Distribution Agreement

In presenting this thesis or dissertation as a partial fulfillment of the requirements for an advanced degree from Emory University, I hereby grant to Emory University and its agents the non-exclusive license to archive, make accessible, and display my thesis or dissertation in whole or in part in all forms of media, now or hereafter known, including display on the world wide web. I understand that I may select some access restrictions as part of the online submission of this thesis or dissertation. I retain all ownership rights to the copyright of the thesis or dissertation. I also retain the right to use in future works (such as articles or books) all or part of this thesis or dissertation.

Signature:

_____ _____

Malcolm Hakeem Tariq Date

Racism, Segregation, and Interracial Sex and Intimacy
in the Protest Novels of Chester Himes and Lillian Smith

By

Malcolm Hakeem Tariq
Master of Arts

English

Lawrence Jackson, Ph.D.
Advisor

Barbara Ladd, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Mark Sanders, Ph.D.
Committee Member

Accepted:

Lisa A. Tedesco, Ph.D.
Dean of the James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies

Date

Racism, Segregation, and Interracial Sex and Intimacy in the Protest Novels of Chester Himes and Lillian Smith

By

Malcolm Tariq
B.A., Emory University, 2012

Advisor: Lawrence P. Jackson, Ph.D.

An abstract of
A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
In English
2013

Abstract

Racism, Segregation, and Interracial Sex and Intimacy
in the Protest Novels of Chester Himes and Lillian Smith

by Malcolm Hakeem Tariq

The 1940 publication of Richard Wright's *Native Son* marks the beginning of a significant era in American letters; it is credited with developing the naturalist African American protest novel. Chester Himes is often noted as a Wright's predecessor as his first two published novels are written in the same protest tradition in their examinations of racism as Himes experienced it in Los Angeles during World War II. Likewise, Lillian Smith's *Strange Fruit* explores segregation in the post-World War I South. Notably, both of these writers interrogate African American subjectivity through the framework of interracial sexual politics or intimacy. This thesis investigates how Himes and Smith advance their plots using the sexual affairs between the black and white races as tools by which to expound on larger American racial discourses. An examination of Himes's work will closely inspect how he writes the experience of the black man and his interactions with white women. I will also explain how Himes scripts anger into his black male characters and how he uses this attribute to write against the conventional hero. Quite the opposite, the black woman will be the primary subject in the inspection of Smith's novel due to how she is constructed in the white Southern imaginary and physically controlled by the Southern white man.

Racism, Segregation, and Interracial Sex and Intimacy in the Protest Novels of Chester Himes and Lillian Smith

By

Malcolm Tariq
B.A., Emory University, 2012

Advisor: Lawrence P. Jackson, Ph.D.

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
In English
2013

Acknowledgements

I would like to extend special thanks to my professors who have been instrumental in the continuous shaping of my academic endeavors and the growth of my intellectual capacity. To my colleagues in the Department of English and elsewhere who have been nothing but supportive in the midst of profound stress. To my family, whose love and guidance never let me fall. And lastly, to my dear friends near and far, who have proven to be more than I asked for and who have made the last year bearable. I blame you for my survival.

to my parents who
have given me
the tools
to build
my own house
and the love
to make it a palace

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction

"Regardless of Statistics, this every one knows: Whenever, wherever, race relations are discussed in the United States, sex moves arm in arm with the concept of segregation" (*Killers* 120). So says Lillian Smith in her book, *Killers of the Dream*. Prompted by her own experiences in the South as a white Southern woman, Smith explores how white men wheel power over African Americans, white women, and poor whites. Drawing on Smith's work, Calvin C. Herton asserts that

> The sexualization of racism in the United States is a unique phenomenon in the history of mankind; it is an anomaly of the first order. In fact, there is a sexual involvement, at once real and vicarious, connecting white and black people in America that spans the history of this country from the era of slavery to the present, an involvement so immaculate and yet so perverse, so ethereal and yet so concrete, that all race relations tend to be, however subtle, *sex* relations. (7)

Published in 1969, Hernton's *Sex and Racism in America* is one of the first book-length studies of how racism in the United States is rooted in sexual matters and attempts to makes sense of how sex governs relations between white and black Americans. He looks at "how the racism of sex in American has affected the sexual behavior of blacks and whites toward one another, and how black and white people perceive each other and themselves sexually as a result of living in a world of segregation and racial bigotry" to uncover what "we mean to each other as sexual beings" (7). While my project is not concerned with exploring racism

through examinations of individuals as sexual beings, it looks at how writers write about racism through a protest tradition. Specifically, it looks at a pattern in protest novels of the 1940s that approach racism through fictional interpretations of interracial sex and intimacy, of which Chester Himes and Lillian Smith are two key figures.

According to Stephanie Brown, "when it is approached from the vantage point of the classificatory rubric ["the tendency to periodize black literature into peaks and valleys"], the period from 1940 to at least 1952 is too easily labeled the golden age of 'protest fiction,' written by imitators of Wright, and little else" (12). Chester Himes's novels come in the wake of the successful *Native Son*, Richard Wright's 1940 protest novel most praised for bringing out the essential richness of social realism in African American fiction. Many critics of Himes's protest novels approach his texts through the lens of Wright's, placing Himes in a trajectory that mirrors his contemporary's. Moreover, although Brown is specifically referring to African American literature, Lillian Smith's *Strange Fruit* definitely fits within this framework as she is writing a form of protest in the mid-twentieth century that relates to issues related to the segregation of African Americans. The most obvious similarity among these three writers is that they each approach protesting American race relations through differing notions of interracial sexual politics. Bigger, Wright's protagonist, is accused of raping a white millionaire's daughter before murdering her. Himes's protest novels move from the landscape of Wright's urban Chicago to concentrate on racism in Los Angeles during World War II. His depictions of sexual relations between black men and white woman are perhaps the most political: they represent more than

the physical aspect of sex. Smith bares witness to the physical hold that Southern white men have over black women's bodies, painting a somewhat raw portrait of Southern segregation in post-World War I Georgia. While sexual assault in Wright's novel is a somewhat minor aspect of the plot, Himes and Smith stand out more significantly in their treatment of racism and segregation through interracial sex and intimacy.

Born in Jasper, Florida in 1897, Lillian Smith moved with her family to Clayton, Georgia in 1915. After studying at the Piedmont Institute in Demorest, Georgia (1915-1916) and the Peabody Conservatory in Baltimore (1917-1919), she taught music at a Methodist school for girls in China (1922-1925). Smith returned to Georgia in 1925 to direct Laurel Falls Camp for Girls, which was started by her father in 1920. There, with her life and work partner Paula Snellings, Smith wrote fiercely about the South in which she was reared. Publishing two novels, three memoirs, two nonfiction studies of race, and dozens of articles and speeches, Smith blossomed into an important voice of the South. None of her works proved more provocative than *Strange Fruit*.

Published in 1944, Smith's first novel is situated in the imagined city of Maxwell, Georgia. *Strange Fruit* tells the story of Tracy, a white man, and his relationship with a young black woman by the name of Nonnie. Returning from World War I, Tracy finds Nonnie waiting on him just as she had been since he left. Despite the known fact of Tracy's many trips to Colored Town to visit Nonnie, their relationship is rarely spoken of by either of their families. Their relationship is a semi-secret, though various townspeople know about where Tracy goes when he ventures across the railroad tracks. Still, when Nonnie

becomes pregnant, Tracy decides to marry Dorothy, his longtime girlfriend in White Town, and pays his friend Henry, the black son of his former nanny, to marry Nonnie. When Nonnie's older brother hears about Nonnie's relationship with Tracy and the arrangement that has been made with Henry, he murders Tracy and flees town. Although the events in the novel center on an interracial relationship, scholars have noted that the plot is most advanced by Smith's treatment of sex, white womanhood, and homosexuality, and their larger implications towards to race. In the subsequent years Smith would continue to write and publish on these themes.

Though Smith did not reconsider publishing her novel, at times she expressed apprehension about how the book would be received by her neighbors and how that reception would affect her, her family, and her summer camp. Writing to her friend, Glenn Rainey, Smith said:

> I dread what it is going to do to my family and Clayton friends and camp. It isn't a shocking book. If any one else had written it all of Clayton would take it in its stride; but because I've written it, it will seem personal somehow to them, and every nasty "blue" word in it will be as loud in their ears as if I had yelled them from Dover and Green's drugstore. I've passed the age when notoriety can take the place of commonplace and dignified relationships. Sometimes I wish I'd done it at least ten or fifteen years ago. Anyway, I'll have to sit and take it.

Smith's anxieties were not misjudged: following its publication, *Strange Fruit* was banned in Boston and received slanderous reviews by some of her fellow

Southern writers.[1] Nevertheless, her dedication to telling the truth as she saw it served as a stimulus for her to "sit and take" the criticism that she anticipated.

Smith expands on her mission to tell the truth about the horrors of Southern segregation in her next book, *Killers of the Dream* (1949). Drawing on her own experiences growing up and working in the South, *Killers* is perhaps the most direct confrontation of its day to confront the South's treatment of sex, segregation, and sin. This project is Smith's most keen personal investment in drawing out how sex and racism influence segregation. Most notably, she underlines what she calls the "ghosts relationships" that plague the South due to the association of sex with sin. The first, and foundation for all of these ghosts, is that of white men having coveted sexual relationships with black women in what she calls the "back yard."

> [T]he back-yard temptation was [...] a menace—not so much a "menace to our women" (that poisonous idea flowered later) but a menace to the basic beliefs of white culture. In the front yard was a patriarchal system; in the back yard a matriarchy. (*Killers* 112)

Through this connection, the white woman becomes associated with the front yard and all things pure. The black woman becomes quite the opposite, providing a space for white men to sexually explore what is considered deviancy. Such is the case in *Strange Fruit*. Tracy's mother, Alva, wants sexual conservativeness for her children, leading Tracy to

---

[1] *Strange Fruit* is banned for obscenity by the Boston police commissioner less than a month after its publication for Smith's use of the word "fucking" (the "blue word"). The commissioner wanted her to take out that word in addition to the scenes when Nonnie is raped and when the preacher tells Tracy to get "some good nigger to marry her." Smith does not comply. Even in her native South, Smith said that "Here at Clayton they pass the book around to each other in paper bags—furtively, sharing a piece of 'nastiness' with each other" (Gladney 83).

Dorothy and even providing him with the financial means to rid himself of Nonnie.

Through the black woman's association with sex, Smith says that "race-sex-sin spiral" takes place:

> The more trails the white man made to back-yard cabins, the higher he raised his white wife on her pedestal when he returned to the big house. The higher the pedestal, the less he enjoyed her whom he had put there, for statuses after all are only nice things to look at. More and more numerous became the little trails of escape from the sanctuary and more and more intricately they began to weave in and out of southern life. Guilt, shame, fear, lust spiraled each other. (*Killers* 116-117)

In dissecting the sexualized body, Smith attempts to take apart the body of American history, bringing to light a past rooted in sex as stimulated by a white male power that even plagues present-day relations.

Though writing at the same time as Smith, Chester Himes explores sex in a much different manner. Born in 1909 in Ohio, Chester Himes is reared both in the Midwest and in the South, and is therefore acquainted with the segregated terrain from which Smith is writing. However, it is his relocation to Los Angeles that inspires his first novel, *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945). As Himes says in the first volume of his autobiography, *The Quality of Hurt*, he wrote his "bitter novel of protest" because "Los Angeles hurt me racially as much as any city I have ever known—much more than any city I remember from the South" (75, 73). Indeed, it is this bitterness that his works of protest are often criticized for. Patsy

Graves gives the novel a favorable review, citing that Himes has "brilliantly succeeded in showing how it feels, day by day, to be a Negro constantly pitted against a white world." The main character, Bob, "is so pathological as not to be typical, perhaps, but there is hardly a sane Negro in America who does not feel, at some time or another, that he has had enough shoving around on account of the color of his skin" (Graves 99). It is for this very reason that James Baldwin finds fault with the novel, which is not good and "more than a tract, relentlessly honest, and carried by the fury and the pain of the man who wrote it" (Baldwin 3). Baldwin sees Himes's book as being concerned with the roles that rage and tension associated with white guilt play into what he calls the "American dilemma" (3). Both Graves and Baldwin point to an issue dealing with rage: Graves defends Bob's rage while Baldwin dismisses it, citing Himes's second, *Lonely Crusade* (1947), as nothing but a continuation of this misdirected anger. Critics and readers challenge this book even more so than they did *If He Hollers*. The main character, Lee Gordon, is condemned for succumbing to fear and the racial backlash he receives throughout his life, most specifically at work. Philip Butcher thinks the novel "unconvincing" and that Lee was an introvert "so sensitive to race and sex and even tactual impressions as to be a psychopathic case" (Butcher 23).

Nevertheless, Stephanie Brown considers Himes to be the postwar African American writer most obsessed with the protest novel. Himes is most criticized for offering hate-charged men who are angry at white people. But it is in this fashion that Brown notes that Himes "recognized the limits the growing imperative to write in the protest genre placed in black writers' aesthetic and

political expression. In form as well as content, Himes illustrates generic constraint as well as discriminatory practices, protesting, in effect, the protest form itself" (42).

Both of Himes's protest novels are centered on the daily lives of young working class African-American who have leadership roles in their places of employment. In an interview with Hoyt Fuller, Himes described the main parts of the theme of *Lonely Crusade* as concerned with "a Negro organizer in Los Angeles during the war, and [...] the relationships between the Jews and Blacks, between Communists and unions" (Fuller 6). While the novel is indeed about all of these associations, critics fail to note the most apparent similarity between the novels: Although Himes is exploring issues of race, labor, and politics, most notable is the complex of how interracial heterosexuality is acted out. In both instances Himes's black men are devoted, either through marriage or a nearly exclusive relationship, to a black woman. Upon the introduction of a white woman to the plot, the main character's psyche is then disrupted and he becomes attracted to her in some way, sometimes straining his relationship with the black woman. However, while the white woman is wanted for sex, she is not wanted for intimacy. Yet, the black men of Himes's protest novels are not sexually attracted to white women. The white women are often targeted and yearned for either because of something lacking in the black men's lives or for the mere reason that they are restricted from the men under a racialized wartime America. While he is drawn to her, he also hates her for the fact of her whiteness and how she uses it against him. Critical reception of these men only focuses on the anger that fuel their desire and hate. But just as Brown notes Himes's subversion of the protest

novel, my argument is that the anger in these novels are indicators of greater psychological issues, such as fear and failure, that result from Himes's past experiences in racist World War II America. Himes particularly cites this time as the essential turning point in American race relations (Brown 46). He writes in his autobiography that

> I had written what I thought was a story of the fear that inhabits the minds of all blacks who live in America, and the various impacts on this fear precipitated by communism, industrialism, unionism, the war, white women, and marriage within the race. It was not too big a scope; this was our daily life during the war. I did not record a single event that I hadn't known to happen; the characters were people who either lived or could have lived; the situations were commonplace. (*Quality* 101)

These sentiments are played out through anger in the world of Chester Himes. He uses interracial sexual encounters in these novels to magnify the extent to which wartime racism psychologically affects black men.

Even in his negative review of *Lonely Crusade*, James Baldwin says that one of its strengths is "the handling of the white girls' relation to Lee [and] Lee's sexual relationship with his wife" (4). While the novels are very much so concentrated on racism and its institutional implications, it is through his relationships with a committed black woman and the decoyed white woman that the black man's subjectivity emerges.

The categorization of Chester Himes and Lillian Smith's novels as protest fiction can be defined by the content of the work and the writers' personal

investments in publishing it. Himes says that he is obsessed with two things in his writings: "BLACK PROTEST" and "BLACK HETEROSEXUALITY" (*Black on Black* 7). He also explicitly says that his first two novels are works of protest as they detail the forms of racial oppression he unexpectedly met in Los Angeles. These novels, especially *If He Hollers*, scream with an anger that Himes wants his readers to recognize and wrestle with. Contrarily, Smith's novel is at once a soft-spoken while still managing to maintain a deafening timbre. And despite her enduring engagement with the South that she calls home, writing this novel was a difficult task for Smith to achieve. In her correspondence it is easy to see that she was often conflicted about the direction the novel was taking during its initial drafting. She was also unsure about the theme, saying, "I am disappointed in it. My theme is bigger than I am. That is the trouble" (19 May 1941). When asked what she wanted her novel to do, Smith responded that she hoped it would

> quicken [readers'] awareness of the complexities of personality; that it arouse their imaginations so that they will think of our people, white and colored, as human beings, not as 'problems'. It was written, not for a short-range 'purpose'. It was written because its author wanted to put on paper her feelings, her knowledge, of a little southern town and its people; to set down the 'truth' about human relationships as she sees it; to re-state in simple, contemporary terms that ancient, three-fold struggle between man, and his home and his world; to state, perhaps more explicitly, the paradoxical question: how can a man be sane in an insane culture? ("Lillian Smith answers questions")

Smith's appropriation of a novel with a purpose moves her work beyond a production of art for art's sake as she was very conscious of it being misinterpreted by potential publishers. For her, *Strange Fruit* is intended to call attention to historic myth and oppression that still plagues the people and area about which she often writes. Or, as Kimberly S. Drake puts it,

> Protest writers of [the early- and mid-twentieth century] used their literary talent to involve their readers in the imaginative experience not only of social oppression but of the victim's struggle to understand, manage, or resist that oppression. In doing so, they hoped to compel readers toward analysis and action of the mechanisms and effects of social oppression; in particular, they demand that readers reexamine not only their own class and racial biases but also the concept of social deviance and its concomitant processes of categorization and judgment. (3)

Smith calls her readers to "analysis and action" through a great interest in psychology. Drawing out Smith's deep engagement in psychology, most especially child psychology and the works of Karl Menniger, Jay Garcia notes that her studies led her to cultivate "innovative interpretations of the languages of race and made possible a concerted exploration of 'whiteness' as a locus of cultural power and social coercion" (103). Even the publication of *Strange Fruit* was met with Smith's publishing company advertising her as a writer whose career history included work as a child psychologist, which Garcia demonstrates was mostly likely also due to her job overseeing the summer camp for young girls. Likening Smith's novel to a psychological foundation "implied greater openness in

discussions of sexuality, an ability to explore the emotional conditions that nurtured social prejudices, and a general inclination to challenge conventional interpretations of the modern world" (116).

This project is investigates the significance of interracial sex and intimacy in the protest novels of the 1940s. Chester Himes and Lillian Smith are exemplary subjects for such a focus because their novels were so popular among the general public in spite of their taboo subject matter[2]. It must be noted that while Himes is writing a black experience, it is not from "the minds of all blacks who live in America" as claimed in his autobiography, but from that of a black man (*Quality* 101). While he does make room for black women, it is not so much from their point of view or an articulate analysis of how they are affected by racism and other everyday challenges that they face. For this reason, the examination of Himes's work will closely inspect how he writes the experience of the black man and his interactions with white women. I will also explain how Himes scripts anger into his black male characters and how he uses this attribute to write against the conventional hero. Quite the opposite, the black woman will be the primary subject in the inspection of Smith's novel. Though it is without a doubt a dense text and can be approached from a variety of angles, Smith's most powerful rendering is the plight of the black woman as she is constructed in the white Southern imaginary and physically controlled by the Southern white man.

---

[2] Smith's novel becomes a best seller and a staged adaption travels to cities in Canada and Northeastern cities before opening on Broadway. Smith makes enough money from the play to keep it on Broadway longer than anticipated. While Himes's novels don't bring him as much financial success, they are highly reviewed (though mostly negatively) and bring him to the attention of many other writers and literary figures. He is also presented with writing and publishing opportunities such as being invited to Yaddo, an artists' colony in New York.

Chapter 1

Fear, Failure, and Encounters of Interracial Sex in Chester Himes's *If He Hollers Let Him Go* and *Lonely Crusade*

The protest fiction of Chester Himes can readily be identified by its anger and bitterness. His first novel, *If He Hollers Let Him Go*, is perhaps his most charged fictional response to West Coast racism as he experienced it in Los Angeles during World War II. The beginning of the novel finds Bob Jones in bed. Before waking up to start his day, Bob has a cycle of dreams concerning a dog, a job search, and a lieutenant looking for a big crippled man accused of murder. Even though he can feel himself waking up, he tries his best to keep his eyes closed, "feeling scared in spite of hiding from the day. It came along with consciousness." Eventually, though, Bob will have to "get up and die" (3). Bob's fear is rooted in racial discourse, for he feels "torn inside, shrivelled, paralysed" by the very fact that he is a black man in wartime America. For Bob to "wake and die" suggests that he cannot function in American society as he would like to, it stifles him. But this feeling is one that he did not experience before coming to Los Angeles in the fall of 1941. Bob identifies the war as the ultimate cause of his stress, insisting that "since I'd been made a leaderman out at the Atlas Shipyard it was really getting me. Maybe I'd been scared all my life, but I didn't know about it until after Pearl Harbour" (*Hollers* 3). Describing his outlook since the bombing, he feels that white people's hatred of people of color is what inspires a hatred of white people in him.

> After that it was everything. It was the look in the white people's faces when I walked down the streets. It was that crazy, wild-eyed,

> unleashed hatred that the first Jap bomb on Pearl Harbour let loose in a flood. All that tight, crazy feeling of race as thick in the streets as gas fumes. Every time I stepped outside I saw a challenge I had to accept or ignore. Every day I had to make one decision a thousand times: *Is it now? Is now the time?* [...] I could always feel race trouble, serious trouble, never more than two feet off. Nobody bothered me. Nobody said a word. But I was tensed every moment to spring.

Here Bob details that even though the Japanese bombed the United States, Americans turned hostile toward all minorities, including African Americans. This tension is so great that Bob anticipates the moment when he will respond drastically after being accosted by some form of racial hatred. This is the decision he has to make: when to come out of complacency and confront racism in the same manner that he is essentially being assaulted. Even though no one white person in particular is creating "race trouble" for Bob, it's the overall tension in his relationships with larger institutions that he is particularly worried about. This is why Bob is more anxious after being made a leaderman in the shipyard. Although he has more access to administration, he is more vulnerable to racism from his supervisors and most especially from his fellow leadermen and co-workers who work under him. He faces losing his job if the time ever comes for him to react so strongly on the worksite.

Alice, his girlfriend, is the only person that can help Bob through his frustrations with white America. He describes her as a "warm, intelligent, confident [...] really fine chick" he enjoyed looking at. Coming from a prominent

family in the black community, Alice is a kind of woman Bob would expect to look him over. Her father is a doctor and, while Bob only finished two years of college, Alice is a college graduate and works as a social worker. She is poised even among friends and colleagues, attending lectures, hosting discussions in her home, and serving as president of a local chapter of her sorority. Even though Bob is unsure why Alice would want to date a guy like him, he relishes their union.

> It set me up to have a chick like her. It gave me a personal pride to have her for my girl. And then I was proud of her too. Proud of the way she looked, the appearance she made among white people; proud of what she demanded from white people, and the credit they gave her; and her position and prestige among her own people. (6)

Because of this, Alice is set apart from Bob's racial anxieties. When lying in bed avoiding the world, he tries to "just drift on my thoughts as long as they touch her" for if they did he would "begin to wonder, maybe to doubt her" (6). Though at times he does question Alice's commitment to their relationship and starts his fair share of disagreements with her, Bob knows that he needs her. Alice represents a type of black sophistication that Bob only hopes he can one day attain. While she knows that blacks are discriminated against, she never lets this disturb her daily life's activities.

Bob, on the other hand, cannot keep an appropriate temper suited for his position on the job when confronted by racist rhetoric. One day Bob asks a white woman, Madge, to help him with a project. Instead of fabricating an excuse like the other white men who Bob previously asked, Madge hastily responds, "I ain't gonna work with no nigger!" To this, Bob calls her a "cracker bitch" and walks

away (27). Bob is soon reprimanded for his anger and demoted from his leadership position. Madge remains unpunished. What is most interesting here is that Bob immediately knew that this interaction would not be an easy one. He says that as soon as he saw the "big, peroxide blonde" that "she was going to perform then—we would both perform" (27). The performance made possible by this situation requires Madge to first cast a hostile approach toward Bob. Because she is a white woman this means accusing him of some form of assault that he didn't commit. Bob, in return, must try to meander his way out of the situation, as white men will surely come to Madge's rescue.

When an indignant Bob is later detailing the event to a white male co-worker, the man gives him Madge's address for him to possibly "cure" Madge.

> I wanted to tell him that I didn't want to go bed with her, I wanted to black her eyes; but just the idea of her being a white woman stopped me. I felt flustered, caught, guilty. I couldn't realize what was happening to me, myself. It was funny in a way. I couldn't tell him that I *didn't* want her because she was a white woman and he was a white man, and something somewhere way back in my mind said that would be an insult. And I couldn't tell him that I *did* want her, because the same thing said that that would be an insult too. (119)

No matter what Bob decides to do, the outcome will render the same results. Bob feels as if he is being manipulated and controlled not only by the white man, but by Madge as well. After this encounter she unknowingly exerts a hold over Bob that he cannot decipher. Moreover, it also after this idea that Madge is in

need of a "cure" that Bob conceptualizes her as a sexual object, not a sexual being. When Bob describes Alice it is as one would describe a woman, especially a woman that one wants to or already knows on a sexual basis. Conversely, the language used to describe Madge is often such that likens her to an animal or some unnamable force.

Some time after their first encounter Bob goes to approach Madge in the shipyard to tell her that they should "stop all this jive and get together like we want," but he stops himself once he finds her. He reasons to himself that as a white woman that is just what she wants, for him to want her, but still he "wanted her then more than I wanted all the Alices in the world" (124). Bob calls himself a coward after failing to approach Madge as he initially set out to do. Realizing that he is being manipulated, he notes how he "never knew before how good a job the white folks had done on me" (124). Thus, he is only determined to obtain Madge because he is forbidden to do so in the first place. For Bob to attain the white woman means he has done something America has prohibited him from obtaining.

In this same fashion Hernton analyses the sexual relations between black men and white women like Bob and Madge. Like Lillian Smith, he maintains that the white southern woman remains unsexualized as white men direct their sexual energies toward black women. Out of guilt they condemn black women for these sexual acts and engage their white women in the myth that sex is essentially a sin. Hernton claims that "It was in this way, out of the sheer necessity for sexual release and expression, that the southern white woman fixed her fantasies upon the most feared sexual symbol of her times—the Negro male" (19). Furthermore,

"The Negro man is secretly tormented every second of his wakeful life by the presence of white women in his midst, whom he cannot or had better not touch" (4). Hernton's preoccupations here are concentrated on the physical. Though Himes seems to be arranging a sexualized attraction between his black men and white women, it is solely a psychological attraction on the behalf of the men; they are not interested in sex with white women because they are sexually attracted to them.

Bob claims that Madge's color is not the conscious force behind his fascination of her:

> It wasn't that Madge was white; it was the way she used it. She had a sign up in front of her big as Civic Centre—KEEP AWAY, NIGGERS, I'M WHITE! And without having to say one word she could keep all the white men in the world feeling they had to protect her from black rapists. That made her doubly dangerous because she thought about Negro men. I could tell that the first time I saw her. She wanted them to run after her. She expected it, demanded it as her due. I could imagine her teasing them with her body, showing her bare thighs and breasts. Then having them lynched for looking.
>
> And that was what scared me. Luring me with her body and daring me with her colour. It ate into me, made me want her for her colour, not her body. In order to have her I'd have to challenge her colour (126)

At one point he says he should rape her. And even then it isn't because he thinks that Madge believes he will. It isn't a payment for her hostility toward him. Rape in this context functions as an assertion of power. Madge is something that Bob must wrestle with, physically and mentally. On one occasion, he visits her personal residence in hopes of winning her over. They start wrestling and Madge tells Bob to rape her before he even says anything related to sex. What looks like sexual tension here is actually a means for Madge to live out her own sexual fantasy. Hernton says that some black men "risk their lives for white flesh, and an occasional few actually commit rape" (4). Bob is only after Madge's white flesh because he is manipulated into thinking that it's what he wants. He immediately recognizes this after Madge tells him to rape her and leaves her room before she has the chance to accuse him of anything.

Hernton continues that the white woman's "preoccupation with rape was (and is) not only a grotesque fantasy, but also an accurate index of her sexual deprivation. The Negro became (and still is) the scapegoat of the ideology of sex and racism as it was (and is) accepted by the white woman in southern culture. While she did not actually lynch and castrate Negroes herself, she permitted her men to do so in her name" (19). In *If He Hollers*, Himes is deliberately subverting the idea of black-committed sexual violence. Where rape is seen as a violent act, one rooted in asserting a certain power over another individual, Himes writes it as it is actually envisioned by white America. In other words, although it is assumed that Bob, the black man, craves Madge, the white woman, so much that he is willing to rape her, Himes writes that white women like Madge want to use

rape as a means to trap black men in order to live out a sexual fantasy they are denied.

Lonely Crusade's Lee Gordon's fear is even more pronounced than Bob's. While Bob is cognizant that he is being manipulated by his white coworkers, Lee Gordon is constantly trying to discover the differences between him and white women. He does not know what Lee does: that he is being psychologically controlled by white America. Because of this, Lee's fear remains the driving force behind his failure. This fear is developed early in his childhood, the first substantial failure occurring when he is the only black student in his Pasadena, California classroom. He senses that he is not the same as everyone else, but wonders if this is due to other reasons besides his race. After hearing some talk from other boys about the differences in the vaginas of girls according to race, Lee decides to hide in the girls' bathroom one day to see for himself. He discovers no difference among his classmates, but is caught in his quest and expelled from school. Lee's family is forced by neighbors to move away from the town. His parents tell him that there is no difference between him and white people, that he could do just as good if he proved that he could. Lee is not so easily convinced:

> He came to feel that the guilt or innocence of anything he might do would be subject wholly to the whim of white people. It stained his whole existence with a sense of sudden disaster hanging just above his head, and never afterwards could he feel at ease in the company of white people. (*Lonely* 34)

Lee takes this anxiety with him throughout his schooling, and insists that by the time he graduated high school "he had never said more than a dozen words to

any white girl in his class" (*Lonely* 34). Where he first dismisses all white people, he later specifically mentions that he rarely spoke to white girls. This instance marks the beginning of Himes's preoccupation with Lee's sexual relations.

His second failure comes when Lee graduates from college and cannot find work. Like many other African Americans Lee is only able to find work in the domestic sector, one that he refuses to enter. Yet, while he sits at home waiting on what he considers to be a suitable job for a college graduate, his mother goes to work as a domestic servant in a white person's home. His "Hunger and this constant refusal of employment" are factors of failure that transform into a dominating fear of even greater failures. Lee becomes especially afraid after his mother dies and he has no more financial support to continue living without a job:

> Afraid at first of giving in and working as a servant just to live. Then afraid of what would happen to him if he didn't. Of becoming a thief, a panderer, or worse, an Uncle Tom.
>
> Afraid that some day when he felt on the ragged edge of desperation one of the rife blond receptionists with the revealing blouses, carried on a quarter-hour telephone conversation, would look up and say impatiently: "Why in heaven's name can't you people realize we cannot use you?"
>
> And he would lean across the table and slap her.
>
> Afraid of the sudden, fearful penalty that he would have to pay. The entire Negro race would have to pay it with him. And if he

> was still alive when the police got through with him, he would feel like a traitor to a cause.
>
> Just a pure and simple fear of the white folks and the days. (*Lonely* 37)

Lee is not only afraid of not finding work, but even more terrified that constant rejection in spite of his qualifications will result in an angered and violent confrontation on his part. Besides graduating from college, the only success that Lee credits to himself is marrying his wife, Ruth. Still, both failure and fear follow him into this new part of his life despite the pride he has in this accomplishment. If anything, they occupy an even greater presence in his married life with Ruth.

The beginning of the novel finds Lee awake in bed with a sleeping Ruth, thinking about his new job organizing black workers for a labor union. This is an important job for Lee because he is the first black man chosen to lead a Los Angeles union. He becomes aware of what his position means not only to him, but for his race as well. Lee's promotion to this job is an important step for the black race because it marks another avenue that they are venturing into and Lee serves as leader of this transition. His anticipation causes him to feel uncomfortable:

> For now the very thing that had, at first, inspired [his happiness] brought a sudden fear. The elation at having secured this job was now replaced by the frightening realization that he, a Negro, was holding it—that he had once again crossed in the competitive white world where he would be subjected to every abuse concocted in the minds of white people to harass and intimidate Negroes. (*Lonely* 4)

Lee anticipates abuse on his new job on account of his race. Again, his fear is driving him to restless thoughts that are explicitly manifestations of hate. He hates the "urge in him that always sent him sowing in the fields, [...] his fear, [...] and himself for feeling it" (*Lonely* 4). These are almost the exact feelings that Lee has when searching for work and being rejected by a blond receptionist. Both instances are marked by an intensified repeating tension between fear and hate.

Interestingly, the only remedy for Lee's anxiety is sexual intercourse. His fear causes him so much stress that he becomes angry at Ruth for being able to sleep when he is under so much stress, "making herself distasteful to him so that she would be presentable on her job" (*Lonely* 5). It is during times like this, when he is faced with the weight of fear, that he desires sex. Fear is functioning as a "sense of depression that reduced him to sterility as if castrated by it" (*Lonely* 7). Sex is the cure for his depression and the only thing that can annul his castration. It is what will make him feel like a man again and something over which he has direct control. He cannot regulate his feelings of fear, much less the resulting hate. Lee attempts to arouse Ruth into intercourse, but she refuses him on more than one instance. He eventually forces her for the sole reason that she is his wife, "the vessel of his impotency, into whom he must release his slow numbing sense of panic" (*Lonely* 9). It is Ruth's job to assuage Lee's fear, but even after intercourse Lee feels no different; the fear is still there. He has failed at providing sexual pleasure for the act was "self-abuse, repulsive" and "unemotional." (*Lonely* 9)

Ruth's job is of more concern in this situation because it is provides her with her own sense of independence and she is able to sleep because it does not

require her to experience so much stress. Lee is awake thinking about a job that is suppose to take care of the both of them; he wants to be the sole breadwinner. In this way, marriage is supposed to provide him with protection, so that he would not have to be afraid of white women ever again. But Ruth's job and his unemployment "only changed the pattern of his fear." Whereas before he was afraid to speak to white women, now he experiences "the fear of being unable to support and protect his wife in a world where white men could do both." It is precisely what he fails at in his marriage to Ruth that he attempts to find in his affair with his white mistress, Jackie. (*Lonely* 39)

Lee meets Jackie one night at a party attended by mostly white communists. Even though this is their first time meeting, Lee kisses Jackie and follows her home with both parties aware of Lee's marriage. Although he does not know this, he is drawn to Jackie because he is still searching for the differences between them, the same quest that results in his early expulsion from school. Jackie and Lee have a disagreement on that first night and when she tells him that he should go, he attempts to sexually force himself on her. Jackie refuses, but Lee insists that she has been trying to get him all night and now she has a chance at him. Lee sees this as a power struggle and he wants to prove to Jackie that he is more powerful than she believes. He refuses to be dismissed on Jackie's terms because she is a white woman. He does not want her to feel as if she has so much control over him that he can be called upon and dismissed at any time she pleases. Inside he knows he is being foolish for refusing to leave the apartment, but Jackie's refusal of him inspires a

> crazy, tearing sense of desperation—the knowledge that he was again being a fool, that he had always been a fool, and was unable to restrain himself from doing so. He was furious with himself for this sense of confusion…this awful necessity of facing his dilemma in reality, instead of blindly revolting against it, that provoked in him the impulse to hurt her, dominate her, subdue her and bend her to his will. She was here, and she was white, and there was no one else to take it out on but himself. (*Lonely* 108)

Lee's dilemma is that he wants to control his actions when he feels compelled to act on them. His failures are a part of his dilemma because some of them could have been avoided had he been content with not trying to uncover the mystery of the white woman. This is why Lee cannot leave Jackie without gaining some form of victory, it presents another goal at which he has failed. If he cannot win the initial argument, then taking control of her physically will suffice. Yet, this internal struggle for control is something that Lee cannot understand. Jackie presents Lee with the opportunity to explore this. Like the young girls from his elementary school, Jackie is a white woman who Lee cannot directly comprehend. As a child he wondered if white women possessed a secret that adult white people would be afraid of a black boy like him discovering, something "in their make-up that once discovered would bring them shame" (*Lonely* 34). He is moreover interested in the mystery of their situation and why, as a black man, he is publicly denied access to white women.

Lee already feels ashamed of his failures, which are in part why he has some of the fears that he does. He is looking forward to finding out the shameful

past of the white woman because it will, once and for all, place them in the same reality, remedying some of his fear. For Jackie to experience shame in the same way that Lee does, disables the fear that he has of her. Instead, they would both face a fear, though not necessarily a common one. She will no longer be superior to him in the same way that she was when Lee tries to assert his sexuality on her. There would no longer be a need for him to prove to her that he is capable of such masculinity. He gets close to connecting with Jackie on this level just one time. A certain situation leaves Lee's job in a tragic state and Jackie expelled from the Communist Party. She thought she was safe, protected, but finds herself in the same situation as Lee: exiled in controversy. When Lee comes to comfort her, Jackie accepts his companionship. Because Lee finds that "it was Jackie was now needed comforting re-created the image of all white women in his mind and changed completely the structure of his own emotions" (*Lonely* 279). Lee recognizes that both he and Jackie are in vulnerable states at this point for the Communist Party and the union are against them. Even in this polemic Lee is lost in a somewhat ecstasy because he can finally feel Jackie as a person who understands his fear and the pain it brings him. Through this, he comes to love her "desperately, violently, and completely" (*Lonely 279*). He cannot love Ruth in this same manner because Ruth does not comprehend such pain. She cannot connect with Lee on such a level because she has her own security and does not require any extra protection or comfort from Lee like Jackie does. To Lee, Ruth has no fear because she is able to protect herself. Where he once had protection in his marriage and his job, both are now failing him. Jackie was protected by the Communist Party, which eventually dismissed her. Even though in their current

states he and Jackie are lost, Lee feels that their love can overcome this for his fear has subsided. He has found that level of existence on which he and the white woman are both equally situated.

The white woman in Himes's protest fiction thus presents herself as confusion for black men. They are attracted to her for unconventional reasons. In *If He Hollers*, Bob is being psychologically manipulated to believe that he is sexually attracted to her when he actually is not. In *Lonely Crusade*, she confronts Lee with his own fears and failures. It is therefore the case, more so with Lee than Bob, that Edward Margolies claims that "In a society where the man is expected to support and protect his women, the Negro male who finds himself unable to do so for caste and economic reasons may turn for solace to the white woman." For both men, Margolies agrees that the desire of Himes's male characters for white women is "often mixed with hate, since she is viewed as the original cause of their parish status." Bob figures out that his bitterness arises from this psychological confusion while Lee continues to vacillate in it. (Margolies 93)

Figuring the Hero: Bitterness, Hate, and the Persisting Fear

A frequent critique of Himes's black men is that they are bitter. Carl Milton Hughes says that Lee "advances the notion that Negro personality will be destroyed in the realistic world of practical affairs…[and] must hate everyone and everything in order to survive or to achieve individuality." Because of this, he develops a hate for "everyone and everything in order to survive or to achieve individuality." Hughes asserts that such a portrayal offers no solution to the

problems facing blacks or whites living in America (Hughes 73). But even though Himes presents Lee as resentful of certain characters at times, he does not initially make Lee committed to hating them for it is only due to his fear that he comes to hate at all. In his 1946 paper 'The Psychological Approach to Race Relations," Horace Cayton suggests that the African American mentality is centered by a fear-hate-fear-complex:

> "For [the Negro], punishment in the actual environment is ever present; violence, psychological and physical, leaps at him from every side. The personality is brutalized by an unfriendly environment. This reinforces and intensifies the normal insecurity he feels as a person living in our highly complex society. Such attacks on his personality lead to resentment and hatred of the white man. However, the certain knowledge that he will be punished if his emotions are discovered produces a feeling of guilt for having such emotions. Fear leads to hate; but the personality recoils with an intensified and compound fear. (16)

Cayton's proposition is that Lee's initial fear is caused by bad experiences in his childhood. For example, in getting expelled from school as a child, Lee is afraid of failing and being dismissed by white people again in his adult life. Lee feels this fear and becomes upset about it. He starts to hate white people. However, he then feels fear again that his hatred will be discovered by white people and that he will consequently be punished for it. A good instance of this is when Lee is constantly being rejected for jobs after he graduates college. When he imagines leaning across a table and slapping a white receptionist, he suddenly becomes fearful of a

penalty that he may have to pay. Lee comes to hate white people because they make him fearful, a feeling he hates himself for experiencing.

Likewise, Bob first fears not Madge, but the restrictions that discriminatory racism has placed on him and the choices he is allowed the make and those he should stay clear of. Madge is an example of a choice that Bob should not make. Restraining himself on behalf of this knowledge, Bob hates both the system that created such rules and himself for being subjected to them. Nevertheless, the resulting fear is of himself and what he will do, for when Bob turns from Madge he goes in the direction of a white guy who he's been after for more than half of the novel. The man beats Bob nearly unconscious during a lunch break because of a game of craps. Bob is so determined to get his revenged that he follows him home, pointing a gun at him. If he cannot get Madge he will at least get his revenge on "my white boy." Again, the question is raised: Is this the event in which he responds with a violent reaction and white American gets ahold of him legally?

Himes is purposefully not painting a complacent picture of Lee's nor Bob's situation. Stephanie Brown notes that Himes is less optimistic about race relations improving than his contemporaries and is therefore not trying to give answers to blacks living in white America. What he offers instead is a treatise on how the black American, specifically the black man, comes to encounter the American experience that he is currently subjected to. Himes's men go to the extremes to which racism drives them, an ultimate mental imprisonment that they cannot escape. Himes's black readers probably are not favorable of his method of using the white woman to explain such a situation, for offering his

hero no escape from the bonds of a white woman renders him especially weak. Because of this, he seems to be no hero at all to black men.

In his 1946 essay, "The Negro Writer as Spokesperson: Disentangling His Race from the White Man's Pattern," Harry Overstreet articulates that for the black writer to succeed he must engage characters that go against the grain of stereotypical depictions of African Americans. To Overstreet, the most "prevalent image we have of the Negro is that of the shiftless, no-account, lazy individual [...] who is quite incapable of organizing his work" (26). His claim is that black writers should be very concerned with creating new images of African Americans who embody the same standards as white fictional characters. This shift in black representation will move white Americans to accept black Americans in larger society and, thus, create a more harmonic atmosphere for African Americans. To illustrate his claim, Overstreet names the images of blacks that should be written into fiction. One of these images is that of the hero.

> Negro history has had its brave leaders, fighting for their people under the most heartbreaking conditions. But bravery is not confined to Negro leaders. It is part of the everyday conditions of Negro life. Every Negro boy, from the very beginning of his life, has to learn that he is in the midst of dangers and that he has to make his way through life in spite of them. (Overstreet 26)

Although Overstreet makes the statement that white Americans love to witness bravery, his image of the black hero is also meant to offer hope to the black experience in America.

Himes is not interested in extending this specific notion of the hero in his protest novels. The ideologies of Overstreet and Himes enter into conversation when Himes delivers his 1948 lecture, "Dilemma of the Negro Novelist in the United States." To Himes, the foremost job of the black writer is to write the truth because it is what ultimately informs the writer of their position as an African American in a country dominated by white citizens.

> "The Negro writer, more than any other,[…] must discover from his experiences the truth of his oppressed existence in terms that will provide some meaning to his life. Why he is here; why he continues to live. In fact, this writer's subject matter is in reality a Negro's search for truth." (Himes 52)

Himes must write the truth because it will serve a better purpose than to equate the black American to the white American, as Overstreet puts forth. A black American without knowledge of what is true about himself and his situation will be "forever veiled in mystery" and "heir to all the weird interpretations of his personality" (Himes 53). A black writer not writing the truth is lost, even (or maybe especially if) he uses false images to situate himself on a level of white American acceptance.

Himes's position is nearly the same that W.E.B. Du Bois takes in 1926 when he publishes "Criteria for Negro Art." Du Bois thinks that all art should be used for propaganda. He says that the white public asks that white writers produce art with "racial pre-judgment [that] deliberately distorts Truth and Justice, as far as colored races are concerned." In this same respect, it is his opinion that black people want to follow in the vein of the white public, which will

result in black writers producing "prophets almost equally unfree." Overstreet is advocating that black writers render such fictional prophets so that they will be better accepted by whites. Du Bois thinks that such a proposition results in black people being ashamed of their customs and insists that "Our worst side has been so shamelessly emphasized that we are denying we have or ever had a worst side" (Du Bois 573). This "worst side" includes the image of the "shiftless, no-account, lazy individual" that Overstreet speaks of. However, Du Bois is concerned with black people judging art for themselves and accepting the art they produce for their own use. This is his method for liberating the African American image in fiction and painting true portraits. It is the only way to "make ourselves free of mind, proud of body and just of soul to all men" (Du Bois 574).

The truth that Himes ascribes is that no matter how much his black men try to succeed, they will always be inhibited by psychological fears developed through their experiences in racist America. Thus, he is not interested in portraying heroes, but presenting black characters that are representative of individuals dealing with being black in white worlds. His men cannot resurrect themselves by novel's end because they are caught in a system that does not allow them to. Moreover, the formula that Himes presents locates the white woman as the greatest influence for the failure of the black man. While the white woman is not the sole reason for his downfall, she is most certainly the catalyst behind it. Although Lee knows that he is a black man, he doesn't fully understand the ramifications of living in a white man's world. There are certain lines that he will never cross, one of which is successfully living among white people without racial prejudice. In some way or another, Lee will continue to be exploited and only

after realizing this by the novel's conclusion can Lee understand his fear and rise above his failure. Conversely, Bob is fully aware of his fear and the manipulation that he is subjected to. Even after trying to settle with Alice to escape the trap that Madge is setting up for him, he is caught in one of her lies and sentenced to another of his fears as punishment, joining the army. Himes uses the interracial sexual encounter to detail that under racism the black man's fate cannot be controlled by him. No matter how much he tries to overcome the white woman, she will find a way to bring about his social demise.

Chapter 2

Southern Segregation and the Control of Black Women's Bodies in Lillian Smith's *Strange Fruit*

Lillian Smith's figuring of politics surrounding the black body does not begin with the black subject itself. In her psychological work on her White Town characters, Smith comes to formulate how white boys develop into white men who sexually exploit and abuse black women. In *Strange Fruit*, Smith asks what happens when a white man falls in love with a black woman in an era where he is prohibited from doing so. Smith portrays Tracy's love for Nonnie through a tangled veil, for he at once professes his love while physically hurting her.

To his mother, Alma, Tracy is a near failure. Having completed only half a year of college, he has not prepared himself for any career. Although he does serve in World War I, he has returned home with no clear plan for his future and no intention of making one. Alma's primary preoccupation is Tracy's fate. She wants him to accept God, marry a white woman, and settle down with a decent occupation. Tracy shows no interest in any of these as he also nearly refuses to go to church and remains ambivalent about his relationship with his longtime girlfriend, Dorothy (Dottie) Pusey. Everyone assumes that Tracy will marry Dorothy upon his return from the war because she has waited on him for so long. Tracy shows no keen interest in Dottie, but as a white man from a respectable family he is expected to maintain a certain level of decency if he expects to remain in White Town.

As in *Killers*, Smith links sex with religion in *Strange Fruit*, arguing that the South related sex to sinning. It is sacrilegious to engage in sexual relations

outside of that which is necessary to produce children. Sexual pleasure should be avoided at all costs. Moreover, it is through white women's refusal to take part in such a sexuality that lends this blasphemous behavior to black women. Such is the topic of conversation when Alma makes an appointment for Preacher Dunwoodie to speak to Tracy and inspire him to do as he should. Tracy learns that the ultimate way for him to begin a righteous life is for him to "join the church, marry that fine little Pusey girl, set up housekeeping and make her a good living" (67). The preacher tells him that most colored girls go on to find a man of their own race and "maybe marry him. Live a fairly decent, respectable life—that is, if a nigger woman can live a decent, respectable life." (59). Blacks are thus not moral in their mating rituals, according to many in White Town. Moreover, the preacher's claim about black women's sexual practices puts the blame on black women, removing white men such as himself from the situation entirely. Black women are essentially a sickness that white men must overcome even though many young men explore lust in Colored Town. The preacher says that "That's youth and the devil," but "once you make up your mind to leave Colored women alone and stick to your own kind, you soon get weaned" (59).

The act of weaning here can be applied to the actual maternal act of breastfeeding. So far as white women refuse to do work of any kind, black women take on employment positions that require them to not only assume the position of maid, but also the mother incarnate of the family. When Tracy is growing up the Dean family has their own residential maid, Mamie, who has a son, Henry, who is about the same age as Tracy. Although Alma was around to nurse Tracy herself, Mamie "nursed them both, not knowing which was her own, as she used

to say" (71). Tracy becomes weaned to Mamie, treating her more like a mother than he does Alma. This reading of Tracy may also render Tracy as being weaned to black women in general, explaining white men's yearning for black women in their youth. The breast, even in its maternal functioning, becomes associated with sexual appetite at the mouths and minds of men in White Town, an appetite that the white women avoid. Tracy can thus be understood through the veneer of the white woman.

Alma is the novel's greatest example of how white women are reared to disassociate themselves from sexualized bodily engagement. Anything outside of this normalcy is considered deviant. Hernton expounds on this in explaining that

> Not only did the southern white woman push sex out of her life as a shameful thing never to be mentioned; not only did she silently give up her husband to illicit, backyard love affairs—she also gave her children to "black mammies' to suckle and nurture, because, according to the myth of sacred white womanhood, the white woman was above such "nasty" things as attending to the biological functions and needs of child-rearing. (18)

Even though she has been married for many years, Alma sometimes sleeps in another room, avoiding her husband's sexual urges. She has even entertained the thought of them sleeping in separated twin beds. Alma sees sex as a part of her job as a wife, albeit the most dreadful duty. For white women, sex is only performed under obligation, such as reproduction purposes, anything else is sin. One reason Tracy dreads marrying Dottie is because, like his mother, she would want to maintain this sacred idea of sex. "Tracy liked the thought of Dottie

sinning," though the notion of seeing herself as a sexual being would repulse her (29). This kind of recreational sex happens in the backyard with black women. Tracy knows that Nonnie would give him anything, "Her body—or a drink of water. It'd all be the same." Dorothy would not allow Tracy to explore sex as he wishes, as he believes "He'd have a time with that girl…[she'd] think it was wrong or something." Nonnie represents a sexuality that cannot be performed in White Town, while Alma and Dorothy contrasts themselves against her, attending to what Hernton calls "the myth of sacred white womanhood" (18).

These women of White Town are best described through what Andrea Powell Wolfe calls the body politic, "a white female body whose purity is maintained through the abjection and careful containment of blackness, especially as it is tied to the culturally prohibited expression of white female sexuality" (130). Nonnie gives her body to Tracy in ways that Dorothy could never bring herself to, allowing him the opportunity to explore a richer sexual experience that is outlawed in White Town as "wrong or something." Thus, in the same way that white women see domestic activities as below them and relinquish these duties to black women, sex outside of obligation becomes associated with the black female body; it's immoral and ungodly to have sex without the expectation of pregnancy. Therefore, Wolfe argues that the black women in *Strange Fruit* do the "shit work" that white women refuse to perform (cleaning, cooking, breast feeding, and sex). Wolfe argues that such activities as breast feeding and sex locate black women within a body politic associated with breasts and genitalia, and that their work inside of white households are associated with

the anus as black women are only allowed to enter and exit white homes through the back door. Smith is depicting the orifices of the genitalia and anus

> as openings through which white southerners learn that "dark, dangerous, evil" necessarily either enters or exits white society, as representative of the actual back doors of upper-class, white homes and "colored" entry ways of public buildings through which black bodies are permitted to pass-indeed, the literal manifestations of the figurative "back doors" that Nonnie agrees on using in order to maintain a relationship with Tracy. (Wolfe 139)

Nevertheless, Wolfe claims that the novel "demonstrates the potential subversive power of the black mother to explode the veneer of white female sanctity" (130). Furthermore, White Town condemns black women as the sexual deviants who white men are allowed to access in adolescence or before they mature and come to accept a more decent life with a white woman who does not allow her husband access to her body in such measures. Thus, as Wolfe maintains, Black women as "mapped onto the breasts, genitalia, and anus of the body politic…come to represent the abject itself; they comprise the parts of the social body that must be covered over, contained, and ultimately pushed to the outside of public life" (140).

Figuring the Black Body: Black Town Subverted

Although no one in White Town knows Nonnie as well as Tracy does, as a black woman she is deemed his foil and could only mean trouble for him should they share the rest of their lives together. Contrary to the hypersexuality that

Nonnie is associated with in White Town, in actuality she expresses no blatant interest in sex and only engages in the act after Tracy suggests it. She is perhaps Smith's most complex figures for her views on race and how she assumes the position as Tracy's mistress so contently. She remains silent for the most part and Smith refuses to define her as she does the other characters. Where whole passages and chapters are dedicated to the points of views of her sister Bess, Tracy, and his family, Nonnie's thoughts are transmitted as if they are mediated and not coming directly from her. When Nonnie does speak, her words are short, but profound. Images of Nonnie often capture her sitting next to Tracy, "Cool, quiet…waiting. Not saying a word" or looking into the swamps or sitting on her front porch, "waiting" (98).

Smith's portrayal of Nonnie is quickly pushed into inquiry when she says that Nonnie stood "tall and slim and white in the dusk" (1). Both white and black people's reactions to Nonnie validates that she is physically attractive beyond measure. From a young age Bess is jealous of her younger sister's lighter skin tone and the attention that she gets from her mother because of how pretty she is. Both Colored Town and White Town are aware of her striking features, for "Nonnie Anderson was something to look at twice, with her soft black hair blowing off her face, and black eyes set in a face that God knows by right should have belonged to a white girl" (2). In her characterization of Nonnie, Smith is implicitly complicating race matters. The desire she attracts from white men who "whistle when she walks by," displays Nonnie as a black woman, though her features suggests that she may be of white blood as well. Indeed, the features which Smith attributes the character having are extremely close to those of a

white woman on the cover of the 1949 Signet edition from New American Library, while on more current editions she appears more clearly as a black woman.

Having graduated from Spelman College, Nonnie returned to Maxwell to work as a maid. In fact, "Mrs. Brown's servant Nonnie was the best servant in Maxwell" (1). The first sentence of the novel finds Nonnie doing what she does for most of the novel's duration, "She stood at the gate, waiting" (1). This image of Nonnie waiting depicts her as a passive and content young woman. She does not go in search of anything and only anticipates what will be presented to her. Nonnie is unlike Bess and her older brother, Ed, in that she is content with her situation. She is not motivated enough to move beyond the Southern bonds that are made for her. When her brother offers to take her up north with him so that she could put her education to use, she tells him that she, unlike him, has always been happy. "You're ambitious. I'm not. Sometimes I don't think contented people ever are" (90). She exists almost in dreamlike states and she appears serene and patient when she waiting on Tracy. Even in moments when she is alone, looking off into the distance at the swamp, she is contemplative, showing no strong emotions toward anything. In some ways the world that Nonnie has created for herself, is exactly that—a dream—according to Bess. It is unreal for Nonnie to believe that she can pretend that race relations and her personal situation are satisfactory.

But Nonnie's aspirations, or lack thereof, are reflective of her opinions on race. As Smith portrays Nonnie as having lighter skin, Nonnie does her own work to erase her blackness. During one of the few times that Nonnie shares her

innermost thoughts with Tracy, she says that "Race is something—made up, to me. Not real. I don't—have to believe in it. Social position—ambition—seem made up too. Games for folks to—forget their troubles with" (64). To make sense of her relationship with Tracy, Nonnie is trying to convince herself that race is not an important concern. Her contentment to stay in the South does not represent her satisfaction with her immobility, but a recognition of her love for Tracy. Leaving the South would also mean abandoning him and she is willing to sacrifice her advancement for him. Nonnie is comfortable with her and Tracy's relationship and even what it means for them in the future. Even if Tracy marries Dorothy, Nonnie says that nothing will change their relationship. He will still come to visit her and she will, as she always has, make herself available. Still, her intentions seem miscalculated to Bess, as they always have:

> Nonnie always smiled and called her a "race" woman when she tried to tell of this flux of feeling, this shifting rage and pride and despair that swirled and backwashed around her. Nonnie would smile; and smiling, seemed to lift her skirts above troubled waters, to withdraw to a remote and secret place of safety. It was as if she had shut out this world she'd been born into, insulating herself by soft denials of it. If she said it didn't exist, it didn't exist. It was this invulnerableness which angered Bess, this giving the lie to her fears. And sometimes she hated Non for her superiority to hurt. (23)

Nonnie's refusal to recognize race is what keeps her safe and makes her think that her relationship with Tracy can last. She holds hope that one day Tracy will devote himself to her in the same way that she is devoted to him. Even after Tracy

denounces her for Dorothy, she still insists that their relationship will be the same. Nonnie's idea that race does not exist is what keeps this notion of a lasting relationship with Tracy safe, it's what she counts on. She fears losing him and will hold on to him as much as possible.

Furthermore, while White Town is concerned with matters of sex and sinning, Colored Town is occupied with issues of race and upward mobility. Smith explores these concerns through the very notion of white, both as a color and a race. Nonnie's mother, Tillie, sends all three of her children to college in hopes that they find avenues of success outside of Maxwell, where they would only be able to find low-ranking employment that residents of White Town do not want for themselves. Tillie's intentions leave no room for Nonnie to become involve with a white man because that would only place her into a historic cycle of black sexual exploitation. Even Bess is "a plum fool" for returning to Maxwell pregnant from a black man. Nonnie's pregnancy would have been much worse to Tillie had she lived to witness it.

One of the first times Bess witnesses Nonnie in the company of Tracy, she runs to tell Tillie so that Nonnie could be stopped. But when Bess reaches her mother she finds her "coming from work, walking cautiously on the sides of her feet to ease her bunions." Tillie nears her porch and, removing a dead bloom from one of her plants, says, "Some day fo I die, Gawd willin, I'm goin tuh splash it fum top tuh bottom, befo and behind, wid de snowest white paint I kin lay ma hands on" (13). Here, Smith uses the color white as a metaphor for upward mobility. Tillie wants something better and the only thing better is in White Town where life is more comfortable. Should she have a life like her employer in White Town,

Tillie would not have bunions on her feet and life would be easier for her and her family. Nevertheless, Tillie is also attracted to the color white because she thinks it is pretty. Of her two daughters, she always dotes on Nonnie for her pretty looks. Bess has darker skin than her younger sister and does not get the same treatment from her mother.

However, Tillie's aspirations are limited as she wants her children to be respectful of white people and earn their way in white society without white people entering their lives with ruin. Although Bess knows that Tillie would have "taken a hoe and driven that white boy plumb out of their lives," she resists telling her mother about Tracy for the sake of both Nonnie's and Tillie's protection. It is very apparent to Bess that her mother thinks highly of her younger sister because she is always dotting on how pretty she is and how Bess must watch out for her. When mentioning the prospect of Nonnie getting married, she says "Ef she gits! She don seem tuh care a speck fo menfolks.' Tillie chuckled contentedly" (13). Informing Tillie of Nonnie's relationship with a white man would devastate her and the expectations she has for her daughter.

Smith's engagement of the color white is complicated when she applies it to Bess and Nonnie. While Tillie sees the color white as a metaphor for upward mobility, Smith uses it strictly within the bounds of race with Bess, who is pushing against it, and Nonnie, who is trying to enter it. This is most apparent through what Bess describes as "nigger smell":

> She lifted her arm. Smelled to heaven! "Pure nigger smell," she whispered, whipping herself with her compulsion to see her race through white eyes.

> "Yes, nigger," she whispered as she hurried along Back Street. "It's caught up with us." It was as if the Andersons had been running away from it, getting a little whiter and whiter with each generation, running hard. But it's caught us. And it catches everybody sooner or later. It's reached out and caught us. You can run until you're panting, but it'll catch you. Going to college won't help you run any faster—all that stuff they tell there makes it worse. Be proud of your African heritage, they tell you! Yeah…music…rhythm…all that…Proud! When you're pushed around through back doors, starved for decent friendliness and respect, they tell you about Benin bronzes—things like that. Sure! When you're so hurt you feel as if you're bleeding inside, you're suppose to remember that some old archeologist or somebody found that way back there in Africa your ancestors could make bronze—sculpture or something. And now you're suppose to fell fine. See? When all that matters to you or any other Negro is that your folks were slaves and you're still slaves. You can't run away from that shadow; whichever direction you turn it turns with you. (188)

Here Bess is expressing an anxiety associated with the expectations that her mother has of upward mobility and is not optimistic her family's progress. In fact, Bess blames her college education as the primary reason for inspiring her to believe that she could rise beyond the boundaries created for her. She claims college is a mere burden because it presented her with possibilities that she could

never envision for herself in Maxwell. She knows that in her hometown, no matter how much education she has, she will always be treated unjustly and given the jobs the no one else wants. Her blackness is a “shadow” that she cannot run from. There is no use in her panting the house white “fum top tuh bottom, befo and behind” because it will never be any better than any of her neighbors in Colored Town.

On the contrary, Nonnie does not see herself as part of race seen “through white eyes.” She claims to not see herself as any specific race through any person’s eyes. As previously demonstrated, Nonnie says she does not see herself as having a race. However, as proven, this assertion is only used as a crutch for Nonnie to believe that she can have a life with Tracy. Yet, it must be said that Nonnie does not want to be white for the sake of possessing the power of the race, she puts up this silent fight only as much as it will bring her closer to Tracy. Even after his death, Nonnie attempts one last time to gain access to this side of Tracy. Arriving at the Dean household hours before they are to bury he is to be buried, she delivers flowers from her employer who could not attend. Among the mourners, all assumedly dressed in black, Nonnie wears a white dress, becoming easily noticeable by anyone. If she doesn’t stand out for her blackness, she is most definitely distinguishable by the veneer of her white apparel. But again, Nonnie is rebuffed when Tracy’s sister stops her from viewing Tracy’s body. Although Nonnie did not put on the dress that morning knowing that she would have to deliver flowers to Tracy’s house, she still wears it in spite of knowing that she will have to work in White Town on the day of Tracy’s funeral. This can be read as Smith’s attempt to write Nonnie as a character trying to be stripped of her

blackness and become accessible to this life that has so explicitly denied her entry.

Owning the Black Body: In and Out of Aunt Tyse's Cabin

Yet, Smith works overtime to capture what she feels is a historical problem in the South. As Smith demonstrates, the black woman cannot occupy a space for herself outside of the bounds of those created for he race. Even though black women both nurture and produce white babies, they themselves can never rise above situations created for them. Their sexuality gives them no agency in segregated White Town. This is highlighted in questions surrounding Tillie's sexual history and the paternity of her children. Though Nonnie is the only one in her family not to deny her relations with a white man, Tillie is accused of birthing children resulting from relations with white men. Her husband, Pappy, complains that his children don't favor him after hearing a white man talking explicitly about his relations with Tillie. He can barely frame the words to communicate his distress: "Tillie—you ain had no…traffic…wid…white—" (189). Tillie insists that all the children are his, though she does not refute the stories what he overheard. She uses her sex to evade his inquiries, leading him to her bedroom. Tillie's sexuality only assists her in Black Town, albeit if it is only to abate her husband. If she has indeed birthed the children of a white man, it has not helped her any, hence her wanting to find a better means for her and her children. Tillie has entered into a historical cycle of exploitation that she does not want to subject her children to, given her more of an impetus to drive Tracy from her family should she have discovered him before her death.

To push her point even further, Smith dictates that interracial sexual relations can only take place in the backyard cabins. Even actual love cannot escape this periphery as Nonnie and Tracy's relationship begins and ends in Nonnie's Aunt Tyse's deserted cabin. The cabin denotes a greater emphasis on Smith's linking Nonnie to a slave mistress in the backyard visited by her white lover. But like Nonnie, Tracey shows optimism about the future of their relationship. He likes Dorothy, but does not love her enough to marry her. When considering their life together, he concludes that she would be "cute" at the age of fifty and that he wouldn't have to worry about talking much because she did enough of it herself. One of the reasons that Tracy does not want to be with Dorothy, is because she likes him if "it was just to change him." Smith returns to the act of painting. In the same way that Tillie wants to paint her house white, Tracy maintains that Dorothy and his mother want to paint over him to make him a new person that they desire him to be. He thinks that "When Dot got behind him too much with her paintbrush he'd go to Nonnie and she would peel the new paint off down to the old Tracy" (99). Contrary to the women in White Town asserting Tracy's need to be corrected or fixed, Nonnie provides Tracy with a space for him to be himself. She remains patient with him, listening to everything he has to say very attentively. Even shortly after her mother's funeral and when she tells him that she's pregnant, Nonnie never wants to fill their time together with talk about herself and remains open to his needs and wants. Therefore, Tracy does not only visit Nonnie for sex (they actually only have sex a few times). He also enjoys her company because he can talk to her about his

feelings and aspirations. In fact, while his family thinks Tracy has no ambition, he tells Nonnie that he wants her to be apart of his future plans.

Nevertheless, it is apparent that Tracy has an internally conflicting love for Nonnie. This becomes clear when Tracy sexually assaults Nonnie while under the influence of alcohol. What Nonnie assumes is a normal visit, is quickly shattered when Tracy tells her to "Stop talking like that. Think you can act like a white girl, huh? Well, won't let you. Been playing that trick on me all my life, haven't you?" He blames Nonnie for "Making the whole goddamed town laugh its head off" at him. What comes next is a lie Tracy wants himself to believe: "You're nigger…yesh…nigger. Thass all. Thass all I wanted—all I ever wanted—anybody say I wanted more goddam lie" (133). First, Tracy puts the blame for their relationship on Nonnie, claiming that she falsely identified herself as a white woman to make him fall in love with her. This statement is undercut when he next declares that he only wanted her because she is a "nigger." The use of the word "nigger" assumes a bad connotation where he previously referred to her as a "Negro." In constructing Nonnie as a nigger, Tracy wants to display his ownership of her and the power that he has in their relationship to declare that it is he who wanted her, not she who wanted him. In a sense, it is not Nonnie who Tracy is fighting, but the love that he has for her and the rules of White Town that says he is not allowed such freedom with his feelings.

Still, Tracy is not convincing in his approach. In the process of restraining Nonnie and tearing her clothes from her body, Tracy experiences a moment in which he sees someone else committing this crime.

> He saw a man—couldn't see much, couldn't see much—a man above her, saw him press her down against the floor—don't do that!—saw him press her body down hard—saw him try and fail, try and fail, try and fail…heard a low sobbing…a deep harsh cry—she's crying—no, it's you crying—it's you—you couldn't—you—couldn't—couldn't…you couldn't—you couldn't—you couldn't— (134)

There is essentially a disconnection between what he is doing and the message that his mind is sending him to stop. And in the midst of raping Nonnie, Tracy starts to weep for he knows he does not want to violate her. Interracial rape is functioning in two ways here. First, it is Tracy's message to Nonnie that he owns her. She is his to do anything he wants. He had "come for something—not going till I get it." Calling her a "nigger," Tracy says "Thass all I wanted—all I ever wanted—anybody say I wanted more goddam lie." Referring to Nonnie as such creates a distancing between the two. This is for Nonnie to know her place, to know the "rules" as he put it. Secondly, Tracy is reaffirming to himself that he will be able to come to Nonnie in the future for nothing more than sex. The emotional connection they once shared has to be broken before he marries Dorothy, for it is morally corrupt for a white man to have a black woman for more than sexual pleasure. Nonnie must know that she no longer has access to him as she did before.

Tracy, as a sexual offender, becomes a participant in a cycle that historically robs black women of what Eileen Boris calls bodily integrity, or "freedom from unwanted pregnancy, or sexual violence, and freedom to choose one's sexuality and sexual partners" (2). Nonnie's rape clearly does not entail that

she is allowed such safety from sexual assault. Additionally, although she loves Tracy and is not upset about her pregnancy, in no way is she granted asylum from these things for social laws prevent her and Tracy from becoming exclusive lovers. Bodily harm is a form of control as white men can get away with such crimes without being reprimanded for them. Thus, Boris contends that southern segregation "mapped power and hierarchy through bodies by denying free movement to African-Americans" (2).

By this time Nonnie is already pregnant, so her pregnancy is not a result of sexual assault, but a consented encounter. The child she carries is a symbol of the love that she and Tracy share. For this reason, Nonnie insists that she is not sad or ashamed of her pregnancy. She tells Bess that she's "not ruined. I'm happy. Very happy" (82). But when she relays the news to Tracy, she declares that she is "glad," noting a sense of satisfaction after being successful at some feat or winning a much sought victory. Her word choice with Bess is meant to make her sister more at ease, to not cause her much stress. On the other hand, Nonnie wants Tracy to know that she is glad because "I'll have something they can't take away from me." She further explains that "It's like thinking something for a long time you can't put into words. One day you write it down. You always have it after that" (4). Nonnie's unborn child will become her method to obtain evidence of the love that both she and Tracy have been thinking of and her memories of him after his eventual abandonment of her.

With the birth of Nonnie's child not occurring by the novel's ending, her future remains uncertain. Both the father of her child and the man paid to marry her have been murdered. Nonnie's last appearance shows her returning to

another day of work in Colored Town as if the preceding events had not occurred, making the first attempts to continue living amid tragedy and disappointment as Smith's black women often do. But as the story comes to close, another man expresses a romantic interest in Nonnie. The discovery that Sam, a longtime family friend, is in love with Nonnie could change her life's course should she come to accept his offer for companionship. Interestingly enough, though Sam seems genuinely interested in Nonnie, his consideration of her isn't through her personhood, but through her body.

> But Sam knew, and it was a terrible thing to know, that he loved her so much, that he loved this body Deen had used and tried to throw away so much that he was willing not only to take it, but Deen with it—to have Deen's blood forever mingled with his, Deen's child forever to bear his name…" (225-226)

For Smith to deliberately script Nonnie through her body via the consciousness of a black male love interest is an even more emphasis on the role that the black female body plays in her novel as it is concerned with the scripting of race and segregation. Yet, this also highlights the traffic of the interracial children that result from relationships such as those between Nonnie and Tracy. Much like the speculation from Pappy that Nonnie and her siblings are fathered by a white man, Smith presents the likelihood that Tracy's unborn child may be raised as the son of a black man, with no idea that he is biracial. However, as Wolfe points out, Nonnie's child becomes a figure of inquiry "strange fruit" in its own right (132). But as Wolfe locates the "fruit' of Nonnie's womb as it biologically consist of Nonnie and Tracy, Smith herself figures it symbolically between Tracy and Sam.

In such, Patricia Yaeger's proclamation that "the [southern] body [...] is not portrayed in isolation from the segregated world but as a hybrid form—already mixed with or imprinted by its environment" is directly related Nonnie's child as it will be mixed-raced and still subjected to only identify and socially participate as black (237). In this way, even the children of black women's labor, though both white and black, become inscribed to either forget their paternity or remain unknowledgeable as they will never have the chance to participate in white society under southern segregation. Though the womb can be scripted as a grotesque figure due to its "mingled" blood, it should be noted that the blood is not taken literally as Sam's blood is not present in Nonnie's womb. Here, Smith is referring to the future where Tracy's blood will be present in Sam's grandchildren should Nonnie allow him to raise the child as his own. Thus, Nonnie still maintains no control over her body by the novel's end; even her blood becomes obscured from conversation as her body remains attached to Tracy's name.

Conclusion

It is evident that at the same time Chester Himes is thinking about how he will explore racism and protest in his novels that he is also considering the ways that the two are already written into public discourse. In a scene from *If He Hollers*, Bob visits Alice while she is hosting a few of her friends. The topic of literature comes up after it is mentioned that Leighton, Alice's white male friend, has just read Lillian Smith's *Strange Fruit*. While Leighton is interested in the characterization of Nonnie, Bob does not approve of her at all and prefers Richard Wright's *Native Son*. Whether or not Himes is doing this purposefully, he is positing himself into a direct conversation about race matters as they are portrayed through protest novels. Moreover, this scene is pivotal in understanding the importance that literature has in society to inspire conversation and action. The mere fact that Alice, her friends, and Bob are discussing novels without having prior knowledge that they would be one of the main discussion topics suggests that the literature of this period was highly digested by the general public, even if the public in this scene is only representative of middle class, employed persons. These are novels that interrogate African American subjectivity through the framework of interracial sexual politics or intimacy. While Wright's novel contains but a smaller fraction of the interactional sexual encounter, Himes and Smith both advance their plot via the sexual affairs between the black and white races.

Alice and her other friends are puzzled that Nonnie does nothing and remained "so goddamned crazy about a white man." Bob thinks that Wright makes the point better than Smith does. While others in the room condemn

Wright's characterization of Bigger Thomas as an unfortunate choice who "just proved what the white Southerner has always said about us; that our men are rapists and murderers." But Bob maintains that if one was to prove the contrary that nothing would change, "most white people I know are proud of having made Negroes into Bigger Thomases" (*If He Hollers* 87-88). Bob's quest is not to become a Bigger Thomas, a goal that he says in this conversation with Alice and her friends is almost inevitable. Indeed, in the same manner that Bigger is wrongfully charged with sexually assaulting the white woman that he murders, the challenge that Bob is continuously confronted by a white woman with the possibility of sexual intercourse, or rape. She wants to make a Bigger Thomas of him. Thus, Himes's investment in interracial sexual politics in his protest novels is to point out the manner in which Black men become psychologically manipulated in their oppression as a result of racism.

Himes's inclusion of Lillian Smith in this scene is not surprising since her novel is published in 1944, the year preceding the appearance of *If He Hollers* (*Native Son* appears in 1940). However, Smith stands out in this terrain as being the only female and the only white writer protesting the inequalities subjected to African Americans[3]. Furthermore, protest in 1940s literature is primarily discussed from the Wrightian point of view and incorporates only the works of other African American writers. Although Lillian Smith cannot claim full inclusion into this tradition that includes Himes and Ann Petry, she can nevertheless serve as an auxiliary in the subject matter that she takes up. It is

[3] For clarification, Smith is the only female in the scene that Himes sets up in *If He Hollers*. Ann Petry, an African American, was also a vital voice in the protest tradition following Wright. Her novel *The Street* (1946) was one of the bestselling novels in the 1940s, supposedly making Petry the first black woman to sell one million copies of a book.

inherent that at the base of these works, the effects on racism is being taken to task in addition to such issues as class, gender, and sexuality. When grouped with Wright, Himes, and Petry, Smith is unique in that she also details the pull that racism and segregation have on the white American.

Yet, Smith herself inserts her novel in conversation with Wright's mission for *Native Son*. She wrote to him in the months following *Strange Fruit*'s publication and proposed that they talk about "the responsibility of writers to their culture and its problems" (Gladney 84). In her interviews and essays, Smith maintains that her novel comes out of the need to understand the relationships that people share. She wanted to write a story about two different families and their relation to one another. Nevertheless, Smith's novel can be seen as one of the foremost protest novels of the 1940s. Her novel exposes the dangers that racism and segregation not only have on society at large, but a community. Most powerful, however, is the manner in which Smith details the danger that black women and men face at the hands of white Southern men. *Strange Fruit* pays particular attention to the vulnerability of the black woman as she is scripted and exploited by whites, particularly white men.

To some extent, even the manner in which these novels were consumed and reproduced help to explain the general public's intolerance toward the notion of black men raping white women. *Strange Fruit* becomes a successful novel and is eventually scripted for the stage.[4] Interestingly enough, *Native Son* also makes

[4] Smith writes the adaptation of *Strange Fruit* for the stage and her sister helps with the technical aspects. The play opens in Montreal in October 1945 and moves to Toronto, Boston (where the novel is banned), and Philadelphia before opening on Broadway in November 1945.

it way to the stage *and* the screen.[5] Although Bigger Thomas rapes a black woman, everyone knows that he does not sexually assault the white woman he kills. However, when *If He Hollers* is considered by the editorial staff of Himes's publisher for the *George Washington Carver Memorial Award*, it is rejected after one of the women editors says she is was disturbed by it. No doubt many people were bothered by Wright's novel and many, Southerners in particular, thought so negatively of Smith's as to call it trash, Himes's novel never makes it to the level of success that these two literary works make in other mediums. Though Bob Jones and Lee Gordon are not guilty of actually committing sexually assault, Himes's cites the mistreatment of his novels in the United States as his impetus for moving to Europe following the publication of *Lonely Crusade*. The reception of Himes's protest novels can therefore be understood not only on the level of racism, but the anxiety white America experienced over any notion of black men and white women having sexual relations, much more black men sexually assaulting white women.

[5] *Native Son* is adapted for the stage by Richard Wright and Paul Green and opens on Broadway in March 1941. A film version filmed in Argentina with a 42-year-old Wright casted as 20-year-old Bigger Thomas is released in 1951. This initial version is not well received and a different film adaptation appears in 1986.

Works Cited

Baldwin, James. "History as Nightmare." *Critical Response to Chester Himes*. Ed. Charles L. P. Silet. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1999. Pages 3-5.

Brown, Stephanie. "'If Only I Can Get It Funny!': Chester Himes's Parodic Protest Novels." *The Postwar African American Novel: Protest and Discontent, 1945-1950*. Jackson, Mississippi: The University Press of Mississippi, 2001. Pages 41-66.

Butcher, Phillip. Review of *Lonely Crusade* by Chester Himes, *Opportunity* (Winter 1948): 23.

Cayton, Horace R. "The Psychological Approach to Race Relations". *Reed College Bulletin*. 25.1 (November 1946).

Drake, Kimberly. *Subjectivity in the American Protest Novel*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

DuBois, W.E.B. "Criteria of Negro Art". *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*. Ed. David H. Richter. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007. Pages 569-574.

Fuller, Hoyt W. "Traveler on the Long, Rough, Lonely Old Road: An Interview With Chester Himes." *Black World* 21.5 (March 1972): 4-22, 87-98.

Garcia, Jay. *Psychology Comes to Harlem: Rethinking the Race Question in Twentieth-Century America*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012.

Graves, Patsy. "The Minority is Hollering," *Opportunity* (April-June 1946): 99.

Hernton, Calvin C. *Sex and Racism in America*. New York: Grove Press, 1988, c1965.

Himes, Chester. *Black on Black: Baby Sister and Selected Writings*. London: Michael Joseph, 1975. Page 7.

_____. "Dilemma of the Negro Novelist in the United States". *Beyond the Angry Black*. Ed. John A. Williams. New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1969. Pages 52-58.

_____. *If He Hollers Let Him Go*. London: Falcon Press, 1947.

_____. "If He Hollers Let Him Go." *Saturday Review of Literature*. 16 February 1946. Page 13.

_____. *Lonely Crusade*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1986.

_____. *The Quality of Hurt*. New York: Paragon House, 1971.

Hughes, Carl Milton. *The Negro Novelist: A Discussion of the Writings of American Negro Novelists, 1940-1950*. Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1967.

"Lillian Smith answers some questions about STRANGE FRUIT," Box 1, Folder 2, Lillian Eugenia Smith collection, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

Margolies, Edwards. *Native Sons: A Critical Study of Twentieth-Century Black American Authors*. Philadephia: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1968.

Overstreet, Harry A. "The Negro Writer as Spokesperson: Disentangling His Race from the White Man's Pattern." *Saturday review of Literature*. 2 September 1946. Pages 26-27.

Smith, Lillian. *How Am I to Be Heard?: Letters of Lillian Smith*. Ed. Margaret Rose Gladney. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993.

_____. *Killers of the Dream*. New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1949.

_____, letter to Glenn Rainey, 19 May 1941, Box 6, Folder 7, Glenn W. Rainey papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

_____, letter to Glenn Rainey, 13 December 1944, Box 6, Folder 7, Glenn W. Rainey papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

_____, letter to Glenn Rainey, Wednesday, Box 6, Folder 7, Glenn W. Rainey papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

_____, letter to Glenn Rainey, Sunday night, Box 6, Folder 7, Glenn W. Rainey papers, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

_____. *Strange Fruit*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1944.

Wolfe, Andrea Powell. "The Subversive Potential of the Abjected Black Maternal Body in Lillian Smith's *Strange Fruit*." *Flannery O'Connor Review*. Pages 130-144.

Yaeger, Patricia. *Dirt and Desire: Reconstructing Southern Women's Writing, 1930-1990*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000. Pages 218-249.