



“SHE IS TWENTY-THREE MONTHS PREGNANT”

The *Quare*, Black Maternity & Bob Kaufman’s Surreal
(Re)vision of the African American Migration Narrative
L. Lamar Wilson

This journey into the poetics of Bob Kaufman begins and ends with the Black maternal, whose prayers, coos, moans, and wails are arguably the first sounds its literary progeny hears outside our own utterances in our first mothers’ wombs. Throughout the African American canon and in our day-to-day lives, Black mothers’ voices and songs help us navigate Blackness, this multivalent consciousness often interdicted by racism’s fictions of sub-humanity, animality, and inferior intellect among those of African descent. From *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to *Gone with the Wind* to *The Help*, Black mothers are loved in white Americans’ narratives, idolized even, solely when they serve as mammies—one-dimensional surrogates of absolution and service for guilt-ridden white liberals. Thus, this journey examines the ways that Kaufman joins the long list of Black writers who fashion the Black maternal as a harbinger of and centrifugal force for deeper engagement with and understanding of this complex, indestructible life force disparaged worldwide, even in the texts of apologists for white supremacist State violence such as Harriet Beecher Stowe, Margaret Mitchell, Kathryn Stockett, and Vanessa Place, whose vacuous appropriation and redeployment of Mitchell’s Mammy’s words as “art” imploded on itself within a matter of hours in May 2015. The sonic codes that Black mothers dispatch in their prayers, coos, moans, and wails disquiet the deceptive safety of the birthright of American exceptionality and convey the peril that hovers over Black life because of these racist fictions, particularly in what is now known as the global South. As scholars such as sociocultural critic Rinaldo Walcott and African American creative writers dating from

Lucy Terry Prince and William Wells Brown have shown us, all lands below the formerly French territory of Freedom, Canada, comprise this expansive South, and in this space, the bodies of children marked Black by one drop of their mothers' blood remain constantly vulnerable to violence. It is from this space that twentieth-century and contemporary African American writers have begun to encode in Black bodies—initially trafficked throughout the global South, then often willfully fleeing the specters of the chattel lash therein—an ontological liminality that satirizes these racist fictions about Blackness.

A closer investigation of Black maternity reveals its centrality in shaping the elegiac tradition in African American poetics over the past four centuries, which I explore in my larger project's rehistoriography of protest in African American literature. In this portion of that larger study, I argue that Kaufman's surrealist migration narrative "Grandfather Was Queer, Too" is an important transitional, mid-twentieth-century elegy in a tradition that consistently posits a self-affirming future for Blackness through the exhortations and complaints of Black mothers, whose expressions of joy and pain haunt their Black and white progeny alike. Exposing the hypocrisies of government-sanctioned violence in the postcolonial United States in "Grandfather Was Queer, Too," Kaufman champions the ways that embracing vagrancy, fugitivity, and kinship with the non-human can further liberate the children of the Great Migration—and Blackness itself—from the chains of respectability that had been Black writers' primary means of flouting these fictions. Even as they have had to contend with the politics of purity, Black poets always have done this subversive, subtextual work in their literary art. We see it when Publius Terentius Afer (a.k.a. Terence) of Carthage centers sex workers and liberated slaves like himself as ciphers and tricksters in the Roman comedies of antiquity. It advances further when Phillis Wheatley of Senegambia reaches back to claim Terence as an ancestor in the opening pages of *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* and implicitly illumines time after time the falsehoods in Enlightenment and colonial American zealots' theories of Africa as a profligate space, rife with paganism of the worse kind. She achieves this feat through meditations on her own forestalled joy and her mother's faith practices and grief, juxtaposed with the post coital bliss and

subsequent maternal suffering of Aurora, the goddess of dawn, a revered symbol of Greco-Roman paganism. Aurora's son Memnon is slain in battle by Achilles but granted immortality because of his mother's tears. Like Wheatley, Memnon is of African origin, hailing in myths from Ethiopia, and like him, Wheatley's poignant memories of her mother's sun-centered faith praxis and supposition about her mother's mourning of Wheatley's capture—and empathy with grieving colonial mothers—grants her immortality. Kaufman's surreal elegy, then, continues a long tradition of enacting a *quare*¹ *futurity for Blackness* through maternity. Through his elegiac and surreal narrative of migration, the maternal becomes a site to birth a posthuman and posthumous vision for the Black body as what Charles W. Mills calls a “philosophical object” through which “alternative epistemologies” about Black life, Black death, and Black mourning can emerge.²

This reading of Kaufman's quaring of Black maternity in “Grandfather Was Queer, Too” challenges scholars to reimagine the African American elegiac tradition as one not of mere mourning and passive engagement with the form's investment in pastoral and maritime scenes but as intentional alignment of the suffering of non-human subjects with Black mothers, their lovers, and their children in order to redefine Blackness outside the bounds of the white gaze *while* critiquing the State-sanctioned violence that gaze fosters. I argue that Kaufman, our “Rimbaud,” and other African American poets often foreground the precarious states of Black female flesh and Black maternity to fashion this nuanced consciousness for Black life, even in death. This vision of Blackness as *quare* comes a decade after E. Patrick Johnson,³ Sharon Holland, and a new generation of African American, Southern-bred theorists challenged scholars in *Black Queer Studies* (2005), an anthology edited by Johnson and Mae G. Henderson, to restore to Blackness *quare*, global South subjectivities not afforded by queer scholarship. This study, I offer, is of particular importance in the underexplored field of African American poetics, where the reinvention of the elegiac tradition remains ripe for discoveries about the impact of Blacks' experimentation on the American literary canon, its genres and movements, writ large. As Kaufman and other African American elegists shine mirrors on the white supremacist gaze that marks

Black flesh *queer*, they lay bare its assumptions of Blacks' stasis and emotional legibility, its impositions of sub-humanity and sexual, economic, and social disenfranchisement, and the resultant traumas, and they urge an embrace of a fugitive space outside the fictitious ideal of American liberty and justice for all, where new ways of devising freedom, intimacy, and pleasure beyond white men's needs for domination and service can manifest. Alongside Mills, then, my reading here engages poet-scholars Nathaniel Mackey, Fred Moten, and Lorenzo Thomas, particularly Moten's recent essays on the elegy,⁴ to craft a language for limning the aesthetics of the sounds that battered and embittered Black female bodies make holy and for dancing on and around "the queer color-line"⁵ of Black particularity and pathology. In this square space, that which Moten calls "black mo'nin'" and Kaufman names "queer meters" unfolds.

This essay's close reading, then, is linked to my larger investment in what I call *the inherent quareness of Blackness*. The elegiac tradition in African American poetics, long read through the surface valence of mourning, in fact, springs, I contend, from writers' articulation of and protest against their Blackness serving as the prototypical marker of abjection and difference, now subsumed in contemporary sexuality studies in the term *queer*. Novelists and theorists have attempted to define this strange imposition of difference upon Blackness in a number of other postcolonial terms, *Other* chief among them. *Quare* readings of African American poetics offer a space to honor this chorus of Black mothers as both simultaneously indicting those who have exacted the traumas that mark them as outsiders of heteronormativity *and* reaffirming their integral role in building a racially and culturally complex American nation-state. *Quare*, this nominalism rooted in self-definition, allows Black scholars to stop playing sexual-identity politics with the writers themselves in our discussion of the complex sexualities they represent in their work, and it sustains an African diasporic consciousness not inherent in *queer*, its elder allomorph, which has been deployed primarily by scholars affirming white male anal-centric and phallogocentric discourse. Instead, *quare* lays claim upon a global citizenship to the spaces that Blacks' circum-Atlantic journeys have taken them. I aim to inspire scholars to reconsider the ways in which African Americans in

the global US South blur the lines delineating genre and gender with the poetic elegy, traditionally characterized by lament, adoration of the idealized dead, and consolation of those grieving. Through this ancient poetic form and mode, Black mothers become highly effective and affective philosophers and philosophical objects who presage in their moans, cries, wails, and songs, ways to see Blackness anew. The white supremacist gaze marks all Black flesh animal and void of Jungian animus and anima, inferior not mirror, in extremis not supernal, posthuman and liminal, queer not quare.

In analyzing the quare in the African American poetic elegy and its migration narratives, specifically through this reading of a wandering migrant's journey from Creole Louisiana to the San Francisco Bay in "Grandfather Was Queer, Too," I also aim to challenge scholars to consider Black sexualities' contravening power, taking into account the complexities of Blackness that mark all Black bodies quare, those non-heterosexual and those heterosexual alike, from the advent of African American poetics to the present day. In Kaufman's poem, he intentionally names the speaker's presumably heterosexual ancestors' relationship as "queer." This bold move invites readers to reexamine chattel slavery outside the realm of queer theories' white male supremacist gaze of abjection. An Africanist, woman-centered consciousness compels us to consider the ways that slavery's trauma marks *all* Black sexualities as non-heteronormative, yet no less capable of deeper understanding through a quare lens on Black maternity. The quare parses an additional layer of language to revisit the horrors of the lash and of Reconstruction and Jim Crow violence and to recontextualize their haunting remnants in narratives of the last century's migration that detail domestic violence, mental illness, drug addiction, and abject poverty. Through the quare, we can begin to find more complex ways to discuss episodes documented in these narratives of interracial and intraracial rape, incest, and other sadomasochistic cruelties exacted upon and enacted by Black bodies—those explored, for example, in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora*. This quare lens makes room to articulate more fully efforts by Black mothers and their progenies—from the earliest African American literary texts to contemporary ones—to exercise subjectivity despite centuries as objectified property and to experience love and pleasure

amid unimaginable precarity and soul-rending suffering. When scholars view Blackness through the lens of *the quare* that Kaufman's migration narrative invites us to explore, African American poetic elegies like "Grandfather Was Queer, Too" manifest not as neutral, sentimental, imitative wordplay, now subsumed under the rubric of "jazz poetics," but reveal themselves to be sociopolitical tools through which their harbingers grapple with being Black and thus with being marked as *kweer* (choral witness), *queer* (strange, Other to the white supremacist gaze), and *quare* (self-affirming, self-defining, liminal). Fully aware that they bear the archetypal markers in the white imagination of foreignness, omen, and hypersexual deviance, Kaufman and other elegists articulate a keen awareness of the Black maternal's capacity simultaneously to humor and discomfit audiences in verse and song by refracting that which might otherwise reify racist notions of Blackness.

In large part, poet Audre Lorde and Hortense Spillers, the preeminent scholar on the Black maternal, paved the way for this new reading of the African American poetic and elegiac tradition and Kaufman's role in it. In her 1978 essay, "Poetry Is Not a Luxury," Lorde underscores the Black maternal as a universal site of origin for all and proclaims that "it is dark, it is ancient, and it is deep" (355). Her vision makes way for a shift in the study of African American poetics and of LGBT studies writ large to enter this liminal space of possibility, focalizing a lens on the ways in which African American poets assert America's utopian ideals as co-determinant with a reverential embrace of its "Black mother" within. In honoring Black female voices in this way, Black mothers shape the redefinition of Blacks' ontological relationship to the human, the nonhuman, and the posthuman/posthumous. No longer are they mammies and nursemaids present only to serve those lording over and codependent upon them. Unlike succeeding theories, posited as reactionary to -isms foreclosing full subjectivity to those living outside the confines of white male heterosexuality, Lorde privileges the interior maternal realm as an alternative space of generativity to the exclusionary, "european"-American way, which she subversively lowercases, that demands silence, invisibility, and rejection of the self among those marked queer by the sheer fact of being Black and doubly so by being LGBT, its own kind of death in life: "Our children cannot dream unless they

live, they cannot live unless they are nourished, and who else will feed them the real food without which their dreams will be no different from ours?” (356–357). Thus, Lorde problematizes Julia Kristeva’s contemporaneous theorization of abjection of the maternal body through the metaphor of *the chora* in response to the Lacanian and Freudian “Law of the Father.” Rather than exploring an assumed innate expulsion of the maternal that affirms white male dominance (and a loss of identity once the father dies, leaving one in a posthumous state), Lorde posits a different *chora* and charges African Americans to subvert hegemonic forces by embracing the “ancient” Black mother within—which can live there indefinitely when nourished—several years before Spillers delved more deeply into the complexities of the Black maternal.

For a decade, Black feminist and womanist thought flourished as Black women writers and scholars took up Lorde’s and Alice Walker’s charge to center themselves in their own discourse with great aplomb. Then, Spillers’s landmark essay “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe” emerged in 1987, positing an ever-prescient challenge to scholars. Critics of Black male writers should consider readings of their work, Spillers proposed, through the same womanist lens; not doing so precludes us from probing their efforts to contend with the trauma of slavery and its post-emancipation incarnation, Jim Crow. Spillers’s essay deconstructs how slavery renders the nuclear model of the family all but impossible for Blacks, leaving Black men, and Black male writers like Kaufman especially, to make peace in their art with the white supremacist “law of the Mother,” which marks all progeny of the Black maternal Black and thus queer, regardless of the race of their fathers:

The African-American male has been touched, therefore, by the *mother*, handed by her in ways that he cannot escape, and in ways that the white American male is allowed to temporize by a fatherly reprieve. ... The black American male embodies the *only* American community of males handed the specific occasion to learn *who* the female is within itself. ... It is the heritage of the *mother* that the African-American male must regain as an aspect of his own personhood—the power of “yes” to the female within. (*Black, White, and in Color* 228, her emphases)

This investigation of “Grandfather Was Queer, Too” takes up Spillers’s

challenge to explore how Kaufman honors Black maternity in his surreal migration narrative while haunted by the peril and possibility her quare generativity births. This haunting has its traces in the earliest “true” African American migration narratives of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, namely when Olaudah Equiano⁶ roots his earliest memories of joy, in his 1789 *Interesting Narrative*, in his experiences with his mother and when Frederick Douglass⁷ bears out the psychic devastation of slavery by disclosing early in his 1845 *Narrative* how the institution he calls both “cruel” and “strange” (read: queer) create an emotional and physical chasm between him and his mother, Harriet Bailey. It is through their creative efforts that Equiano and Douglass demonstrate what Spillers portends can emerge from Black male writers who dare to articulate their complex relationships with their Black mothers. Through this new lens, intimacies with white male peers like Richard “Dick” Baker, a young American boy who helps Douglass learn to read, become quite quare. In fact, in critiquing white supremacy, Douglass describes the loss of Dick with the same impassioned language he uses to describe his mother. His mother’s palpable absence and ultimate permanent departure at such a young age incites elegiac—and poetic—effusions that underscore this longing for a mother figure throughout his life. Thus, Douglass’s narration of his mother’s estrangement and his own escape upon fighting Edward Covey, coupled with Equiano’s polemical indictment of the violence he sees and the wanderlust it incites as he pursues freedom, set in motion a tradition of fraught migration narratives that get more complicated in the fictional ones that emerge from the children of the twentieth century’s Great Migration from the Deep South to the North, most famously Richard Wright’s *Native Son* and Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*. Wright and Ellison further indict the queer lens on Black sexuality in their narratives about monstrous, sexual deviants Bigger Thomas and Jim Trueblood, whose respective acts of rape and incest do as much to censure the titillation the retelling gives white listeners (and readers) as they do to complicate stereotypes about Black masculinity in the white American imagination. Often overlooked in discourse on these narratives, however, are the Black mothers, who are relegated to silent complicity in seemingly never-ending cycles of victimhood. Kaufman’s “Grandfather

Was Queer, Too,” however, leaves readers to ponder a quare futurity awaiting in the womb of a “twenty-three-months-pregnant” mother in its final stanza’s last lines, her child(ren) conceived as a result of loving intimacies rather than forced, violent ones. With his poem’s stark yet hopeful last image, Kaufman offers a metaphorical breaking of the waters, then, to rethink the quare possibilities Lorde and Spillers augur in attending to and reframing Black maternity’s central role in African American migration narratives—a task Kaufman situates as forestalled, long-overdue—in his surrealist poetics.

Kaufman’s avant-garde poetics as a whole, and “Grandfather Was Queer, Too” in particular, pushes forward the African American elegiac tradition of migration narratives with Black maternity as both the symbol of deep-rooted historicity in chattel and post-emancipation trauma throughout the global South and herald for quare tomorrows in places most open to such generativity. By the mid-twentieth century, the New Negro and Négritude movements that birthed Wright, Gwendolyn Brooks, Margaret Walker Alexander, Aimé Césaire, Suzanne Lacascade, Philippe Thoby-Marcelin, Ellison, and others had begun to foster in Black art an investment in the colloquial and the surreal, which freed Kaufman and others of the Beat and Black arts movements up to offer sonic (re)visions of readers’ internalized narratives about this gendered space of generativity. Kaufman’s poems, many of which are elegies, present narratives that posit the Black maternal as a liminal site that nurtures within its generations an African diasporic consciousness *and* an American one primed to expose the truths that the former knows about the latter’s mendacity. In *Extraordinary Measures: Afrocentric Modernism and Twentieth-Century American Poetry* (2000), scholar Lorenzo Thomas demarcates an underexplored “direct line” between the Beat and Black arts movements with which Allen Ginsberg and Le-Roi Jones/Amiri Baraka⁸ are respectively synonymous (200). The term *beatnik* was coined, after all, by *San Francisco Chronicle* columnist Herb Caen in April 1958 upon seeing Kaufman perform. The shortened word that evolved from it, *beat*,⁹ became synonymous with the literary movement with a capital B, of largely white gay men, whose demigod, Ginsberg, has inspired subsequent generations of white gay Beats. Today, *beat* is largely used by LBGT men of color—and those white men

like Caen who wish to appropriate Black cultural production by way of defining it—to describe those who are not only exhausted with cycles of cultural hegemony and poverty but too busy being fierce and fabulous to be bothered with worrying about their oppressive forces. Moreover, Thomas’s observation compels scholars to explore Kaufman’s central role in defining what is Beat and his speakers’ embodiment of a civil rights ethos. Kaufman and his poetics await as a kind of palimpsest whose surreal vision of Black maternity predicts a quare futurity that has manifested since “Grandfather Was Queer, Too” was published in his 1959 full-length debut, *Solitudes Crowded with Loneliness*.¹⁰

Black queerness proves fertile ground on which Kaufman builds his re-envisioned African American migration narrative in “Grandfather Was Queer, Too.” Before we reach the travails of the Black mother and her unborn child(ren), however, Kaufman takes readers on a journey with a subject much like Kaufman himself from the Louisiana bayou to the San Francisco Bay’s Beat scene. Along the way, the consciousness of Kaufman’s chief subject, an “intellectual” migrant, evolves again and again, through extended metaphors and symbolic anthropomorphic experiences with flora and fauna over four stanzas. Through this migrant’s simultaneous encounters with State surveillance and violence that attempt to mark him a vagrant, victimized criminal, Kaufman animates moments of resistance, perseverance, and unapologetically transgressive intimacies that serve as a primer for his contemporaries who take pride in an aloof relationship to the rules and torture of the State. Rather than responding in acquiescence, shame, and deference to the State as a result of the trauma it inflicts, Kaufman urges Beats like himself, his poet-speaker, intellectual-migrant, and titular Grandfather to take pride in vagrant acts that challenge the State’s inhumanity, disenfranchisement, and racism. From the outset, the challenge of interpretation begins with the title. Who is the speaker, who was his paternal ancestor, and what makes both of them queer? If we read this poem through the lens that many Kaufman scholars use, we can deduce that the ostensibly heterosexual Grandfather’s *queerness* is very much akin to our theorization of *the quare*, one characterized by his tendency to be Beat, to exhaust and buck the rules of decorum sonically and sexually. This inclination may have roots, it appears, in the speaker’s (and Kaufman’s) purported

mixed-race heritage¹¹ and artistic filiality with the French surrealists and Romantics.

In the first stanza, readers find Kaufman's subject, simply identified throughout most of the poem by the nondescript pronoun "he," steeped in the Louisiana swamp terrain Kaufman knew well, but in this opening moment of surrealist (re)vision, "he" is "first seen" in the bayou. The stanza unfolds as follows:

He was first seen in the Louisiana bayou,
Playing chess with an intellectual lobster.
They burned his linoleum house alive
And sent that intellectual off to jail.
He wrote home everyday, to no avail.
Grandfather had cut out, he couldn't raise the bail. (1–6)

As Kaufman often does in his poetics, readers are invited to observe a speaker's (and his subject's) awareness of surveillance. In this aquatic space storied for its mystery and mysticism, the speaker and his "he" know that governmental surveillance is an implicit, matter-of-fact praxis, and thus he discomfits us, his voyeuristic readers, in the stanza's third line, implicating us in the all-encompassing "they" who "burned his linoleum house alive" (3). Here, even the subject's home is animate, a breathing, thinking organism, and we, Kaufman's readers, are indicted in its brutal murder as the "they," the poem's purveyors of State violence. Before more acts of State violence unfold in "Grandfather Was Queer, Too," Kaufman makes implicit the extent of his migrant-subject's already-always vulnerability because of the haunting absence of a female human ancestry outside the incinerated space of domesticity often aligned with the maternal: the home. Readers are left to wonder what happened to the Black mother figure, possibly even assume that she is a victim of this State-sanctioned fire. Kaufman, a descendant of multiple actual and fictional matrilineages, opens his poem, then, with what some might perceive as a sublimation of the familiar tropes of the African American migration narrative of maternal orphanage. There is no mention of a mother's death, though she is nowhere to be seen, and thus we are left to empathize with him all the more: Where is his mother? Who will care for him?

As the journey from the Louisiana bayou unfolds in the preceding

line, the speaker describes the poetic subject engaging in a challenging mind game with an “intellectual lobster,” where this seeming maternal void is filled and the conversation about the fragility and possibilities of maternal generativity implicitly begins. Here, too, Kaufman takes the surreal, daring move to align maternity outside the domain of the human to deepen the empathetic potential for his migration narrative for already-always dehumanized Blacks *and* for the flora and fauna with which they have this already-always strange kinship. The game of chess, with its ancient East Indian, polytheistic roots, serves as a fitting metaphor for the geographical and metaphysical cartographies that lie ahead for the poem’s subject as he and his titular Grandfather flee various unwelcoming spaces governed by the State. After all, the queen—the most potently square, gender-bending piece on the board game most rooted in reimagining and ventriloquizing the tools of the State—has the most mobility, versatility, mutability, agency, and power to help any player win a chess match. In this chess game, then, Kaufman makes the opponent of this “he” an “intellectual lobster,”¹² an apt aquatic symbol of simultaneous fragility and strength, known for pregnancies that can last, from mating to conception to hatching, about twenty months.

The nature of the female lobster’s mating, gestation, and birthing rituals is instructive for our reading. Lobsters thrive best at the ocean bottom, where they can avoid their many predators. There, to initiate mating, each female lobster hovers outside the den of rocks of the male of her choice, usually the largest she can find, and does a mating-boxing dance with her antennae and swimmerlets, through which she releases pheromonic urine to invite her male suitor. The male responds in kind by using his swimmerlets to waft this intoxicating perfume throughout his den. The female’s ongoing swimmerlet-antennae boxing dance calms the male’s aggressive response until it is clear it is safe for her to enter his den. Inside, she molts her hardy shell, which the species does nearly twenty-five times before age five, leaving her utterly vulnerable to harm, and they continue the mating-boxing dance for hours, sometimes days, before sexual touch ensues. However, once sex begins, it is so intensely tender some marine biologists describe it in terms akin to those used to characterize the gentlest of human lovemaking. The female remains in the den for at least a week until she develops another shell hardy

enough to protect the sperm she has gathered in sex, from which ten thousand to two thousand eggs will be fertilized. Then, she leaves without even a hint of the affection and seductive scent she has used to draw her mate. She uses her swimmerlets to fan as much oxygen as she can to her fertilized eggs to keep as many alive as possible, although only one percent live once they are released from her after nine to eleven months of gestation. They are pushed out of her and set adrift in the sea, away from their mother, to start the process of fending for themselves on their own. Thus, outside of this bottom environment of temporal mutuality and tender sex, lobsters, males and females alike, learn quickly to be stealthy omnivores and combative territorial creatures, hunted as they are by fellow sea creatures and insensitive “human” animals as soon as they are of any significant size. Invoking the total essence of what is little more than a prized source of meat for sea fauna and the wealthy human defenders of the State, Kaufman endows his migrant-speaker and his Grandfather with an aquatic mirror of generativity and resistant, elusive reconnaissance in the lobster, whose final hardy shell is as hard to crack as are the secrets of the queen piece in the human game deemed one of the hardest to master. In the first two lines of his poem alone, Kaufman charges his migrant-subject and his readers to imagine themselves as indefatigable as the State by way of the lessons of environmental adaptation and subversive play in the games of life and death that the maternal and its queens have to teach.

Kaufman’s surrealist (re)vision of the African American migration narrative through maternity works not only at the level of metaphorical symbolism, but it manifests sonically as well in the jazz lyricism of each syllable. That familiar marker of his poetics becomes apparent quickly in the consonance, assonance, and anaphora of lines three to six (“They burned his linoleum house alive / And sent that intellectual off to jail. / He wrote home every day, to no avail. / Grandfather had cut out, he couldn’t raise the bail.”). Once the subject, “he,” is rendered homeless by a fire—even his house, outfitted in the midcentury floor material of choice, linoleum, is animate and personified, the crackling sound of which invokes its own ominous yet pleasing music—he ends up in jail (4), a fate Kaufman endured so regularly that his arrests, often as a result of his public poetic outbursts, became Beat legends.

What sounds like lines from a blues song lolls quickly off the readers' tongues into slant rhyme in line five as efforts to reach loved ones via letters dispatched "every day, to no avail" leave the subjectivity of "he" forestalled, locked up and away, cut off. In this way, Kaufman's tone emphasizes the high-energy, hyper-alert play that his chess game has initiated rather than the maudlin, dirge-like minor chords of the blues. Finally, he closes the opening stanza by goading readers and his surreal (re)vision of the African American migration narrative forward with a line of anaphora, an ultimate fusion of blues and ragtime to make of it jazz in refrain that closes each of the first four stanzas in the five-stanza poem—"Grandfather cut out, he couldn't make the bail" (6). This refrain, on the one hand, seems to disrupt the speaker's kinship to his ancestor, who may know the path his (great-)grandson has chosen but opts instead to distance himself and allow the younger "he" to chart his own path. On the other, this refrain enacts the symbolic transmutation and metaphorical disambiguation that sonically moves Kaufman's African American migration narrative from its ties to Black art rooted primarily in Judeo-Christian and Catholic metaphors to its role as a beacon for contemporaneous Black American art that foregrounds African diasporic kinship and global citizenship. Kaufman's vision of spirituality also honors polytheism and poly-sexualities, evidenced in his subjects' philoxenist relationship to other humans, fauna, flora, and sundry objects.

A closer examination of this refrain illuminates how Kaufman uses it to reimagine Black sexuality as quare, always outside the bounds of the normative yet not pathological. This refrain in "Grandfather Was Queer, Too" makes all the more clear Kaufman's affinity for the linguistic and lyrical frivolity of the African American music and literature of the first half of the twentieth century, rooted in blues moods and word-play implicit in jazz poetics. As the late James A. Snead explains in the 1984 essay "Repetition as a Figure of Black Culture," the jazz "cut" is a sudden shifting back to a sound heard before that sets in motion a new beginning within a song in *medias res*. In this poem, the refrain—which (re)asserts Grandfather's decision to "cut out," to excise himself from the burden of an impossible task, "pay[ing] the bail"—refracts the multigenerational migration narrative by offering readers a glimpse

of a family seemingly fractured by the State. Present here, of course, is the real despair for “he” and Grandfather, their intangibility for each other, their never being able, it appears, to have enough resources to outpace and/or destroy the systems oppressing and abusing them and those they love. But Kaufman doesn’t leave readers mired in dystopia. When readers are given the “cut” of Grandfather managing to “cut out” in the poem, to elude oversight long enough to move forward on his journey, he provides his grandson a geographical road map to (and readers a metaphorical one for African Americans’ quest for) freedom in the West.

The vulnerability of once-enslaved Black flesh to exploitation and abuse at the hands of the State also becomes increasingly apparent in this refrain, even before Grandfather meets and impregnates his mate. In the second stanza, Kaufman enacts scenes of anthropomorphism, zoomorphism, and synesthesia that intensify Kaufman’s elegiac critique of white supremacist violence on quare Black flesh. In many ways, “Grandfather Was Queer, Too” animates what Moten theorizes as “the sexual cut” in his text, *In the Break*, riffing on Mackey’s exploration of the “echoic spectre of a sexual cut” in his 1986 epistolary jazz novel, *Bedouin Hornbook*. While Moten’s text focuses primarily on the subversive vocalizations and phrasing of a famous survivor of sexual trauma, Billie Holiday, Kaufman’s (re)vision of the African American migration manifests as he ushers in the liminal possibilities resident in the Black maternal, which Spillers, Mackey, Moten, Saidiya Hartman, and others remind us is the originary site of the traumatized sounds that haunt in the wake of chattel slavery. As Kaufman meditates on and mediates his relationship to the Black maternal and quareness, Mackey’s insights on what modulates his elegiac chords compel readers to reconsider that:

[the] quintessential music is the orphan’s ordeal—an orphan being anyone denied kinship, social sustenance. ... Song is both a complaint and a consolation dialectically tied to that ordeal, where in back of ‘orphan’ one hears echoes of ‘orphic,’ a music that turns on abandonment, absence, loss. ... Music is wounded kinship’s last resort. (232)

Kaufman’s poet-speaker-intellectual-migrant-Grandfather is one of

many examples of Mackey's orphans in African American literature, and through our subject's girlfriend—whose racial identity is not made explicit when she emerges in the fifth and final stanza but whose intimacies with Black men implicate her as a harbinger of Black maternity—Kaufman describes generativity thriving outside the bounds of State-ordained marriage to reconcile his “wounded kinship” to this quare site.

The quare maternity that Kaufman attenuates in the environmental and sociopolitical resistance to State violence in the first stanza becomes all the more apparent and powerful in the second stanza when the lobster metamorphoses into a butterfly, which, like the migrant-speaker, demonstrates no investment in feeding the capitalist State with its intellectual work and is punished in the most horrific, racially charged way. In this stanza, Kaufman enacts scenes of anthropomorphism, zoomorphism, and synesthesia that intensify his elegiac critique of white supremacist violence on quare Black flesh. The second stanza reads:

Next seen, skiing on some dusty Texas road,
An intellectual's soul hung from his ears,
Discussing politics with an unemployed butterfly.
They hung that poor butterfly, poor butterfly.
Grandfather had cut out, he couldn't raise the bail. (7–11)

In line seven, readers find the somehow liberated “he”—now conflated with that lobster (or, in the least, a kindred, “intellectual” spirit)—“skiing” in Texas, one of the American landscapes least fathomed as hospitable to such (re)creation and re-envisioning. Rather than the metaphor of heart-on-sleeve, Kaufman leads readers to take note as, in lines eight to nine, “an intellectual's soul hung from his ears / Discussing politics with an unemployed butterfly.” What if the human soul is as accessible, Kaufman tacitly asks, as one's ability to listen to others, and what is the job of the butterfly but to roam free? What, then, does it mean to be metamorphosed from unattractive, voracious caterpillar into a literary symbol of change and beautiful but be “unemployed”? How does it feel to be without work, without those with souls to hear to one's political statement about freedom? Kaufman's speaker is empathetic to this butterfly's lessons on liberty, even as it is brutally punished—lynched as it were, by this nondescript “they” that implicates readers—for its political act. Situating this most extreme act of violence

in this way, exacted on something as fragile and innocent as a butterfly, underscores the depths of Kaufman's myriad subtleties in this poem. Knowing that some readers have become so callous that they do not see Blacks' deaths as reasons to mourn, he cleverly makes use of a symbol that *does* invoke empathy, offering a stark mirror about the poison of racism. If it weren't intuited in the first stanza, Kaufman makes it plain in the second: "They" (read: we), the co-perpetrators of State violence, maintain stasis when we take for granted the butterfly as a political citizen in our global community, as more than a universal metaphor or symbol to deploy as cliché in literature. Again, with his stanza-closing anaphora, Kaufman builds a multigenerational migration narrative, of the escape artist, Grandfather, who opts, like this intellectual-migrant, to "cut out," to keep pressing on, rather than participate in the corrupt capitalist and legal systems that punish these symbolic agents of change. Here, too, the refrain of the first stanza, inspired as one recalls by the quare chess lessons learned and a likely maternal lobster, undercuts and drowns out the synesthetic imagery that the most disturbing sexual elements of lynching conjures.

Kaufman's elegiac critique in his (re)vision on the African American quickly shifts next to focus on exploring what Blacks' quare generativity and creativity can make possible for themselves and other victims of State violence despite its cruelties. The third stanza reads:

Next seen on the Arizona desert, walking,
Applying soothing poultices to the teeth
Of an aching mountain.
Dentists all over the state brought gauze balls,
Bandaged the mountain, buried it at sea.
Grandfather had cut out, he couldn't raise the bail. (12–17)

In line twelve, readers find the migrant "next seen on the Arizona desert." At this point in his elegy, Kaufman has established his subjects' humanity such that they no longer necessitate the identity-grounding markers of "he" or "intellectual" in the poem as they blur into Kaufman's surrealist coats of many existential colors on this lyrical canvas-cum-palimpsest-narrative. Here, he does not have to flee, as he did in Texas. No, here, he can walk. Although the butterfly's body has been slain, its spiritual wisdom has not died; in fact, it has set the migrant free to rove

onward and venture into a desert, a space often storied as barren and populated with treachery, deprivation, thirst, extremes of heat and cold, and death to the underprepared human. Kaufman invokes none of these tropes in his surrealist masterpiece. Instead, he deepens his animation of the typically inanimate by humanizing one of the desert's most striking symbols: the mountain. He turns readers' objectification of this symbol onto our intellectual souls' eyes and ears. Here, the intellectual-migrant assumes the role of quare maternal healer for this mountain in jeopardy. It is ill; it is, Kaufman writes, "aching" (14). Yet, like the intellectual's house, where the maternal seemed initially absent, the mountain is not some vacuous, static object of victimhood and exploration, and akin to the butterfly, endowed with the sage, steely consciousness of the maternal lobster, it is not simply an imposing, illusory symbol to boost the egos of humans primed to *conquer* it by climbing it. Adding to the edginess of Kaufman's surrealist imagery, this mountain has teeth, letting readers know its peaks once had the capacity to snipe, to snare, to swallow its climbers whole. Now, though, it is dying. Kaufman leaves readers to deduce that its teeth have been infected by those who have traversed the mountain's terrain for centuries and left behind an excess of refuse that has festered and done irrevocable damage. In this way, Kaufman makes a subtle environmental statement and offers critique of the dangers of humans' abuse of other metaphysical community members in the natural world, even seemingly inanimate ones, long before other writers of color. The empathetic intellectual-migrant tries to ease the mountain's pain with poultices, intuiting that the calcification and tooth decay have advanced beyond a point of restoration. In addition, in one of the poem's most enigmatic moments, Kaufman crafts those conceivably most equipped to offer aid, "dentists all over the state" (15), as inept. They simply fill the mountain with aimless gauze and cover it in bandages that do not heal. After it succumbs, they give it a sea burial. In the hands of these ineffectual dentists, this act of mercy seems an almost criminal one, an afterthought by those with no depth of knowledge of what has been lost. What would otherwise be a lovely, tender image of a mountain receiving its last rites—of an enchanting, bittersweet tale of how grief berthed a gigantic grotto in an ancient Greco-Roman myth—reads as a casting off, a discarding of one of the

gods' creations, even though its surreal, implausible internment has poetic resonance for readers. Lest we forget how far the intellectual-migrant has traveled from that Louisiana bayou, Kaufman's stanza-closing anaphora reminds us that his quest for freedom is not devoid of multi-generational irony. Here, Grandfather's escapist act begins to portend something unexpected down the road for his progeny, and Kaufman fashions a metaphysical "cut" that undercuts any sentimentality that the tale of the Arizona Mountain might incite. Instead, Kaufman piques readers to ask: What lies ahead for the intellectual migrant, and where is Grandfather now anyway? Again, the refrain of the first stanza wrests readers from the sadness of the mountain's death as blues and jazz blur again, metaphor and subtext merge, omen borders on curse. The maternal ancestor of the lobster remains present for the orphaned migrant's surreal journey, even in Grandfather's absence, making possible his own quare generativity that Kaufman foregrounds in the fourth and penultimate stanza.

At this pivotal turning point in Kaufman's surreal journey, the intellectual migrant's lobster-butterfly spirit is fully actualized, as it were, and he is ready to embrace the mother within himself and begin to move beyond contemplation to co-creation in the northern Bay area. The fourth stanza reads:

Next seen in California, the top part,
Arranging a marriage, mating trees,
Crossing a rich redwood and a black pine.
He was exposed by the Boy Scouts of America.
The trees were arrested on a vag charge.
Grandfather cut out, he couldn't raise the bail. (18–23)

Kaufman offers a prophetic vision in 1959 that challenges contemporaneous political discourse on interracial love and marriage and finally introduces a human maternal body, problematizing further the quare generativity that is deemed fugitive by the State and is thus vulnerable to policing and violence. In "the top part" of California, where he is "[n]ext seen" (18), Kaufman's migrant-intellectual no longer reacts to the events around him or responds solely to the life forces he happens upon. Here, he is "[a]rranging a marriage, mating trees" (19), creating the surreality he now knows can be tangible. It is in this space so far from

his original trauma that he transforms the death and loss that he has endured and witnessed, cross-breeding an ancient tree of knowledge, “the rich redwood,” with a peer known for its versatility and resilience, “the black pine” (20). Both species are known for longevity, each living more than five hundred years. In this way, Kaufman alludes to the quare generativity that the migrant has discovered through cross-species experimentation, tacitly highlighting the interracial intimacies he finds possible in San Francisco’s art scene. Yet, even in this final destination in this revisionist migration narrative, State-sanctioned surveillance threatens creativity and love. Who, ironically, but the Boy Scouts of America—an organization with a storied, problematic hierarchy and fraught homosociality that harbors, breeds even, predators whose acts taint boys’ maturation to manhood—would “expose” (21) the scandal of such an affair as that which the migrant-intellectual has fostered? The trees, having committed acts deemed unnatural that the State must punish, get “arrested on a vag charge” (22). With this jazz “cut,” Kaufman sonically invokes in this line, for the first time, Black female sexuality with a slur used to describe the female birth canal, the sacred pathway for quare generativity. Kaufman cleverly aligns heterosexual procreation outside the bounds of traditional marriage—unions here that are self-defined, ceremoniously un-Christian, and thus criminally quare—with State-sanctioned spaces of homosociality, where homosexual acts could occur unmitigated, underwritten even, by the State. Thus, in “vag” the slur “fag” echoes in this jazz cut as Kaufman trusts that his readers will infer from the accusations of vagrancy the implications of same-sex desire, conflating them with those of interracial intimacies. In this stanza, then, he lampoons the absurdity of laws that demonize those who love outside the hegemony of white male heteronormativity.

With this confluence of ironies, Kaufman proves a Master Gardener of his own Great Design, for what could have been interpreted as a poem in which race has no bearing becomes at this moment a surreal metanarrative on the dangers of racism. What could have been solely a racial satire on the African American quest for freedom manifests as a simultaneous one about the plight of those marked LGBTQ. Long before scholars Julia Kristeva, Kimberlé Crenshaw and others theorize intertextuality and intersectionality, Kaufman *shows* readers how one

feels when one's racial and sexual identities imbricate one as a criminal many times over. In so doing, he again eschews a sentimental scene for one that grounds his surreal portrait in a tangible, timely dilemma and unmasks the true cancers—racism and sexual intolerance—destroying America. As one born in a city, New Orleans, where multiraciality is not only a given but a badge of beauty for both its citizens and its international renown and as one whose own mien marks him a member of any number of cultural communities that his imagination can devise, Kaufman offers readers a new political vision for the latter half of the twentieth century and beyond.

Kaufman's lyrical and musical genius reaches its pinnacle in the closing stanza as his speaker, one so close to the poet that it becomes hard to separate the two, announces his presence in a first-person reference. Kaufman and his speaker introduce an unexpected jazz "cut" that calls into question the subject positions of all parties (poet, speaker, intellectual-migrant, Grandfather) and blurs the lines of temporality, materiality, narrative interpellation, and gender and sexual normativity. When the poet-speaker declares "Now I have seen him here" in line twenty four, readers are left to wonder: Is the speaker-poet himself the intellectual-migrant reflecting on his own journey or that of an ancestor? Or both? Is Kaufman further mythologizing his alleged Jewish great-grandfather's assimilation experience? Nonetheless, narrative clarity is not Kaufman's goal in this poem. On the contrary, "Grandfather Was Queer, Too" seems most invested in showing how State-sanctioned oppression cyclically affects generations in a family and how innately human it is—particularly for people of African descent, whose sub-humanity consistently has been asserted in literary and theoretical texts—to resist physical and metaphysical hegemony, to be Beat, as it were, which, Kaufman philosophizes, is a "queer" act. "He is beat," Kaufman writes, at the end of line twenty four, and with that single word, multiple narrative interpretations become apparent to readers who connect the connotations implicit in Beatness and quareness. Fittingly, this partner of the forebear of a quare future has "green ears" (25), alluding to and transforming the lynching trauma described in stanza two. This woman, who "is twenty-three months pregnant" (26), is particularly empowered and poised to birth new possibilities, given

her green—read: fertile and unsullied—consciousness/soul. That her gestation is nearly three times as long as is humanly possible under normative circumstances underscores all the more the multigenerational impact of trauma on the Black maternal and her progeny, the extremity of the pain and peril that such an extended labor without release and relief must involve. In this way, the threat of death for the mother and of stillbirth for her child(ren) looms in the poem, undermining any notions that the quare future Kaufman portends is not without its dangers. Moreover, in this way, Kaufman—as all African-American elegists do—positions the maternal body as the prototypical philosophical object to challenge and transform false ontologies of Blackness that undergird racist State practices.

Rather than responding in acquiescence and with deference, Beats like the poet-speaker, the intellectual-migrant, and their grandfather(s) before them take pride in vagrant acts that challenge State disenfranchisement and racism. In this final stanza, Kaufman, the quintessential Beat who has endowed his poet-speaker and Grandfather with his own anarchist spirit and who is part of a movement that is all but synonymous with championing nonheteronormativity, takes his surrealist (re)vision of the African American migration narrative beyond the symbolism of flora and fauna into the bold territory of same-sex human desire, even making room for polyamorous and incestuous interpretations, though my reading interprets the kisses that end the poem far differently. In the poem's last three lines, the poet-speaker and migrant-intellectual, who are at once singular and collective selves and possible *doppelgänger*s for each other and their grandfather(s), are tired of being on the lam and hip to the futurity of corporeal and metaphysical freedom awaiting those who embrace the life of the Beat, of being queer, or, for Black bodies, of being quare.

Kaufman seals his surreal (re)vision of the African American migration narrative, which reads much like a dark fable-cum-queer fairy tale, in the penultimate line with kisses to punctuate the simultaneous innocence and irreverence of this relationship between the poet-speaker-intellectual-migrant, Grandfather and his Grandfather's girlfriend and to champion the hope of beating the State through what liminal, if endangered, Black maternal bodies can birth. One recipient is the poem's male

subject, possibly in celebration of how this quare future will unburden him of the strictures and fictions of Black hypermasculinity, possibly in ominous comfort for the new vulnerabilities they must now unpack. The other kiss blesses (and curses) this woman who bears the scars and carries the weight of these fourteen-months-overdue, quare generations. “Live happily ever after,” Kaufman says to and of those in his metanarrative on migration. Yet, his direct address also reaches out to contemporaneous, present-day, and future readers.

Throughout “Grandfather Was Queer, Too,” Kaufman uses his own refrain to process this “wounded kinship” of his orphaned state, so far removed from Great-Grandfather Abraham and others. In his poem, the unnamed girlfriend does not speak or sing. Her objectification proves a compelling quandary, one worthy of greater inquiry. One might read her silence as Kaufman’s own indoctrination into the practice of putting the Black maternal in service to Black masculinity, except that the entire poem emerges from what she may birth. Kaufman’s refrain, then, *is* as much her song as Grandfather’s, for it is being passed down throughout generations of gestation, to his speaker to tell us what she and others recall. Conversely, in “Carl Chessman Interviews the P.T.A.,” Kaufman offers a contrasting view of wealthy white maternity, which is the antithesis of the traumatized Black maternal. In this 1967 poem, the poet posits these “gold star mothers” (11) as safely aligned with white privilege and State oppression. It is this community of women who decide to go beyond their traditional roles of serving at the needs of schoolchildren and who install the “cute gas stove” (10) that may ultimately kill Chessman, whom Kaufman deems a victim of State oppression. Readers are left to wonder what Chessman hears them singing as the Vietnam War rages on and civil rights tensions escalate to a feverish pitch that will end in tragedy in the succeeding year with the murder of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. All that is known is that Chessman “feels their / meters” and translates them as “queer” (11–12). This cloud of witnesses against Chessman is not concomitant with the inherent quareness of Blackness and the affirming subjectivities Black maternity births. They have indicted Chessman, whose execution Kaufman conflates with Native American genocide and the ecocide of many hapless flora and fauna, including the buffalo, throughout the

poem. Thus, Kaufman aligns these “gold star mothers” with Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Marie St. Clare and other white women whose cloak of virtue is actually one that hides mendacious, racist worldviews. Thus, the “queer” in “Grandfather Was Queer, Too” is far removed from the “queer” of “Carl Chessman Interviews the P.T.A.,” and it is against the backdrop of these contrasting visions of maternity that Kaufman’s quare futurity in “Grandfather Was Queer, Too” becomes clearer.

In essence, Kaufman posits a kind of utopia that scholar José Esteban Muñoz argues still eludes people of color, particularly Blacks, to some degree because of the “queer” meters of the “gold star mothers” of America’s P.T.A.s, which have long solely gotten readers’ attention. Opening *Cruising Utopia* (2009), Muñoz muses, “Queerness is not here yet. . . . The here and now is a prison house. We must strive, in the face of the here and now’s totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a *then and there*” (1, his emphasis). Like Muñoz, Kaufman’s re-envisioning of the African American migration narrative challenges readers to reach for that which remains on the cusp, waiting for birth: a nation in which multiracial and sexual intimacies of all kinds thrive free from the State surveillance and oppression. What a quare—if elusive—happily-ever-after that will be when the songs that Black mothers’ voices birth are fully heard, celebrated, and become anthems for twenty-first-century subjectivities not interdicted by the strictures of gender binaries.

NOTES

1. The narrative of the journey of the word *quare* into African American literary theory starts on the British Isles and ironically and aptly coincides along the way with the liberating, incisive power of African American choral performance. Alongside a reference historian Robert of Gloucester makes in his 1325 *Chronicle* of the Brits and Normans, the words that would lead to contemporary definitions of *queer*—intermittently spelled, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, *kweer* and *queere* in the singular and *queris* and various iterations in between in the plural—first appeared in Reformation pioneer John Wycliffe’s 1382 Middle English *Bible*, the first in the language, a translation of the fourth-century Latin Vulgate. This earliest *kweer* described the lead singers in a church, the plural spelling specifically associated with cantors in a Jewish temple,

the direct link to the contemporary word *choir*. By 1390, verbal forms of the word (*quaere* and *queering* primarily) had come to define the act of questioning or interrogation. In the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries, adjectival forms (chiefly *queir*, *query*, and *quare*) entered the idiolect, describing those who exhibited odd, eccentric characteristics, those of dubious character, and those inciting suspicion. The Irish dialect's introduction of *quare* is significant because in this usage, the strangeness offers positive connotations emphasizing intensity and exceptionality in quantity and quality. In her important 2010 book, *The History of White People*, Nell Irvin Painter notes that the poorest of the Irish were “judged racially different enough to be oppressed, ugly enough to be compared to apes, and poor enough to be paired with black people” (134). Consequently, the nuances encoded in *quare* by the Irish are especially resonate with the tragicomic and melancholic ones that the word bears when deployed in the most extreme of US Southern draws in which the word *choir*, when pronounced, sounds like its ancient ancestor, *kweer*, and/or its “black Irish” allomorph *quare*. This *choir*, quite familiar to working- and middle-class African Americans like Kaufman and his literary forebears and progeny, melds the guttural and resplendent sounds, cadences, exegesis, sexuality, and irreverence of the spirituals, ragtime, the blues, jazz, rhythm & blues, psychedelic/funk, and hip-hop songs that have transformed American faith practice, the American songbook, popular culture, and everyday vernacular. This dialectical, musical fusion often manifests in contemporary African American worship spaces' choirs, particularly in those that maintain their “Southern” roots and traditions, so that the spaces become sources of transgressive, transformative, culturally diasporic education and spiritual practice. At the center of these worship experiences are two important figures: (1) church “mothers,” who are exalted to saint-like status in life, given the coveted seats adjacent to the pulpit that the minister occupies known as “the Amen corner,” and often assume the responsibility for “praying through” those cleansing themselves of their sins before God; and (2) lead church choir members, who are often gender-blending, effeminized tricksters like the biblical Lucifer, whose meticulously layered aesthetic presentation and singing prowess are as outrageous, flashy, and dripping with pious affect as the mothers' performance of holiness is reserved, demure, and sometimes borderline masculine. Together, their moaning, wailing, singing, and shouting push the worship experience to a fever pitch as the sacred and worldly blur. Ironically, the men of the choir are marked not

only quare by their dramatic flair but demoralized outside that church role by Blacks' internalization of the queer gaze that shames their sexual ambiguity and/or obvious propensity for homosexuality. The sole way the most astute gender-blenders can escape such chagrin is to graduate to the pulpit or deacon board. In *Animacies* (2012), Mel Y. Chen, building on E. Patrick Johnson's scholarship, explores of what Chen calls theorists' "de-adjectival verbalization" of *queer*, in order to "shift meaning to the side of a normative interpretation, away from meaning associated with the notional center" (69), and the "deverbal nominalization" of the word, which functions "to detemporalize [the word] so that it refuses a dynamic reading" and becomes timeless (74). However, what Chen does not underscore are some of the implications of these homophones that endow them with self-affirming possibilities, not solely reactionary, if subversive, play in various parts of speech. This study explores these adjectival homophones' positive, transformative implications.

2. In the opening chapter of *Blackness Visible*, Charles W. Mills underscores the centrality of acknowledging the Black body as a "philosophical object" to any effective critique of Western political philosophy (16). He also argues in that text that all African American critical and literary works are political articulations of what he calls "alternative epistemologies" (21), which redefine Black ontology in the American imagination under a hermeneutic of presence and personhood, rather than absence and sub-humanity. He notes the challenge Black feminists face in exposing "the realities of racial subordination without having race loyalty automatically trump gender" (17). He later observes "that the feminist challenge to mainstream political philosophy may provide a useful model" for twenty-first-century critical race theorists to intervene in discourse on political philosophy (121). Underscoring what feminism accomplished in illuminating the pervasiveness of patriarchy, he points to the importance of that movement's "excavation and rediscovery of oppositional political texts or fragments by women" and "mapping of the full dimensions of female subordination, what would be required to incorporate women into the body politic on a basis of real moral equality" (121). Black feminist scholars took up this cartography with aplomb in the latter half of the twentieth century.

3. In Johnson's essay, "'Quare' Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know About Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother," he cites a quare link between Irish and African American vernacular, focusing on the

term's use in the Black Southern lexis he knew growing up while citing his scholarly roots in Alice Walker's theories of womanism, which she details in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983). Walker defines a womanist as one who exhibits "outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior" (her emphasis), who articulates "[w]anting to know more and in greater depth than is considered 'good' for one," and who "[a]ppreciates and prefers women's culture, women's emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance to laughter), and women's strength" (xi). With this philosophy, Walker empowered scholars to examine Black women's art for its self-affirming power and to celebrate it as a testament to these women's awareness that "their experiences as ordinary human beings was valuable, and in danger of being misrepresented, distorted, or lost" (13). Johnson celebrates the folk wisdom gained on his homophobic grandmother's front and back porches about quareness connoting "something excessive—something that might philosophically translate into an excess of discursive and epistemological meanings grounded in African American rituals and lived experience" (126). In this way, Johnson's essay, like others in *Black Queer Studies*, has blazed a path for a more expansive lens on quareness that takes into account a more temporally vast non-whiteness, the global South-focused critique this study of Kaufman's "queer" aims to advance. Even after Johnson's and Henderson's collection and the subsequent work of Holland, Walcott, Dwight A. McBride, Roderick Ferguson, and others, who continue to take up the watershed anthology's effort to "*quare* queer—to throw shade on its meaning in the spirit of service to 'Blackness'" (7), scholars have avoided nuanced conversations about this inherent quareness of Blackness—almost always framed as the representational opposite of white heterosexuality, intellect, and forestalled subjectivity—*because* of the long-standing homosexual implications of the term and the ways it often leads readers to play sexual identity politics with texts' authors.

4. In the essay "The Case of Blackness," Moten's riff on Frantz Fanon's "The Fact of Blackness" from *Black Skin, White Masks*, Moten deconstructs the racist lens on Black ontology, which irrevocably links it to a "kind of failure or inadequacy" that is "non-attainment of meaning or ontology, of source or origin, is the only way to approach the thing in its informal (enformed/enforming, as opposed to formless), material totality" (181–182). Blacks' embrace of perpetual outsider-ness, Moten posits, can fashion the kind of protest in art that not only is not a response to white male racism and hegemony but instead transforms phenomenologies of

the human and non-human, the object and the subject, of (no)thing-ness/ (no)where-ness and ubiquity/omnipresence. To this end, this project's genealogy of Black poets' innate, self-affirming protest offers an alternative to the influential theories of Black pessimism, whose invaluable insights on the pervasiveness of systemic racism Orlando Patterson and others have put forth since the 1980s. Moten continues: "Perhaps this would be cause for black optimism or, at least, some black operations. Perhaps the thing, the black, is tantamount to another, fugitive, sublimity altogether. Some/thing escapes in or through the object's vestibule; the object vibrates against its frame like a resonator, and troubled air gets out" (182). "The air of the thing that escapes enframing," which Moten sees at the heart of blackness, is what I'm interested in, too, in this project's engagement with poets and texts that not only have not been heralded but also have been dismissed as "minor." Black creativity that elides an oppositional response to white hegemony through the prototypical "angry Black male" voice and instead takes on that of the seemingly innocuous maternal one offers scholars a new lens on Blackness, a petrichor in which to bask after two stormy centuries spent legitimizing Black art. Thus, the very meaning of being Black shifts through the quareness of Black maternity—in spirituals like "Sometimes, I Feel Like a Motherless Child" and in the poetics of various writers, many of whom are now outside or on the periphery of the African American literary canon.

5. Siobhan Somerville's *Queering the Color Line: Race and the Invention of Homosexuality in American Culture* (2000) unpacks phenomenologies of Blackness in African American fiction. My larger project builds on Somerville's theories, extending discourse into poetics on the interstices of racial, gender, and sexual identities in lineated and prose poems, particularly those in Jean Toomer's *Cane*.

6. Equiano's deep sense of homelessness crystallizes as he describes being the youngest son and "favorite" of his mother and details his separation from the spiritual rituals she taught him, including paying homage at a shrine to her own mother and other ancestors. In many ways, his travels throughout the circum-Atlantic and global South—and the coincident seafaring intimacies with otherwise raced male and female bodies—unfold as an unsuccessful quest for a surrogate mother. Moreover, several of his most impassioned moments in *The Interesting Narrative* spring from his recollection of feeling complicit (if not forcibly a participant) in abuses exacted upon Black girls and women, even as he is keenly aware

of being powerless to prevent them. Rather than see Equiano's quest for a mother figure, its earliest white readers and many today read *Interesting Narrative* as a collective act of surrogation. This concept, which Joseph Roach presents in *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (1996), is a system of failures among non-Blacks who experience Black artistic expression without fully grasping the complexities of what they witness beyond the racist fictions about Blackness they have internalized as facts. Roach theorizes that Blacks' "performed effigies" are created by "communities [as] a method of perpetuating themselves," even as dominant culture-curators fashion them as "inanimate effigies" (36). In this way, Equiano's travels throughout the Caribbean and southeastern and northeastern United States, then, often get framed as his longing for whiteness and its freedoms rather than his longing to reclaim his connection to the joys and freedom he felt in the presence of his African mother.

7. Douglass also details his Aunt Hester's brutalization as a cryptic reminder of what could befall him at any time at the hands of cruel slavers such as Edward Covey. In *Lose Your Mother* (2007), a chronicle of her failed quest to find ancestral ties to an African home, Saidiya Hartman distills this experience of exile that she and these literary forebears experience when she writes, "The most universal definition of the slave is a stranger" (5).

8. Although Ginsberg and Jones/Baraka distanced themselves from Kaufman during the latter part of his life as they gained mainstream acclaim and he became increasingly eccentric, the pair offered posthumous praise for the man whose poetics and performance most encapsulated the essence of the major mid-twentieth-century movements for which they are famous. In a 1991 PBS interview with David Henderson, Baraka lauded Kaufman invoking an anarchist spirit "from the feelings of being opposed to society, and that that whole society had to be overthrown" (*Cranial Guitar* 11–12). In that same documentary, Ginsberg said of Kaufman: "He wasn't just political, he was metaphysical, psychological, surrealist, and enlightened in extending his care into the whole society of poetry, seeing that as the revolution. There was a kind of psychological revolution going on along with the liberation of the word" (7). Henderson later edited and collected these and other musings into an introduction for *Cranial Guitar*, his 1996 collation of excerpts from Kaufman's published and then-unpublished works.

9. Dating to the mid-nineteenth century, the word *beat* began adjectivally

to describe not only those experiencing physical and emotional exhaustion or, conversely, enjoying the success of besting a competitor but also specifically to connote a general discontent and refusal to cooperate with laws deemed oppressive or with societal rules of decorum. Those who are marked recidivist criminals by acting above the law began to be known as Beats. They publicly protested the State's intrusion into their private, amorous lives with a ferocity and brazenness that inspired a generation of youths, many of whom were LGBT, to join them. Thus, by the mid-twentieth century, LGBT men, particularly those of color, began basking in the fabulousness of their Beat-ness. With snaps to punctuate their indifference and collective "F-you" to oppressive systems, they cloaked themselves in the best attire and makeup, and began competing in "balls" in which judges decided who are the most "beat" sissies on the block. Of course, it would be more than thirty years after *Ebony* and *Jet* magazines documented these gender-transgressive events in Chicago, New York, and elsewhere on their pages before Jennie Livingston would make them legend with her 1990 documentary film, *Paris is Burning*.

10. Early in the even more enigmatic poem-within-a-film script-within-in-a-poem in his second collection, *Golden Sardine* (1965), titled "Carl Chessman Interviews the P.T.A. in His Swank Gas Chamber Before Leaving on His Annual Inspection of Capital, Tour of Northern California Death Universities, Happy," Kaufman again invokes the allomorph *queer*, keenly aware, it seems, of its many fraught connotations in his contemporary moment and in his anticipation of ours. This epic indictment of the media frenzy incited by Caryl Chessman's years on death row was a perennial piece Kaufman extemporized in performances in the late 1950s; yet, it was not published beyond a broadside until five years after Chessman met his fate in a San Quentin gas chamber. In its third prosaic stanza, Kaufman reimagines the convicted serial rapist and robber chatting with the "gold star mothers" of the eponymous P.T.A., whose "meters," Kaufman quips, Chessman "feels ... [and] pronounces them queer." This reading focuses chiefly on his first recorded use of the term in the aforementioned early elegy in *Solitudes* and ends with a brief meditation on that opening framing in the "Chessman" poem. The echoes of Black maternity, subtextual but deeply resonant in "Grandfather," attenuate the "queer" sounds of white maternity in "Chessman," which likely have received more attention because of the famous crime case that inspired it.

11. In the 1989 book, *View Askew: Postmodern Investigations*, Steve Abbott recounts one of Kaufman's layered tales of his parentage, citing him as one "born of a German Jewish father and a Native American Martinique Black Roman Catholic mother in New Orleans" who "grew up speaking Cajun as well as English" (130). Abbott says Kaufman's maternal grandmother, an African slave, "used to take him on long morning walks," which imbued him with a sensitivity to the concerns of Blacks' US plight (130). In Damon's introduction to the *Callaloo* special issue, however, she describes Kaufman as one son among thirteen children of a schoolteacher and a Pullman porter, raised in a middle-class, Catholic home in Tremé, one of the oldest African American communities in the United States. Kaufman, Damon argues, is one "with a colorful if somewhat fictitious legacy—that of a hybrid Orthodox Jewish and Martiniquan 'voodoo'-inflected Catholic upbringing. (The possibility that his great-grandfather, Abraham Kaufman, was Jewish and Kaufman's own fluency in French Louisiana patois helped to give rise to this legend)" (106).

12. With this gesture to the crustacean, Kaufman also invokes a metaphor that is beloved among his surrealist and environmentally conscious ancestors, including nineteenth-century French Romantic poet Gérard de Nerval, also known as Gérard Labrunie, who reportedly so loved lobsters that he treated them as pets, allegedly walking one of his favorites down Parisian streets on a leash.

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St. Louis. He is the poetry editor of the online journal *Vinyl Poetry* and the 2015–2017 Creative Writing Fellow in Poetry at Emory University.

Ernest Williamson III has published creative work in over 600 journals. His poetry has appeared in journals such as the *Oklahoma Review*, *Review Americana: A Creative Writing Journal*, *Pamplémousse*, formerly known as the *Gihon River Review*, and the *Copperfield Review*. Some of his visual artwork has appeared in journals such as the *Columbia Review*, the *GW Review*, *New England Review*, and the *Tulane Review*. Many of his creative works have been published in journals representing over 75 colleges and universities around the world. Dr. Williamson is Assistant Professor of English at Allen University, and his poetry has been nominated three times for the Best of the Net Anthology.

L. Lamar Wilson is the author of the poetry collection *Sacrilegion*, as well as several nonfiction pieces in such venues as the *Root* and the *Washington Post*. He holds an MFA in Creative Writing from Virginia Tech University and is a PhD candidate in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

Indigo X is an alias for a craftin' woman of color from the Midwest, a graduate student who views epistolary methods as life-giving and life-saving for those of us who want to connect.