

1-1-1997

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Recommended Citation

Kelley, James. "Blossoming in Strange New Forms: Male Homosexuality and the Harlem Renaissance." Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal 80.4 (Winger 1997): 499-517.

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Figure 1. Charles Cullen (?). Untitled. Color. By Countee Cullen. New York: Harper, 1925. ii.

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BLOSSOMING IN STRANGE NEW FORMS: Male Homosexuality and the Harlem Renaissance

James Kelley

IN PERHAPS THE MOST FREQUENTLY CITED but rarely analyzed chapter of Wallace Thurman's 1932 roman à clef *Infants of the Spring*, Dr. A.L. Parkes convenes a meeting of young black writers at "Niggeratti Manor." Dr. Parkes, a caricature of Alain Locke, one of the leading black intellectuals of the period, calls this meeting as the first step in what he hopes will be a "concerted movement" to "establish the younger Negro talent once and for all as a vital artistic force" (228). But despite his best efforts, the meeting ends in disarray, and the "movement" he longs for never develops.

This failure has generally been read as an expression of Thurman's disillusionment with the Harlem Renaissance. But the episode offers much more, including a parodic inquiry into two distinct yet intertwined discourses — primitivism and decadence — that played a crucial legitimizing role in the movement and that were particularly important for the four homosexual or bisexual authors who appear in this chapter: Locke, Countee Cullen, Richard Bruce Nugent, and Wallace Thurman. These discourses embodied the combination of European and African influences that Locke describes in "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts" when he observes that the "deep-seated aesthetic endowment" that African Americans brought with them to this country "blended itself with entirely different cultural elements and blossomed in strange new forms" (254). And although some of the forms of primitivism and decadence that "blossomed" during this

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period were too "strange" even for Locke himself, all were — to extend his metaphor — hybrids whose very hybridity challenged the conventional views of race and sexuality that dominated both black and white culture at the time.¹

Dr. Parkes begins the meeting at Niggeratti Manor by emphasizing the important role that the members of his audience can play in "the future of [their] race"; and echoing the organic metaphor that Locke used in "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts," he insists that they can achieve their goals only by cleansing their work of its "decadent strain" and returning to their African "roots." "You are," he says,

"the outstanding personalities in a new generation. On you depends the future of your race. You are not, as were your predecessors, concerned with donning armor, and clashing swords with the enemy in the public square. You are finding both an escape and a weapon in beauty, which beauty when created by you will cause the American white man to reestimate the Negro's value to his civilization. . . .

"But," and here his voice took on a more serious tone, "to accomplish this, your pursuit of beauty must be vital and lasting. I am somewhat fearful of the decadent strain which seems to have filtered into most of your work. Oh, yes, I know you are children of your age and all that, but you must not, like your paleface companions, wallow in the mire of post-Victorian license. You have too much at stake. You must have ideals. You should become . . . well, let me suggest your going back to your racial roots, and cultivating a healthy paganism based on African traditions." (233-35)

When the floor is opened for comments, DeWitt Clinton, the fictional counterpart to Countee Cullen, agrees with Dr. Parkes's opening remarks even as he alters them slightly. "The young Negro artist," he says, "must go back to his pagan heritage for inspiration and to the old masters for form" (236). These views are quickly challenged by the flamboyant Paul Arbian, whose name sounds out the initials — R-B-N — of his model Richard Bruce Nugent and who closely resembles Nugent in both manner and dress.²

What old black pagan heritage? . . . What about the rest? . . . My German, English, and Indian ancestors. . . . How can I go back to African ancestors when their blood is so diluted and their country and times so far away? I have no conscious affinity for them at all. (236-37)

Arbian's objections are supported by Raymond Taylor, Thurman's fictional counterpart in the novel, who asks: "Is there really any reason why *all* Negro artists should consciously and deliberately dig into African soil for inspiration and material unless they actually wish to do so?" (237).

These disagreements continue when a stanza from Cullen's "Heritage" is recited. Both Dr. Parkes and Clinton affirm the African American blood consciousness expressed in the poem. But Arbian counters with a quotation of his own from Oscar Wilde's "The Decay of Lying" — "Nature imitates art" — and Taylor enunciates a doctrine of individualism that echoes Wilde's 1891 tract "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" and the Nietzschean writings of H.L. Mencken (241, 244, 240).³ From there, the meeting (and, by implication, the movement as a whole) dissolves quickly into angry exchanges and wordless departures.

As this summary suggests, the four main participants in Dr. Parkes's meeting belong to two opposing camps. Dr. Parkes and Clinton (Locke and Cullen) trace their roots to a primitive Africa even as they draw on Western literary forms such as the essay and ballad, while Arbian and Taylor (Nugent and Thurman) identify with *fin-de-siècle* decadence and individualism. Despite the differences between these two views, however, both are opposed to a third position, the doctrine of racial uplift, which implied in part that African American art and literature should strive explicitly to improve the social, political, and economic status of African Americans. In Thurman's text, this doctrine is enunciated by Allen Fenderson, who has been identified by several critics as the fictional stand-in for Arna Bontemps. Fenderson agrees with Dr. Parkes that writers can help to improve the position of blacks in America, but he disagrees with the latter's strategy for achieving this goal. Instead, he urges the assembled company to follow what he says is the lead of W.E.B. Du Bois. According to Fenderson,

Dr. Du Bois has shown us the way. We must be militant fighters. We must not hide away in ivory towers and prate of beauty. We must fashion cudgels and bludgeons rather than sensitive plants. We must excoriate the white man, and make him grant us justice. We must fight for complete social and political and economic equality. (238)

Fenderson's comments do not capture the full complexity of Du Bois's view of art and literature, but they do echo his dissatisfaction with literary representations of African Americans during the mid-1920s — representations that included the work of younger writers such as Locke, Cullen, Thurman, and Nugent. Earlier in the decade, Du Bois had been more sanguine about the role that literature could play in the struggle for racial equality. Although he was initially skeptical about using NAACP funds to support the arts, for example, he nonetheless presided over the first *Crisis* literary awards dinner, which was held in November 1925 (Lewis 176, 143), and under his leadership *The Crisis* sponsored many more literary contests.

However, Du Bois continued to worry that new literary developments were hurting the cause. In January 1926, for example, he commented in an otherwise positive review of Locke's anthology *The New Negro* that "With one point alone do I disagree with the Editor. Mr. Locke has newly been seized with the idea that Beauty rather than Propaganda should be the subject of Negro literature and art" ("Our Book Shelf" 141). Du Bois added that "If Mr. Locke's thesis is insisted on too much, it is going to turn the Negro Renaissance into decadence" ("Our Book Shelf" 141), suggesting that on this point at least he saw little difference between Locke and writers like Thurman and Nugent whose work exhibits a more explicitly decadent strain.

Du Bois's dissatisfaction became even more evident in February 1926, when a *Crisis* editorial called for a symposium on "The Negro in Art: How Shall He Be Portrayed" and posed seven questions that were addressed in subsequent issues by prominent writers and intellectuals, black and white. These questions began neutrally enough:

When the artist, black or white, portrays Negro characters is he under any obligations or limitations as to the sort of character he will portray?

Can any author be criticized for painting the worst or the best characters of a group?

This neutrality is soon replaced, however, by an implicit critique of recent literary depictions of African Americans.

Is not the continual portrayal of the sordid, foolish and criminal among Negroes convincing the world that this and this alone is really and essentially Negroid, and preventing white artists from

knowing any other types and preventing black artists from daring to paint them?

Is there not a real danger that young colored writers will be tempted to follow the popular trend in portraying Negro character in the underworld rather than seeking to paint the truth about themselves and their own social class? ("The Negro in Art" 165)⁴

As the symposium drew to a close, Du Bois made his views even more clear by publishing his "Criteria of Negro Art." In this essay, he echoes his earlier review of Locke's *New Negro* anthology by asserting that "all art is propaganda and ever must be, despite the wailing of the purists," and he adds, "I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda" (296). And in December 1926, he published a scathing review of Carl Van Vechten's controversial *Nigger Heaven* in which he calls Van Vechten's novel a "caricature" and "an affront to the hospitality of black folk and to the intelligence of white" because of its depiction of Harlem's demimonde ("Books" 82).

Du Bois had clearly decided that literature was an unreliable ally in the struggle for racial justice, and in 1927 *The Crisis* suspended its literary contests. *Opportunity*, the other leading black journal of the period, ended its literary contests around this time as well (van Notten 170). Apparently Du Bois was not alone in his assessment.

Fenderson does not mention these texts or events in his speech at Dr. Parkes's meeting in *Infants of the Spring*, but his reference to Du Bois and his bald summary of Du Bois's views would have reminded the novel's first readers of all this and more. Fenderson's approach is immediately rejected by Parkes, Clinton, Taylor, and Arbian, all of whom opt for "beauty" in one form or another rather than "propaganda." Their reaction, which mirrors the views of their real-world counterparts, highlights the gulf that developed during the mid-1920s between Du Bois and the younger writers of the Harlem Renaissance and underscores these writers' dissatisfaction with the didactic, explicitly activist version of racial uplift that Du Bois advocated.

One aspect of the doctrine of racial uplift that undoubtedly contributed to its rejection by the writers at Dr. Parkes's meeting was its disapproving attitude toward homosexuality, which reflected the attitude of the black community generally. Early studies of the Harlem Renaissance by gay white scholars often overlooked this bias and stressed the sexual diversity and open-

ness of Harlem in the 1920s and early 1930s. In 1983, Eric Garber argued that

Many of the writers, intellectuals and artists of the Harlem Renaissance were homosexual, bisexual or otherwise sexually unorthodox. Their status as artists, part of the "talented tenth" who were thought by Du Bois to be the saviors of their race, protected them from public disapproval of their private lives. ("T'ain't Nobody's Bizness" 14)

And in 1986 George Chauncey asserted that "Harlem above 125th Street was known by all for its rent parties and after-hours clubs where lesbians and gay men were wholly accepted or even predominant" ("The Way We Were" 30).

More recent studies, many by the same authors, however, have contradicted this view, in part because they distinguish more clearly between the experiences of white visitors to Harlem and those of black gays and lesbians. Thus, when Garber expanded his 1983 essay for publication in the 1989 collection *Hidden from History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, he dropped his claim that membership in Du Bois's "talented tenth" shielded "sexually unorthodox" writers from "public disapproval," and he noted that when Augustus Granville Dill, the business manager of *The Crisis*, was arrested for homosexual solicitation in a subway washroom, Du Bois promptly fired him (Garber, "A Spectacle in Color" 326).⁵ Similarly, both Chauncey's 1994 study *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* and Lilian Faderman's 1991 *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* offer explicit critiques of what Faderman characterizes as the "sexual colonialism" of most contemporary white visitors to (and, one should add, subsequent white scholars of) early twentieth-century Harlem. According to Faderman,

whites were reluctant to see Harlem's ambivalence toward homosexuality. Instead, they saw that Harlem appeared "wide open" sexually and, typical of many who enjoy the fruits of colonialism, they did not analyze why or even question Harlem's limits. (70)

The doctrine of racial uplift was not solely responsible for these "limits," of course, but it did nothing to challenge them and often reinforced them; as Essex Hemphill points out this doctrine posed particular problems for gay and lesbian authors.⁶ Until 1926, African American literary magazines were funded almost exclusively by racial-uplift organizations such as the NAACP

and the Urban League. Striving to create and maintain an image of the African American community as moral, educated, middle class, and (above all) cohesive, these journals did not offer a sympathetic forum for works dealing with any form of sexuality, including same-sex desire.

As a result, gay and lesbian African American authors not only had to "negotiate their presence in the shops and churches of Harlem as well as in its clubs" like black gays and lesbians generally (Chauncey, *Gay New York* 248), they had to "negotiate their presence" in black literary circles as well. In part for this reason, writers such as Locke, Cullen, Nugent, and Thurman refused to follow the advice of those such as Fenderson who urged them to join in the struggle for racial uplift by "fashion[ing] cudgels and bludgeons." Instead they sought to create what Fenderson dismisses as "sensitive plants," cross-strains and hybrids that enabled them to express their shared desires in carefully shaped and frequently coded ways.

One such hybrid was the combination of primitivism and classicism that marked the work of Alain Locke. According to David Bergman, Locke and, to a lesser extent, Cullen sought to link their African heritage to ancient Greek traditions in order to create "a cultural context for black homosexuality." Locke did this, Bergman argues, by applying to African art and experience the terms that some nineteenth-century Anglo-American homosexuals had used to categorize Greek art and life — "rigid, controlled, disciplined, abstract, heavily conventionalized" — and by describing homosexuality in terms that draw on both traditions. Thus, in his letters of seduction to the young Langston Hughes, Locke refers to homosexuality as sharing the "Greek ideals of life," being "caught up . . . in the coils of classicism," and feeling "pagan to the core" (Bergman 177).

Locke was also interested in hybrid literary and artistic forms because they challenged established racial hierarchies. In "The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts," for example, he noted that the discovery of African classicism had reinvigorated the western art world, implicitly calling into question the conventional view that European culture was superior.

This artistic discovery of African art [by European modernists] came at a time when there was a marked decadence and sterility in certain forms of European plastic art expression, due to genera-

tions of inbreeding of style and idiom. Out of the exhaustion of imitating Greek classicism and the desperate exploitation in graphic art of all the technical possibilities of color . . . form and decorative design became emphasized. . . . And suddenly with this new problem and interest, African representations of form . . . appeared cunningly sophisticated and masterful. (258-59)

Locke's interest in hybrid forms is also evident in his praise of the creative merging of African and Anglo-American musical influences in jazz and the spirituals, and in what David Levering Lewis somewhat cynically calls his "graft[ing] abstractions from the German, Irish, Italian, Jewish, and Slovakian nationalisms to Afro-America" (117).⁷ It can be seen as well in his attitude toward the younger generation of African American writers. In his late 1927 review of *Fire!!*, the controversial literary magazine published by Thurman and Nugent, Locke argues that the contributors to the journal's first and only issue — who included Thurman, Nugent, Hughes, and Zora Neale Hurston — had been influenced both by white modernism and by the African American soldiers who had fought in the First World War. He notes that "The bold, arresting red and black of [the journal's] jacket is not accidental — this is left-wing literary modernism with deliberate intent: the *Little Review*, *This Quarter*, and *The Quill* are obvious artistic cousins." And he adds that "Like the past generation that found a short-cut to emancipation in fighting for freedom, these ardent youngsters hurdle the non-combatant positions of respectability to the firing line of moral challenge and reform" ("Fire" 563).

But this collapsing of boundaries and mixing of cultural forms had its limits for Locke. Thus, he lamented that "alien florid adornments" and "artificial hybrids" were corrupting the spirituals ("The Negro Spirituals" 207; "Toward a Critique" 110), and he criticized one influence in particular in his review of *Fire!!*. In his words,

if Negro life is to provide a healthy antidote to Puritanism, and to become one of the effective instruments of sound artistic progress, its flesh values must more and more be expressed in the clean, original, primitive but fundamental terms of the senses and not, as too often in this particular issue of *Fire*, in hectic imitation of the "naughty nineties" and effete echoes of contemporary decadence. Back to Whitman would have been a better point of support than a left-wing pivoting on Wilde and Beardsley. (563)

Du Bois had sounded a similar warning in his review of Locke's *New Negro* anthology: "if Mr. Locke's thesis is insisted on too much it is going to turn the Negro renaissance into decadence." This similarity may seem surprising in light of the many differences between these authors. But Du Bois and Locke were very much the Ruskin and Pater of their age, and although they argued over the primacy of social and aesthetic concerns, they were united in their denunciation of the new generation of decadents.

Locke's antipathy toward decadence and his preference for primitivism are evident in his editing of another hybrid creation: Countee Cullen's poem "Heritage," which appeared in Cullen's first book of poetry, *Color*, and which Locke republished in a revised form in the March 1925 issue of *Survey Graphic*, which was devoted to the Harlem Renaissance, and in the anthology *The New Negro* that grew out of this issue. Locke had praised *Color* for its culling and mixing of variant strains, including nineteenth-century poetic forms and the "fruit of the Negro inheritance and experience" ("Color — A Review" 14-15). But the version of "Heritage" he included in *Survey Graphic* and *The New Negro* differs substantially from the one in *Color*. Along with the perhaps too revealing dedication to the handsome Harold Jackman, twenty-six of the poem's 128 lines — approximately one-fifth of the total — are missing from the *Survey Graphic* and *New Negro* version, and in three places large blocks of text have been rearranged.⁸

It seems probable that Locke rather than Cullen was responsible for these changes. In the posthumously published *On These I Stand*, a collection of Cullen's poems "selected by himself," "Heritage" appears almost exactly as it had in *Color*; the only difference is that the space between the last two stanzas has been eliminated. The poem also appears this way in James Weldon Johnson's *The Book of American Negro Poetry* (221-25). The form the poem takes in these two publications, both of which followed the special issue of *Survey Graphic* and *The New Negro*, suggest that Cullen did not approve of the changes made to his poem; indeed, he may not even have known about them beforehand. As Arnold Rampersad points out, "Locke's editing practice and his craftiness infuriated some of his contributors," and at least one author, Claude McKay, was "incensed . . . when Locke timidly, and without permission, changed the title of his poem 'The White

House' to 'White Houses' in order to avoid possible repercussions" (xxi-xxii).

The strongest indication of Locke's involvement in editing "Heritage" is the nature of the changes themselves, which eliminate the poem's most obviously decadent elements and highlight its primitivism. Cullen's debt to his European literary predecessors, particularly Keats, has long been recognized by scholars of his work. Few scholars, however, have noted the decadent strain running through "Heritage." Even Bergman only hints at this link when he writes that "One can hear some of Prufrock and perhaps a bit of 'Sunday Morning' in the celebratory dance, but most of all Cullen has 'caught the tread of dancing feet,' that Oscar Wilde hears in 'The Harlot's House'" (181).

The sections of "Heritage" excised before publication under Locke's editorial guidance reveal an even more substantial decadent strain. The longest of three sections present in *Color* but absent from both *Survey Graphic* and *The New Negro* begins with the lines "Here no leprous flowers rear / Fierce corollas in the air" (*Color* 37). These flowers, like the "strange" and "sick flowers" of Algernon Charles Swinburne's "Ave Atque Vale" — "Sweet-smelling, pale with poison, sanguine-hearted" (57) — reek of the *fin-de-siècle* decadence that both Locke and Du Bois identified as the bane of the African American artist. In addition, this section contains clear echoes of the "Ballade des Dames du Temps Perdu" by François Villon, whose poetic skill and criminal tendencies had earned him a place of honor among many aesthetes and decadents of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁹

Other, smaller elements of the poem also reveal Cullen's debt to the European decadents, and it appears that Locke altered many of these as well. For example, "Quick and hot" is replaced with "Faint and slow" in the following passage, reducing its emotional charge:

Patience wavers just so much as
Mortal grief compels, while touches
Quick and hot, of anger, rise
To smitten cheek and weary eyes (*Color* 40)

Such changes suggest that Locke pruned the poem to eliminate its decadent elements and make it conform more fully to his own disciplined and classical aesthetic.

Even more significant, however, were the changes made in the poem's final stanzas, which highlight its primitivism. What had been the last stanza in *Color* was moved in *Survey Graphic* and *The New Negro* to a position much earlier in the poem, and what then became the last two stanzas were altered as well. The penultimate stanza underwent an internal reversal of the first and second quatrains so that it begins with the speaker's conversion and repudiation of the "Heathen gods" and ends with a sympathetic description of those gods. In *Color*, the stanza reads:

Quaint, outlandish heathen gods
Black men fashion out of rods,
Clay, and brittle bits of stone,
In a likeness like their own,
My conversion came high-priced;
I belong to Jesus Christ,
Preacher of humility;
Heathen gods are naught to me.
(39)

But in *Survey Graphic* and *The New Negro*, it reads:

My conversion came high-priced.
I belong to Jesus Christ,
Preacher of humility:
Heathen gods are naught to me —

Quaint, outlandish heathen gods
Black men fashion out of rods,
Clay and brittle bits of stone,
In a likeness like their own.

(*Survey Graphic* 675; *The New Negro* 252)

The *Survey Graphic* and *New Negro* version then ends with the eighth of the nine sections in *Color*, with the last rhyming couplet set apart for emphasis: "Lord, forgive me if my need / Sometimes shapes a human creed."

These revisions effect a subtle shift of emphasis in the poem. In its original form, "Heritage" dramatizes the agony of being torn between a Christian present and a renounced pagan past. But in *Survey Graphic* and *The New Negro* it conveys a sense of reconciliation in the recovery of an African artistic legacy.

A comparison of the illustrations accompanying the different versions of Cullen's poem reveals the same conflict of influences and literary sources, the same tension between the primitive and the decadent. *Color* is illustrated with drawings that are almost

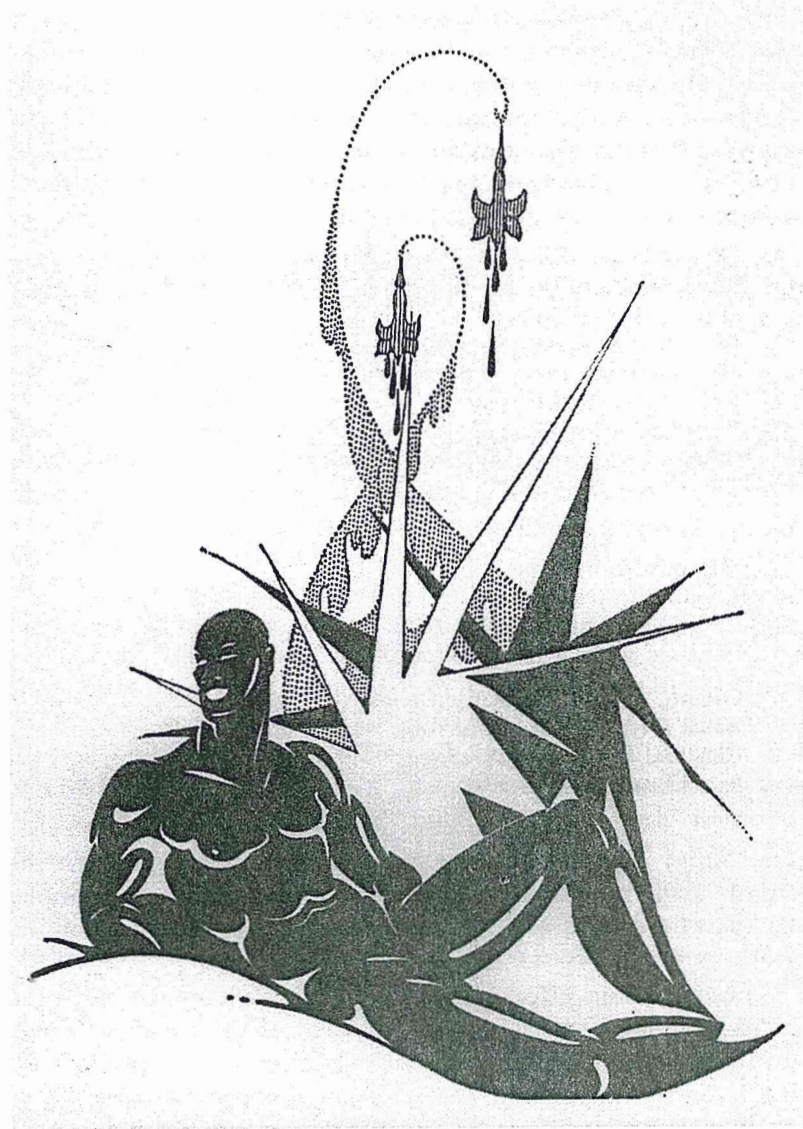


Figure 2. Charles Cullen (?). Untitled. *Color*. By Countee Cullen. New York: Harper, 1925. ii.

certainly the work of Charles Cullen, a white male artist who is credited with similar designs in Countee Cullen's two subsequent volumes of poetry, which appeared in 1927. The shared surname is accidental but implicitly transgressive in its suggestion of kinship and relations between men across racial boundaries, and the drawings in *Color* present nude men, white as well as black, sometimes muscled but more often androgynous, alongside burning candles and dripping lilies that seem to draw their inspiration from art nouveau, if not more directly from the late nineteenth-century decadent works of Aubrey Beardsley (see Figures 1 and 2 for examples).¹⁰ In *Survey Graphic*, on the other hand, "Heritage" is illustrated by photographs of two African statues (one of which can be seen in Figure 3) and two African masks, which reappeared in *The New Negro* as illustrations to Locke's essay "The Legacy of Ancestral Arts." These images clearly reflect Locke's African classicism, and their flat, self-contained, and highly conventionalized features contrast starkly with the sensuous curves and implicitly erotic imagery in Charles Cullen's drawings, which Countee Cullen himself had chosen to accompany his work.

Bergman notes correctly that "'Heritage' introduces Locke's essay on 'The Legacy of the Ancestral Arts' in the anthology *The New Negro* and forms — since Locke was the editor of the anthology — a gloss on Locke's position" (180). But the poem can be read this way only because it was altered in ways that eliminated its decadent elements and reinforced its primitivism. Yet it is Cullen's hybrid version — bereft of its illustrations but nonetheless exhibiting its mixture of paganism and Christianity, primitivism and decadence — which persists, ripe with potential, in subsequent anthologies and discussions of the poem.¹¹

Ripe with utopian potential, one is tempted to add. The earliest *OED* listings pair the term *hybrid* with adjectives such as *monstrous* and *grotesque*, a connection that may originate in the hybrid's violation of the Levitical codes against mixing. Further *OED* entries show that the word *hybrid* was scarcely in use until the nineteenth century, a period that witnessed the emergence of categorizations and classifications on an unprecedented scale, particularly in descriptions of plant and animal species, human races and cultures, and sexual orientations (523). In its transgression of such boundaries — whether national, racial, or sexual — the hybrid promises to resist, challenge, and undo these catego-



Figure 3. *Dogon Couple*, Mali, Africa. The Barnes Foundation (BF #A197, Gallery XXII). "From Cezanne to Matisse: Great French Paintings From the Barnes Foundation." Copyright 1995, The Barnes Foundation. Photograph by Lynn Rosenthal, 1995. Photograph courtesy of The Barnes Foundation.

ries. Cullen's poetry engages in such acts of undoing even as it constructs a hybridized and eroticized artistic lineage that permits the poet to voice forbidden desires in original and experimental ways. The changes that Locke appears to have made in the version of "Heritage" published in *Survey Graphic* and *The New Negro*, coupled with the loss of the black-on-white illustrations that accompanied the poem in *Color*, have no doubt perpetuated a distorted view of Cullen's work, but they cannot completely erase its racially as well as sexually transgressive power.

Even so, the utopian implications of hybrids such as Locke's African classicism or Cullen's combination of primitivism and decadence must be evaluated in terms of the boundaries they fail to transgress, or perhaps unwittingly reinscribe, as much as by the violations they permit. Also attending the first and only gathering of African American authors in Thurman's novel are a number of women artists, including Sweetie May Carr, the fictional counterpart to Zora Neale Hurston. Carr is the only woman allowed to speak in this scene, and she contributes nothing to the discussion except offhand remarks and occasional giggles. She thus serves as little more than comic relief. The four counterparts to Locke, Cullen, Nugent, and Thurman argue about which sources they might use and which literary lineages they might create in order to achieve their aesthetic goals and legitimate their same-sex desires. But whether they turn to ancient Greek and African pasts, or to the decadent authors of the late nineteenth century — or to innovative combinations of the two — their work is limited by an unexamined reinscription of patriarchal authority.

Despite Thurman's parodic approach, then, Dr. Parkes's meeting at Niggeratti Manor serves all too clearly as a fictional analogue to the 1924 Civic Club dinner that was organized ostensibly to celebrate the publication of Jessie Fauset's novel *There is Confusion* but which actually highlighted the work of a group of predominantly male authors that included Locke, Cullen, and Thurman.¹² The marginalization of female writers at both events illustrates the limits of the legitimizing narratives established by the gay male authors of the Harlem Renaissance; fashioning lineages to counteract their own exclusion, they excluded others without a second thought.

NOTES

1. Locke's use of this organic metaphor here was not unusual. In the March 1925 issue of *Survey Graphic*, and in the subsequent anthology *The New Negro*, for example, he praises a "second crop of the Negro's gifts" that promises much, including a release "from the arid fields of controversy and debate to the productive fields of creative expression" ("Enter the New Negro" 634; "The New Negro" 15). Similar metaphors appear in the work of many of his contemporaries, and they have resurfaced in recent studies of the Harlem Renaissance as well. Claude McKay, for instance, writes in his sonnet "Like a Strong Tree" as well as in his 1929 novel *Banjo* of the empowerment of "getting down to our native roots" ("Like a Strong Tree" 134; *Banjo* 200). The title of Thurman's novel, *Infants of the Spring*, shares in this set of metaphors, as do the lines from *Hamlet* that Thurman chose as an epigraph to the novel:

The canker galls the infants of the spring
Too oft before their buttons be disclosed
And in the morn and liquid dew of youth
Contagious blastments are most imminent.

(I.iii.39-42)

A more recent example of the use of such metaphors is Arthur P. Davis's critical study *From the Dark Tower: Afro-American Writers 1900-1960*, in which Davis divides the principal figures of the Harlem Renaissance into two groups, the "Planters" and the "First Fruits."

2. Among the critics listing the individuals represented in Thurman's novel yet failing to identify Arbian as Nugent's fictional counterpart are: Nathan Irvin Huggins (193), Margaret Perry (91), Arthur P. Davis (111), and John A. Williams (285-308). SallyAnn H. Ferguson, who more recently has identified the "two young girls, recently emigrated from Boston" arriving with Sweetie May Carr as fictional counterparts to Hurston's cousins Doris Westmore and Hazel Jamison, also fails to include Arbian/Nugent in her list of the novel's characters and nonfictional counterparts (22-24). The extensive parallels between Nugent and Arbian are traced by Eleonore van Notten in her ground breaking biography of Thurman, *Wallace Thurman's Harlem Renaissance*. See especially pp. 275-86. The final scene in Thurman's novel, Arbian's elaborately staged suicide, is of course an embellishment.
3. The parallel between Thurman's views and H.L. Mencken's Nietzschean "ideology of egoism" is discussed in van Notten (122). Wilde's stance in "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," however, seems equally relevant:

A work of art is the unique result of a unique temperament. Its beauty comes from the fact that the author is what he is. It has nothing to do with that fact that other people want what they want. Indeed, the moment that an artist takes notice of what other people want, and tries to supply the demand, he ceases to be an artist, and becomes a dull or an amusing craftsman, an honest or a dishonest tradesman. He has no further claim to be considered as an artist. (300)

4. The symposium questions were reprinted with each of the seven responses; these have been listed in the works cited as well.
5. Lisa Duggan observes that constructive criticism of Garber's early presentations by black audience members encouraged him to correct for the ten-

6. In his introduction to the 1991 anthology *Brother to Brother: New Writings by Black Gay Men*, Hemphill writes of the limits imposed on homosexual and bisexual artists of the period: "because the mission to uplift the race predominated, there is little homoerotic evidence from the Harlem Renaissance except for selections of works by Richard Bruce Nugent" (xxii).
7. For a fuller discussion of Locke's liberating aesthetic vision, see Everett H. Akam.
8. The *Survey Graphic* and *New Negro* versions of the poem are virtually identical. Aside from minor alterations in punctuation, only one small change was made from the journal to the bound volume: the phrase "gentle flesh" was restored to the *Color* phrasing "gentle food," replacing one of the *Survey Graphic*'s less fortunate alterations (*Survey Graphic* 674; *New Negro* 250).
9. Villon's sonnet, in part through its translation by Dante Gabriel Rossetti, had become part of Victorian aestheticism, and the connection between Villon and the late nineteenth-century aesthetes is made explicit in Thurman's *Infants of the Spring* when Arbian fantasizes going on trial "in the grand manner like Wilde or Villon" (164).
10. Few scholars have mentioned the homoerotic black-and-white illustrations that appeared in Cullen's first three volumes: *Color*, *Copper Sun*, and *The Ballad of the Brown Girl: An Old Ballad Retold*. David K. Kirby, for example, makes only brief mention of the figure accompanying Cullen's "Heritage." Amitai F. Avi-Ram attributes such neglect to critical biases: "the strongest evidence of homophobia in the reading of Cullen is simply the silence in which the homoerotic suggestions are passed over" (45n20).
11. Christianity provided Cullen — as it no doubt did others — with yet another source for legitimizing his same-sex desire. Alden Reimonenq quotes a letter of 7 January 1924 from Cullen to Locke in which Cullen professes his attachment to Harold Jackman: "I feel toward him as a David to a Jonathan" (151). Similarly, Cullen's later long poem "The Black Christ," as Gregory Woods points out, casts the male victim in the role of Lycidas, Jonathan, and Patroclus, "all prematurely dead and volubly mourned by the men who loved them" (132).
12. This dinner has been discussed extensively in the critical literature about the Harlem Renaissance. See, for example, van Notten 39-41. Among the most most important results of this dinner was the issue of the *Survey Graphic* edited by Locke (van Notten 41).

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