



Dying Metaphors and Deadly Fantasies: **Freud, Baldwin and Race as Intimacy**

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Abstract: This article has for foundation a textual dialogue between Baldwin and Freud. It argues that the imprint left by nineteenth and early twentieth-century racial metaphors on the Freudian construction of gender and sexuality has reproduced the logic of racial differentiation within psychoanalysis. This can be seen, for instance, in the mutual exclusion of identification and desire and the role played by unconscious fantasies. Baldwin's exploration of American white consciousness provides the lens for perceiving this racial undercurrent in Freud's texts, and more particularly in his 1915 sketch of the fantasy. In this text, Freud underlines the double nature of the fantasy which partakes at the same time of the unconscious and the preconscious. Meanwhile, he also draws an analogy with the so-called "half-breed." As it is mirrored by the supposed racial duality of the mixed race individuals, the ambivalence of the psychic location of the fantasy will happen to bear some importance in the Freudian account of gender and sexual identities. Through the mediation of the fantasy, the relation between race and gender and sexualities evolves in a complex interplay of identity and difference best exemplified by the figures of speech of the analogy and the metaphor, both aiming at scientific and objective truth. The possible counter-truth which has vanished in the process is that of the "half-breed" whose voice is being silenced. It is through the writing of consciousness and intimacy of James Baldwin that this silenced voice can be heard again as he strives to dismantle the cultural logic of differentiation and the lethal power of metaphorization and stifling fantasies.

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I.

A joint exploration of racism and anti-Semitism, this article¹ has for its foundation a textual dialogue between Baldwin and Freud. It argues that the imprint left by nineteenth and early twentieth-century racial metaphors on the Freudian construction of gender and sexuality has reproduced the logic of racial differentiation within psychoanalysis. This can be seen, for instance, in the mutual exclusion of identification and desire and the role played by unconscious fantasies.

Most present-day analyses on psychoanalysis and race try to assess the alleged universalism of psychoanalysis or assert the pertinence of race as a category for the study of subjectivities. This article argues instead that, as a modern theory of subjectivity based on sex and sexual difference, psychoanalysis has been strongly influenced by the cultural, scientific and religious constructions of race. At the same

¹ This essay is a chapter of a book project tentatively entitled *The Intimacy of Madness and the Madness of Intimacy in African American and Diasporic Queer Literature* for which I have conducted research at The W. E. B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research, Harvard University, as a Sheila Biddle Ford Foundation Fellow and as a Scholar-in-Residence (Spring 2007). Some of the arguments have already been published to a lesser degree in my articles, "Le 'sang-mêlé,' le fantasme et l'homosexualité: étude d'une analogie freudienne à trois termes," in Michel Prum ed. *Sang impur* (L'Harmattan, 2004) and "Landmarks for a Study on Violence, Madness and the Cultural Trope of American Interracial Sadomasochism," in Michel Prum et al. eds. *Über l'Autre* (L'Harmattan, 2005). More recent parts and drafts of this essay are also based on lectures delivered at Harvard University (February 2007), U.C. Berkeley (March 2007), Temple University (March 2007) and at the University of Virginia (April 2007). I would like to express my thanks to Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Nelson Maldonado-Torres, Lewis R. Gordon, and Marlon B. Ross for extending these invitations. Thanks are also due to Ramon Grosfoguel, Lewis R. Gordon and Eric Mielants for organizing the "Global Anti-Semitism Conference."

time, the binary logic of gender and sexuality in psychoanalysis delineates the space where emerges a seemingly self-assertive white consciousness.

Our genealogy of psychoanalysis crosses racial and sexual perspectives yet refrains from hierarchizing them. It regards subjectivity as a site of multiple identities and identifications, the open space where identity formation is about movement and not arrested development. Contrary to most current critical approaches—be they in African American and diasporic studies, gender and LGBTQ studies, or psychoanalytical criticism—our critical standpoint is textual and literary and, as such, aims at examining the unfolding of identity without taking cultural, racial, gender-related or sexual category as its point of departure or an all-determining factor and frame. In Freud, the psychic landscape and the grammar for its exploration freeze the movement of identity formation, though it is nonetheless betrayed by the still discernible racial traces left in the text, more particularly in Freud's 1915 sketch of the fantasy.

To recapture this movement and understand how it evolves in the closed space of identity, contributing to the consolidation of a modern conception of race, sex, and gender, we rely on the insights of the African American writer and thinker James Baldwin. What is central in Baldwin and makes him particularly relevant to illuminate Freud's blind spots is that his black subjectivity and writing are not divorced from homosexuality and homoeroticism. His aesthetics of optics consists in showing the hidden articulation of race with the repudiation of homosexuality and the resulting (often lethal) cultural, political and psychological consequences. Between Baldwin, the American Negro, and Freud, the Austrian Jew, both scholars of the Old Testament, the transatlantic dialogue helps to understand how psychoanalysis intertwines the

cultural baselines of race, sex, and gender to invent a modern subject psychically defined through their inter-relatedness. At the same time, the importance of sexuality in Freud's conflict between his Jewishness and a white consciousness to which he may have strategically adhered proffers the background to investigate the sexual dimension of American race relations, the matrix of intimacy from which springs the narrative of a white consciousness whose violence leads to madness.

II.

Our method, which subordinates psychoanalytical theories to literature, partakes of an epistemological shift as regards identity, identity formation, the subject and subjectivity. What is fundamentally at stake is to sketch the critique of a modern western subjectivity which conceives the subject as being in a predetermined space that shapes its identities. To philosophical, sociohistorical, psychoanalytical, and cultural variations of this postulate we oppose literature where the double praxis of writing and reading not only creates the space of the text but also defers perpetually its closure. Furthermore, the common interest of Freudian psychoanalysis and literature in one figure of speech in particular—the metaphor—illustrates their strikingly obscure parenthood and the different ways space can be imagined, understood, or made intelligible.

A prevalent conceptualization in both of them, for instance, consists in dividing space into interiority and exteriority, along a disjunctive tension to be theorized or transcended and reinvented. Through the act of reading, always unique and singular, literature maintains open the imaginative space it creates by substituting a bridging relation to the division between interiority and exteriority, between the text and reality,

the metaphor and the object metaphorized. In doing so, extra-textual reality and metaphorized objects are made utterly volatile, permanently diffracted through a kaleidoscopic perception that shifts according to time, space, and the reader's subjectivity, ensuring thus the renewing of interpretation and the possibility for a multiple relation to reality. The potentiality of literature also lies in the condition for the co-existence of subjectivities that would be equal if not identical; starting with those introjected by the literary situation—the author, the narrator, the characters and the reader.

Vis-à-vis metaphors psychoanalysis has a comparable relation but with a different objective. If psychoanalysis has recourse to the metaphorization of speech on which literature relies as well it cannot offer itself the excessive luxury of a multiple reality that would not cohere with the ideals of science. For being accepted as a scientific theory functioning as a system, with an apparatus and a coded sociolect that articulates its own concepts and teleologies psychoanalysis has to dry up, sip, and absorb metaphorization. Meanwhile, it is for the sake of the same coherence and scientific eligibility that metaphors cannot be cleared off from the psychoanalytical text. This doubling of psychoanalysis's paradox can be explained by the condition of its own possibility—for being seen as the science that reveals the hidden truth of the unconscious, which by definition has no material reality, psychoanalysis needs to use metaphors but insofar as they are delimited, closed spaces bound to and determined by their location. Only in the defined space where science understands and is understood—culture—can the immateriality of the unconscious which metaphors capture be deemed scientific.

Metaphors are thus necessary to psychoanalysis in as much as, contrary to literature, they are bereft of the limitless

metaphorization power of speech, deprived of the possibility to open up the space of imagination, of (re)invented subjectivities. In as much as metaphors die into psychoanalytical, scientific, cultural analogies. Psychoanalysis therefore strongly relies on the analogical use of cultural metaphors such as the dark continent standing for the purposely mysterious and unknowable female psychology, the configuration of the psychic spaces represented by a landscape to be explored and colonized, the Oedipus complex standing for family patterns and the subject's gendered and sexual formation. In the relation between literature and psychoanalysis, and for what regards the role of metaphors, similar conclusions can be drawn about the teleology of story-telling, which is the other great debt psychoanalysis has vis-à-vis literature. While being in literature a tension that the postulate of fiction allows not to terminate, a circular movement which needs not to be interrupted, the teleology of story-telling provides for psychoanalysis the coherence and logic it seeks. Though of importance rationality in literature is counterbalanced by the possibility of its failure, the uncontrolled turbulence style may provoke. In psychoanalysis, it is the theoretical ensemble that subdues such turbulence, salvaging from story-telling the pure impact of its rational unfolding. The tension has thus more to do with an arrested development, the story-telling with a vignette, a micro-story-told. When literature gives an impulse to movement, psychoanalysis controls it within the seemingly sealed off space it needs to stand for.

The story that psychoanalysis strives to tell is that of a subjectivity where psychosexual formation, gender and sexuality obey to unconscious though rationalized dynamics. One of the strategic means to institute this rationalization is to summon the much-spread cultural metaphor of race. This does not mean that Freudian psychosexual formation is strictly determined by

race nor that psychoanalysis does not, in turn, influence its cultural conception. Without speculating on the nature of their bond and their subsequent definition, what matters at this stage is to state that, in psychoanalysis, sex and race are irretrievably related. This connection has been examined and analyzed by much of the recent critical literature that intends to explore the signification, potentialities, and limitations of psychoanalysis—as a theory of the subject based on sexual difference—when it comes to race. Nevertheless, most of the methodology therein employed rests paradoxically on a categorization that it contends to deconstruct.

For instance, when Christopher Lane opens his edited collection of essays *The Psychoanalysis of Race* (1998) by remarking that psychoanalysis and race share a “conceptual interdependence” that few thinkers have theorized (7) he also posits psychoanalysis and race as categories that the collection does not apply to each other (12) but rather “implicate” “in ways which describe their joint enigmas and interpretive blind spots” (12). To explore the “conceptual interdependence” of psychoanalysis and race while considering them *a priori* as operative concepts with differentiated terms, thereby postulated as external to each other, is problematic. One finds such a methodological shortcoming in Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks's essay “The Comedy of Domination: Psychoanalysis and the Conceit of Whiteness” where she refers to Europe as the original space of the discourse of race (and not as the space that the discourse of race engenders), or in Daniel Boyarin's one, “What Does a Jew Want?; or, The Political Meaning of the Phallus” where he mentions the colony as the original space of the colonized (and not as the space, along the metropolis's, which colonization creates) (in Lane ed., 1998).

A similar limitation can be identified in Sander L. Gilman's *Freud, Race, and Gender* (1993) where race, masculinity and

femininity are analyzed as social constructs whose elaboration and signification are already frozen by the cultural influence they bear. In fact, with inverted positions on the positive or negative influence that race may have had on Freud's account of sexual difference, Boyarin and Gilman follow the same logic. While Boyarin argues that "a series of potentially toxic political symptoms" (in Lane ed., 1998)—racism and an ambivalence towards homoeroticism—are generated in Freud by his self-alienation as a Jew living in an anti-Semitic cultural and historical context Gilman explains Freud's account of sexual difference, which he criticizes, by his racial situation where Jews are feminized and homosexualized. Both these analyses speculate over race and sex by looking at each from the perspective of the other. Meanwhile, and despite the mutual implication of race and sex, these analyses refrain from examining their formation as concomitant and continuous. When race and desire could be more fruitfully regarded as spatializing each other, without interruption or limits, Boyarin and Gilman consider these spaces as already closed and, from and within them, ask the question of how Freud positioned himself racially. But, less than assessing Freud's position in the context, the point is to fathom out how he created the position of psychoanalysis and his towards race and sexuality *through* the psychoanalytical text and how this text prescribes to take the through for an in. This is what literature, as praxis, teaches to theory—the effort to think through, a method for not considering seemingly closed spaces as hermetically sealed.

Thereby always situated in the closed spaces of geography, culture and theorization, the relation between psychoanalytical psycho-sexuality and race cannot be but limited in scope. What these interpretations discard is the geographical, cultural, theoretical and political reality psychoanalysis

invents. This is not to claim that humanistic knowledge, and more particularly the various acceptations of race and sex, do not pre-exist psychoanalysis. But what psychoanalysis invents—or more precisely borrows and imports from literature—is their being encompassed within the limitless space of the psychic landscape and notably the unconscious. Meanwhile, the scientific and cultural environment of Freudian psychoanalysis requires that this limitless space should appear as being under control, with territories as delimited and differentiated as race might be. A chronologizing and interpretive misconception, these critical analyses have for point of departure the effect sought for by psychoanalysis—the idealized fantasy of itself as a science with a method (the interpretation of the subject's introspection), a field (the psychic landscape), and an object (the unconscious dynamics of sexual formation) which, though immaterial, can nonetheless be envisaged through the empirical character of race. In order not to repeat these mistakes, one needs to take psychoanalysis for what it is: a fantasy idealizing itself as scientific proof and cultural response. It concomitantly encloses and naturalizes the spaces of race, sex, and gender but without rooting out within itself the possibility of seeing through and re-opening them—provided one reads psychoanalysis through its fantasy, through literature.

A too much-neglected essence and safeguard of critical interpretation, the possibility to fail is inherent to literature. As we pointed out about story-telling and style, to lead rationality, systemic thoughts, teleological narratives and the idealized fantasy of the self—the self as psychoanalysis, in Freud's case—to collapse re-establishes the free circulation of emotions, desire, and affects while consciousness emerges as (re-invented) self. This interweaving of emotions and reason that midwives the open space of the text and of its multiple identities is

described by James Baldwin in "Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood" (1985) as the overlapping of desire and imagination which fuel each other (*Baldwin, Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison, Library of America, 1998, 815; titled "Here Be Dragons" in *The Price of the Ticket*, 1985). Such a statement does not only encapsulate adequately what literature and the praxis of writing stand for in Baldwin's eyes. It also refers in his text to the "possibilities of the human being."

Though it may be considered as a return to the literary premises of psychoanalysis, our critical perspective is more properly a shift. As the starting point of our analysis is Baldwin's "possibilities of the human being"—a black voice, a black subjectivity which are nowhere to be found in psychoanalysis. There is no place to return to. The place is in black writing and literature where being inside does not mean to be submitted to space, bound to the closed space of race and theory, as shown by Fanon, for whom the colonial experience does not limit itself to the colony, or by Du Bois, for whom being a problem within America revealed the untenable character of Tocqueville's idealized democracy. The place to shift to is where race is not a cultural metaphor, a scientific proof, nor the fantasy of psychoanalysis, but the lived experience of being black, the open space of multiple possibilities. Black queer literature was for us such a place—but only to discover that the missing place, the lack of psychoanalysis, its absent black subjectivity, is not a circumscribed blind spot but the deadly fantasy that also engulfs identity thinking. Meanwhile, in a mesmerizing reflection, psychoanalysis invents itself through the controlled space of desire, through race as intimacy.

To understand how psychoanalysis invents itself through the closing space of race and sex, one needs, Baldwin in mind, to ponder over the historical moment when

Freud captures the "half-breed," his sense and destiny, and gives bone and flesh to the fantasy of psychoanalysis. In his sketch of the fantasy, which will be cornerstone in his account of gender formation and sexualities, Freud draws in a complex interplay of identity and difference an analogy with the so-called "half-breed" that eighteenth-century scientific racialism has classified as the closest to the white race with almost indiscernible black features. Within Freud's first topology of the psychic apparatus, which associates preconscious, conscious, and unconscious, the fantasy has the particularity of partaking at the same time of the unconscious and the preconscious. While belonging to the latter he originates in the former. By this double nature it mirrors the supposed racial duality of mixed-race individuals.

III.

The triangulation between race, gender, and sexualities in psychoanalysis rests on this fundamental psychic location of the fantasy whose ambivalence is compared by Freud to "individuals of mixed-race who, taken all round, resemble white men, but who betray their colored descent by some striking feature or other, and on that account are excluded from society and enjoy none of the privileges of white people" ("Unconscious," 1915. Standard Edition, 14:191). Whereas Sander L. Gilman and Daniel Boyarin refer to the "half-breed" passage in their analysis of the rapport between psychoanalysis and race, they both situate their interpretation primarily in the specific frame of race as Jewishness, on the account of Freud's complex relation to his being a Jew. None of them, besides, relates Freud's definition of the fantasy and its near-invisible "half-breed" with his theorization of the self-blinding Oedipus whose eponymous complex terminates (through the castration

complex) psycho-sexual formation and the fantasy of multiple gender identification.

In his attempt at demonstrating how race as Jewishness imprints its logic in Freud's construction of gender, Sander L. Gilman's exploration of their relation in *Freud, Race, and Gender* (1993) is essentially sociohistorical and cultural. Gilman argues that it was because of the strongly anti-Semitic environment of fin-de-siècle Austria that Freud elaborated an account of female gender formation that was first meant to be inclusionary and not exclusionary. Women were supposed to be a complement of men and not their opposite, a gender configuration which had, Gilman explains, an obvious racial subtext and agenda: the point for Freud was to use gender as the medium to facilitate the integration and acceptance of Jews. Since the circumcised and thus feminized Jewish male body stood as the metaphor for all Jews, the strategy followed by Freud was to project the supposedly feminine qualities of the male Jew onto the woman and use the latter as the vehicle, if not the foil, that would ease Jewish integration.

While commenting upon the "half-breed" passage, Gilman also pinpoints that Freud evokes the "mixed race" when he compares the unconscious with the preconscious (21), which is, if not inaccurate, at least incomplete. Indeed, the "half-breed" does not metaphorize a comparison between the preconscious and the unconscious but a very particular state of psychic in-betweenness, that of the fantasy. The "mixed race" stands for the fantasy inasmuch as the latter is a psychic hybrid—belonging both to the preconscious and the unconscious. Gilman's analysis of Freud's inclusionary gender model parallels his reading of the psychic apparatus—masculinity, femininity, preconscious, and conscious are seen as *a priori* closed spaces to be penetrated, while Freud's textual analogy between the "half-breed" and the

fantasy is more ambiguous. Gilman's implicit definition of cultural and metapsychological spaces as bounded also explains the reason why, while referring to the comparison of Jews (the so-called "Negroes of Europe") and Africans, quite common at the time, he considerably downplays the anti-African and anti-black dimension present in the Freudian text. As closed as psychic or gender spaces, race is the territory of Jewishness. But Jewishness, in turn, is more complex, divided and divisive, than what it appears.

As Gilman mentions, Freud acknowledged in his autobiography that he was an "Eastern Jew," "out of his appropriate place and class and living now in the center of Austrian culture, Vienna" (14). Yet, Freud was not truly an Eastern Jew: Gilman explains that his family moved from Germany to the "Barbaric East" and then to Austria. This tension between one place and another, between belonging or not, is quite symptomatic of the situation in late nineteenth-century Europe of an acculturated Jew whom Freud liked to consider himself to be. To further Gilman's remark, one may also add that this situation of the acculturated Jew reflects, through the prism of belonging, the in-betweenness of the "half-breed" from the double vantage point of the fantasy and race.

But, at this point, one may ask a question discarded by Gilman: even though Jews were said to be the "Negroes of Europe" and Eastern Jews were associated to Africans, why did Freud illustrate the topology of the psyche and the double nature of the fantasy through an analogy with the "half-breed" and not with the acculturated Western Jew, since the two of them share this in-betweenness well fit for mirroring the ambivalent quality of the fantasy? Freud knew that any reference to Jewishness would be used against him and would harm the scientific credentials of his theory. What the "half-breed" thus

metaphorizes is not only the fantasy but what appears to be in fact Freud's fantasy of a theory of the fantasy, a rationalization in which what is at stake is the Europeanization of psychoanalysis thereby cleared off—at least in this moment—of any obvious Jewish content that would not be Western and white. The “half-breed” comes opportunely to metaphorize the idealized erasure of this Jewishness that could be compared to blackness, foreshadowing the psychoanalytical and phantasmatic construction of whiteness.

Gilman's restrictive reading of the racial content of the fantasy leads also to his underestimation of the role played by blackness in the psychoanalytical account of gender formation and sexualities, which also articulates phantasmatic constructions. Three years after “Unconscious” and its “half-breed” passage, Freud publishes *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis* (1918) dedicated to the so-called case of “the Wolf Man,” where he elaborates what were to constitute the hallmark of psychoanalysis—the primal scene, the witnessing (or the phantasmatic representation) of parental sexual intercourse and its dreamt sequel featuring the prospect of castration as a punishment for such an infringement. A fantasy of origins where the parents are seen or imagined performing an undifferentiating anal penetration (in which both can penetrate and be penetrated), the primal scene does not cast out the possibility of a merging of desire and identification. Both parents being libidinally invested the child can identify with his father and concomitantly desire him.

This pleasurable drama comes to an end with another phantasmatic representation, related to the preceding one, that of the castration which, in the text, takes the shape of a dream testifying in Freud's interpretation to the boy's internalization of a cultural law—a boy cannot be like his father and desire him for fear of being castrated. But Lee Edelman

has shown that Freud's interpretation of the child's recollected fantasy and dream is a re-construction that orientates both scenes towards the threatening castration and, thereby, represents, on the one hand, the stabilization of masculinity through the proscription of homosexual incest and, on the other hand, the establishment of sexual difference, as both a logical if not a natural outcome (Edelman 174-183). This is also the conclusion drawn by Judith Butler's reading of the oedipal complex in Freud's *The Ego and the Id* (1923) where she demonstrates that masculinity is already discriminated and posited before the unfolding of an Oedipus complex which precisely is supposed to lead to sexual difference (Butler 1990, 57-78). The interest of such a construction resides in presenting the renunciation to homosexual attachments as necessary—a conclusion to which had also come Diana Fuss in her interpretation of Freud's understanding of femininity, desire and female identification in her essay “Freud's Fallen Women: Identification, Desire, and ‘A Case of Homosexuality in a Woman’.”

Though most of these lesbian and queer critics' insights do not elaborate on the implications that such a reading of the fantasy, with all its destabilizing potential, may have for race, a parallel examination of the two paradigms of race and gender allows to identify both of them as phantasmatic and closed spaces. In fact, if we were to unfold the different layers of the initial “half-breed” metaphor within the narrative where it is embedded, we could eventually envisage the metaphor for what it stands—the psychoanalytical fantasy as both whiteness and heterosexual masculinity. Besides scientific objectivism, Freud's lack of sympathy or compassion for the “half-breed's” misfortune can logically be explained by the fact that the latter is an embodied absence of subjectivity without history, consciousness, nor feelings. He is reduced to a phallic

presence that penetrates without consent the white world to “enjoy [its] privileges” and that should be consequently punished, a catastrophic *mise-en-abyme* of what could be Freud’s destiny in the anti-Semitic universe of science. By being thus unmasked as black, he is skinned, literally cut into two halves (half-breed) and the phallus he was is textually and metaphorically circumcised. He becomes a Jew by no longer being white.

Is this in contradiction with the earlier conclusion we drew? Or, conversely, does this (re)doubling of the self represent, in the midst of his own fantasy as scientist, Freud’s most dreaded scenario which, while foreshadowing the “Wolf Man’s” primal scene and dream of castration, would confirm that not only Jewishness is to be seen as white but *has* to be seen as white? If the “half-breed” is a metaphor of the fantasy that engenders the psychoanalyst’s fantasy of himself as white, once inserted in a narrative that also functions as a metaphor standing for circumcision, the whole passage has then to be read as an allegory of psychoanalysis—visibly renouncing to Jewishness, visibly indulging in racism but invisibly reinscribing a Jewish identity *potentially* black. A coded reflective mirror, the text delineates the space for an identification between Freud and the “half-breed.”

But as Butler points out after Jacqueline Rose, identification being not identity is bound to fail. To determine the extent to which psychoanalysis invents a modern white straight subjectivity one needs to explore the reason why this identification should fail in the first place and this implies looking at the relation between Freud and the “half-breed,” within the unconscious of psychoanalysis—where there is more to see than what the eye meets. As Slavoj Žižek argues in the essay “Love Thy Neighbor? No, Thanks!,” any power relation is sexualized as soon as “an intrinsic ambiguity creeps in, so that it is no longer

clear who is effectively the master and who is the servant” (in Lane 1998, 170). What kind of sexual content is there to understand in the bond that the textual circumcision—the coming to the fore of the black skin—seals between Freud and the “half-breed” and how does the black Jew lose his Jewishness?

In the literary and cultural heritage of the father of psychoanalysis, who dreamt of a Judaism without God while identifying with Moses, there is a passage from the Old Testament of a particular interest for us. Ham’s curse may well stand as the hypotextual primal scene of psychoanalysis that the “half-breed” text re-constructs. In this perspective, Ham’s punishment would be internalized, translated into a textual circumcision, a literal and crippling blackness which foreshadows the ominous threat of castration that, incidentally, Freud had identified as “the deepest unconscious root of anti-Semitism” in *Analysis of a Phobia in a Five-Year-Old Boy (Little Hans)* (1909) (*SE*, 10: 198-199 ; quoted by Daniel Boyarin in Lane, ed., 1998, 214) where the term “castration complex” appears for the first time. The reading through of the biblical passage reveals that the deepest unconscious root of psychoanalysis—as a response to anti-Semitism—is the excision, the rooting out of homoeroticism cryptically metaphorized in the Freudian text by blackness.

In a fantasy of origins of sort, the book of Genesis situates the genealogy of Ham’s descent—which apologues of slavery would conveniently see as black—in a well-known family drama featuring a troubled father, Noah, and a troubling son, Ham. Catching sight of his father’s nakedness, as Noah was lying drunk in the vines, Ham is punished for his transgression of the divine rules through his descent. His son, Canaan, will be the slave of his uncles, Sem and Japhet and Canaan’s sons the slaves of their descent. Not only does Ham’s transgenerational curse enclose his descent

into the differentiated sphere of a specific lineage singularized by its social status—a race different and inferior—but it leaves unharmed Noah’s patriarchal power. Indeed the castration of Ham’s homoerotic gaze onto his father has no consequence on his position. The son being punished through his sons, the son’s father escapes punishment and therefore guilt.

While Ham’s descent is trapped in the closed space of a different race Noah safely remains the father of all his sons, including Ham, as long as homoeroticism is punished and cast out. The condition for a tenable identification between father and son is the banishment of the possibility of homosexual desire between them. The renunciation to the homosexual possibility founds the father and son relationship. The bond prevails over the bonding. Of course, the return of the cursed within the primary circle would entail that homosexuality is again visibly present justifying retroactively that the renunciation to homosexuality as well should be transgenerational. It has thus to run through sons and fathers until god, substituting the rainbow that symbolized his bond with Noah, seals with Abraham, son of the sons of Sem, the new bond of circumcision—the naked truth of Jewishness as homosexual bonding castrated.

In the psychoanalytical text, where nakedness is metaphorical, homoeroticism is present inasmuch as it is textually castrated through blackness. The father and son relation has to be looked for in discernible traces that Freud may have disseminated within and without the “half-breed” passage while he fathers psychoanalysis. As we have pointed out, the “half-breed” echoes intra-textually other instances of the fantasy, particularly fantasies of origins, such as castration in the “Wolf Man” case or as it completes the oedipal complex. In both cases the repudiation of male homosexuality in a family context is at stake. But more

importantly, in Freud’s text, the “half-breed” himself is defined as belonging to a “specie” engendered by drives of which he is the “Abkömmlinge”—the German term for “descent,” “offspring.”

As fantasy the “half-breed” is the son but only the son of a drive, a biological impulse with no other history than the narrative psychoanalysis unfolds and encloses upon him with no father. It is the absented father that ensures the failed identification between Freud and the “half-breed” and the subsequent impossibility of homosexual bonding between father and son. There cannot be any homoeroticism since there is neither father nor son. Or more precisely, as Noah and Ham, they do not belong to the same sphere, the “half-breed” being sent back to drives, biology and race. Meanwhile if the “half-breed” is a black Jew the text encrypts his Jewishness and no father acknowledges him. It is precisely from this emptied space of asserted fatherhood that metapsychology supersedes biology, history and religion, engendering a fantasy of race where whiteness is the color metaphor of a successful repudiation of homosexuality. It is kept in the shadowy depths of the unconscious, surfacing only as text and skin.

IV.

For James Baldwin, whose all life and works revolve around the exploration of white consciousness, the text and skin are not the porous surface where emerge the unconscious (homo)sexual roots of race but the acknowledged synecdoche of the black lived experience in America. From a vantage point that Freud’s text does not frame—the vantage point of Ham whom he identifies to the African American, notably in *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953) and *The Fire Next Time* (1963)—Baldwin elaborates an etiology of the white man’s fantasy as

reality. In this reality, not only are blacks and homosexuals differentiated and confined into specific spaces, they are also raped, castrated and burnt alive. Freud's theorized construction of whiteness, with its intermingled conscious and unconscious algebra, is here physically inscribed on landscapes and faces. In what could be a vibrant response to Freud's silenced voice of the "half-breed," this is how Baldwin reads the text, mind and lips of white America, captured in their absence on the African face:

They face each other, the Negro and the African, over a gulf of three hundred years—an alienation too vast to be conquered in an evening's good-will, too heavy and too double edged ever to be trapped in speech. This alienation causes the Negro to recognize that he is a hybrid. Not a physical hybrid merely: in every aspect of his living he betrays the memory of the auction block and the impact of the happy ending. In white Americans he finds reflected—repeated, as it were, in a higher key—his tensions, his terrors, his tenderness. Dimly and for the first time, there begins to fall into perspective the nature of the roles they have played in the lives and history of each other. Now he is bone of their bone, flesh of their flesh; they have loved and hated and obsessed and feared each other and his blood is in their soil. Therefore he cannot deny them, nor can they ever be divorced. ("Encounter on the Seine: Black Meets Brown," 1950, *James Baldwin, Collected Essays*, 89)

A moment of anagnorisis that the "half-breed" passage failed to be, Baldwin's text strikes by the resemblance it

bears with Freud's. Nonetheless, if one may contend that, as the "half-breed" vis-à-vis the Jewishness-whiteness rapport, the African permits to question the relation of black and white Americans, the latter triangulation is not a subtext nor a context but the kernel of the passage. Furthermore, the African represents the point of departure of the emerging consciousness at the backdrop of which "alienation" has to be understood. Indeed the Negro is not estranged from the African but from what he embodies in his eyes—the immensity of a boundless time and space, fathomable only through the traumatic stigmas ("conquered"; "too heavy and too double edged"; "trapped") the situation of the encounter encapsulates. A Freudian "hybrid" in reverse which, through the history and geography that were missing in Freud, has become another self. In this uncanny moment of dis-alienation, the two selves are in fact reunited. In a logic exactly opposite to Freud's, where subjects are determined by discriminated spaces, the encounter on the Seine puts in perspective two *re-locations*.

The first one is the Negro's in his face-to-face with the African whom he *recognizes* as an other self. This recognition dries up the source of estrangement. The second interlocks the three spaces of Africa, Europe and America. The blurring of their frontiers is achieved through the encounter itself, a *mise-en-abyme* which doubles the dis-location in Paris and in Africa of an American scene thereby manifestly bound to the triangle of the slave trade. This is what white Americans do not recognize, their "alienation," which maintains them out of consciousness and within fantasies. To the "half-breed" fantasy in Freud, responds in Baldwin's whites' lack of consciousness. The "alienation" at stake is thus not the Negro's, who is no longer estranged from Africa and the African, but the white American's for whom the closed spaces of racial and national identity

rationalize the split between a phantasmatic self-idealization and the unbearable horror of reality. Besides, the African is not cast out for the purpose of a scientific demonstration but is included in a narrativization which aims at showing the opposite.

Much more in accord with the tenets of psychoanalysis than the Freudian text itself, Baldwin's "encounter" puts to the fore the failure of speech ("an alienation too vast [...] to be trapped in speech")—beyond rationality what the text addresses is the desire and imagination the Freudian fantasy has cut itself from. In this perspective as well, the intertextual identification of the two "hybrids" breaks against another major difference: the use in Baldwin of a highly emotional style that unveils the sophisticated grammar of self-consciousness. It is through its literary quality that Baldwin's text comes to signify on Freud's subterranean teleology of fantasy and identity. While Freud's "half-breed" betrayed by "some striking feature or other" (191) the truth of biology and his black ancestry, the Negro's living in Baldwin betrays, first and foremost, memory and history, which are obviously absent from the psychoanalytical "hybrid" portrait. Moreover, whereas betraying equaled betrayal and entailed exclusion in Freud's narrative, it expresses revelation and announces communion in Baldwin.

As a subjective experience further enhanced by the "tensions," "terrors" and "tenderness," the Negro's memory unfurls along this ternary rhythm into a bridging history between white Americans and black Americans, already associated to Africans. This unacknowledged communion would remain a sheer drama, unreal and artificial, if, as it falls into the "perspective" the text creates, "the nature of their roles" were not revealed by the empirical fact of miscegenation. Its truth imposes itself naturally, as it were, and all the more so that it is thrust forward with the author-

itative force of biblical scansion and metaphors: "Now he is bone of their bone, flesh of their flesh." When the Freudian text relied on the implacable logic, freezing cultural metaphors and story-telling, Baldwin's narrative strategy finds itself on an emotional intensity meant to strengthen and quicken the process of signification. The first part of the last-but-one sentence of the passage—"they have loved and hated and obsessed and feared each other"—is exemplary of this technique. It is a syntactical unit whose continuity rests on the haunting repetition of "and"—the lexicalized obsessive bond, the nature of which is the key to "alienation"—that the phrase translates into affects, the historical communion between blacks and whites, past and present, to which the use of the present perfect testifies as well.

But the awakening that emotions mediate would not be complete if history and emotions, as communal as they might be, were not being returned to the "hybrid" for an empowerment of which the "half-breed," castrated by the text, was deprived. The power of the Negro is the text, which unveils truth and within this truth gives him the features of resistance, face-to-face with the fantasy. The Negro's empowerment, through consciousness and desire, history and emotions, is discernible in the key metaphor of the "happy ending," coordinated to the "auction block." Behind the scathing irony that, in the fashion of the pastoral-like narratives of antebellum plantation life, re-casts the purchase of the slave into the "happy ending" of an American wedding, creeps the ugliness of reality—the incomprehensible bond of economic exploitation and sadistic violence through collective rape and mass murder. This is the *raison d'être* of white Americans' continued denial of the Negro, despite the fact that they cannot "be divorced."

While necessary to the system and indelible in memories, if not in history, the white fantasy as idealization continues to

keep horror at bay and produce another reality based on falsehood and bad faith. The text and the “hybrid” make this reality of the fantasy inescapable. Reflecting the “encounter” on the Seine, while giving it its hidden sense, the “auction block” is the theatre of another scene, the “hybrid” and the white American’s own primal scene, which is here the object of an ellipsis. Like the bond between the “hybrid” and the white American, recalling Freud and the “half-breed’s,” the scene is visible only through the trace it left, the “impact of the happy ending” between the master and the female slave. The “impact,” the offspring of this probable rape, is the “hybrid” himself. As “his blood is in his soil,” his self is reflected in the white man who is thus unmasked as father while the text draws the Negro’s face as America.

Decontextualized in Freud’s “half-breed,” the repudiation of homoeroticism in the construction of whiteness is central in Baldwin’s works. Alluded to in “Encounter on the Seine” through the use of vocables such as “tenderness” or “loved,” the homoeroticism of male bonding is often re-coded elsewhere in contexts of explicit sexualized violence. An American version of Freud’s “Wolf-Man” and of his primal scene, a passage from Baldwin’s “Nobody Knows My Name” (1959) re-casts castration not as the universal fantasy that stabilizes masculinity through the rejection of femininity but as the cultural law of white America, and particularly the law of the South, which forbids manifest homoerotic bonding and, first and foremost, that between father and son, through a racialized and sadistic violence.

In “Nobody Knows My Name” Baldwin develops the “very bitter interracial history” (in *Baldwin, Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison, Library of America, 1998, 203) he had sketched in “Encounter on the Seine,” re-uniting this time the artificially opposed spaces of Southern and Northern America, which

form the same nightmarish reality. As in “Encounter,” the “bitter interracial history” is “written in the faces of the people” and on the “Southern landscape—the trees, the silence, the liquid heat [...]—[which] seems designed for violence, seems, almost, to demand it” (203). Desire is everywhere to be seen, while invisible, inconceivable in its horror, only conceivable as a fantasy of origins requiring historical revision. While on the outskirts of Atlanta, the writer’s mind’s eye visualizes it as a hallucinated scene, discovered “out here; over this fence, behind that tree, in the darkness, there” (203). As striking as Noah’s nakedness, this scene of desire betrays more than the memory of the auction block, more than the awareness of being the offspring of a rape, it opens wide the incommensurable gulf of nothingness onto the self.

In the Southern primal scene where black and white fathers merge in hatred, where desire originates in crime, the writer contemplates his conception as non-being. For him, in order to be and keep open the possibilities of his being black, re-invent himself and survive, the recourse to imagination is the only way out from the maddening trap of history, the deadly abyss of consciousness. The essay therefore re-writes the historical reality of black women’s rape by white masters into an improbable romance between the white man and “his concubine, the sensual-looking black girl” (204). But the ugliness of reality is not evaded by the writer’s fantasy which includes the possibility of its unveiling as imaginary and false. Contrary to Freud’s double sequence of the “Wolf-Man’s” hallucination of his parents’ intercourse, the primal scene, and the subsequent dream of castration, Baldwin’s narrative joins both the fantasy and castration within the same unit. In this undifferentiating textual space, the ambivalence of the rape/romance micro-narrative is thus dislocated—dissolved as it is being shifted—into the ambiguity of the

black man's castration which closes the passage and gives back to the rape/romance its reality as sexualized violence. Meanwhile it also reveals the significance of homoeroticism in the family/national drama, both phantasmatic and historical:

And the white man must have seen his guilt written somewhere else, seen it all the time, even if his sin was merely lust, even if his sin lay in nothing but his power: in the eyes of the black man. He may not have stolen his woman, but he had certainly stolen his freedom—this black man, who had a body like his, and passions like his, and a ruder, more erotic beauty. How many times has the Southern day come up to find that black man, sexless, hanging from a tree! (204)

The white man's guilt is eventually determined by the homoerotic attraction of the black male body whose castration identifies him as the transgressor. While giving centrality to homoerotic desire, Baldwin's fantasy of origins makes manifest the latent logic of Freud's insights in the "Wolf-Man" case and in the "half-breed" passage.

What castration aims at is the punishment of a homosexuality that blackness metaphorizes and which is a threat for the white father. One may incidentally recognize him through the homoeroticized identification between the white man and the black man which echoes, in "Encounter on the Seine," the "tensions," "terrors," and "tenderness" the "hybrid" saw reflected in white Americans. Patriarchy and power, as white and heterosexual, thus consolidate themselves through the same rejection of homosexuality, the same psychological matrix, in fin-de-siècle Vienna, in Paris-on-the-Seine, or in the Southern cultural context where strange metaphors, "sexless,

hanging from a tree" (204) recall that the violence of the fantasy is a reality.

Indeed only through violence—onto the other and/or self-inflicted—can the closing spaces of race and sex, and of the father's position within them, lead to idealization the fantasy may produce. The violence of the "half-breed's" castration and his exclusion from the white world enhance the mastery of the psychoanalytical discourse while masking any too obvious Jewish content. The violence of white Americans' denial and alienation in "Encounter on the Seine" is the condition to keep afloat the mythology of a benevolent white paternalism, a history of lies and crimes in which the writer of "Nobody Knows My Name" blinds himself before acknowledging its full signification. This is also Baldwin's own phantasmatic idealization of himself as father of the text, as a writer in an ontogenesis which, after transcending the biographical family in "Notes of a Native Son" (1955), transcends now the historical one, securing for himself the possibility of self-transformation. The violence transpiring through the maddening text being the price of his and the reader's ticket, provided the idealization of literature is safe.

Baldwin was well aware of the role played by violence in the phantasmatic construction of identities and more particularly in the idealization of white American masculinity. In "Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood" (1985), he explains for instance that the reality produced by the fantasy—the idealization—can be obtained only at the cost of a divorce between "the idea of one's sexuality" and "the idea of the self" (815). In this respect, Baldwin is close to Jacques Lacan whose "fundamental thesis is that a minimum of 'idealization'—of the interposition of phantasmatic frame by means of which the subject assumes a distance from the real—constitutes our 'sense of reality': 'Reality' occurs insofar as

the real is not (and does not come) 'too close'" as Žižek reminds us (in Lane 1998, 166). But in the American context, the distance from the "real" (the ugliness of reality), from, in Baldwin's terms, "the idea of one's sexuality," is covered by a "violence [which] has been the American daily bread since we have heard of America. This violence, furthermore, is not merely literal and actual but appears to be admired and lusted after, and the key to the American imagination," adds Baldwin (815). This also means that the violent distancing from sex re-locates the sex it meant to repudiate in the very midst of the idealized self. It is within that perspective that Baldwin frames his etiology of American interraciality, where discourses on race, pregnant with idealization, supply through violence the resolution to a sexuality which cannot be controlled nor mastered, which is inherently in excess. Violence per se is sexual. Race provides the good reason to unleash it in the blackness of pain and pleasure, onto the other and in oneself.

As the Freudian "half-breed's" textual circumcision/castration tentatively bore the possibility of an identification between the Jewish psychoanalyst and the "hybrid," the castrated black man of Baldwin's short story "Going to Meet the Man" (1965) supports an identification with Jesse, the discontinuously impotent white sheriff, until the racist, masculinist, and heterosexist American ideology puts an end to it. Two elements identify them to each other in the story: Otis, Jesse's childhood best friend, whom the unnamed castrated black man reminds him of, and the physical castration whose scene, witnessed when he was a child, Jesse needs obsessively to recollect for being able to overcome his impotence during sexual intercourse with Grace, his wife. This interracial identification, and its homoerotic component, shifts at the end of the narrative into a father and son one when, Jesse, still a child, seated on his

father's shoulders, watches in the middle of the roaring crowd, a black man being castrated and burnt.

This fourth of July "picnic," according to Jesse's father's own expression, ends on the paroxysmic form of love that Jesse ever felt for his father. A baptism in fire, it also signals his entry into the community of white men that the South and the American nation extend. Seen through the synthetic prism of psychology, ethics and politics, the spectacle of torture that the story stages and which narrativizes what Baldwin would call in "Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood," "the key to the American imagination," can only stand as a cultural aberration allowed by ideological and political wrongs. It is reason gone astray. Indeed, when not considered in an utilitarian or didactic perspective, lynching, public humiliations and other forms of spectacles of pain—minutely analyzed by Saidiya V. Hartman in *Scenes of Subjection, Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in 19th Century America* (1997)—cannot be looked at but as a psychological deviance of a sadistic kind, easily dismissed for being pathological. But as Baldwin's accounts recall, the frontier between strict utilitarianism and pathology is tenuous.

There would have been, for instance, no slave system—culturally accepted while legally endorsed and protected—without slave-breeding, rape and therefore without a primary sexual arousal which, in this context cannot be deemed abnormal. When it comes to the notion of spectacle, one may follow Hartman's Butlerian analysis and claim that it is through its display that torture performatively justifies itself beyond ethical or cultural contradictions. This is what Baldwin's texts make manifest in Freud: the racializing psycho-sexual dynamics which fulfill their role in the elaboration of white identity through the violence of their textual display. In relation to identity formation, the question is therefore not "how can violence and torture

be ethically and culturally accepted?" but rather "how can they be sustained within an idealization of the self?"

In "Going to Meet the Man," the scene of torture is saturated with similes comparing the black man's bodily parts to the white father's and son's, as in "Nobody Knows My Name." These comparisons underline in the child's vision the shared humanity without which there could not be any identification, be it compassionate or sadistic. Seeing himself and his father in the man in flames, the child recognizes his humanity as corroborates his haunting question: "*What did he do ? [...] What did the man do? What did he do?*" (in *James Baldwin, Early Novels and Stories*, ed. Toni Morrison, Library of America, 1998, 948). With the father's absence of answer, it is the scene of torture that unfolds in its conclusion the rational explanation to the excess of emotions, fear, anxiety, fascination and intense pleasure, it has aroused in the child, his father and mother, and their friends:

The black body was on the ground, the chain which had held it was being rolled up by one of his father's friends. Whatever the fire had left undone, the hands and the knives and the stones of the people had accomplished. The head was caved in, one eye was torn out, one ear was hanging. But one had to look carefully to realize this, for it was, now, merely, a black charred object on the black, charred ground. He lay spread-eagled with what had been a wound between what had been his legs. (950)

From a human body the black man has been turned into an object whose unrecognizable nature—"a black charred object on the black, charred ground"—is put into relief by the repetition of "what" and the alliterations in "w." The rational explanation the torture scene provides,

while securing the minimum of identification for the circulation of emotions, is: it is not a man like us. But for this rationalization to take place identification has to fail and, as Judith Butler suggests in *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993), identifications are bound to do so:

Identification is constantly figured as a desired event or accomplishment, but one which finally is never achieved; identification is the phantasmatic staging of the event. In this sense, identifications belong to the imaginary; they are phantasmatic efforts of alignment, loyalty, ambiguous and cross-corporeal cohabitation; they unsettle the "I"; they are the sedimentation of the "we" in the constitution of any "I", the structuring presence of alterity in the very formulation of the "I". (105)

From other in a failed identification the black man becomes sub-human, animal, object. It is also the logic of racism as Lewis R. Gordon explains in "African-American Philosophy, Race, and the Geography of Reason":

[...] since the Self-Other dialectic constitutes ethical relationships premised upon a hidden equality (each self is another's other and vice versa), and since antiblack racism depends on a fundamental inequality (a human-below-human relation from the standpoint of the white, a human-other-human relation from the standpoint of the black), a system of unilateral ethical relations results, wherein blacks experience ethical responsibility in relation to whites but whites do not exemplify such reciprocity. The consequence is that

racism destroys the Self-Other dialectic and collapses into the double world identified by double consciousness: a Self-Other *and* Nonself-Nonother structure. It is, in other words, the denial of the humanity of the black as *another human being* before the white. (*Not Only the Master's Tools: African-American Studies in Theory and Practice*, Lewis R. Gordon & Jane Anna Gordon eds, 2006, 12)

What violence thus displays and permits to implement is a rationalized and racialized hierarchization between a self and an other which *a priori* were related as equals and could thus be identified to each other. Running counter to Elaine Scarry's argument in *The Body in Pain* (1985) according to which the suffering body and the agent of the suffering are absolute opposites, or to Hannah Arendt's when she suggests that Nazi camps were beyond logic and rationality in *Auschwitz & Jerusalem*, the present analysis also implies that there is a disjunction, a rupture in the humanizing emotional identification which will allow the corollary dehumanizing rationalization to occur. This disjunctive moment is central in the unleashing of violence and in the torture scene. It is the moment when rationality and affects collapse into each other, when consciousness is suspended, when the self is being shattered by the spectacle of death whose image of ultimate failure reflects its own. It is this anguish of being shattered and the murderous aggressiveness towards others that brotherly love, as sublimation of sexuality, is supposed to assuage, as Freud argues in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1929).

But according to Leo Bersani in *The Freudian Body, Psychoanalysis and Art* (1986), Freud had understood at an earlier stage that sexuality was necessarily about failure, that one could not in sex relate to others nor

assuage the anxiety stemming from the anguish of being shattered. From this realization he felt the need to rewrite sexuality within a historical and teleological perspective—salvaging pleasure, sexualization and procreation—so that it would not be meaningless. Though he had already sketched in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905) an analysis of sadism as a masochistic identification with the suffering object—which he would develop ten years later in “Instincts and their Vicissitudes”—Freud, Bersani adds, could not come to terms, with this unsettling truth about sexuality: bound to fail, sexuality in itself would be a form of sadism, a masochistic identification with the suffering object.

An idealization of itself, borrowing coherence, logic and power of conviction from science and literary narratives, psychoanalysis would stem therefore from the catastrophic fantasy that the intrinsic failure of its object study—sexuality—could be (like) its own. In this perspective, the “half-breed's” textual castration can be re-interpreted as Freud's sadism or masochistic identification reflecting in fact his own suffering as a Jew in an anti-Semitic world. In Freud's cultural environment where anti-Semitism is expressed through utterly sexual forms, particularly misogynous and homophobic, the circumcised Jew also mirrors the failure of sex, and the subsequent illusion of gender and race, all unbearable to his persecutors. Freud's idealized self as scientist and his positioning as white would thus be the mask concealing his masochistic identification with the “half-breed.” In a hide-and-seek dialectic, this would be the meaning of the violence of Freud's “half-breed” and Baldwin's torture scene: the outcome of a structure of failure where necessarily unachieved identifications—like the homoerotic one between father and son—find their resolution into pain, onto others and self-

inflicted.

But the difference between Freud and Baldwin is that the latter shows what the former hides and, in this display, it is the violence of white consciousness as heterosexuality which is disclosed. The sadism with which Baldwin's "hybrid," "Negro," and "black man" are treated in his essays, short stories, and novels encodes a form of masochistic identification typical of white American Puritanism whose homophobic undercurrent also finds masculinity, as Baldwin explains in "Freaks and the American Ideal of Manhood." It is in such a paradigm that he locates most of his white male characters. Besides Jesse in "Going to Meet the Man," there is also, for instance, David, the first-person narrator of *Giovanni's Room* (1955) whose long self-flagellating confession as a guilty closeted gay man parallels the semiotic castration of a black presence invading the text but always in the guise of signs and never as fully embodied subjects.

In these narratives, homoerotic desire is the agent of punishment whose pleasurable pain is already within the law. As such, race relations incarnate a (sado)masochistic power-structure where, bound to fail in violence, inter-subjectivity is maddening or murderous. Incidentally, madness, in its paranoid, psychotic, or neurotic forms, translates the emotional upsurge of the shattered self which, in a racist context, does not equate the failure of reason. Baldwin's white male characters are not mad. They live in a madness of race and sex masquerading as normality. Contrary to what Henry Louis Gates, Jr., argues in "Talking That Talk" (*Critical Enquiry*, 1986, 205), the racist's error, and theirs, is not one of thought. Simply because it is not an error in the first place—reason has not gone astray. Rather, the cultural injunctions to master one's pain and pleasure, with one's emotions, are no longer complied with, either because the social conditions of the racist environment

do not provide anymore the means for channeling emotions, through for instance idealization, or that these conditions are in conflict with other powerful sources of emotional arousal, since to dehumanize and torture someone requires great strength and mastery. It is thus a conflict between what is and what should be or what society asks for that Baldwin depicts in his anatomy of American racism. In "Going to Meet the Man," Jesse's paranoid and neurotic symptoms do not betray his guilt at being a racist but his guilt at not being a good enough one. A good enough white man whose racism would prove the castigation of his homoerotic desire. Therefore, it is not reason that fails; it is racism calling for not failing in the repudiation of homosexuality.

The safety web or, according to the point of view, the deadly fantasy, is provided by race and the ideologies of hierarchized differences. They maintain the illusion that pleasure is not in the pain that cultural, religious, or psychoanalytical laws inflict—a phantasmatic idealization which contains the return of a shattering and threatening ugly reality. Meanwhile, within the structure of failure that masochistic identification unfolds, these systems preserve their *jouissance*, an unacknowledged "surplus-enjoyment" which finishes reifying the other. While desire is defined by the "gap between a positive object of desire and desire itself," "*jouissance* emerges when the very reality that is the source of unpleasure, of pain, is experienced as a source of traumatic excessive pleasure [...] In clear contrast to desire, *jouissance* (or libido, or drive) is by definition 'dirty' and/or ugly; it is always 'too close,'" as Žižek demonstrates in lacanian terms (in Lane ed., 1998, 158-167).

One easily recognizes here the features of the castrated black man, Jesse and his father's *jouissance*, or those of the "half-breed," Freud's one. The offspring of drives, possibly ugly and dirty, at least with

striking features, too close since already within the white world, the “half-breed” is Freud’s source of unpleasure, as he is the embodied reminder of his Jewish condition and of homophobic anti-Semitism. But this displeasure soon gives way to the irrepressible vertigo to be in, to be part of, to belong to the world of science, white and gentile, and straight. Though excessive, this pleasure is also contained within the psychoanalytical fantasy the “half-breed” has become: a conceptual tool, working as the lever of Freud’s self-idealization as scientist—his own “black charred object on the black, charred ground.”

To quell the prospect of its own destruction, the self therefore needs to be idealized through the creation of an other. An other like it, for the idealization to be possible, while unlike it for it being continued. This combination of identification and differentiation is the metapsychological matrix of race where, while opposing identity and difference, ideologies endow them with values. The same relation binding identification and differentiation underlies the elaboration of metaphors for which speech is the initial matrix, the space where signifieds and signifiers take on their respective value in function of an all-mighty referentiality. Most of erring readings of race and desire, taken separately or considered together, originate from this underestimate: race and desire, alike, are a movement until they are arrested. To make the terms of this simile metaphorize each other is already being ideological and fall in the ready-made trap of chronologizing sex over race and vice versa or hierarchizing them. Since, while being isomorphic, race and desire are not parallel but perpendicular. They are not their mutual and respective self and other. Each contains the possibility of the other’s self-and-other binary.

As an ideological construct, what race represents is the lever which dissociates hetero- and homoerotic desire, masculinity

and femininity, while allowing their hierarchization. Similarly, ideological constructs of gender and sexual difference provide the categories for thinking races as separate and unequal or mixed and degenerated. The cross-like framework the two perpendicular structures form together delineates the closed space of the family or the nation where white fathers rule, oppose, castrate, punish for fear of being unmasked in the frailty of their power, pleasurable and self-destructive. Freud, Noah, Jesse’s father are in this respect emblematic figures, immersed in pain and pleasure and whiteness, that the literary texts expose in the nakedness of their fantasy.

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