Black Nationalism and the Problematic of Sexual Otherness in James Baldwin's *Another Country* and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*

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> I'm not here to argue or discuss anything that we differ about, because it is time for us to submerge our differences and realize that it is best for us to first see that we have the same problem, a common problem . . . We are all in the same boat and we all are going to catch hell from the same man. He just happens to be the white man . . . If we have differences, let us differ in the closet; when we come out in the front, let us not argue about anything until we finish arguing with the man. (X 405)

The clarion call for abandoning differences, forcefully articulated by Malcolm X in a well-known speech quoted in the epigraph above, constitutes an abiding theme in the rhetoric of Black Nationalism, a term that refers to a set of interlinked ideologies advocating a broad and overarching solidarity among black people and an aggressive, revolutionary assertion of their social, political and economic rights. Such a conception of racial unity necessitates the adoption of a homogenous identity centered solely on the metanarrative of race; consequently, anything even seemingly falling outside that paradigm is considered a threat to the notional oneness requisite for the construction of a linear, straightforward *telos* of radical transformation and must be overridden. This paper purports to analyse two seminal African American literary texts, James Baldwin's *Another Country* (1962) and Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), to argue that the discourse of a reified, essentialised blackness, often under girding celebratory accounts of black resistance to the hegemony of whiteness in America, is nevertheless not without its share of problems, especially in its misogynistic and homophobic emphasis on normative gender roles and compulsory heterosexuality, leading to the marginalization of its supposed sexual and gendered others. These include not only women who are insufficiently submissive or feminine but also non-heterosexual, gender-transgressive subjectivities. In an important study entitled *Black Women Novelists and the Nationalist Aesthetic* (1994), Madhu Dubey illustrates how the racial ideology of the 1960s, with its myopic focus on the black male self as the archetypal figure of heroic social change, understood black feminine identity

within an exclusively reproductive frame. Amiri Baraka, a leading figure of the Black Arts Movement, for instance, preached an uncritical reversion to traditional gender roles and attempted to justify patriarchy as a natural system, "[n]ature has made woman submissive, she must submit to man's creation in order to exist" (qtd. in Dubey 18). The black woman is constantly rendered on the peripheries of the Black Nationalist discourse, reductively configured either as the (re-)producer of male heroes or, more dubiously, as the principal cause of black men's economic and social emasculation. The nationalist agenda proliferates only by assigning a fixed, immutable place to everyone- man and woman, normal and abnormal, black and white, native and foreigner. Any confusion among these categories precipitates a semiotic and moral collapse.

This makes the position of the black homosexual especially precarious, "even further away from the center [when compared to black heterosexual women], an unimaginable, unfathomable, unutterable entity" (Dunning 63). The highly contested relationship between Black Nationalism and queerness, or what is provisionally termed "sexual otherness" in the title of this paper, forms the conceptual core of my argument. In the essay "It's Raining Men: Notes on the Million Man March," Robert Reid-Pharr discusses precisely this fraught dynamic, premised on the assumption that blackness and homosexuality are mutually antithetical, irreconcilable forces and that queer people are existential threats to the very idea of a cohesive black community. Referring to a historic protest-gathering of African American men in Washington, D.C. in 1995, Reid-Pharr notes that "if the real message of the march was that it is going to take a heroic black masculinity to restore order in our various communities . . . then it follows that black gay men are irrelevant, or even dangerous to that project" (38). Nationalism conceptualizes its perpetuation narrowly in terms of heterosexual, monogamous reproductivity, delegitimizing possible flows of desire that fracture culturally sanctioned myths of an aggressive, virile manliness and a pliant, tractable femininity. In their inability to lead to procreation, same-sex relations are not only considered unnatural and reprehensible, an "anathema to the building of a strong black nation," but also negatively conflated with a perverted sexual desire for whiteness" (Williams 136). In a vociferous indictment of James Baldwin, Eldridge Cleaver, a prominent political activist and leader of the Black Panther Party, dismisses homosexuality as portending the annihilation of a valiant, robust blackness, a veritable "racial death-wish":

> [The] white man has deprived him [the black male homosexual] of his masculinity, castrated him in the center of his burning skull, and

> when he submits to the change and takes the white man for his lover as well as Big Daddy, he focuses on "whiteness" all the love in his pent-up soul and turns the razor edge of hatred against "blackness" - upon himself, what he is, and those who look like him. (qtd. in Dunning 48)

In Cleaver's analysis, black men having sexual relations with other men is akin to a passive capitulation to white masculinity, leading to a complete disintegration of the resistant black self. This equation between homosexuality and miscegenation is a politically charged one: it ratifies the significance of heterosexual, mono-racial sex as the fundamental building block of the nationalist schema, as a neat binary between blackness and queerness emerges, the disturbing implication of which is that, one could only legitimately adopt either of those socially volatile identities. Understandably then, Baldwin's homosexuality strikes Cleaver as a form of racial betrayal, the celebrated author presenting to him a very public image of the black man as castrated and womanly.

These authenticating discourses, used to otherize black queers, also lie at the heart of the trajectory of twentieth-century African American literature, which, before the appearance of black female writers in the mid-1970s, was an overwhelmingly masculinist enterprise dominated by the likes of Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison (Hudson and Shin 247). Noteworthy from several perspectives, this phallocentric tradition nonetheless treats black maleness as an essential given, impervious to any form of critical scrutiny, even celebrating it as a form of defiance to the supremacy of the white man in a racist America. Baldwin's writing, with an emphasis on what critic Irving Howe pejoratively calls "a program of aesthetic autonomy and faithfulness to private experience," addresses precisely this gap (qtd. in Hudson and Shin 249). In offering a strident critique of heteronormative masculinity, it resists an easy assimilation into the discursive imperative of Black Nationalism, thus complicating the always-already fraught relationship between art and politics, the burden of representativeness that a black author must shoulder as the spokesperson of his fraternity and his aesthetic, imaginative autonomy as an artist. Baldwin discusses some of these concerns in two important essays, "The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy" and "Here Be Dragons." In "To be an American Negro Male", seen by him as "a kind of walking phallic symbol," suggests that the straitjacket of black masculinity was a prison that he struggled to liberate himself from, throughout his life (290). He understood masculinity and femininity to be performative, non-biologically determined roles that often entrap and immobilize individuals, rendering them

incapable of approximating an androgynous wholeness of being. "We are all androgynous," he asserts, "each of us, helplessly and forever, contains the other-male in female, female in male, white in black, black in white. We are a part of each other" ("Here Be Dragons" 690). Essentialism of any kind, whether pertaining to gender, sexuality or race, does not resonate well with Baldwin's psychic and political worldview, profoundly shaped as it is by his traumatic personal experiences, "I think that I know something about the (*sic*) 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 Boy Looks at the White Boy" 290).

In his critically acclaimed novel, *Another Country* (1962), Baldwin rigorously demonstrates the tragic consequences of disciplining and compartmentalizing the self in accordance with the mandates of such rigid and ossified ideologies. By disavowing hegemonic racial and sexual categorizations, he queries the nationalist contention that to be queer is somehow opposed to being black. Rufus Scott and Vivaldo, the novel's two major characters have suppressed homoerotic desires for each other, never fully acknowledging and burying them under the socially acceptable veneer of heterosexuality. In a fleeting moment, however, they do confront the irrepressible truth of their existence:

> Have you ever wished you were queer? Rufus asked, suddenly. Vivaldo smiled, looking into his glass. "I used to think maybe I was. Hell, I think I even wished I was." He laughed. "But I'm not. So I'm stuck" (51).

When prodded further by Rufus about his sexual experiences – "[s]o you been all up and down that street, too" (51) – Vivaldo's response gestures towards the shared victimization that men face at the hands of patriarchal notions of manliness and that his individual experiences are in some ways symptomatic of a larger malaise: "We have *all* been up the same streets. . . Only, we've been taught to *lie* so much, about so many things, that we hardly ever know where we are" (51-52 emphasis mine).

Conforming to what it means to be a man in America constitutes a fundamental falsehood which Baldwin seems to imply; congealed in their roles as gendered and racial subjects, men, both black and white, willfully negate possibilities of sexual and spiritual companionship. It is their masculinity and a gridlock of racial and gendered barriers that keep Rufus and Vivaldo apart,

incapable as they are of transcending their keenly-felt sense of blackness and whiteness. These categories, vehemently glorified in the nationalist discourse, here become obstructions in the way of a liberating communion between two individuals. This becomes starkly manifest when, later in the novel, Vivaldo relates to Eric how, in moments immediately preceding his suicide, Rufus had needed him, "Well, when he looked at me . . . I had the weirdest feeling that he wanted me to take him in my arms . . . I had the feeling that he wanted someone to hold him . . . [and] that night, it had to be a man" (342).

Wondering whether Rufus would still have been alive had he been embraced in that moment, Vivaldo admits to himself as much as to Eric, that he chose to perpetuate his best friend's death owing to his deep-seated fear of coming across as a 'faggot'. He confronts the adverse repercussions of upholding an unyielding code of masculinity, one that makes him repress his fondness, both emotional and erotic, for another man and reject the possibility of Rufus', and his own salvation. Ironically, Rufus is himself guilty of denying other men the affirmative potentialities of same-sex desire, reminiscing at various points in the novel how he had psychologically brutalized Eric, and treats him "nothing more than a hideous sexual deformity" (46). Nevertheless, Eric's memories continue to haunt and conflict Rufus throughout his life, making him regret his own insistent attempts to check the "flood of affection" he had once experienced for his friend (46). Rufus' internalised homophobia devastates Eric, who is consequently forced to flee America altogether and settle in Paris. This is an act of violence, the text avows, that Rufus perpetrates not simply on the "other" but also the "self"; driven by an overwhelming, inescapable need to belong to a destructive regime of heteronormative manliness, Rufus strangulates his capacity to love, eager as he is to plot his identity along conventional, socially viable trajectories of "seeing" and "being." Unable to relate to people across racial and sexual lines, he is thus forced to annul within himself the plenitude, the vital life force, which in Baldwin's syncretic consciousness makes us uniquely human, beyond the narrow and stifling confines of identity.

Vivaldo, on the other hand is rescued from his inner demons as he makes love to Eric, and is able to partially undo the damning effects of years of social posturing and indoctrination: "He [Vivaldo] had brought about something that he had long desired," Baldwin writes, and "he could not pull away, he did not want to" (383). Ultimately delighted to discover that sexual intimacy between men, an act he had long thought of as humiliating and self-debasing, could bring such tremendous solace to him, Vivaldo feels "all of his hope which had grown

so pale flush[ing] into life again" (387). His new-found love for Eric, described in the text as a great revelation, is at once deeply personal and political- besides being individually gratifying, it holds forth for Vivaldo the utopian promise of transcending reductive, dehumanising polarities of right and wrong, moral and immoral, man and woman, active and passive: "Now, Vivaldo, who was accustomed himself to labor, to be the giver of the gift, and enter into his satisfaction by means of the satisfaction of a woman, surrendered to the luxury, the flaming torpor of passivity" (385).

To Eric, the novel's most explicitly queer character, Baldwin ascribes the role of a messiah, in that, unlike Rufus and Vivaldo, he manages to fully come to terms with his otherness and emancipate himself from the gnawing need to perform one's masculinity in compliance with coercive heteronormative scripts. Rejected and condemned as filthy and diseased in the eyes of the world, in some ways epitomising what most men often dare not acknowledge within themselves, Eric has "no standards for him except those he could make for himself" (212). Remarkably liberated to that extent, Eric catalyses Vivaldo's redemption, pulling him back from the brink of existential loneliness and despair. Significantly, however, he too encounters his bisexual side, finding sexual fulfillment in his female friend, Cass, who "had awakened something in him, an animal long caged, which came pounding out of its captivity now with a fury which astounded and transfigured them both"(292).

This has crucial ramifications for understanding both Baldwin's vision and, more importantly its political limitations. With Eric finding his encounter with Cass pleasurable, even restorative, and Yves, his French partner engaging in flirtatious banter with an airhostess on the flight he takes to join Eric in America, we are plunged into a universe where all of the novel's main characters are, to varying degrees, bisexual. What is unceasingly foregrounded here is the centrality of desire as a liminal, free-floating force that undermines binary notions of self-other, black-white and straight-queer constituting gendered common sense on how our affective and corporeal selves pan out in the everyday. Ostensibly a progressive manoeuvre, it is, in fact, a defensive one, insofar as it stops short of asserting the power of exclusive same-sex relationships as posing a radical challenge to the *status quo*. One ought to, then, be mindful of the text's diffident sexual politics- curiously as late as 1984, Baldwin spoke of his discomfort with the term *gay*. In an interview with Richard Goldstein, he mused: "[t]he word 'gay' has always rubbed me the wrong way. I never understood exactly what is meant by it . . . I simply feel it's a world that has very little to do with me, with

where I did my growing up. I was never at home in it" (qtd. 59). More problematically, Baldwin sought to steer his readers away from specifically gay interpretations of his work. Admitting that the negative reception of *Giovanni*'s *Room* (1956) – a novel centered on an American man's anguished homosexual affair with an Italian bartender in Paris – had taken a toll on him, he stressed that the book was "not *really* about homosexuality. It's about what happens to you if you're afraid to love anybody. Which is much more interesting than the question of homosexuality" (61 emphasis mine). Although Baldwin's attempt to broaden and universalise the appeal of his work is at some level understandable, it, in my opinion, dulls the edge of his social critique. In playing down the queer implications of his work, Baldwin seems content in condemning the rigid exclusivity of all sexual orientations, never proceeding to locate same-sex desire as a distinctive and thorough going threat to the moral architecture of heteropatriarchy.

It is in comparison with Baldwin's tentative, relatively hesitant stance on the issue that one might situate Alice Walker's treatment of sexual otherness as far more categorical in its decentering of the heterosexist matrix. For one, Walker, writing in the 1970s and 1980s was part of an established black feminist tradition, which was scathingly critical of the nationalist "figuration of black feminine identity as [a form of] absence" (Dubey 156). Black women writers and critics rigorously interrogated the regressive, sexist stances of the Black Nationalist discourse, highlighting gender differences at a time when the continuous affirmation of an integrated racial community was considered beyond the pale of questioning. Then it is ironic, that such skepticism towards a unitary conception of blackness did not extend itself to a ready and empathetic embrace of lesbian issues as central to the feminist agenda. Renowned queer-feminist writer, Audre Lorde, explains this contradiction: "Those of us who stand outside . . . power often identify one way in which we are different, and we assume that to be the primary cause of all oppression, forgetting other distortions around difference, some of which we ourselves may be practicing" (517). Lorde expostulates how heterosexism and homophobia internally fractured black women's groups that, for all their radical views, partook in some of the negative stereotypes conventionally ascribed to the Black lesbian. Widely perceived to be deranged and abnormal, her very existence was an affront to the sanctity of the black family and, along with gay men, ideologically equated with non-blackness. Together, these queer subjectivities were deemed to be marginal even irrelevant to the more authentic struggles of the Black Nation. In fact,

lesbianism is one vector of identity that remains absolutely invisible from all fictional representation of blackness during the 1970s, the terms "black" and "lesbian" remaining virtually incompatible until the publication of three path-breaking novels, Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, Gloria Naylor's *The Women of Brewster Place* and Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*, in 1982.

Walker can thus be seen to be working within the Black feminist tradition and yet, along with Lorde and Naylor, opening it up for newer sites of exploration and contestation. In her essay, "In the Closet of the Soul," she avows freedom for all women, regardless of gender identity and sexual orientation: "Women loving women, and expressing it 'publicly,'" she contends, "is part and parcel of what freedom for women means, just as this is what it means for anyone else" (qtd. in Johnson 211). The text of *The Color Purple* begins with a patriarchal structure on silence directed towards its black female protagonist: "You'd better not never tell nobody but God. It'd kill your mammy" (3). Celie's story is structured around many threats, physical and psychological, constantly enforced upon her. Simultaneously victimized by racism, misogyny and homophobia, she is a veritable non-entity, brutally effaced at every level of her existence. The idea of deriving pleasure from the sexual act with her husband, simply referred to as Mr. ___ for the most part of the novel, seems untenable to her, experiencing it as she does in the form of naked debasement, objectification and phallic aggression: "He git (*sic*) up on you, heist your nightgown round your waist, plunge in. Most times I pretend I ain't (*sic*) there. He never know (*sic*) the difference. Never ast (*sic*) me how I feel, nothing. Just do his business, get off, go to sleep" (74). Repeatedly abused and humiliated, denied education and independence, Celie nevertheless experiences a sexual and emotional awakening when she begins to get attracted to one of Mr.___'s mistresses, the glamorous Shug Avery: "Shug Avery was . . . [t]he most beautiful woman I ever saw . . . An (*sic*) now when I dream, I dream of Shug Avery. She be dress (*sic*) to kill, whirling an (*sic*) laughing" (8).

Shug's physical attractiveness closely approximates her libertine, even hedonistic persona. Unencumbered by any of the moral and cultural limitations designed to contain female sexuality, she pursues her desires without guilt or inhibition. "Why any woman give (*sic*) a shit [to] what people think," she proclaims, "is a mystery to me" (181). What ruffles most men about her is her uncompromising determination to live life on her own terms. She is economically independent, widely travelled and unwilling to succumb to the constraints of a

monogamous marriage. "She embodies," Linda Abbandonato proposes, "the highly disruptive potential of sexuality . . . to survive and flourish in "aberrant" forms despite the cultural imposition of a norm" (1112). Even at an early juncture in the novel, Shug's picture instantly leads to Celie's metamorphosis from a silent object to an actively desiring subject, a shift enabled by lesbianism's potential to disrupt the cultural mechanisms of patriarchy. Compulsory heterosexuality is the basis on which women are prevented from attaining full personhood, and same-sex desire queries the terms of this social contract. In an obvious manifestation of this reversal, the gendered categories that are so routinely fetishized in the nationalist rhetoric are irrevocably muddled during an erotically charged encounter between the two women: "First time I got the full sight of Shug Avery long black body with it (*sic*) black plum nipples . . . I thought I had turned into a man" (47). Having become conscious of her sexuality, the woman ceases to be at the receiving end of abject negation and feels like a man, hence demystifying in the process the supposedly natural bases for the hierarchization of gender. Another important moment in the novel describes Shug helping Celie gaze at her own genitals in a mirror and grapple for the first time with the sheer corporeality of her body. The notion of shame, often deployed to control and domesticate women, is gradually dispelled here as Celie admires the beauty of her vagina as a "wet rose" (75). Furthermore, Shug insists that since Celie had never hitherto found sex with her husband satisfying, she is "still a virgin" (74). Severing the reified connection between sexuality and reproduction, Shug encourages her more uninitiated lover to fundamentally reorient the way she understands carnal pleasure, making it central rather than peripheral to her experiences.

The relationship between the two women, however, is not merely sexual in nature. Celie's initiation into same-sex eroticism is contextualised within her growing emotional steadfastness and self-reliance that become apparent, among other things, in the reconceptualization of her institutionalized beliefs about God, who, she eventually realizes, is not "a he or she, but a (*sic*) It" (176). Phallogocentrism has been ruptured: God has been transfigured from a vengeful, authoritarian white male to a new form of androgynous wholeness, a life-affirming creator palpable in "[e]verything that is or ever was or ever will be" (176). An inextricable link is established between God and the pleasure principle, the *jouissance*, that pervades the universe:"God love everything you love . . . I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it" (177). This process of liberating self-fashioning reaches an

emphatic climax in Celie's decision to reject her husband altogether and move to Memphis with Shug. "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook," she fumes defiantly, "[b]ut I'm here" (187). Setting up an independent, gender-neutral business enterprise of sewing custom-made pants, Celie gives vent to her buried creativity and entrepreneurial energy, hence rejecting her troubled past. Symbolic of the novel's broader questioning of gender norms and categories – pants are suggestive of mobility and flexibility, a less formal, restrictive form of dress traditionally forbidden to women – Celie's venture transcends ideological barriers of both sex and colour. Her products, which "release the wearer into authentic self-expression" and cater to everyone, are manufactured in a non-prejudiced, diverse setting, employing both Sofia and a white male worker towards a common goal (Berlant 21). On that account, Celie's workplace becomes an apt metaphor for Walker's vision of social reconciliation and harmonious co-existence between men and women of diverse racial backgrounds, one that she actualizes by consciously inverting stereotypical gender hierarchies. While women increasingly breach masculine privilege in the novel, the men are feminized re-connecting with their softer, more humane selves. As Keith Byerman contends, the text partly resolves its tensions "by making all males female (or at least androgynous), all destroyers creators, and all difference sameness" (qtd. in Kaplan 198). Albert's gradual understanding of the value of mutuality and cooperation releases him from his destructive maleness and he revives his sewing talent, becomes an avid shell collector and participates in the communal feeding of yam to Henrietta. He also "clean[s] . . . [the] house just like a woman," cooks, and washes the dishes (201). Albert sums up his profound transformation in a conversation with Celie when he says, "I'm satisfied this the first time I ever lived on Earth as a natural man. It feel (*sic*) like a new experience" (236). Natural man, in Walker's egalitarian schema, has relinquished his gender-based superiority complex and is ready to amicably coexist with natural woman, who no longer sees herself as a victim. In much the same vein, Harpo who had previously harboured a desire to beat his fiercely independent wife, Sofia into behaving in a more docile, womanly fashion eventually tells her: "I loves(*sic*)every judgment you ever made" (255). By the end of the novel, he renounces his predatory anxieties and resolves all his differences with Sofia, forging a remarkably equitable relationship with her. While he attends to household chores, Sofia and her Amazonian sisters accompany their brothers as pall bearers of their mother's coffin.

The sexist social order in Africa also becomes the target of Walker's

scathing criticism. So firmly entrenched is the investment in male dominance among Olinka men and women that a mother can only claim about her girl-child: "A girl is nothing to herself; only to her husband can she become something," which refers of course, to being "the mother of his children" (140). Education is the sole reserve of boys who, when they become men, are expected to look after their wives. Those who rebel against this oppressive ethos, such as Tashi's aunt are sold into slavery leading to a complete obliteration of their individuality. It is quite striking, then, that Tashi manages to carve a niche for herself: "She is changing, becoming quiet and too thoughtful, they say. She is becoming someone else; her face is beginning to show the spirit of one of her aunts who . . . refused to marry the man chosen for her. Refused to bow down to the chief" (145). Matters come to a head with her rejection of Adam's proposal, setting the terms of the marital agreement- she will not barter her unique self, her scarred face or skin colour to fit into the normative expectations of ideal femininity or win her suitor's favor. Adam, for his own part, goes far beyond promising eternal fidelity to Tashi; he scars his face after hers, signifying the critical breakthrough that male-female relations have achieved in the novel. In many ways, their relationship is indicative of an "emergent sexual consciousness that allows for difference without penalty or privilege" (Allan 136).

In her essay, "Breaking Chains and Encouraging Life," Walker urges her readers to espouse the rights of black lesbian women by declaring, "We are all lesbians" (qtd. in Johnson 211-212). This universalising rallying cry is audacious in its broad sweep, especially in a context where the Black Nationalist agenda dictates the unremitting glorification of a united community built exclusively around race. In calling attention to the contradictions that challenge the narrow, dogmatic definition of a positive black self, always already consolidated, stable and known, Walker gives prominence to the subversive implications of same-sex desire with a forthrightness one rarely comes across in Baldwin's novels. Celie's choice of lesbianism is politically charged because, as Lorde opines, "openly women-identified black women who are no longer dependent on men for their self-definition may well reorder our whole concept of social relationships" (521). The novel is also lesbian in the more expansive sense referenced in Adrienne Rich's concept of the "lesbian continuum," which spans a whole spectrum of "woman-identified experiences, not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman" but also "the sharing of rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny

[and] the giving and receiving of practical and political support" (239). In view of such an understanding, Celie's love for Shug forms part of a more pervasive structure of productive, mutually invigorating female bonds shared by Celie and Sofia, Celie and Nettie, Sofia and her sisters, Shug and Mary Agnes and Tashi and Olivia.

Although both *Another Country* and *The Color Purple* are implicitly critical of Black Nationalism and its denigration of sexual otherness, one may conclude that Walker emerges as far more confrontational in her political stance. In his unwillingness to depict exclusively queer characters or relationships, Baldwin, on the other hand, ends up limiting the scope of his vision. Unsurprisingly, we find that all prominent characters across his oeuvre are bisexuals: David and Giovanni in *Giovanni's Room* (1956); Rufus, Vivaldo and Eric in *Another Country* (1962); and Leo and Christopher in *Tell Me How Long the Train's Been Gone* (1968). In this, Baldwin's politics is far from radical as he refuses to move beyond questioning Black masculinity as a restrictive imperative that has tightened its noose around most American men. The significant lacuna in his position is perhaps an unequivocal assertion of the errant, deterritorializing power of same-sex desire to counteract the strangle hold of the institutions that so alienate him. Throughout his career, Baldwin insisted homosexuality was a private matter, best kept away from public view. About André Gide, he wrote disparagingly that the acclaimed French author's "homosexuality . . . was his own affair which he should have kept hidden from us" ("The Male Prison" 102); thirty years later, in the same interview with Goldstein cited above, he maintained: "It seems to me simply a man is a man, a woman is a woman, and who they go to bed with is nobody's business but theirs . . . that one's sexual preference is a private matter" (71). Walker, then can be said to explode the possibilities of a tradition of representation that Baldwin, writing in the racially explosive climate of the 1960s, could only warily, defensively inaugurate.

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