.

The posthumous publication of *The Garden of Eden* by Scribner’s in 1986 propagated a great deal of criticism attending to matters of transgressive sexuality within Hemingway’s oeuvre, and such issues continue to capture the attention of readers. While my analysis proceeds from the lines of inquiry set forth by critics such as Comely and Scholes, I also argue that late twentieth- and early twenty-first century literary scholars have not been the only ones to engage Hemingway’s fiction on these levels. In what follows, I want to argue that James Baldwin’s second novel, *Giovanni’s Room* (1956), actively confronts, appropriates, and redeployes specific narrative figures from “The Sea Change.” Even without access to earlier drafts of the published text, Baldwin intuits the remnants or traces left behind after Hemingway’s omissions. In advance of poststructuralist criticism, Baldwin – an openly gay black artist and critic – recognizes that the power relations articulated in Hemingway’s story might easily be destabilized, and that its confounding treatment of homosexuality contains the potential for new resistance. Writing from the margins, Baldwin’s allusion to “The Sea Change” instantiates dialogism: in their conversation about sexuality, the later writer selects moments from his precursor’s story, revolutionizes the aesthetic maneuvers, and
redeploys them as modes of symbolic action in *Giovanni’s Room*. Thus, Hemingway’s homophobic text sets the stage for Baldwin’s homosexual novel.41

Set in post-World War II Paris, *Giovanni’s Room* depicts a romantic relationship that develops between a young white American named David and an Italian, Giovanni. The novel is told from a deeply internalized first person point of view, and the main narrative is cast as a retrospective account that David tells. In short, the two men become sexually involved – though David is engaged to an American woman – and briefly cohabitate in Giovanni’s rented apartment. Ultimately unable to cope with his shame, David leaves his male companion. This abandonment leaves Giovanni in a state of desperation, which ends in an act of murder and theft for which he is sentenced to execution. David’s central, retrospective storyline details the circumstances leading up to Giovanni’s certain death, which occurs by way of the guillotine.

Clearly, even brief summaries of these two texts reveal some points of overlap that illuminate the intertextuality, as well as the disparities between them that spring from Baldwin’s “radical marronage” of Hemingway’s story, to borrow a phrase from Houston Baker, Jr. (80). I begin by looking at a major omission that Hemingway made to the story’s conclusion as he prepared the finished draft. As we shall see, the omission completely alters the sexual semantics of the story. Before the change, the ending mise-en-scene involves explicit homosexual identification and association amongst the male characters. After the omission, their interactions read more like normative male bonding. Before the change, there appears to exist a relatively seamless continuum between the homosocial atmosphere of the bar and a structure of homosexual desire. After the omission, what had been a continuum becomes a gap. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick
asserts in *Between Men*, normative “male bonding” of the type that remains in the finished draft can “be characterized by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality” (1). Since the erasure works to displace the male protagonist’s interest in homosexuality entirely onto his female companion, the homophobic construction of the narrative exhibits the “ways in which sexuality functions as a signifier for power relations” (Sedgwick 7). Therefore, this occluded moment brings us closest to the main crossroads of sexuality, gender, power, and style in “The Sea Change.”

Despite Hemingway’s calculated removal of *explicit* homosexual identification between male characters, traces of the displacement remain in other narrative figures and certain aesthetic strategies of the story. As my analysis attempts to show, these traces manifest dramatically in acts of *looking* that occur between characters, in mirrors, and in the narrator’s perspective and rendering of the mise-en-scène. As the loci of the narrative drama, these acts of visual identification also evoke discourses of racial Otherness; having omitted the queer male center of the story, the author subsequently relies on racial signifiers to complete the process of displacement, and thereby protect and normalize the white, heteromasculine viewpoint. Thus, Hemingway’s experimentation with perspective can be seen to derive from and perpetuate a male compulsory heterosexuality. As a result of the omission, the text is distanced from its primary object; Phil embodies this contradiction when, for example, he tries to hold onto a heteronormative patriarchal authority while vicariously partaking of the woman’s lesbian affair. So, the vocabularies of racial and sexual alterity emerge and intersect as the text attempts to resolve an otherwise irresolvable social conflict.
Such textual remnants allow Baldwin to intuit the gap left behind by Hemingway’s main omission, and to redirect the political implications thereof. Baldwin directly appropriates these textual remains, a strategic move that signifies upon a modernist precedent. It is a move that showcases what Robert Genter describes elsewhere as a cultural and historical imperative whereby “late modernists,” such as Baldwin, sought out and confronted the innovation of their forebears in order to reorient the aesthetics of Modernism toward an ethos of social engagement at mid-century. In this way, Giovanni’s Room constitutes “a deliberate attempt to use the aesthetic form to challenge the choice of lens” through which earlier writers worked, and in turn to suggest “that the visions offered by the artist were not merely more poetic but possibly more liberating” (4). By reading Baldwin reading Hemingway, textual remnants become freshly available; Baldwin cracks the aesthetic veneer of “The Sea Change” in order to find and remake the psychosocial reality that it covers. In this way, my critical dialogism in this chapter enables new discoveries about the politics of representation in Lost Generation modernist texts, and pushes toward new theoretical horizons within the study of queer and African-American literature.

I.

In Chapter One, I retrieve the mostly omitted lyrics of a particular jazz song and bring them to bear upon Hemingway’s first novel. In part, that critical process links the author’s craft of omission to particular anxieties about racial and sexual transgression. Though the black drummer’s voice is partially muted, the intertextual force of “Aggravatin’ Papa” undermines Sun’s efforts to silence the drummer and displace the
fact of a mixed racial affair. My reading in that chapter attempts to show that
Hemingway cannot use racial and sexual discourses without being used by them.
Presently, I want to argue that Baldwin was aware of this conflict in his predecessor’s
fiction.

However, before exploring Baldwin’s responses, it is necessary to identify the
major erasure Hemingway made in his composition of “The Sea Change,” from its early
versions to the published text. Indeed, as James R. Speer and Neal B. Houston point out,
Hemingway spent a great deal of creative energy in drafting and revising “The Sea
Change”:

He began several abortive attempts and made four revisions in writing the
tale (#679, #680, #681, #681a), until he finally turned it into a story of
great substance. Even in the typed version, published in This Quarter,
Hemingway made final, inked-in corrections emphasizing the beauty of
the girl (1,4), the notable past experience of Phil and the girl (3) and the
bitter but controlled attitude of Phil (3). Obviously the author took great
pride in “The Sea Change” and was striving to reveal to the reader a
provocative story which he believed was of great worth and merit. (132)
Hemingway’s belief in the story’s merit is evidenced not only by his mention of it as
exemplary in “The Art of the Short Story,” but also in his return to its major themes in
The Garden of Eden. In short, the narrative depicts a homosexual revelation that occurs
within a previously heteronormative relationship. The story begins in medias res.
Stylistically, dialogue drives the narrative, which occurs inside of a Parisian café on a
summer morning. An argument between an American man and his female companion
conveys nearly all of the action, characterization, and narrative context. The reader quickly learns that the woman has a lesbian lover, whom she wishes to join and thus leave her male lover, Phil. She does leave Phil, who remains at the bar in the company of the bartender and two men who enter the scene midway through the story, during the couple’s argument.

Speer and Houston detail some of the last minute corrections that Hemingway made regarding the woman’s looks, the couple’s history, and Phil’s demeanor, and these facets of the text do constitute important moments in the analysis that follows. However, the omissions that the author made to the story’s conclusion are crucial to my analysis because those omissions completely change the nature of Phil’s sexual identification. After the woman leaves, Phil moves from his table and joins the gentlemen at the bar. There, he views himself in the mirror, where he repeatedly claims that he is “a different man” (CSS 305). Given my reliance on the author’s revisions here, it is worth quoting part of the conclusion at length. The following passage ends the published version of “The Sea Change”:

She stood up and went out quickly. She did not look back at him. He watched her go. He was not the same-looking man as he had been before he had told her to go. He got up from the table, picked up the two checks and went over to the bar with them.

“I’m a different man, James,” he said to the barman. “You see in me quite a different man.”

“Yes, sir?” said James.
“Vice,” said the brown young man, “is a very strange thing, James.”

He looked out the door. He saw her going down the street. As he looked in the glass, he saw he was really quite a different-looking man. The other two at the bar moved down to make room for him.

“You’re right there, sir,” James said.

The other two moved down a little more, so that he would be quite comfortable. The young man saw himself in the mirror behind the bar. “I said I was a different man, James,” he said. Looking into the mirror he saw that this was quite true.

“You look very well, sir,” James said. “You must have had a very good summer.” (CSS 304-5)

What does difference consist of here? Does he proclaim to be “a different man” simply because he has been jilted? Or might the experience of being left for a woman force him to confront the possibility of being gay?

The language of difference could potentially stage the “change” of the story’s title, but the nature of that change in the published text remains unclear and unarticulated. In contrast, manuscript research reveals that, in earlier drafts of the text, a much more explicit homosexual interaction takes place amongst the men. Hemingway excised several lines from the story’s concluding passage; the following originally appeared in the text after Phil moves from his table to the bar: “What do the punks drink, James. [sic] What can you recommend to a recent convert? . . . Take a look at me and mix whatever you like” (qtd. in Comley and Scholes 88). Comley and Scholes point out that “punk is a word used in Hemingway’s world to designate male homosexuals” (88). By having Phil
apply this slang to himself – “a recent convert” – the text leaves little doubt about his surfacing homosexual curiosity. His proximity to the others at the bar, who “moved down a little more, so that he would be quite comfortable,” suggests that they might be the very “punks” to whom Phil refers. In this case, the space that they make for him becomes another sign of affiliation, if not group solidarity. In the manuscript text, this fictionalized Bar Basque effectively becomes a gay bar by the end of the story.

Thus, the creative energies that Speer and Houston recognize in the author’s composition of the story appear to have been spent primarily on erasing any direct references to the protagonist’s queer identity. This merits another look at the author’s glib statement about his process of omission. In “The Art of the Short Story” he says of “The Sea Change,” “I left the story out. But it is there. It is not visible, but it is all there” (3, emphases mine). This statement is incredibly telling, and directs us toward the textual remains left behind after Hemingway’s main omission. I argue that the recurring “it” in this claim is inconsistent, and that “it” signifies two distinct objects. Indeed, Hemingway “left the story out” about Phil’s homosexual turn; however, “it is all there,” in the sense that the woman bears the stigma. Phil’s homosexuality “is not visible,” but the woman’s “is all there.” The male’s transgression is erased and displaced onto the female. Thus, a self-referential claim about style is itself highly stylized and misleading. The short, declarative sentences in “The Art of the Short Story” seem straightforward, clean, and forthcoming. Yet, as the recent criticism of scholars such as Scott St. Pierre illustrates, the project of aesthetic simplicity is thoroughly informed and complicated by a prevailing sexual politics. Therefore, upon closer investigation, and viewed in light of the omitted content, Hemingway’s retrospective claim about the story operates under an “ideology-
fueled *illusion of clarity*” (St. Pierre 364, emphases mine). Of course, the third-person gender-neutral pronoun “it” *seems* stable, but we need only consider the author’s indebtedness to Gertrude Stein’s technique of repetition-with-variation to make a case for the multiplicity of referents in play.

Hemingway’s frequent references to “The Sea Change” throughout his career in pieces like “The Art of the Short Story,” as well as in various letters, indicate that the narrative loomed large in his imagination. Given my emphasis upon his intentional omissions from the manuscript, it is necessary to recognize an evident tension between the conscious and unconscious factors that contribute to the story’s overall composition. Indeed, his removal of the male homosexual content appears to be a purposive maneuver; however, his active avoidance of this particular moment raises more questions than it answers. Is he removing it simply because he is uncomfortable with it? Or is his revision process constrained in part by a concern about public perception, and also in part by deeper psychosocial anxieties about sexuality and gender? By sustaining the tensions and generative value in such questions, I hope to show that the aesthetic displacement of homosexuality onto the female – via the story’s visual strategies – is overdetermined by the omission of the male homosexual content.

Interestingly, Hemingway’s retrospective claim about “The Sea Change” in “The Art of the Short Story” relies upon a visibility-invisibility dichotomy in its attempt to privilege omission and minimalism: “It is not visible, but it is all there” (3). This is of interest because the sexual politics of the story manifest when acts of “looking” and *being seen* figure as sites of narrative drama. Indeed, Hemingway’s erasure of Phil’s homosexual “conversion” renders invisible the transgressive sexuality of the male
character. In a sense, this produces a gap in the text; St. Pierre describes the effect of such a gap, as “bound by its very nature to incite a movement of desire” (373). However, lest the story promote such a movement amongst men, that same-sex desire gets displaced onto the female, who becomes a kind of surrogate for the male, and who visibly shoulders the burden of the text’s sexual anxieties. So, we can attend to the visual nuances of the text and to the surfaces that are available in order to trace the process of displacement. This allows us to discern the homophobia that motivates Hemingway’s primary omission, and to see that “in a culture so deeply frightened by homosexuality, it is not surprising that a desire frequently called forth by Hemingway’s writing has been a desire that violently excludes the possibility of homosexuality and securely establishes the belief in its heterosexuality” (St. Pierre 373). “The Sea Change” thus distances itself from its primary object – a queer male social relation – and completes this maneuver by doing violence to the female.

In the first chapter, we see how the phenomenon of “the gaze” is working in the relations between Brett, Jake, and the black drummer in The Sun Also Rises. The shifts in observational agency – Jake’s perceptual dismantling of the black man, and the drummer’s highly suggestive glances toward Brett – exhibit a power play based on race and sex in Hemingway’s aesthetics, which indicate that his craft is deeply affected by the possibility of a socially transgressive sexual encounter. “The Sea Change” differs from the Zelli’s scene in Sun insofar as the short story contains no African-American characters. Interracial couples are not the primary focus in this story as in the novel, but telling details in the story reveal that Hemingway subtly employs a racialized vocabulary to introduce an episode involving homosexuality. For the man and the woman, being tan
signifies a kind of racial and sexual freedom. The first instance of nondialogue, third-
person narration presents this vocabulary to the reader. After the several lines of
dialogue that begin the story, we read:

It was the end of the summer and they were both tanned, so that they
looked out of place in Paris. The girl wore a tweed suit, her skin was a
smooth golden brown, her blonde hair was cut short and grew beautifully
away from her forehead. The man looked at her.

“I’ll kill her,” he said.

“Please don’t,” the girl said. She had very fine hands and the man
looked at them. They were slim and brown and very beautiful. (CSS 302)

The narrator’s description of “the girl” is marked by both desire and a death
threat. Of course, she does not take this threat seriously, and her “Please don’t” is a kind
of pat phraseology that mitigates the force that Phil intends. The threat is a performance,
a rhetorical gesture meant to reflect the prescribed gender role of the dominant male.
Phil’s performance of heteromasculinity is half-hearted, and therefore does not sustain
the violence he invokes. Indeed, his threat is empty and her reply reveals it as such, yet
the statement nonetheless conveys the possibility of violence. Framed as it is by
descriptions of the girl’s desirability, this moment enacts a significant consequence of
compulsory heterosexuality. Sedgwick explores this phenomenon in a different literary
context in Epistemology of Closet; there she discusses the violence – to both self and
others – that emerges from any structure of heterosexual “desire” which is itself
contingent upon homosexual panic. She asserts that “the worst violence of
heterosexuality comes with the male compulsion to desire women and its attendant
deceptions of self and other” (198). Not only does this relation put pressure on the idea of “authentic” heteromasculine desire, it constitutes a “mutilating charade” (Sedgwick 198). Indeed, Phil’s impulsive, if hollow, death threat can be read as a symbolic representation of this charade; in a moment, we will see how the story’s experimentation with perspective performs a similar violence upon the female.

In conjunction with the threat, the racial markers that manifest here are partial projections of Phil’s own gaze, and they work to displace further the sexual panic he experiences. The close attention to surface details in the third-person narration focuses primarily on color, particularly skin color. They are “both tanned,” but the woman – who has just revealed herself to be a lesbian – appears especially dark. Though Comley and Scholes stop short of “undertaking a fuller reading of this passage,” they readily recognize the link between racial discourse and sexual transgression: “In this story about a woman leaving a man for another woman, we find a conspicuous mention of bobbed or bleached hair, [and] of dark skin color” (87). The external signifier of a dark skin color, of a kind of blackness, conveys the unseen reality of homosexual desire; by projecting this outward onto the girl, Phil displaces his own sexual anxieties and gives homosexuality over to women and people of color. White heteromasculinity thus discursively preserves its sanctity and privilege. The author’s use of racial language is subtle, yet the narrative is persistent in its overt visual cues, particularly when characters are shown to observe one another.44

Indeed, there is a strong emphasis on specularity in the above-quoted passage: “they looked out of place in Paris”; “[t]he man looked at her”; “[s]he had very fine hands and the man looked at them.” This emphasis comes about through the repetition of the
past tense verb “looked.” Critics have made it abundantly clear that Hemingway’s use of repetition with variation emerged from his temporary tutelage under Gertrude Stein, although her employment of the technique as a kind of narrative “insistence” is drastically different from what Hemingway makes of it. However, as Lamb points out, “[s]omething Hemingway surely learned from her is that by repeating a word in a different context you can foreground a different denotation or connotation and change that word’s meaning. This sort of repetition with variation, a variation produced by different contexts, is central to Hemingway’s use of repetition in his nondialogue prose” (121). The changing context Lamb refers to here is grammatical, and variations of the verb “look” appear thirteen times in the story. Twelve of these variations occur in the mere thirty-six sentences of nondialogue prose, which would seem to suggest that visibility – seeing, and being seen – are major preoccupations within the narrative.45

A story otherwise dominated by dialogue thus shows itself also to be an experiment in visual perspective. Where Lamb asserts that repeating a particular word in subsequent sentences changes that word’s meaning, such is not exactly the case in “The Sea Change.” Rather than eliciting a change in the word’s semantics, the shifting usages of “to look” result in a multifocal perspectival framework that simulates film. In her essay, “Hemingway’s Camera Eye: The Problem of Language and an Interwar Politics of Form,” Zoe Trodd recognizes this aspect of the author’s prose. She posits that his aesthetic response to “the problem of ‘used up words’” – a phrase that she takes from Henry James – is not only apparent in Hemingway’s insistence on minimalism, but also in “a camera-eye aesthetic that re-embodied reality . . . and rejected all apparently coherent and exclusive ways of perceiving the world” (8). To be sure, “The Sea Change”
exhibits this multi-focal aesthetic, and Trodd’s focus on the filmic in Hemingway’s prose is justly influential. However, other aspects of her reading are problematic, as I will show in a moment.

Returning to the previous example, we can see how the changing grammatical context of “looking” accomplishes a filmic perspective wherein characters’ visual exchanges occur under an overt, “objective” narrative eye: “they looked out of place in Paris”; “[t]he man looked at her”; “[s]he had very fine hands and the man looked at them.” In this sequence, the text performs a kind of zooming, or telescoping effect. It first presents the larger geographical context for the couple, as they sit – “out of place” – in a Parisian café; the perspective then moves closer and describes the nuances of the couple’s interaction at their table, until it finally rests upon a single body part.

Before unpacking the remaining textual processes that build upon and complicate the politics of “looking” in the narrative, it is first crucial to examine why interpretations like Trodd’s are problematic. Like many other Hemingway scholars, Trodd identifies a moment of interest in the author’s aesthetics for the mere purpose of (re)asserting his ingenuity. Even more problematic is Trodd’s insistence that Hemingway’s “camera eye” style is somehow capable of containing within itself a coherent and valid response to the representational crises of modernity. A careful examination of his technical strategies reveals that the opposite is, in fact, the case. That is to say, the privileged gaze of the authorial, “camera” eye is in part dependent for its constitution upon the social constructs of sexual and racial difference. Hemingway conflates these two categories in “The Sea Change,” brings them into the focus of his aesthetic vision, and, in the process, establishes a white, heteronormative center as the a priori and privileged locus of control.
Hemingway’s “camera eye” vision thus proves itself to be an aestheticization of power. Therefore, Trodd’s analysis of his “politics of form” misses the mark. She rushes to see the author’s craft as an effective form of literary protest against the ideological status quo, and in the process seeks to valorize his technical virtuosity. Proceeding from his well-known skepticism of Great War propaganda, she claims that his prose “countered with minimalism the problem of ‘used up words,’” and that his “camera eyes answer the problem of abstract language” (8, 13, emphases mine). She gives her attention exclusively to the textual medium – to the lens itself – and thereby fails to see beyond it to the objects within its scope.

Although Laura Mulvey’s famous essay, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” (1975), is certainly dated in the now expansive world of film theory, it nonetheless bears a special relevance to this discussion of modernist sexualized power in this “filmic” text. To be sure, the overt feminism of Mulvey’s essay would unseat Trodd’s claim that Hemingway’s style is intrinsically oppositional. For my purposes, however, Mulvey’s basic Freudian study of looking helps lay the theoretical groundwork for locating the gender and sexual politics in the story. In many ways, Hemingway’s early-twentieth century text can be read as an aesthetic equivalent of classic Hollywood cinema; thus, given some of the filmic elements within the story’s perceptual framing devices, as well as the dramatic emphasis on the gaze within the narrative, Mulvey’s discussion of scopophilia – pleasure in looking – is particularly relevant. 46 Take, once again, the above-quoted sequence from “The Sea Change”: “they looked out of place in Paris”; “[t]he man looked at her”; “[s]he had very fine hands and the man looked at them.” Here, via this telescoping mechanism, the woman’s body undergoes a process of
dismemberment. This last sentence that features her hands gets repeated—with slight grammatical variation—shortly after its first appearance in the text:

“Couldn’t you have gotten into something else? Couldn’t you have gotten into some other jam?”

“It seems not,” the girl said. “What are you going to do about it?”

“I told you.”

“No; I mean really.”

“I don’t know,” he said. She looked at him and put out her hand.

“Poor old Phil.” she said. He looked at her hands, but he did not touch her hand with his. (CSS 302, emphases mine)

Her pitying regard for Phil bears the threat of condescension, and the repetition of “He looked at her hands” signals his apparent attempt to wrest some measure of control from an otherwise emasculating scenario. The fetishization of her hands via his perspective thus reveals his desperation. When she says, “Poor old Phil,” she is not necessarily expressing sympathy for him, or guilt for creating a socially unacceptable situation; rather, in the context of the dialogue, her statement syntactically makes him the object of focus. The non-dialogue narration tells us that “She looked at him” before she says “Poor old Phil,” a visual nuance that places him more firmly in a passive, objectified position and which gives her, by contrast, perceptual agency. Briefly, the scales are tipped in her favor, a circumstance that reverses the power dynamic “[i]n a world ordered by sexual imbalance, [where] pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female” (Mulvey 2186). This reversal is only temporary, and is immediately offset by a return to his perspective.
However, “Poor old Phil” serves as a reminder that Hemingway’s composition of the story began as an exploration of male sexual difference. When the author omitted that original subject on the drawing board, the female companion consequently shouldered the brunt of the displacement. Thus, “Poor old Phil” is a palpable trace of the text’s complicated transformation: post-omission, “The Sea Change” is distanced from its primary object, and the implicit violence of Phil’s perceptual process enacts the very same compulsory heterosexuality by which the text assumed its finished state.

Furthermore, Phil’s angle of vision operates as a kind of defense mechanism against the anxieties that emerge from the non-normative order of things. Phil’s authority—even though it feels diminished—reasserts itself by way of the visual cut-up effect that renders the female character’s form incoherent. The focus on her hands effectively “destroys the Renaissance space” that would otherwise give her character depth and fullness (Mulvey 2187). Of course, Hemingway’s particular form of modernist experimentation has little concern for maintaining “Renaissance space” to begin with, but in this instance it becomes especially clear that the male gaze performs a kind of violence on the female object as a means of regaining control. The greater relevance of Mulvey’s assessment thus lies within the implied violence of the fetishizing process. Though I do not wish to follow Mulvey’s assertion that a castration anxiety, per se, causes Phil’s defensiveness, there is nonetheless a definite threat to his heteromasculinity that permeates this interaction.

In the longer view of the story’s composition, male homosexual identification constitutes this original menace. Subsequently, omission serves as a strategy that allays this. The text then places the threat of homosexuality at a further remove from the male
center, by giving it over to the woman. As I have already shown, there is an erotic
dimension to Phil’s observations of his partner’s hair, clothes, and hands at the same time
that there exists an edge of brutality in his perceptual process. In light of Jake Barnes’s
narration in Zelli’s, where he too fragments the black drummer into “all teeth and lips”
and relies on racial epithets to name him, we might begin to recognize a pattern of active,
vioent fetishization within the perceptual framework of Hemingway’s male protagonists.

Phil’s hostility, while temporarily palpable, is short-lived. The turning point in
the story occurs after his dismissal of the woman, when he concedes to her wishes and
she leaves to join her female lover. Even in the midst of his concession, his word of
permission might be read as a final attempt to regain male authority: “‘You want me to
go?’ She asked seriously. ‘Yes,’ he said seriously. ‘Right away.’” (CSS 305). However,
because the preceding dialogue portrays her departure as a foregone conclusion, she
seems only to acknowledge his dismissal as a kind of courtesy. In effect, she allows him
to play at having the last word. This gift thus caters to two contradictory impulses. On
the one hand, he might appear to have the power of authorizing the affair; on the other, he
might vicariously partake of the homosexual experience: “when you come back tell me
all about it” (CSS 304).

This utterance operates as a conditional: though his authorization of the affair is
merely rhetorical, he nonetheless concedes to it on the premise that she later inform him
of the details. In the published version, this statement provides the only verbalized
indication that Phil has an interest in homosexuality. Indeed, it is at this narrative
moment in the manuscript texts where the protagonist enjoins the bartender to fix him a
drink similar to the ones that “the punks drink,” and where he views himself as “a recent
convert.” Thus, as the site of the primary omission, it is worth exploring how the aesthetics of self-perception in this final scene effectively suppress the male homosexual interactions of the preliminary drafts. As I will show in a moment, Baldwin begins Giovanni’s Room with a moment of self-reflection that appropriates the figure of the mirror image from Hemingway’s story. However, Baldwin uses the figure to invert the racial and sexual vocabulary of “The Sea Change”; as a result, he restores to his novel that which his predecessor displaces.

Arguably one of the most perplexing endings in Hemingway’s oeuvre, the passage that concludes “The Sea Change” – quoted above at length (pp. 7-8) – is striking for a number of reasons. When the woman leaves, Phil moves to the bar and proceeds to announce that he is a “different man.” Had the author retained the overt references to gay men and Phil’s “conversion” experience, this “difference” would read as a “coming out” of sorts, and would effect the sexual “sea change” of the story’s title. However, the omissions disallow any subversion of heteromasculinity. Consequently, in the published version, the theme of the “sea change” is at war with the text’s ideology: Phil attempts to reveal some level of personal transformation, but the perceptual framework at the end of the narrative refuses to indicate what that might consist of. Thus, the scene comes across as an overt homosexual awakening in the manuscript versions; but that experience is suppressed and, with the threat of queer language and identification removed, the finished version of the scene can ultimately register as normative male bonding.

With minor syntactical variations, he proclaims “I’m a different man” three distinct times, and the narrative voice corroborates this twice: “Looking into the mirror he saw that this was quite true.” Turning the gaze upon himself “in the mirror behind the
bar,” he feels compelled to make himself an object of attention. In the absence of his female companion – who had previously served as the center of Phil’s gaze, and who subsequently bore the brunt of the text’s displacement – Phil attempts to occupy a position at the center of some larger focus. However, despite the overemphasis on looking and on external appearances, there is very little in the way of describing his appearance. Contrast this lack of perceptual detail with the fairly thorough depiction of the woman at the beginning of the story: “The girl wore a tweed suit, her skin was a smooth golden brown, her blonde hair was cut short and grew beautifully away from her forehead” (CSS 302). When Phil views her, the reader is given partial access to see what he sees; when he views himself and listens to his own voice, however, that access gets obscured. Calling attention to the representational process itself ironically serves as a way for Hemingway to dodge a deeper consideration of Phil’s dilemma.

The only actual description of Phil is that he is a “brown young man.” This phrase does not round out the portrayal of the story’s protagonist, but it does reiterate the earlier conflation of race and sexuality. A lingering discursive trace of the story’s homosexual content, this oblique view of Phil’s brown-ness is an aesthetic indicator that race can potentially serve as a surrogate term for sex, and that, as Sedgwick says, “all these available analytic axes do after all mutually constitute one another” (Epistemology 31). However, the gender politics of the text demand that the discursive conflation of race and sexuality functions differently for Phil than for the female. When applied to the woman, the racial signifiers emphasize her sexual difference; when used in reference to the male protagonist, “brown” serves as a fill-in for the omitted material, and thus as a mechanism that further distances him from the “ punks” and the “converts.”
Hemingway’s reliance on racial signifiers in Phil’s description is a means to deflect the otherwise irresolvable contradiction between, on one hand, a textually formative but ultimately submerged male homosexuality, and on the other, the cultural imperative of compulsory heterosexuality.

II.

In 1961, Baldwin published an essay in *Esquire* magazine that deals with race and hypermasculinity. Significantly, he titled the piece “The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy,” which was subsequently included in Baldwin’s essay collection, *Nobody Knows My Name: More Notes of a Native Son* (1961). In large part, the tone of the essay is congenial, but it nonetheless contains incisive observations about the politics of representation that manifest in white writers’ treatments of racial and sexual difference.47 “The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy” can thus be read as a parallel to the critique within *Giovanni’s Room* that I explore in the analysis that follows. In that essay, Baldwin writes,

What has happened, however, time and time again, is that the fantasy structure the writer builds in order to escape his central responsibility operates not as his fortress, but his prison, and he perishes within it. Or: the structure he has built becomes so stifling, so lonely, so false, and acquires such a violent and dangerous life of its own, that he can break out of it only by bringing the entire structure down. (239)

Indeed, Baldwin evidences an incredible propensity for deconstructivist criticism in this passage as he points up the radical negations that inhabit texts, and this critical impulse
guides his dialogic relationship with Hemingway’s “The Sea Change.” Baldwin does not explicitly protest the homophobic nature of that story; rather, he appropriates Hemingway’s “fantasy structure,” and restages its textual machinery in order to demonstrate the instability of the white heteronormative center. In a sense, Baldwin’s process involves “[e]xploring the iterability of language, its ability to function in new contexts with new force” (Culler 135). He intuits the various escapes from and displacements of the homosexual content in “The Sea Change,” and in Giovanni’s Room he repurposes those textual traces to demonstrate the “violent and dangerous life” that animates Hemingway’s text (“The Black” 239).

The foremost of these traces involves the gaze and its attendant figures of looking, visibility, and being seen. In “The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy,” Baldwin frames dialogism as an act of one writer looking at another. He goes even further with this by personalizing it: “I have spent most of my life, after all, watching white people and outwitting them, so that I might survive. I think I know something about the American masculinity which most men of my generation do not know because they have not been menaced by it in the way that I have been” (“The Black” 217). Here, Baldwin describes his own visual acuity as an upshot of both racist ideologies and “the American masculinity.” As a gay black man in a racially and sexually oppressive culture, the ability to see and the ability to intuit forms of surveillance develop as consequences of power structures, and as strategies for survival in navigating them. Thus, this specialized intuition for seeing and being seen suggests that Baldwin would have also been highly aware of these phenomena as imaginative strategies in literary texts.
Accordingly, Giovanni’s Room is a novel that is deeply invested in visibility, which it uses insistently as a formative trope that emerges – at least in part – from Baldwin’s critical appropriation of “The Sea Change.” In what follows, I hope to show that Baldwin may have looked to “The Sea Change” as a site of dramatic sexual conflict, that he may have intuited the push-and-pull of homoeroticism and homophobia in Hemingway’s text, and that he saw that the story was internally liable to destabilization. Hemingway defends against and covers over homosexuality via experimentation with perspective, and thereby preserves the centrality and stability of the white heteromasculine point of view. By appropriating Hemingway’s figures, Baldwin exposes the homosexual panic that shapes “The Sea Change” and makes that panic an object of study in Giovanni’s Room. His appropriation operates as both “resemblance and menace” as it shows the white heteromasculine gaze to be unstable and contingent (Bhabha 123). 49

Consider the specular emphasis that pervades the following narrative moments of the novel, even when taken out of context and viewed as discrete fragments:

“Jacques’ eyes never left my face” (GR 57); “now I was in the zoo, and they were watching” (53); (76); “Well – I can’t do anything to help him and I can’t stand having him watch me . . . I paused and sat up, looking outward. She watched me” (179); “In the mirror, suddenly, I saw Hella’s face . . . She looked very tired and drab and small . . . I felt the sailor staring at both of us” (214-15).

Throughout the novel, the narrator, David, recurrently finds himself situated before mirrors or other reflective surfaces, as well as before different audiences that make him the object of an outside gaze. Even the few examples quoted above illustrate that others
consistently watch David, despite his ostensible primacy as the novel’s first person narrator.

The text continuously pushes against the authority of David’s perspective by making him into a kind of spectacle. In the first section of this chapter, I show that Hemingway omitted Phil’s coming out as “a recent convert” at the end of the story; “The Sea Change” thus figures the mirror as an ironic surface, in which we are not meant to see homosexuality reflected back. Compare that concluding passage in which Phil’s visage gets blocked and his sexuality silenced to the following passage from Giovanni’s Room, which depicts the first night that David meets Giovanni. At a bar, David’s appearance undergoes close scrutiny from his gay acquaintance, Jacques:

“How do you feel?” he asked me. “This is a very important night for you.”

“I feel fine,” I said. “How do you feel?”

“Like a man,” he said, “who has seen a vision.”

“Yes?” I said. “Tell me about this vision.”

“I am not joking,” he said. “I am talking about you. You were the vision. You should have seen yourself tonight. You should see yourself now.”

I looked at him and said nothing. (73-74)

Jacques insists that he is witnessing David’s sexual turn, and explicitly suggests to David that he, too, “should see” himself. Textual echoes from “The Sea Change” resound strongly at such moments in Baldwin’s novel. Fascinatingly, the above dialogue reads much like the manuscript version of Hemingway’s story, in which Phil – “the recent
convert” – views himself in the mirror and suggests to the bartender that his internal transformation has caused a change in his outward appearance. The omissions, however, paper over Phil’s self-regard and successfully terminate any attempts to achieve depth of character.

It is as if Baldwin infers the “punks” and “converts” that get expunged from Hemingway’s story, and then situates his protagonist directly within their coterie and emphasizes the psychosocial turmoil that the protagonist experiences. The end of the published version of “The Sea Change” features Phil as he invokes others to look at him and see “quite a different man”; of course, we never really see Phil, and the omission of the original references to his and to the other men’s sexualities negates the content of his claim, thus leaving the story at its surfaces, its mirrors that refuse to reflect (CSS 305).

In the Jacques-David interaction quoted above, Baldwin establishes a dramatic milieu that intimately replicates that which we see in “The Sea Change”: an American man in a Parisian café, in the company of homosexuals. While the space and the characters certainly resemble the setting and dramatis personae that we encounter in Hemingway’s text, Baldwin’s reworking of the perceptual field within that context gives teeth to the appropriation. On two different occasions in “The Sea Change,” the barman and the two other customers observe Phil and his female companion:

The barman was at the far end of the bar. His face was white and so was his jacket. He knew these two and thought them a handsome young couple. He had seen many handsome young couples break up and new couples form that were never so handsome long. He was not thinking
about this, but about a horse. In a half an hour he could send across the street to find if the horse had won. (CSS 303)

Shortly after this, the men at the bar view them, too: “The two at the bar looked over at the two at the table, then looked back at the barman again. Towards the barman was the comfortable direction” (CSS 304). On both occasions, acts of looking propel these moments of non-dialogue narration, and to a certain extent they serve as framing devices meant to spotlight the couple’s interactions. However, the looking that they perform remains completely unrevealing and innocuous. As I have already shown, Phil’s view of the female during their conversation is highly charged and highly descriptive, and works to push homosexuality onto her, and off of him. However, when these other characters at the bar look at Phil, they do so mindlessly and without intent, pondering horses instead of their visual surroundings.

The various deflections and erasures that defend against any view of Phil as a homosexual get completely transformed in Giovanni’s Room. Jacques not only boasts that he has been watching David and inferring his desires, he goes so far as to call David “a vision,” which signifies “something seen otherwise than by ordinary sight . . . an appearance of a prophetic or mystical character, or having the nature of a revelation” (“Vision”). Jacques thus suggests that he possesses a certain perceptual insight, and openly recognizes something that David is trying very hard not to see. Jacques’s scrutiny shows that he occupies a position of authority in the course of their dialogue as he presents a threat to the protagonist’s tenuous claim to heterosexuality.

Jacques’s choice of words in calling David “a vision” is particularly poignant, especially as it occurs just moments after David experiences an incredibly surreal
interaction with what appears to be a transvestite, an interaction that haunts him enormously. Because I am suggesting that Hemingway’s text serves as a template of sorts for Giovanni’s Room, I find it instructive to read both Jacques and this nameless transvestite figure as reconstructions of the two men at the bar in “The Sea Change,” characters who were originally written into the text as “ punks.” Where those two characters in Hemingway’s story get emptied of all their previous sexual significations via the author’s revisions, the wraith-like transvestite in Giovanni’s Room presents to David and the reader a vision of radical difference. Furthermore, where the two men at the bar in “The Sea Change” prefer to look in the “comfortable direction” – away from Phil – the gaze of the transvestite focuses directly on David and incites in him a moment of profound homosexual panic. The figure appears to him as a monstrous apparition:

Now someone whom I had never seen before came out of the shadows toward me. It looked like a mummy or a zombie . . . something walking after it had been put to death . . . the flat hips moved with a dead, horrifying lasciviousness . . . It glittered in the dim light; the thin, black hair was violent with oil . . . the eyelids gleamed with mascara, the mouth raged with lipstick . . . the shirt was covered with round, paper-thin wafers, red and green and orange and yellow and blue, which stormed in the light and made one feel that the mummy might, at any moment, disappear in flame . . .

I was not sure that he was coming toward me, but could not take my eyes away. He stopped before me, one hand on his hip, looked me up and down, and smiled. (GR 54-55, emphases mine)
David’s perception of this figure is marked by an insistent sense of uncertainty and fear; he begins describing the person using the gender neutral pronoun “it,” which he uses until the end of the long descriptive paragraph, at which point the figure has approached closely enough for David to ascertain that “it” is a man in drag. An abject terror pervades David’s perception of this individual, which indicates his extreme homosexual panic. His narrative reliance on the pronoun “it” illustrates that the constructs of male/female and heterosexual/homosexual no longer provide anchorage for his interpretation of the social world. His panic during the transvestite episode can therefore be seen to derive from what Sedgwick calls “the treacherous middle stretch” that opens up when prescribed gender and sex roles dissolve (Epistemology 188). Despite the cinematic horror of the figure’s approach, David concedes that he cannot keep from looking, and this “mummy” returns David’s gaze with a most foreboding force.

They converse briefly in French. He asks David if Giovanni “pleases” him – “il te plaît?”; the question suggests to David that his sexual interest is visible, and sets the stage for Jacques’s probing inquiries in the following pages (GR 55). This disturbs David greatly, and the unique force of his interlocutor’s gaze accentuates the apprehension he feels: “I really was not sure I had heard him right, though the bright, bright eyes, looking, it seemed, at something amusing within the recess of my skull, did not leave much room for doubt . . . It did not seem real, he did not seem real. Besides – no matter what I said, those eyes would mock me with it” (55). Defensively, David tells him to “[g]o to hell,” and then, more forcefully, “[v]a te faire foutre” (“fuck off”) (55, 56). Nonetheless, the transvestite character gets the better of David in the exchange: he forces the protagonist to see his desire for Giovanni, and intimates the impending damage wrought by David’s
compulsory heterosexual posturing. During the course of their exchange, he tells David, “for a boy like you – he is very dangerous . . . I fear that you shall burn in a very hot fire . . . You will be very unhappy. Remember that I told you so” (55-56).

Indeed, this premonition foreshadows David’s complicity in Giovanni’s execution; it also points up David’s responsibility for his fiancée’s psychological trauma when she finally discovers that he is a homosexual. The physical and emotional victimization of both Giovanni and Hella dramatizes the very real violence that Sedgwick has more recently shown to attend compulsory heterosexuality. However, more significantly for this discussion, the text is also highly attuned to the ideological violence perpetuated by heterosexist power structures, which registers at the level of discourse. As I suggest above, “The Sea Change” uses a highly visual aesthetic as a cover-up in the text, as a way to paper over the gaps left behind after the removal of the male homosexual content. The text’s experimentation with visual perspective keeps Phil safe from the threat of sexual difference, and in the process performs a kind of violence on the woman. In a fascinating turn, the figure of looking actually serves to look away from what had previously been its primary object; this ambiguity thus participates in the ideological concealment.

The threatening scene with the transvestite forces into relief this ambiguity and instability in the power of the gaze. Early in Giovanni’s Room, David reflects upon his primary strategy for evading his homosexual desire and for preserving the fiction of his heterosexuality: “I had decided to allow no room in the universe for something which shamed and frightened me. I succeeded very well – by not looking at the universe, by not looking at myself, by remaining, in effect, in constant motion” (GR 30-31). His evasion
is described as a distinctly visual phenomenon. When the prying eyes of Jacques and the transvestite turn the gaze back on David and force his homosexuality into the open, the text reconstructs the visual ambiguity that we see in “The Sea Change.” David’s strategy for control and evasion – “not looking” – dramatizes the means by which “The Sea Change” directs visual attention away from Phil and the gay men in that story. However, far from satisfying a homophobic imperative to displace sexual otherness away from the white male center, Giovanni’s Room insists upon disrupting the authority of David’s visual perspective. It makes him into a “vision” for Jacques, and allows a transvestite to revel in the spectacle of the protagonist’s sexual crisis.

Shortly after this passage, David literally reflects on his own visage and inadvertently views himself as Jacques had previously urged him: “I stared down at the amber cognac and at the wet rings on the metal. Deep below, trapped in the metal, the outline of my own face looked hopelessly up at me” (76). The language of entrapment that David supplies to the distorted reflection repeats and internalizes the threat that manifests in Jacques’s spectatorship and in the ominous exchange with the transvestite. The reflection in his drink negates David’s avowed strategy of “not looking at myself”; in so doing, it violates his willful attempt to maintain the cultural privilege afforded by an ostensible heterosexual identity (GR 30-31). The theme of the trap that surfaces in David’s cognac reappears later in the novel when he resides with Giovanni in his rented room, and many critics have explored the various significances of the novel’s titular space. Entrapment – or, perhaps more accurately, containment – can also be read as a structure that derives from the aesthetics of looking. As I argue, Giovanni’s Room sources those aesthetics from the same text that it critiques; thus, in the analysis that
follows, this structure of containment affords Baldwin further leverage in destabilizing “The Sea Change.”

Critic Cyraina Johnson-Roullier provides a concise and highly relevant assessment of Baldwin’s borrowing from literary Modernism when she recognizes that the “problems” of sexual and racial difference are typically “aestheticized” in modernist texts, whereas in Giovanni’s Room “they are instead brought to the fore” (945). The following passage can be seen to showcase Baldwin’s strategy of repurposing an aesthetic trace – here again, the figure of the mirror – in order to bring forward the global implications of discourse and power. Indeed, the most widely discussed passage of the novel is its very first paragraph, in which David regards his reflection in a window at dawn:

I stand at the window of this great house in the south of France as night falls, the night which is leading me to the most terrible morning of my life. I have a drink in my hand, there is a bottle at my elbow. I watch my reflection in the darkening gleam of the window pane. My reflection is tall, perhaps rather like an arrow, my blonde hair gleams. My face is like a face you have seen many times. My ancestors conquered a continent, pushing across death-laden plains, until they came to an ocean which faced away from Europe into a darker past. (GR 7)

Where Hemingway concludes his short story with the protagonist gazing into a mirror, Baldwin begins his narrative with a character’s visual reflection. He picks up where his precursor leaves off, and in the process appropriates the mirror in order to deploy a more expansive interpretation of minority discourse, and to talk back to racism
and heteronormativity. Fascinatingly, in these few sentences we can witness several levels of appropriation. As already noted, the reflection itself serves as an object that links *Giovanni’s Room* to the visual imagery of “The Sea Change.” Furthermore, the style of David’s narration here is uniquely repetitive and picks up on Hemingway’s innovative technique of repetition-with-variation: “I watch my reflection . . . My reflection is tall . . . my blonde hair . . . My face is like a face you have seen many times. *My ancestors conquered a continent*” (7, emphases mine). By writing into a form of narrative experimentation made famous by his predecessor, Baldwin inhabits the discursive makeup of “The Sea Change” and in turn effects his appropriation-as-critique. The phrase “my reflection,” repeated two times, not only draws attention to the mirror image as an allusive object, it signifies on the form Hemingway’s prose.

The subsequent variation that Baldwin supplies to the “my” phrasing – “my face,” “my blonde hair,” and “my ancestors” – personalizes the experience of looking, emphasizes the narrator’s racial identity, and connects him to the longer history of American Manifest Destiny and imperial conquest. Similar to the telescoping effect that we see in Phil’s perspectival framework in “The Sea Change,” David’s persistent use of the first person possessive pronoun develops as a syntactical strategy that expands outward. However, instead of using the method to displace the focus away from the white male center, this first passage of the novel develops the technique to implicate David not only in something “terrible” within the narrative that follows, but also in the larger and bloodier projects of Western history.

In the longer view of the narrative, this moment also functions as a framing device: “the narrator tells the story from two separate perspectives at the same time – one
being that of the experienced David after the events of the novel have taken place, the other being that of the David who lives in denial” (Johnson-Roullier 941). Clearly, the “experienced David” voices this first passage, and Baldwin returns to this perspective at the end of the novel. The passage establishes David’s historical privilege and also his primacy as the novel’s first-person narrator. My analyses above reveal varying degrees of perceptual agency in characters like Jacques and the unnamed transvestite when their gazes threaten David’s heterosexual posturing. Those discrete episodes suggest that his primacy and privilege are both unstable, that there is an ambiguity in the power of David’s narrative eye. On a macro level, the text further illustrates this instability by showing that the novel’s frame – the retrospective view of the “experienced David” – operates as a strategy of containment that is purposively tenuous.

In the above passage, the language of racial identification immediately draws attention to David’s whiteness: “my blonde hair gleams.” Situated as he is before a mirror, the rhetoric of race recalls Phil, “the brown young man.” However, where “The Sea Change” ultimately uses the figure of the mirror to reflect Phil’s sexuality rather than reflect on its imbrication with the discursive constructs of race, gender, and class, David’s whiteness instantly invokes Imperialism and colonial conquest: “My ancestors conquered a continent, pushing across death-laden plains, until they came to an ocean which faced away from Europe into a darker past” (GR 7). David’s arrow-like shape physically embodies the violence contained in his reference to American Manifest Destiny, and attaches his person to this longer history. Indeed, it charges him with a certain culpability even before we learn of his role in Giovanni’s demise. Thus, where Hemingway’s mirror ironically refuses to reflect, and instead settles for a kind of
autotelic focus on style and surface, Baldwin’s darkening window allows him to excavate the remains, and achieve the depth needed to confront the complex discursive processes within racial and sexual ideologies. We might, as I argue, view Baldwin’s appropriation of “The Sea Change” as a crucial part of that interrogation process. Indeed, he subjects the racial and sexual figures in Hemingway’s story to a kind of inversion process, as if making a photographic negative of his precursor’s composition, wherein “the ‘whiteness’ of the stereotypically Anglo-Saxon hero [is] foregrounded” (Rohy 220).

In contrast to David’s whiteness, Giovanni’s Room consistently renders Giovanni as the racialized Other; indeed, critics have gone so far as to identify him as the novel’s Africanist presence.51 He is also very clearly the emotional center of the text, yet we never attain access to his viewpoint, to his personal story; Baldwin facilitates this occlusion on purpose because Giovanni, as Baldwin is all too aware, does not speak back to power. Thus, the white American male – the one struggling with his burgeoning homosexual desires, the one motivated by the stifling and injurious demands of compulsory heterosexuality – is the one who contains the racialized Other in the force of his narrative eye. But, we should ask: if Giovanni is the emotional center of the novel, but his own narrative agency remains locked away within David’s perspective, does this not point up another ambiguity in the power of the gaze?

In short, indeed it does. Yet Baldwin’s is an active ambiguity, an invasive and unsettling strategy that registers at the level of critique when we read it next to Hemingway, whose celebrated “clarity” is anything but direct or straightforward, and whose aesthetic strategies cover over the ideologies fueling the narrative. Again, we return to “The Sea Change,” where the openly queer female is not only racialized, but is
refused both depth and perspective: “The man looked at her . . . She had very fine hands and the man looked at them. They were slim and brown and very beautiful” (CSS 302). Phil’s gaze precludes hers and, moreover, performs a kind of violence on her physical form, fragmenting her body into a single appendage. Though this dismemberment seems benign next to Giovanni’s beheading by the guillotine, Baldwin’s appropriation and re-writing of such violent specularity exposes the discursive contradictions that shape Hemingway’s story.

At the end of the novel, Baldwin returns to the frame narrative, where the experienced David sits alone in his room in the south of France, and imagines Giovanni being led to his execution. Prior to the following passage, we learn that David has received word that Giovanni is to be executed on this very morning:

I walk into the bedroom where the clothes I will wear are lying on the bed and my bag lies open and ready. I begin to undress. There is a mirror in this room, a large mirror. I am terribly aware of the mirror.

Giovanni’s face swings before me like an unexpected lantern on a dark, dark night. His eyes – his eyes, they glow like a tiger’s eyes, they stare straight out, watching the approach of his last enemy, the hair of his flesh stands up. I cannot read what is in his eyes . . . (GR 221)

As with the novel’s opening paragraph, the conclusion relies upon the figure of the mirror to punctuate the narrative formally. However, despite the framing device, the story’s end is far from tidy. Looking into the mirror, David encounters Giovanni’s visage instead of his own, which the text describes with a gothic intensity. The emphasis on Giovanni’s eyes recalls David’s panic in the earlier scene with the transvestite. Again, we get the
sense that his perceptual agency is jeopardized, but Baldwin here takes the conflict to new levels. David concedes that he “cannot read what is in [Giovanni’s] eyes,” a sign that his perception is not only threatened, but disabled entirely by the gaze of the imagined other. The ostensible containment of Giovanni within David’s perspective throughout the novel is definitively exploded in this final scene. The nuances of this passage ultimately and decisively disrupt the containment of Giovanni by David’s perspective. In the mirror, David and Giovanni experience a kind of intersubjectivity as the latter’s imagined face displaces that of the protagonist.

David proceeds to imagine Giovanni’s execution in the pages that follow the above passage. By narrating Giovanni’s imagined death as he stares at himself in the mirror, David’s rhetoric accomplishes an intersubjective maneuver; the spatial and experiential distance between the two is bridged, and David psychologically and emotionally shares in Giovanni’s execution. Here, his perspective loses the distance required to subject Giovanni to his gaze, which effectively dissolves the self/other, white/black binary. Thus, David’s visual containment of Giovanni, the racial and sexual Other, fails:

The body in the mirror forces me to turn and face it. And I look at my body, which is under sentence of death . . . And I do not know what moves in this body, what this body is searching. It is trapped in my mirror as it is trapped in time and it hurries toward revelation . . . I long to make this prophecy come true. I long to crack the mirror and be free. (GR 222-23)

Interestingly, the language in this passage closely follows the discursive contours of Baldwin’s 1949 essay, “Everybody’s Protest Novel.” In that piece, he embraces
“disquieting complexity” as a literary strategy that can challenge what he sees as the reductive, power-complicit style of so-called “protest writers” such as Richard Wright (11). Viewing the essay as a kind of warm-up for the novel, compare the emphasis on looking, revelation, and freedom in the above passage from *Giovanni’s Room* to the following lines from “Everybody’s Protest Novel”: “only within this web of ambiguity, paradox, this hunger, danger, darkness, can we find at once ourselves and the power to free us from ourselves. It is this *power of revelation* which is the business of the novelist” (11, emphasis mine). Thus, though David’s longing “to crack the mirror” might seem to indicate a continuation of his sexual crisis, I would argue that it signals a *potentiality*; it performatively reiterates “the power to free us from ourselves” that Baldwin valorizes in his earlier essay, and therefore lends an edge of hope to an otherwise tragic narrative. If, as I argue, Baldwin sources the figure of the mirror from “The Sea Change,” it becomes possible to view the above passage from *Giovanni’s Room* as a fascinating reflexive commentary on the politics of representation. Hemingway’s mirror, which refuses to reflect the homosexual content of the story, functions as an ironic method of *concealment* that perpetuates homophobia. The unreflecting mirror contains the story’s central ambiguity: namely, that the text hides its most formative moment, and does so by developing visual figures. In Baldwin’s hands, the mirror is cracked, and in turn becomes a figure that enables a “power of revelation” that *reveals* at once the ideological violence of discourse and its potential for resistance (“Everybody’s” 11).

In closing, and in light of all this “looking” business that directs my textual analysis, I think it is worth taking a step back and reconsidering Baldwin as a reader of
Hemingway, as one who – like us – must look at and deal with that literary precedent. In this regard, Edward Said’s theoretical framework in *Orientalism* can serve as a productive start in resituating these two writers; reading Baldwin reading Hemingway “introduces an opposing point of view, perspective, consciousness to the unitary web of vision; it violates the serene Apollonian fictions asserted by vision” (240). However, unlike Said in *Orientalism*, Baldwin avoids the pitfalls of merely reversing the discursive binaries that marginalized him to the extreme. In this way, his *active* relation to Hemingway anticipates Bhabha’s formulation of resistant mimicry, a form of radical and creative destruction that enables new discoveries about the politics of representation in core modernist works, and pushes toward new horizons within the study of queer and African-American literature. In “The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy,” Baldwin candidly describes his relationship to structures of power; given the ideological push-and-pull that I recognize in this chapter, it is worth ending in Baldwin’s own words: “Well, I know how power works, it has worked on me, and if I didn’t know how power worked, I would be dead. And it goes without saying, perhaps, that I have simply never been able to afford myself any illusions concerning the manipulation of that power. My revenge, I decided, would be to achieve a power which outlasts kingdoms” (233). In many ways, my critical speculation seeks to emphasize the various forms of “manipulation” that occur in Baldwin’s use of “The Sea Change.” He does, indeed, draw an evident power from the appropriation, and in so doing fashions for himself a special subjectivity and artistic agency that operate both within and *against* the “kingdom” of the American canon.
Notes

1 Prominent Hemingway scholar Susan F. Beegel demonstrates this tendency when she claims that “Hemingway’s prose, based on his belief in the ability of concrete language to construct an objective reality, his craftsmanlike insistence that language is a tool of the writer, and not vice versa, would prove extremely resistant to the critical method of deconstruction” (287, emphases added). Though she is right to identify the lack of general deconstructivist approaches to Hemingway, it is also worth noting that she clearly accepts Hemingway’s own beliefs about his aesthetic project and, in turn, erroneously suggests that his work is impervious to deconstruction.

2 As many have recognized, the posthumous publication of *The Garden of Eden* in 1986 precipitated a shift in the criticism. That novel’s treatment of such issues as homosexuality, racial fetishism, and gender bending proved a substantive departure from the oeuvre, and invited interpretations with more outspoken poststructuralist leanings. Since then, a number of Hemingway scholars have proceeded to follow these threads in the author’s other fictions, in the texts that he published during his lifetime. Nonetheless, the number of such studies remains comparatively low. See Comley and Scholes, *Hemingway’s Genders: Rereading the Hemingway Text* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Eby, *Hemingway’s Fetishism: Psychoanalysis and the Mirror of Manhood* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999); Mooldelmoog, *Reading Desire: In Pursuit of Ernest Hemingway* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

3 Anecdotal evidence from the author’s life provides further confirmation that he felt an enduring attraction to people of color and their cultures. Strong cites a fascinating letter composed by Hemingway’s wife Mary in 1955, which she wrote to her husband when he was visiting with the Kamba people of Kenya. Apparently, he was well on his way to acquiring a kind of membership in the tribe, an impulse that Mary’s letter reins in. She acknowledges that he is “allured by the mystery and excitement of becoming one of them,” but sternly remarks that “[t]he fiction that having your ears pierced will make you a Kamba is an evasion of the reality, which is that you are not and never can be anything but an honorary Kamba, and that it is out of harmony with your best character which is that of a wise, thoughtful, realistic adult white American male” (qtd. in Strong 1). In recollecting an earlier experience with Josephine Baker, the author’s own language is shot through with descriptors that betray a sexualized primitivism: “Tall, coffee skin, ebony eyes, legs of paradise, a smile to end all smiles. Very hot night but she was wearing a coat of black fur, her breasts handling the fur like it was silk” (qtd. in Stovall 78-79).

4 Published in 2012, Dudley’s *Hemingway, Race, and Art: Bloodlines and the Color Line* (Kent State UP) challenges the received wisdom that Hemingway’s fiction perpetuates a racial hierarchy. His primary claim is that Hemingway in fact subverts racial ideologies in the US, that he “raz[es] the color line” (7). Dudley’s book attempts to redeem Hemingway against Toni Morrison’s scathing critique of the author in *Playing in the*
Despite his best efforts, however, Dudley’s claims are perhaps a bit forced. His argument is indeed original, but his focus on defending Hemingway’s racial sensibility causes him to lose sight of the many complexities and contradictions that pervade the narratives.

In his study of Hemingway’s attainment to celebrity, Raeburn adequately describes the author’s unprecedented ascent:

The rapidity of Hemingway’s rise to literary fame and honor was extraordinary. In 1924 a young and obscure former newspaperman living in a garret, he became by 1930 the most famous and respected novelist of his generation. Literary critics hailed him at the beginning of his career as the brightest star in American fiction and its best hope for the future. His fellow writers were equally taken with him, and many showed their admiration by imitating him. By the end of the decade, just five years after the appearance of In Our Time (1925), it was already possible to speak of Hemingway’s influence on contemporary American fiction as greater than that of any other writer, living or dead. (12)


In Hemingway’s Genders, by Nancy R. Comley and Robert Scholes, the authors maintain that Hemingway expressed “a fascination (attraction and repulsion) with transgressive sexuality” throughout his career (75). They closely and effectively analyze a number of his works that evince this interest; interestingly, though, this striking episode from Sun remains untouched in their work.

My recognition of this similarity between Brett and Mandy is certainly not intended to level the immense differences between their socioeconomic and cultural conditions. Chela Sandoval offers perhaps the most instructive manner in which to read their distinct yet mutually anti-patriarchal positions – as “two different understandings of domination, subordination and the nature of effective resistance” (75). This allows us to maintain a valuable relation between the two characters, and continue to emphasize the oppositional potential they embody. Furthermore, using Sandoval to articulate the nature of their resistance reveals the extent to which these modernist figures perform some of the conflicts within feminist thought since the second wave.

See “Can the Subaltern Speak?”

For the purposes of this study, I limit my analysis to the above-quoted lyrics, which constitute the first pre-chorus, the main chorus, and the first coda. However, the musical score indicates that there are multiple repeats, and – with the exception of the main chorus – the vocals change with each repeat. The second pre-chorus is different, and there are two additional codas:

[Second Pre-Chorus, this time in the voice of Mandy Brymm]
“Now I don’t mean to scold,
But I must get you told,
You’ll see my love grow cold.
Don’t care who she is
Or what she does
Ain’t a gal in this here town,
That can love and pet you like your own sweet mamma,
So you’d better throw ’em down:
[Chorus]
[Second Coda]
Now papa, you best be careful, as you can be,
’Cause I can beat you doin’ what you’re doin’ [to] me,
Aggravatin’ papa, don’t you try to two-time me!
[Third Coda]
Now papa, once you were steady, once you were true,
But papa, now sweet mamma can’t depend on you,
Aggravatin’ papa, don’t you try to two-time me!” (Turk and Robinson 3-5)

11 It is important to note that “Aggravatin’ Papa” has many precedents in both the jazz and blues traditions. For example, “St. Louis Blues” – written by W.C. Handy in 1914 and most famously performed by Bessie Smith – also articulates a female’s anxiety over male abuse and sexual exploitation.

12 Historians have shown similar strategies to persist within popular representations of iconic figures like Josephine Baker.

13 To this point, it is worth noting that jazz vocalists would have taken great liberties in improvising on the lyrics in order to emphasize or refigure certain elements of the song. For example, in 1923, the jazz singer Alberta Hunter recorded a performance of “Aggravatin’ Papa” in which she improvised on the coda in such a way as to enhance Mandy’s threat of violence against Sam: “Got one hand on my razor, one arm around my gun,/ If I catch you foolin’ round, I’ll tear your doghouse down,/ So, Aggravatin’ Papa, don’t you try to two-time me!” (Hunter).

14 It is important to note that Sandoval’s use of the term “differential” here means the tactical use of earlier white and middle-class feminisms.

15 Many black writers explored this phenomenon at the turn of the century. For example, see Charles W. Chesnutt’s story “The Wife of his Youth,” and his novel The House Behind the Cedars, as well as James Weldon Johnson’s The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man. It was also a concern for many Harlem Renaissance writers as well; for perhaps the most thorough and explicit treatment of a color politics within black communities, see Wallace Thurman’s The Blacker the Berry.
While this point might seem distant, its focus on the intersection of racial and nationalist discourses will prove especially relevant in other contexts that this dissertation explores – specifically, my discussion of Langston Hughes’s short story, “Home” (1934), in the following chapter.

I would, however, qualify Kinnamon’s claim. As many readers have pointed out, Brett’s role as a “New Woman” evokes a variety of responses from her male counterparts, which provides an opening for feminist critics to theorize about the novel’s representation of her aggressive sexuality. Given the centrality of the Jake-Brett romance within the narrative, I would argue that sexual politics do indeed constitute a “major theme.” The same might be argued with regard to Robert Cohn and the varying degrees of anti-Semitism that surround his presence in the novel.

The boxing metaphor that Hemingway employs upon Jake’s entrance anticipates Bill Gorton’s story of the Vienna prize-fight at the beginning of Book Two, as well as the novel’s climax in which Robert Cohn beats both Jake and Pedro Romero. Interestingly, Cohn’s display of violence stems from his inability to handle what he interprets to be Brett’s licentious behavior: “I just couldn’t stand it about Brett” (198). The music that “hits” Jake in Zelli’s links the drummer to Brett’s subsequent lovers via the boxing metaphor, furthering the implication of her sexual past with the black musician and, more importantly, establishing her inclination toward racial and ethnic Others throughout Sun.

Interestingly, Eugene Bullard – the historical personage upon whom the drummer is loosely based – married a white Parisian woman of high socioeconomic status. For more on Bullard’s marriage, see Tyler Stovall’s chapter – “Gender, Race, and Miscegenation: African Americans in Jazz Age Paris” – in the volume The Modern Woman Revisited: Paris Between the Wars, edited by Whitney Chadwick and Tirza True Latimer.

For a thorough historical treatment of miscegenation as a cultural phenomenon, see Martha Hodes’s White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South and the collection, edited by Hodes, titled Sex, Love, Race: Crossing Boundaries in North American History.

See Allyson Nadia Field’s essay “Expatriate Lifestyle as Tourist Destination: The Sun Also Rises and Experiential Travelogues of the Twenties” for more on the suggestiveness of Brett’s assertion here. In it, Field identifies a travelogue titled Paris with the Lid Lifted, by 1920’s travel writer Bruce Reynolds, in which he urges expatriate tourists that “[w]e must all understand each other; all be great friends” (qtd. in Field, 32). As Field shows, expatriate guidebooks adhered to a particularly “clubby” social rhetoric that not only pinpointed prominent sites in the city for tourists to visit, but also suggested to expatriate travelers how they should interact socially. When Brett explains to Jake that the drummer is her “great friend,” she echoes this text, skews the rigidity of the color line, and gives Jake – and the reader – reason to intuit a certain level of intimacy.
Other historical evidence further corroborates connections between Hemingway and Hughes. For example, Hughes saw a speech that Hemingway gave in 1937 at the Second Congress of American Writers at Carnegie Hall; shortly after, in 1938, the two men met during the Spanish Civil War, when both were working as war correspondents—Hughes for the *Baltimore Afro-American*, and Hemingway for the North American Newspaper Alliance (Holcomb and Scruggs 10). Hughes’s 1956 autobiography, *I Wonder As I Wander*, includes a chapter titled “A Hemingway Story,” in which he records an anecdote about Hemingway in Spain. In that chapter, Hughes considers Hemingway “a big likeable fellow whom the men in the brigades adored” (363).

The full text of Hughes’s tribute to Du Bois is provided below:

> So many thousands of my generation were uplifted and inspired by the written and spoken words of Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois that for me to say I was so inspired would hardly be unusual. My earliest memories of written words are of those of Du Bois and the Bible. My maternal grandmother in Kansas, the last surviving widow of John Brown’s Raid, read to me as a child from both the Bible and *The Crisis*. And one of the first books I read on my own was *The Souls of Black Folk*. Years later, my earliest poems were accepted for publication by *The Crisis* under the editorship of Dr. Du Bois. It seems as if, one way or another, I knew Dr. Du Bois all my life. Through his work, he became a part of my life. (556)

Rampersad quotes one of the editors at *Atlantic Monthly* who had rejected “Home.” His response to the story is typical of many attitudes towards protest literature both during and after the Harlem Renaissance: “Why is it that authors think it is their function to lay the flesh bare and rub salt in the wound? ... most people read for pleasure, and there is no pleasure here” (qtd. in Rampersad 282).

Of course, the violence perpetuated against African Americans in the early-twentieth century assumed many forms, and the return of black soldiers from World War I is only one among manifold historical occasions that served as flashpoints for that violence.

In the first chapter of his foundational book, *When Harlem Was in Vogue* (1979), David Levering Lewis contextualizes the return of black soldiers by detailing the march of the 369th Infantry Regiment through Manhattan and into Harlem (3-5). While Lewis’s interpretations of the Harlem Renaissance have been much contested and revised by scholars, the primacy of the veterans’ return in his study rightly attests to its historical and cultural significance.

Claude McKay, for instance, composed a short story between 1922 and 1923 during an extended visit to the Soviet Union, which he titled “The Soldier’s Return” (James 214). The narrative describes the near lynching of a black veteran in his Southern hometown, an event precipitated by the white response to his military uniform. The story’s title is a direct reconfiguration of Du Bois’s own, and its central plot develops as a response to the lynching practices that surged in the wake of the Great War. The trope of the military
homecoming held such promise for McKay that he came back to it several years later in his novel *Home to Harlem* (1928), which begins with the return of its AWOL protagonist. For a thoughtful and comprehensive discussion of the war-homecoming subgenre and the black writers who practiced it, see Davis.

28 It is also important to note that, in the 1930s and 1940s, Edmund Wilson and Malcolm Cowley had already begun to describe Hemingway and his characters as archetypes of a generation whose entire existence had been shaken by the war. Young’s book, *Ernest Hemingway: A Reconsideration*, was the first full-length study of the author, and established the critical tendency to seek out Great War trauma in his fiction.

29 It is worth noting that contemporary critics of various orientations continue to revisit and wrestle with Young and Lynn’s much-digested formulations about the relative impact of the war on Hemingway. For instance, Matthew C. Stewart returns to the debate directly in his article “Ernest Hemingway and World War I: Combatting [sic] Recent Psychobiographical Reassessments, Restoring the War,” *Papers on Language and Literature* 36.2 (Spring 2000): 198-217. Steven Trout takes a New Historical approach in his essay, “‘Where Do We Go from Here?’: Ernest Hemingway’s ‘Soldier’s Home’ and American Veterans of World War I,” *The Hemingway Review* 20.1 (Fall 2000): 5-21.

30 In their introduction, Holcomb and Scruggs declare with a degree of hyperbole that Hughes “effectively idolized” Hemingway (10). I take issue with this critical portrayal of the relationship. Despite the apparent ethos of Holcomb and Scruggs’s volume as a whole, such a claim perpetuates a view of modernist art that elevates white texts over black ones, and suggests a unilateral structure of influence in which Hemingway’s craft maintains both historical and aesthetic primacy. As my analysis attempts to reveal, Hughes’s appropriation exposes certain contradictions at the heart of “Soldier’s Home,” which should certainly give us pause before claims that Hughes’s complex story is act of “admiration” (10).

31 In light of the tribute to Hemingway that begins this chapter, it is worth noting an inconsistency between Hughes’s appraisal of his style in that short note, and the implicit interpretation of “Soldier’s Home” contained in his radical recoding of Krebs’s dilemma. In the tribute, Hughes declares that there is an “immediacy” within “Hemingway’s reality [that] conveys itself with more than deliberate speed” (555-56). Perhaps the tribute’s genre and venue constrained his assessment in the 1960s; however, as I will show, Krebs’s experiences are far from immediate. It is, in fact, Roy’s reality that takes on these qualities, as “Home” makes available to the reader the full impact of his violent demise.

32 Take, for instance, the pains taken by Nick Adams to construct a dwelling in “Big Two-Hearted River: Part I”: “He had made his camp. He was settled. Nothing could touch him. It was a good place to camp. He was there, in the good place. He was in his home where he had made it” (*IOT* 139).
33 To be sure, much ink has been spilled on the thematics of the paternal in Hemingway’s fiction. For particularly insightful studies, see the chapter titled “Decoding Papa” in *Hemingway’s Genders* by Nancy R. Comely and Robert Scholes, as well as J. Gerald Kennedy’s essay “Angling for Affection: Absent Fathers, Fatherhood, and Fishing in *A Farewell to Arms*,” collected in *Hemingway’s Italy: New Perspectives*. For all of the critical attention paid to Hemingway’s conflicts with fatherhood, few studies exist that explore the implications of the patriarchal within a nationalist political paradigm.

34 Though I have been using the term “frame” to describe different points of view within the narrative, it is interesting to consider the white crowd as a structural framing device for the story in its entirety. The narrative is book-ended by the presence of whites gathered in numbers: at the beginning, it is a “crowd” at the train station regarding Roy; at the end, the crowd transforms into a violent lynch mob. Structurally, this figure performs the social determinism constraining Roy’s agency. Indeed, the story evidences highly modernist techniques in its representational strategies, but it also adheres to a narrative trajectory that owes much to literary Naturalism.

35 In Chapter Three, I return to the subject of narrative interiority in my analysis of James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*. Like Hughes, Baldwin repurposes Hemingway’s aesthetics; however, Baldwin’s novel innovates by staging the conflict between homosexual identification and heteronormativity.

36 The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines empathy as “the power of projecting one’s personality into (and so fully comprehending) the object of contemplation” (“Empathy”).

37 Hemingway composed “The Art of the Short Story” as the preface to a collection of his stories that Scribner’s had originally intended to compile into a students’ edition. Hemingway subsequently convinced the publishers to alter the intended audience so that it would appeal beyond the classroom; however, he retained the style of “an extemporaneous oral presentation before a class” (Benson 1). Ultimately, the whole project was scrapped. As Jackson J. Benson points out, the editors and Hemingway’s wife both interpreted the essay’s tone as smug and condescending, and decided that his reading audience would also find it off-putting (1). It was finally published posthumously in the *Paris Review* in 1981.

38 “The Sea Change” was initially published in *This Quarter* in 1931, and subsequently compiled in the short story collection titled *Winner Take Nothing* in 1933.

39 In a reading of *A Farewell To Arms*, Debra A. Moddelmog accounts for at least some of this “familiarity” by identifying that “Hemingway’s characters act both in opposition to time-honored conventions about sexual behavior and desire and in accordance with the changing views of sexuality expressed by some of the more liberal marriage ‘experts’ and sexologists writing in the early part of the 20th century . . . whose writings Hemingway read with much enthusiasm early in his life,” “We Live in a Country Where Nothing
For the most thorough treatment of Hemingway as a subject for queer literary theory, see Moddelmog, *Reading Desire: In Pursuit of Ernest Hemingway* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999). Following her, I want to clarify that I do not intend to posit “a gay Hemingway” (4). Rather, I see texts like “The Sea Change” – with their myriad aesthetic conflicts – as sites for investigating the complex processes and politics of sexual and racial identification in modernist literature.


St. Pierre argues this point most succinctly when he states that the author’s “sparse, declarative prose” is entangled “in our culture with a triumphant ideal of straight male virtue” (364).

It is worth noting that his claim in “The Art of the Short Story” echoes his famous iceberg principle. In an interview with George Plimpton, he describes that “[t]here is seven-eighths of it underwater for every part that shows. Anything you know you can eliminate and it only strengthens your iceberg. It is the part that doesn’t show” (235).

The discursive conflation of racial difference with homosexual experience is not exclusive to “The Sea Change” and *The Garden of Eden*. A story titled “The Mother of a Queen” features a gay Mexican matador, who the narrator – his manager, Roger – regards scornfully. The concluding paragraph offers a view into the dual treatment of ethnicity and sexuality: “There’s a *queen* for you. You can’t touch them. Nothing, nothing can touch them. They spend money on themselves or for vanity, but they never pay. Try to
get one to pay . . . What kind of blood is it that makes a man like that?” (CSS 319, emphases mine).

45 “Look” is a key verb in Hemingway’s aesthetic, especially as it occurs in his short fiction. “Hills Like White Elephants” (1927) is another story in which “looking” plays a major role. In his analysis of that text, critic John Hollander uses the term “parataxis” to describe the repeated and juxtaposed appearances of the verb within the narrative. For more on this, see Hollander’s essay “Hemingway’s Extraordinary Reality” in the volume Ernest Hemingway (ed. Harold Bloom, New York: Chelsea House, 1985).

46 For more on the genesis of “the gaze” as a key term in the field of film studies, see David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson’s Film Art: An Introduction (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1979).

47 Interestingly, at one point in “The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy,” Baldwin discusses Norman Mailer’s style and identifies that many of his texts “are written in a lean, spare, muscular prose” (228). These same descriptors have often been used to describe Hemingway’s aesthetic project. This stylistic “toughness” has been traditionally associated with certain forms of heteromasculinity, as St. Pierre points out: “Perhaps best known for the distinctive simplicity of his prose style – hard, lean, terse – Hemingway has come to seem to many readers the most unimpeachable representative of an especially clear and particularly manly brand of literary realism” (363).

48 In his famous essay, “Everybody’s Protest Novel” (1949), Baldwin recognizes the rhetorical pitfalls of unreflectively railing against established racial ideologies. He references Richard Wright’s short story cycle, Uncle Tom’s Children, in order to assert that the outspoken invective within black protest fiction is an extension of the “self-righteous, virtuous sentimentality” of antebellum abolitionist literature (14). Baldwin argues that such texts “actually reinforce . . . the principles which activate the oppression they decry,” and that in the process they perpetuate “categorization, life neatly fitted into pegs” (14, 18). For Baldwin, writers like Wright diminish the complexities of the interior life, and do an immense disservice to the lived experiences of “ambiguity” and “paradox,” experiences that contain “the power to free us from ourselves” (15).

50 To be sure, much ink has been spilled on the evident racial politics involved in Baldwin’s act of writing through a white narrator. Following the critically acclaimed Go Tell It On the Mountain – which introduced the young writer as an up-and-comer in the world of race conscious black art in the US – his use of a gay, white expatriate in his second novel met less than favorable reviews from critics on both sides of the color line. Indeed, the author’s open homosexuality and that of his characters made it difficult material for both black and white readers. Speaking to the mutually constitutive nature of these discourses, and to the heteromasculine strain in the racially segregated worlds of mid-century American letters, Baldwin in an interview once said, “[t]he sexual question and the racial question have always been entwined, you know. If Americans can mature on the level of racism, then they have to mature on the level of sexuality” (qtd. in McBride 68).

51 For example, critics Myriam Chancy and Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman both recognize that the text attributes blackness to Giovanni’s character. Chancy rightly asserts that David “endeavors to perform the social ideal of white, straight malehood, only to find that the ideal, for him, is that which is socially aberrant – the black, the gay, in short, all that his lover Giovanni, comes to represent” (158). Abdur-Rahman’s interpretation too sees Giovanni as figuratively black, but also as suffering experiences similar to those seen in the African-American historical context: “In terms of race, Giovanni’s dislocation in Paris, his failure to belong, and the extreme poverty he faces emblematize the alienation that African Americans experience” (482).


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