“You no prove you ah man yet”: Violent Conceptions of Postcolonial Masculinities in Marlon James’ *A Brief History of Seven Killings* and George Elliott Clarke’s *Canticles I: (MMXVII)*

Noor E Nawaal Bhuiyan

Department of English

McGill University, Montreal

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Table of Contents

Abstract

George Elliott Clarke's epic poem, *Canticles I: (MMXVII)*, and Marlon James' novel, *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, explore how the transatlantic slave trade's legacy of violence shaped subsequent formations of masculinities in the peripheries. Imperial logic operated on the systematic dehumanization of Black men and women – both authors purport that the abuses of slavery stripped Black men of their personhood through hypersexualization and emasculation. Due to the gendered nature of imported racial hierarchies, however, Black women during and in postslavery North America and Jamaica bore the brunt of individual and state-sanctioned violence. Through the internalization of white supremacist ideals, including strictly enforced cisheteronormativity, Black men, despite being victims of colonialism themselves, enacted violence on Black women as a homosocial ritual, a reaffirmation of their long-denied masculinity. Black male violence against Black women encompassed psychological, sexual, physical, and linguistic axes, which ultimately resulted in the "burial" of Black women from sociopolitical and literary spheres. As a response to their literary invisibility, Black women began (re)writing themselves into the canon. Both Clarke and James respond to this emergent literary tradition by recreating the invisibility of Black women through the violent language and imagery of their work, while simultaneously supporting the Black feminist archive of Hortense J. Spillers, Octavia E. Butler, and others by way of their radical and consistent usage of African American Vernacular English and Jamaican Patois, respectively. By exalting the language of the enslaved to "proper" literary heights, Clarke and James craft post-neo-slave narratives that grapple with slavery's complex and enduring violence while imagining possibilities for Black futures that resist gender-based social and linguistic subjugation.

Résumé

Le poème épique de George Elliott Clarke, *Canticles I: (MMXVII)*, et le roman de Marlon James, *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, explorent la manière dont l'héritage de violence de la traite transatlantique des esclaves a façonné les formations de masculinités dans les périphéries. La logique impériale a opéré sur la déshumanisation systématique des hommes et femmes Noirs – les deux auteurs prétendent que les abus de l'esclavage ont rendu les hommes Noirs hypersexualisés et émasculés. Cependant, en raison de la nature genrée des hiérarchies raciales importées, les femmes Noires pendant et après l'esclavage en Amérique du Nord et en Jamaïque ont vécu le pire de la violence individuelle et par l'État. En intériorisant la suprématie blanche, y compris la cishétéronormativité stricte, les hommes Noirs, bien qu'ils aient eux-mêmes été victimes du colonialisme, ont fait preuve de violence envers les femmes Noires comme un rituel homosocial, une réaffirmation de leur masculinité longtemps niée. Cette violence s'est exercée à la fois de manière psychologique, sexuelle, physique et linguistique, ce qui a finalement abouti à « l'enterrement » des femmes Noires des sphères sociopolitiques et littéraires. En réponse à leur invisibilité littéraire, les femmes Noires ont (re)commencé à s'inscrire dans le canon. Clarke et James répondent à cette tradition littéraire émergente en recréant l'invisibilité des femmes Noires à travers le langage et l'imagerie violents de leur œuvre, tout en soutenant simultanément le travail d'archives féministes d'Hortense J. Spillers, d'Octavia E. Butler et d'autres de par leur utilisation radicale de l'anglais vernaculaire afro-américain et du patois jamaïcain, respectivement. En exaltant le langage des esclaves à des sommets littéraires « appropriés », Clarke et James élaborent des récits post-néo-esclavagistes qui s'attaquent à la violence complexe et durable de l'esclavage tout en imaginant des possibilités pour un avenir Noir qui résiste à l'assujettissement social et linguistique basé sur le genre.

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Introduction: The Endurance of Western Imperialism in Black Literary Imagination

The legacy of slavery manifests in the popular historical narrative as a brutal, but past, transgression, a bygone evil. Africadian poet George Elliott Clarke, and Jamaican novelist Marlon James, are challenging this ossified notion of slavery through their writing in *Canticles I*: *(MMXVII)* [2017] and *A Brief History of Seven Killings* (2014), respectively, especially regarding how imposed racial and gendered hierarchies continue to enact and proliferate abuse. The African-American and Caribbean canons have historically privileged male-centric, or masculinist, approaches in their portrayals slavery. Clarke and James, through their language and imagery, seem to largely follow this tradition by violently subjugating their (very few) Black female characters. The "metaphysical violence that preconditions" our "knowledge about slavery" operates along physical, psychological, sexual, and linguistic axes, all of which render Black women especially vulnerable (Colbert et al. 58). Modernist Black female authors have been resisting the historically-neglected representations of their subjectivities by redefining the category of the "black intellectual" (Crawford and Snorton 127). While both Clarke and James privilege Black male intersubjectivity, the projection of physical difference ensures that, by speaking about Black men, they implicitly speak about Black women. In a way, their narratives depend on the temporal and geographic architecture that they inherit from Black feminist archives. Indeed, the authors' discourse on the enduring subjugating power of western imperialism is uniquely amplified by the literary forms they choose; I argue that the stylistic characteristics of both the epic poem and the novel enhance Clarke's and James' thematic mission. That is to say, prioritizing textuality and intertextuality in readings of *Canticles I* and *A Brief History* – especially in terms of deliberately reproduced, and unflinching, violence –

threatens common assumptions on the types and longevity of abuses suffered by the enslaved and their descendants in ways that only historical (re)analysis cannot.

Historiographic methods are, however, invaluable to this mode of literary analysis. They provide the context, or the scaffolding, that structure both narratives. For instance, *Canticles I* and *A Brief History* depart in their temporal and geographical scales, yet the writers illustrate violence along similarly gendered and racialized lines. Their shared knowledge on imperial and colonial origins in Europe, as well as the subsequent sociopolitical ramifications of the transatlantic slave trade, is hence quite apparent throughout their texts. Some of it is as a result of their traditional academic training, though much of it relates to their positionality – as two Black male postmodernists, Clarke and James are themselves victims of intergenerational violence. At four years old, Clarke was called an anti-Black slur by three white children – his father explained that he and his brothers are "Coloured," and so Clarke became suddenly and startlingly aware of his visible difference amidst white hegemony in 1960s Nova Scotia (Clarke, *Odysseys Home* 3). Although James was raised in Black-majority Kingston in the 1970s, Jamaica did – and still does – adhere to colonial standards of propriety. As an openly gay man, "verbal and other violence surrounding homosexuality" meant he had to either leave the country or "become a victim of rage against 'battyboys'" (Wright). Politics of intersectional difference have shaped both men's lives, and the ways in which they learned to perform their masculinities. Their speakers, too, navigate the complexities of identity formation against established ideals of white masculinity, often through violent means, and at the expense of women, both Black and white.

Othering based on perceived racial difference is often attributed to Enlightenment Europe, though perverse perceptions of African men and women had existed for centuries prior. In *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (2013), Anne

McClintock names Ptolemy, Leo Africanus, Francis Bacon, John Ogilby, and Edward Long, amongst many others, as examples of male authority figures throughout Europe – and throughout time – that prescribed certain characteristics to African people. Often, they conflated African corporeality, anatomy they thought to be so unlike their own, as physical manifestations of immorality. Indeed, **"**As early as the second century A.D., Ptolemy wrote" that "the constellation of Scorpion, which pertains to the pudenda, dominates" Africa; Leo Africanus builds on Ptolemy's work, stating that there was "no nation under heaven more prone to venerie" than "the Negros"; Francis Bacon's describes the "Spirit of Fornication" as a "little foule, ugly Aethiope"; John Ogilby, in describing west Africans specifically, designated that they bore "large propagators"; Edward Long saw Africa as "the parent of everything that is monstrous in nature" (McClintock 22). As such, a mounting body of work – authored almost exclusively by wealthy European men – solidified the notion of sin as embodied by the African in the nineteenth century European imagination. Indeed, it became "fact" – "The *Universal History* was citing a well-established and august tradition when it declared Africans to be 'proud, lazy, treacherous, thievish, hot and addicted to all kinds of lusts.' It was as impossible, it insisted, 'to be an *African* and not lascivious, as it is to be born in *Africa* and not be an African'" (McClintock 22).

By co-opting the authority of "great" European thinkers, the continent legitimizes supposed biological and intellectual differences between Black Africa and white Europe. The so-called excess sexuality of Africans is repeatedly highlighted; even prior to the rise of Victorian puritanism, interpretations of the Bible equated chastity with moral success. The above passage refers to "monstrous" lust and genitalia, to inherent treachery and lasciviousness – the African mind lacks rationality, the African body grotesque in its disproportionate parts. "With social Darwinism, the taxonomic project, first applied to nature, was now applied to cultural

history. Time became a geography of social power, a map from which to read a global allegory of "natural" social difference. Most importantly, history took on the character of a spectacle" (McClintock 36-7). The Bible therefore legitimizes the notion of primordial Africa, anachronistically dangling "beyond time" – European Enlightenment ideals of "civilization" and "progress" were antithetical to their perception of primitive, animal Africans. As such, European Christians happily proclaimed that Africans must be less than human, as they exist in a state of "negation," in an absence of morality altogether, since their bodies seemingly act of their own accord. Ultimately, Africans must not be as intellectually capable as the Europeans, because their motivations are carnal, rooted in simple flesh and sensuality.

Clarke provides an excellent example of this phenomenon in his poem "*Negro Inventory*." He writes that

> *Negro* is bamboo, coffee, sugar cane.
> [...]
> *Negro* serves as candy.
> Licorice, liquor, rice: Commodities weight the *Negro*.
> [...]
> *Negro* is orange or an orangutang's tangy guts.
> [...]
> *Negro* is a priest riving in a child's rectum…
> [...]
> *Seduction* is *Negro* — as is every price reduction.
> A violent *Negro* masks an ingenious *Negro*.
> Pathological polysyllables get voiced by every anthropological *Negro.*
> *Negro* gotta be as thrifty as is *Breath* itself.
> Or *Death* (itself being *Negro*). (Clarke, *Canticles I* 148)

Packed within Clarke's "*Negro Inventory*" is every manner of inflammatory language, depicting the enslaved Black individual in a myriad of historically-informed ways – they are sources of labor, and therefore capital, for the master ("bamboo, coffee, sugar cane," all "Commodities"); they are "*Seduction*" and "candy," for the master to ravish as they please; they are "violent" and

perverse, as the allusion to pedophilia would indicate; they are subhuman "orangutang[s]." Throughout, it is clear that the enslaved Black person serves as *tabula rasa* onto which white society projects their fears and desires. Their dehumanization is dependent on all of these interlocking factors. And yet, the enslaved person is "ingenious," "thrifty," and "polysyllab[ic]" – Clarke contrasts his barrage of violent language and imagery with expressions of Black intellect and humanity. Such is the mosaic identity of the African-American, a battleground of simultaneous projection and budding actualization – both "Breath" and "*Death*."

As such, European projection of their own "forbidden sexual desires and fears" onto Africans becomes clear, fueled especially by their tradition of "male travel as an erotics of ravishment" (McClintock 26, 22). This tradition – which McClintock aptly identifies as "porno-tropic" – invites distinctions not only along racial lines, but through that of gender, as well (McClintock 22). Black women, whose intersecting axes of identity as both Black and female, compound in the eyes of the settler to figure them "as the epitome of sexual aberration and excess," even more so than for Black men (McClintock 22). Settlers like Sir Thomas Herbert likened the appearance of both Black men and women to that of "Baboons"; the women, however, are further humiliated by being written to have kept "frequent company" with primates (McClintock 23). Colonizers, as they arrived to African shores, warned of these supposedly lascivious, beast-like women – more animal than human. "The traveler William Smith [... wrote] of the perils of traveling as a white man in Africa, for, on that disorderly continent, women 'if they meet with a Man they immediately strip his lower Parts and throw themselves upon him'" (McClintock 23). As such, Black women are not only dehumanized by being portrayed as consorting with apes, but they are also rendered as outrageous and insatiable threats by and to white men.

Francis Bacon, like many European men of the sixteenth century, envisioned white male domination "not only by an imperial geography of power but also by a gendered erotics of knowledge: 'I come in very truth,' he proclaimed, 'leading to you Nature with all her children to bind her to your Service and make her your slave'" (McClintock 23). By interpreting earth, or land, as female, male encroachment adopts the more decisive character of "male megalomania and imperial aggression but also of male anxiety and paranoia" (McClintock 26). By the nineteenth century, African women became burdened not only by European racial configurations, but also by the gendering of space as a result of historical misogyny. The creation of a feminized earth allowed for the eventual possession of women, specifically Black women, as slaves. When Black women are exoticized as "natural," or extensions of nature, their individual humanity is erased, and they are simultaneously constructed as conquerable. This complex, religiously-endorsed ideology of hierarchy, justified their subjugation as fabricated categories of nature.

Black feminist scholar Hortense J. Spillers elaborates on this phenomenon of physical dispossession in her 1987 essay, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book." She engages specifically with white ownership of the Black captive body, which results in dissociation for the enslaved from their personhood, and what that entails, entirely:

> New-World, diasporic plight marked a *theft of the body* – a willful and violent (and unimaginable from this distance) severing of the captive body from its motive will, its active desire. Under these conditions, we lose at least *gender* difference *in the outcome*, and the female body and the male body become a territory of cultural and political maneuver, not at all gender-related, gender-specific. (Spillers 67)

Following the establishment of the United States as a settler colony, acceptable expressions of masculinity and femininity were restricted to specific guidelines, influenced by the various specifications characteristic of Enlightenment thinking. Whiteness and Christianity were absolute prerequisites, bound under the umbrella of patriarchal practices. Forced to construct their identities against these rigid standards, a struggle ensues within and against early Black communities – if "Slaves shall be deemed, sold, taken, reputed and adjudged in law to be *chattels personal*, in the hands of their owners and possessors, and their executors, administrators, and assigns, to all intents, constructions, and purposes whatsoever," then each enslaved individual is invented as "just a purchase" and "no person" at all (Spillers 78; Clarke, *Canticles I* 164). Characterizing the white master as "possessor" and the Black slave as "*chattel*" only reinforces the utter objectification of the Black individual as property to be owned and sold, as well as the legal impossibility of full-fledged personhood within this system.

Spillers continues by defining the exact ways in which Black bodies became detached from any semblance of self-determination, as they were made "*wholly* generated" ahistorical "actants" by the seventeenth century American judiciary (66). She outlines how systemic racial difference, combined with property laws, "externally imposed meanings and uses" onto Black individuals, and their larger community. First, "the captive body becomes the source of an irresistible, destructive sensuality;" simultaneously, and "in stunning contradiction – the captive body reduces to a thing, becoming *being for* the captor;" moreover, "in this absence *from* a subject position, the captured sexualities provide a physical and biological expression of 'otherness';" finally, as a category of "otherness," the captive Black body "translates into a potential for pornotroping and embodies sheer physical powerlessness that slides into a more general 'powerlessness,' resonating through various centers of human and social meaning"

(Spillers 67). The hypersexualization of both Black men and women therefore directly correlates to how they were barred, legally, socially, and politically, from self-actualization. Perceived sexuality was solidified by slave owners as biological fact, a physical manifestation of difference that justified the "othering" of Black individuals. Instead, they were merely appendages to their overseers – themselves capital, and producers of capital. The most insidious violence, therefore, was the absolute powerlessness that came with this form of dehumanization. powerlessness through. Black women, in particular, faced the brunt of psychosexual trauma, not only from their white possessors, but also from the Black men within their communities.

The dominant settler culture insisted on patriarchal kinship. The constraints of slavery, however, namely the refusal to grant the enslaved personhood, and the labor-based roles Black men and women were forced into, drastically affected interpersonal relationships in Black communities. As Spillers elaborates, the Black family existed in a state of perpetual contention, even into the twentieth century, especially within the constraints of decidedly patriarchal, early-modern America. Designated to "subculture," African-Americans were "placed at a distinct disadvantage" within this sociopolitical paradigm (Spillers 66). According to Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "black males should reign because that is the way the majority culture carries things out," as the minority group could face further ostracization in their inability to adequately assimilate (Spillers 66). Indeed, if Black Americans engaged with "matriarchal" patterns of organization and being, they would be "caught in a state of social 'pathology'" (Spillers 66). Early Black communities did not adhere to the normative model of the white nuclear family, only adding to their alienation as a "pathologized" or "abnormal" population. General dispossession at the individual level due to tenuous formations of masculinities and femininities was instrumental in reproducing generations of slaves. In fact, "if 'kinship' were possible, the property relations

would be undermined, since the offspring would then 'belong' to a mother and a father. [... G]enetic reproduction becomes, then, not an elaboration of the life-principle in its cultural overlap, but an extension of the boundaries of proliferating properties" (Spillers 75). Eroding the Black individual's sense of self creates a kind of snowball effect, in which all subsequent relationships are also subverted to feed the white slave owner's interest and maintain his capital. Both Black men and women feel the "crushing burden" of the "'white' family, [...] and the "Negro Family," [being] in a constant opposition of binary meanings" (Spillers 65, 66). Blackness and kinship become fundamentally incompatible, rooted in the anomalous association Black men and women form with their masculinity and femininity, respectively, and how that manifests in their relationships with one another.

Indeed, Black women were especially valuable in their ability to produce more slaves, yet this very fact rendered them even more vulnerable by reinforcing their status as simply property, not full-fledged women. Motherhood and femininity denotes womanhood or personhood, which Black enslaved women were not afforded – they did not possess themselves, nor their children. The

> biological reproduction of the enslaved was not alone sufficient to reenforce the *estate* of slavery. If, as Meillassoux contends, "femininity loses its sacredness in slavery," then so does "motherhood" as female blood-rite/right. To that extent, the captive female body locates precisely a moment of converging political and social vectors that mark the flesh as a prime commodity of exchange. While this proposition is open to further exploration, suffice it to say now that this open exchange of female bodies in the raw offers a kind of Ur-text to the dynamics of signification and representation that the gendered female would unravel. (Spillers 75)

Within this matrix, Black men are suspended in a limbo-like state – they, too, are almost entirely powerless in a white supremacist society, except in relation to Black women. With the anxiety and emasculation that comes with denied personhood, violence in its many forms can serve as a powerful reaffirmation of manhood, a strategy for asserting a sense of selfhood. Violence is an enactment of agency. This contradiction comes to define Black manhood – as victims of sexual, psychological, and physical abuse at the hands of their owners, but also as perpetrators of that very violence against women, especially Black women, who are some of the most disenfranchised members of larger American society.

Both Clarke and James explore the relationship between Black male violence as a means of survival and self-determination following the process and aftermath of enslavement and colonization. While the first installment of *Canticles I*, released in 2016, almost entirely follows the arrival of conquistadors to the Americas and the ensuant establishment of slavery, I have chosen to only work with the second installment in relation to James' novel. *Canticles I: (MMXVII)* meditates on the reverberating effects of both slavery and imperialism as they evolve into the twentieth century, which more closely correlates to James' focus and scope in *A Brief History*, which grapples with postslavery Jamaica, and my own central thesis. I chose to put Clarke and James in conversation with one another as both authors are materially and geographically connected through the transatlantic slave trade; both Black Canadians and Afro-Jamaicans are directly and intergenerationally impacted by this history of immense physical and psychological violence. I am, however, also interested in how their later geographical isolation from one another has affected each nation's distinct evolution of Black masculinity; where, and how, do they still coincide? How does expression of Black male violence differ between Nova Scotia and Kingston? How does Clarke and James' historical geographical

separation continue to impact their literary and formal choices – in most effectively portraying and commenting on this pervasive violence – despite the often unifying force of globalization in the twenty-first century? I will attempt to answer these questions by exploring how the gendered traumas of enslavement resulted in fractured relationships, both romantic and familial, due to the tumultuous state of self-determination under white supremacy in historical and modern Black communities. Black male characters are seldom written as both victims and perpetrators of violence, though Clarke and James illustrate this interplay in various ways throughout their texts. The repetitive recreation of violent imagery in both works ultimately depicts the circular and self-replicating nature of colonial violence in every facet of Black existence.

As such, Nina Burgess, the only dynamic female character in *A Brief History*, is constantly aware of her vulnerability as a Black woman. Assault and intimidation color nearly all of her interactions with men, Black and white, lovers, law enforcement, and passersby alike – her "high school teacher used to warn [the girls] not to dress like sluts and fear rape all the time" (James 92). Colonial logic still applies, even in the latter half of the twentieth century, even with Black men as the executors. As McClintock states, "In myriad ways, women served as mediating and threshold figures by means of which men oriented themselves in space, as agents of power and agents of knowledge" (24). Black women like Nina only exist as instruments through which Black men realize their personhood, as objects of their desire and victims of their violence. Black women are even more invisible in Clarke's work, and when they do appear, they are sexually violated and/or murdered, with very few exceptions – I argue that this is intentional on both Clarke's and James' parts. Black women have been forced into social and literary invisibility through the specific cruelty of slavery, which still lends precarity to their claims to womanhood and femininity. Due to their constructed relationship to Black men, Black masculinity is also still

an unstable category. Clarke and James are simply recreating the "disappearance" of Black women as yet another mode of violence that Black men, intentionally or unintentionally, enact. Neither author is able to "get over" or "move beyond slavery" as the framework through which they realize their work, as the Black men and women encased within their narrative are "perpetually haunt[ed]" by the "traumatic history of racialization and political disenfranchisement" (Colbert et al. 219, 217). Slavery's institutions thus continue to affect "cultural production" and "structure black life" and relationships – at stake is a thorough understanding of how the reproduction of colonial violence continues to shape the social, political, and literary landscape in North America and the Caribbean.

Chapter One: Conflation of Corporeal Violence with "Animal" Desire in the Formation of the Africadian

In his foreword to *Canticles I*, George Elliott Clarke outlines his mission in crafting this collection, wherein he centers undervalued "partisan[s]" and their "*Histor[ies]*" (ix). Although initially elusive on who his speakers are, Clarke clarifies that the partisans in question are the victims of slavery and their "free" offspring, their united history that of the transatlantic slave trade, an imperial process so intrinsic to the cultural formation of North America that it traverses both time and geographical space. Simultaneously, however, Clarke's epic poem is shaped *by* his unique geographical positionality; despite its global scope, *Canticles I* cannot be read without taking into account North America's colonial history, or Clarke's Africadian ancestry. In this chapter, I argue that Clarke's expansive narrative – propelled by the near-mythic imagery of his Black heroes as they undertake the superhuman, and psychologically destructive task, of resisting enslavement and surviving all its associated violences – reveals the complex status of Black men, during and postslavery, as simultaneous victims and perpetrators of racial and gendered violence. Through the voices of his Black male speakers, Clarke presents visceral imagery of the psychosexual violence they were subjected to at the hands of their white owners and overseers. Although burdened by socioeconomic persecution and hypersexualization, Clarke's poem frequently illustrates Black men's continuous violation of both Black and white women. Clarke thus posits that Black men, emasculated and made powerless through western imperialism, reaffirm their manhood through the performance of a violent masculinity shaped by colonialism. Black women, in particular, are most vulnerable to their violence as Black men partake in the formation(s) of their masculinities. As such, Clarke's epic poem grapples with how imperialist institutions objectified both Black men and women in various, often violently

contentious, ways, resulting in systems of social relation that privilege race- and gender-based violence.

Clarke's ubiquitous, and seemingly gratuitous, depictions of violence against women in *Canticles I* is curious, considering the Black feminist literary tradition that influenced his own "post-neo-slave narrative" (Colbert et al. 70). As Margo Natalie Crawford and C. Riley Snorton illustrate in their compilation of essays, *The Flesh of the Matter: A Critical Forum on Hortense Spillers* (2024), seminal Black feminist literature, such as Octavia E. Butler's *Kindred* (1979) and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987), reshaped the African-American canon by "rendering visible" the historically-erased Black woman (Crawford and Snorton 151). The violently racist, gendered hierarchies of slavery subjugated the Black woman to the point of sociopolitical and literary disappearance – indeed, the "historical subject of black women in the United States has been 'studied,' 'narrated,' 'criticized' and 'spoken for' from everybody's point of view, but their own" (Spillers qtd. in Crawford and Snorton 152). Through Dana and Sethe, and as prolific Black female authors themselves, Butler and Morrison "theoriz[ed]" the Black woman back "into existence" in postslavery America; their work has contributed to the "institutionalization of Black Studies and Women's and Gender Studies, [...] and [to] a major shift in the dominant discourses on race, gender, and sexuality toward an intersectional reckoning with difference" (Crawford and Snorton 151, 153). Clarke's position is thus intriguing, as he is both speaking with and against what is now the dominant discursive mode – as a Black male author that violently recreates the subordination of Black women in *Canticles I*, he is arguably contributing to their literary (re)disappearance. However, his "*Beloved*-style" narrative devises a link between "past and present that constructs a continuity between the nascent antiblack racism of [...] colonial America and the antiblack racism that is still in the process of being denaturalized in the

twenty-first century" (Colbert et al. 70). As a "traumatized subject" himself, his poetry "hold[s] on to historical trauma in order to *repossess* the history that *possesses*" him – there is no "fixed time line of loss," or its representation (Colbert et al. 70). Therefore, the way in which he yokes the deranged abuses of slavery to their neocolonial aftereffects, i.e. in formations of violent Black masculinities, is largely inspired by this Black feminist literary tradition.

The ubiquity of slavery's aftereffects in sociocultural interactions is reflected in the grand scope of *Canticles I*, which draws together and resurrects the motivations, "words, [and] phrases" of notable historical figures – Malcolm X, Nat Turner, and Sojourner Truth, to name a few – as well as searing "images" of race- and gender-based abuse, into a "confessional narrative" enacted by the composite voice of the speaker, resulting in a lyric epic of global magnitude (Clarke, *Canticles I* ix). His collection can thus be read as a post-neo-slave narrative, because "unlike [...] nineteenth-century slave narratives," they "undermine the coherent subject of narration by developing a series of other voices which sometimes supplement and sometimes subvert the voice of the 'original' narrator" (Colbert et al. 71). Clarke, for instance, is the sole author of *Canticles I*, but the tens of voices that he adopts allow him to echo decisive and divisive eras of American history through well-known actors. As such, Clarke's contemporary interpretation of the post-neo-slave narrative allows him to exercise his literary imagination to reasonably "fill in the gaps," as he deems fit, on what historians do not, cannot, or refuse to know. He simultaneously builds upon and "fabulates," as Saidiya Hartman might offer, not entirely unlike the manner in which many of his Black modernist predecessors approached the (post)-neo-slave narrative.

Clarke is clear that his "print keyboard" is an "*Ouija* board" that brings to life, connects, and "mirrors" events and speakers "chronologically" in the collection and through this

"*Whims[ical]*" depiction of a history (*Canticles I* ix, x). The "ad hoc territory" that Clarke traverses lends him the ability to "revise" history in a manner that foregrounds and highlights Blackness, as popular historical accounts so rarely do. *Canticles I* undoubtedly forces the reader to "read slavery against received epistemologies" (Colbert et al. 71). This is true even of the narrative form of *Canticles I* – a traditional epic poem "include[s] superhuman deeds, fabulous adventures, highly stylized language, and a blending of lyrical and dramatic traditions, which also extend to defining heroic verse" ("Epic"). However, Clarke's move is slightly different in that his focus is almost solely on the representation of Black subjectivities, on the oft neglected as central actors through his "heroic" verse. In "*Letter from Rev. King*," for instance, Clarke invites Martin Luther King's voice to speak of "*Unkind*" white settlers in Canada that vigorously oppose the "Abolitionists[' …] *Cause*"; Edward Mitchell Bannister receives his own titular poem, in which Clarke features the "*Beauty*" and majesty of Bannister's art, lost to the "blind [...] *Ugliness*" of racist America; Black men, women, and children "howl" and "weep" as they "perish," their death a "Perfume" that pleases white senses (115, 105, 85). Each discrete poem of Clarke's epic is strung together through the visceral language of pain – the pain of unbelonging, the pain of continuous subservience. Ultimately, he is drawn to the literal boldness the traditional epic facilitates, as well as the melody that internal rhyme and pentameter command – however, he is shifting focus through his choice of actors, and his choice to siphon through them candid, violent, and often sexually explicit language. As such, Clarke reworks what both the white American and Black feminist canon can signify by putting forth an "antimemorial experimental form" through *Canticles I* that turns "inside-[...]out" the "architecture" of the traditional slave narrative (Colbert et al. 74, 78). Within this collection exist multiple "heroes," stretching across time and geographical space – their journey(s), however, as they claw away the signifier of

"slave" to inch towards "progress" amidst burgeoning empire, is how Clarke decides to (re)organize his subversive epic.

Canticles I is thus a recollection of the various genealogies of enslaved Black individuals as they grapple with the intergenerational effects of physical, psychological, and sexual trauma. Clarke layers quotidian snapshots of individual experience, deftly transitioning from encounters between master and slave in North America in introductory poems like "'*Prophet*' *Nat Turner on his Southampton Insurrection (1831)*," to formerly enslaved Black imperialists mobilizing against native West African populations in "*Declaration of the Independence of Liberia (1847)*," to mid-twentieth century colonial reverberations in Germany and China ("*Auschwitz II, or Birkenau: A Survey*," "*Mao Reacts to the Holocaust (1948)*," and "*Mao @ Nanking*," amongst others). The sheer grandeur of Clarke's project is evident here as he recounts, in painstaking detail, the evolution of western imperialism in the hundred or so years that transpire between the first and final poem of this installment. Folded into this linear narrative is the progression of some Black populations from enslaved to complicit in the very same violent systems that they were subject to, a matter that is dealt by Clarke throughout the anthology with searing candor. Rarely are Black men afforded this level of complexity in literature, yet most of Clarke's actors and speakers assemble as victims, perpetrators, or both under the shared context of violent subjugation. Clarke therefore sustains an extended focus on slavery as the root of ideological evil in North America, the treatment of which is simply absent in the Canadian *oeuvre*. Indeed, as an Africadian living in the settler colony of Canada, the government's conspicuous and continued silence on the issue of slavery is topical and incredibly personal to Clarke. A reading of *Canticles I* is thus incomplete without this necessary background, which directly informs his formal and thematic choices.

Clarke writes in his memoir, *Where Beauty Survived* (2021), that he conjured the term "Africadian" following the need for specificity regarding individuals of Black Maritime communities. Before the 1990s, "Black," "Negro," and "Coloured" were most popular, but these labels ignored historical Indigenous admixture, as well as a differentiation from "Black Newcomers," or immigrants that arrived to Canada's eastern shores much later, and perhaps not directly as a result of slavery (*Where Beauty Survived* ii). By the 1990s, however, institutions and citizens alike endorsed the use of "African-Nova Scotian," which Clarke swiftly followed with the introduction of "Africadian" into the lexicon (*Where Beauty Survived* ii). In his own words, Africadian "designate[s] black people arising from the historical communities of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island, to distinguish [their] culture and [their] three-century-long presence from the originally offshore histories and cultures of Black Newcomers" (Clarke, *Where Beauty Survived* ii). Indeed, "the historical, Africadian population has endured aeons of slavery first and segregation later that merit current attempts at uplift, programs not necessarily required by African-heritage Newcomers" (Clarke, *Where Beauty Survived* ii). Clarke also approves the term "Black Indigenous" as synonymous to Africadian, as thousands "have Indigenous (Cherokee and Mi'kmaq, in [his] instance) and/or African-American and/or West Indian roots" (*Where Beauty Survived* ii). For the purposes of this thesis, I will use "Africadian" to refer to Clarke and his community – he is, "at last, [himself]: Africadian" (*Where Beauty Survived* ii).

As such, Clarke's identity is itself both specific and deeply historical, emerging through centuries of imperial exchange, which is reflected in the imaginative post-slave architecture of *Canticles I*. While Africadia only denotes the Black Maritimes, Clarke does intentionally evoke African-American and Afro-Caribbean influences in his construction of the Black Maritimer; the

definition of Africadian acknowledges the cultural influences of both communities in its characterization. In *Odysseys Home* (2002), Clarke specifically names stereotypically African-American cultural signifiers, especially soul food ("collard greens and hamhocks") and music ("Motown"), and iconic civil rights leaders ("Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr") [4]. While this does imply a lack in an obviously identifiable, uniquely Africadian presence in Canadian arts and politics, it also points to the exportation of an overly simplified depiction of "Blackness" from the United States to the rest of the world. While Africadians, African-Americans, and Afro-Caribbeans are joined by the shared struggle of racial subjugation – he even references the likes of Aimé Césaire and Léopold Sédar Senghor when he speaks of "*Négritude*," or the awareness and cultivation of "Blackness" as reclaimable, tangible, and empowering – regional nuance and personal experience is nonexistent in the homogeneity of "Black" as a blanket form of identification (*Canticles I* 237). Clarke's popularization of the term "Africadian," however, and his prolific presence in the Canadian literary landscape through the cultural relevance of his writing, is working to rectify the erasure of Canadian Blackness: "Black Power" is not just an "*American*" concept, and can be understood and utilized by African-Canadians to suit their historical and sociopolitical context without ignoring the shared trauma of slavery (*Odysseys Home* 5).

Clarke is actively opposing Canada's collective attempt at distancing itself from its slavery-ridden past through his writing. As it stands, "slavery is still not thought by most Canadians to be an integral part of their collective experience," especially when compared to the more overt involvement of their neighbor, the United States (Donovan 110). Canada is, however, absolutely implicated in this imperial endeavor – while many Black Canadians descend from

"fugitive" American slaves, white Canadian slave owners have participated in their own, independent trade from as early as the 17th century. That is to say,

> fugitive slaves came to [Canada] from the United States after the end of the War of Independence, after the end of the War of 1812, and as part of the Underground Railroad later in the 19th century. Given this history of providing asylum to slaves and other refugees – and the emphasis within Canada on individual rights – the study of slavery in Canada goes against the dominant image of Canada as a land of freedom. Yet there were slaves in the territory that became New France/Quebec, at least 4,000 between 1685 and 1800. Recent scholarship estimates that there were another 4,000 slaves in Canada after the French regime. Much but not all of that increase in slave numbers came from mainland Nova Scotia, Cape Breton, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland. (Donovan 110)

While Clarke is himself a product of "fugitive[s]" seeking asylum in Nova Scotia following the War of 1812, Quebec and the Maritimes boasted slave presence centuries earlier. As Donovan explains, Canada does indeed have an extensive past marred by slavery, with thousands of documented enslaved individuals within state bounds. It is simply that Canada's current sociopolitical interests, especially its curated image as a moderate "melting pot," purposefully eclipses this history. In fact, by the late eighteenth century, at least "34 per cent of the total black emigrants [to Nova Scotia] remained slaves," and "practically every county in mainland Nova Scotia had slaves" (Donovan 111). While the difficult accounts of slavery are "on the periphery" for white Canadians, Africadian and African-Canadian artists continue to resist against "the broader narrative of Canadian history" to tell the stories that are central to *their* "daily realities" (Donovan 112, 113).

Indeed, Clarke maps out, in a fairly linear fashion, the (hopeful) hardship of the Underground Railroad in "*Harriet Tubman Proceeds*," before penning the journey many of those very fugitive slaves took to Canada:

> To run the marathon of the wind —
> crash through the bush and brush —
> as hungry as moonlight is for the night —
> and live off velvet, rabbit meat —
>
> to crack and suck bones as hollow as thirst —
> or swallow bite-size dirt as I hide,
> wallowing in grit, bathing in it —
> to disallow my flight,
>
> my *Freedom* dream, which maps field
> and forest as medicinal green, oh but I must!
> Caught, my wings will be chopped off,
> my body fenced in afresh,
>
> allowed no ration of *Inspiration*,
> *Freedom* once more utopic, a fancy,
> my nights locked in barracoon brooding,
> my days wracked by sockdolager sobs,
>
> my flesh taking *Barbarian* disgusts —
> uninterrupted injuries —
> the whip, the lash, the brand,
> the fists, the hound dog bites….
>
> Preachers' barking lungs,
> slaves' scathing songs,
> congressmen puking sanctions,
> the quibbling mechanisms
>
> of lynchers' pulleys
> (ropes draped over tree branches),
> drive me to hunt the horizon,
> to seek the oily abyss of woods:

> Or smother in whirlpools,
> or skulk in gutter dirt, hoof-broken turf.
> *Location* is Yankee *Affliction*,
> but *Healing*, if it's Canada…. (*Canticles I* 78-9)

In "*Marathon*," Clarke juxtaposes horrific imagery of imprisonment and subjugation with the cautious hope of imminent freedom. Due to then-naturalized religious justification for slavery ("Preachers' barking lungs"), their Constitutional designation as only ⅗ of a single free (white) person ("congressmen puking sanctions"), and the perpetual physical and psychological violence of daily lives as slaves (the "uninterrupted injuries" of "the whip, the lash, the brand, / the fists, the hound dog bites," the ultimate threat of the "lynch"), many enslaved individuals saw no solution but to escape their horrific abuse. After successfully evading detection following escape from the plantation by way of the Underground Railroad, many enslaved people braved the "wind" and "brush" of the wilderness as they trudged north. They knowingly faced starvation, hunting "rabbit[s]" when they could, eating literal "dirt" when they could not, desperately "crack[ing …] bones" and "suck[ing]" out the marrow to stave off a ravenous "hung[er]." "Hungry," here, is a double entendre – literal hunger, of course, but also the "thirst" for "*Freedom*," that rare commodity cruelly gatekept by the "Yankee[s]." The desire for freedom manifests in the body, in perseverance – by apostrophizing the speaker as they cry out "oh but I must!", Clarke highlights the joy and excitement folded into a narrative of pain, the nourishing power of hope. The novel "abyss" of what lies beyond their known world is not nearly as terrifying as their "*Barbarian*" reality of being "locked" away, "sob[bing]" – Clarke's imagery of "wings" savagely "chopped off," "body fenced in" is visceral in its shocking violence. Re-enslavement (or worse) is what they risk, should they be rediscovered. And yet, "utopic" freedom is sustenance, the journey "medicinal" in its promise to soothe all wounds, physical and

emotional, if only they manage to cross the border. To the enslaved, the promise of Canada is quite literally "*Healing*." Nothing could be worse than the violence they leave behind.

Of course, the subsequent experience of this "unknown […] space" was bleak, infected with the same imported racial hierarchy as the United States (Colbert et al. 82). Some fugitives were re-enslaved, others "free," but not quite – the result is Clarke's poetic "collective mourning":

> The ex-States ex-slaves
> are only as "fugitive" as was "Boney,"
> ebbing from Moscow,
> indelibly a war criminal….
>
> The blackamoors barging into Canada West
> (Upper Canada), hankering for *Liberty*,
> are now anchored
> on 600 acres
> of prime, Essex County turf,
>
> where, "free at last," as they so chortle,
> they are dusky busybodies,
> buzzing and huzzaing
> pulpit palpitations,
> as opposed to pouring down sweat behind oxen.
>
> Their farcical "escapes" justify,
> so thinks this minstrel rabble,
> unchecked *Insolence*,
> so that they may waive *Circumspection*….
>
> And may compose a café class,
> and so make pubs their parliaments,
> and cough at *Caucasian* Christianity
> and scoff at Judeo-Christian mores
> and Greco-Roman laws,
> and parade themselves scandalously as our peers—
> as if they were unblanching Britons!

> [...]
>
> The Colony's rulers must pare down
> the specious vermin,
> wrest back acreage from these crooks and crones….
>
> (The *Law* should be such a smothering sheet in cover,
> the sable race finds no quarter to inhale and increase.) [Colbert et al. 82; Clarke,
>
> *Canticles I* 112-3]

Clarke pens "*Pamphlet to the Electors of Canada West (1856)*" in white Nova Scotian judge Thomas Chandler Haliburton's voice. In his 1823 work, *A General Description of Nova Scotia: Illustrated by a New and Correct Map*, Haliburton urges "Britons" to emigrate to Canada's lesser-known "Colony" of Nova Scotia – yet, as Clarke makes clear, his pro-immigration stance did not extend to the formerly enslaved (7). Clarke, in Haliburton's voice, calls the "ex-slaves [...] war criminal[s]," "crooks and crones," "blackamoors," "vermin," "sable race," and a "café class," not only othering and objectifying the growing African-Canadian population amidst a white majority, but denigrating them to obvious second-class citizenship through demeaning language. Clearly, only the white man is entitled to ownership over "600 acres" of "prime [...] turf," not the "*Insolen[t]*" former slave that "barg[ed] in," whose only relationship to the land should be to toil and labor "behind oxen." Folded into Clarke's language, however, is the irony of white indignation over land ownership in the "Colony," land which had been unlawfully seized from Indigenous communities in the first place.

As Haliburton may have purported, the brazen ex-slaves refuse to even properly assimilate, "hankering" for their American "*Liberty*" on Canadian soil (Clarke, *Canticles I* 112). Most blasphemous of all, however, is their indignation for imported European legal systems and religions, as they "cough at *Caucasian* Christianity / and scoff at Judeo-Christian mores / and

Greco-Roman laws" (Clarke, *Canticles I* 112). The very same laws and sermons, of course, that justify their subjugation. The only way the noisy, "scandalous" former slaves should be dealt with in "(Upper Canada)" is through the "wrest[ing]" of their "acreage" so that they may never "find[...] no quarter to inhale and increase," essentially remaining in a cycle of suffocating poverty (Clarke, *Canticles I* 112, 113). Even more sinister, however, is the "smothering" nature of the "*Law*" that Haliburton is calling to be enforced, which will asphyxiate the population – that is to say, kill them off – so that they may not reproduce, or "increase" (Clarke, *Canticles I* 113). This genocidal rhetoric is emblematic of the "Colony" itself, which rests upon forcefully seized Indigenous land – as the native population is rendered nearly invisible by imperial forces, the same attempt is made with regards to early Black communities. It is worth noting here that Clarke is not claiming that any of the violent language in "*Pamphlet to the Electors of Canada West (1856)*" is lifted directly from Haliburton's work – rather, he is simply echoing a period-specific sentiment, an attitude that was shared by many early colonists, including the likes of conservative Haliburton.

While "*Pamphlet to the Electors of Canada West (1856)*" outlines some of the sociopolitical difficulties encountered by the "fugitives," "*Marathon*" remains as a testament to the power of faith, the unshakeability of hope. The journey that thousands of formerly enslaved individuals embarked on was indeed a marathon – long, taxing, and painful, but at the finish line lingered a sense of freedom and accomplishment. "Free," or perhaps, "free[-er,] at last" (Clarke, *Canticles I* 112). "*Marathon*" and "*Pamphlet to the Electors of Canada West (1856)*" are thus examples of how the discrete poems within Clarke's epic engage with geographical periphery (Africadia, Western Canada, or more broadly, the nation itself) while gesturing towards the global phenomenon of slavery as a violent manifestation of western imperialism. Therefore, by

engaging with slavery and its connotations so extensively throughout *Canticles I*, Clarke is fighting the calculated phenomenon of Black erasure as it relates to greater Canadian history, and is bringing into startling clarity the physical, sexual, and mental abuses suffered by the enslaved. While Clarke's Africadian background scaffolds the epic as the niche periphery that he is observing, he does not lean towards Afro-Canadacentrism any more than Afro-Americentrism; he engages with both in a delicate balancing act that recognizes Africadian history as intrinsically connected to Black American (and Caribbean) subjugation through the overarching framework of slavery, as enacted by western imperialism as a whole. Western imperialism allows for the existence of European colonies in the Americas; it allowed for slavery; it allows for the continued dispossession of African-Americans and African-Canadians through prejudiced legal systems and strict white religiosity.

Alongside the linguistic and physical violence that the enslaved encountered, both Black men and women were subjected to distorted projections of "sexual desire" by their white masters along lines of perceived physical difference, especially considering their genitalia (Tomlins 10). As such, the construction of the Black male body as hypersexual and "animal" becomes a "psychological actuality" in slavery and postslavery North America, in which beastly sexuality becomes a corporeal reality (Tomlins 8). This can be attributed, at least in part, to imported Enlightenment ideals: "Rene Descartes' theoretical reflections on the mind and body separation helped lay the seeds for and, thereby, influenced greatly the eighteenth century [...] understanding of a material and immaterial split in what it means to be a human being" (Hopkins 181). Essentially, "the mind, symbolized by whites in Europe, strove for loftier goals in the human situation, while the body, embodied in Blacks and other darker peoples of the globe,

longed for expressions of the carnal" (Hopkins 182). Clarke takes on Charles Darwin's voice as he illustrates this concept:

> The Blacks [...] consider us akin to gods—
> or Apollonian demons—
> or cold *Glory*—
> or obliterating storms—
> and we don't disappoint.
>
> (What is Europe—
> but insurgent sunlight—
> doves flashing amid grapevines?)
>
> We deem their societies more earth
> than sky,
> more dirt than *Metaphysics*,
> more sperm than tears,
>
> and so their alleged "humanity"
> seems spurious. (*Canticles I* 240)

Black people therefore become a constructed "category of nature" by the "god[-like]" Europeans, ruled by "passion, biology, the inside, otherness, inertness, unchanging, statis, matter—a more primitive way of being" (McClintock 23; Hopkins 182). Likened to mere "dirt" of the "earth," they are incapable of elevation and refinement, of the exalting, "*Metaphysic[al]*" heights of scientific, rational Europe. European society, according to those like Darwin, is "insurgent sunlight," pure light outshining the darkness of the primordial, "smoking ruins" of Africa (Clarke, *Canticles I* 241). Unable to control their hypersexual urges, as they are more "sperm than tears," they are justifiably enslaved as the "private property" of the "intelligen[t], [...] more developed," and emotionally regulated white man (McClintock 24; Hopkins 182). Clarke takes this dehumanization a step further by comparing Black people, the men specifically, to mythical yet animal "goat-footed centaurs" that smell perpetually of "*Coitus*" (*Canticles I*

241). They are "So unlike" the Europeans that their "humanity" itself is uncertain (Clarke, *Canticles I* 241, 240). Thus, Black men are denied their personhood through the violent configuration of their bodies as pleasure objects, threatening in its undisciplined abundance.

White fixation of Black genitalia, especially the phallus, is no coincidence. "Anglo-American culture long held a fascination with the penises of black men and projected both desire and jealousy upon an objectified and disembodied black phallus" (Foster 450). While "early Americans [...] saw erotic possibilities and beauty in black bodies," their simultaneous disgust at their own erotic musings rendered the Black man as scapegoat (Foster 449). Essentially, "he is penalized for the guilty imagination of the white people who invest him with their hates and longings, and is the principal target of their sexual paranoia" (Hopkins 185). Unfortunately, "to be an American Negro male is also to be a kind of walking phallic symbol: which means that one pays [...] for the sexual insecurities of others. The dominating culture prosecutes and perpetrates insecurities on Black others because of the white tradition's simultaneous fear and fascination, dislike and desire" (Hopkins 184). As Holland elaborates, "Blackness, at least as it is understood in visual culture, not only produces 'erotic value' for whiteness, but it holds the very impossibility of its own pleasure through becoming the sexualized surrogate of another. In a sense, *blackness can never possess its own erotic life*" (46). In other words, Black male sexuality is still bound up in "a matrix of desiring relations that tend to make it difficult to mark where racist (here, colonial) practice begins and where our good desire ends" (Holland 50). Can the Black erotic be autonomous from projected white desires? Perhaps, though certainly not until the enduring notion of Cartesian dualism, separating the mind (spirituality) from the body enacted by the legacy of slavery is reassessed.

If the Black male body is configured as "deficient by nature and creation," unable to freely control its urges, then the still pervasive, though less overt, idea that it "thrives on raw, animal eroticism" makes sense (Hopkins 182). The Black male body becomes a threatening "model of masculinity that highlighted power, strength, and mastery rather than one of moderation and self-control" (Foster 452). Really,

> the idea of the male Black as Beast haunts the triangular interplay of African American male body on (white) female body defended by white male (authority) body [...] It is "an established fact that our culture links manhood to terror and power, and that Black men are frequently imaged as the ultimate in hypermasculinity. . . . The cops who beat Rodney King and the jury who acquitted King's assailants openly admitted that the size, shape, and color of his body automatically made him a threat to the officer's safety." Somehow Black men have become a primary cathartic scapegoat for the evils committed by maleness at large [...] And, following the predominant American cultural script, it is powerful white men who perceive their sacred crusade to destroy this ugly, Black man-monkey. (Hopkins 183-4)

White men thus cite the beastliness of the Black male body as justification for overpowering, controlling, and humiliating Black men, "warping [their] bodies via iron and steel" (Clarke, *Canticles I* 16). All of the "terror" surrounding their physique is linked to their phallus, which, through various aforementioned historical factors, has been perceived as grotesque or unnatural. Indeed, "The Negro (male) phallus is as ugly / and unbending as a crucifix" (Clarke, *Canticles I* 314). As Christianity remains fixed through time, so does the perception and position of the Black man. Searingly, Clarke writes that "Whoever says *Sexual Assault*, says Negro" (*Canticles I* 315). The Black man becomes synonymous with sexual deviancy, transgression, and excess –

he's uncontrollable, inhumane. He deserves to be restrained and disciplined. Clarke's work is therefore working simultaneously along two axes: he is representing the history of Black hypersexualization in plain terms, in a way in which its inherent violence is palpable. He is also opposing reactionary puritanism by writing of Black erotics, both past and present, in surprisingly tender terms.

Enlightenment ideals alone cannot be blamed for the conception and enforcement of slavery in the Americas. However, as McClintock explains in the introduction to this thesis, they certainly differentiate between the intelligent, Christian, chaste, morally successful European (white) and the primitive, pagan, lascivious, morally bankrupt African (Black). Religion, or, more precisely, Christianity, is a significant driver behind Enlightenment thinking, even amongst the secular forces of racism that also emerge during this era. Religion therefore becomes instrumental in the creation of "whiteness" as a category in the new American colonies – in other words, this interpretation of Christianity is incompatible with Blackness. If Black people could be Christian in the same way as white people, then whiteness could not exist as the subjugating category in the same capacity. For many Southern American Baptists, Methodists, and Presbyterians, the "monopolization" of Christianity in this specific manner manifested as Christofascism, or religious, racial, and sociopolitical exclusivity ("god-complex") [Hopkins 187]. The incredible capitalist potential of the plantation is another agent that worked in tandem with Christofascism to not only justify slavery, but maintain the ownership of slaves as a "divinely sanctioned" right (Jemison 264). As such, there is a coherent chronology of development when it comes to the appropriation of religion in the creation of the "devilish," erotically-charged, animalistic slave. "Appropriation" is a key term here – as Clarke writes, "*Slavery* is a[n old,] classical system. / It counts on abominations / not even numbered in

Leviticus" (*Canticles I* 38). White male anxiety regarding perceived Black male hypersexuality (and the supposed threat they posed on the "chaste" white woman) becomes a religious issue, and therefore a matter requiring biblical intervention. Invoking God's name was the divine, yet clearly contrived, justification necessary to act violently upon differences, religious, racial, sexual, imagined, or otherwise, for imperial gain.

Adding to the superiority complex of white Christians is the theological justification they received from their ministers, reinforcing their beliefs that "not only did God sanction slavery, but slavery's supporters were better Christians and more faithful interpreters of Biblical text than were their opponents" (Jemison 258). In this line of thinking, the best Christians were those that fell into prescribed familial roles, and that did, in fact, include any slaves that the patriarch "owned" – the father/master was supposed to be a "benevolent" and "paternalistic" overseer of all family (and property) members. After all, the New Testament's "injunctions for slaves to obey their masters appeared alongside instructions for wives to obey their husbands" (Jemison 259). Gender and race therefore become inextricably intertwined in the context of slavery; pro-slavery theology persisted, not just in the South, because "religious arguments had situated slavery amidst other forms of household order and had relied upon widely accepted views of women's subordination as a corollary to slaves' deprivation of rights" (Jemison 266). As Spillers writes,

> African-American women's community and Anglo-American women's community, under certain shared cultural conditions, were the twin actants on a common psychic landscape, were subject to the same fabric of dread and humiliation. Neither could claim her body and its various productions – for quite different reasons, albeit – as her own, [...] *she*, [the white woman,] appears not to have wanted *her* body at all, but to desire to enter someone else's, specifically, [a Black woman's], in an apparently classic instance of

> sexual "jealousy" and appropriation. In fact, from one point of view, we cannot unravel one female's narrative from the other's, cannot decipher one without tripping over the other. In that sense, these "threads cable-strong" of an incestuous, interracial genealogy uncover slavery in the United States as one of the richest displays of the psychoanalytic dimensions of culture before the science of European psychoanalysis takes hold. (77)

White men undoubtedly exerted power over white women and both Black men and women. While women are now universally subjugated, Black women are uniquely so, and they rest at the mercy of not only white men and women, but Black men, as well. The threads of hierarchy and subjugation are especially contorted under the umbrella of slavery, and religiously-endorsed "othering" and gender roles are partly to blame. Ultimately, this hierarchy placed white men (including ministers) at the top, because slaves (and white women and children) were incapable of ordering themselves. Even Northern theologians agreed on the necessary subordination of women: Charles Hodge, who held an influential position at Princeton Theological Seminary, wrote, "We believe that the general good requires us to deprive the whole female sex of the right of self-government" (Jemison 260). Deprivation from self-actualization becomes a key struggle for white women, but especially Black women and men.

Clarke is particularly interested in the ways the aforementioned power structures play into formations of Black male selfhood and manhood. In *Canticles I*, he represents violence enacted by and against enslaved Black men, including the beatings and psychological abuse their owners and overseers, both male and female, performed, but also the rapes and murders they executed against Black and white women. Continuous abuse, crumbling kinship structures, as well as legally sanctioned dispossession, can contribute to ostentatiously violent affirmations of masculinity – violence that will counter social emasculation. This can be partly attributed to their

internalization of dangerous white supremacist ideologies, especially projected hypersexuality, which Clarke portrays through graphic scenes of self-hatred and sexual violence from the very first poems:

> I.
>
> A raven splashed the primal sign.
> Its beak leaked drool,
> scarlet spittle,
> burgundying a branch,
>
> so that freakish streaks imaged
> The Holy Family—
> Babe Jesus, Mama Mary, Papa Joe—
> as clear Red Indian.
>
> Shortly, I watched tea leaves erect
> a transcendent bric-a-brac*—
> an upright black cross in a white china cup. (Clarke, *Canticles I* 3)

Although the first few stanzas of "*'Prophet' Nat Turner on his Southampton Insurrection (1831)*" does not explore human interaction, violent or otherwise, the language is rife with sexual innuendo and Christian symbolism. The "primal [...] raven / leak[s] / spittle" in "streaks" that resemble "The Holy Family." The language unflinchingly conjures imagery of sexual release, which is startling in and of itself, but made even more so through the "drool['s]" creation of/proximity to arguably the most central biblical figures. By yoking together the two categories so early and so brazenly in the text, Clarke immediately sets the tone for the rest of the epic – the reader is intentionally made uncomfortable through the intermingling of sexual and religious imagery. He reaffirms his choice by "erect[ing]" a "black cross in a white china cup." It is also worth noting the clear dichotomy of black and white throughout the poem, including the black "raven" on the pristine branch. This poetic tension mirrors sexual, religious, and general

contention between white and Black communities in the Americas – always at odds, yet forever (uneasily) entwined. Clarke is already challenging the "proper" contents of an epic through the ever-present sexual imagery, but the form of the lyric is also protested through the use of African-American Vernacular English (AAVE). Rather than write out baby Jesus, Mother Mary, or Father Joseph, he writes "Babe Jesus, Mama Mary, Papa Joe." This is, perhaps, how an early Black Christian would casually refer to the Holy Family – yet another challenge to (white) religious and textual hegemony.

Clarke continues:

II.

You have my *Historic Diary*—
black-lace ink looping white-face pages—

and so you know I did dream
of inseminating a blonde ballerina,

while parental applause
kept time with our galloping bed.

Yes, if not for my *Prophetic Mission*,
I'd've fucked even the wrinkled white wives
and gunked my throat with way too much white wine.

III.

When the *Liberation*—
not "ruction"—
got going,
I tutored my lads—
"No *Fornication*, no *Intoxication*:
Only kill and slaughter and massacre."

Disobeying, fellers yanked out dogging cocks
to hound and sound any blanching bitch,

but also acted piggish, slurping every drip
and drop of firewater.

IV.

Yes, I did rip free Whitehead's—
misty pantaloons—
as see-through as breathing*—

to know her delicious sprawling
her gold hair slopping over my copper chest.

I steeled myself against her silkiness;
stayed no more an affable, natty Negro;

knifed open her milk breasts;
sucked their brilliant scarlet;

suddenly, my lurching, drooling penis
felt as nauseatin as a stallion's.

Yessum, I smashed her brains to mincemeat;
stilled her bleating….
(Clarke, *Canticles I* 4-5)

Finally, Nat Turner and his men are in violent motion. Two motifs are especially evident, and intentionally placed in opposition to one another – the "blonde," or "gold," hair of the white female rape victims, and the "penis" and "cocks" of the Black male perpetrators. Blonde women are the epitome of whiteness, almost lacking melanin completely; Black men produce "too much" melanin to ever be white, always in excess. The Black phallus is omnipresent as an agent of "[dest]ruction," an enactment of violent agency. Nat Turner warns his men against "*Fornication*" during the insurrection, and yet, they "Disobey[,]" not because they're uncontrollably lascivious, but because rape is power play. The men's "*Liberati*[*ng* …] *Prophetic Mission*" depends on a power reversal, and this is one of several violent means through which

they attempt such a feat. Although the women's whiteness (which, too, is omnipresent in the poem: "white-face pages," "white wives," "blanching bitch," "Whitehead," even the wine Turner drinks is "white") affords them certain sociopolitical privileges over Black people, their womanhood renders them vulnerable. It's a "dream" to "hound" or "conquer" a white woman because it is a momentary ascension in the white American social hierarchy. White men are more difficult to overpower, though they, too, can be made vulnerable through the violation and/or murder of their women, the protection of whom most feel is their patriarchal duty. No longer the acceptable, "affable" Black man, Nat Turner "knife[s] open" Whitehead's "milk breasts," and "suck[s]" out her blood, her literal lifeforce. Whitehead becomes "both object of Turner's sexual desire and his sacrificial savior, through whom (in a masturbatory fantasy minutes before his execution) Turner" briefly tastes social power and "recovers his unity with [...] God" (Tomlins 2). The power he feels is "delicious," until it is not – he compares his own phallus to that of a "stallion," an animal acting out of pure instinct. The thought is disconcerting, so he violently "smashe[s] her brains to mincemeat" because he can, not because he *has* to. He, like many Black men, is left wanting – due to his fluctuating position on the social hierarchy, and his inability to coherently dictate his selfhood beyond just violent masculinity, power gained through these violent means is only momentary relief.

Rape is ubiquitous in Clarke's narrative – some of it coerced, others an exercise of power, temporary or otherwise. "Scholars have suggested that rape can serve as a metaphor for enslavement – thus applying to both men and women who were enslaved. As Aliyah I. Abdur-Rahman argues, 'The vulnerability of all enslaved black persons to nearly every conceivable violation produced a collective 'raped' subjectivity'" (Foster 445). Sexual violence is thus not only a product of slavery, but a key characteristic in its maintenance. The sexual abuse

of men under the complex slavery is particularly under-studied, mainly due to a lack in concrete evidence, with the exception of castration. For instance, pregnancy is impossible in these cases, and the silence that came with the shame of being victimized by another man also drove many enslaved men into lifelong silence. Thomas A. Foster recounts the 1787 rape of Elizabeth Amwood, a free Black Marylander, by an unnamed enslaved Black man, to illustrate the curious power imbalances of slavery. The catch is that the enslaved man was forced "to pull Down his Britches and gitt upon" Amwood under the direct orders of William Holland, a white man with no direct relationship to either victim (Foster 445). He was also held at gunpoint by John Pettigrew, Holland's associate – he had no choice but to violate Amwood, or die.

Pettigrew and Holland "taunted them both" throughout the excruciating ordeal, "asking if it 'was in' and 'if it was sweet'" (Foster 445). For the two white men, it was little more than an amusing game, a powerfully thrilling reaffirmation of their status at the top of the racial hierarchy. Yet, it came at the cost of humiliating both Amwood and the enslaved man, neither of whom, after nearly two centuries of subjugation at the time of the incident, had a means to directly resist. Most shocking of all, the men compared Amwood's rape to mounting "a Mare to a horse" (Foster 445). Reduced to livestock in heat, both Amwood and the enslaved man are utterly dehumanized. They are forced to embody imposed carnality, "like a bull / covering a cow's back" in a primitive, "sable forest," more beast than "civilized" human (Hopkins 181; Clarke, *Canticles I* 42, 43). Indeed, "the transatlantic trade altered the very shape of sexuality in the Americas for *everyone*" (Holland 56). The sexual violence enacted against Black women was not quite as simple as the oft-stated power imbalance between some disembodied figures of Man over Woman. Slavery complicates this, implicating Black men, white men, Black women, and white women, in numerous degrading configurations. It was not uncommon to punish male

slaves by sexually assaulting their female loved ones – Josiah Henson, resurrected by Clarke, speaks of how "massa grabbed [his] mama / and jabbed 'home' his dick right there" following his disobedience (*Canticles I* 101). Black men thus feel emasculated in their inability to "protect [...] female kin from being sexually assaulted," by white owners, an act of violence that is psychologically damaging for Black men, and psychosexually cruel to Black women (Foster 445-6).

There is a general resistance to "recogniz[ing] the climate of terror and the physical and mental sexual abuse that enslaved black men also endured" due to the common definition of sexual assault necessitating a male perpetrator, a female victim, and penetration as the sole vehicle (Foster 448). However, Clarke, Foster, and Holland make clear that slavery itself dissolved such simple, binaristic terms as earlier theorists did not account for race or the dynamics of coerced violence. In fact, "black men were sexually assaulted by both white men and white women. It finds that sexual assault of enslaved men took a wide variety of forms, including outright physical penetrative assault, forced reproduction, sexual coercion and manipulation, and psychic abuse" (Foster 447). Martha Hodes goes as far as to conclude "that the sexual 'coercion' of black men in antebellum America 'lurked as a possibility regardless of how frequently it came to pass'" (Foster 447). That is to say, the possibility of violence can itself be an expression of violence – it is violence in its purest form to be forced to live in constant fear. As Foster elaborates, "it would be safe to say that, regardless of location and time period, no enslaved man would have been safe from the threat of sexual abuse" (448). The longevity of lynchings in the United States speaks to Foster's point:

> On one Sunday afternoon (the day of Jesus Christ), April 23, 1899, over two thousand white folk congregated and frolicked to witness the lynching of the Black male, Sam

> Hose. Like the overwhelming amount of cases, no evidence was produced. After chaining Mr. Hose to a tree, "they cut off his ears, fingers, and genitals, and skinned his face. While some in the crowd plunged knives into the victim's flesh . . ." Jubilant participants removed his liver and heart while others broke up his bones. The festive crowd of Christians fought over these precious souvenirs. Crucified on resurrection Sunday, Hose's dying body deteriorated near an adjacent sign declaring "We Must Protect Our Southern Women." (Hopkins 187)

The dynamic between the lynchers and Hose eerily mirrors that of Pettigrew and Holland with the unnamed man forced to rape Amwood. As Amwood's dignity is violently obliterated, so is Hose's through his devastating castration. Like the unnamed man, Hose is ravaged to oblivion through the removal of his face, his identity gleefully desecrated. All the while, the white perpetrators are "festive" and "jubilant," as though Hose's humiliation is a frivolous activity. They continue on, as if it is holy retribution, a simple practice of ensuring that the Black man remains within his sphere of subjugation, effectively in his "place" under the Christofascist hegemony. How can Clarke's poetry not be violent, when Black "*Suppression* [i]s their *Mission*," when the "*Hypocrisy*" of "*Lynch Law*" continues to "Rape[...] *Justice*" (*Canticles I* 399, 170)?

As such, the psychic abuse of Black men under slavery, and their complex subjectivity as victims and perpetrators of gendered violence, is explored in near-excruciating detail in *Canticles I*. Black women, for the most part, are absent, except in instances of either sexual exploration or as victims of sexual violence. Why would Clarke, as a self-proclaimed "feminist," intentionally erase Black women from this specific text (*Where Beauty Survived* 87)? If he is capable of dignified and tender imagery of Black women, such as the imaginary scene he conjures of his mother "surviving all tempests and tantrums, standing tall—intact—indomitable—on an Atlantic

beach," and in texts such as *Beatrice Chancy* (2000), then why not in *Canticles I* (*Where Beauty Survived* 87-8)? As I write at the beginning of this chapter, the various violences unleashed onto Black women by both Black and white men, whether psychological, sexual, or physical, hinged on their unique racial and gendered positionality under the Europatriarchal institution of slavery. Their categorization as both Black and woman made them doubly vulnerable, and thus ensured their systemic erasure from life and literature. This is the capacity through which Clarke mostly represents his (largely absent) women:

> That night, the Pagan Queen
> was forced down for my pleasure—
> gun-butted to her knees—
> her loin cloth lifted….
>
> Yes, I took her like a bull
> covering a cow's back:
> Raucous was our rutting—
> black Yank on black gook.) [*Canticles I* 42]

The former slave, on his re-colonizing mission, arrives in Liberia. Thoroughly assimilated to white America, having internalized Christofascism and republicanism, he wreaks the same havoc on West Africa that he was once a victim of. The "Pagan Queen" is a woman, not Christian, not American, a vaguely familiar, yet nonetheless "other" to the "black Yank." He assaults her for no reason other than he can – such is his violent masculinist prerogative. She is dehumanized as a "cow," but he, too, is a "bull" – despite his best efforts, he could not and cannot ascend to whiteness. Neither are fully in charge of their destiny – such are the complicated dynamics of slavery, rife with illusions of power for all except the white man. Clarke sheds light on this harsh reality, particularly for Black women, by presenting them in ways that neglect their individuality and personhood. Clarke thus intentionally represents Black women in *Canticles I* with this

context in mind – the epic hinges on the harrowing violence of slavery, the most vulnerable victims of which were Black women.

With this complex and constant animalization by way of hypersexualization, Black individuals in the Americas began resisting through the adoption of "prudish theology. Such a religious way of thinking springs from two reactionary ways of believing—self-denial Puritanism and conservative Victorianism. To be pure entails restricting the mind from thinking about body eroticism and, above all, a guilt whipping to prevent engaging in such activities" (Hopkins 183). In an attempt to reject the imposition of white supremacist ideologies on the Black (particularly male) body, many Black Christians have instead unknowingly reproduced the "traditional teachings of white Christianity. Out of moral necessity, however, Black Christians exaggerated white Christianity's version of "p.c."—Puritan Correctness. Later, many Black Christians adopted white Christianity's Victorian repression to rebut the myth of Black sexuality being out of control" (Hopkins 183). Ultimately, "Black Christians have taken sexual refuge in the sort of rigid segregation they sought to escape in the social realm—the body and soul in worship are kept one place, the body and soul in heat are kept somewhere else (Hopkins 182). This "post-racial" sensibility, in an effort to combat the enduring violence of hypersexuality as natural to the Black body, also limits erotic possibility.

Bracketed between instances of violence, as Black love often was/is, is Clarke's short poem "*The Ecstasy of Linda Brent (a.k.a. Harriet Jacobs)*." Neither Jacobs nor Clarke care much for imposed "*Chastity*" – sex does not render one "'loose' or wanton or irreligious," and certainly not "promiscuous" (*Canticles I* 102). She is not "immodest" because to "join flesh isn't to coin dirt," especially when it is borne from "*Love*" (Clarke, *Canticles I* 103, 102). By mirroring Jacobs' own "beautiful [...] black[ness]" to that of "Th'Ethiope face of the raised-up

Jesus," Clarke deifies Black sexuality, starkly contesting the historical demonization of the sensual potential of the Black body (*Canticles I* 102). "In a word, religion t[akes] on an ebony body. And this body display[s], act[s] out, and embrace[s] eroticism" (Hopkins 188). Clarke accomplishes a similar feat in a later poem, "*Ellington Tours Africville, Nova Scotia (1936)*":

> But I pleasure in Africville:
> Watch skirts tease ultra-slender gams,
> see lightning splash against windows,
> hear chatter, titters, giggles, guffaws.
>
> No wonder my piano explodes in Africville!
> [...]
>
> (My lady's a graceful, buxom, Bauhaus nude,
> I gotta sit to caress.)
>
> Listen:
> Water slams a cliff;
> chunks thud free—*blam!*—
> a gigantic clod crashes crushingly down,
> hits waves, aiiieeeees like an orgasm. (Clarke, *Canticles I* 390)

A tiny Africadian enclave, Africville once "supported its own church, school, corner store, and post office. Most [... of] the residents owned their homes, kept farm animals, tended vegetable and floral gardens, and—just like the plutocratic Caucasians on the Northwest Arm—could boat, fish, and swim in waters practically lapping at their front or back doors" (Clarke, *Where Beauty Survived* 58). Largely detached from the rest of the white supremacist Maritimes, Africville was a site for potential, where self-actualization was possible for the formerly enslaved. The joyous tone of this poem is thus hugely and deliberately distinct from the violence that permeates most of *Canticles I* – the geography and temporality of early Africville is responsible. Africville breeds "pleasure" through unencumbered "chatter, titters, giggles, [and] guffaws." In stark opposition to Haliburton's description of Black self-expression as "minstrel[ry]," Africville's

residents lilt in onomatopoeias, reminiscent of musical notes (Clarke, *Canticles I* 112). Lovers "tease" and "caress" one another; gone are fantasies of rape and exploitation. Indeed, Clarke, through Duke Ellington's voice, describes Mildred Dixon as a "graceful, buxom, Bauhaus" lady. The alliterative quality of the language is, once again, pleasantly musical; Dixon's body is fine artwork in and of itself, as the allusion to the Bauhaus movement would indicate. Africville stokes Ellington's creativity – here, his "piano explodes"! Clarke therefore conflates musical creation with sexual release – he finds erotic potential in creativity, and vice versa. The very act of expressing one's sensuality, of harnessing its spiritual and creative energy against imposed, postslavery stereotypes, is euphoric self-actualization that "aiiieeeees like an orgasm." This poem, rooted in a space nearly devoid of white hegemony, contests violent, hypersexual masculinity by fearlessly conjoining embodied sensuality with spirituality, a uniquely Black mode of being, of resistance.

While the violent motifs of Clarke's epic poem, such as the representation of Black women as violated and largely invisible, seems to counter the work authors like Spillers, Butler, and Morrison have done to lovingly recreate "the nuanced realities" of Black women's "interior life," I argue that Clarke's later poems actually align his project with their now-dominant Black feminist literary discourse (Crawford and Snorton 168, 169). As the African-American/Canadian canon shifts from the overwhelmingly masculinist "black nationalism" of the 1960s to the Black feminist "counternarratives" of the 1970s and '80s, so Clarke's narrative follows this "radical [...] shift from the project of man to a new understanding of the human" (Colbert et al. 79; Crawford and Snorton 153; Colbert et al. 80). Violence remains a necessary expression of the post-neo-slave narrative – it is an undeniable truth that has followed Black men, as they overcome socioeconomic subjugation, and Black women, as they bridge the "pluralit[ies],

contradictions, and gaps" in their existence by re-making themselves as an act of literary self-actualization. Now,

> What the "brothers" must do is listen to dissension and divergent views, because as we liberate ourselves we cannot assume nor insists that we're better than others or that one ism solves the worlds anguish; we must admit that Caliban is there when we look in the mirror some morning and that just as the aims of the French Revolution got bogged down in personalities, egos, temperament so can the "Black Revolution." Because hate is legislated, etc. we need love now more than ever—love for ourselves—love for each other. If this persists, if we can keep a sharp eye on that light above the fog, if we can stare across the wide abyss at each other (age, viewpoints, goals) and still feel kinship. "We shall overcome" and by whatever means necessary. (Spillers qtd. in Crawford and Snorton 161-2)

Clarke is attempting to represent this "divergent" view through his narrative evolution in *Canticles I*. Clarke's own "serendipitous [...] rereadings of scriptures" rely on this reconfiguration of the Black body, on embodied sensuality and spirituality, as they intersect and meld into one another (*Canticles I* ix). As such, "eroticism is pleasurable life force internal to the body; this force draws on history, knowledge, desire, pleasure, wholeness, and creativity" in ways that echo Clarke's language and form in *Canticles I* (Hopkins 189). In order to escape the layered violences that plague Black men, they must learn to "love religiously their own erotic body, 'irregardless'" (Hopkins 192).

Clarke thus constructs an enduring narrative that weaves together the complex relationship(s) between Black men, white men, Black women, and white women during and following the transatlantic slave trade. Periphery shapes the narrative, which is itself a

postmodernist reimagination of the traditional epic poem that centers Black subjectivities. Through careful and intentional imagery and language, Clarke explores the physical, sexual, and psychological torment of enslaved Black men. The oppressive practices of slavery, especially white Christianity and the American judiciary, created a complex dynamic where Black men were both victims and perpetrators of gender-based violence. Their disenfranchisement often invited violent retribution against both Black and white women. Black women were rendered – and remain – vulnerable to intertwining patriarchal and racist forces. This resulted in their historical and textual invisibility. Hopkins' revolutionary work, however, offers an alternative perspective on the Black male body, one that reconceptualizes eroticism as a means through which the body frees itself, and reconnects with the spiritual orientation of the mind.

Chapter Two: The Attack on (Post)modern Masculinity: A Jamaican Case Study

Masculinity is often falsely conceptualized as universal, as natural and genetically embedded. This bioessentialist point of view ignores the historical influence of slavery and colonialism in formations of masculinity in the peripheries, and its continued, and violent, domination within these spheres. Jamaican writer Marlon James centers this constellation of colonial effects in his mammoth Booker Prize-winning novel, *A Brief History of Seven Killings*; set primarily in his hometown of Kingston, this particular work shocked readers with its unabashed, seemingly endless treatise on violence. James' portrayal of violence permeates the structure of the narrative, and all of its interlocking devices. As such, I argue that the violence James reproduces in *A Brief History* through voice, imagery, dialogue, and dialect reflects the complex legacy of colonial violence on postmodern formations of national and individual identity. Indeed, all of James' male characters, despite their own victimhood as racialized and economically subjugated individuals, participate in gendered violence as a homosocial ritual; through the violent language of their dialogue, and the visceral imagery of their physical dominion over Black women, James contends that Black men can use violence to subvert historically-enforced emasculation. Nina Burgess, as a Black woman, is doubly vulnerable to verbal and physical intimidation at the hands of Black men in postslavery Jamaica – by adopting her voice, James relates the violent minutiae of her unique subjectivity to historical and contemporary subjugating factors. James thus testifies to the victimhood of both Black men and women, constrained to colonially-informed sociopolitical and economic systems in 1970s Jamaica, while acknowledging Black men's potential as violent oppressors in their masculine formations.

Although Caribbean writers have always engaged with colonialism to some capacity in their writing, literary scholar Belinda Edmondson is one of the first to make explicit the connection between colonial violence and subsequent masculine formations in her groundbreaking work, *Making Men: Gender, Literary Authority, and Women's Writing in Caribbean Narrative* (1999). Edmondson argues that the Caribbean canon has been largely shaped by "European philosophy and literature," particularly English sensibilities (38). Some of the Caribbean's finest and most influential male writers, either consciously or subconsciously, adopted the aesthetics of what Edmondson calls "the Victorian 'Literary Man'" in discrete "acts of authority" (39, 41). This distinctly British mode of writing granted these men "access to the world of professional letters," which "was still determined by one's ability to write in a certain way, such that what counted as 'publishable literature' was at least partly a function of class" (Edmondson 41). Trinidadian-born V. S. Naipul, for instance, "refers to himself as a British writer" despite his vast influence in West Indian literature, and anticolonial historian C. L. R. James was himself a beneficiary of colonial institutions as a member of the "West Indian bourgeoisie" (Edmondson 38, 39). Thus emerged a dichotomous, almost contradictory relationship between England and (post)colonial Jamaica, which "affected the first generation of West Indian writers in their efforts to define West Indianness, in which geographical unreality, cultural lack, and racial inferiority all converged to define the terms of writing" (Edmondson 20).

As in Chapter One – wherein I support the link *The Psychic Hold of Slavery* generates between the intersecting traumas of slavery and subsequent "post-neo-slave" narratives like Clarke's – Edmondson's work similarly claims that the perpetuity of colonial violence has shaped and continues to shape modernist and contemporary Caribbean literature. That is to say, the "geographical unreality, cultural lack, and racial inferiority" influencing the formation of the

Caribbean canon are violent dredges of the imperialist policies enacted by European colonists during the slavery era. Despite the fact that Marlon James is largely writing against this masculinist literary tradition, his male characters, both Black and white, perform colonially-informed masculinities that produce a complex web of perpetration and victimhood – Black women, however, are at the mercy of all men within this complex. These dynamics began with the targeting of racialized women during enslavement; by citing their "lascivious," "exotic, [and] highly sexual" nature as grounds for domination, and "attributing a lack of proper masculinity" to the men of "the dominated country," early colonists violently expressed their power through the projection of arbitrary physical categories (McClintock 22; Spencer-Wood 479; Walonen 67). By ascribing Africa and the New World as "weak" or "law[less]" places, conquistadors set the stage for various forms of "violence between men" to occur (Walonen 67). In fact, "historically '[v]iolent or wild masculinities were … socially constructed on the colonial frontier'" as the "masculinist imperialist agendas" of the Spaniards and the British "push[ed] largescale violence that manifest[ed …] in local acts of killing and assault that perform[ed patriarchal] masculinist identities, which in turn dr[o]ve further geographical expansions of violence-driven imperialism" (Walonen 67, 68). For the native male inhabitant in the early modern era, this barrage of violence resulted in a "kill or be killed" mentality – only those perceived as "masculine" warriors within the narrow constraints of European patriarchy were "admired, though not trusted" (Connell 306). Those categorized as "effeminate" were met with particularly insidious violence (Connell 306). Gendered violence, then, at least within this context, "resulted from the breakdown of traditional gender orders, under the pressures of colonialism and post-colonial economic change" (Connell 305).

As such, normative parameters for the expressions of masculinity and femininity, namely that of "respectab[ility]" by way of "heretosexual[ity]" are established in Jamaica along Europatriarchal standards (Brown-Glaude 55). Violent colonial policing during and postslavery, such as the legal enforcement of monogamy and heterosexuality through "traditional" marriage, not only legitimizes gender bioessentialism, but uses it as a tool to subjugate Jamaican men and women. And yet, the Anglophone Caribbean literary sphere that James traverses has only recently become preoccupied with colonial standards of propriety, and how that continues to limit the self-determination and self-expression of Afro-Jamaican men and women. Misogynoir, in particular, constricts how Black masculinities through the violent pervasiveness of white male supremacy (of which, of course, Black women bear the brunt); Weeper, for instance, internalizes the Caribbean's postcolonial homophobic attitude to the extent that he refuses to acknowledge his desire, even while engaging in sexual acts with other men. Thus, the "dangers of crossing" designated, and now naturalized, political, gender, and sexual "borders" remains a critically understudied area for Caribbean writers, especially regarding Black men (Bucknor viii). *A Brief History*, however, takes up and fleshes out concerns of tumultuous statehood and identity formation as they continue to be determined by postcolonial violences.

James defines the perpetuity of historical violence in modern Jamaica through his two most vulnerable characters – Nina, a Black woman, and Weeper, a homosexual Black man. Neither neatly fits into the constraints of the cisheteropatriarchy, and as a result, they face various forms of violence. Postslavery

> Nationalist discourses shape and control the sexual desires of women through masculinist definitions of propriety. By representing themselves as sexually "proper" (that is, heterosexual, endogamous, and monogamous), women not only protect the nation and

> men's honor but they also reproduce national boundaries. Proper sexual behaviors ensure that women's bodies remain pure, and that nations are fortified [...] Men are also expected to behave in sexually appropriate ways. Like women, their sexual desires are defined within nationalist discourses. Of prime significance is the expectation that men are heterosexual, since manhood is often defined to include men's ability to impregnate women. (Brown-Glaude 43)

The "fortifi[cation]" of the postcolonial nation thus depends on the normative socialization of its subjects. For postslavery nations like Jamaica, normative standards of masculinity and femininity were largely influenced by Europatriarchal configurations of masculine ideals. The violence of masculinity, here, is rooted in conquest – essentially, all "alternative forms of masculinity ha[d] been largely eclipsed or destroyed" by violent encroachment (Walonen 67). For the enslaved Africans brought to the land now known as Jamaica, the unrelenting violence of both the transatlantic slave trade and subsequent settler colonialism reshaped traditional modes of social organization. The propagation of "healthy" interpersonal relationships fortify community, which is antagonistic to the colonial project. As such, colonial authorities either denied or redefined "proper" manhood for Black Jamaicans by casting violent expressions of masculinity as both superior and antagonistic to Black womanhood.

In numerous pre- and postcolonial West African societies, for instance, conceptions of Black femininity hinged on motherhood and a woman's relationship to her kin, though this signification did not immediately imply a weakness or inferiority, as in Enlightenment Europe. In her book, *Women's Authority and Society in Early East-Central Africa* (2010), Christine Saidi describes motherhood as "status," one that was "administered by women without the interposition of men" (18). Moreover, this matrifocal method of social organization afforded

mothers primacy in "women's transition to adulthood *and* of young men's labor and access to reproduction, and thus fundamentally shaped inheritance, residence patterns, and authority over kin" (Saidi 18). While there were certainly gender-based spherical divides in precolonial West African communities, mobility was largely unrestricted, and women controlled access to their economic and sexual labor. Women readily occupied the public sphere through their "work of daily subsistence," while simultaneously bearing and raising children; men were "Hunt[ers]" and warriors that also had domestic, or private, expectations, such as "sexually satisfy[ing]" their wives and "tak[ing] care of [them] during [their] pregnancies" (Saidi 15, 16). Their roles operated on a logic of "gender equity," wherein "women's and men's spheres of social authority and power [were] both distinct and complementary," and neither "subordinate[d …] the other (Saidi 17, 18). Even in West African societies of patrilineal or double descent, men were not necessarily granted ready "access to women's labor and reproductive capabilities," as the now-"universal" patriarchal perspective purports (Saidi 12, 8). Women in precolonial West Africa thus displayed the potential of self-determination by freely engaging in economy and culture, as organizers, farmers, and mothers.

European conceptions of motherhood were far more restrictive; the ideal family was to be "represented by the husband as its head," despite the fact that women were and are the primary progenitors (Hegel 314). "In addition, [the husband] is primarily responsible for external acquisition and for caring for the family's needs, as well as for the control and administration of the family's resources. These are common property, so that no member of the family has particular property, although each has a right to what is held in common" (Hegel 314). In this Enlightenment configuration, white women are naturally the domestic property of their husbands, who are the moral authorities of the nuclear family unit. However, the husband *must*

"car[e] for the family's needs" by providing his wife and children with "resources" (Hegel 314). The husband's capital is therefore "common property" to which his wife is entitled – for wealthy colonists, this included any enslaved individuals legally owned by the nuclear unit. Despite their gender-based oppression as intellectually and rationally less "ideal" than white men, white women were still granted personhood as possessors-by-proxy (Hegel 309). Thus, the oppressed white woman can be an oppressor in turn, completing the gendered dynamics of racial hierarchy required for slavery.

Consequently, the metropole's racial and gendered designations were violently enforced in both the public and private spheres of the colony, bridging plantocratic economic models with the patriarchal domestic to engorge the (white) ruling class' capital. Negation therefore came to define the Caribbean and its African-descended population – denied ownership over their labor, hence their bodies and the land upon which they resided, as well, allowed for the violent disenfranchisement of the enslaved. Edmondson consolidates this point by writing that "violent conquest" was and still is "associated with the rites of manhood" (107). Moreover, their designation of women as categories of nature to be owned and dominated by men is a colonial misconstruction of historical African matrilineality, and thus intrinsically tied to the imperialist mission of slavery. As such, the characters James creates, as well as the imagery and language he employs in describing them, earnestly responds to the colonial valences that color(ed) West Indian Anglophone literature, though he is not entirely immune to reproducing its violences, either. This tension represents the difficulty Edmondson identifies as plaguing the formation of a distinctly Caribbean *oeuvre*, which itself stems (in part) from the fracturing of Caribbean identity due to a centuries-long and brutal colonial process. While James does not explicitly write about early colonial Jamaica or the experience of enslavement in *A Brief History*, as Clarke does in his

work, the legacy of slavery provides the imperial background through which his violent plot unfolds. The imperial logic of this violence mirrors that which Clarke's African-American and Africadian speakers experienced and continue to experience – despite their geographic and temporal distance from one another – due to their respective communities' shared history of enslavement.

The intersection of misogyny with European racial concepts thus ensured that white men possessed most of the domestic, political, and economic power in the plantocracy. Women as a social class have already been rendered as inherently inferior to men "by the ideology and identity of Spanish machismo, which valorized male sexual conquests," explicitly linking imperialism and sexual violence to a certain interpretation of masculinity (Spencer-Wood 483). As such, "Masculinity [...] is not only a relationship between men and women but also between men. Hence we might say that while patriarchy 'makes' men superior, masculinity is the process of producing superior men" (Srivastava 33). Historical African social matriarchy is thus evidently incompatible with dominant European patriarchal discourse, as their native communities gave rise to free, determinate women. Enslaved West African women thus posed the greatest ideological threat to Europatriarchal configurations, and so the imperial hammer struck down hardest upon them. This is true even in postslavery Jamaica:

> As a symbol of the slave past, the black woman represents a double threat. For Caribbean men, on one hand, she carries within her the ability to "name" her descendants, which is, as Spillers suggests, the ever-present discursive reminder of the subjugated status of [black] Caribbean men to white European men. For European men, on the other hand, the black woman's ability to "race" the mulatto child in her own image was a direct assault on the cherished European idea that male sperm was stronger than female, an idea that

> was the basis for European laws of inheritance. Lynda Boose suggests that this need to reestablish masculine genetic primacy is the reason for the many representations of romantic alliances between black men and white women in English Renaissance texts and the singular absence of representations of black women and white men: [...] For both black men and white, therefore, the body of the black woman becomes a threat to entrenched ideas of masculine patriarchal authority and dominance. Consequently, she must be "buried" in the new mediation between colonizer and newly decolonized subject. (Edmondson 107-8)

Indeed, adopted ideals of whiteness and heteropatriarchy "*revised*" Black kinship systems by destroying "'motherhood' as female blood-rite/right" (Spillers 74, 75). That is to say, "the offspring of the female" no longer "'belong[ed]' to the Mother, nor [was] s/he 'related' to the 'owner,' though the latter 'possesse[d]' it" (Spillers 74). The white owner replaces the Black father in a disturbing distortion of "patrimony," in which the enslaved child ("it") is dehumanized as property, as neither the enslaved mother nor father could belong to a distinct lineage while being "owned" themselves (Spillers 74). Moreover, the locus at which projected racial and gendered significations collide proves even more detrimental to enslaved Black women. The Afro-Jamaican man, usurped by the European man through this relational/familial collapse, is prompted to unleash his anger and anxiety onto the Black woman, the only individual more categorically vulnerable than himself. Violence, whether psychological, physical, sexual, or literary, can thus be a "masculiniz[ing]" execution of "agency" for emasculated Afro-Jamaican men (Edmondson 107).

Alison Donnell, in her book *Creolized Sexualities: Undoing Heteronormativity in the Literary Imagination of the Anglo-Caribbean* (2022), builds further upon these violent notions of

perceived gender difference as they pertain to and have shaped the literature of the Anglophone Caribbean, including the work of Marlon James. While strict binaristic thinking, whether along gendered or racialized axes, is undoubtedly linked to imported Enlightenment ideals, casting Jamaica as "exceptionally homophobic" and/or patriarchal is a gross oversimplification (Donnell 3). Although "British colonial 1864 buggery laws remain intact" in present-day Jamaica – symptomatic of a greater "morality" and "purity" issue, guided by the now-institutionalized racist religiosity of colonialists – and the violent harassment of women, gay men, and other "non-heteronormative subjects" is a daily occurrence, James is not the first to cleverly contest homophobia within representations of homophobia (Donnell 3). Rejecting the notion of "queerness," in the broadest sense, as monolithic, has long been the mission of postmodernist and contemporary Caribbean writers like Dionne Brand, Michelle Cliff, and H. Nigel Thomas. Weeper's noxious masculinity, for example, cannot be extricated from his homosexuality, nor his broader identity as an Afro-Jamaican man; if one does not account for colonial "loss, trauma, and difficulty" in his expressions of queerness, it is, "at best, inadequate and, at worst, reductive to the task of retexturizing a literary history of Caribbean people's erotic lives and orientations" (Donnell 5).

As such, the world James builds around Weeper and Nina is "literally and figuratively haunted" by pre- and post-slavery violence (Harrison 88). James "reaches outward, backward, and forward" in narrative "time and space" to counter both literary and historiographic orthodoxy in the Caribbean (Harrison 89). *A Brief History* is James' "counter-memory" to the canonized violence of 1970s Jamaica, yet the "fiction" of the novel is nonetheless pregnant with sociopolitical and literary discourses that have determined Jamaican nationhood (Harrison 89). Indeed, in "the fictional world of *Brief History*, to be a man is to carry the promise of sexual

conquest and the threat of physical violence. The hypermasculinity perpetrated by its gang leaders, drug dons, and 'bad man' youth is premised on the display and the mutual (over)validation of physical coercion and sexual supremacy" (Donnell 100). The homophobic violence Weeper displays and is simultaneously a victim of is therefore not extricable from the sexist violence Nina experiences. Both are symptomatic of colonial control as the violent repression of "abnormal" sexuality, whether homo-, hyper-, or otherwise.

One of the ways in which this violence manifests is in the aforementioned literary "buri[al]" of the Black woman. The Caribbean canon is rife with "male-authored revolutionary narrative[s] that ha[ve] fused the meaning of revolution to masculine authority" (Edmondson 107). In other words, under the epistemology of the gendered and racialized (post)colony, the "'monstrosity' of black femaleness [...], the result of the slave mother's ability to mark her descendants with her status and thereby "erase" the mark of the slave Father," is an offense punishable enough to justify the necessary "erasure and replacement of the black female body" from "Caribbean" literary "space" (Edmondson 107, 115). James seemingly participates in this burial; of the eleven characters to whom he gives a voice, Nina is the only woman. Even the logic of how he names her – Nina, or Kim, or Dorcas? – is symbolic of her invisibility. She has no constant identity or geographical positionality, such is the nature of the psychotic violence that follows her. Even when she finally "escapes" to the United States, violence against her persists on a systemic level – less overt, but no less insidious. Her race and gender fall under similar scrutiny in the United States, a postslavery nation operating under the same imperial logic as Jamaica. Violent, subservient colonial configurations of gender will always follow Nina, and women like her, no matter where they go or what they do to attempt to evade it. The

fractured geography of James' novel therefore speaks to the placelessness of Black women, and how their unique identity produces them as victims to the (potential) violence of all men.

James does attempt to subvert canonized Caribbean tropes by radically writing Nina Burgess into two serious relationships with white men – Danny Brown, "A blond-hair man who came down to" Jamaica from New York City to "do research for his degree," and Chuck, "*just a regular* [expatriate] *from Little Rock*" with whom she eventually cohabitates – the inequalities present in both partnerships ultimately reproduce the "entrenched" postcolonial Jamaican "ideas of masculine patriarchal authority and dominance" (32, 235, 227; Edmondson 108). Danny is a researcher, a figure of intellectual authority; Chuck is an engineer for "Alcorp Bauxite," presumably far wealthier than most of the local Jamaicans (James 227). Their whiteness grants them effortless mobility between the center and the periphery; in the United States and Jamaica, two postslavery nations, the white man summits gendered and racial hierarchies. As such, over Black men and especially Black women in the postcolony, they exert immense socioeconomic power. As Nina herself states, "Doesn't happen every day, a Jamaican who doesn't turn into a yes massa I going do it for you now massa, whenever he sees a white man. Danny used to be appalled by it. Until he started to like it. Hell of a thing when white skin is the ultimate passport" (James 49). James' ironic use of Jamaican Patois illustrates Nina's awareness of such a hierarchy, but her inability to ever truly escape it. White supremacy, coupled with Europatriarchal notions of male superiority, renders Black women, even those "high brown" like Nina, victims of total and inescapable violence (James 32). Proximity to whiteness through light skin still does not rid one of Black womanhood, nor the abuses that come with it:

> All of them come through Mantana's. White men, that is. If the man is French he thinks that he gets away with saying cunt but saying you cohnnnt, because we bush bitches will

> never catch his drift. As soon as he sees you he will throw the keys at your feet saying you, park my car *maintenant*! *Dépêche-toi!* I take the keys and say yes massa, then go around to the women's bathroom and flush it down the shittiest toilet. [...] If he's British and over thirty, you spend the whole time watching the stereotypes pile up, from the lettttttt meeeee sssssspeeeeeakkk toooo youuuuu slowwwwlyyyyy, dahhhhhhhling beccauuuuuse youuuuuuu're jussssst a liiiiiiitle blaaaaack, speed of their speech to the horrible teeth, coming from that cup of cocoa right before bed. [...] If he's Italian, he'll know how to fuck too, but he probably didn't bathe before, thinks there's such a thing as an affectionate face slap and will leave money even though you told him that you're not a prostitute. If he's Australian, he'll just lie back and let you do all the work because even us blokes in Sydney heard about you Jamaican girls. If he's Irish, he'll make you laugh and he'll make the dirtiest things sound sexy. But the longer you stay the longer he drinks, and the longer he drinks, well for each of those seven days you get seven different kinds of monster." (235)

Mantana's, the bar that Nina frequents during her time in Montego Bay, is almost exclusively white – "the non-white people, almost all women, [...] had the same damn look. The white man please come over here and save me because I have nowhere left to go look" (James 236). The bar is itself a segregated, neocolonial institution, symbolic of the powerful hold white men still possess over Jamaican socioeconomy through hoarded geographical space. The white men Nina encounters can never be her "saviors" – they are remnants of the colonial problem that has trapped her at the bottom of the imposed hierarchy. James also implies that the women allowed to traverse the invisible border into Mantana's white space benefit from colorism, as they all "had the same damn look" as light-skinned Nina. While light skin is an advantage in this

neocolonial system, Nina is still unmistakably Black, and thus subject to hypersexual stereotypes – after all, everyone's "heard about [...] Jamaican girls" and their apparent sexual prowess. Nina is thus nothing more than a "prostitute," an available offering for the white men to indulge in (James 136). James' startling language and imagery in relaying Nina's violent quotidian experiences speaks to the oversexualization, infantilization, and physical and sexual violence plaguing Afro-Jamaican women, which is itself a central tenet of postcolonial Jamaican nationhood.

Moreover, the French man calls Nina a "cunt" and has her stoop to the ground to retrieve the car keys he violently "throw[s]" at her; the British man drags his words as he "ssssssspeeeeeakkk[s] toooo [her] slowwwwlyyyyy" on the assumption that her Blackness and womanhood ("bush bitch") render her unintelligent or illiterate (James 235). The French man physically, threateningly looms over her as she crouches; the British man exhibits his "intellectual" superiority over Nina, one that he claims is inherent to his white manhood. And yet, it is British colonization that had instituted English as the *lingua franca* of Jamaica; her "liiiiiiitle blaaaaack[ness]" is the very reason she can speak the language (James 235). Nina momentarily reverses this power dynamic by satirizing the French man's accent ("cohnnnt") and flushing his property, his car keys, "down the shittiest toilet" she can find; she counters the British man's blatant "stereotyp[ing]" of her by insulting his appearance by way of his "horrible teeth" (James 235). It is significant, then, that these reversals are economic, linguistic, and physical, as the hegemony of white supremacy through stolen labor, suppressed language, and the denigration of Black features have historically subjugated Black individuals. However, the subordination of Jamaican Patois as inferior to "proper" English is a systemic issue, as is the physical and sexual violence she faces from those white "monster[s]"– her acts of resistance are

only temporary within the narrative. The continuous nature of this violence, and Nina's inability to ever truly escape it, only highlights the perpetuity of colonial violence in postslavery Jamaica, especially against Black women.

As such, James' consistent and defiant use of Jamaican Patois in *A Brief History* actually counters the orthodox Caribbean preoccupation with "proper" English, which I argue has its roots in the colonial policing of African languages as a control tactic. A firm understanding of English became crucial to "Victorian perceptions of literary mastery and black nationalist oppositional discourse" – Nina, like most Jamaicans, "know the power of word" (James 138). "The term 'Bad English' in the anglophone Caribbean is" therefore "much more than a pejorative"; the colonial origins of "good English" can be described along hierarchies, "from the 'broken English' of the slaves to those slaves who try to 'improve their language' by 'catching' at words they hear from the whites and 'misapplying' them" (Edmondson 61). Edward Long's proslavery rhetoric is deeply rooted in the belief that the enslaved are fundamentally incapable of linguistic "correctness," instead "infect[ing]" themselves and even the white people around them with the disease of "gibberish" (Edmondson 43-4). Long's positionality as white British, and therefore *of* "civilization" – in stark opposition to the indeterminate, peripheral "other" – legitimizes him as a "natural" moral and linguistic authority. By labelling Patois as incorrect "gibberish," a "misappl[ication]" of the English language, colonial authorities further deferred linguistic, and by extension, nationalist formation. It was also an attempt to undermine Black intellect, as their "broken English" is a "pejorative" reflective of their inability to "improve" or "advance" to the colonists' level. As such, the policing of language carried the same violent potential as other, more bodily methods of subjugation. Therefore, the "English canon" as object of study is structurally "useful" to the likes of Naipaul and C. L. R. James as it is "a means of

constructing literary authority for themselves as" historically subordinate "literary subjects" (Edmondson 133). Literary formation in the periphery is thus disrupted by many of the same historical forces that accomplished slavery, and substantiates the contemporary search for "Caribbeanness" independent of Victorianism (Edmondson 138).

Nina's father, concerned with upward mobility and the opportunities it could bring their family, seeks a formal education for her. As a result, she attends "Fifteen years of schooling" so that she may learn "how to talk proper" – in other words, like a white person – no doubt necessitated by the discriminatory nature of the postcolonial socioeconomy (James 33). Nina must "purchase" the "instruments of Western patriarchal knowledge" in order to participate in a postcolonial society that has been constructed almost entirely to maintain her subjugation (Edmondson 134). The hegemony of "proper" English is all encompassing, and James' men are also well aware of its power – Josey Wales, leader of the Storm Posse, "Always speak proper English when [he] want a man know that [an] argument is over" (341). "Proper" language comes with inherent authority in postcolonial Jamaica, as it opposes the "Bad English," or Patois, that the general Black population speaks. Even in "Sound Boy Killing," the elusive final section of *A Brief History*, James discusses the unique linguistic positionality of the Afro-Jamaican:

> —You not sure you get my point. For serious, you did always talk so stoosh or is white people you ah take showoff with?
>
> —You think anybody speaking proper English trying to take after white people?
>
> —Trying to take after something.
>
> —Oh so chatting bad must mean you is a real Jamaican then. Well if it make you feel better white people love hear you people talk much more than me.
>
> —You people.

—Yes, you people. Real Jamaicans. All of you so damn real. (James 517)

A dialogue between two unnamed characters, a man and a woman, unfolds through the smooth lilt of Patois. Rather than "showoff" to "white people" by imitating their language, James intentionally uses Patois phrases ("stoosh," "chatting bad," "For serious") and grammar ("you is" instead of "you are," "you did always talk" instead of "did you always speak") to represent the ebb and flow of "Real Jamaican" speech. Interestingly, both James and his characters speak of propriety in Patois, subtly rejecting the historically enforced linguistic hegemony of British English. Nina talks "proper," not "proper[ly]"; it's "something" wholly Caribbean in all of its composite parts. Patois is based *on* English, but is *not* English – this nuance is significant to cultural and literary interpretations of what "Caribbeanness" is and can be. James' sustained use of Jamaican Patois therefore acknowledges the actualizing power of language in formations of national and individual identity; his Patois novel resists "the relationship of the West Indian artist to the British literary tradition, wherein all these power relationships are encoded in the very language itself" (Edmondson 122-3). Their Patois dialect is a symbol of nationalist discourse, which is both emblematic of a struggle towards self-determination while still being a product of postcolonial violence. After all, Patois "is still the sweetest thing [Nina] ever heard come out of" a mouth (James 33).

The practice of white intellectual authority on the plantation emboldened owners and overseers to also weaponize language through racist, misogynistic speech acts – concurrently with physical and sexual violence – to uphold the subjugation of Black women. The normalized violence of insulting, gendered language is seldom given historical levity, despite its apparent roots in the racialized and gendered dynamics of slavery in the Jamaican context:

> Through this language of insult, planters discursively fragmented women's bodies, denied them the status of 'real' women, and metaphorically reduced them to their genitalia or to animals. The misogyny of insulting language directed against enslaved and apprenticed women suggests that these women's specific experience of subordination is not adequately described by a focus on discrete acts of sexual violence, or analyses of the additional burden of domestic and reproductive labour imposed on them, but rather was intertwined with daily interactions among managers and enslaved/apprenticed people. [...] Through sexualised insulting language, gendered domination and more specifically the threat of sexual violence was integrated into the totality of power relations in slave society, rather than isolated in discrete acts of rape or other forms of sexist oppression. The language of insult described here was used by managers in the context of disputes over work, health, family and other conflict-provoking aspects of daily life. It played a role in justifying, in the eyes of these managers, the sexual victimisation of enslaved women. (Paton 246-7)

Although white male slave owners did not "invent" violently sexist language, their appropriation of it worked to bolster their social capital by maintaining the subordination of Black women. A population already rendered extremely vulnerable due to the unique intersections of their race, gender, and status as enslaved, linguistic violence was an added threat that forced hypervigilance – fear became constant and ingrained. During a fight that Nina has with Chuck, for instance, he calls her a "conniving nigger" – this language, however, has become so ubiquitous in her society that "the word nigger didn't quite have the kick he was counting on, nor bitch, nor cunt since Jamaican girl don't response to none of them things" (James 358). Violent language that belittles Black women, whether it be racial slurs, animalization, or the reduction of her personhood to just

her genitalia, is so commonplace in postslavery Jamaica that women simply accept its constant presence and abuse. As such, linguistic violence, coupled with corporeal abuse against Black women, continues to shape their self-actualization and socialization.

Furthermore, Nina's immense fear of being raped is a result of hypervigilance due to the impending threat of violence that colors her daily life. Her very existence as a woman in postcolonial Jamaica, with its inherited machismo, subjects her to the imminent threat of rape and death. "I only need to remember every headline," she thinks, "about some family getting shot, bulletin about the curfew, news report about some woman who get raped or how crime moving like a wave uptown to scare myself stupid" (James 49). Early in the narrative, as she attempts to approach The Singer's residence – with whom she has been having an affair – she is stopped by the police. "Mind me have to scream rape," she says, to which one responds "And who the r'asscloth going care, eh?" (James 46). From the reader's very first introduction to Nina, James makes clear the vulnerable status of most women in Jamaica – not only are white men executors of violence against Black women, but Black men, through an inherited violent masculinity, follow suit. The police are more so perpetrators of gendered violence, as men in positions of relative power – "I heard a story about a woman who went to the police," Nina recounts, "to report a rape but they didn't believe her so they raped her again" (James 104). It is no surprise, then, that she "don't want none of these men touching [her]. They always grab on to ass or crotch first" (James 47). Reminiscent of "imperial discourse," James' "male intruders ward off fears of narcissistic disorder by reinscribing, as natural, an excess of gender hierarchy" by exercising their power through sexual violence (McClintock 24).

In the above scene, it is past curfew, and Nina is stranded. The last bus has left, and her heel is broken. Already in a position of extreme vulnerability, Nina is confronted by two

policemen patrolling the area. They offer to take her back home to Havendale, and she reluctantly agrees. As they drive, Nina remembers that "At the stoplight a right turn takes you to Havendale. They turn left" (James 94). Nina is understandably terrified, and the policemen's blasé assertions that they are taking a "Shortcut" is a conscious effort, on their part, to taunt her (James 94). They are enjoying the fear their position of power her fear puts them in:

> You can't really know how it feels, just knowing deep down that in a few minutes these men will rape you. God take you make fool, this Cassandra from Greek mythology in history class who nobody listens to, who can't even hear herself. The men haven't touched you yet but you've already blamed yourself, you stupid naïve little bitch this is how man in uniform rape a woman [...] They haven't raped you yet but you know they're going to, the threat of it in the third time you catch one looking through the rearview mirror without smiling or laughing and his hand adjusting his crotch like he's playing with, not fixing himself. (James 104)

No one but Black women can "really know how it feels" to fear so constantly the desecration of their bodies. She internalizes the violence of the language often hurled against her, calling herself a "stupid naïve little bitch," a "fool" – as though she is to blame for the mens' violent perversions. James' allusion to Cassandra, and his collusion of her to Nina, signifies the position of Black women position as perpetual victims, never to be believed, always to be faced with the brunt of now-conventional violence.

As the above passage illustrates, violence hinged on and was reinforced by speech acts, especially once the flogging and mutilation of the enslaved in Jamaica tapered away. Abusive language produced the immobilizing fear of physical violence without the necessary crack of the whip. Indeed, witnessing and experiencing all types of violence was commonplace for the

enslaved. Physical, sexual, and psychological violence, however, was almost always "accompanied by, mediated through, and often preceded by abusive words" (Paton 246). By focusing simply on the "physical aspects" of violence against the enslaved, valuable discursive knowledge on the complex interplay between violences, as well as their lasting cultural impact, is lost. In essence, abusive words "in themselves and through their relationship to violent acts, played a central role in asserting and attempting to perpetuate the dominance of slave-owners and plantation managers over enslaved people" (Paton 246). James is keenly aware of the power violent language carries as an organizing, humiliating, and subordinating tool. The word "whore" appears twenty-three times in *A Brief History*, "slut" fourteen times, "bitch" a hundred and sixty-three times, "pussy" a whopping one hundred and eighty-two times, and "rape" is referred to over ninety times. Much of the violent language is hurled directly against women, or is uttered casually amongst men in relation to (mostly) Black women. The normalization of this misogynistic language is represented through its ubiquity in the novel, and in the fact that women, too, internalize and repeat these scathing signifiers. Animalizing a Black woman to a "bitch," or reducing her to just genitalia ("pussy"), or echoing overwhelming mentions of sexual promiscuity and lasciviousness ("whore," "slut"), are all dehumanizing tactics that were employed by slave owners and overseers during slavery in Jamaica. Nina herself refers to "Bush people" and "bush bitches" multiple times, not only participating in the primitivization of her community, but in the dehumanization of its women; she also refers to herself and others as a "prostitute," reflecting hypersexual tropes of Black femininity as they had been ingrained into national consciousness over the course of centuries (James 33, 235, 136, 410). Despite their modern colloquial usage, these words are saturated with misogynoir that strips women of their personhood, and maintains their subjugation, in ways that are historically relevant. James is

therefore staging a complex interplay between perpetration and victimization through the vicious voice(s) of his Black male speakers as they participate in the subjugation of Black women. While they indeed suffer from social, economic, racial, and political circumstances, Black men in *A Brief History* are still the overwhelming culprits of gendered violence, linguistic or otherwise.

Black men in *A Brief History* participate in linguistic and physical violence as a homosocial ritual, a reaffirmation of manhood historically denied under the systems of slavery. Black men, for centuries, were denied ownership over their bodies and the labor produced by it. As Faith Smith articulates in her book, *Strolling in the Ruins: The Caribbean's Non-Sovereign Modern in the Early Twentieth Century* (2023), "Caribbean [men] (who want to take [white men's] place in the great house as owners, and as part of the trajectory of proving their moral right to befriend, share power with, and inherit—or recover—the wealth of local and visiting white élites [...)] affirm their African descent no matter how physically white-appearing they may be" (14). For enslaved men and their male descendants, embodying whiteness, socially and/or institutionally, even with the knowledge that they could never truly *be* white, provided them with a sense of power. The possibility of control over their own bodies and destinies was intoxicating, aspirational – yet the only masculine model of socioeconomic ascent possible within the system of postslavery was that which required the violent enforcement of white heteropatriarchy. As such, in the latter half of the twentieth century, the United States takes advantage of Jamaica's tenuous nationhood by sowing instability through violent neocolonial institutions. Barry Diflorio, to whom James dedicates multiple chapters, is a CIA informant, the most extreme "expatriate" there is. Echoing early colonial sentiments, the CIA strove "to reorient Jamaican society along lines beneficial to the United States' geopolitical and economic agenda" (Walonen 72). The CIA exercised its power "by directing and teaching members of Wales's

gang" to wreak havoc, therefore justifying continued American influence – under the guise of stabilization – in the region (Walonen 73).

As such, the very structure of the Storm Posse both contests and reproduces colonial violence. In the fickle landscape of postslavery Jamaica, "wordly advancement" was only possible through colonially-endorsed, violent "masculinist" means (Walonen 75). This included the murder of vulnerable people, such as impoverished Black women, the dispersion of drugs, and general intimidation:

> Some pattern of yours, Josef? Offing pregnant chicks?
>
> —Fuck off.
>
> —Real classy, don man. Your whole crew of Jamaicans and their why-shoot-one-*hombre*-when-you-can-liquidate-the-whole-block way of thinking. Storm of bullets, eh? Storm Posse. Real classy.
>
> —You are the man who make them, boss, not me. Don't make monster then bawl how them monstrous. (James 513)

The visceral imagery of "pregnant chicks" and "whole-block[s]" dying due to the gang's actions is intentionally curated by James to illustrate the violent means through which Josey Wales and his men perform their masculinity. The threat that this gang poses places its members firmly at the top of the sociopolitical hierarchy, a powerful position indeed. Through "the paternalistic indoctrination of younger men into this world of aggressive masculinism," older members of the gang, such as Papa-Lo, constantly usher in new members, including the teenaged Bam-Bam (Walonen 75). The homosocial potential of gang life reveals itself here, through the cloistered masculine community that their violence produces. Their personhood and manhood depends on the Storm Posse, and the sense of belonging that they find within it. However, the various violent

axes that caused the material conditions that allowed for these "monster[s]" to be "ma[de]," including the emasculating capability of poverty, and the lack of selfhood that develops as a result, is also resisted by its very existence. The indoctrination of new members into this complex hierarchy resembles the reproduction of familial bonds, such as between father and son. In a way, gang life is recomposited kinship, producing relational identities that mirror blood-rites. While this relationship traps both Afro-Jamaican men and women in cycles of violence, it imbues some Black men with a masculinity that fosters the community that they had been historically denied.

Weeper, one of Josey Wales' right-hand men, eagerly participates in most of the posse's activities. His homosexuality, however, is fundamentally incompatible with the strict masculinities of gang life – he is constantly afraid "that Josey going pop up outside the window" and discover him in the act (James 404). His "belonging" to the gang thus depends on his ability to emulate their patterns of violence, including physical and linguistic confirmations of heterosexuality. As with Nina, whose victimhood hinges on her identification as a Black woman, James similarly claims that non-conformist Black men are also threatened by postcolonial configurations of misogyny –

> But you really want to yell and scream and howl, yes I read *Howl*, fucking facety white boy you think just 'cause me black and from the ghetto me can't read? But this is not about ignorant white boy, is about you wanting so bad to howl and bawl but you can't howl and bawl because to howl and bawl is to give it up and you can't give it up, not to another man, not a white man, not any man, ever. As long as you don't bawl out you not the girl. You not born for it" (362)

Weeper's expression of his homosexual desire is inextricable from the colonial complex of gendered and racial hierarchy. The pre-existing configuration of women as inherently submissive renders Weeper as unable to fully immerse himself in the sensual act for fear of being further emasculated through the acknowledgement of his penetration. He is especially insecure of being "dominated" by a white man, which both threatens his Blackness and his particular expression of masculinity. Simultaneously, however, he *wants* to be able to "howl and bawl," to experience the intimacy of sex without the violent encroachment of heterosexual expectation on his psyche. There is, of course, the threat of violent retribution from the gang, who continuously refer to gay men derogatorily as "batty boys" (James 443). The accusation is itself an act of scathing violence. So long as Weeper associates with the gang, he cannot reveal this facet of his identity. His internalized homophobia is thus reflective of the external, and culturally enforced, homophobia that emerges as a result of the colonial valorization of heterosexual marriage and reproduction.

As Timothy Chin explains, "Caribbean literary production has traditionally maintained a conspicuous silence around issues of gay and lesbian sexuality," mainly due to the colonial expectation of heterosexual propriety (128-9). James, however, complicates such binaristic ideas by casting Weeper as both queer and violent gang leader:

> *Scope this ill faggot-ass bullshit* this nigger say, popping out of the alley wall like him was a jigsaw piece. You two fudgepackers pick the wrong ghetto to get on with that nasty-ass shit. White crackhead inched back and I said stop. He's still inching so I turn me head and look at him. Stop, I say. White boy make a sound like a snake hiss, something say the nigger about to get the drop on you. I quick-dodge the knife-carrying hand to the left, pull him down with me left hand, swing 'round my back to him and flick

> up my right hand. Knuckle right in the nose. Nigger yelling, but not before I knee him balls, take 'way the knife, then grab him left wrist, push against a board-up window and crucify the motherfucker. Nigger now screaming when I say to the white boy, *Now you can run*. Him laughing hard. We running, and grabbing, and laughing, and hardening, and stopping and a tongue in me mouth before I say I don't use tongue. By the time we get to me walk-up, we leaping step two by two. Last flight of step, belt buckle pull, pants drop to the floor, brief down to the knee and battyhole up. You're not worried about the gay cancer? He spit and push it in. No, I say. (James 361)

The scene, which James condenses into one long passage, moves quickly – almost imperceptible is the shift from physical and verbal violence to sex, which is itself both curiously tender and brutal. Weeper constantly "proves" himself as an ideal fighter, a masculine warrior that effortlessly "quick-dodge[s]" sly knife attacks to "crucify the motherfucker" that threatened him. He has been thoroughly "socialized to [not] show fear in public; instead [he] perform[s his] masculinity or manhood by demonstrating bravery, toughness, and chivalry," which is customary for Jamaican men, especially those in his particular position (Brown-Glaude 57). Yet, as Weeper and the "White crackhead" escape their assailants, there is buoyant "laugh[ter]"; they lean on and "grab" one another, kiss one another. James, however, does not use the word "kiss" – there is little affection in the hurried action of "tongue" in mouth, "brief down to the knee and battyhole up," of the phallus being "push[ed] in." As Weeper later expresses, "bad man don't kiss," because it makes him "think like a faggot" (James 402).

As Pierre W. Orelus writes in *The Agony of Masculinity: Race, Gender, and Education in the Age of "New" Racism and Patriarchy*, the "masculinity of black/brown men is founded in their colonial past," and any proximity to perceived femininity, of "softness" of any sort, whether

through a kiss with another man, or penetration, is threatening to their sense of masculinity (66). To be feminine is to be vulnerable to domination, and penetration can only be recognized as degrading if one prescribes to the colonial ideology of man as possessor and cultivator of woman. Weeper quite explicitly prescribes to this notion: although he expresses the potential to think differently about his own masculinity – "Don't think the man getting fucked must be the bitch" – and he rarely maintains this impression (James 362). Weeper tells his lover that he "love[s him]," only to immediately retort that he "don't mean that," that he should instead violently "Kick [his lover's] foot and kick him out" to distract from his blunder (James 362). Through the internalization of violent colonial doctrine, Weeper becomes unable to imagine love as a possibility for himself; sexual gratification is the closest he dares to get, and even that is checked by a constant stream of violence. Even when he daydreams about "wak[ing] up" next to his lover, "put[ing] on [his] clothes" and "say[ing] babe, I gotta go," he reminds himself that "boy would be a girl" if his life really were "a movie" (James 362). The movie is a normative stand-in for the line of masculinist thinking that has been plaguing men in the Global South since early colonialism, pushing them to internalize homophobia and other gendered notions.

This kind of thinking remains consistent for Weeper, revealing the ingrained nature of his homophobia. When he catches his current partner looking at him, he immediately assumes that "[his] lips dry?" or his "Eye crossed?" not that he's "beautiful" or worth admiring (James 401). He dismisses this emotional exchange as simple "Batty boy business," which is easier to confront than his own ingrained perspectives on manhood and masculinity (James 401). All the way up on the fifth floor, "Nobody can see [them] but the sky. But Air Jamaica going fly right by and Josey going see me," thinks Weeper (James 402). James repeats Weeper's fear of being caught by Josey, such is the agonizing fear of non-conformity in the intense, masculinist

environment in which he performs and participates.“I know it’s five floors up,” he continues, “but what if somebody pass by the window right now and see my leg up in the air?” (James 403). The omnipresence of Josey, in this scene, reveals Weeper’s constant fear of being discovered as “deviant,” a fear that eerily parallels Nina’s own fear of violence, one that only exists because he feels overwhelming pressure to enact a certain, restrictive type of masculinity. With some coaxing from his lover, who reminds Weeper that “the only person who’s going to see [him] out that window is Superman,” Weeper seems to take on a position of pseudo-acceptance – “This is America and me can do what me want,” he thinks, “so fuck what any of you want to say, or as Americans would say, Kiss my ass” (James 404, 403).

Weeper’s resistance is short lived – a shot of pure cocaine, administered by John-John K, kills him shortly after. While he did occupy “the ambiguous and sometimes contradictory space” that his identity afforded him, his death is symbolic of how difficult it is to negotiate differences in a culture charged with colonial violence (Chin 138). The potential to perhaps “enable new forms of social and cultural relations” is not yet realized, not for Weeper, Nina, or any of James’ many protagonists (Chin 139). Although early European colonialism did not directly affect modern Jamaica, colonial expansion operated under a gendered logic, in which the vast, fertile, feminized land is claimed and culled by the encroaching male conquistador. This forms a heteropatriarchal hegemony that is quickly disseminated as imperialists mobilize globally, doubly trapping both men and women as subordinating ideology takes root. Indeed, the institutionalization of a hegemonic form of masculinity” permeated “the schools, military forces, and civil society of the British settlers. It was specifically a harsh and insistent masculinity adapted to the need to dominate a colonized population” (Connell 307). Furthermore, “Colonized men were recruited in considerable numbers into imperial armed forces, especially the British

and French. Patriarchal households organized labor forces and allowed white men sexual access to [...] slave women," which is not only an "effect of empire," but at the core of colonizing policy (Connell 307; Spencer-Wood 483). This continuous stream of violence has had devastating consequences in the formation of the nation, its literary canon, and individual actualization.

A Brief History is thus unique in its geographical positionality – while it replicates colonial violence in its portrayal of sexual, psychological, and physical abuse, the narrative form simultaneously contests literary manifestations of that very violence. His intentional use of Jamaican Patois threatens the hegemony of the English language in Caribbean literary production. White supremacy and "correct" language usage are linked, as one reinforces the projected superiority of the other; Patois thus denotes Caribbeanness, and James' successful application of it throughout his novel exalts it to the status of literary respectability. Moreover, the various stream-of-consciousness and poetic passages in the novel also resist the traditional prosaic structuring of the masculine Caribbean canon. There is a certain violence in the constrictive nature of "proper" literature, one that James, through his visceral language and imagery, is contesting. Neocolonial violence still subjugates Black women through the pervasiveness and intersecting violences of Black and white masculinities, but reimaginings are not impossible. By "refigur[ing] the meaning of 'revolution' and 'revolutionary'" Caribbean literature through the agency of his non-conformist characters, James is "envision[ing an] anticolonial narrative that does not preclude the meaning of black womanhood" or its many signifiers (Edmondson 108). The complex, intersecting violences that color Black feminine life is thus littered with literary possibility.

Conclusion: "God loves us in our bodies": Radical Futurity Through a Reconfiguration of the Black Body

Slavery remains so central to Anglophone Caribbean and African-American *oeuvres* because it is not "reducible to an object-event of metaphysics; moreover, it comprises an event-horizon that structures western thought itself. Slavery, in [this] analysis, is an antiblack episteme that enables the distinctions between human and nonhuman, citizen and property, self-possession and dispossession to have meaning" (Colbert et al. 56). The fabric of western civilization, and by virtue, the literature of its disenfranchised, is inextricably, and endurably, shaped by these violent, dehumanizing factors. Although literature can and has been a way to self-actualize and fight historical dispossession, the specifically masculinist violence that slavery and its institutions advance(d) has largely been unexplored by Black North American and Afro-Caribbean authors, despite their shared history of subjugation by the English. Clarke and James, however, articulate their geographically-rooted histories of violence by speaking to, and in many ways, against, the literary hegemonies that they encounter. The Caribbean orthodoxy that colors the region's canon informs the formation of James' novel – and the epic poetic tradition that Clarke draws from and reforms – have their roots in an imperial, largely British, history. By redefining what "proper" literary language and subject(s) can be, Clarke and James are outlining the postmodern narrative possibility of agency and self-determination, despite the intergenerational experience of catastrophic violence.

With this important context in mind, I read both of their texts as (potentially) feminist, certainly when approached through a transnational framework. It is nonetheless difficult to ignore the nauseating, sometimes staggering depictions of graphic violence woven throughout both texts. In the case of both Clarke and James, Black women make up the overwhelming

majority of victims. This violence distracts from – but does not disappear – what I argue is the feminist undercurrent working within their texts, made all the more explicit as they near their final chapters and poems. Both authors' distinctly creolized and Africadian frameworks contest universalized conceptions of (western) feminism, especially regarding the definitiveness with which gender and sexuality are often discussed. Postcolonial feminism relies somewhat on an expansive definition of intersectionality, rendering nonnormative the very experience of living as racialized. Clarke and James' literary progress and development, therefore, is inextricable from postcolonial and postslavery violence. Canadian and Jamaican nationhoods and identity formation(s) are folded over and informed by this very violence. Each author therefore intentionally leaves readers grappling with uncertain, open endings. Clarke is perhaps working to answer some lingering questions in his forthcoming volumes of *Canticles*, though both writers intentionally gesture towards the vast progress still to be made through the violence that still permeates. There is undoubtedly a desire to read feminist intention into their work, but I argue that Clarke and James invite meditation on what has been said, and what remains to be explored. Black futurity is thus intentionally left impossible to concretely imagine.

Masculinist literary authority, as demonstrated, leaves very little space for women. This phenomenon can be directly linked to how Black women were "made" subservient first by European colonists in both the Caribbean and North America, then in tandem with their "fellow [male] slaves" through insulting speech, back-breaking labor, and "sexual [...] repression" (Dadzie 25). In (re)making themselves as visible in the literary world, they must resist English social and linguistic authority, but also the dominance of their own men within Black literary spheres. They are doubly silenced – and yet, as the Black feminist booms of 1970s and '80s North America and Jamaica illustrate, a reconfiguration of the canon is possible. With the

endurance of novels such as Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* (1982), Audre Lorde's *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982), Jamaica Kincaird's *Lucy* (1990) – and of course, the writings of Butler and Morrison – Black women reveal the power of "personal [literary] invention":

> This is the age of the Black woman. I'll not forget that it was out of turmoil and ~~suffering~~ climbing of the last decade that the Afro-American woman was born again. She will not fear to be herself—no more, not again. This is a moral and aesthetic victory of the first order. Also, this century will settle the "race" question once and for all, one way or another. I suppose it is "all and everything" to be able to stand at the intersection of history and help direct traffic." To be young, female, and black at this point in history is to stand suspended between heaven and hell. (Crawford and Snorton 163; Spillers qtd. in Crawford and Snorton 164)

Spiller's language is itself flexible, rife with potential. If the Black woman, as both literary subject and object, is suspended between "heaven and hell," then she has the choice, or the ability, to write herself either or any way. She does not have to "suffer" any longer, but can rather "climb" up, be "born again" in her own terms. She exercises her agency by detailing the nuance of her interior life, unencumbered by the Black male intellectual tradition. As such, a Black woman can indeed find her voice, and a Black man can join her in "dialogue" so that together they may "reveal to [them]selves [their] own voice–beauty–authority" – and so the projected corporeal signifiers that ideologically limit women as subservient to men, and all Black individuals as unintelligent, hypersexual, dispossessed, and perpetual victims, can be reformed (Spillers qtd. in Crawford and Snorton 160).

Black women have similarly been "buried" by the Black and white men that helm the Caribbean canon. Stringently masculine, traditional Anglophone Caribbean literature figured

national, and revolutionary, discourse as inherently male. For feminist literature to form and thrive in the West Indies, the notion of literary authority as an inherently masculine endeavor had to be challenged. Accordingly, contemporary Caribbean women's literature often reflected a "desire to dissolve the construction of Caribbean nationhood that has been predicated on such stringently masculinist and European definitions," even as it rearranged "the genre of the national allegory to include the displaced Caribbean female subject" (Edmondson 167). As the voice(s) of this neglected literary community came into focus, the West Indian literary canon, which traditionally had established "itself in dialectical relationship to the English canon," became radically reconfigured through the collective discursive power of Caribbean women authors (Edmondson 167). "West Indian space, West Indian literature, and who can be a West Indian author" has been reassessed through the tireless work of these women (Edmondson 167). Ultimately, they have ushered in "a reexamination of key structures in Caribbean discourse and, in the process, expanded the contours of postcolonial Caribbean national identity" (Edmondson 167). The Black American feminist tradition is thus influential to both Clarke and James – their narratives are formed in relation to this modernist history as it shapes their respective canons. While both writers identify with violent perpetration, and recreate this complex in their men, their persistent use of dialect has the discursive power to reconfigure their seemingly traditional, masculinist narratives by reimagining the positionality of their women. If Nina Burgess, and Harriet Jacobs, and Mildred Dixon (if momentarily, but searingly nonetheless) can be radically portrayed as beings *for* themselves, with an abundance of intelligence, agency, and sensuality, then earlier imagery of fear and violation in *A Brief History* and *Canticles I* is simply a realist recreation of the complex gendered horrors of slavery. They do not, by virtue of their existence, negate feminist and self-determinate narrative possibility.

By shifting into a more accommodating, holistic method of writing towards the end of their respective narratives, Clarke and James find reconfiguration and self-actualizing power in community, in writing *with* history and its silenced women. There is no one liberating discursive mode; the excitement lies within possibility. We can, however, start by asking:

> what is the relationship between a fictional text and the historical, or the community in history, both *inventing* and *invented* by its texts? Reading, active decoding in order to rearrange one's living in an object world, becomes a key point of entry into the "larger sociality that shapes our becoming." Reading encourages recommitment to acts of collective care and concern that, however tentatively, short-circuit the impersonal structures, myths, and legends that [...] "conventionalize desire, intimacy, and even one's own personhood." Doing so is not a fictional encounter with things as they really are in a positivist sense, denuded of all self-delusion and unburdened from fantasy or attachment, but instead a reawakening to the contingency of the world as it is and a disenchantment with our frames of knowing and speaking through which we might loosen the *self*, bound as it is to particular histories and matrices of desire, to make room for new desires and attachments that in the absence of a less contentious term I will call love. (Crawford and Snorton 115)

Love as an organizing, creative force can combat the violent masculinization and mythicization of slavery in canonized narratives. "Active[ly] decoding" the signifiers that make the Black woman subordinate allows her to "become" something different, free of subjugating historical "matrices." Writing the Black woman in a narrative as simply a person, in and of herself, allows the relationship between Black men and women "less contentious," and it will spring wide open with possibility. If the Black woman is "[un]bound" from the psychic and corporeal violences of

slavery, she can "*invent*" herself, render herself as she *is*. This also makes possible a reconstruction of the Black male body; he, too, can become sensual without being hypersexual, be spiritual without being puritan, be beautiful in his physicality without being made beastly or grotesque. "Collective care," or "love," within literary and social space, is *the* liberating and healing force. If love is "the desire to induce change without trauma, to become revolutionized and open and yet more oneself," then to (re)define the Black body is to ecstatically embody an identification that rejects the subjugating historical forces of slavery (Crawford and Snorton 115). "What's the value of my first-person address, / i.e., 'I'?" Clarke asks (Canticles I 438). Perhaps the nature of the ever-changing Black feminist archive will soon find an answer. It, through literary acts of kinship, remains "luminously unfinished" and "actively in process, [...] building toward a future" that can, and will be, different (Crawford and Snorton 152).

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