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CONCEPTS OF MARRIAGE IN THE FICTION OF  
VIRGINIA WOOLF, NELLA LARSEN, AND DOROTHY ALLISON

M.A. Thesis

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines concepts of marriage in one representational work each by Virginia Woolf, Nella Larsen, and Dorothy Allison. I explore gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and female sexuality as categories governed by ideological impositions that in turn influence subjectivity and thus marital arrangements. I demonstrate that the characters' choice to submit to or to resist ideological constraints on these categories provide for an either open or closed concept of marriage. While Woolf proposes a performativity, or open concept of marriage, Larsen and Allison warn against marital performance, or a death-like/ closed concept of marriage. The three authors show that their female characters' choices are limited as their existence in a patriarchal, racist, sexist, and heterosexist society grants them Selfhood (only) through marriage and married motherhood. Woolf, Larsen, and Allison illustrate clearly that to allow for an open subject formation it is necessary to de-ideologize the afore-mentioned categories, and to challenge destructive/ closed concepts of marriage.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

This M.A. Thesis explores the representations of marriage in selected fictional works by Virginia Woolf, Nella Larsen, and Dorothy Allison. Feminist literary and post-structuralist theoretical frameworks (including queer theory and neo-Marxism) are used to illuminate the ways in which ideology and discourse affect representations of modern female subjectivity as depicted in narrative works. The thesis examines the ways in which intersections of gender, race, and class are represented in the fiction writing of Woolf, Larsen, and Allison and either resist or support dominant patriarchal and heterosexist ideologies and paradigms of women in marriage.

As I will argue, marriage is like a double-edged sword in which one may oscillate between the closure of one's subjectivity by performing normalcy according to the ideology of the dominant discourse, and the openness of one's subjectivity through which marriage becomes freed up through a re-appropriation of ideological impositions. Depending on a subject's ideological expectations, the subject, when she has achieved marriage as the master-signifier, will experience marriage - in Butler's terms (see p. 2ff) - as a "performance"(closed concept) or as a "performativity" (open concept): if marriage is a boundary, then there is closure; if marriage is a limit in which there is infinite deferral and approximation, then there is openness. My debt, here, is to Žižek who explains that *boundary* means closure as it is "the external limitation of an object" (*For they know not*, 109), whereas *limit* means openness as it "results from a 'reflection-into-itself' of the boundary" (*For they know not*, 109-110). The limit is unattainable because there is

continuous approximation, deferral, and development, and thus openness as “the object can never fully become, [...] what the object *ought to* (although it never actually *can*) become” (*For they know not*, 110). In this sense, then, gender as a socially imposed boundary argues for closure. But the concept of gender can also be freed up for openness as “every boundary proves itself a limit: apropos of every identity, we are sooner or later bound to experience how its condition of possibility (the boundary that delimits its conditions) is simultaneously its condition of impossibility” (*For they know not*, 109-110).

Marriage is a site of performance or performativity in the sense that performance entraps the character through ideology in Althusserian terms (see p. 6ff), whereas performativity offers a possibility to escape ideology and what society considers normalcy by recognizing this entrapment, and by consequently producing an alternative way to live one’s marital life. The performance or performativity of marriage depends on the enactment of gender categories. Judith Butler explains that gender is performative and contingent as it is a fabrication, an impersonation, and an enactment “discursively maintained for the purpose of the regulation of sexuality within the obligatory frame of reproductive heterosexuality” (“Gender Trouble,” 337). In the “performance” of gender, on the one hand, we enact our imposed femininity or masculinity depending on whether we are biologically female or male thereby making gender a boundary and thus closing off the possibility to perform alternatives to prescribed gender roles. In the “performativity” of gender, on the other hand, we recognize gender as performance, but also as a limit so that we can enact different gender concepts: “This perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization, and it

deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to essentialist accounts of gender identity” (“Gender Trouble,” 338). Thus, in the performativity of gender, we realize that “every boundary proves itself a limit” (*For they know not*, 110) in the sense that we can enact gender in an open way through re-appropriation. We can, consequently, find a limit/openness in marriage through the performativity of gender as there is always a continuous deferral and approximation.

Race, sexuality, and class are further socially constraining categories that can be factors influencing the ‘performance’ and ‘performativity’ of marriage. Race, class, sexual orientation, as well as female sexuality potentially challenge and threaten the ideological production and perpetuation of normalcy, and, if a character aims for performativity, these categories have to be re-thought. Applying queer theory, I want to explore how and if the female characters in the novels discussed here are able to keep their subjectivity open by resisting the socially imposed constraints of marriage: I will examine whether the female characters recognize their ‘performance’ in marriage, whether they choose ‘performativity,’ whether they can be open to an alternative, liberating “queer space” without necessarily choosing an explicit lesbian destiny for themselves, whether they can be open to otherness and difference, and hence, whether their alignment with or resistance to the different signifiers of gender, race, class, female sexuality<sup>1</sup>, and sexual orientation can help them to avoid social constraints and escape ideological entrapment. Furthermore, I want to highlight how the liberation/ performativity is different for each author, and I want to emphasize that Woolf, Larsen, and Allison resist the singular, monolithic imposition of

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<sup>1</sup> “Gender” denotes gender roles, and “female sexuality” denotes libidinal drives.

marriage in which social constraints deny alternative possibilities for their female characters.

In this introductory chapter, I will set up the parameters for answering the questions mentioned above by explaining signification, myth, ideology, hegemony, and subject interpellation from the point of view of the discursive construction of subjectivity. Before I explore the course of ideological impositions and constraints, I need to clarify the process involved in the production of ideology and hegemony by probing the terms of signification and myth as developed by Barthes. In *Mythologies*, Barthes explains that signification is a process of the interrelation between language and myth in the sense that language imposes ideological paradigms on subjectivity and that language is simultaneously open to resignification and thus offers an alternative concept of subjectivity. Barthes draws on the linguistic conception that the meaning of things is not resident in the things themselves, but in the *relation* of the signifier and the signified. The relation between signifier and signified is arbitrary; there can be different signifiers for the signified, and there may be more than one signified. Barthes explains that language is a first order semiological system; on the level of language, a sign is “the relation between concept and image” (Barthes, 114). He takes the example of a rose as a sign (Barthes, 113): the rose (meaning) is a sign resulting from the relation of the rose as signifier (aesthetic concept) to passion as signified (concept). Myth, or metalanguage, is a second order semiological system which robs language of its “original” meaning. For instance, myth turns the word “woman” into a signifier for femininity and nurturing instead of denoting a human being with specific anatomical characteristics. The sign created from the interrelation between

signifier and signified on the linguistic level, becomes a signifier on its own on the level of myth. Thus, the first meaning of the first order semiological system (language) becomes distorted, but is still present, and the second meaning of the second order semiological system (myth) is imposed on the first one.

When myth is imposed on language, words can be filled with ideological meaning by means of contingency thereby creating an unnaturally “naturalized” history, yet this contingency can also help to free language from constraining ideological meaning. Myth is a type of speech (Barthes, 109) that transforms history into nature, or, in other words, that ‘naturalizes’ or distorts history while it appears that historical events are natural and not contingent: The function of myth is “to distort, not to make disappear” (Barthes, 121). Natural things are inevitable, whereas historical events are contingent, but through myth we come to believe that historical events are natural. The reader of signs ‘consumes’ myth and is immersed into non-contingent/produced signification due to ideological mythologization. In order to demystify myth, the reader of signs has to resist ideological signification by not equating the word ‘woman’ with femininity. Although ideology renders mythical signification natural, myth can be deconstructed by freeing words from their ideological connotations and associations, and signs can be opened up for re-signification as myth is merely a product of de-historicized contingency.

Barthes explains further that normative subjects (he calls them bourgeoisie) have their own rhetoric which works with fixed, unalterable, naturalized mythic signs by means of which they set themselves up as the cultural Self producing and fixing the Other into a subordinate position. The rhetoric of the bourgeois myth is a “set of fixed, regulated,

insistent figures, according to which the varied forms of the mythical signifier arrange themselves” (Barthes, 150), and the rhetoric of identification produces the exclusion of Otherness. In the process of identification, the Self constitutes his/her subjectivity through myth in the sense that the Self completes itself by disallowing any space for the Other. The Self sees the Other as alien, as something he/she cannot identify with, and thus as something that must ‘naturally’ be excluded from its own dominant discourse: “The petit-bourgeois is a man unable to imagine the Other. If he comes face to face with him, he blinds himself, ignores and denies him, or else transforms him into himself” (Barthes, 151). The Self wants to reduce Otherness to sameness or else to exoticism, because the Other is threatening the essence of the Self (Barthes, 151). If the rhetoric of bourgeois myth demands uniformity, it engages in a discourse of the naturalness through the exclusion of Otherness. Hence, the reader of signs must demystify and deconstruct myth in order to resist the exclusion of Otherness.

Althusser goes beyond Barthes’ notion of language and myth claiming in “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses” that the subject submits to ideology, that the subject is constituted by ideology, and that ideology is produced and perpetuated through ideological apparatuses<sup>2</sup>. Ideology is a reproduction of unnaturally naturalized history, and ideological impositions make it difficult for the subject to confront, recognize, demystify, and resist myth. Althusser derives the origin of ideology from the reproduction of labour in the sense that the conditions of production have to be reproduced in order for

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<sup>2</sup> Althusser calls these ideology producing apparatuses the Ideological State Apparatus and the Repressive State Apparatus.

production to occur. The conditions of production to be reproduced are “1. the productive forces, 2. the existing relations of production” (Althusser, 128). The reproduction of the conditions of production requires a submission to, reproduction of, and practice of the ruling ideology:

The reproduction of labour power requires not only a reproduction of its skills, but also, at the same time, a reproduction of its submission to the rules of the established order, i.e. a reproduction of submission to the ruling ideology for the workers, and a reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression, so that they, too, will provide for the domination of the ruling class ‘in words.’ (Althusser, 132).

The submission of the woman as the Other to the man as the Self can occur only because the myth of her submission was produced at first by means of unnaturally naturalized history, and then instated as normalcy through the reproduction of this ideological imposition.

The condition of Self and Other, and of dominance and submission is produced and maintained through the deference to ideological impositions and hegemony. Althusser identifies ideology as a “system of the ideas and representations which dominate the mind of a man or a social group” (Althusser, 158). Ideology is produced and reproduced through the educational, religious, family, political, trade-union, communications, and ‘cultural’ apparatuses (Althusser, 150). Ideology governs a subject’s mind and actions as ideology continually indoctrinates the subject with concepts that are a product of

contingency. Furthermore, the production of ideologies is possible only because subjects follow the hegemony of the dominant group for consent on what constitutes normalcy and deviancy. According to Gramsci, hegemony<sup>3</sup> is a spontaneous consent among subjects to produce and reproduce an ideology that serves the profit (power and control) of the dominant group. Hegemony can be broken down, if we confront and resist the naturalization of myth and the submission to ideology.

Althusser describes ideology as an illusion that derives its power from the nothingness of its origins as ideology has no 'natural' history. Althusser conceives of ideology as "a pure illusion, a pure dream, i.e. as nothingness" (Althusser, 159) *appearing* to come out of nowhere as it has a non-contingent, de-historicized 'natural' effect. Ideology is eternal, because it seems to have no history (Althusser, 159-160). Althusser's first thesis on ideology is that ideology (as an illusion) conveys its message through allusion to imaginary conditions: "Ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (Althusser, 162). Althusser's second thesis on ideology is that "Ideology has a material existence" (Althusser, 165), and not a spiritual one. In this sense then, ideology has an unignorable material existence, although

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<sup>3</sup> Gramsci explains the functions of social hegemony as:

"1. The 'spontaneous' consent given by the great masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group; this consent is 'historically' caused by the prestige (and consequent confidence) which the dominant group enjoys because of its position and function in the world of production.

2. The apparatus of state coercive power which 'legally' enforces discipline on those groups who do not 'consent' either actively or passively. This apparatus is, however, constituted of the whole of society in anticipation of moments of crisis of command and direction when spontaneous consent has failed." (Gramsci, 12).

it is apparently based on nothingness: ideology is “an imaginary relation to real relations” (Althusser, 1971), and the subject submits to the ideology by adopting a certain behaviour, by displaying a practical attitude, and by participating in “regular practices which are those of the ideological apparatus on which ‘depend’ the ideas which he has in all consciousness freely chosen as a subject” (Althusser, 1971). Ideology reproduces a nothingness thereby creating an illusion for the subject that the enactment of ideological impositions is real and well founded. Furthermore, ideology has a powerful influence on the subject formation and on subject positioning as it interpellates subjects as Self or Other. Ideology transforms individuals into the Self by interpellating an individual Self and not Other (Althusser, 1971-1977); the subject interpellated as Self recognizes himself/herself as Self. Ideology has the power to interpellate subjects as Self or Other so that the Other is excluded from the dominant discourse; however, the Other can also resist ideological interpellation as ideology bases itself on nothingness.

Ideology has the power to produce the normative subject as cultural Self and render the deviant subject the cultural Other through hegemony, and in a closed concept of marriage, ideological impositions dictate power relations between husband and wife. Ideological marriage vows interpellate the husband as the dominant, dictatorial Self and the wife as the silent, non-resistant, submissive Other, and thus there is a “performance” in marriage based on myth and the more particular social constraints of gender, class, race, female sexuality and sexual orientation as they are re-enforced through interpellative ideology and hegemony. Resistance to ideology and hegemony renders the subject the cultural Other, but marriage may enable the cultural Other to pass as the cultural Self as

marriage grants Selfhood to the married subject under the additional condition that the subject project the cultural Self to the outside. A subject's decision to marry may thus be seen as an apparent submission to ideological imposition, hence 'performance' of marriage, but the performativity of marriage allows the subject to occupy a traditional role of femininity while deconstructing and inverting this category within the framework of an apparent submission to societal conventions. Hence, in the performativity of marriage, the married subject is able to keep her subjectivity open and explore alternative possibilities for subjectivity by deconstructing and inverting the constraining categories.

Having outlined ideology, production of subjectivity, and subject and object positioning, I want to give a possible response to these problematic structures by drawing on queer theory. In "Queer Pedagogy and its Strange Techniques," Britzman says that we need to rethink the formation and position of our subjectivity in order to encounter the Other of our Self as well as Otherness. We sustain our constructed subjectivity and normalcy by not stepping out of the circle of our own subjectivity. Queer theory problematizes normalcy, and thus it "proposes to think identities in terms that place as a problem the production of normalcy and that confound the intelligibility of the apparatuses that produce identity as repetition" (Britzman, 81). Queer theory wants to disturb the presumption of normalcy, because normalcy negates the Other and the Otherness of the Self. Queer theory disrupts the subject's investment in a meta-narrative of normalcy and in "a desire for a transparent truth, for stable communities and identities, and for a pedagogy that ignores contradictions" (Britzman, 80). It resists the "institutional press for closure, tidiness, and certainty" (Britzman, 82), and it "takes up that queer space of

simultaneously questioning and asserting representations and outing the unthought of normalcy" (Britzman, 82). Hence, queer theory opens up to questioning the representations of normalcy further constrained by ideological impositions on gender, race, class, female sexuality, and sexual orientation, and thereby presents a liberating and alternative space with infinite possibilities.

Queer theory opens up a discourse of Otherness as it challenges "heteronormativity" as a discursive strategy for the containment of Otherness, and "exorbitant normality" as that willful passion for ignorance concerning the deviance of Otherness. Acknowledging that difference is a pre-condition for the exploration of the Self "identity is [...] a discursive effect of the social, constituted through identifications. [...] Identification allows the self recognition and misrecognition" (Britzman, 83). Britzman examines identity "not as identical to itself but only a possibility made in relation to another, and [...] such a relation is one of difference within as well as difference between identities" (Britzman, 83). Queer theory challenges 'heteronormativity' as a discursive strategy and 'exorbitant normality' as passion for ignorance. Exorbitant normality "occurs when 'the other' is rendered either as unintelligible or as intelligible only as a special event, never everyday. Exorbitant normality is built when the other is situated as a site of deviancy and disease, and hence in need of containment" (Britzman, 85); heteronormativity is the result of the containment of Otherness. In the fiction of Woolf, Larsen, and Allison, queerness as a resistance to normalcy and to ideological constructions offers the female characters the possibility to explore a deviant Otherness, to question performance in marriage, to engage in performativity, to resist ideology and hegemony, and thus to become self-directing subjects

with the view of keeping subjectivity 'open.'

Having provided an understanding of the basic theoretical concepts I will be drawing on for the remainder of my thesis, I will now give a brief synopsis of each of the literary chapters to follow. In my second chapter, I will discuss class, sexual orientation, compulsory heterosexuality, performativity and passing in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. Mrs. Clarissa Dalloway represents the feminine Self to the outside world while she is the feminine Other to her inside. Clarissa has queer if not lesbian tendencies rendering her Other as Post-World-War-One society is organized through compulsory heterosexuality in the sense that all subjects have to be heterosexual;<sup>4</sup> compulsory heterosexuality renders queer sexual orientation Other; thus, society feels an 'urge' to eliminate the sexually deviant subject. As a result, Clarissa uses her marriage to become the feminine Self, as her sexual orientation threatens to make her the feminine Other. Her marriage and motherhood allow her to pass as a seemingly normative character while, in fact, she is deviant. Clarissa's marriage to Richard is a performativity because it leaves her the space to explore her Otherness as Richard does not confine her subjectivity to that of a heterosexual woman. Septimus' subjectivity sheds light on that of Clarissa as he is in the position of the masculine Other; however, his lower class status and his war trauma do not allow him to pass as the masculine Self, when it becomes publicly known that he has an unmasculine and possibly queer subjectivity. Septimus may have queer tendencies, but his marriage (as performativity) offers him no protection from elimination as the masculine Other because, in Post-World-War-One society, it is unacceptable for a man to publicly

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<sup>4</sup> See Barrett, 148, on homophobia in England.

expose queer and unmanly behaviour, and to make one's wife take over the masculine role of breadwinner.

In my third chapter, I will discuss the intersection of race, gender, and Black female sexuality in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand*. As a mulatta, Helga Crane is oscillating between Blackness and Whiteness, and her mulatta existence renders her the cultural Other. Helga is not completely accepted into Black or White society, and thus she lives a performativity of Blackness or Whiteness in order for Blacks or Whites to grant her Selfhood. Race is a performance, but Helga's mulatta existence demonstrates that racial enactment can be broken open for performativity. In addition to racial prejudice, Helga also suffers from a sexual prejudice because Black female sexuality is subject to negative ideological constraints as overtly excessive. Helga feels suffocated by this racial-sexual prejudice, and whenever she feels this constraint she leaves one of her racial backgrounds behind to seek acceptance from the other one. Only when Helga has countered the White man's racial-sexual prejudice is she ready to initiate the exploration of her female sexuality. Yet, Helga feels the pressure to marry in order to legitimize the exploration of her Black female sexuality; she marries a Black Reverend, who, she assumes, will neither construct her sexuality as excessively sexual nor consign her subjectivity to that of an object of male sexual desire. Helga's marriage is not liberating her, but on the contrary, confines her to the role of mother and wife, and her husband uses religious dogma to keep her in her subservient position. Helga's husband does not constrain her Black female sexuality, but he pushes her to engage in the performance of marriage as he uses social pressure as well as rapidly successive pregnancies to make her conform to a motherly and

wifely role. Helga's concerns with racial-sexual prejudice had prompted her decision to marry a Black Reverend. Yet, instead of being liberated, she is likely to die as her marriage forces her to close her subjectivity.

In my fourth chapter, I will discuss the intersection of gender, class, and sexual orientation in Dorothy Allison's *Bastard out of Carolina*. Bone Boatwright is a 12 year old girl who suffers physical and sexual abuse as well as violent sexual assault at the hands of her step father Daddy Glen. Daddy Glen wants Bone to submit to the law of the father and he attempts to 'teach' her to be heterosexual and feminine. Glen sees Bone's oscillation between femininity and masculinity, and his abuse of her is his attempt to suppress his own femininity as well as his assertion of his manhood that is always-already at stake. Bone's mother Anney is the implicit bystander to Glen's abuse of Bone, and she fails to protect Bone as she feels the necessity to submit both herself and Bone to the law of the father in order to become the feminine Self. Anney's marriage to Glen renders her the feminine Self, and within the framework of the microcosm of her family Glen grants her Selfhood only if she submits to his laws; consequently, Anney leaves Bone behind after the rape in order to distinguish herself from Bone as the feminine Other. Bone's lower-class status and her fatherless existence render her vulnerable to Glen's abuse, but her Otherness allows her to explore her Self and keep her subjectivity open. Her Otherness as well as her alignment with her lesbian aunt are likely to enable her to recover from her trauma. Anney and Glen's marriage is a performance as they enact their gendered roles of femininity and masculinity according to ideological expectations. Their marital arrangement not only fails but also seeks to destroy Bone as Other, whereas Aunt

Raylene's queer space grants Bone Selfhood, security, and a likely recovery.

Clarissa, Helga, and Anney decide to marry because they feel that marriage is going to grant them Selfhood, but the retaining of their Selfhood depends on the open or closed concept of their marriage. Clarissa circumvents and thus resists ideological impositions on her subjectivity in regards to her sexual orientation as she projects the normative feminine Self to the outside world while being Other to her inside. Her marriage and motherhood grant her Selfhood in society as well as within her marital arrangement with Richard, as a consequence of which she keeps her subjectivity open and does not die. Helga eventually submits to ideological impositions on her subjectivity as her husband compels her to enact her maternal and wifely roles. Marriage promises her Selfhood as a sexually desirous Black woman, but in her closed concept of marriage, the Reverend grants her no Selfhood. Before her marriage, Helga has an open and self-directing subjectivity, but during her marriage she closes her subjectivity and is not only likely to die literally from rapidly successive childbirths, but is already dead metaphorically due to her closure of subjectivity. Anney also submits to ideological constraints on her subjectivity as Daddy Glen confines her subjectivity to the strictly feminine. Like Helga, Anney had a self-directing and open subjectivity before her marriage, but during the course of her marriage to Glen, she submits to Glen's reign and to ideological impositions of femininity and wifhood. This closed concept of marriage contributes to making Anney an implicit bystander to Glen's abuse and rape of her daughter Bone. Anney wants to be the feminine Self in her marital arrangement with Glen so that she has to distinguish herself from Bone as the feminine Other and agree to the elimination of her own daughter. The

performativity of marriage is thus a 'life-affirming' concept as it allows for open subject formation, and as it promotes egalitarian relationships among subjects. The performance of marriage, in contrast, is death-like and destructive as it aims to close subjectivity and submit husband and wife to fatal ideological constraints.

## Chapter 2:

### **Sexual Orientation, Compulsory Heterosexuality, and Passing in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway***

"Marriage, marriage, that was the right thing, the only thing, the solution required by every one she knew."  
(Woolf, *The Voyage Out*, 164)

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Virginia Woolf shows that subjects are not coherent but fragmented, and she explores the effect of open and closed subjectivity, and of sexual orientation on concepts of marriage. In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa seems to be the feminine Self to the outside world while she is the feminine Other to the inside. Clarissa is the feminine Self as she is a 'normative,' married, upper middle-class woman who gives creative parties. Outwardly she appears to have a coherent subjectivity, but, in fact, her subjectivity is fragmented as signified through Woolf's employment of the stream-of-consciousness technique. Clarissa's fragmented subjectivity signifies that Clarissa is not only the feminine Self, but also the feminine Other. Clarissa is the feminine Other as she has queer or lesbian tendencies that are unacceptable in Post-World-War-One society. As a split subject she can engage in the exploration of Otherness in her Self and in Others, and keep her subjectivity open by aligning herself with different signifiers such as Richard, Peter, Sally, Elisabeth, Doris, and Septimus. Thinking about the past and encountering Peter Walsh in the present, she realizes that she has made a good choice in not marrying Peter as he would have absorbed her subjectivity and intruded on her life in the same way

that he intruded on Sally Seaton and Clarissa kissing more than thirty years ago. Clarissa's marriage to Richard Dalloway is asexual, unromantic, and detached, but it is much more fulfilling for her than a marriage to Peter would ever have been because this marital arrangement leaves her the additional space to explore her subjectivity without intrusion. Being a married woman makes Clarissa the feminine Self as her marriage and motherhood profess that she must be heterosexual, freeing her from the suspicion, if any, of having queer tendencies. Within her marital arrangement, Clarissa can be the feminine Other, she can exercise her creativity, she can reflect without intrusion, she can think back to Sally Seaton's kiss without ever being charged with adultery, and she can pass as a heterosexual wife with an acceptable and respectable social status. Clarissa appears to perform her marriage outwardly (to the public). But, in fact, she engages in performativity or open concept marriage as she escapes the entrapment of the ideologies of marriage imposed upon her from precisely this "public" perspective. This concept of marriage allows Clarissa to keep her subjectivity open and to experience her Otherness in terms of sexual orientation.

Septimus and Rezia's marital arrangement sheds light on Clarissa and Richard's as both marriages engage in performativity; however, Septimus and Rezia's lower-class status makes it more difficult for them to pass as normative because they do not enjoy upper middle-class privileges as a means to protect their rights to 'individuality.' Septimus is always already Other as he has androgynous characteristics, and he is rendered Other even more by publicly exposing the symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder due to his war trauma. Septimus' traumatic experiences form his incoherent subjectivity, and he

resists initially aligning himself with Rezia because she, like the rest of society, does not understand his symptoms and because she expects Septimus to be the normative masculine Self. When Rezia accepts Septimus as masculine Other, and when Septimus finally acknowledges Rezia as a living signifier to align himself with, Rezia and Septimus can *enjoy* their marriage as performativity promising Septimus' recovery from his trauma. Septimus is likely to recover from his war trauma through the performativity of marriage as this marital arrangement does not compel him to enact the masculine role of breadwinner and domineering husband, but allows him to explore his queerness. However, the doctors have already decided to eliminate Septimus as the masculine Other. Septimus' suicide is his resistance to a society that interpellates its subjects as fully functional, closed, and heterosexual, and that rejects deviancy and the public discourse of queerness.

In this chapter, I will analyze the effect of performance and performativity of sexual orientation on a closed and open concept of marriage, and I will call attention to the consequences of the subject's submission and resistance to ideological constraints on subject positioning and on marital arrangements. I will apply queer-feminist theory in order to explain the performance and performativity (Butler) of sexual orientation and I will draw on Rich to show the reasons for "compulsory heterosexuality" and I will employ Žižek to explicate subject formation and positioning. I will begin this chapter by analyzing Clarissa's reasons for becoming the feminine Self and argue that her marriage guarantees her a subject positioning as a socially acceptable woman. I will then show Clarissa to be passing as the feminine Self, permitting her to have an open subjectivity as a 'queer' or bisexual woman. I will demonstrate that Clarissa's marriage appears to be performance,

but that it is, in fact, a performativity, and I will argue that this marital arrangement of performativity is necessary to enable Clarissa's passing as the feminine Self while preventing her from being marginalized as the feminine Other. I will then examine Septimus' split subjectivity and the 'queerness' that renders him unacceptable as the masculine Other. I will highlight his inability to pass as the masculine Self as a result of his public exhibition of the symptoms of his war trauma and of his lower-class status. Septimus' elimination as Other shows that Clarissa's performativity is necessary. It also demonstrates that Septimus' lower-class position and the ideologically imposed notion of the man as breadwinner places Septimus under more social pressure than Clarissa as Clarissa can retreat into her private feminine sphere whereas Septimus must perform in the public masculine sphere.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, Woolf sets up Clarissa as a split subject oscillating between feminine Self and feminine Other. From the outside, Clarissa appears to be a coherent and normative subject as the feminine Self, while, on the inside, Clarissa, in fact, is a fragmented and deviant subject continually aligning herself with different signifiers as the feminine Other. Clarissa constantly has to enact her ideologically imposed feminine Self in order not to be uncovered as feminine Other: "Clarissa recognizes her difference, her inner incompatibility with the public identity 'Mrs. Dalloway' that she composes for the world. Despite her outward composure, the lesbian within threatens to stir the tranquility of that 'leaf-encumbered forest, the soul'" (Barrett, 162). By enacting perfectly her social role as the wife of a Member of Parliament and as mother of Elisabeth, Clarissa represents herself as the normative feminine Self to the outside. Yet, from the inside looking out,

Clarissa is the feminine Other as she has bisexual tendencies and independent views of marital arrangements. Clarissa is not subject to marginalization and elimination from the point of view of her upper middle-class status because she does not show her Otherness to the outside, and because, more significantly, she passes as the feminine Self (as a married mother). Clarissa's *passing* as the feminine Self in society while actually being the feminine Other provides the means for her maintaining her social status as a respectable woman. Her marriage to a man who enjoys social respectability and who represents the masculine Self makes it seem as though Clarissa were engaging in a performance and thus a closed concept of marriage, but, in fact, she is engaging in a performativity and thus an open concept of marriage.

Clarissa is a split subject as she is both feminine Self and feminine Other, and this oscillation between Self and Other calls into question the ideological imposition of the category of woman as heterosexual and as absolutely feminine (see p.29). Clarissa sees herself as split, multiple, and only "artificially pulled together into a semblance of harmony for social purposes" (Hanson, 68). Clarissa's split subjectivity enables her to engage in a performativity of her marriage as she keeps her subjectivity open by aligning herself with different signifiers and exploring Otherness. Her split subjectivity is positive and enriching for her, but her oscillation also means that she transcends the 'normal' category of woman. Žižek explains that the subject is always-already split, fragmented, open, and it cannot be truthfully represented in a uniform way; however, the subject gains meaning and visibility through alignment with a master-signifier. As a signifier, the subject is always already void, and subject formation occurs through the alignment and re-alignment with various

signifiers. The Self is constituted by representing what the Other is not: “a signifier (S1) represents for another signifier (S2) its absence, its lack  $\$$ , which is the subject. [...]The two signifiers enter a ‘differential’ relationship only via a third term, the void of their possible absence” (Žižek, 22-23). Thus, there is always a signifier representing the Self, and the Other is produced through the absence of qualities that give a subject Selfhood as determined by ideological impositions. Clarissa gains Selfhood in society as she outwardly aligns her Self with the master-signifier of married heterosexual femininity. Septimus gains no Selfhood in society despite his marriage because he does not align himself publicly with the master-signifier of heterosexual masculinity.

The woman becomes the feminine Self and fully representable by aspiring toward and aligning herself with a master-signifier that represents ‘true womanhood.’ Yet, the master-signifier of the feminine Self representing ‘true womanhood’ is merely an ideological imposition as it is constituted by means of de-historicized contingency, and thus it can be broken open for re-signification. Žižek, drawing on Lacan, explains that, initially, there is no master-signifier because “any signifier can assume the role of the master-signifier if its eventual function becomes [sic!] to represent a subject for another signifier” (Lacan in Žižek, 23). The master-signifier is created by “ascrib[ing] to *one* signifier the function of representing the subject (the place of inscription) for all the others (which thereby become ‘all’ - that is, are totalized): in this way, the proper *Master-Signifier* is produced” (Žižek, 23). The master-signifier for ‘true womanhood’ is thus a product of ideological impositions in the process of which many signifiers for ‘true womanhood’ are replaced with one monolithic signifier. The master-signifier for ‘true womanhood’ is

constraining as firstly it leaves no alternative possibilities for signification, and secondly it is unattainable as a product of ideological impositions. The master-signifier thus has to be broken open by de-ideologizing and granting various signifiers for 'true womanhood' such as in Clarissa's practice of her femininity. Likewise, the master-signifier for 'true manhood' needs to be re-signified in order for men like Septimus to be socially acceptable and not be subject to elimination from society as masculine Other.

The master-signifier of 'true womanhood' is, on the one hand, constraining as it is constituted by ideological impositions that can never be fully achieved; on the other hand, the approximation of the master-signifier of 'true womanhood' keeps Clarissa's subjectivity open because this master-signifier is a site of contestation providing her with possibilities for alternative womanhood. Likewise, the *representation* of feminine Self as master-signifier can never be fully achieved, because the feminine Self is constituted by an approximation and rejection of the feminine Other as non-representation. Any attempt to represent the feminine Self as a coherent subject is not only a constraint but also a failure because there is constant deferral:

this oscillation between representation and non-representation points toward the ultimate *failure* of the subject's signifying representation: the subject has no "proper" signifier which would "fully" represent it, every signifying representation is a misrepresentation which, however imperceptibly, always-already displaces, distorts, the subject... And it is precisely this irreducible failure of the signifying representation which elicits the passage from "simple" into "expanded" form: since every signifier *misrepresents* the subject, the movement of representation

goes on to the next signifier in search of an ultimate “proper” signifier, the result of which is a non-totalized “bad infinity” of signifying representations. (Žižek, 24)

Žižek goes on to explain that the subject as a signifier is a void and has a lack: “The subject is this void, this lack in the series of the predicates of the universal Substance” (Žižek, 48). If the subject and the category of womanhood are initially void, it also means that they can be filled with meaning retrospectively. Therefore, the category of womanhood is open to resignification: to the outside, Clarissa represents herself to be the heterosexual feminine Self as she occupies and enacts the role of wife and mother; however, Clarissa can fill this signifier of feminine Self with her own understanding of herself as woman, thus enabling her to pass as the feminine Self projecting to the outside an image of coherence while at the same time being a split subject with the view to keeping her subjectivity open. Septimus could also pass as the normative married Self, if he attempted to display heterosexuality, masculinity, and normalcy to the outside world. Septimus’ Otherness keeps his subjectivity open, but it also subjects him to elimination from society rendering the concept of passing a necessary one for survival in Post-World-War-One society.

Ideological impositions reserve the category of woman, or of ‘true womanhood,’ for the feminine Self by excluding the feminine Other, but the category of woman is open to resignification and to inclusion of the feminine Other as ‘true womanhood’ is merely a historically produced category. The category of ‘woman’ as a signifier for the feminine Self is produced by the exclusion of the feminine Other: “The constitutive instability of the term

[woman], its incapacity ever fully to describe what it names, is produced precisely by what is excluded in order for the determination to take place" (*Bodies That Matter*, 218). Butler argues that the category of woman is created in a historically contingent way and naturalized retrospectively as heterosexual femininity (*Gender Trouble*, 32-33). The category of woman is an 'unnaturally' naturalized category, yet, it is open to resignification, and thereby can be a site of resistance to ideological impositions of femininity and heterosexuality: "*Woman* itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it [the term] is open to intervention and resignification" (*Gender Trouble*, 33). The category of woman is a constant deferral and approximation because it is "a permanent site of contest [as there is] [...] no closure on the category" (*Bodies That Matter*, 221), and Clarissa's split subjectivity (feminine Self and Other) demonstrates that the category of woman is an open one, and that the open category of womanhood is necessary for the survival of the subject.

Marriage represents/enacts the cultural Self as it is a site of the production and reproduction of heterosexuality and normalcy; hence, marriage renders the married woman the feminine Self and the married man the masculine Self. The pressure to marry stems from ideological impositions of "compulsory heterosexuality" meaning that all citizens *have to be* heterosexual for the reproduction of the species. Consequently, queerness becomes constituted as a site of disease in its disruption of normalcy.<sup>5</sup> 'Compulsory heterosexuality'

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<sup>5</sup> See introductory chapter for Britzman on disruption of normalcy and containment of deviancy.

produces normalcy by means of hegemony,<sup>6</sup> and Butler explains that “the category of ‘sex’ is, from the start, normative; it is what Foucault has called a ‘regulatory ideal’” (*Bodies That Matter*, 1). The category of sex has regulatory forces forming “the bodies it governs, that is, the power to produce - demarcate, circulate, differentiate - the bodies it controls” (*Bodies That Matter*, 1). Rich argues that ideological impositions are very powerful in producing the compulsion to be heterosexual and to be married (Rich, 237) by means of threats of marginalization. Rich points out that heterosexuality is compulsory for women as lesbian existence otherwise threatens the control men have over female sexuality and reproduction: “the enforcement of heterosexuality for women [is] a means of assuring male right of physical, economic, and emotional access” (Rich, 238). Rich thus suggests that “for women heterosexuality may not be a ‘preference’ at all but something that has had to be imposed, managed, organized, propagandized, and maintained by force” (Rich, 239-239). Hence Clarissa needs to marry and project heterosexuality to the outside world, if she does not want to be marginalized or even eliminated as the feminine Other.

Marriage perpetuates heterosexuality and normalcy, and does not tolerate queerness, Otherness, and deviancy so that the unmarried subject is rendered invisible. By means of hegemony and ideological impositions, the institution of marriage has the power to render the unmarried subject Other and deviant; hence, ideological constraints force the subject to marry if she wants to avoid being marginalized and rendered invisible. Clarissa's decision to become the feminine Self by means of marriage thus enables her to become

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<sup>6</sup> See introductory chapter for Gramsci on hegemony, and for Althusser on the powerful influence of ideological apparatuses.

representable and visible instead of being marginalized as the feminine Other. Furthermore, the role of wife and mother guarantees Clarissa a respectable place in British Post-World-War-One society as she is fulfilling her duties as a female citizen. British Post-World-War-One society does not accept deviancy of its citizens, but rather imposes its ideology of 'normalcy':

The social order of Britain in 1923 was resolutely inimical to the reality of actual life cherished by Clarissa and Septimus. It created standards that, far from allowing for free, individual expression, forced individuals into rigid roles with unfulfillable expectations. The regime's ideals are antithetical to life itself. [...] The regime works on ideals and ideal symbols relating to the glory of patriarchal society. (Littleton, 48)

Representation and politics are linked to each other in the sense that only the conforming subject attains the right and privilege for representation. The ideologically imposed category of woman is an incomplete representation of womanhood, as the feminine Other is excluded from this category as a result of her deviancy: "On the one hand, *representation* serves as the operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects; on the other hand, representation is the normative function of language which is said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women" (*Gender Trouble*, 1). A woman is only representable if she is the feminine Self. Consequently, the feminine Other, such as the unmarried and financially independent Doris Kilman, is rendered unrepresentable if not even invisible.

In the performance of marriage, subjects have to engage in a performance of gender and heterosexuality, and this concept of marriage is a closed one, as there is no room for queerness. Foucault argues that subjects are produced in a matrix of power relations (Foucault in *Gender Trouble*, 2), and ideological impositions gender women and men in terms of binary opposites in which women represent emotion, weakness, and submission, while men stand for reason, strength, and dominance. Judith Butler explains that “the subjects regulated by such structures are, by virtue of being subjected to them, formed, defined, and reproduced in accordance with the requirements of those structures” (*Gender Trouble*, 2). In the matrix of power relations, performativity opens up a possibility to resist the performance of ideologically imposed subjectivities while simultaneously avoiding marginalization as the unmarried Other.

In the performance of marriage, the woman has to abandon her feminine Other and become the feminine Self by means of male identification resulting in the effacement of her own subjectivity. Barry points out that male identification has a negative impact on the woman as she defines her subjectivity and sexuality as inferior to the man. The woman internaliz[es] the values of the colonizer and actively participat[es] in carrying out the colonization of one’s self and one’s sex.... Male identification is the act whereby women place men above women, including themselves, in credibility, status, and importance in most situations, regardless of the comparative quality the woman may bring to the situation.... Interaction with women is seen as a lesser form of relating on every level. (Barry in Rich, 237)

Male identification is linked to the performance of marriage in the sense that the feminine

Other has to enact absolute femininity and heterosexuality. *Absolute femininity* is the performance of an ideologically imposed view of the category of woman in which the woman abandons her feminine Other; feminine Otherness can mean, for example, enacting a masculine role or, in general, exhibiting deviant, 'unfeminine' behaviour. In the performance of marriage, the feminine Self allows her husband to colonize her subjectivity and independence; Sir Bradshaw, for instance, describes a wife's role as one of "love, duty, self-sacrifice" (Woolf, 110). Hence, the feminine Self effaces her own subjectivity as she submits to the law of the father, her husband, and when she complies with 'normalcy' and the performance of marriage:

For example, Lady Bradshaw. Fifteen years ago she had gone under. It was nothing you could put your finger on; there had been no scene, no snap; only the slow sinking, water-logged, of her own will into his. Sweet was her smile, swift her submission. [...] Once, long ago, she had caught salmon freely; now, quick to minister the craving of her husband's eye so oilily for dominion, for power, she cramped, squeezed, pared, pruned, drew back, peeped through. (Woolf, 110)

Unlike Lady Bradshaw, Clarissa does not efface her subjectivity in her marriage, and consequently, she lives her life with a measure of enjoyment.

Marriage as a performance and as a site of normalcy tries to eliminate Otherness as deviant. Yet marriage can also enable deviant subjects to pass as normative by means of the 'performativity' of marriage. In the performativity of marriage, subjects live their Otherness while pretending to have a coherent and normative subjectivity in order to be

socially acceptable: there is openness as there is an exploration and acknowledgment of Otherness in one's Self as well as Otherness in others. Clarissa's marriage enables her to pass in society as a normative subject, and Rich argues that it is often safer for a woman to pass as heterosexual while dwelling in a "lesbian continuum" in dreams, instead of living a full lesbian existence:

Women have married because it was necessary, in order to survive economically, in order to have children who would not suffer economic deprivation or social ostracism, in order to remain respectable, in order to do what was expected of women. [...] We may faithfully or ambivalently have obeyed the institution, but our feelings - and our sensuality - have not been tamed or contained within it. (Rich, 242)

Clarissa has to pass as a heterosexual woman in order to gain visibility in the dominant discourse and not fear elimination of her Otherness:

Women, lesbians, and gay men [...] cannot assume the position of the speaking subject within the linguistic system of compulsory heterosexuality. To speak within the system is to be deprived of the possibility of speech; hence, to speak at all in that context is a performative contradiction, the linguistic assertion of a self that cannot "be" within the language that asserts it. (*Gender Trouble*, 116)

Despite his marriage, Septimus does not gain visibility within the dominant discourse but rather is subject to the liquidation of his subjectivity because he makes no attempt to pass as the heterosexual man enacting his role of masculinity.

As a married woman Clarissa is passing as the heterosexual feminine Self by projecting to the public her marriage as 'performance'. Nonetheless, Clarissa resists the interpellation of her married body as heterosexual. Clarissa has bisexual tendencies, and she resists compulsory heterosexuality through the performativity of her sexual orientation as she enacts her gendered role as mother and wife while having lesbian tendencies. Gender is a product of compulsory heterosexuality in the sense that the compulsion to be heterosexual demands the specific enactment of gender roles of femininity and masculinity. Butler says that heterosexuality sets itself up 'unnaturally' as the original, the true, and authentic ("Imitation and Gender Subordination," 312) thereby challenging the 'naturalness' of gender roles. Butler points out that the repetitious enactment of sexual orientation can break open the heterosexual gender performance of subjectivity as heterosexuality is merely an enactment without an original:

In its effort to naturalize itself as the original, heterosexuality must be understood as a compulsive and compulsory repetition that can only produce the *effect* of its own originality; in other words, compulsory heterosexual identities, those ontologically consolidated phantasms of "man" and "woman," are theatrically produced effects that posture as grounds, origins, the normative measure of the real. ("Imitation and Gender Insubordination," 313)

Performativity is thus "the repetition, and the failure to repeat, produc[ing] a string of performances that constitute and contest the coherence of that 'I'" ("Imitation and Gender Insubordination," 311); the performativity of sexual orientation gives Clarissa the possibility to engage in a performativity of gender roles. Consequently, she keeps her subjectivity

open and lives an open concept of marriage.

Clarissa decides to marry Richard in order to maintain her social status and to become representable as the feminine Self while being able to keep her subjectivity open as the feminine Other. Clarissa marries Richard for several reasons: Richard is a good-hearted man who likes continuity (Woolf, 128) and gives security while leaving Clarissa her independence: "The less intense alliance with Richard allows Clarissa greater space to fulfill her submerged desires. Peter Walsh might have destroyed this aspect of her, not by mere closeness but by the incessant judgment of her secret beliefs about the world" (Littleton, 46). Furthermore, as Clarissa does not have an education, she could not possibly afford to maintain her luxurious life-style and thus be able to give parties. Before her marriage, Clarissa is dependant financially on her father and this dependance would be problematic, if she had not married, as he does not accept Otherness (he dislikes and rejects Sally Seaton's and Peter Walsh's Otherness), and he would most likely not have allowed her to explore her Otherness. More importantly, though, Clarissa marries Richard because he is the masculine Self and her marriage to him makes her the feminine Self. Hence she avoids being marginalized from society as the feminine Other. She thinks that if she behaves like the feminine Self, she is immune to harm of any sort: "Those ruffians, the Gods, shan't have it all their own way - her notion being that the Gods, who never lost a chance of hurting, thwarting and spoiling human lives, were seriously put out of it if, all the same, you behaved like a lady" (Woolf, 85).

The price Clarissa has to pay for becoming the socially acceptable feminine Self is her subjection to the law of the father, her husband Richard; however, Richard is a good

choice for a husband as he does not force her to liquidate her subjectivity. In theoretical terms, Clarissa loses her own identity as a married woman signified by her giving up her maiden name while taking on her husband's name and identity as Mrs. Dalloway: "She had the oddest sense of being herself invisible; unseen; unknown; there being no more marrying, no more having children now, but only this astonishing and rather solemn progress with the rest of them, up Bond Street, this being Mrs. Dalloway; not even Clarissa any more; this being Mrs. Richard Dalloway" (Woolf, 13). In practical terms, however, Clarissa has found in Richard a husband who gives her space to explore her Otherness, and thus she can circumvent the complete subjection to the law of the father. In their marital arrangement, Clarissa and Richard give each other abundant space to live their subjectivity and to render the concept of marriage an 'open' one. Clarissa and Richard respect each other's dignity and need for independence: "And there is a dignity in people; a solitude; even between husband and wife a gulf; and that one must respect, thought Clarissa [...]; for one would not part with it oneself, or take it, against his will, without losing one's independence, one's self-respect — something, after all, priceless" (Woolf, 131). In their marital relationship, there is a mutual understanding and acceptance of each other's needs. Although Clarissa has failed Richard "again and again" (Woolf, 34), Richard loves Clarissa and accepts their marriage as detached and dispassionate (Woolf, 34):

In came Richard, holding out flowers. She had failed him at Constantinople [...]. He was holding out flowers - roses, red and white roses. (But he could not bring himself to say he loved her; not in so many words). [...] She understood; she

understood without his speaking; his Clarissa. [...] He had not said 'I love you'; but he held her hand. Happiness is this, is this, he thought. (Woolf, 129-130)

Clarissa decides to marry Richard and not Peter Walsh as Peter most likely would have forced her to close her subjectivity and engage in a 'performance' of marriage. Clarissa thinks that "in marriage a little licence, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house; which Richard gave her and she him. [...] But with Peter everything had to be shared; everything gone into. And it was intolerable" (Woolf, 8). Clarissa does not like that Peter "always criticizes [*her*]" (Woolf, 44), and that he does not acknowledge what she thinks, feels or wants: "His lack of the ghost of a notion what any body else was feeling [was] that [which] annoyed her, had always annoyed her" (Woolf, 50). Peter and Richard do not understand the purpose of Clarissa's parties, but Peter, unlike Richard, criticizes her for being "the perfect hostess" (Woolf, 67) thereby hurting her intentionally and successfully. Peter admits being "jealous, uncontrollably jealous by temperament" (Woolf, 174), and his jealousy would have restricted Clarissa and thus kept her from aligning herself with different signifiers.

Although Peter realizes that marriage is problematic for women as they are forced to 'become' their husbands, he is likely to have forced Clarissa into a performance of marriage as he seemingly cannot perceive of marriage as performativity. Peter thinks that Clarissa must hate her marriage as he perceives her as "growing more and more irritated, more and more agitated, for there's nothing in the world so bad for some women as marriage" (Woolf, 44). Perhaps, Peter cannot conceive of marriage as enabling Clarissa's means of passing in a 'compulsory heterosexual' society, and thus, he is unlikely to think

of marriage as an open concept. He complains that Clarissa has to give up her subjectivity for her husband: "With twice his wits, she had to see things through his eyes - one of the tragedies of married life. With a mind of her own, she must be quoting Richard. [...] These parties, for example, were all for him, or for her idea of him" (Woolf, 84). However, this statement implies also that he might have expected the effacement of her subjectivity in their marriage considering that he is a jealous (Woolf, 174) and possibly a possessive man. He claims to know Clarissa well; however, he does not see that Clarissa is passing and that the parties are for her own enjoyment as an expression of her subjectivity. Her parties are a signifier for Clarissa's desire to align herself with various signifiers and for her talent to compose life in a creative fashion. Clarissa may think Peter absurd (Woolf, 69), but most importantly, she thinks that he takes her space and independence: "Why always take, never give?" (Woolf, 184).

Peter is a socially 'unrespectable' man thus rendering him the masculine Other. Furthermore, Clarissa as feminine Other could not have become the feminine Self if she had married the masculine Other. Peter is an odd character as he still has "the same queer look" (Woolf, 44) and has strange and irritating habits such as playing with his pocket knife. Lady Bruton, Hugh Whitbread, and Richard represent the cultural Self, and in their eyes as well as in Clarissa's, Peter is a social failure because he has not yet established himself as the masculine Self: Peter is not married (any more), he traveled to India instead of maintaining a steady job, he is androgynous, and, most importantly, he has an uncategorizable character: "But to help him, they reflected, was impossible; there was some flaw in his character. [...] It wouldn't lead to anything - not to anything permanent,

because of his character" (Woolf, 118). A marriage to Peter would not have given Clarissa social status. With Peter being the masculine Other, Clarissa would have remained the feminine Other and she would not have been able to keep her subjectivity open as he would have absorbed her subjectivity.

Clarissa has a split subjectivity, and she keeps her subjectivity open by aligning herself with various signifiers inside and outside of her Self. Clarissa explores Otherness as she is never content and is always looking for signifiers with which to align herself: "the soul; never to be quite content, or quite secure" (Woolf, 13). She invites different people making "her drawing room a sort of meeting-place; she had a genius for it. [...] Infinite numbers of dull people conglomerated round her of course. But odd unexpected people turned up; an artist sometimes; sometimes a writer; queer fish" (Woolf, 84). The presence of other people brings out parts of her that may remain hidden otherwise: "She had a sense of comedy that was really exquisite, but she needed people, always people to bring it out" (Woolf, 86). Clarissa's parties are not only for her husband, but also for herself as she can align herself with different signifiers. Her parties are "an offering. [...] An offering; to combine, to create; but to whom? An offering for the sake of offering, perhaps. Anyhow it was her gift" (Woolf, 133).

Clarissa has an ambivalent subjectivity so that her preferences and dislikes for people depend on the moment and on the perspective from which she regards people. Clarissa is a cubist in the sense that she takes things apart and puts them together differently every time she makes a synthesis: Clarissa is taking apart people's identities "cutting them up and sticking them together again" (Woolf, 114). For instance, at times

she likes Doris Kilman, and sometimes she finds her repulsive: "Kilman her enemy. That was satisfying; that was real. Ah, how she hated her - hot, hypocritical, corrupt; with all that power, Elisabeth's seducer; the woman who had crept to steal and to defile. [...] She hated her: she loved her" (Woolf, 191). Peter is another character whom Clarissa finds sometimes annoying and unbearable, yet, she cannot let go of him either, as she is still thinking about him after so many years of not having seen him.

Clarissa knows that she has an uncategorizable subjectivity, but she does not try to close her subjectivity by adjusting her image of herself to the one other people have of her. Clarissa is aware of her ambiguous character and of her Otherness, but it is most important to her to project coherence to the outside world while enjoying life. Peter cannot explain Clarissa because she is uncategorizable: "Not that she was striking; not beautiful at all there was nothing picturesque about her; she never said anything specially clever; there she was, however, there she was" (Woolf, 83). Clarissa, however, has a realistic image of herself as someone who "loved success; hated discomfort; must be liked; talked oceans of nonsense: and to this day, ask her what the Equator was, and she did not know" (Woolf, 134). What is important to Clarissa is a good projection of one's Self to the outside: "[People] looked; that was all. That was enough. They looked so clean, so sound" (Woolf, 194). Clarissa knows that the exterior projection of her Self and her interior Other do not correspond, but she accepts her split subjectivity. Clarissa looks into the mirror viewing her exterior feminine Self and then shifts to contemplating her interior feminine Other: Clarissa sees

the delicate pink face of the woman who was that very night to give a party; of

Clarissa Dalloway; of herself. [...] That was her self - pointed; dartlike; definite. That was her self when some effort, some call on her to be her self, drew the parts together, she alone knew how different, how incompatible and composed so for the world only into one center, one diamond, one woman who sat in her drawing-room and made a meeting-point, a radiancy no doubt in some dull lives, a refuge for the lonely to come to, perhaps. (Woolf, 40)

Clarissa aligns herself with Sally as Other because Sally makes Clarissa see the world from a different perspective so that Clarissa can open up her subjectivity to Otherness. Sally is Other as she is poor and has no respectable parents: "Sally [is] without a penny to her name, and [has] a father or a mother gambling at Monte Carlo" (Woolf, 80). Furthermore, Sally makes Clarissa aware of her privileged class: "Sally it was who made her feel, for the first time, how sheltered the life at Bourton was" (Woolf, 36). With Sally, Clarissa transgresses into male domains of politics and education: "There they sat, hour after hour, talking in her bedroom at the top of the house, talking about life, how they were to reform the world. They meant to found a society to abolish private property. [...] The ideas were Sally's, of course - but soon she was just as excited - read Plato in bed before breakfast; read Morris; read Shelley by the hour" (Woolf, 36). Most importantly, though, Sally and Clarissa talk of the necessity to reform the institution of marriage speaking "of marriage always as a catastrophe" (Woolf, 37).

Sally is an important signifier for Clarissa's exploration of her feminine Other, and for making Clarissa aware of other signifiers that lie outside her Self. Sally has had a great impact on Clarissa's life as Sally made Clarissa aware of her sexuality and her attraction

to women. Clarissa's account of her relationship to Sally concentrates primarily on their female-only bond, but it also lets us know that it is marked by their transition from feminine Other as girls to feminine Self as married women. In retrospect, Clarissa thinks of her relationship with Sally as a romantic one: "This falling in love with women. Take Sally Seaton; her relation in the old days with Sally Seaton. Had not that, after all, been love?" (Woolf, 35). Clarissa has genuine feelings for Sally differing from the ones for men: "The strange thing, on looking back, was the purity, the integrity, of her feeling for Sally. It was not like one's feeling for a man" (Woolf, 37). Today, when Clarissa thinks back to her feelings for Sally, she cannot feel anything initially, but then "the old feeling began to come back to her" (Woolf, 37).

When Sally kissed Clarissa more than thirty years ago, Clarissa had the most exquisite feelings, and Peter's intrusion on their kiss foreshadows their male 'identification' that will eventually and almost inevitably take place. Rich argues that 'compulsory heterosexuality' employs "societal forces [...] [to] wrench women's emotional and erotic energies away from themselves and other women and from woman-identified values" (Rich, 232). Clarissa remembers when Sally kissed her:

She and Sally fell a little behind. Then came the most exquisite moment of her whole life passing a stone urn with flowers in it. Sally stopped; picked a flower; kissed her on the lips. The whole world might have turned upside down! The others disappeared; there she was alone with Sally. And she felt that she had been given a present, wrapped up, and told just to keep it, not to look at it - a diamond, something infinitely precious, wrapped up, which, as they walked (up

and down, up and down), she uncovered, or the radiance burnt through, the revelation, the religious feeling! (Woolf, 38-39)

Peter's intruding male presence interrupts the extraordinary moment of female-only 'bonding,' and Clarissa perceives his interruption as a great disruption when "the moment of exclusive female connection is shattered by masculine intervention" (Abel, 32). Clarissa experiences his intrusion as something horrible: "It was like running one's face against a granite wall in the darkness! It was shocking; it was horrible! [...] 'Oh this horror!' she said to herself, as if she had known all along that something would interrupt, would embitter her moment of happiness" (Woolf, 39). Abel describes Peter's intrusion as "the jealous male attempting to rupture the exclusive female bond, insisting on the transference of attachment to the man, demanding heterosexuality" (Abel, 32). Clarissa transfers her attachment from Sally to Richard and thus signals a heterosexual subjectivity to the outside world; however, Clarissa lives "a double life" (Rich, 242) when she is married. As a bisexual woman, she does not completely forsake her lesbian tendencies.

Clarissa's sexual orientation permeates her subjectivity thereby affecting her marital life. Clarissa feels more drawn to other women than to her husband. Clarissa

could not resist sometimes yielding to the charm of women, not a girl, of a woman confessing, as to her they often did, some scrape, some folly. And whether it was pity, or their beauty, or that she was older, or some accident [...] she did undoubtedly then feel what men felt. Only for a moment, but it was enough. It was a sudden revelation, a tinge like a blush which one tried to check and then, as it spread one yielded to its expansion, and rushed to the

farthest verge and there quivered and felt the world come closer, swollen with some astonishing significance, some pressure of rapture, which split its thin skin and gushed and poured with an extraordinary alleviation over the cracks and sores! Then, for that moment, she had seen an illumination; a match burning in a crocus; an inner meaning almost expressed. But the closed withdrew; the hard softened. It was over - the moment. (Woolf, 34-35)

Contrary to this overwhelming account of her feelings toward women, Clarissa describes her dried-up or never viable sexual relationship with Richard in which she fails him over and over again: Her "room was an attic; the bed narrow; and lying there reading, for she slept badly, she could not dispel a virginity preserved through childbirth which clung to her like a sheet" (Woolf, 34). She is relieved that Richard does not press a sexual relationship with her anymore: "Lying awake, the floor creaked; the lit house was suddenly darkened, and if she raised her head she could just hear the click of the handle released as gently as possible by Richard, who slipped upstairs in his socks and then, as often as not, dropped his hot-water bottle and swore! How she laughed!" (Woolf, 35).

Clarissa and Septimus's subjectivity are linked to each other in the sense that Septimus is the masculine Other, just as Clarissa is the feminine Other; however, unlike Clarissa, Septimus is unable to enact the masculine Self. His war trauma, his latent homoerotic tendencies, and his lower-class status combine to undermine his achievement of Selfhood. Clarissa acknowledges her Otherness while passing as the normative

feminine Self, whereas Septimus' war trauma inevitably conduces him publicly to expose his Otherness so that he cannot pass as the masculine Self. Septimus suffers from mental illness as a result of his traumatic experiences during World War One, but society provides no room for war veterans suffering from Post-Traumatic-Stress-Disorder (PTSD): "Septimus's war trauma [...] is perpetuated and its psychological damage aggravated by a culturally prescribed process of postwar reintegration that silences and marginalizes war veterans" (DeMeester, 649). Septimus is in a vicious cycle as he cannot heal from his trauma because society renders him invisible as the hysterical masculine Other suffering from PTSD: Septimus makes no attempt to become the masculine Self *because* he suffers from PTSD; at the same time, PTSD as a mental disorder displayed in public renders him Other in the eyes of society so that he must be eliminated and made invisible. Rendering him invisible further delimits his chance to recover from his war trauma. Septimus' Otherness is also linked to the loss of his officer Evans with whom he had a homosocial bonding: "Septimus's unacknowledged homoerotic feelings for Evans make it difficult for him to come to terms with his death" (Smith, 317), and thus with his trauma of war. Because Post-World-War-One society does not allow for 'queer' liaisons between men, Septimus feels enormous guilt which further reduces his chance of recovery from his war trauma. Septimus' preoccupation with his trauma and the loss of Evans leave Rezia and Septimus estranged from one another, and Septimus initially closes off his subjectivity to Rezia as he aligns himself only with the dead signifier Evans.

Septimus and Rezia engage in a performativity of their marriage, but Septimus is uncovered as Other because, not being able to work for a living, he makes his wife the

breadwinner. Thus Septimus cannot fulfill the expectation of the masculine Self in his non-performance as breadwinner, husband, and father (Septimus does not want to have any children). When Septimus finally acknowledges Rezia as a living signifier who, in return, accepts his queerness and thus gives him protection from marginalization and solitude, they can *enjoy* their marriage as performativity. Septimus is most likely to recover from his trauma in this marital arrangement than in a performance of marriage. Yet, his alignment with his wife comes too late: the doctors have already decided to eliminate Septimus as the masculine Other. Representing upper-class values and the law of the same, they ignore the wishes and needs of the 'queer' lower-class couple Septimus and Rezia. Though the mere fact of Septimus' being different does not give the doctors the right to exclude him from society, they assume this right anyhow, as they represent the law and decide who is Self and Other. Septimus' suicide is a resistance to the law that tries either to make him the masculine Self or to render him invisible by liquidation. The elimination that threatens Septimus as a result of his masculine Otherness shows that Clarissa would have suffered liquidation, too, if she had gone public with her Otherness, and if she had not "passed" as the feminine Self.

Septimus is a man who develops from masculine Other to Self to Other. Before the war, Septimus is the masculine Other as he is androgynous and unable to fulfill expectations of manliness: he "looked weakly" (Woolf, 94) and has literary inclinations in spite of being a lower-class man. But his brave soldierly deeds in the war render Septimus the masculine Self as "he developed manliness; he was promoted; he drew the attention, indeed the affection of his officer, Evans by name" (Woolf, 94). His war trauma, however,

diverts Septimus to the masculine Other as he suffers from PTSD expressed by male hysteria. After the war, Septimus seems to be the masculine Self as he gets married and appears to form a heterosexual relationship with Rezia; yet, Septimus and Rezia's marriage is a performativity as Septimus aligns himself with the dead signifier Evans while disregarding Rezia and being disgusted by heterosexual intercourse more generally (Woolf, 97-98).

Septimus cannot pass as the masculine Self because he suffers from his war trauma, and his marriage guarantees him no Selfhood because he publicly exposes his Otherness. Septimus cannot enact his role of masculinity because he suffers from trauma: "Trauma inevitably damages the victim's faith in the assumptions he has held in the past about himself and the world and leaves him struggling to find new, more reliable ideologies to give order and meaning to his post-traumatic life" (DeMeester, 650). DeMeester explains further that

Persistent and delayed responses to combat stress occur because traumatic events, especially war, damage the foundations of the victim's identity. According to psychologist Erik Erikson, combat damages the soldier's identity, which is "[a] sense of identity [that] produces the ability to experience oneself as something that has continuity and sameness"; and therefore, the soldiers' lives "no longer hung together and never would again" (qtd. in Leed 3-4). War neurosis is the result of a shattered sense of identity, the inability to integrate the veteran's identity as a warrior into his pre- and postwar civilian identities. (DeMeester, 656).

Septimus cannot pass as the masculine Self and thereby avoid his elimination because he publicly displays a shattered sense of his subjectivity, and he cannot recover from his trauma because society does not understand and accept male hysteria as it is queer, other, and disease-like. Septimus' situation is further aggravated by his lower-class status, as he cannot fulfill the masculine role of breadwinner. So out of financial necessity, Rezia has to take on this role which, in turn, makes Rezia reject Septimus' Otherness.

The marriage between Rezia and Septimus is a performativity in which Septimus and Rezia switch the roles of femininity and masculinity. This marital arrangement promises a recovery for Septimus from his trauma only when Rezia accepts Septimus' Otherness and when Septimus perceives her as a friend rather than as an intrusion. The performativity of their marriage is initially difficult for Rezia to accept because it contradicts the norm; that is, according to ideological impositions of masculinity Septimus is not supposed to be Other: "She could tell nobody, not even Septimus now, and looking back, she saw him sitting in his shabby overcoat alone, on the seat, hunched up, staring. And it was cowardly for a man to say he would kill himself, but Septimus had fought; he was brave; he was not Septimus now" (Woolf, 25). As a foreigner in England, Rezia is always already Other so that she is likely to feel uncomfortable not having a husband who would enable her feminine Self. When Rezia feels deserted and tricked by the medical profession when the doctors do not help, Septimus bonds with her. Dr. Holmes ignores Septimus' symptoms thinking that "there is nothing the matter" (Woolf, 24) with Septimus, and Dr. William Bradshaw simply wants to subject Septimus by excluding Septimus from the general public. By sending him to a sanatorium, Bradshaw aims to render Septimus'

Otherness invisible: "Naked, defenseless, the exhausted, the friendless received the impress of Sir William's will. He swooped; he devoured. He shut people up" (Woolf, 112). When the doctors want to separate Rezia and Septimus, and try to shut him up, she decides to protect Septimus herself. Septimus always feels deserted (Woolf, 101) due to his traumatic experiences, and he aligns himself with Rezia when she feels deserted herself so that eventually he comes to accept her as an accomplice.

When Septimus and Rezia begin to enjoy their performativity of marriage, Septimus has a chance to recover from his trauma within this marital arrangement. Septimus can recover from his trauma of war by keeping his subjectivity open and seeing his alignment with Rezia as something positive. Accordingly, Žižek suggests that "'Reconciliation' does not convey any kind of miraculous healing of the wound of scission, we just have to *re-mark* it" (Žižek, 78). Septimus needs to remark his trauma by drawing a 'positive' conclusion out of his traumatic experiences in order to survive, such as accepting Rezia as a source of protection, acknowledging his 'queerness,' and enjoying his marriage as performativity. When Rezia and Septimus accept their position of Otherness, they start building a community of their own against the outside world: "Not for weeks had they laughed like this together, poking fun privately like married people. [...] Never had she felt so happy! Never in her life!" (Woolf, 157). Septimus sees Rezia as a strong, active, protective, masculine-like subject who makes him feel secure: "When she sewed, he thought, she made a sound like a kettle on the hob; bubbling, murmuring, always busy, her strong little pointed fingers pinching and poking; her needle flashing straight. [...] He would wait in this warm place" (Woolf, 157). Septimus feels community with Rezia as they

are alone together against the rest of the world: "He had become himself then, he had laughed then. They had been alone together" (Woolf, 158).

Rezia and Septimus eventually engage *comfortably* in the performativity of their marriage, but there is no time to enact a performance of their marriage to the outside world, as Dr. Holmes intrudes on their arrangement trying to shut up Septimus as masculine Other. Dr. Bradshaw represents the law of the symbolic order and as Septimus' Otherness threatens this system the doctors decide to shut him up:

Septimus' nervous breakdown poses a threat to what Sir William represents: the symbolic, the regime of rationality, the reign of norms and the normal, for Septimus lets his unconscious forces slip or break through the symbolic order and is unable to stay in the place of identity prescribed by social convention. [...] Sir William is not only at the head of his profession; he is the representation of Morality, Law, and Order. (Wang, 185)

Now that Septimus has accepted Rezia as a source of protection while she acknowledges his Otherness, he does not want to be separated from her (Woolf, 161), and he sees Rezia as triumphing over Holmes and Bradshaw: "Over them she triumphed. [...] And, she said, nothing should separate them" (Woolf, 162-163). However, when Septimus realizes that Rezia cannot protect him from the law that rules without pity over the less privileged, he commits suicide as a form of resistance to the law.

As a split and hysterical subject, Septimus resists the submission to the symbolic order, and his suicide signifies this resistance. Žižek explains that "the resistance, the hesitation of the subject fully to assume his symbolic mandate [...] defines the position of

a hysteric. [...] And what is hysterical theatre if not a staging of this resistance?" (Žižek, 156). Septimus' suicide is thus resistance to the law and not a plunge out of depression: "Holmes would get him. But no; not Holmes; not Bradshaw. [...] There remained only the window, the large Bloomsbury lodging-house window. [...] But he would wait till the very last moment. He did not want to die. Life was good" (Woolf, 163-164). Septimus kills himself satisfying Holmes' desire for the elimination of Otherness while resisting the law. Rezia understands that Septimus resists and that he has no chance in this society as the masculine Other: "Holmes was at the door. 'I'll give it to you!' he cried, and flung himself vigorously, violently down on to Mrs. Filmer's area railings. 'The coward!' cried Dr. Holmes, bursting the door open. Rezia ran to the window, she saw; she understood. [...] 'He's dead,' [Rezia] said, smiling at the poor old woman" (Woolf, 164-165).

I have demonstrated in this chapter that there are strong ideological impositions for the 'normative' formation of the subject as the feminine Self and as the masculine Self, as well as powerful ideological constraints to reproduce and perpetuate this 'normalcy.' Marriage is a site for the production, reproduction, and perpetuation of normalcy by rendering the married subject 'normative' and, simultaneously, by marginalizing and even rendering invisible the unmarried and deviant subject. Societal values in *Mrs. Dalloway* dictate that gendered roles of femininity or masculinity be enacted, and the 'proof' of this enactment is a performance of heterosexuality as this society functions by 'compulsory heterosexuality.' The compulsion to be heterosexual forces subjects to marry in order to

demonstrate to the public that one is 'normative' and heterosexual, and that one belongs to one category of gender. 'Compulsory heterosexuality' hence marginalizes and even eliminates Otherness as a disease-like deviancy. Clarissa's decision to become the feminine Self by means of marriage while being the feminine Other to the inside, demonstrates ideological impositions of 'compulsory heterosexuality.'

In the performance of marriage, the subject enacts ideologically imposed roles of gender and heterosexuality. This marital arrangement is a closed concept as it leaves no space for the deviant subject to explore Otherness in one's Self as well as Otherness in Others. In the performativity of marriage, the subject can explore Otherness, keep her/his subjectivity open, and use marriage as a means to pass as 'normative.' Clarissa engages in a performativity of her marriage that enables her passing as a normative subject who does not have to fear threats of marginalization or annihilation as Other. Clarissa has a split subjectivity oscillating between feminine Other and feminine Self, but it is safer for her to project a coherent subjectivity to the outside as ideological constraints do not allow for Otherness, queerness, and incoherence.

Septimus' character demonstrates that the subject has to project Selfhood to the outside, in order to survive in a society that constructs its subjects as heterosexual, normative, and coherent. Septimus' marriage as performativity offers him no protection from being rendered Other because he is a lower-class subject without privileged treatment for and recognition of his trauma. Septimus' subject positioning shows that it is more difficult for the lower-class masculine Other to pass as the masculine Self than it is for the upper-class Clarissa to pass as the feminine Self. Septimus suffers from a war

trauma, and his traumatic experiences prevent him from enacting the role of masculine Self. As a man, Septimus has to fulfill ideological expectations to be the breadwinner; as a lower-class man, he has to fulfill this task even more so out of financial necessity. The final alignment with his wife Rezia should have been likely to enable Septimus to remark his trauma by drawing a 'positive' conclusion from his traumatic experiences; however, his less privileged class status prompts the doctors to assume the right to excise him as the masculine Other. Septimus' suicide is a resistance to the imposition of 'normalcy', and it is his last attempt to maintain the integrity of his subjectivity as Other. Woolf promotes the performativity of marriage as it enables the deviant subject to pass as normative; the performativity of marriage is much more likely to enable surviving as Other than a performance would. Yet, Woolf also criticizes a society that functions by ideological impositions, that forces its subjects into a normative existence, that necessitates passing in the first place, that produces concepts of Otherness and Selfhood, and that lets normative subjects assume the right to eliminate deviant subjects. If society had accepted Otherness and respected its lower-class subjects, Septimus would have been more likely to recover from his trauma and survive.

**Chapter 3:**  
**Race, Gender, and Black Female Sexuality  
 in Nella Larsen's *Quicksand***

“Self-consciousness exists *in itself* and *for itself*, in that and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it is only by being acknowledged or recognized.”  
 (Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind* in Fanon, 216)

In *Quicksand*, Nella Larsen shows the quasi fatal interrelations and constraints of race, Black female sexuality and gender roles for the female character. Ideological impositions of these categories serve to close Helga's subjectivity because she has to marry in order to legitimate her female sexuality, and because she has to engage in the performance of race and gender once she is married. Helga's subjectivity is open as long as she oscillates between Black and White, that is, as long as she does not fix her subjectivity to an *either Black or White* imposition of race. As a mulatta, Helga finds this discursive space of oscillation traumatic; however, this space is also liberating because in it Helga can align herself with different signifiers, and explore the Otherness of her Self, as well as Otherness in others. Helga begins to close her subjectivity when she thinks that she needs to marry in order to legitimize her sexual desires as a Black woman, because Black female sexuality is subject to negative ideological constructs as a site of deviancy, as I will explain further on. Moreover, when she marries a Black man, she attaches her subjectivity to *one* race thus foundationalizing her mulatta existence as Black, and more significantly, confining herself to the role of mother and wife. Her marriage to Reverend

Green confines her subjectivity even more, for religious constraints keep her in her place as a subservient wife and mother of many children. As a married woman, she is trapped in her gendered roles, and her subjectivity closes because she can no longer oscillate. When Helga turns down Axel Olsen's marriage proposal, she thinks she escapes being owned by a White man; however, her marriage to a Black man proves not to be a much better choice as she has now become her husband's 'slave.' Before Helga is married, she has the possibility to leave when she feels suffocated by race and gender; now that she is confined to the performance of her gendered role, she cannot leave, but is likely to die.

In this chapter, I will apply post-colonial and feminist theory in order to highlight the intersection of race, gender, and Black female sexuality, as well as the performance or performativity of these categories. I will set up a framework of Black subjectivity in order to explain the impact of negative ideological representations of Black female sexuality on the subject formation of Helga as a mulatta. I will then describe her oscillation between Blackness and Whiteness highlighting the constructedness of race as well as the possibility for performativity of race. Finally, I will demonstrate her marriage to be a submission to ideological constructs and religious constraints, and a fixation upon one race. As a consequence of her submission to such constraints, Helga closes her subjectivity as she engages in the performance of race and gender.

In *Quicksand*, Larsen portrays the main character, Helga, as more than Other as she is a mulatta oscillating initially between Blackness and Whiteness. Helga eventually becomes the Black feminine Self when she fixes her subjectivity to one race through marriage, yet, at the expense of her open subjectivity. Helga's actions do not follow

independent decisions, but are reactions to ideological impositions and constraints of race, gender, and female sexuality. Furthermore, belonging to a race entails enacting not only a racial but also a gendered role such as Helga's enactment of an asexual feminine role in resistance to the ideological imposition of the Black woman as libidinous.<sup>7</sup> Whenever Helga feels suffocated by gender and race constraints, she leaves; however, race and Black female sexuality as sites of deviancy prove to be much more problematic than gender in her decision to marry. Helga only becomes truly suffocated by her gender roles when she can no longer escape them as a mother and wife.

As a mulatta, Helga finds herself in a traumatic space between Blackness and Whiteness; however, her interracial position demonstrates that categories of race are socially imposed as she can assume the roles of either Blackness or Whiteness. Depending on the society Helga frequents, she changes her behaviour of Blackness or Whiteness, and her oscillating position enables her to challenge the fixedness of categories of Whiteness and Blackness from a more critical perspective: "Larsen makes readers pause and question whether skin color is merely a surface that encases the self or whether surfaces in fact create the self" (Hostetler, 36). Race is a performance, and Helga's life before her marriage demonstrates that categories of race can be broken open for performativity and passing. This space of oscillation is difficult for Helga because she makes Blacks, Whites, and her own Self feel uncertain as to which race she really belongs, but her oscillating existence keeps her subjectivity open, and calls into question the seemingly firm category of race.

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<sup>7</sup> See exposition by Hazel Carby on p.60.

Race is a discursively constructed category and thus a performativity, and it produces power relations between the races by means of interpellation. The category of race is an historically contingent fabrication that is like an empty signifier filled with meanings retrospectively. Exterior racial phenomena of black and white skin produce a 'reality' of Blackness and Whiteness by means of contingency and discourse, and thus they bring forth real power relations: "Constructs are [...] 'real' to the extent that they are fictive phenomena that gain power within discourse" (*Gender Trouble*, 119). For instance, when Helga is in Denmark, her aunt casts her in the role of a Black and exotic woman and thus imposes a racial (Black) and sexual (exotic and seductive) subjectivity on her. Physically to belong to a race - for instance, by colour of the skin - means to be faced with ideologically imposed meaning through the categories of Whiteness or Blackness by means of interpellation and naming: "To be named is [...] to be inculcated into that law and to be formed, bodily, in accordance with that law" (*Bodies that Matter*, 72). Helga's mulatta existence proves that race is an enactment of ideological impositions as she can enact Blackness or Whiteness depending on the society she frequents (American South versus Harlem/ Harlem versus Copenhagen), and that the performance of race can be broken open to performativity.

The subject is formed through discourse and the law, but subjects can resist the law by using discourse to resignify the category of race as language is not fixed but always already performative. Butler draws on Žižek to explain that discursive interpellation is always already subject to failure as interpellation is an act of contingency and thus subject to instability:

Any effort of discursive interpellation or constitution is subject to failure, haunted by contingency, to the extent that discourse itself invariably fails to totalize the social field. [...] In Žižek's view, every discursive formation must be understood in relation to that which it cannot accommodate within its own discourse or symbolic terms. [...] [Subject formation] is a failure of complete determination, a constitutive contingency, that emerges within the ideological field as its permanent (and promising) instability. (*Bodies That Matter*, 192)

Interpellation is open to resignification because naming is unstable as it is a result of contingency: "The impossibility of a full recognition, that is of ever fully inhabiting the name by which one's social identity is inaugurated and mobilized, implies the instability and incompleteness of subject-formation" (*Bodies that Matter*, 226). As the operation of language is contingent, so the performativity of subjectivity through discourse allows for the resignification of the category of race.

Because the ideologically and discursively produced categories of race become fixed by the reiteration of the interpellation, it follows that an absolute racial enactment can never be fully achieved as it is merely a production. The racially interpellated subject has a racial identity attributed to her/him simply by naming her/him Black or White thereby producing a performance of race. Butler draws on Žižek to explain that "the effectivity *and* the radical contingency of naming [is] an identity-constituting performance. As a consequence, the name mobilizes an identity at the same time that it confirms its fundamental alterability. The name orders and institutes a variety of free-floating signifiers into an 'identity'; the name effectively 'sutures' the object" (*Bodies that Matter*, 208). Butler

explains the process of naming as one in which the referent becomes fixed over time by its very own reiteration:

A proper name of a person *comes to refer* first by a preliminary set of descriptions that assist in the *fixing* of the referent, a referent that subsequently comes to refer rigidly and regardless of its descriptive features. [...] The “fixing” of the referent is thus a “citation” of an original fixing, a reiteration of the divine process of naming, whereby naming [...] inaugurates [...] existence within the divinely sanctioned community of men. (*Bodies that Matter*, 212).

Helga's ‘flexible’ enactment of her Blackness and Whiteness indicates her performativity of race as well as the impossibility of ever fully achieving these racial categories. Identification of the racialized subject with *either Whiteness or Blackness* can never be fully achieved since race is an approximation, a contestation, and a negotiation. Butler explains that identifications are open to resignification: “Identifications are never simply or definitively *made* or *achieved*; they are insistently constituted, contested, and negotiated” (*Bodies that Matter*, 76). Helga's mulatta existence shows that the interpellation of her subjectivity as Black or White is not fixed but alters with her choice of her racial subject positioning (e.g. in the South versus North/ America versus Europe).

Race is discursively produced by distinguishing the racial Self from the racial Other, and by excluding the racial Other. A member of a race is interpellated Black or White due to her/his skin's colour resulting in ideological impositions and constraints upon subjectivity. Frantz Fanon argues that Blackness or Whiteness appears only to be a skin colour, yet the ideological construction of certain characteristics ensues from this

phenomenon. Blacks, on the one hand, have to assume a White mask if they want to be accepted somehow into the world of Whiteness; however, they alienate themselves from their own (Black) people through the assumption of the White mask (Fanon, 17-25). Whites, on the other hand, make up the dominant discourse and construct their existence as superior to Blackness so that they will never accept a Black person with a White mask (Fanon, 30-38). In the United States of the 1920s, Whites construct Blacks as inferior and as the cultural Other by means of interpellation and hegemony.<sup>8</sup> Within the Harlem Renaissance, Blackness represents the cultural Self, yet, Blacks may still imitate Whiteness. For instance, Anne Grey is Helga's Black friend in Harlem, and

She hated white people with a deep and burning hatred, with the kind of hatred which, finding itself held in sufficiently numerous groups, was capable one day, on some great provocation, of bursting into dangerously malignant flames. But she aped their clothes, their manners, and their gracious ways of living. While claiming loudly the undiluted good of all things Negro, she yet disliked the songs, the dances, and the softly blurred speech of the race. (Larsen, 48)

Blacks form the cultural Self within Harlem by excluding the cultural Other (Whites), but even in Harlem Blacks ultimately perform Whiteness, because they seek to be recognized and accepted (not only tolerated) by the dominant discourse of the Whites. For instance, the rich Black older widow Mrs. Hayes-Rore engages Helga as her companion on her travels and thus represents the value system of the dominant White society which demands that respectable women do not travel alone.

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<sup>8</sup> See Binder, for instance.

In the world of Whites, Blackness is constructed as outside cultural normalcy, and hence it is a site of deviancy. As the cultural Other, Blackness is constructed as exotic, distorted, and even evil. Thus Blacks as the cultural Other are excluded from the White world; however, Blacks want to be recognized by the Whites as they make up the dominant discourse. Fanon explains how he was rendered Other and excluded from the dominant discourse when he was interpellated, in the country of the colonizer, as a Black and thus scary man:

I subjected myself to an objective examination, I discovered my blackness, my ethnic characteristics; and I was battered down by tom-toms, cannibalism, intellectual deficiency, fetishism, racial defects, slave-ships. [...] On that day, completely dislocated, unable to be aboard with the other, the white man, who unmercifully imprisoned me, I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object. [...] My body was given to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored. [...] The white world, the only honorable one, barred me from all participation. [...] I was expected to behave like a black man - or at least like a nigger. I am the slave not of the "idea" that others have of me but of my own appearance. (Fanon, 112-114, 116)

Whites can construct Blackness as the Other, because "a certain sensitizing action takes place" (Fanon, 154), when Whites and Blacks interact: "If his [the Black's] psychic structure is weak, one observes a collapse of the ego. The goal of his behavior will be The Other (in the guise of the white man), for The Other alone can give him worth. That is on the ethical level: self-esteem" (Fanon, 154). Blacks in Harlem will thus perform a

Whiteness in order to be recognized by Whites, and simultaneously reject Whiteness while aspiring towards White masks.

Fanon draws on Hegel to explain that the formation and recognition of the Self is possible only if the Self grants Selfhood to the Other. In the Harlem Renaissance, Blacks grant themselves Selfhood, yet, outside Harlem, Blacks remain the racial Other who are not recognized by the Whites. A mutual recognition of each other (Blacks and Whites) has to take place in order for each to form its own subjectivity, or else the cultural Other will aspire to become like the culturally normative in order to gain recognition:

Man is human only to the extent to which he tries to impose his existence on another man in order to be recognized by him. As long as he has not been effectively recognized by the other, that other will remain the theme of his actions. It is on that other being, on recognition by that other being, that his own human worth and reality depend. It is that other being in whom the meaning of his life is condensed. (Fanon, 216-217)

The society of the United States in the 1920s was dominated by Whites as the normative Self, and for Blacks to be recognized by the White world, they aspired to become that normative Self.

Whites construct Blacks as the cultural Other particularly in regards to representing Black sexuality as overtly excessive. As a result, Blacks counter this ideologically imposed constraint by emphasizing their asexuality. In constructing Blacks as overtly sexual (Fanon, 157 ff), Whites portray them as the personification of evil (Fanon, 180) and as a symbol of sin (Fanon, 189). By the same token, the Black woman in the US of the 1920s

is often represented as licentious:

Hazel Carby (1987) argues that this myth originates with the construction of the sexual identity of the female slave. Southern ideology included a trope on pure white womanhood (Welter, 1976) that actually worked to control white women and thus legitimate white offspring. She asserts that in contrast to the passive sexuality assigned to the white woman, “overt sexuality, on the other hand, emerged in images of the black woman” (Carby, 1987, 27). These images [...] functioned to absolve white slave masters of their responsibility for the rape of slave women. (Carby in Barnett, 578)

Fanon says that “in Europe the Negro has one function: that of symbolizing the lower emotions, the baser inclinations, the dark side of the soul” (Fanon, 190). Fanon calls this racial-sexual prejudice “the unreflected imposition of a culture” (Fanon, 191) that has a real effect on the formation of the Black subject. Helga’s perception of herself is shaped by this prejudice, and when she is constructed as a Black, exotic, and libidinous woman, she is “forever in combat with [her] own image” (Fanon, 194) fighting off this racial-sexual prejudice.

Late nineteenth Century Black female writers responded to this image of the Black woman as libidinous by representing their Black female characters as absolutely chaste and asexual. Larsen, by contrast, a member of the later Harlem Renaissance, tried to find a space to represent Black female sexuality:

even while Larsen wished to explore her heroine Helga Crane’s sexuality, she was compelled, in order to avoid primitivist stereotypes, to make Helga a model

of chastity and education, a person who never uses dialect, who disapproves of nightclubs, dance, and promiscuity, and who finds it natural to use phrases such as “Thanks awfully” to her fellow teachers in Naxos, Mississippi. (Gray, 257)

Despite Larsen’s attempt to create a space for Black female sexuality, Barnett argues that while “Helga may experience authentic desire [for two men in the novel], there is no mode of representation or any legitimate space within society in which black women’s sexuality can be expressed” (Barnett, 580). Helga counters this racial-sexual ideological imposition on her subjectivity by emphasizing her asexuality. When she allows for her sexual desires to awaken, she has to legitimate her Black female sexuality by entering marriage.

Helga uses her marriage to become the Black feminine Self because she feels pressure to legitimate her sexuality, and to prove that she is human and intelligent, and not animalistic and sexually excessive. Fanon argues that Blacks as colonized people want to become superior to their Blackness because Whites have taught them that their Blackness is inferior. Blacks thus want to reach a human level, constructed and recognized by Whites, by becoming like Whites: “The black man wants to be white.” (Fanon, 9). He says that “white men consider themselves superior to black men. [...] Black men want to prove to white men, at all costs, the richness of their thought, the equal value of their intellect” (Fanon, 10). Likewise, Black women want to prove that their bodies are just as pure as their White counterparts’, thus creating a cult of true Black womanhood.

Although Helga’s asexuality renders her the cultural Self, Helga is always already the cultural Other because she is a mulatta springing from an interracial liaison. As a mulatta,

Helga feels like an outsider, because she is between the two cultures of Blackness and Whiteness belonging to neither of the two completely. The border lines between the two cultures are rigid, and in Naxos, Helga strongly feels her difference from the other Black teachers and from the Black student body: "she was, she knew, in a queer indefinite way, a disturbing factor" (Larsen, 7). As a mulatta, Helga cannot feel part of either society because Black and White society are equally stratified:

Negro society, she had learned, was as complicated and as rigid in its ramifications as the highest strata of white society. If you couldn't prove your ancestry and connections, you were tolerated, but you didn't "belong." You could be queer, or even attractive, or bad, or brilliant, or even love beauty and such nonsense if you were a Rankin, or a Leslie, or a Scoville; in other words, if you had a family. But if you were just plain Helga Crane, of whom nobody had ever heard, it was presumptuous of you to be anything but inconspicuous and conformable. (Larsen, 8)

Nonetheless, Helga continually oscillates between the two cultures, and as she feels like an outsider in both cultures, she can only have a temporary feeling of belonging although she can leave when she feels suffocated by constraints of race, gender, and Black female sexuality.

Helga's unusual parentage renders her Other not only because her parents come from different races but also because they were probably not married and because Helga's mother is White. Helga is always already Other as a mulatta, but her mulatta existence is even more Other, because it was the White woman, Helga's mother, who had 'accepted'

and loved a Black man. Usually, the parentage of racially mixed children is such that the father is White and the mother is Black echoing an unequal relationship between slave master and slave. Helga's parentage of White mother and Black father is thus an unusual miscegenation. Fanon explains that having a White mother is an honor because it proves that the relationship between the parents must have been romantic: "The white man can allow himself the luxury of sleeping with many women [...] But when a white woman accepts a black man there is automatically a romantic aspect. [...] It is an honor to be the daughter of a white woman. That proves one was not 'made in the bushes'" (Fanon, 46). But an interracial romantic relationship where the mother is White also 'upsets' the norm as this type of relationship indicates that miscegenation was voluntary. Another factor adding to Helga's Otherness is that it is uncertain whether Helga's parents were ever married. Hence, Helga's parentage is utterly unacceptable and renders Helga absolutely Other:

During the little pause that followed Helga's recital, the faces of the two women, which had been bare, seemed to harden. It was almost as if they had slipped on masks. The girl wished to hide her turbulent feeling and to appear indifferent to Mrs. Hayes-Rore's opinion of her story. The women felt that the story, dealing as it did with race intermingling and possible adultery, was beyond definite discussion. For among black people, as among white people, it is tacitly understood that these things are not mentioned - and therefore they do not exist. (Larsen, 39)

Helga is the cultural Other not only because she oscillates between Blackness and

Whiteness, but also because she is suspected of being the illegitimate child of a White mother. When Helga wants to be socially acceptable in Black society, she has to pass as Black. Yet hiding her White heritage makes her “feel like a criminal” (Larsen, 42) in Harlem.

Helga thinks that her Otherness is keeping her from achieving things in life, but her Otherness actually helps to keep her subjectivity open. Helga explores her Otherness and Otherness in others. Thus “Helga Crane’s position is actually enabling, allowing her to be both inside and outside the race issue, observer and participant” (Gray, 258). Helga’s desire for exploration prompts her decision to leave Naxos and commence her journey: “It wasn’t, she was suddenly aware, merely the school and its ways and its decorous stupid people that oppressed her. There was something else, some other more ruthless force, a quality within herself, which was frustrating her, had always frustrated her, kept her from getting the things she had wanted. Still wanted” (Larsen, 10-11). Jeffrey Gray sees Helga’s mulatta existence as one of a traveler between cultures and continents making the reader realize that race is a construction and not an essence, and that the mulatta existence is a potentially enabling factor in Helga’s life:

*Quicksand* offers the much more profound (and, to many, no doubt distressing) idea that there is no essence, black, white, or mulatto, that arrival at essence is always deferred; and that in our awareness of ourselves as difference, everyone is mulatto, born of and self-located between two differences. The racially indeterminate and travelling mulatto figure serves to open up possibilities, to heighten our awareness of that absence of determined essence, and of the

reality that the construction of the Self goes on, home and abroad, subject to forces that crowd the body with contradictory representations - pleasant and disturbing, limiting and enabling. (Gray, 268)

Helga is a traveler between cultures and her indeterminate subject position enables her to pass as the identity she chooses to produce and enact. Hence, she can keep her subjectivity open by exploring her Otherness; however, her position is traumatic as others reject her uncategorizability.

Helga's mulatta existence upsets Blacks and Whites as neither can finally categorize her racial subjectivity, and in return, Helga has difficulties further developing a lingering feeling of belonging to one of the two cultures, as none of them grants her Selfhood, but rather traps her in racial, sexual, and gendered roles. Helga loves and in turn renounces both cultures of Blackness and Whiteness because her inherent Otherness makes Blacks and Whites reject her as not 'complete'-ly White or Black. Helga feels rejected for her Otherness: "She, Helga Crane, a despised mulatto" (Larsen, 18). Thus she leaves the Black and White societies by turns because she feels suffocated by racial prejudice. When Helga is accepted by the Blacks in Harlem, she loves Harlem and wants to have Black children in Harlem (Larsen, 46); however, when she feels trapped there by racial prejudice and immobility;

She began to lose confidence in the fullness of her life, the glow began to fade from her conception of it. As the days multiplied, her need of something, something vaguely familiar, but which she could not put a name to and hold for definite examination, became almost intolerable. [...] She felt shut in, trapped.

[...] Nothing seemed any good. She became a little frightened, and then shocked to discover that, for some unknown reason, it was herself she was afraid of. (Larsen, 47)

As a result of Helga's feeling trapped in Harlem, she decides to leave for Europe renouncing her ties with her Black heritage: "Should she be yoked to these despised black folk? [...] She didn't, in spite of her racial markings, belong to these dark segregated people. She was different. She felt it. It wasn't merely a matter of color. It was something broader, deeper, that made folk kin" (Larsen, 55). Hoping for the Whites to grant her Selfhood, Helga goes to Copenhagen where she is also rendered Other and where racism is merely replaced by exoticism.

Helga seeks primarily an attachment to people of a kindred spirit, but rejection on the part of both Blacks and Whites due to her uncategorizability makes Helga vulnerable to being marked Other. So she enacts a performance of race in order to be granted Selfhood. Helga explores both cultures separately, and Helga ultimately enjoys a mixed race atmosphere where she does not have to belong to one race in particular. For instance, Helga admires Audrey, a woman she meets in Harlem, who is the only person to interact with people of different races and invites these people to her parties: "What [Helga] felt for the beautiful, calm, cool girl who had the assurance, the courage, so placidly to ignore racial barriers and give her attention to people, was not contempt but envious admiration" (Larsen, 62). On the boat to Copenhagen, Helga is relieved to feel part of her Self and not part of a race: "that blessed sense of belonging to herself alone and not to a race" (Larsen, 64). Helga's mulatta existence undoes categories of race that

ideology constructs as fixed, but finally she seeks to find her 'true' subjectivity by aspiring toward belonging to one race because she feels that only belonging will grant her Selfhood. In Copenhagen, the white painter Axel Olsen constructs Helga not only as the racial Other, but also objectifies her as the libidinous Black woman. Adding a sexual component to her Black exoticism keeps Helga even more from achieving Selfhood, and thus she renounces her ties with the White world and returns to the United States. In the United States, she learns in her encounter with the mulatto Dr. Anderson that even the racially mixed man grants her no Selfhood as he confines her subjectivity to that of a desirable sexual object. She eventually fixes her racial identity to Blackness by her marriage to a Black man in the hope of evading racism and White sexism forever and in hope of the Black man's granting her Selfhood and salvation; however, her marriage closes her subjectivity as it fixes her to the role of mother and wife once again.

Larsen exposes the construction of race both in the United States and in Europe. But it is only during Helga's stay in Europe that racial constructs become clearly apparent to her as she is specifically asked to enact a performance of her race and her Otherness. In Europe, Helga embodies multiple Othernesses as a Black African-American woman: "difference is different in Europe. To be a foreigner is to be additionally embodied: one is African *and* American. For Helga, embodiment is multiple: she is exhibited as black, female, American, English-speaking, and silent - that is, because of the language, at a remove of greater voicelessness" (Gray, 262). In Copenhagen, Helga engages in a performativity of her racial and multiple Otherness as she enacts and represents exoticism for the Europeans while differing from the exterior projection of her Self: "In Denmark

Helga does not perform her notion of herself; she masquerades as the exotic other. The impression that Helga is to make in her 'exotic things' is a calculatedly produced construction" (Barnett, 584). Helga's aunt, Fru Dahl, tells Helga to be different and exotic: "And you're a foreigner, and different. You must have bright things to set off the color of your lovely brown skin. Striking things, exotic things. You must make an impression.' [...]

In her own mind she had determined the role Helga was to play in advancing the social fortunes of the Dahls at Copenhagen, and she meant to begin at once" (Larsen, 68). Helga enjoys her performativity of race and the new construction of her subjectivity, but only until she realizes that Olsen objectifies her and views her with racial-sexual prejudice.

In Copenhagen, Helga engages in the performativity of race, but this enactment initiates a vicious circle. Helga's mulatta existence and performativity of race render her Other, and as her performativity grants her no Selfhood she strives to receive acknowledgment by pleasing the White people's expectations of her exoticism; fulfilling these expectations maintains her status as Other leaving her without Selfhood. Helga's performance of her supposed exoticism and racial Otherness objectifies her as a piece of art to be looked at, admired, or dismissed, and thus she poses no threat to the Selfhood of the people of Copenhagen; however, this objectification renders her Other, granting her no Selfhood as she imitates ideologically imposed views of Blackness:

Helga felt like nothing so much as some new and strange species of pet dog being proudly exhibited. Everyone was very polite and very friendly, but she felt the massed curiosity and interest, so discreetly hidden under the polite greetings. [...] She had only to bow and look pleasant. [...] No other woman in

the stately pale-blue room was so greatly exposed. But she liked the small murmur of wonder and admiration which rose when Uncle Poul brought her in. She liked the compliments in the men's eyes as they bent over her hand. [...] The women too were kind, feeling no need for jealousy. To them this girl, this Helga Crane, this mysterious niece of the Dahls, was not to be reckoned seriously in the scheme of things. True, she was attractive, unusual, in an exotic, almost savage way, but she wasn't one of them. She didn't at all count. (Larsen, 70)

When Helga sees Black actors in a circus performing their ideologically constructed racial subjectivity, she feels very uncomfortable and exposed: The Blacks on stage make Helga conscious of the fact that her enactment of racial attributes is a performance for the amusement of the Whites, and that this enactment renders Blacks the Other and does not grant them any Selfhood:

Helga Crane was not amused. Instead she was filled with a fierce hatred for the cavorting Negroes on the stage. She felt ashamed, betrayed, as if these pale pink and white people among whom she lived had suddenly been invited to look upon something in her which she had hidden away and wanted to forget. And she was shocked at the avidity at which Olsen beside her drank it in. [...] Else why their constant slavish imitation of traits not their own? Why their constant begging to be considered as exact copies of other people? (Larsen, 83)

Helga engages in the performativity of race in order to explore the Otherness of her Self, as well as to be granted Selfhood by the Whites. However, Olsen's portrait as well as this

racial enactment of Blackness make her realize that this very enactment only feeds into Whites' expectations of Blackness while not granting her any Selfhood at all.

Olsen's portrait of Helga makes evident the link between racial representation and sexual objectification, as well as between stereotypical iconography and the constraint on identity. Both in America and in Europe, Helga is represented as a physical object: "Like the text in which she appears, she is first seen as an aesthetically self-conscious surface, carefully crafted and controlled" (Hostetler, 37). Although Helga is always described as an object of art, "it is not until the crucial passages in Denmark, where we see Helga as the object of a series of ideologically charged representational moves, that Helga and the narrator recognize the exoticization and objectification of Black woman's sexuality" (Barnett, 578). Olsen treats Helga with arrogance (Larsen, 73), and he sees her as an exotic piece of art:

But in spite of his expressed interest and even delight in her exotic appearance, in spite of his constant attendance upon her, he gave no sign of his more personal kind of concern which - encouraged by Aunt Katrina's mild insinuations and Uncle Poul's subtle questionings - she has tried to secure. Was it, she wondered, race that kept him silent, held him back. Helga Crane frowned on this thought, putting it furiously from her, because it disturbed her sense of security and permanence in her new life, pricked her self-assurance. (Larsen, 77)

The portrait that Olsen draws of Helga is meant to be a representation of Helga's subjectivity, but it, in fact, portrays her as a Black female sexual object. Olsen thinks that

"[his] picture of [her] is, after all, the true Helga Crane" (Larsen, 88), whereas Helga thinks that the portrait does not represent "herself at all, but some disgusting sensual creature. [...] Yes, anyone with half an eye could see that it wasn't she" (Larsen, 89). The portrait indicates that Olsen constructs Helga's subjectivity accordingly to racial stereotypes rendering Helga an icon of lascivious Black female sexuality: "Supposedly aesthetic renderings show traces of [a] preexisting ideological basis; the white imagination's fantasy of the black woman's sexual voraciousness lies below the surface of the portrait" (Barnett, 578). Olsen's portrait of Helga demonstrates that racial constructs are based on stereotypes and ideological expectations, and that these stereotypes are arbitrary, contingent and untruthful. Although Olsen's portrait of Helga is untruthful, it has real effects. It prompts Helga to counter racial stereotypes, to turn down Olsen's marriage proposal, to engage in sexual activity after she has successfully rejected a sensual image of her Self, and finally to marry a Black man who will not construct her sexuality as excessive but who will nonetheless trap her in the roles of mother and wife.

Helga responds to Olsen's racially prejudiced and sexual image of her with contempt because she knows that her subjectivity and Olsen's representation of her do not correspond and because she feels compelled to counter Olsen's distorted image of her. Although Helga is a mulatta, that is, part white, Olsen represents her as a Black libidinous woman because "'mulatto' is still read as 'black' in the white cultures of both the United States and Europe" (Gray, 257). He thus reinforces and fortifies the social constructedness of race. In Olsen's eyes, Helga has an unsatisfiable sexuality, and Fanon argues that "a woman of color is never altogether respectable in a white man's eyes"

(Fanon, 42). As a result, Olsen's portrait and marriage proposal elicit a negative response in Helga. Olsen constructs Helga's image based on racial impositions, and his drawing clarifies that exterior racial differences intermingle with sexual and racial prejudices. Helga therefore feels compelled to counter this sensual image of her Self as it renders her Other and does not grant her Selfhood. Helga turns down Olsen's marriage proposal because Olsen perceives, constructs, and depicts Helga as a libidinous Black woman. Helga intends to circumvent this racial and sexual stereotype by eventually choosing to marry a Black man who will not construct her as overtly sexual because he is himself always-already depicted as overtly sexual.

Helga and Olsen's discussion about their possible marriage becomes a racial issue as Olsen constructs Helga's subjectivity by racial-sexual prejudice as a result of which Helga responds likewise with racial prejudice. Olsen sees Helga as a member of a racial category instead of acknowledging her divided subjectivity. Olsen suggests to Helga in accordance with his racially prejudiced and sexually charged portrait of her: "Helga, you are a contradiction. [...] You have the warm impulsive nature of the women of Africa, but, my lovely, you have, I fear, the soul of a prostitute. You sell yourself to the highest buyer" (Larsen, 87). But to Olsen's dismay Helga responds to his construction of her in racial and sexual categories with racial arguments. She turns down Olsen's marriage proposal because she does not want to be treated like a female slave, or a prostitute: "But you see, Herr Olsen, I'm not for sale. Not to you. Not to any white man. I don't at all care to be owned. Even by you" (Larsen, 87). Furthermore, she expresses the fear that Olsen will reject her eventually for her racial Otherness, rendering a racially mixed marriage a

mishap: "You see, I couldn't marry a white man. I simply couldn't. It isn't just you, not just personal, you understand. It's deeper, broader than that. It's racial. Some day maybe you'll be glad. We can't tell, you know; if we married, you might come to be ashamed of me, to hate me, to hate all dark people. My mother did that" (Larsen, 88). Helga's racially oriented response to Olsen's proposal may seem absurd, but her arguments bespeak her fear of Olsen's objectification of her as an erotic and exotic piece of art while ignoring her oscillating and multiple subjectivity.

In turning down the white man's marriage proposal, Helga counters a racially and sexually charged stereotype of her. Consequently, she stops repressing her sexuality and begins exploring her sexuality with Black men. After Olsen's marriage proposal, Helga is homesick for the Blacks, if not for America: "I'm homesick, not for America, but for the Negroes" (Larsen, 92), and she decides that the Blacks are her people: "*These were her people. Nothing, she had come to understand now, could ever change that. Strange that she had never truly valued this kinship until distance had shown her its worth*" (Larsen, 95). Upon her return to the United States, Helga begins to accept and explore her sexuality in connection with Black men, believing they will not construct her subjectivity in terms of race and impose ideological constraints of Black female sexuality on her: "Helga can only experience eroticism directly (and indeed, only temporarily) as a desiring subject after she has rejected her stereotypically racialized image in Olsen's portrait" (Barnett, 578). Helga's failed erotic encounter with Dr. Anderson, who is also a mulatto and has to repress his sexuality, prompts Helga to engage in a night of sexual passion with the Reverend Green. Helga's need to legitimize her sexuality by marriage proves quasi fatal as she now

has to perform her biological role of dangerous childbirth, as well as her social role as mother, and her religious role as a wife of a Reverend. Helga's open subjectivity becomes closed because she *reacts* to ideological constraints on her Black female sexuality instead of freeing herself of them.

Helga is ready to explore her sexuality with Dr. Anderson after he kisses her at a party as she assumes that he, as a mulatto, will not have racial-sexual prejudices. Although Anderson does not confine Helga to status as merely a member of a race, he sees her as a sexual object nonetheless and thus grants her no Selfhood. Anderson is described as a man guided by his reason, and, much like Helga, he suppresses his sexual desires because he counters an ideologically constructed stereotype of the Black man as excessively sexual. Dr. Anderson exhibits an

ascetic protest against the sensuous, the physical. Anne had perceived that the decorous surface of [Anne's] new husband's mind regarded Helga Crane with that intellectual and aesthetic appreciation which attractive and intelligent women would always draw from him, but that underneath that well-managed section, in a more lawless place where she herself never hoped or desired to enter, was another, a vagrant primitive groping toward something shocking and frightening to the cold asceticism of his reason. (Larsen, 94-95)

When Dr. Anderson kisses Helga, she is willing to become a sexually desiring subject. She wants to have an affair with Dr. Anderson because he has awakened her sexuality and because she trusts that he will not construct her as a sexual, libidinous woman; however, Dr. Anderson apologizes to Helga for his uncontrolled sexual impulse implying

that he, in fact, sees her as an object of sexual desire and not as a sexually desiring subject. Helga is attracted to Dr. Anderson because he is, like her, a mulatto, and Hostetler points out that for Helga

Anderson seems to represent creative potential as well as danger, to suggest the possibility that she can reconcile her sexuality with her identity as a black American woman. Yet when she finally decides to act on this interpretation, she is "slapped" by his cool apology for what she realizes he views as a dark, primitive sexual attraction, to be repressed below the surface of a calm, respectable life. [...] Anderson [...] responds to Helga according to the cultural stereotype of women as objects of desire. In the failure of Helga's relationship with Anderson [...] her finally acknowledged longing to be understood as a sexually desiring subject, rather than as an object, is shattered. Instead, Helga feels that Anderson, too, sees her as a sensual creature devoid of self. (Hostetler, 43)

The incident with Dr. Anderson is a prelude to Helga's further exploration of her sexuality with the Black Reverend Mr. Pleasant Green who, she assumes, is unlikely to constrain her subjectivity to an object of sexual desire, and thus grant her Selfhood.

Helga marries a Black man to evade the construction of her as a libidinous woman, but it eventually becomes evident that her choice of husband is highly problematic as he uses religious faith to explain and justify the status quo of her feminine role as mother and wife as well as her life-threatening situation as childbearer. After Helga's return from Europe where she refused Olsen's construction of her identity as a Black libidinous

woman, and after Anderson's conversion of Helga's subjectivity to that of an object of sexual desire, Helga "seduces the Reverend Mr. Pleasant Green and sanctifies her initiation into sexuality by marrying him" (Hostetler, 44). Helga thinks that her marriage will save her from *unlawful* sexual activity and bring her some sort of security; however, "Larsen depicts Helga's marriage as joyless, punctuated only by the intense pain of repeated and dangerous childbirth" (Barnett, 580). Barnett argues that it is not "the discourse of primitivism [...] [that] finally destroys Helga as a momentarily desiring subject. It is the marriage she enters hoping to legitimate and provide a framework for this brief experience of eroticism" (Barnett, 597). Helga marries a Black man in the assumption that he will not confine her subjectivity. However, her fixation upon one race closes her subjectivity as she engages in a performance of race and gender during her married life.

Helga engages in a night of sexual passion with the Reverend, when Anderson reduces her subjectivity to that of a sexual object. Helga's decision to marry the Reverend is a mixture of her hope for security and salvation as well as of her revenge on Dr. Anderson:

She had made her decision. Her resolution. It was a chance at stability, at permanent happiness, that she meant to take. She had so many other things, other chances, escape her. Still confused and not so sure that it wasn't the fact that she was "saved" that had contributed to this after feeling of well-being, she clutched the hope, the desire to believe that now at last she had found some One, some Power, who was interested in her. Would help her. (...) With the thought of yesterday came the thought of Robert Anderson and a feeling of

elation, revenge. She had put herself beyond the need of help from him.  
(Larsen, 117)

Helga's decision to marry is determined by her wish to legitimate her sexual desires, and thus she makes a hasty decision for a marriage to the Reverend: she "meant, if she could manage it, to be married today" (Larsen, 117). Helga seeks salvation from 'unlawful' sexual desire through the Reverend, and despite Helga's previous suspicion of religion (Larsen, 34), she now puts her trust into God's hands (Larsen, 117). The Reverend is an agent of God, and thus she trusts that the Reverend will be her salvation from an unhappy, empty, and sinful life: "With him she willingly, even eagerly, left the sins and temptations of New York behind her to, as he put it, 'labor in the vineyard of the Lord' in the tiny Alabama town where he was pastor to a scattered and primitive flock. And where, as the wife of the preacher, she was a person of relative importance. Only relative" (Larsen, 118). In her husband's parish, Helga gives up her luxurious life for one of physical suffering, hardship, religious deception, and confinement all soon leading to her own discontent, more so since she cannot escape from this self-destructive situation.

At the beginning of her marriage, Helga likes her new life as the wife of a preacher of a small community, yet her initial enjoyment is soon replaced by discontent as she realizes the hypocrisy of her marriage. At first, Helga "did not hate him, the town, or the people. No. Not for a long time" (Larsen, 118). Helga likes "to be mistress in one's own house, to have a garden, and chickens, and a pig; to have a husband - and to be 'right with God' - what pleasure did that other world which she had left contain that could surpass these? [...] And for a time she loved everything and everyone. Or she thought

she did" (Larsen, 120). As her marriage progresses, she is trapped fulfilling her wifely duties of household chores and she begins to close her subjectivity as she "did not at that time reason about anything. [...] She had done with soul-searching" (Larsen, 121). Eventually, Helga becomes disgusted with the Reverend (Larsen, 121), but she attempts to disregard this sentiment as well as the fact that the Reverend has lost personal interest in her except for sexual intercourse: "Helga tried not to see that he had rather lost any personal interest in her, except for the short spaces between the times when she was preparing for a recovery from childbirth" (Larsen, 124). Helga thought she would escape being rendered an object of sexual desire by marrying a Reverend, but the Reverend commodifies her for his own purposes, and he traps her in the role of mother and wife, leaving her unable to escape from this suffocating situation.

Helga is under social pressure to perform her social role as mother and as the wife of a preacher, but Helga's inability to fulfill these ideological expectations renders her Other in her community. As the Reverend does not receive the wifely services from Helga, he goes to visit other women in the community, thereby pressuring Helga to fulfill her wifely duties if she wants to stay in his favour and be socially acceptable:

Perhaps it was the fact that the preacher was, now, not so much at home that even lent to it a measure of real comfort. For the adoring women of his flock, noting how with increasing frequency their pastor's house went unswept and undusted, his children unwashed, and his wife untidy, took pleasant pity on him and invited him often to tasty orderly meals, specially prepared for him, in their own clean houses. (Larsen, 124)

The women provide Reverend Green with the services for his physical well-being as he explains that the feminine role of subservience is an act of God against which one cannot struggle. The Reverend manipulates the women for his convenience, ignoring his wife's hardship, and he takes advantage of religion for keeping the women in their place as caretaker and house-slave:

How, [Helga] wondered, did other women, other mothers manage? Could it be possible that, while presenting such smiling and contented faces, they were all always on the edge of health? All always worn out and apprehensive? Or was it only she, a poor weak city-bred thing, who felt that the strain of what the Reverend Mr. Pleasant Green had so often gently and patiently reminded her was a natural thing, an act of God, was almost unendurable? [...] One day on her round of visiting - a church duty, to be done no matter how miserable one was - she summoned up sufficient boldness to ask several women how they felt, how they managed. The answers were a resigned shrug, or an amused snort, or an upward rolling of eyeballs with a mention of "de Lawd" looking after us all. (Larsen, 125)

If Helga wants to be the socially acceptable Black feminine Self, she has to acknowledge her subservient role as caretaker and provider of various services.

Initially, the Reverend succeeds in manipulating Helga into a position from which she accepts her fate passively rendering her the black feminine Self within her community. Helga finally realizes his manipulation. However, she cannot escape her situation due to her dangerous pregnancies and her consequent bodily illness as well as her responsibility

to her children. In the end, Helga completely puts her trust in God ridding herself of the responsibilities for her life and that of her children:

So, though with growing yearning she longed for the great ordinary things of life, hunger, sleep, freedom from pain, she resigned herself to the doing without them. The possibility of alleviating her burdens by a greater faith became lodged in her mind. She gave herself up to it. It *did* help. And the beauty of leaning on the wisdom of God, trusting, gave her a queer sort of satisfaction. Faith was really quite easy. The more weary, the more weak, she became, the easier it was. Her religion was to her a kind of protective clothing, shielding her from the cruel light of an unbearable reality. (Larsen, 126)

When Helga becomes sick from childbirth, she begins to hate her husband: "She cared nothing, at the moment, for his hurt surprise. She knew only that, in the hideous agony that for indeterminable hours - no, centuries - she had borne, the luster of religion had vanished; that revulsion had come upon her; that she hated this man. Between them the vastness of the universe had come" (Larsen, 129). Once Helga hates her husband, she loses faith in God:

Life wasn't a miracle, a wonder. It was, for Negroes at least, only a great disappointment. Something to be got through with as best as one could. No one was interested in them or helped them. God! Bah! And they were only a nuisance to other people. [...] With the obscuring curtain of religion rent, she was able to look about her and see with shocked eyes this thing that she had done to herself. [...] The white man's God, and his great love for all people

regardless of race! What idiotic nonsense she had allowed herself to believe.

How could she, how could anyone, have been so deluded? (Larsen, 130)

Once Helga hates her husband, and loses her faith in God, she seems ready to open up her subjectivity for exploration and oscillation. Once again, however, frequent childbirth keeps her ill and finally destroys her spirit, leaving her without physical and mental power to resist and escape.

Once Helga hates her husband and loses her faith in God, she sees the hypocrisy of the institution of marriage especially in regards to its religious aspect, and she ceases to perform her social function of mother and wife. Helga performs no longer her tasks as mother and wife, and retreats completely from public life into herself: "From her husband's praisings, prayers, and caresses she sought refuge in sleep, and from the neighbors' gifts, advice and sympathy" (Larsen, 131). Helga is ashamed of the hypocrisy in her marriage: "Shame, too, swept over her at every thought of her marriage. Marriage. This sacred thing of which parsons and other Christian folk ranted so sanctimoniously, how immoral according to their own standards - it could be" (Larsen, 134). Helga means to leave her husband, but this time she cannot leave: "*AND HARDLY* had she left her bed and become able to walk again without pain, hardly had the children returned from the homes of their neighbors, when she began to have her fifth child" (Larsen, 135). Helga is likely to die from childbirth. Yet spiritually she perhaps has already died when she began to submit to ideological impositions and constraints of race, gender, and female sexuality as well as to religious dogmas for the feminine role in marriage and motherhood.

To sum up, in this chapter, I have demonstrated that race is a construct and a

performance, but that it is open to performativity. Helga Crane's mulatta existence shows that race is an enactment of ideological impositions that have an effect on a subject's identity. As a mulatta, Helga is always already Other, not accepted fully either in Black or White society. In either society, Helga has to engage in a performativity of race and of her subjectivity in order to be granted Selfhood. Because neither of the cultures completely accepts Helga, Whites and Blacks do not grant her Selfhood, and she is compelled to enact a Whiteness or Blackness in order for the Whites or Blacks to grant her Selfhood. In her search for Selfhood, she keeps her subjectivity open, but her subjectivity is easily upset as her construction of her subjectivity is dependent on whether others grant her Selfhood or not. Helga resists racial and sexist constraints on her subjectivity. But the image of the Black woman as libidinous is too strong an ideological imposition to free herself from. Hence, she decides to marry in order to legitimate her Black female sexuality.

Helga declines Olsen's marriage proposal because he constructs her subjectivity in terms of racial and sexual prejudice, and this rejection in his construction of her subjectivity opens up Helga to the acceptance and exploration of her Black female sexuality. In the incident with Dr. Anderson, Helga proves that she is interested in exploring her sexuality but only with Black men as they will not, she assumes, construct her as excessively sexual. Dr. Anderson does not constrain Helga to ideological impositions of race; however, he does not grant her Selfhood as a sexually desiring subject either. Helga thus chooses to marry a Reverend who, she assumes, is unlikely to see her as an object of male sexual desire; however, he only uses her for sexual, maternal, and wifely services

demonstrating the hypocrisy and manipulative power of religious dogmas for self-serving purposes through the institution of marriage. Helga's decision to marry is an attempt on her part to find a space in which she can legitimately explore her Black female sexuality. Hence, this decision is not an independent act of conviction, but rather a reaction to ideological impositions of Black female sexuality and an attempt to reconcile her inner desires with ideological constraints. Yet, Helga's marriage turns out to be not a salvation from stigmatized Black female sexuality, as she had hoped, but a quasi death sentence: she cannot flee from her gendered role because rapidly successive childbirths confine her to her feminine role in the house. In marrying a Reverend, Helga has to fulfill her role of mother and wife, and her husband's religious conviction that childbirth, as well as her motherly and wifely role, is a God-given act against which it is impossible to rebel keeps her in her subservient position.

Once Helga realizes that religious faith keeps women and Blacks in their subservient position, and that her husband ignores her hardship and pushes her back into her feminine role, she hates her husband, loses faith in God, and wants to escape her quasi fatal situation; however, this time she cannot leave because she is busy giving birth and falls ill as a result. Helga's pre-married life is a traumatic space of oscillation between two cultures, but her performativity of race keeps her subjectivity open. Submission to ideological constraints of race, gender, and female sexuality becomes a quasi death sentence for her as they close Helga's subjectivity, and keep her from exploring her Otherness. Helga's marriage is a performance of her ideologically imposed roles, and thus it becomes a death-like evacuation of her subjectivity.

## Chapter 4:

### Gender, Class, and Sexual Orientation in Dorothy Allison's *Bastard out of Carolina*

"My sexual identity is intimately constructed by my class and regional background ... however much people, feminists in particular, like to pretend this is not a factor."  
(Allison in McDonald, 23)

In *Bastard out of Carolina*, Dorothy Allison exhibits the destructiveness of ideological constraints on gender, as well as alternatives to prescribed, normative gender roles. She addresses class and gender as powerful categories having a determining influence on the formation of subject positions; however, she also shows that the subject can resist the constraints of gender performance. The main character Bone is a 12 year old girl aligning herself with different signifiers, thereby resisting the closure of her subjectivity. Bone's family structure is determined by heteronormativity and the social imposition of gender both of which conduce to confine Bone's mother Anney, Bone's stepfather Daddy Glen, and Bone to their respective gender roles. As a poor lower class family, Anney and Daddy Glen constantly aspire toward middle-class values without critically evaluating them, thereby obstructing the open development of their own subjectivities. As their marriage progresses, Anney and Daddy Glen force Bone more and more to exhibit heterosexuality, as well as absolute femininity or masculinity<sup>9</sup>, all of which result in a closed subjectivity.

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<sup>9</sup> Absolute femininity or masculinity means the performance of gender roles in which androgyny is impossible.

As a consequence, Bone resists these constraints more and more by exploring her subjectivity in the queer space provided by her Aunt Raylene. In her aunt's alternative liberating queer space, Bone finds the possibility to explore gender performativity as well as her own subjectivity in the more ameliorative terms of femininity and masculinity, and she is likely to recover from her trauma suffered through Glen.

In this chapter, I want to demonstrate - by applying feminist, queer, and Neo-Marxist theories - the way in which Dorothy Allison represents the problematic intersection of class, gender, and female sexual orientation in relation to marital performance and to ideological constraints. Furthermore, I will highlight the way in which Allison suggests performativity as a way to open up the formation of subject positions. I will begin this chapter by explaining Bone's subject formation in the triangular relationship of Anney, Glen, and Bone. Then I will analyze Anney and Glen's subject formation and marital arrangement as products of progressive subjection to ideological constraints. Finally, I will return to Bone highlighting the effect of Anney and Glen's heterosexual and marital expectations on Bone in demonstrating and arguing for her resistance to performance, constraint, and closure through/in the queer space of her lesbian Aunt Raylene.

In *Bastard out of Carolina*, Allison introduces the main character Bone as radically Other in terms of social status, class, and notions of gender. As a girl, Bone is discursively constructed as Other to the male Self; however, she is more other than Other. Bone is born into a triply disadvantageous position by being labeled a 'bastard' girl from the lower class. The law of the 1950s stamps Bone's birth certificate 'illegitimate,' thus interpellating her "a certified bastard by the state of South Carolina" (Allison, 3). Branding Bone

'illegitimate' signifies that "the facts had been established" (Allison, 4) that Bone's life is one of a female outside the law of the father. Furthermore, because Anney never acknowledges the father's identity to anyone, Bone grows up with the sense that the presence and identity of the law of the father is irrelevant to her life and that she can freely develop her subjectivity. Before the arrival of Glen, Bone grows up for the first years of her life with her mother and half-sister Reese in a female-only household; this arrangement is briefly interspersed though not affected by the short-lived presence of Reese's father Lyle Parson. Living in a female-only household makes Bone and Anney's existence comparable to lesbians not submitting to the law of the father: "If the lesbian subject is a threat precisely because she eludes patriarchal control, then the illegitimate child and the unwed mother occupy a similar position" (Irving, 101). Bone and Anney's quasi-lesbian existence renders them Other and socially unacceptable, and hence Anney decides to marry in order to gain Selfhood for herself and Bone.

Bone's not-fixed/uncategorizable social identity pushes her outside the law of the father and thus poses a threat to the organization of the social order of the 1950s of the American South <sup>10</sup> rendering her more Other than other women. Bone's Otherness stands for her always-already fragmented subjectivity as an ability to explore freely the Other of her Self, as well as Otherness in others. The inherent 'uncategorizability' and Otherness of her identity and the absence of male authority in her formative years establish the premise for Bone's resistance to the law of the father and for her desire to explore

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<sup>10</sup> The social order in the pre-Civil-Rights-Movement American South of the 1950s was stratified along highly sexist, racist, patriarchal, hierarchical, homophobic, and class-oriented lines; see Woodward, and Yates, for instance.

Otherness in herself and in others. This position of Otherness might also enable Bone to recover from her trauma and narrate her story.

Bone's resistance to the patriarchal world becomes evident first when she tries out different gender roles of masculinity and femininity. The patriarchal world demands of women and men that they adhere to their respective gender roles, an arrangement in which the feminine stands for submission and weakness and in which the masculine stands for dominance and strength. Patriarchy not only distributes specific hierarchical gender roles, but also creates a hierarchy amongst men: "*Patriarchy* is a hierarchical system of social relations among men that creates and maintains the domination of women. Although not all men benefit equally from patriarchal systems, as a system of social organization patriarchy patterns and shapes relations between and among men and women" (Anderson, 15). Patriarchy as a hierarchical system is made possible through the matrix of the Symbolic Order governed by the law of the father.

The Symbolic Order establishes structures of power relations by means of the law of the father. In the matrix of these power relations, subjects are "regulated [...], formed, defined, and reproduced in accordance with the requirements of those structures" (*Gender Trouble*, 2). Power relations are constituted by de-historicized contingency, and they manifest themselves in the law, norms, and discourse; power relations become naturalized, fixed and unalterable through the reiteration of their manifestations (law, norms, discourse). The Phallus is a signifier of power relations and a symbol of control, dominance, and penetration/knowingness although itself not being controlled, dominated, and penetrated/known; yet, the Phallus is a void master-signifier as it is created as a

vacuum filled with meaning retrospectively by means of de-historicized contingency. This contingent relation between the signifier (Phallus) and the signified (power relations) becomes naturalized, and thus fixed and unalterable; however, the relation between signifier and signified is arbitrary<sup>11</sup> so that the Phallus as void signifier and naturalized power relations as signified can be opened up for alternative resignifications, such as attributing the power of the phallus to femininity.

Power relations in the Symbolic Order established through ideology dictate that the men “have” the Phallus as a sign of masculinity, strength, and control, whereas the woman “be” the Phallus as a sign of lack of the Phallus and, as a consequence, of her submission to the Phallus. Butler argues that “the Symbolic Order creates cultural intelligibility through the mutually exclusive positions of ‘having’ the Phallus (the position of men) and ‘being’ the Phallus (the paradoxical position of women)” (*Gender Trouble*, 44). The Phallus is attributed to men due to their anatomy, although this distribution is an effect of de-historicized contingency and thus ‘unnatural’ naturalization: “The law requires conformity to its own notion of ‘nature’ and gains its legitimacy through the binary and asymmetrical naturalization of bodies in which the Phallus, though clearly not identical with the penis, nevertheless deploys the penis as its naturalized instrument and sign” (*Gender Trouble*, 106). If the attribution of the Phallus to the man is a result of de-historicized contingency, then it is possible for the woman to assume the Phallus.

Women are said “to be” the Phallus as a site of always-already having lost the Phallus. Because women “are” the Phallus, they are void and absent, and thus they are

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<sup>11</sup> See introductory chapter for Barthes on signification.

unrepresentable in phallogocentric discourse (*Gender Trouble*, 9). Though the Phallus signifies power and control, it always already bespeaks a fear of the loss and lack of the Phallus due to the de-historicized contingency and thus instability of its signification: "Inasmuch as the phallus signifies, it is always in the process of being signified and resignified" (*Bodies that Matter*, 89). The loss of the phallus implies two situations: a) due to castration anxiety, the male does not want to be associated with the feminine; b) if the Phallus can be lost and if it is open to re-significations, it can be gained/assumed/had by women: "Castration could not be feared if the phallus were not already detachable, already elsewhere, already dispossessed" (*Bodies that Matter*, 101). The Self (the one who *has* the phallus) needs the Other (the one who *is* the phallus) as an instrument by means of which to establish his existence and to erect his discourse: the Self has no-thing without the Other as the supplier of the Phallus. If Bone as the Other takes on the Phallus as an instrument of power, her action will be monstrous as she upsets the naturalized distribution and relations of power.

The category of sex, much like the Phallus, is an empty signifier that gender and sexuality/sexual orientation fill with meaning retrospectively. Sex is thus not a cause for the effect of gender, but rather it is a cause instituted *after* the category of gender becomes naturalized:

In the first volume *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault argues that the univocal construct of "sex" (one is one's sex and, therefore, *not* the other) is (a) produced in the service of the social regulation and control of sexuality and (b) conceals and artificially unifies a variety of disparate and unrelated sexual functions and

then (c) postures within discourse as a *cause*, an interior essence which both produces and renders intelligible all manners of sensation, pleasure, and desire as sex-specific. (*Gender Trouble*, 94)

Because gender does not have the category of sex as its origin, it is an enactment without an origin, without a cause. Gender is performatively produced, so that “there is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very ‘expressions’ that are said to be its results” (*Gender Trouble*, 25). Gender as an enactment without an origin is thus simply an effect that can consequently be broken open to resignification:

Gender is a complexity whose totality is permanently deferred, never fully what it is at any given juncture in time. An open coalition, then, will affirm identities that are alternately instituted and relinquished according to the purposes at hand; it will be an open assemblage that permits of multiple convergences and divergences without obedience to a normative telos of definitional closure. (*Gender Trouble*, 16)

Bone’s enactment of femininity and masculinity challenges the ‘naturalness’ of her gendered subjectivity, and this ‘unnatural’ enactment upsets naturalized power relations in her attempt to assume the Phallus.

The category of gender exhibits power relations determined and reiterated through the law; however, as gender is performatively produced (*Gender Trouble*, 24) as a contingent and naturalized category, it can be broken open to resist closure by resignifying itself and engaging in performativity instead. In the performance of gender, we

enact our imposed femininity or masculinity depending on whether we are anatomically female or male thereby closing off the possibility of performing alternatives to prescribed gender roles. In the performativity of gender, we recognize gender as ongoing performance, so that we enact different gender concepts: "This perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization, and it deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to essentialist accounts of gender identity" ("Gender Trouble," 338). As gender is produced through ideology and reinforced through hegemonic laws, it seems to be a fixed category constructed by sex. However, gendered subjectivity is fragmented and open to performativity so that gender roles are not bound to correspond to a retrospectively imposed category of sex: "When the constructed status of gender is theorized as radically independent of sex, gender itself becomes a free-floating artifice, with the consequence that *man* and *masculine* might just as easily signify a female body as a male one, and *woman* and *feminine* a male body as easily as a female one" (*Gender Trouble*, 6). This performativity of gender keeps Bone's and Aunt Raylene's subjectivity open as they do not close off the possibility for alternative gender roles.

Bone keeps her subjectivity open by questioning 'normalcy' and by aligning and re-aligning herself with different signifiers. More particularly, Bone resists the closure of her subjectivity by exploring gender roles other than the ones prescribed to her by law. As outlined in the introductory chapter, Žižek explains the concepts of open and closed subjectivity by means of the limit (open concept) and the boundary (closed concept). He suggests that *boundary* means closure as it is "the external limitation of an object" (Žižek,

109), whereas *limit* means openness as it “results from a ‘reflection-of-itself’ of the boundary” (Žižek, 109-110). The limit is unattainable because there is continuous deferral, approximation, development, and thus openness as “the object can never fully become, [...] what the object *ought to* (although it never actually *can*) become” (Žižek, 110). In this sense, then, gender as an imposed boundary represents closure for subjectivity, but the concept of gender can be freed up for openness and performativity as “every boundary proves itself to be a limit: apropos of every identity, we are sooner or later bound to experience how its condition of possibility (the boundary that delimits its condition) is simultaneously its condition of impossibility” (Žižek, 109-110). Bone’s engagement in performativity and the exploration of the limit upsets power relations in the Symbolic Order, and Daddy Glen perceives her activities as attempts to assume the Phallus thereby threatening his unstable position in the Symbolic Order as one in which he (as a man) is always on the verge of losing the Phallus.

Bone’s position always-already outside the law of the father means that she is beyond boundaries, out of control, and much less likely to allow Glen to inscribe her body as ‘being’ the Phallus, and she is much more likely than any other female to assume the Phallus. Daddy Glen feels threatened by Bone’s attempt to go beyond the limits of her gender, so that he looks at Bone with “his eyes sliding over me like I was a new creature, something he hadn’t figured out yet how to tame” (Allison, 142). Bone wants to explore Otherness, because as a site of deviancy and ‘disease’ (Britzman, 85) she feels open to it. ‘Exorbitant normality’ (Britzman, 85) constructs Bone as sensational Other, and

'heteronormativity' seeks to contain her Otherness;<sup>12</sup> hence Glen feels a necessity to control the formation of Bone's subjectivity by restricting Bone absolutely to the subservient feminine sphere.

Gender is a limit as there is constant deferral and approximation, and Bone does not allow Glen to restrict her to only the feminine sphere by always going beyond boundaries, by exploring her subjectivity in terms of the masculine *and* the feminine, and by looking for various signifiers to form her gendered subjectivity: Bone is a girl, but she does not adhere to the gender role assigned anatomically to her as she is not sweet, kind, submissive, or obedient. Instead, she disrupts the presumption of normalcy in gender terms and tries out what it is like to perform masculinity while being a girl:

I begged my aunts for Earle's and Beau's old denim work shirts so I could wear them just the way they did when they worked on their trucks, with the front tucked in and the tail hanging out. Beau laughed at me affectionately as I mimicked him. [...] I followed them around and stole things from them that they didn't really care about - old tools, pieces of china, and broken engine parts. I wanted most of all a knife like the ones they all carried. (Allison, 23)

The more Glen abuses Bone, the stronger her wish becomes to be like a boy in order to defend herself: "I wished I was a boy so I could run faster, stay away more, or even hit him back. [...] One day my hands would be a match for his" (Allison, 109). Thus, Glen's attempt to confine Bone to the strictly feminine sphere has the opposite effect as she now

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<sup>12</sup> See introductory chapter for Britzman on disruption of normalcy and containment of deviancy.

definitely wants to 'have' the Phallus.

Bone's lower-class status has a great influence on the formation of her subjectivity, and it also has a strong effect on her traumatic experience within the marital arrangement of Glen and Anney. Bone knows that she is 'white trash', that other people hate her for it, but that her mother is trying to shelter Bone, Reese, and herself from lower-class categorization: "We knew what the neighbors called us, what Mama wanted to protect us from. We knew who we were" (Allison, 82). More particularly, Bone is well aware of the fact that her mother is ashamed of and hates her lower-class existence: "Mama hated to be called trash, hated the memory of every day she'd ever spent bent over other people's peanuts and strawberry plants while they stood tall and looked at her like she was a rock on the ground. The stamp on that birth certificate burned her like the stamp she knew they'd tried to put on her" (Allison, 3). Anney thinks that society will grant her Selfhood if she leads a married, middle-class life, and thus she aspires toward these 'conditions' without critically evaluating them.

Bone has contempt for the middle-class, but this contempt keeps her from speaking out against the abuse she experiences because she fears, perhaps rightly so, that people from the middle class will not understand and thus negatively judge her White trash existence. Like Anney, Bone hates it when people look at her like White trash: "Anger was like a steady drip of poison into my soul, teaching me to hate the ones that hated me. Who do they think they are? I whispered to myself. They piss honey? Shit morning-glory blossoms? Sit on their porches every Sunday morning and look down on the world with contempt?" (Allison, 262). Bone has contempt for middle-class people who she believes

hate her for being a lower-class bastard girl. However, this contempt keeps her from accepting help from the young doctor inquiring into Bone's case of her broken coccyx. Bone doesn't tell the doctor why her coccyx is broken (the result of Glen's physical abuse), because she sees that the young doctor "looked angry, and impatient, and disgusted" (Allison, 114) making Bone think that he will not understand their white-trash existence: "He didn't know, didn't know my mama or me" (Allison, 114). Furthermore, she wants to protect her mother from further shame: "It made my heart hurt to see her look that way. I couldn't hurt her, I couldn't" (Allison, 116). Instead of speaking out for help, Bone 'collects' evidence of the abuse:

I remained silent, stubborn, resentful, and collected my bruises as if they were unavoidable. There were lumps at the back of my head, not swellings of flesh and tissue but a rumpled ridge of a bone. My big toes went flat and wide, broken within a few months of each other when I smashed into doorjamb, running while looking back over my shoulder. (Allison, 111)

If Anney did not strive so blindly for a middle-class life but rather taught her daughter to accept and not feel ashamed of her lower-class existence, Bone would be much more likely to seek help from the outside world.

The more Bone explores her subjectivity in terms of femininity and masculinity, the more Daddy Glen and Anney submit to ideological constraints in their marital arrangement by assuming their gender roles as prescribed by the hegemonic law. The power relations can only become clearly distributed between them if they repress their respective strengths (Anney) and weaknesses (Glen). Hence, they have to contain their prominent gendered

Otherness in order to meet ideological impositions of absolute femininity and masculinity. The strict adherence to prescribed gender roles closes their subjectivity because they force themselves to close the gap between how they see themselves (the Imaginary) and how others see them/how they see each other (the Symbolic): ideological impositions dictate that they have to portray a unified and not a fragmented picture of the Self. However, by closing the gap, they are concerned with how others see them/ they see each other leaving them estranged from their own view of themselves:

This double reflection produces a symbolic point the nature of which is purely virtual: neither what I immediately see ("reality" itself) nor the way others see me (the "real" inverted image of reality) but *the way I see the others seeing me*. [...]

The depiction of a strange world opposed to ours can give rise to the radical estrangement from our own. [...] The double inversion calls into question the very standard of "normality." (Žižek, 13)

Anney and Glen's trying to close the gap between how they see themselves and how others see them/how they see each other hinders them from questioning normalcy and perceiving the harm they do to Bone and to themselves. Glen will allow for performativity in neither Bone, nor Anney, nor himself, but he cannot stop Bone from exploring the limit. His unsuccessful attempt to confine Bone to absolute femininity, to make her submit to the law of the father and to ideology, and "to be" the Phallus culminates in his rape of her.

Glen and Anney's marriage is a boundary, because they engage in the performance of their subjectivity as they submit progressively to ideological impositions on their gender. Performance and *boundary* are linked to each other in the sense that both pertain to a

closed concept of existence countering an open concept of existence in which there is performativity and a *limit* by means of infinite deferral and approximation. Like gender, marriage can be a performance or closed concept in the sense that performance entraps the character through ideology in Althusserian terms,<sup>13</sup> whereas performativity offers the possibility of escaping ideology and what society considers normalcy by recognizing this entrapment, and by consequently producing alternative ways to live one's marital life. Anney and Glen see their marriage as a boundary and thus they engage in a performance of their marriage. Submitting more and more to ideological impositions on gender, and, consequently, to ideological constraints on their marital arrangement has a destructive effect as Bone suffers most horrifically from Anney and Glen's progressive closure of subjectivity.

Anney marries Glen in order to give herself, Bone, and Reese a legitimate existence as a heterosexual family unit governed by the law of the father and by middle-class values. Anney sees marriage as a way to circumvent, but not to sublimate the law labeling her a loose woman by stamping her daughter a Bastard and rendering their female-only household one outside the law of the father and hence outside normalcy. When Anney is unsuccessful at having the 'illegitimate' erased from Bone's birth certificate, she decides to marry in order to legitimize her and Bone's existence: "That same year she met Lyle Parson and started thinking more about marrying him than dragging down to the courthouse again" (Allison, 5). Her marriage to Glen may give Anney a husband of middle-class origins and status as a socially acceptable woman; however, this happens at the

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<sup>13</sup> See introductory chapter for Althusser on ideology.

expense of her daughter's well-being and at the expense of her own independence as an affirmative woman. Anney's abandoning Bone in favour of her husband signals to Glen that she totally subjects herself to the law of the father, that she has become the 'normative' feminine Self due to Glen's ideological expectations, and that she agrees with patriarchy's need to eliminate the uncontainable feminine Other (Bone).

Anney aspires toward middle-class values without critically evaluating them, and she believes that her marriage to a man from the middle-class will take from her shoulders the heavy weight of her personal baggage. Anney marries up into the middle-class where, supposedly, physical and sexual abuse do not happen. Ironically, it is a man from the middle-class who physically and sexually abuses, and gravely sexually assaults the child, whereas the White trash Boatwright men *never* harm any of their children. If Anney admitted that abuse was happening in her family, she would revert to her status of lower-class family, which is not an option for her. Anney does not go public with Glen's abuse of Bone, and thus fails to protect Bone while having hoped to protect her by her marriage to Glen. It is only after the rape by a middle-class man that the 'illegitimate' is erased from the certificate rendering the rape a quasi 'necessary' step for the legitimization of Bone in a patriarchal society, as Glen imprints the law of the father with sexual violence on Bone's subjectivity.

Anney is the implicit bystander to Glen's abuse of Bone; indirectly she 'supports' the abuse by remaining silent and not leaving her husband. There are several reasons why Anney does not leave Glen, and the most obvious one is that Anney is in love with Glen, and she needs him for love and sex: "She needs him, needs him like a starving woman

needs meat between her teeth” (Allison, 41). More importantly, though, Anney believes in the ideological impositions that a woman needs a man who supports her financially though she is absolutely capable of supporting her household by herself: “I need a husband [...] And a car and a home and a hundred thousand dollars” (Allison, 13). Furthermore, Anney seeks social status and protection through the marriage to Glen in a patriarchal world: “Mama [...] in the shelter of his arms” (Allison, 37). Glen is Anney’s third man in her life with whom she is intimate, and it is unacceptable in terms of ideological impositions for a woman to have an illegitimate daughter, several or no partners, and thus to live outside normalcy. Finally, Anney is not only the implicit bystander, but also the victim of Glen’s abuse. If we see Bone as an extension of Anney, then the abuse of Bone is a displaced version of the abuse of Anney: at the end of the narrative, Bone recognizes that “her life had folded into mine” (Allison, 309); thus, Anney feels trapped like a victim, like Bone.

Anney has the symptoms of a battered wife, although Glen does not abuse her physically: Glen abuses Anney psychologically by manipulating her, lying to her, and estranging her from her daughter. Glen first isolates Anney, Bone, and Reese from their extended family, so that he can consequently trap them in the house and seize mental control over them: “The new house in West Greenville was so far from any of the aunts’ houses that there was rarely time to stop by and see them” (Allison, 105). Glen is becoming more and more successful at keeping Bone and Anney apart and estranged from one another: “He was always watching me, it seemed, calling me to him whenever Mama and I would start talking, sending me to get him a glass of ice tea or a fresh pack

of cigarettes out of the freezer. [...] Mama told me I should show him that I loved him, but no matter how hard I tried, I never moved fast enough for him" (Allison, 62). Anney is more and more on Glen's side, whenever he beats Bone; she makes Bone feel as though she is responsible for the beating and thus deserves this corporeal chastisement: "When Daddy Glen beat me there was always a reason, and Mama would stand right outside the bathroom door. Afterward she would cry and wash my face and tell me not to be so stubborn, not to make him mad" (Allison, 110). As their marriage progresses, Anney surrenders to Glen's laws totally, thereby forsaking her attachment to Bone:

The final step in psychological control of the victim is not completed until she has been forced to violate her own moral principles and to betray her basic human attachments. Psychologically, this is the most destructive of all coercive techniques, for the victim who has succumbed loathes herself. It is at this point, when the victim under duress participates in the sacrifice of others, that she is truly "broken." (Herman, 83)

In the performance of their marriage, Anney becomes the feminine Self as she submits to the law of the father and Bone becomes the feminine Other even more so as she resists this submission.

Glen does not only victimize Anney psychologically, but he also makes her adhere more to the model of absolute femininity. Before she marries Glen, Anney oscillates between femininity and masculinity: she is a young, assertive, single working mother trying unsuccessfully to fight the law that stamps her daughter a bastard and labels her a loose woman. During her marriage she is still working (despite Glen's disapproval), because

she realizes that Glen cannot perform as the only breadwinner. Yet, she believes in ideological stereotypes of the husband as breadwinner and protector of the family unit: “Even though Anney does not depend on Glen financially, she believes she needs a man to survive. [...] Her final decision to remain with Glen thus has less to do with her love for him than her fear of being without a man” (McDonald, 20). Glen wants Anney to be absolutely feminine, and the longer she is married to Glen, the more she forbids herself the oscillation between femininity and masculinity and feels the need to eliminate Bone as the oscillator between these two constraining concepts. At the end of the narrative, she eventually plays her role of femininity perfectly: Although Glen sexually assaults her own daughter, Anney stays attached to her husband, leaves her daughter, and is, thereby, a good, submissive wife following her husband no matter how wrong he is.

Anney submits to the law of patriarchy completely when she does not leave her husband after the rape of her daughter. Her first submission to the law took place when she was unable to erase the ‘illegitimate’ from the birth certificate: “Anney endeavors to reconstruct the normative heterosexual unit, collud[ing] with Glen’s attempt to subordinate Bone to Glen’s authority” (Irving, 101). Anney can only erase the ‘illegitimate’ from the certificate when Glen has imprinted himself and his heterosexual laws onto Bone’s subjectivity through his rape of her. Anney’s submission to the law of the father demonstrates to Bone that, according to normalcy and ideological impositions, a woman is not allowed to have an identity of her own without a man and his laws: “The mother’s continued preoccupation with and eventual acquisition of the birth certificate demonstrates her ongoing acquiescence to patriarchal dictates: indeed, one could view her delivery of

this certificate to her daughter as the last of her attempts to re-subject Bone to the structure's mandates" (Irving, 101). Despite Anney and Glen's attempts to subdue Bone's subjectivity to the law of the father, Bone resists this ideology.

Glen abuses Bone and Anney, and sexually assaults Bone in order to assert his masculinity that is always at stake. Glen represents the law in the microcosm of the family, but he occupies a contested position because Anney and Bone always seem to assume the Phallus which, according to the ideological distribution of power relations, is meant to belong to him. Like the law, Glen remains opaque and will not allow anybody to study, evaluate, criticize, or replace his existence: "Glen's eyes told nothing. The man's image was as flat and empty as a sheet of tin in the sun, throwing back heat and light, but no details - no clear line of who he really was behind those eyes" (Allison, 43). Despite his opaqueness, the uncles know that there is something very wrong with Glen; uncannily they foresee unknowingly that Glen will resort to sexual assault if he feels that sheer physical violence cannot assert his masculinity: "He's quiet, but you make Glen mad and he'll knock you down. [...] Boy uses those hands of his like pickaxes. [...] He gets crazy when he's angry. [...] Use his dick if he can't reach you with his arms, and that'll cripple you fast enough" (Allison, 61).

Glen's mental and physical abuse of Bone culminates in his rape of her as a signifier of the Phallus. The rape is his utmost means to dominate and control her, "to demonstrate contempt for [her] autonomy and dignity" (Herman, 53): "the purpose of the rapist is to terrorize, dominate, and humiliate the victim, to render her utterly helpless" (Herman, 58). Glen rapes Bone when he realizes that she resists his dictates, and will not submit to his

will and his requests. He says: "You'll shut up. I'll shut you up. I'll teach you. [...] You'll never mouth off to me again. You'll keep your mouth shut. You'll do as you're told. You'll tell Anney what I want you to tell her" (Allison, 284-285). His rape of Bone demonstrates to her that "he has" the Phallus, that he is the law, "that resistance is futile, and that her life depends upon winning his indulgence through absolute compliance" (Herman, 77). He signals to her that she a) must not deviate from, but obey Glen's laws, b) must be contained within the restrictive realm of heteronormativity, and c) must learn to be a heterosexual woman, even if through violent rape. Bone cannot physically defend herself against being raped by Glen; however, she survives her trauma and resists Daddy Glen by having aligned herself with Aunt Raylene's liberating, alternative, and inspiring queer space in which Aunt Raylene encourages her to explore her Otherness and to keep her subjectivity open.

Glen is the perpetrator and perpetuator of patriarchy ("the Law is the Law"). In Žižekian terms, the law that patriarchy establishes ("the Law is the Law") can only exist because there is an exception B (marginal) to the rule A (more important than B), and because there is an exception to this exception B. The law always transgresses itself in order to exist, and thus the law is a crime: When neither A nor B maintain themselves, the law has to transgress itself; the law's transgression is an exception to the exception, a negation of the negation, a crime. The law needs the crime in order to justify its existence. For Lacan,

The greatest transgression, the most traumatic, the most senseless thing, is *law itself*: the "mad" superegotistical law which inflicts enjoyment. [...] The maddest

thing is the reverse of the appeasing law itself, the law as a misunderstood, dumb injunction to enjoyment. [...] First we have the simple opposition between the position and its negation - in our case, between the positive, appeasing law and the multitude of its particular transgressions, crimes; the "negation of the negation" occurs when one notices that the only true transgression, the only true negativity, is that of the law itself which changes all the ordinary criminal transgressions into an indolent positivity. In this precise sense, "negation of the negation" designates "self-relating negativity": the moment when the external negative relationship between the law and crime turns into law's internal self-negation - when the law appears as the sole true transgression. (Žižek, 30-31)

Žižek concludes that the law is the universal crime, and "that law needs crime to affirm its own reign by means of the crime's 'sublation'" (Žižek, 32); that is, the law justifies its existence by asserting that the crime that law commits is not really a crime. Žižek suggests that "law remains in its most fundamental dimension a form of radical violence which must be obeyed regardless of our subjective appreciation" (Žižek, 34). Glen is the law in the microcosm of Bone's family, and his laws echo the senseless existence of the macrocosm's law which stamped Bone a bastard. Glen affirms that "the law is the law" by "sublating" the crime that he commits in the name of the law; that is, he says that the crime that he commits in the name of the law is the law and not a crime.

In order to better understand and explain the factors underlying Glen's abusive behaviour, we have to analyze Glen in terms of the oppression he suffers from patriarchy. Glen is not only the perpetrator and perpetuator of the law, but also its victim. Glen has

a hierarchical relationship with his father where Glen is inferior to his father. According to patriarchal law and ideology, Glen is still superior to women by the simple fact of his 'having' the Phallus. At the same time, Glen is the victim of paternal psychological abuse based on his father's ideological belief that a man must always perform his masculinity, and that a middle-class man must not marry trash. Glen resists his father by marrying a class down: "He would have her, he told himself. He would marry Black Earle's baby sister, marry the whole Boatwright legend, shame his daddy and shock his bothers" (Allison, 13). Glen's defiance of his father's expectations, however, exposes Glen to more castrating attacks by his father. The attacks affect Glen because he cares about accepting his father's views and laws, as well as submitting to ideological impositions. Glen's father delivers a lecture to Glen in front of the whole family

on all the things Glen had done wrong in his life of failure and disappointment. [...] Around his father, Glen became [unsure of himself and too careful. He broke out in a sweat, and his eyes kept flickering back to his daddy's face as if he had to keep watching or miss the thing he needed the most to see. He would pull at his pant like a little boy and drop his head if anyone asked him a question. It was hard to put that image of him next to the way he was all the rest of the time - the swaggering bantam rooster man who called himself my daddy. (Allison, 99)

Paternal psychological abuse and societal pressure force Glen to adhere to ideological impositions of the performance of masculinity, yet Glen's impotence to deliver this performance, as well as his inability to lead a middle-class life turns Glen into a

perpetuator of patriarchy and a perpetrator of the crime: "His family continues to look down on him, for both marrying 'trash' and having a wife who works. [...] Unable to feel like a man in his family's eyes, Glen resorts to either childlike behavior or violent rage" (McDonald, 19). Glen's behaviour thus becomes more abusive the more he feels that his Phallus is at stake.

Bone, Glen, and Anney oscillate between femininity and masculinity, and Glen wants to fix and solidify the power relations and distributions of gender roles according to patriarchal expectations. Suffering from castration anxiety Glen wants Bone and Anney to be 'feminine' only in order for him to erect, to have, and to maintain his Phallus. He punishes Bone for being disobedient and constantly crossing gender boundaries: "'Don't run like that,' he'd say. 'You're a girl, not a racehorse'" (Allison, 106). Glen also abuses when he gets laid off (Allison, 107), because he cannot perform the tasks demanded of a man in the macrocosm of society. His Phallus is always at stake because he cannot perform his masculinity like other men: Glen is "shaking a little every time he tried to look a man in the eye" (Allison, 11). Although Glen forbids oscillation between femininity and masculinity, he is attracted by Bone's exploration of the limit of her gender. Bone feels how he is fascinated by her subjectivity and how he simultaneously rejects it: "It seemed like Daddy Glen's hands were always reaching for me, trembling on the surface of my skin, as if something pulled him to me and pushed him away at the same time. I would look up at him, carefully, watchfully, and see his eyes staring at me like I was something unimaginable and strange" (Allison, 105). In the chastisement of Bone's oscillation between femininity and masculinity, he punishes his own oscillation while re-asserting his

contested masculinity.

Anney occupies a paradoxical position in terms of Glen's castration anxiety, and this position is implicit in Glen's abuse of Bone, as Anney does not challenge, but agrees with the ideological belief that a man must 'have' the Phallus. On the one hand, Anney contributes to Glen's fear of the loss of the phallus by being, out of financial necessity, a working woman and the family's breadwinner, and by denying him fatherhood as a manifestation of masculinity (their son is still-born). On the other hand, she wants to re-institute his Phallus by making him feel 'like a man' at her will, and Bone must be the Phallus<sup>14</sup> by which Glen can erect his masculinity, if Anney will not supply the Phallus:

Mama thought that keeping me out of the house and away from Daddy Glen was the answer, that being patient, loving, and making him feel strong and important would fix everything in time. But nothing changed and nothing was really fixed, everything was only delayed. Every time his daddy spoke harshly to him, every time he couldn't pay the bills, every time Mama was too tired to flatter or tease him out of his moods, Daddy Glen's eyes would turn to me, and my blood would turn to ice. (Allison, 233)

The punishment of Bone controls Anney by showing her that she must become absolutely feminine if she does not want to suffer the same punishment as Bone. However, instead of challenging Glen's need for the Phallus, she re-enforces his castration anxiety by letting him 'have' the Phallus *only when* it is convenient.

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<sup>14</sup> The name 'Bone' already implies phallic imagery and her potential assumption of the Phallus.

Glen's "castration" aligns him with the weak and thus with the feminine; unlike Bone, Glen *rejects* this castrating oscillation and tries to control it by any means possible in relation to Bone. Bone knows that he abuses her because Bone reminds Glen of the oscillation between femininity and masculinity within himself that he does not want to face: "I knew that it was nothing I had done that made him beat me. It was just me, the fact of my life, who I was in his eyes and mine" (Allison, 110). Fearfully, he confines himself to the strictly masculine, and thus heterosexual space. Accordingly, he asserts his Phallus by abusing Bone, and through the rape he possibly demonstrates to her that she must be an obedient, heterosexual woman with a subjectivity totally defined by a man. Glen has castration anxiety, and he is a "victim" of the ideological constraints and impositions of masculinity; however, it is also in his own hands<sup>15</sup> to question and disrupt normalcy. If he explored, acknowledged and accepted his Otherness, his femininity and masculinity, he might not close his subjectivity (wanting to be masculine only), and he might not commit a crime against others and himself.

Allison shows in *Bastard out of Carolina* that Anney's and Glen's (heterosexual) marriage is a failure because it is based on performance of gender and thus on the closure of subjectivity. In contrast, Aunt Raylene's queer space gives community, protection, and love to Bone who is "seriously confused about love" (Allison, 258). Bone comes to see her parents' marriage as extremely dysfunctional and destructive, whereas Aunt Raylene's queer space offers her an alternative to this. Daddy Glen keeps Anney from protecting

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<sup>15</sup> Glen's hands are used as a very ambiguous and important image in the novel both in relation to Bone to whom he applies them assertively/violently and hesitantly/reluctantly (see above), and in relation to ideological impositions and expectations.

Bone in physical, sexual, and psychological terms so that Bone's trust in her parents, in heterosexual relationships, and in the notion of a nuclear family is deeply shattered by the violence of the law of the father: "The damage to the survivor's faith and sense of community is particularly severe when the traumatic events themselves involve the betrayal of important relationships" (Herman, 55). Anney and Glen's marriage is a source of oppression and extreme violence, and "to Bone, Anney's decision to remain with Glen, despite his vicious rape of her daughter, constitutes her ultimate betrayal" (Irving, 101). Furthermore, this queer space gives Bone the possibility of performativity, and of keeping her subjectivity open, so that it might be possible for Bone to recover from her trauma: "Allison provides lesbianism as a lifesaving alternative to the dangers of heterosexuality. Raylene's metaphor (and her actual work) of making beauty out of trash resonates deeply within Bone, connecting her own and Raylene's lesbianism and artistic creativity with comfort and safety" (Horvitz, 253).

Allison shows several dysfunctional marriages in *Bastard out of Carolina*, and she sets them in contrast to Granny and to Aunt Raylene who are both women without a husband, but who have the capacity to provide a safe haven for the children coming from these dysfunctional families. In Bone's family, Bone experiences abuse and sexual assault by her step-father Daddy Glen; her mother Anney is the implicit bystander to the atrocities happening to Bone, and she surrenders her daughter to her husband. In her aunts' and uncles' families, Bone also sees dysfunctional and destructive marriages. Husbands either cheat on their wives (Uncle Earle, Uncle Wade), or leave them temporarily (Uncle Travis) or for ever (Grandfather). Wives go either crazy (Aunt Alma), or leave their unfaithful

husbands (Aunt Teresa, Aunt Alma), or die of cancer. While the men never seem to grow up, the women have “to pay” for the men’s irresponsibilities with grief and premature aging: The men “looked young, even Nevil, who’d had his teeth knocked out, while the aunts - Ruth, Raylene, Alma, and even Mama - seemed old, worn-down, and slow, born to mother, nurse, and clean up after the men” (Allison, 23).

The only women in the Boatwright family Bone perceives as content with their lives are Granny and Aunt Raylene who both live without a husband. These women live outside “normalcy” and while Aunt Raylene is clearly “satisfied with her own company” (Allison, 179), Granny keeps spitting and cursing to herself thereby contravening ideological impositions of femininity. Granny and Aunt Raylene are sufficient to themselves and they let neither husband, nor patriarchal ideology construct their subjectivity. Bone witnesses the failure of heterosexual relationships, while she experiences the independent female, lesbian space as highly achievable, liberating and invigorating. At Aunt Raylene’s house, she no longer makes up stories in which she intertwines themes of violence and sex in connection to her and Glen; she also has a dream of an alternative, hopeful, unobstructed, liberating path of life:

The stories I made up for myself changed. In the half-sleep that preceded full sleep I began to imagine the highway that went north. No real road, this highway was shadowed by tall grass and ancient trees. Moss hung low and tiny birds with gray-blue wings darted from the road’s edge to the grass. Cars passed at the road but did not stop, and the north star shone above their headlight like a beacon. I walked that road alone, my legs swinging easily as

I covered the miles. No one stopped. No one called to me. Only the star guided me, and I was not sure where I would end. (Allison, 259)

Furthermore, Bone sees Aunt Raylene and Granny (Allison, 21) as a source of protection and self-esteem: Aunt Raylene praises Bone for being a good and hard worker, a praising that Bone desperately needs.

Aunt Raylene has a great influence on Bone's open formation of her subjectivity, and she introduces Bone to a liberating queer space. Aunt Raylene has always "been different from her sisters. She was quieter, more private, living alone with her dogs and fishing line, and seemingly happy that way" (Allison, 178). When she was young, she had been somewhat wild, and she had "worked for the carnival like a man, cutting off her hair and dressing in overalls. She'd called herself Ray, and with her short, stocky build, big shoulders, and small breasts, I could easily see how no one had questioned her" (Allison, 179). Similarly, Aunt Raylene encourages Bone to do something different with her life: "I'm counting on you to get out there and do things, girl. Make people nervous and make your old aunt glad" (Allison, 182). Aunt Raylene suggests Bone "look at it [the world] from the other side for a while" (Allison, 262), and it is significant that Bone is raped by Glen exactly at a point when she opens herself to Otherness, and when she decides to leave the law of the father behind in order to live with Aunt Raylene.

In contrast to the constraints of Anney and Glen's marital and familial arrangement, Bone experiences Aunt Raylene's world as giving her infinite perspectives and possibilities. Zimmerman explains that "the lesbian's woman-identified perspective and marginalized social position [gives] her 'a specific vantage-point from which to criticize and

analyze the politics, language and culture of patriarchy” (Zimmerman in Palmer, 43). The lesbian continuum<sup>16</sup> resists patriarchy, and it provides a “woman-identified experience, such as female friendship and feminist camaraderie, which are not overtly sexual. The lesbian continuum has important political implications. It represents lesbian existence as a form of resistance to patriarchal power” (Palmer, 45). Bone desperately needs this lesbian continuum particularly after the rape as it shows her the possibility of living without the law of the father and without the fear of punishment such law implies. Furthermore, it gives her the means to survive and most likely recover from her trauma.

After Bone’s rape by Daddy Glen, it is Aunt Raylene who in caring for Bone and her safety replaces the heterosexual family unit. At the hospital, she protects Bone from the sheriff’s interrogation, and she stays next to Bone’s hospital bed during the night: “There was no stopping Aunt Raylene. When the doctor insisted I stay overnight, she planted herself in a chair by my bed and refused to move. She held my hand all night while I lay unsleeping and restless. My arm throbbed, and my mouth was so bruised I could only whimper” (Allison, 299). She gives Bone courage to survive, and she tells Bone to “stop thinking about what happened. You can’t understand it yet. It don’t make sense, and I can’t explain it. [...] Your mama loves you. Just hang on, girl” (Allison, 301). Aunt Raylene tells Bone that she left her lover years ago, because her lover would not abandon her baby for Aunt Raylene; Bone is “thinking [...] about the woman she [Raylene] had loved, the woman who had loved her child more” (Allison, 302). The lesbian woman did not give up her child for her lover, whereas the heterosexual Anney abandons Bone for

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<sup>16</sup> See chapter 2, p. 30 for Adrienne Rich on ‘lesbian continuum.’

Daddy Glen. Bone recognizes that she lives in a patriarchal world making her tired of life: "The world was full of Daddy Glens, and I did not want to be in the world anymore" (Allison, 296). Though suicidal, Bone decides to trust Raylene, and open herself up to the queer space that her Aunt Raylene provides: "When Raylene came to me, I let her touch my shoulder, let my head tilt to lean against her, trusting her arm and her love. I was who I was going to be, someone like her, like Mama, a Boatwright woman. I wrapped my fingers in Raylene's and watched the night close in around us" (Allison, 309).

Aunt Raylene and Anney are fundamentally different in the sense that Aunt Raylene has an existence outside the law of the father, whereas Anney eventually submits to ideological impositions and to the law of the father. Aunt Raylene stands for an open concept of subjectivity and the exploration of the limit, and from this position she is able to protect Bone emotionally and physically giving her a life-saving and understanding home. Aunt Raylene's resistance to the law makes her a strong woman coming "forward like a tree falling, massive, inevitable, and reassuringly familiar. [...] Her arms were so strong, so safe. Don't let me go, [Bone] thought. Just please, don't let me go" (Allison, 297-298). Aunt Raylene is the feminine Other and thus unacceptable in society, but her Otherness and resistance to the law of the father give her a healthy sense of what is right and what is wrong, as well as provide her with a life-asserting subjectivity from which Bone only profits.

In comparison, Anney eventually stands for a closed concept of subjectivity and the boundary, as she is primarily concerned with the regulations of the law and with the submission to the ideological distribution of gender roles in marriage supervised by

patriarchy. Anney has always somehow failed to protect Bone, and when Bone needs her most, Anney leaves her alone in despair at the hospital, disappears, and actually abandons her daughter to follow her husband; before Anney leaves, she hands her daughter the altered birth certificate in which the space for the 'illegitimate' is "blank, unmarked, unstamped" (Allison, 309). Anney re-affirms the importance of submitting to the law, yet she also admits that she had hoped for Glen to make Bone legitimate: "For so long, I've just hoped and prayed, dreamed and pretended. I've hung on, just hung on" (Allison, 247). Anney recognizes at the end that she had ideological expectations of Glen while being blind to his real Self: "Bone, I never wanted you to be hurt. I wanted you to be safe. I wanted us all to be happy. I never thought it would go the way it did. I never thought Glen would hurt you like that. I just loved him so I couldn't see him that way. I couldn't believe. I couldn't imagine..." (Allison, 306). At the end, Anney looks old and she disappears into a nowhere, into nothingness.

I have shown in this chapter that Allison believes that it is absolutely necessary always to resist ideological impositions of subjectivity, gender, and sexual orientation and to avoid harming others and oneself by keeping one's subjectivity open. Anney and Glen's marriage is a site of ideological constraints, and it is destructive to everyone affected by the family unit as it is a boundary and performance. Allison demonstrates that a subject's preoccupation with the ideological distribution of power relations (the Phallus) violates the open formation of subjectivity. The problem is not that Anney and Bone threaten to castrate Glen by wanting or simply by assuming the Phallus, but it is the ideological imposition that dictates that the man 'have' the Phallus and the woman 'be' the Phallus.

If society were organized in such a way that the Phallus were attributed to men due to their anatomy, then Glen would not have to suffer from castration anxiety. Characters like Bone and Aunt Raylene are necessary in order to re-signify, re-contextualize, and re-distribute the Phallus (as a void signifier) a) to signify something other than absolute control, dominance and power, and b) to distribute the Phallus equally between women and men.

The performance in Glen and Anney's marriage is a direct result of the performance of their gendered subjectivity, and thus of the closure of their subjectivity. Bone as more other than Other shows Glen and Anney that there are alternative ways to perform gender, to keep one's subjectivity open, and thus to re-think their marital arrangement in terms of performativity. Instead of viewing Bone as a different signifier with which to align themselves in order to keep their subjectivity open, they submit to ideological constraints and punish Bone for her Otherness. Bone's Otherness is a mote in their eyes as they progressively and monolithically aspire toward coherence and normalcy, rejecting fragmentation and oscillation. Bone's bastard and Anney's initial 'loose woman' existence in a female-only household pushes them outside the law of the father, and Anney seeks to normalize, legitimize, and render respectable their family unit by marrying up into the middle class. However, Glen's contempt for White trash, for Bone's illegitimacy, and for Bone's resistance to the law of the father shows Anney that she must distance herself from anything that Glen hates if she wants to keep his 'protection' in a patriarchal world. In a patriarchal system, ideology claims that marriage is the 'protector' of traditions, of (middle class) values, and of the heterosexual family unit.<sup>17</sup> Ironically, it is this ideology

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<sup>17</sup> See Anderson for her chapter on "Women, Families, and Households."

calling for coherence which makes its subjects turn against the most unprotected members of its system, particularly in the case of dissidence and resistance to the law of the father.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

This M.A. thesis investigated the concepts of marriage in one representative fictional work by Virginia Woolf, Nella Larsen, and Dorothy Allison highlighting the intersection of gender, race, class, female sexuality, and sexual orientation. Ideological impositions influence subject formation and subject positioning through categories of gender, race, class, female sexuality, and sexual orientation. The subject may 'choose' to close her subjectivity and hence live a performance of marriage by submitting to ideological impositions, or she may choose to keep her subjectivity open and hence live a performativity of marriage by resisting or circumventing these ideological constraints. In the three fictional works discussed in the previous chapters, Woolf, Larsen, and Allison demonstrate clearly that resistance to ideological impositions on subjectivity in regards to categories of gender, race, class, and sexuality may have dangerous repercussions, yet submitting to ideological constraints is even more damaging and death-like. Passing as the normative Self in public while being Other in private seems to be the only way to circumvent ideological impositions in a society in which only the normative subject is granted Selfhood and in which the deviant subject is eliminated as Other. Traditional concepts of marriage are directed by a 'common understanding'/consent that power relations and gendered roles are clearly and hierarchically distributed between wife and husband. This traditional concept, or performance of marriage is death-like because development and change, or a challenge to this consent is unacceptable and even punishable by the dominant husband. Marriage is not death-like and destructive if wife

and husband recognize that marriage is a master-signifier filled with ideological expectations, and that these impositions can never be fully achieved as there is continuous deferral of expectations and desires. Hence, the performativity of marriage offers a more viable approach as the subject invents herself anew by means of that very control.

The intersection of gender, race, class, female sexuality, and sexual orientation influence subjectivity which in turn has an effect on marital arrangements. In the fiction of Woolf, Larsen, and Allison, it is evident that the categories of gender, race, class, female sexuality, and sexual orientation constrain subjectivity: they limit the subject to a prescribed rank in the societal order in the sense that the subject has to exhibit a dominant or submissive behaviour 'specific' to these categories. These categories are not 'natural,' but have historically been instated as natural and normative by means of ideological impositions and hegemony as I have previously argued. In the performance of these categories, the subject closes her subjectivity as she submits to and enacts ideological expectations without challenging these constraining notions and without exploring Otherness and deviancy. These categories can be broken open to re-signification and enable the subject to engage in a performativity of subjectivity, and as a consequence, in a more liberating concept of marriage. If the subject aims for an open concept of marriage, the re-thinking of these categories is essential as they can challenge the ideological production and reproduction of oppressive normalcy.

Woolf proposes a performativity, or an open concept of marriage, while Larsen and Allison admonish marital performance, or a death-like/closed concept of marriage. In the performance of marriage, husband and wife enact ideological expectations of normalcy.

'Normalcy' dictates that the husband be dominant over his subservient wife, and this rule of hegemony can be broken open if wife and husband realize that the 'normalcy' of this power distribution is not at all natural, but a result of nothingness, as ideological impositions are based on nothingness or on de-historicized contingency. The performativity of marriage offers the possibility of projecting a 'normal' marriage to the outside in order for the married subject to pass as the normative Self while living a deviant marital arrangement in private. The performativity of marriage thus keeps subjectivity open as it may enable the subject to explore Otherness and deviancy on the inside while enacting normalcy to the outside.

Traditional concepts of marriage are a performance where husband and wife enact prescribed roles, and Larsen, as well as Allison, demonstrates clearly that marriage as performance is destructive if not death-like. The concept of a traditional marriage is based on a hierarchical concept in which the husband holds absolute power and control over his wife. The performance of marriage is destructive especially for the female character as the traditional marital arrangement attributes to her a weak and powerless position. This closed concept of marriage is not only harmful to the married couple, but, as Allison demonstrates, it is also destructive for the characters indirectly involved in this marital life.

Larsen demonstrates in *Quicksand* the destructiveness of Helga's marriage in that her husband uses religious dogma for his own ends, that is, to justify his wife's subservient position and her gendered role of mother and wife as well as her biological 'task' of dangerous childbirth. He manipulates Helga's conception of the world in order to produce

a hegemony serving his own purpose of maintaining his dominant position. The latter remains secure in a society that is structured by patriarchal control and that interprets religious dogma in favour of husbandly reign. Helga's development from an independent, healthy woman to a dying mother and wife is tragic as her choice to marry was influenced by her need to counteract negative ideological impositions on her Black female sexuality. Her attempt to find more liberty in a marriage to a Black Reverend instead of to a White painter ends in disillusionment as her marriage constrains her to her gendered role as mother, wife, and caretaker, as well as to the dangers of rapidly successive childbirths. This performance of marriage entails a closure of subjectivity as Helga is compelled to submit her subjectivity to ideological constraints and as she is no longer allowed to explore her Otherness. The marriage as well as Helga 'deteriorate' because the Reverend denies Helga alternative possibilities for subjectivity.

Allison shows in *Bastard out of Carolina* that Anney and Glen's marital arrangement becomes very destructive for all the family members involved since the performance of marriage reproduces the state of a power imbalance instead of challenging this arrangement. Daddy Glen controls his wife by manipulating and invoking ideological concepts of husbandly/masculine reign and he employs physical violence in order to maintain control over his wife. In this sense, then, Daddy Glen's power in the microcosm of his family equals the power relations in the macrocosm as described by Althusser in terms of the State Apparatus, that is the State Apparatus' ideological and repressive branches.<sup>18</sup> His manipulation resembles the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) in that he

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<sup>18</sup> See introductory chapter for Althusser on ideology (p.6 ff).

imposes ideological constraints, and his physical violence is like the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA) because he punishes the resistant subject by violence in order to force the deviant subject to submit to his ideological impositions. His abuse is a reflection of a societal order that functions by unequal power relations through the aid of the ISA and the RSA in the sense that it is acceptable if not even expected that the 'stronger' be the autocratic lord over the 'weaker.' Anney's silence in the abuse of Bone equals her consent to the punishment of Bone's deviancy and disobedience to normalcy. Yet, Anney's implicit part in the abuse of Bone is a result of Glen's powerful position as husband. His physical violence functions as deterrent to discourage the on-looker Anney from being deviant for fear of receiving the same violent treatment as the dissenter Bone. Glen's rule over his family is autocratic. Moreover, his need to display his phallic powers is evidently his desperate attempt to assert his masculinity that is always already at stake. If society promoted more egalitarian power relations among subjects, the distribution of power in marriage would not lie in the hands of the physically stronger, and, more specifically, Bone would not be subject to abuse by her step father who is prey to castration anxiety himself. Bone suffers tremendously from this performance of marriage, though the institution of marriage traditionally claims to protect family members from harm. Thus, Bone is likely to recover from her trauma in the queer space of her lesbian aunt where she experiences a more egalitarian relationship than with Anney and Glen.

The performativity of marriage offers an alternative to the traditional concept of marriage as it allows married subjects to explore the Otherness of their subjectivity and live a marital arrangement alternative to ideological impositions of the afore-mentioned

categories. Woolf represents the performativity of marriage in *Mrs. Dalloway* as a fundamentally positive thing as this open concept liberates the subject from ideological constraints; however, it is evident that passing by means of the performativity of marriage is less difficult for subjects of the upper middle class. Clarissa passes as the feminine Self in upper middle class society while privately being the deviant feminine Other. Her marriage and motherhood render her the normative, heterosexual feminine Self to the public, but within her marital arrangement, her husband Richard leaves her the space to explore her Otherness. Her marriage thus gives her protection from being eliminated as the feminine Other. In contrast to Clarissa, Septimus' marriage does not grant him protection because he does not project the behaviour of the masculine Self to the outside and because his lower-class status gives him no privilege to Otherness. Within his marital arrangement, Rezia grants him Selfhood as she finally accepts his Otherness, but society punishes Septimus for his inability to pass as the heterosexual, masculine bread-winning normative Self. Clarissa's and Septimus' marital arrangements are in a state of continuous flux because their subjectivity is not fixed but multiple, open, and developmental. Within their separate marital arrangements, they are able to explore their Otherness and keep their subjectivity open; yet while Clarissa survives as the feminine Self, Septimus dies as the masculine Other due to society's impulse to liquidate the Other.

The case of Clarissa and Septimus demonstrates not only that marriage is open to re-signification but also that marriage is a master-signifier whose 'essence' is never fully achieved as there is infinite deferral and approximation. Marital life is never what ideological impositions want marriage to be; if the subject allows for an open development

of her/his subjectivity and accepts that marriage, overburdened by ideological impositions, can never be achieved, marital life will grow in an alternative direction to ideological death-like constraints. Yet, if the subject attempts to force his/her marital arrangement into ideological paradigms, the resulting closure of the concept of marriage proves destructive for the free development of subjectivity.

Woolf, Larsen, and Allison demonstrate that their characters' choices will either entrap or liberate them, but they also show that their choices are limited. The characters are all in a dilemma as they seek Selfhood and social acceptance through marriage at the possible expense of the openness of their subjectivity. The three novelists illustrate clearly that their female characters' choices are limited as their existence in a patriarchal, racist, sexist, and heterosexist society grants them Selfhood (only) through marriage and married motherhood. Although marriage and motherhood promise Selfhood, the traditional concept of marriage grants the female subject no Selfhood when the husband makes her Other and keeps Selfhood for himself as a consequence of which the female subject has *no* Selfhood. The wife thus finds herself in a subservient position in which she strives for a Selfhood that will not be granted to her. As a consequence of the husband's being in the dominant position from which he may or may not grant Selfhood to his wife, the wife has to re-assert her Selfhood that marriage and motherhood promised her in the first place. The wife begins to take part in the liquidation of the feminine Other (as in the case of Anney and Bone, or the women in the Reverend's community and Helga) in order to distinguish herself from the feminine Other and thus to emerge as the feminine Self. Hence, the traditional concept of marriage not only keeps the wife in her subservient

position, but also ensures that she participates in the elimination of the feminine Other and in the reproduction of the 'necessity' for the feminine Self as a rigid concept.

It is not only the relationship between husband and wife that is directed by a discourse of power, but, as Foucault argues, all types of interaction between subjects and institutions are directed by a display of power. If Foucault's assumption is true, then there will not be a 'genuine equality' between husband and wife as long as society is directed by unequal power relations (marriage as a reflection of social power relations). Yet, the relationship between husband and wife can become more egalitarian if society's ideology tended toward a more egalitarian outlook, if husband and wife grant each other Selfhood, and if they both accept each other's strengths and weaknesses in certain domains so that it may be acceptable, for instance, for the wife to become the breadwinner. If both parties involved accept that their subjectivity is made up of Self and Other, they can live their marriage in a more harmonious way without feeling the need to display oppressive power relations to their partner. Marriage can be positive or negative depending on the subjects' choice to submit or resist ideological paradigms, and the institution of marriage needs to be freed of ideological impositions in the sense that the subject recognizes that marriage is a constant approximation, deferral, and development in regards to power relations, desires, and expectations. It is unlikely that human existence will ever be completely free of ideological impositions. But we can challenge oppressive power relations and ideological impositions and constraints nonetheless. Hence, it is necessary to de-ideologize categories of gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and female sexuality. Otherwise, open subject formation and an alternative subject positioning will not be able

to challenge traditional concepts of marriage and thus open up marriage to more ameliorative terms in order to aim for expanded egalitarian relationships between subjects without fatal constraints.

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