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Doctoral Dissertation

African American Masculinities in Ann Petry's Oeuvre

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I, the undersigned Hogar Najm Abdullah hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. To the best of my knowledge this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgement has been made. This thesis contains no material which has been accepted as part of the requirements of any other academic degree or non-degree program, in English or in any other language.

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Abstract

This dissertation articulates how Ann Petry challenges the traditional notions about African American masculinities and redefines them with more positive and progressive attributes in her works. It probes the ways Petry's black male characters face oppression, stereotypes, and systemic barriers, in relation to American hegemonic masculinity and (black) femininity. As black men, they are in the process of being permanently constructed due to the intersecting power of race, gender, class, and other categories on personal, social, and state levels in a context specific manner. I implement an intersectional reading method to analyze Petry's constructions of African American masculinities, enhanced by a two-step strategy of identify-by-explaining categories and asking the other question about their constitutive and overlapping dynamics. This dissertation also addresses Petry's underrepresented role in subverting the socially constructed and maintained stereotypes about African American masculinities and proposes two reasons for it. Firstly, there is an actual interplay between reinforcing and subverting stereotypes in Petry's novels and short stories, which I regard as part of an evaluation of her oeuvre. On the one hand, she depicts stereotypical African American male characters in "Like a Winding Sheet" (1945), *The Street* (1946), and "In Darkness and Confusion" (1947) in order to revisit and refine the violent and sexually driven black masculine stereotypes. On the other, she represents black male characters as racially-conscious and diverse in "Solo on the Drums" (1947), *The Narrows* (1953), and "The New Mirror" (1965) to maintain her non-essentialist and progressive definitions of black masculinities. Secondly, reading Petry on the periphery of protest fiction – epitomized in the works of black male authors such as Richard Wright – overshadows her divergent aesthetics and impedes her contribution to the advancement of mid-century African American fiction. By depicting black male characters from the perspective of a female author, this dissertation showcases how Petry modifies the male-dominated modes of representation of black masculinities. The critique of Petry's representations of African American masculinities, thus, expands outside the male vs. female dichotomy and repositions her beyond the confinements of protest novel aesthetics.

Keywords: African American masculinities, Ann Petry, hegemonic masculinity, intersectionality, masculinity studies, mid-century African American fiction, protest fiction, stereotypes

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Introduction

Ishmael Reed posits that "being a black man in America is like being a spectator at your own lynching" (1993, 16). Reed reflects on how African American men in the US are socially and corporeally annihilated and are susceptible to brutal acts as they have always awed threat, fear, and bestiality. The repercussions of such problematic representations are at the forefront of Ann Petry's fiction. Her fiction provides an unorthodox perspective, different from black male authors' conceptualizations of African American masculinities in the contemporary protest novel of the 1940s - 50s. This dissertation sets forth the representations of African American masculinities in a substantial part of Petry's works from an intersectional perspective. It delves into the multifaceted experiences of African American men in the mid-twentieth century US society through an in-depth analysis of her texts. These texts comprise novels; *The Street* (1946), *Country Place* (1947), *The Narrows* (1953), short stories; "Like a Winding Sheet" (1945), "In Darkness and Confusion" (1947), "Solo on the Drums" (1947), "The New Mirror" (1965), and non-fictional pieces; "Harlem" (1949), "What's Wrong with Negro Men?" (1947).

This dissertation's main question concerns how Petry represents African American masculinities in her fictional works to challenge the traditional notions of African American masculinities and subvert certain stereotypes about this group of masculinities. Petry's contribution to the advancement of mid-century black fiction – especially with regard to her representations of African American masculinities – is underappreciated and overshadowed by her contemporary black male authors. This research also aims to highlight Petry's unwavering role in offering nuanced and sophisticated depictions of African American masculinities. Petry's studied writings pave the way for a more comprehensive insight into the complexity and diversity of African American men's experiences and serve as a powerful tool for challenging and transforming dominant cultural narratives in the US from the 1940s to the 1960s. However, Petry's works alternate between reinforcing and subverting stereotypes in accordance with the (sub)genre of the studied texts. This unresolved debate is considered as a possible way to evaluate her oeuvre and reflect on her time's sociopolitical milieu in this dissertation.

The dissertation argues that Petry transcends the initially restrictive boundaries of protest fiction as established in the man-authored black fiction. The objective of this dissertation is to provide a comprehensive and multilayered assessment of Petry's oeuvre through intersectional analysis of her black male characters. I investigate how her black male characters are constantly

being constructed at the intersection of race, gender, class, and other social categories. In addition, I read their masculinities in relation to hegemonic masculinity and (black) femininity to exhibit the impediments hindering the way of accomplishing their masculine identities. These challenges range from oppression experienced on a personal level to stereotypes on a social level and systemic barriers on a hierarchical level.

An overarching question on the level of the general project is shifting focus from studying the black female characters to the male ones in Petry's fictional texts. Petry's work is traditionally read as being on the periphery of Richard Wright's naturalist protest school of fiction, which masculinized mid-century black fiction (Ward Jr. 2004; Clark 2013; Miller 2016). This view has been critiqued by focusing on Petry's dynamic representations of female characters, which is still a current debate (Holladay 1996; Eby 2008; Griffin 2013). If so, does the return to male issues mean a conservative return to the old male-oriented focus of the protest novel tradition? This dissertation sets out to argue otherwise by applying an intersectional analysis to Petry's works. This perspective results in a sensitive reconsideration of the deep-rooted male stereotypical positions, as in *The Street*, and a thorough problematization of these positions in other works, as in *The Narrows*. In addition, Petry changes the traditionally male-dominated modes of representation. She disrupts the monolithic idea of black masculinity represented by black male authors vs. black femininity by black female authors. Thereby, she extends her depictions of African American masculinities beyond the dichotomous male vs. female critique. She, instead, constructs the masculine identities of her black male characters according to a progressive feminist initiative.

Analyses of the black male characters are conducted in this dissertation by following an intersectional reading method which primarily comprises a two-step strategy of identify-by-explaining the categories and asking the other question about them. The first step identifies the interconnected effect of categories in shaping black masculinities and explains how race is gendered, and classed. It unravels the intersectional process of race, gender, and class and pinpoints how it leads to reinforcing/subverting certain stereotypes about black men. Race is considered the master category in constructing African American masculinities to avoid the infinitive number of intersecting categories. Additionally, this step focuses on the relational nature of African American masculinities; i.e., it helps to measure their masculinity in relation to hegemonic masculinity. Secondly, asking the other question step is utilized to elaborate on the role of categories which

may render invisible in the process of constructing the studied masculinities but are of an essential quality in their identity formation.

The chapters of this dissertation reflect on the all-embracing objective of showcasing Petry's sophisticated and multifaceted literary works via an intersectional reading of her representations of African American masculinities. The first chapter provides a theoretical and methodological background, focusing on how Petry's black male characters are to be analyzed according to the lenses of intersectionality. It explores possible ways of using intersectionality as a method to study Petry's black male characters throughout three sections. The emergence of intersectionality in social theory and a critical reading of its application are covered in the first section. The second section of this chapter focuses on intersectionality as a model to investigate African American masculinities in relation to American hegemonic masculinity by outlining an intersectional reading method. The last section delineates intersectionality as a new direction in literary criticism. The section covers the implementation of intersectionality in literary representations of black masculinities in scholarly works and underlines stereotypes as an analytical category to be studied from an intersectional viewpoint.

The second chapter surveys the literary-historical backgrounds of Petry's nuanced representations of African American masculinities. It poses the question of how Petry's representations of black masculinities relate to stereotypical representations of black male characters in protest novels. First, the chapter delineates the tradition of the protest novel in the US literary scene of the 1940s and 1950s and relates Petry's reception to it. Secondly, it discusses Petry's two rarely discussed non-fictional texts on African American masculinities: "Harlem" and "What is Wrong with Negro Men?". They provide insights into Petry's political disposition and non-essentialist understanding of the marginalizing effects of race, gender, and class in demonstrating the psychological complexity of the urban poor with a focus on black men.

Chapter three discusses how Petry challenges black masculine stereotypes in *The Street* and destabilizes white masculine identities in *Country Place*. The first section peruses Petry's representations of the Mandingo. I analyze the Super and Boots Smith in this novel as black men who sexually violate women to make amends for their feelings of marginalized masculinities, in parallel with hegemonic masculinity and black femininity. This section tracks how Petry revisits the Mandingo stereotype and dismantles it as an attempt to show the problems of adopting such an oppressive stereotype by black men. It presents the black male characters' failure in

transcending the stereotypical representations of their masculinities despite Petry's unquivering efforts to portray the inevitable forces perpetuating them as sexually driven. The second section foregrounds Petry's white life novel *Country Place* to showcase her representation of white masculinities as a backdrop to her works on black male characters. In other words, representing the novel's white masculine identities as insecure and anxious is to question the traditional ways of defining Petry's fictional black male characters in relation to white masculinities regarded as the norm.

The fourth chapter emphasizes the progressive aspects of Petry's black masculinities in *The Narrows*. It underlines their self-consciousness vis-à-vis their racial affiliations and persistent contention for social reform. These masculinities define their identities in more liberal terms and embrace less oppressive oppositions in society than the black male characters of Petry's protest fiction. Not all of them succeed in their pursuits, as they remain marginalized by a relentless intersection of their race with other social categories. However, they resist the hierarchical disparities and white hegemonic ideals of masculinity. They are non-assimilationists, refute stereotypes, and exhibit a determined will for social justice. In the first section of this chapter, I start with studying the intersections between the canonical categories of race, gender, and class in constituting the novel's main character as a politically progressive black man. Then, the second section shifts the focus to investigate the role of the less discussed intersectionalities, namely, age, ability, and sexuality, to showcase a different range of impediments the black male characters of Petry's novel face. At the same time, they exemplify manifold, unsettled, and fluid black masculinities.

Chapter five analyzes a selection of Petry's short fiction from *Miss Muriel and Other Stories* to peruse how Petry reforms black masculine rage and adds nuances to her representations of black male characters. The first section of the chapter reads Johnson in "Like a Winding Sheet" and William Jones in "In Darkness and Confusion as black men who perform violence and practice it as a self-defense mechanism to conceal their feelings of masculine marginalization. While "Solo on the Drums" and "The New Mirror" present less to non-violent black men. These short stories underline new aspects of Petry's portrayals of African American masculinities regarding their middle-class affiliation and privilege. More significantly, they contribute to Petry's varied and multifaceted constructions of black men and accentuate her reliance on African oral traditions and (jazz) music traditions.

Chapter 1. An Intersectional Perspective of African American Masculinities

As represented in Ann Petry's works, African American masculinities are permanently in the process of being constructed due to the intersecting power of race, gender, class, and other categories. Petry's black male characters are men who face oppression, are judged through stereotypes, and are confronted by systemic barriers, hindering their way towards achieving any sense of accomplished masculinity. Each of these challenges is connected to one or some or all of the categories of intersectionality, depending on the specific context of the representation. Intersectionality is the framework I plan to rely on in studying the representations of African American masculinities which can be perceived as an intersection of the traditional masculine norms and the systemic impediments stemming from racism. I argue that Petry aims to represent nuanced images of African American masculinities that can go beyond the usual stereotypical depictions. The main objective of this chapter is to investigate the possible ways intersectionality can be implemented to approach African American masculinities.

This chapter is divided into three sections to support the possible ways intersectionality as a model can be adopted to study the representations of the African American male characters in Petry's fiction. The first section is an account of the emergence of intersectionality in social theory and the critical reading of its application. This overview serves as a possible way to approach Petry's fictional writings by considering the multidimensionality of her depicted characters. This aspect adds further potential to literary analysis models prior to intersectionality by allowing a more sophisticated and multifaceted understanding of the studied characters. Intersectionality in masculinity studies and as a model to investigate African American masculinities is the focus of the second section of this chapter. The section provides an intellectual background of Raewyn Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity, studied as a relational concept and from an intersectional viewpoint.

Henceforth, I delineate an intersectional reading method to analyze Petry's black male characters. Derived from different available methods adopted by other scholars, I refer to this method as a two-step strategy of identifying and explaining categories, and asking the other question about them. I also suggest a master-category strategy for examining the intersection of the different categories to add more depth to the analysis and avoid some of the pitfalls of intersectionality. The last section is dedicated to the thoughts and concerns regarding intersectionality in literary criticism. This section establishes a meeting point between the literary

history of the problematic representations of black men and Ann Petry's. It also underlines stereotyping as an analytical category within an intersectional frame, a form of practice, and how it relates to masculinity.

1.1. Intersectionality in Social Theory: Emergence and Application

Intersectionality started as a feminist enterprise and has noticeably impacted gender studies for the last three decades. It has been utilized to theorize and study structural inequalities, their multifaceted interconnectedness, and, most importantly, how people's everyday lives are affected by the interplay between these structural inequalities. It has been used as a tool to lay bare issues of power and inequality. Intersectionality does not only focus on the oppression of individuals or groups; but also on possible ways for their empowerment and agency. Intersectionality emerged initially within critical race theory and legal studies to exemplify the multiple structural and discursive marginalization. Marvin Lynn and Adrienne D. Dixson contend that critical race theory provides an alternative way of looking at race and racial power as constructed and presented in American (legal) culture and society, usually from an intersectional perspective and away from essentialist notions (2022, 34). Evelyn M. Simien and Ange-Marie Hancock denote that intersectionality focuses on the "simultaneous and interacting effects" of multiple social categories such as race, gender, and class (2011, 185).

Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality in 1989 to conceptualize the interaction between social categories such as gender, race, and sexuality in subordinating women of color in the US to criticize the anti-discrimination laws against them as plaintiffs in the courts. Derived from the English phrase "intersection," meaning "crossroads," Crenshaw applies the term to the intersection of these women's race and gender, creating a site of deprivilege not recognized by law (1989, 139) and defines it as "a metaphor for understanding the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage sometimes compound themselves and create obstacles that often are not understood among conventional ways of thinking of anti-racism or feminism" (Crenshaw 2017). Accordingly, I argue that intersectionality serves as a prism to understand the lived experiences of Petry's black male characters by detangling the injustice and discrimination they are subjected to on multiple levels: personal, social, and state.

As a key concept in gender studies, intersectionality aims to critique the focus of the mainstream research and scholarship on the white middle-class women at the expense of black women and their experiences. The model's task is to acknowledge black women's position in the

mainstream scholarship and research and to attest that they are biased for precluding them. In her 1989 foundational article on the subject, Crenshaw writes:

> In much of feminist theory and, to some extent, in antiracist politics, this framework is reflected in the belief that sexism or racism can be meaningfully discussed without paying attention to the lives of those other than the race-, gender- or class-privileged. As a result, both feminist theory and antiracist politics have been organized, in part, around the equation of racism with what happens to the Black middle-class or to Black men, and the equation of sexism with what happens to white women. (Crenshaw 1989, 152)

In conducting studies of feminist theory and antiracist politics, attention is mostly paid to black middle-class and black men when it comes to racism. Attention is similarly paid to white women when it comes to sexism. As a result, so little attention or almost none is paid to those black women who are not privileged by either race or sex. Crenshaw further elaborates on this subject matter in her 1991 study as follows:

> I consider how the experiences of women of color are frequently the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism, and how these experiences tend not to be represented within the discourses of either feminism or antiracism. Because of their intersectional identity as both women and of color within discourses that are shaped to respond to one or the other, women of color are marginalized within both. (Crenshaw 1991, 1243–4)

She utilizes intersectionality to explain that oppression does not work in singularity. Instead, multiple forms of social categories, such as race, gender, class, and other categories intersect and create new layers of oppression for each black woman. Crenshaw argues that the focus in the mentioned discourses is usually on certain group members seen as privileged, which does not only marginalize those who are "multiply-burdened" (1989, 140), it even hinders the way from a possible analysis of racism and sexism. In other words, the given privileges to certain members of society both discriminate against black women and eliminate the chances of possible constructions of any theoretical frame to represent them based on the interactive force of the categories.

Crenshaw critiques American law and feminist theory for relying on one-dimensional approaches with a limited descriptive possibility. She contends that each of these approaches creates frameworks that consider either gender or race as isolated dimensions of discrimination. Intersectionality is "an attempt" on Crenshaw's behalf "to create a prism that revealed the confluence of structure and identity and to highlight vectors in which discrimination was rendered invisible by the prevailing frameworks that were deployed to identify and intervene against it" (2011, 230). Ann-Dorte Christensen and Sune Qvotrup Jensen (2020, 82) argue that "[s]ince its

coining, intersectionality has been a rapidly traveling and evolving concept, which has crossed borders, continents, and contexts as well as academic disciplines, subject areas, and feminist positions". Crenshaw's utilization of the concept as other African American critics' emphasize structural power relations in the US context. At the same time, emphasis is placed mostly on everyday practices and complex identities, which are also reflective of power relations and politics as in Nira Yuval-Davis' (2006), Ann Phoenix's (2011) and Helma Lutz's (2015), European feminist critics' usage of the concept as it was developed within the humanities and social sciences.

Intersectionality is "old wine in new bottles," as Helma Lutz, Maria Teresa Herrera Vivar, and Linda Supik write in "Framing Intersectionality: An Introduction," and that its roots can be traced back to the analysis of the black feminists' work "in the context of the black women's rights movement in the USA" (2011, 2). However, they emphasize that those works did not necessarily always reflect on an intersectional perspective but paved the way for the emergence of intersectionality. Black feminists have attempted to create an analytical tool for the complex and multidimensional nature of their lived experiences under different labels since the 1970s. Francis Beale's 1979 "concept of double jeopardy" and Patricia Hill Collins' 1990 model of a "matrix of domination" and "interlocking systems of oppression" are used as alternatives for the intersection of race, gender, and class in their works. Among the pioneering black sociologists to tackle how an intersection of race with gender and class shapes oppression and discrimination experienced by African Americans is W. E. B. Du Bois. Du Bois pinpointed the intersectional effect of race with other social categories, especially concerning black women, as in his work *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*. He labels black women in the US as "daughters of sorrow" for bearing the disadvantage of race and sex intersection (Du Bois 1920, 165). Jennifer C. Nash provides an intellectual background to the emergence of intersectionality as a heuristic term and a theoretical frame in black feminism in *Black Feminism Reimagined: After Intersectionality*. The author claims that credit should not only be attributed to the Combahee River Collective – Kimberlé Crenshaw, Patricia Hill Collins, Deborah King, and Frances Beal – who are usually listed among the first to have theorized intersectionality. Supported by recent black feminist scholarship, she argues that Anna Julia Cooper's work can also be regarded as foundational in modern intersectionality theory. She argues further that Cooper's *A Voice from the South* (1892) was possibly the first book of considerable length that provided an example of black feminist theory in the US as it articulates what it means to be a person and citizen in terms of race, gender and class (Nash 2019, 17).

The formerly enslaved African American Sojourner Truth's seminal speech entitled "Ain't I a woman?" can be considered one of the earliest examples of an approach addressing the same issues as intersectionality. Presented at the Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, 1851, this speech is not only one of the first classic examples of utilizing a method similar to intersectionality; but also, is a challenge to the sexist imagery used by male critics to justify the marginalization of women in the abolitionist USA. "Ain't I a woman?" has been used as a refrain in the feminist discourse since the middle of the nineteenth century. bell hooks used this refrain as the title of her 1981 book which scorns analogies between the experiences of white women and black women. hooks accentuates the individualistic character and the underrepresentation of the experience of black women in the US society by arguing that "all women are white and all blacks are men." She further argues that using the term "woman" synonymously with white women and the term "blacks" synonymously with black men indicates a "sexist-racist attitude" in the same language that is supposed to eliminate "sexist oppression" against black women (hooks 1982, 8). Black women's rights are recognized only to the extent that they either coincide with those of white women or black men. Similarly, the discriminatory white feminist discourse is censured by Cherríe Moraga, who co-edited the classic 1981 *This Bridge Called My Back* along with Gloria E. Anzaldúa. In addition to reflecting on an "un-compromised definition of feminism by women of color in the U.S." (Moraga and Anzaldúa 2002, liii), Moraga posits that the white feminist groups preclude black women as "the very nature and structure of the group itself may be founded on racist or classist assumptions" (2002, 31).

Inspired by hooks, Moraga, and Anzaldua, this exclusive nature of black women's experience is the subject matter of the renowned feminist anthology *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave* (1982), co-edited by Akasha Gloria Hull, Patricia Bell-Scott, and Barbara Smith. In introducing the concept of intersectionality, Crenshaw cites this book at the beginning of her influential 1989 paper "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics". In Nira Yuval-Davis's words, both *Ain't I a woman* and *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave* can be regarded as "the starting points of an analytical and political move by Black and other feminists and social scientists to deconstruct the categories of both 'women' and 'Blacks' and to develop an analysis of the intersectionality of

various social divisions, most often – but not exclusively – focusing on gender, race and class" (2006, 193).

The significance of this historical background is to confirm the omnipresence of this intersectional perspective in the works of black intellectuals even long before intersectionality was coined as a term and established as a framework in scholarly literature. It serves as a ground to build on arguments about approaching the primaries of this dissertation from an intersectional point of view. Petry's considered works for this research had been published before intersectionality was established as a field of study. As Petry shows the lived experiences of her characters, usually from the position of people residing on the lowest grids of power in society, intersectionality, as adopted in this research, is also of a bottom-up viewpoint in analyzing those characters. This can be supported by Crenshaw's invocation of Paula Giddings "when they enter, we all enter" (1989, 167), stressing the importance of recognizing the most disadvantageous members of a society which leads to the recognition of those who can be less disadvantaged. Intersectionality is developed in social theory and comes with its problematics. In the remainder of this section, I attempt to indicate the possible ways of adopting it as a framework and outline some of its main challenges with suggested ways to avoid them in my research.

My main objective behind relying on intersectionality is to be more critically aware of issues of inclusion, power, and privilege, but it has its contestations too. The lack of a clear-cut classification of intersectionality is the first and foremost obstacle. It is not definite whether intersectionality is a theoretical framework, a concept, a heuristic device, or a reading strategy for conducting specific analysis. However, this can a potential advantage of intersectionality in the sense that is provides space for scholars to utilize it despite their different standpoints and objectives. Kathy Davis (2011, 43) underlines the uncertainty about the objectives of intersectionality by stating that "it is not at all clear whether intersectionality should be limited to understanding individual experiences, to theorizing identity or whether it should be taken as a property of social structures and cultural discourses". Though critics such as Wendy Sigle-Rushton describes it as an umbrella term for "hierarchies, axes of differentiation, axes of oppression, social structures, normativities" (2013, 4), a precise categorization remains lacking for what intersectionality is. Its objectives are yet to be finalized. Crenshaw reflects on the significance of intersectionality as "a heuristic or hermeneutic tool" that she fashioned to lay bare the discrimination against black women with competent elaborations and amplifications serve as a

way of empowering them (2011, 232). There are also controversies over the metaphorical meaning of intersectionality as a term. Crenshaw (1991,1299) uses it as a metaphor for crossroads as in "the intersection of multiple dimensions". While it is used by Nira Yuval-Davis (2006, 203) as "axes of social divisions" and by Dorthe Stanæs (2003, 102) as a dynamic process or "process of doing".

Despite its intended meaning as a term, intersectionality can be used as both a theory and methodology. Since I plan to employ it as part of my methodological approach, in what follows I will focus on the second aspect. Catharine A. Mackinnon, in "Intersectionality as Method: A Note," argues that "[m]ethod concerns the way one thinks, not what one thinks about, although they can be related" (2013, 1019). In this respect, it is a method when it is a way of considering a certain identity intersectionally rather than inspecting that identity. The fine line between the two is that intersectionality is a method as far as it remains on a hypothetical level related to Crenshaw's earlier reference to it as a heuristic tool. Intersectionality as a method captures the interactive relations "between inequalities as grounded in the lived experience of hierarchy which leads to changing not only what people think about inequality but also the way they think" (Mackinnon 2013, 1028).

This research considers categories, stereotypes, and classifications as indispensable tools of inequality that stand static and hard to subvert. Nevertheless, they result from the dynamic interactions of multiple hierarchies, which could not be detected by the previous and conventional frameworks but recognized by intersectionality. For Mackinnon, intersectionality embraces a "distinctive stance" in looking at the ways the categories converge as it mainly criticizes "a rigidly top-down social and political order from the perspective of the bottom up" and that "it fills out the Venn diagrams at points of overlap where convergence has been neglected, training its sights where vectors of inequality intersect at crossroads that have previously been at best sped through" (Mackinnon 2013, 1020). In my research, intersectionality is utilized to accentuate the left-out dimensions about the representations of Petry's masculine identities in previous literature written on her from one-dimensional methods. For instance, approaching discrimination against black male characters in Petry's fiction interesectionally leads to perceiving how the racism directed against them is stereotypically gendered. In other words, I argue that an intersectional way of thinking is of essential significance in investigating Petry's fictional depictions of black men so as not to miss the gendered dimensions of their race or the racialized aspects of their gender.

In *Intersectionality as Critical Social Theory*, Patricia Hill Collins argues that intersectionality paves the way for highlighting contemporary social issues. It can theorize social inequality, which unfolds ways to facilitate social change. She stresses the heterogenous conceptualizations of intersectionality as a paradigm, concept, framework and heuristic device in scholarly literature as it invites "participation in building intersectionality from different perspectives, thereby signaling intersectionality's dynamic nature" and that it provides "a promising foundation for specifying intersectionality's distinctive questions, concerns and analyses" (Collins 2019, 3). She accentuates that intersectionality is at its "crossroads" in social theory. It is only by focusing on the interrelatedness of the critical analyses and social actions that intersectionality can be used constructively. As social theories "aim to explain the social world, offering interpretations for how and why things are the way they are as well as what they might or might not become," this particular knowledge can be gained by thorough reflection on intersectionality to achieve any social change (Collins 2019, 4).

Building on the assumption that intersectionality, as other social theories, aspire to explain and change the social world, I use it as a framework for the various issues related to inequality, order, and, most significantly, change in the social context of Petry's fictional world. Additionally, the idea of approaching Petry's texts from this perspective produces discussion about the "taken-for-granted frameworks," as Collins writes:

> […] a new framework may emerge that draws from the separate parts. New terms such as heteropatriarchy seemingly combine these separations. Intersectionality itself emerged as a field of inquiry that initially added together what had been separate. Before intersectionality emerged, class, race, and gender each functioned as dominant or master categories in their own right, with their own communities of inquiry and concerns. Yet because each of these categories has a distinctive genealogy, the process of adding them together illuminates various aspects of the additive process. (Collins 2019, 227)

I side with what Collins implies in this study that intersectionality can be used as a provisional concept and that it is always under construction. It is also essential to notice how the meaning of one category changes when another is added to it and that it always risks a bias to one's preferred category. However, some categories are more influential in shaping particular identities and overcoming others, depending on the context of their interaction. The distinctive feature of each category should be taken into consideration; however, they should be studied together than independently as in previous scholarships. This highlights a significant challenge of intersectionality: the additive nature of the analysis.

There is a controversy among scholars over the additive nature of analysis conducted by intersectionality. Myra Marx Ferree argues in "Inequality, Intersectionality and the Politics of Discourse" that intersectionality strengthens "simplistic notions of atomized, additive identities" which either overlook structural/institutional power altogether or provide a basic understanding of power (Ferree 2009, 87). While Vivian M. May repudiates the additive nature of intersectionality in her book, *Pursuing Intersectionality, Unsettling Dominant Imaginaries.* She contests the debate that intersectionality risks additive ideas in analyzing specific identities and that it is nothing more than recycled black feminism in the form of an unsophisticated and destructive approach to feminism. According to May, intersectionality neither abides by additive notions of identity nor consents to one-dimensional perspectives of viewing it (2015, 14). This research is drawn to the latter standpoint and follows a non-additive logic of analyzing the interplay between social categories while implementing intersectionality. That is to say, one masculinity is not the sum of the race added to class or gender. In exploring African American masculinities, it is not rational to think of the effect of the categories added to each other as the collective effect of these categories differs in configuring them qualitatively. Not all categories are of equal significance in constructing specific identities. Following the non-additive nature of analysis leads to investigating diversity in the context of power relations and analyzing what category makes the difference in details.

Exclusion is another point of critique about intersectionality as an analysis model. The model looks at categories working in an intersected way in determining the marginalization or oppression of some people. However, not all categories can add to the quality of marginalization or oppression alike. Therefore, it excludes some members who can be oppressed by some categories but privileged by others. Patriarchy constitutes African American men as privileged in relation to African American women. In other words, intersectionality allows for a relational model. In this dissertation, I do not only look at how these categories intersect and create a site of inequality for the studied black characters in Ann Petry's fiction. However, I look at the process through which categories such as race take on multiple gendered meanings for African American male characters depending on whether, how, and by whom these categories are rendered as pertinent for their masculine identities. These processes dictate specific roles to these masculinities, perpetuated by social differences that shape and alter each masculinity. African American men viewed as hypermasculine are an example of how they are marginalized throughout

the process of racializing their gender and sexuality. The intersection of the dynamic and interactive nature of these categories decapitates their masculine potential. African American heteronormative masculinity is not privileged because it is racialized. Patriarchy does not function the same way for white men and men of color. Black masculinity is privileged as far as it is in relation to black women, even of the same class. Nonetheless, heteronormativity offers the privilege of normalcy to black men in relation to those who are black and gay.

This point can be further elaborated in light of intersectionality being an analytical framework that is primarily process-centered. It highlights how the categories intersect and affect each other; it does not highlight the categories per se and as static entities. Hae Yeon Choo and Myra Marx Ferree (2010, 134) underline the dynamic and relational forces of the categories. It is more efficient to think of "racialization more than races, economic exploitation rather than classes, gendering and gender performance rather than genders" while applying intersectionality to masculinities, as an example. While analyzing a specific masculinity, categories should not be studied as static and final entities. Instead, they should be investigated as dynamic and interactive. To this end, it is more efficient to think of masculinity in terms of their racialization, gendering, and classing than their race, gender, and class per se. The relations between these categories are dynamic and crucial to notice as they create specific frames in which certain masculinities are viewed in relation to either women of the same race or men of a different race.

The blackness of a male character in the selected primaries of my research is to be considered more intricate when it is gendered or classed. The social categories can be mutually constitutive in configuring certain masculinities. Nevertheless, it cannot be argued that these masculinities are the sum of one category added to the other. For example, there cannot be the pure effect of race on masculinity without being influenced by gender, class, or sexuality, as the list of categorical differences is permanently open-ended. This leads to the next inevitable drawback faced in implementing intersectionality to masculinity: the indefinite list of categorical possibilities. Given the openness of the invisible elements contributing to forming an identity, there is always the chance of falling in the trap of an infinitive list of categories. While dealing with specific individuals, scholars are constantly critiqued for their emphasis on the canonical categories – race, gender, and class – and leaving out the less discussed ones – sexuality, ability, age, and so on and so forth. This procedure may risk an open-ended series of questions. There are two possible ways to overcome this drawback: one should narrow down their focus on the most

influential category/categories, and one should not mention multiple differences without taking them into considerate inspection – a point to be elaborated in more detail with reference to Helma Lutz's concept of the "master category" in the second section of this chapter.

There is a fundamental disagreement about the identities formed by an intersectional perspective and the difference between the categories contributing to their formation, a more severe problematics about intersectionality. Ange-Marie Hancock states in her book *Empirical Intersectionality: A Tale of Two Approaches,* that the "race" and "sex" parts in the identity of a black woman cannot be analytically deconstructed on the same level. They are of different attributions to different women based on their specific life experiences. A heterosexual black woman can be located on a single axis of disadvantage; that is, she can be disadvantaged by her race but advantaged by her sex. In this way, intersectionality places the woman on a single axis of disadvantage as she is a member of a racial minority group but does not prevent the woman from having privilege on another axis of disadvantage, sex. Intersectionality encourages scholars to change their conception of power and how they distribute it as identities move from "a margin center metaphor to one of intersections" (Hancock 2013, 266-7). This point is essential and to be taken into consideration while applying intersectionality as each category signifies a different social structure. In addition to intersectionality's interest in unraveling the interaction and mutual constitution between the categories in constructing identity, it also emphasizes how the categories are ontologically different and function differently based on the context.

Another challenge encountered while applying intersectionality is the two different inequality levels resulting from intersectional analyses: structural vs. individual. Intersectionality links the structural and individual levels in analyzing identity formations, an idea raised by Patricia Hills Collins (1998, 2015) and Paulina de los Reyes and Diana Mulinari (2020), among other scholars who consent to the multi-level analytical function of intersectionality. In this respect, approaching an identity through the lenses of intersectionality implies an interconnection between the micro, and macro dimensions of oppression imposed on particular identities. The interplay between the categories should be taken into consideration while doing intersectional analysis, and the interplay between the aforementioned levels of the social world in shaping specific identities. These two aspects are explored in my research following the argument that some African American men turn to the privileges of their gender to compensate for their status of being oppressed by race in relation to other forms of hegemonic masculinity (white by default). For instance, African

American men are stereotyped according to an intersection of their race, gender, class, and so on and are hierarchized based on these categories. This, in turn, leads to structuring a society based on such hierarchies. This is why it is not progressive for them to turn to their gender as a site of privilege in their communities as they add to the legitimacy of identities' hierarchies. Turning to gender as an indicator of privilege, they reinforce the stereotypes about black men on a micro-level and reinforce the white's subordination of them on a macro-level. This functions as an indicator of the interrelation of the different levels of their masculinities.

Tommy J. Curry censures intersectionality in his study "Decolonizing the Intersection: Black Male Studies as a Critique of Intersectionality's Indebtedness to Subculture of Violence Theory" as a framework which confirms the negative violent stereotype. He argues that intersectionality scholars contribute to the image of the black men who "strive for the patriarchal domination of women" (Curry 2021, 132). African Americans are driven to emulate white masculine ideals and power. To achieve this, they subordinate black women and black gay men. However, I read intersectionality as a call to warn about black men's liability to violence and subordinating others. Intersectionality does not aim to oppress black men; it only anticipates the oppressive consequences of stressing their privileged gender. Claiming the privilege of their gender can be explained by how they use violence to subordinate (black) women.

Violence in African American men underlines the inevitable risk of the interlocking nature of systems of subordination, leading African American men to exercise what Frank Rudy Cooper (2006, 866) names "compensatory subordination" in "Against Bipolar Black Masculinity: Intersectionality, Assimilation, Identity Performance, and Hierarchy". For instance, a working-class black man, to ease his pain of being degraded based on the class hierarchy, may subordinate one of his black female co-workers. To subordinate a member of your own racial group is to run the risk of strengthening your own subordination by preserving the status quo. This is why being privileged by gender is not a potential benefit for black men. Compensatory subordination or reactive anger is not constructive; it is destructive. There is a tacit implication in such actions that the African American men legitimize identity hierarchies and, more specifically, legitimize the very racial hierarchy that oppresses them.

The intersectionally oppressive nature of violence in black men can be further elaborated with reference their violating of black men based on their masculinist gender as a site of privilege. Athena D. Mutua, in *Progressive Black Masculinities* argues that "do they understand that

patriarchy and white supremacy are mutually reinforcing structures of domination that have complicated and negative consequences for black women but also for black men" (Mutua 2006, 4). That is, by embracing patriarchy, they weaken their plight for racial justice. The power endowed to black men in the patriarchal system does not only oppress women, but black men too. To combat racism directed against them as men, they need to fight sexism too as both are interrelated which implies the interconnectedness of these systems of oppression. Despite the patriarchal nature of American society, African American men have not fully benefited from their maleness because they remain underprivileged by their race, class and other social categories, especially in relation to white hegemonic masculinity.

Scholars should give head to is that intersectionality can host different epistemologies based on the strategy followed in carrying out analysis. I aim to study the categories of race, gender, and others and investigate their interconnectedness in shaping certain black masculinities. I investigate how black masculinities are redefined and repositioned according to the intersection of categories on the different personal, social and state levels and subvert certain oppressive cultural representations about them. In "The Complexity of Intersectionality," one of the most widely referenced and influential contributions to intersectionality, Leslie McCall (2005, 1773) lists three approaches of studying categories according to the lenses of intersectionality: "anticategorical," "intracategorical," and "intercategorical". The objective behind the first approach is to destabilize the categories, while the point behind the second one is to study the difference within one specific category to provide a detailed analysis and critique of social injustice. The complex, variant, and unequal nature of the intersections between categories is the outcome of comparing different categories in the inter-categorical approach. Intersectionality, Avtar Brah and Ann Phoenix denote "takes up the political project of making the social and material consequences of the categories of gender/race/class visible, but does so by employing methodologies compatible with the poststructuralist project of deconstructing categories, unmasking universalism, and exploring the dynamic and contradictory workings of power" (2004, 82). It grants scholars working on the aforementioned social categories a well-established method saving them from the drawbacks of additive approaches to multiple identities. Since the objective of my project is subverting and challenging the marginalizing status and oppressive stereotypical images of African American masculinities, the anti-categorical approach of intersectionality, grounded in poststructuralist epistemology, is relevant to the analysis of Petry's texts.

Despite denoting the defects of intersectionality, critics such as Davis (2011) and Naomi Zack (2007) stress its success linked to its problematics such as vagueness and open-endness. In the light of the absence of a clear-cut definition and unsettled parameter, an infinite pattern of intersectionality elements of the difference comes to be discovered. Anna Carastathis provides an alternative to critics to overcome this dispute about intersectionality and apply it to their analysis more effectively. In her book, *Intersectionality: Origins, Contestations, Horizons*, she suggests the concept of "provisional" intersectionality that "tentatively bridges the heuristic gap" between our "dominant ideologies socially transformative justice claims" (Carastathis 2016, 108). Intersectionality should be thought of as provisional in the sense that what we observe while applying an intersectionality perspective to specific identities is not final. Intersectionality is of extreme help in conducting analyses when it is used as a heuristic framework that keeps reminding the scholar of how complex the intersections of several constituents are. The heuristic applications of intersectionality will be the departure point of the second section of this chapter, where I attempt to investigate intersectionality as a methodology to study African American masculinities.

1.2. Intersectionality in Masculinity Studies: Conceptualization and Methodology

Intersectionality has been one of the most applied approaches among scholars within gender studies, cultural studies, and other interdisciplinary fields in the past thirty years. However, it has been of limited usage in men and masculinity studies. Christensen and Jensen state that "there have been no special issues and only a few titles in the leading journals within men and masculinity studies from 2007 to 2017 that include intersectionality (2020, 82). The interest of the research field has been focused on stressing the disparity between men and masculinities, often from a power perspective. Connell's studies on hegemonic masculinity in relation to complicit, subordinate, and marginalized masculinities are the most prominent example of this focus (Connell 1995; Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) – concepts applied from an intersectional perspective to analyze African American masculinities and introduced as the foundational basis for analysis in the following subsection. Thus, this research relies on intersectionality as the primary theoretical tool that can facilitate analyses and as the most relevant approach to studying masculinities, adding to the meager number of studies on men and masculinities from an intersectional perspective.

1.2.1. Hegemonic Masculinity: A Relational Concept

Despite the explicitness of gender in the construction of masculinities, other factors such as class, race/ethnicity, age, and ability intersect with gender in producing and reproducing them. Different

masculinities are conceptualized in this intersectional manner and arranged in hierarchies based on class position, race affiliation, youth, able-bodiedness, and so on. Investigating masculinities in an intersectional framework in this dissertation aligns with the initiative of masculinity studies since its emergence. Michael Kimmel, Raewyn Connell, and Jeff Hearn, in their *Handbook of Studies on Men and Masculinities,* argue that "[t]he gendering of men only exists in the intersections with other social divisions and social differences" and that masculinity studies aims at deconstructing "the gendering of men and masculinities and assumptions about them, other social divisions, such as age, class, and disability, come more to the fore and are seen as more important" (Kimmel et al. 2004, 3). By definition, masculinity studies imply a subversive potential: Connell considers masculinities in *Masculinities* as "configurations of practice structured by gender relations. They are inherently historical; and their making and remaking is a political process affecting the balance of interests in society and the direction of social change" (2005, 44). Masculinity studies assign specific meanings to men relevant to a specific time and place. Kimmel (2006, 3) describes masculinities are "neither static nor timeless," i.e., they are unstable and historically contingent. Based on this assumption, "masculinities" in the plural form is used in this research instead of the singular form. There is no one larger pattern to follow in detecting the time and place-based constructions of male identities.

The common ground between Kimmel and Connell's presuppositions is the contingency of masculinities. Most significantly, their hypotheses define the direction of this dissertation. Firstly, the constructions of specific male identities in Petry's works are studied as an intersection of their social setting with the current issues of a particular period. Secondly, this study is positioned in the realm of subverting certain stereotypes about African American masculinities, as represented by Petry. Since masculinity as a category can be studied by investigating the intersecting of gender with these social divisions, an intersectional approach is appropriate to investigate African American masculinities in this dissertation. Hence, I will employ this approach to analyze the African American male characters in Petry's work. The constructing and deconstructing of Petry's masculinities are highly relevant to exploring the effect of specific social factors. These factors contribute to the hegemony of some forms of masculinities and the marginalization/subordination of other forms.

The central methodological claim in masculinity studies is that masculinities are a cultural construction – as underlined in masculinity as a term – and thus liable to be reconstructed and

challenged when placed in different contexts. This field of study is built on feminist scholarship and cultural theory, and its emergence in the 1980s was a response to feminist scholars' pursuits for gender equality. Masculinity studies has been influenced by feminism and queer theories (Gardiner 2002, 2), and it has included notable accounts about heterosexual masculinity as a social construct since the 1990s (Whitehead 2002, 6–7). The dominant principle of this field incorporates examining the male and female genders as social constructions, distinct from sex defined in essentialist terms (Lee 2007, 17). Masculinity studies pays increasing attention to gendering men and regarding masculinity as an unstable category as femininity is and that both are "relational constructions" (Kimmel et al. 2004,18). Masculinity and femininity render as meaningful constructs in relation to each other. Each defines and is, in turn, defined by the other. Connell emphasizes masculinity studies as an interdisciplinary field characterized by a gender relational approach that focuses on the study of men and denotes that "[m]asculinity constantly refers to male bodies (sometimes symbolically and indirectly), but is not determined by male biology. One can, therefore, speak of masculine women, and feminine men; of gender ambivalences and contradictions" (Connell 2015, 40).

In order to provide a nuanced understanding of the plurality of African American masculinities, they will be studied in parallel to American hegemonic masculinity. African American masculinities are measured in relation to this model, which entails ideal characteristics of a masculine construction specific to a milieu. Erving Goffman defines this model in his book *Stigma* as "[t]he young, married, white, urban, northern, heterosexual Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, weight, and height, and a decent record in sports" (1963, 128). Accordingly, any American man who does not possess any of these qualities is positioned outside American hegemonic masculinity. Brett N. Billman describes hegemonic masculinity as "an unattainable version" which is almost impossible for other men to achieve (2006, 2). However, it is helpful to deploy it as a means to measure hierarchy among men based on their social divisions. I utilize hegemonic masculinity as a model by which other black masculinities are measured. Hegemony, in this respect, implies men's maintenance of power/hierarchy. To be more precise, hegemony implies a failure to maintain power and claim patriarchy in the case of African American masculinities. The impediments facing their pursuit of accessing masculine hegemony are analyzed through the lenses of intersectionality.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity is culturally connected to both authority and rationality, key themes in the legitimation of patriarchy. African American men quest of proving themselves as authoritative and rational becomes unattainable when their race intersects with their gender. This intersection hinders their way to access patriarchy and leads to their masculine marginalization, stressed out in relation to American hegemonic masculinity. It can be argued that masculinity, in general, is about privilege and that black men could be privileged in a sense but nonetheless have to suffer the disadvantages of the hierarchies of masculinities and gender role fulfillment when confronted with the hegemonic forms of masculinity. The social inequality these masculinities undergo can be analyzed from an intersectional and dynamic perspective as frameworks connecting race, class, and gender with other categories, and it can be observed that they empower and disempower certain groups of masculinities in different structural locations.

In "On Hegemonic Masculinity and Violence: Response to Jefferson and Hall," Connell dates the concept of hegemonic masculinity back to the 1980s as converged of "ideas from three main sources: women's political experience and research on gender hierarchy; gay men's political experience and theorizing of oppression; and empirical research with boys and men in locales such as schools and workplaces" (2002, 90). It was also adopted by Kimmel (1987) in his study, *Changing Men: New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity*, to criticize the biased role divisions of gender and the prevailing concept of the generic male sex role back then in the US society. The same idea is rearticulated by Kimmel under the title of "Invisible Masculinity" in his book *The History of Men: Essays in the History of American and British Masculinities* where he maintains that "[a]s a middle-class white man, I have no class, no race, no gender. I'm the generic person" and most interestingly he contends how "American men have come to think of themselves as genderless, in part because they can afford the luxury of ignoring the centrality of gender" (Kimmel 2005, 5–6).

The concept of hegemonic masculinity has gone through different developments and has been reiterated differently by Connell since the publication of her book *Gender and Power: Society, the Person, and Sexual Politics* in 1987. It was initially introduced to describe the various forms of masculinity and femininity and to indicate that "their interrelation is centered on a single structural fact, the global dominance of men over women" (Connell 1987, 183). Borrowed from Antonio Gramsci, Connell utilizes the term "hegemony" to describe a particular form of

masculinity which does not imply the dominance of male power through force. She explains it as follows:

> […] 'hegemony' means (as in Gramsci's analyses of class relations in Italy from which the term is borrowed) a social ascendancy achieved in a play of social forces that extends beyond contests of brute power into the organization of private life and cultural processes. Ascendancy of one group of men over another achieved at the point of a gun, or by the threat of unemployment, is not hegemony. Ascendancy which is embedded in religious doctrine and practice, mass media content, wage structures, the design of housing, welfare/taxation policies and so forth, is. (Connell 1987, 184)

Hegemony is not shared by all men equally in Connell's use of the term as it does not abide by the sex role theory. According to this theory, all men imitate the same ideals and behaviors that define masculinity based on their sex. However, structural power and ideological currency shape a hegemonic form of masculinity in a specific context. What both Connell and Kimmel hold about this concept is that it recognizes the political differences among men in terms of gender, race, and class. In other words, it seeks to recognize the hierarchy among men and the historically changeable character of the relations between men, leading to constructing new forms of masculinities accordingly.

Hegemonic masculinity does not implicate a universal account for one dominant form of masculinities in a given society, as Connell reinforces in her subsequent 1993 book, *Masculinities*. She presents the concept as remote from the history and structures of gender relations in modern societies. She states that this "conception presupposes a belief in individual difference and personal agency. In that sense it is built on the conception of individuality that developed in early-modern Europe with the growth of colonial empires and capitalist economic relations" (Connell 2005, 68). It can be inferred that hegemony, which emerged in the early-modern era in Europe, is used to measure the maintenance of power in men based on their accessibility to power and resources. In her study with James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept," hegemony is critiqued for falling short to explicate the dominance of men over women and among men as it was initially argued in her first book. Connell and Messerschmidt write:

> The formulation in *Gender and Power* attempted to locate all masculinities (and all femininities) in terms of a single pattern of power, the 'global dominance' of men over women. While this was useful at the time in preventing the idea of multiple masculinities from collapsing into an array of competing lifestyles, it is now clearly inadequate to our understanding of relations among groups of men and forms of masculinity and of women's relations with dominant masculinities. (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 847)

The inadequacy in hegemonic masculinity as a formulation lies in its incapability to grasp the dynamics of relations between men and women and among men. I find this observation useful in my investigation of the African American masculinities studied in relation to hegemonic masculinity as the subtilities of the relations among men are accentuated in my research in terms of "challenges to hegemonic masculinity" that "arise from the 'protest masculinities' of marginalized ethnic groups" (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, 848). This research relies on Connell's concept to theorize the subtle relations between the different forms of masculinities and recognize their hierarchical positions – the way they are placed on different girds of power in a society. Messerschmidt posits in his 2012 study, "Engendering Gendered Knowledge: Assessing the Academic Appropriation of Hegemonic Masculinity," that scholars who work on gender "must distinguish masculinities that legitimate a hierarchical relationship between men and women, between masculinity and femininity, and among men from those that do not" (2012,72). Hegemonic masculinity, in this respect, serves as an analytical tool to study the denoted masculinities that confirm the hierarchical relations, and the same concept can be used to avoid those masculinities that strengthen hierarchy.

Built on Connell's assumption that marginalized ethnic groups resist hegemonic masculinity, this dissertation argues that Petry's fictional African American male characters do not always emulate the hegemonic form of masculinity which is believed to be the white ideal for the marginalized masculinities to follow in constructing their own identities. Connell makes an apparent disparity between the configurations of black and other global South masculinities and hegemonic masculinity. She states, "[i]n colonization, native bodies were coerced to form plantation, pastoral and domestic workforces; land was seized; new power structures were built around the colonial state. These processes disrupted indigenous gender orders, often with great violence (Connell 2014, 220). Hegemonic masculinity has been "coerced" on men with less power to adopt as an ideal, often with the utilization of "violence" since colonial times. Hegemony in masculinity has been associated with violence since its coinage and has been predicated on dominating men with less power – who usually resist and, under coercion, yield to hegemony.

There is also confusion about the way hegemonic masculinity is equated with violence. Connell argues against violence being an indicator of masculine hegemony in "Masculinity Research and Global Change". "Hegemonic masculinity" for Connell "does not equate to violent masculinity. Indeed, where violence is central to the assertion of gendered power, we can be fairly

certain that hegemony is not present, because hegemony refers to cultural centrality and authority, to the broad acceptance of power by those over whom it is exercised (2012, 13). I rely on Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity as understood "as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women" (2005, 77). Hegemonic masculinity is liable to violence as one possible method to maintain its dominance: "The relationship of men to hegemonic masculinity is often fraught, the enactment partial, contested and capable of shifting into violence" (Connell 2002, 94). That being said, hegemonic masculinity is implemented in this research to analyze violence in African American men as it functions to clarify how violence is embedded in their understandings of masculinity where physical aggression is considered an amiable quality and tacitly encouraged.

Furthermore, this research follows Connell's denotation of the relational nature of hegemonic masculinity: the "distinction between 'hegemonic' and various marginalized, subordinated or complicit masculinities" (hegemony is always a relational concept) expresses the idea that the cultural dynamic of gender among men is also important in the overall politics of the gender order" (2002, 90). Hegemony in masculinity signifies different values in different cultures and may not always be related to by the majority of men. This relativity in hegemonic masculinity is to be accentuated while investigating the constructions of African American masculinities in my corpus to showcase that hegemony is mostly estimated by comparison with less powerful men and that it is not absolute.

Tommy J. Curry critiques the concept of hegemonic masculinity in his article "Killing Boogeymen: Phallicism and the Misandric Mischaracterizations of Black Males in Theory". He argues against the idea that black males look up to white ideals in constructing their manhood and dismisses gender theories in general for their claim that black males are "boogeymen" who inspire fear and threaten other black people. Curry argues that black men are commonly presented as craving the position of white men and as misled by patriarchy's surpluses. He further argues that it is not plausible for black males to consider white men as role models after all the atrocities caused to them by the white men. He refutes "[b]lack male socialization as a process of mimesis consumed by its lack of patriarchal power and Black males, deprived of the calming effects of structural power and recognition— or what R.W.S. Connell actually means by hegemony—resort to brute force, physical power, and violence: savagery, to secure a semblance of white

masculinity's power" (Curry 2018, 237). I disagree with the ways Curry condemns gender theorists, especially the Black feminists working on intersectionality, for characterizing black males as oppressive and violent. Nonetheless, I find his logic of contesting the white ideals as sole touchstones for black males to follow useful for my research. As a part of showcasing how Petry portrays stereotypical African American masculinities as well as ones that go beyond that, I aspire to argue that she represents particular examples of African American masculinities in her fiction that pose a challenge to hegemonic masculinity.

This dissertation investigates how African American masculinities, as represented by Petry, attempt to define themselves as opposing to the effect of the gender order, i.e., patriarchy. However, "[t]he solidification of gender orders in the United States continue to conceptualize Black men and other racialized groups" (Curry 2018, 243). Hegemonic masculinity as an embodiment of the consequences of patriarchal ideology is of limited scope to entail the conceptualization of black men. The unequal gender order contributes to the conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity and does not always lead to progressive accounts of masculinities. This is one risk of implementing the concept of hegemonic masculinity, caused by misinterpretation of it, led to a reformulation and an amplification of the concept, as Messerschmidt argues in his "The Salience of "Hegemonic Masculinity". Along with his pressing emphasis on returning to Connell's original configuration of hegemonic masculinity as "the legitimation of unequal gender relations" (Messerschmidt 2019, 90), he reiterates Connell's indication of the relationality of hegemonic masculinity to other non-hegemonic masculinities. He writes:

> Connell also argued that hegemonic masculinity is constructed in relation to four specific nonhegemonic masculinities: first, *complicit* masculinities do not actually embody hegemonic masculinity yet through practice realize some of the benefits of unequal gender relations and consequently when practiced help sustain hegemonic masculinity; second, *subordinate* masculinities are constructed as lesser than or aberrant and deviant to hegemonic masculinity, such as effeminate men; third, *marginalized* masculinities are trivialized and/or discriminated against because of unequal relations external to gender relations, such as class, race, ethnicity, and age; and finally, *protest* masculinities are constructed as compensatory hypermasculinities that are formed in reaction to social positions lacking economic and political power. (Messerschmidt 2019, 86–7)

The main question that arises from applying hegemonic masculinity to study African American masculinities in this research is: where to place African American men as non-hegemonic masculinities? In other words, which of the four groups of non-hegemonic masculinities featured by Connell encompasses conceptualizing their masculinities? Petry's black male characters can be positioned differently according to Connell's classifications of non-hegemonic masculinity. Based

on the definitions provided in the quote, African American masculinities in Petry's fiction are mainly "marginalized".

Reading these masculinities in terms of hegemony is also of crucial significance to observe as it leads to a differentiation between the ones who adopt white ideals of masculinity and those who defy the assimilative inducements. Messerschmidt further explores the relational nature of hegemonic masculinity as a pattern of it. It does not imply that it is of "fixed masculinity features" exclusive to specific groups of men (Messerschmidt 2019, 88). Thus, men from the less hegemonic groups can also lay claim to hegemony, which is why Messerschmidt suggests the concept in the plural form to be more inclusive. I rely on the singular form of the concept in this research to distinguish hegemonic masculinity as a form of power maintenance in white masculinities in relation to African American masculinities that are regarded as non-hegemonic. I adopt this concept to detect progression in this group of masculinities to observe whether they legitimize equal gender relations or turn to the privileges of their gender in defining their masculine identity to lay claim to hegemony.

The method of inquiry I rely on in investigating African American masculinities in Petry's works is a relational model of masculinity – developed predominantly in Connell's works. According to the indicated model, masculinity in men is not assumed in relation to other men or women as a polar opposite. Nonetheless, gender is prescribed as relations among men and between men and women, creating an order that paves the way for investigating both similarities and differences on homosocial and heterosocial bases. This method also determines the formation of specific social practices that categorize masculinities in patterns, orders and hierarchies. I distinguish between different types of masculinities as social practices in terms of Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity hierarchized in relation to other complicit, protest, subordinate, and marginalized masculinity practices – concepts I apply in the analytical part of my dissertation. Thus, masculinities in their relational aspect are configurations of gender practice and are discerned in terms of their historical contingency and non-essentialism. I primarily regard African American masculinities as marginalized masculinities in parallel with hegemonic masculinity which are intersected constructions. The interconnected effect of the categories decides on the level of marginalization to hegemony in these masculinities.

Intersectionality theory, as Christensen and Jensen argue in "Combining hegemonic masculinity and Intersectionality," is a process of complexities as it places some forms of

masculinities at the top of the hierarchy and further enhances their sense of hegemony based on the components of race, gender, class, and others. On the other hand, it marginalizes some other forms based on at least one or all its components. External and internal aspects of hegemonic masculinity are utilized as terms by Christensen and Jensen to explain further the two primary functions of hegemonic masculinity: men's subordination of women and dominance among men. More concretely, these two layers of hegemonic masculinity are externally the male's oppression of women and internally the hierarchical categories of masculinities. An intersectional perspective of hegemonic masculinity will strengthen the possibilities of analyzing power relations multifacetedly. In addition, it will help map how gender intersects with other social categories such as class, race/ethnicity, sexuality, and age (Christensen and Jensen 2014, 70).

There has been a growing interest within gender studies towards working on masculinity studies, such as the works of Jeff Hearn, Mechthild Bereswill, and Anke Neuber, to name a few, whose intersectionality approach aims at focusing "on the relationship between the dominant, privileged, hegemonic sides of societal structural categories and their antitheses" (Lutz et al. 2011, 8). "By employing methodologies compatible with the poststructuralist project of deconstructing categories, unmasking universalism, and exploring the dynamic and contradictory workings of power," intersectionality makes visible "the social and material consequences of the categories of gender/race/class" (Davis 2011, 48). Jeff Hearn states that the concept of intersectionality complements the concept of hegemonic masculinities, stressing the interaction between gender, class, and other distinguishing categories. He also reinforces the importance of what he refers to as "neglected intersectionalities" in studying hegemonic masculinity. To undo hegemonic masculinity, which implies the cultural dominance of males, Hearn argues that "neglected intersectionalities" should be addressed too (2011, 93). This dissertation focuses mainly on the intersections between the three canonical categories of race, gender, and class; however, it refers to the essential role the other categories play in shaping the African American masculinities in the studied novels according to a two-step strategy of an intersectional reading method – delineated in the following subsection.

1.2.2. An Intersectional Reading Method: A Two-Step Strategy

Intersectionality is adopted in this research as a heuristic framework to detect the overlapping and co-constructive nature of the seemingly visible and invisible strands of inequality, embodied in the categories of race, gender, and others, in constructing African American masculinities. I aspire to

delineate an intersectional reading method to analyze the black male characters of Petry's fiction. This method is derived from different available methods. To analyze the intersection of the categories in shaping these masculinities, I attempt to follow a two-step strategy of identifying and explaining categories, and asking the other question about them. The intersected effect of categories in constructing black masculinities is identified in the first step and the gendered, classed, sexualized aspects of race in these masculinities is explained in relation to American hegemonic masculinity. While the second step investigates the further interconnected implications of the categories with other structures of subordination, inequality and discrimination by relying on Mari J. Matsuda's famous concept of asking "the other question":

> The way I try to understand the interconnection of all forms of subordination is through a method I call "the other question". When I see something that looks racist, I ask "Where is the patriarchy in this?" When I see something sexist, I ask "Where is the heterosexism in this?" When I see something that looks homophobic, I ask "Where are the class interests in this?" (Matsuda 1991, 1189)

The potential in Matsuda's concept lies in offering the possibility to expose multiple positions and power inequalities that can be invisible in the representation of African American masculinities. Implementing the indicated steps does not necessarily happen according to the specified order and is more connected to the heuristic aspect of intersectionality as a method. This strategy functions as a prism – viewpoint – to detect the multidimensionality and complexity of black masculine identities shaped by the interplay between the social categories.

This dissertation deploys intersectionality as a method to analyze African American masculinities on different levels. Race, gender, and class are intersecting concepts that constitute the lived experiences of African American men in Petry's works. This intersection problematizes the construction of African American masculinities. It results in intricate forms of discrimination and marginalization for them on a personal level when other categories enter the picture. Consequently, the masculinity of Petry's black male characters is viewed in reductive and restricted ways and shapes, damaging stereotypes and misconceptions about their abilities and potential as men on a social level. Ultimately, these men face social and economic disadvantages such as poverty and unemployment due to the intersection of their race with other categories on a state level. As men, they fail to accomplish the expected male roles of fatherhood, providing, and protection. In addition, an intersectional perspective paves the way for a more comprehensive appreciation of Petry's representations of African American masculinities. The categories are not

analyzed per se as in previous one-dimensional methodologies. Instead, intersectionality perceives how the racism directed against black men is stereotypically gendered. It unravels the gendered dimensions of their race and the racialized aspects of their gender.

I attempt to avoid the inherent trap of the intersectional model in analyzing African American masculinities by considering several points while conducting the analysis. I do not essentialize Petry's black male characters and stress that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to analyzing their experiences of masculinity. For instance, I showcase that there is diversity within the African American experiences of masculinity shaped by various factors, as in *The Narrows*. To provide a nuanced analysis of African American masculinities, I consider both how African American men are marginalized and how they may hold power and privilege based on gender, as elaborated in the black male characters in *The Street* who turn to the privileges of their gender on a personal level and are ultimately marginalized by an intersection of their race and gender on a social level. Another point I pay attention to while applying intersectionality is to avoid oversimplifying the intersectional matrix by reducing it to a checklist of social categories in shaping black masculine identities. I focus on how the social categories intersect and interact in complex and dynamic ways. I also recognize African American men's unique experiences while considering their relationality to other groups of men.

This procedure may risk an open-ended series of questions, given the infinitive list of categories. For this reason, one should cross-question the leading category in conducting their analysis. The "master category" strategy, as suggested by Helma Lutz (2015, 39) in her article "Intersectionality as Method," makes the scholar critically aware of the various available levels of analysis, depending on the saliency of one specific category in connection to particular experiences or phases in the lives of the studied masculinities. For instance, the category of race is more salient than other categories in the configuration of African American masculinities. It can be linked to structures of domination so that it disempowers and oppresses them. The intersection of it with gender reduces their lives to more oppressing positions in the society.

In shaping African American masculine identities, race overcomes other categories. Gender and class become racial categories that are rendered meaningful through racial domination processes. Therefore, their identities are constructed as a result of exceedingly complex interactions of gender and class, dominated and perpetuated by their racial position in society. Race is regarded as the principal category as an attempt to capture the complex nature of African

American masculinities in intersectional research. Lutz's suggestions make the scholar critically aware of the various available levels of analysis, depending on the saliency of a specific category in connection to particular experiences or phases in the lives of the studied masculinities. For instance, the category of race can be linked to structures of domination in a way that it disempowers and oppresses African American masculinities. Nevertheless, this intersection can work as a strategy to challenge their disempowerment and oppression. In other words, African American masculinities may not always be vulnerable or oppressed on multiple levels, but they can draw on multiple identities to develop a strategy for resistance. Not all categories are of equal significance in constructing particular identities. The categories position identities differently in a society. This, therefore, leads to investigating diversity in the context of power relations and analyzing in detail what category makes the difference, that is, creates unequal identities for different individuals. Thus, Lutz dismisses any scholar's attempts to regard all categories of equal importance and decenter gender in their applications of intersectionality as "superfluous" (Lutz 2015, 39).

It is worth mentioning that there is yet no agreement among intersectionality researchers about one specific way to address this challenge of managing complexity. On the one hand, a group of scholars prefers empirical openness toward the concrete context. Staunæs (2004), for instance, contends the idea of considering specific categories prior to others. On the other hand, some scholars, such as Christensen and Jensen (2012), Phoenix (2006), and Yuval-Davis (2006), maintain that in order to make analysis feasible and manageable, there is a pressing need of pre-choosing several strategic categories to commence analysis. Inspired by the latter group of critics, including Lutz's mentioned study, this research follows a master-category strategy in conducting analysis to grasp differences among the studied masculinities – and, most importantly – to determine the role played by social differences in the social processes that shape and condition each masculinity. I suggest a master-category strategy in examining the intersection of the different categories in constructing African American masculinities to cross-question the leading category in conducting analyses. This is particularly practical because the list of categorical differences for each masculinity is continuously in the process of being altered. This is driven by the presumption that postmodern theorizations on identity presume that identity is always in the making; it is a process.

As Stuart Hall posits, "instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a

'production', which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (Hall 1990, 222) Thus, identity segments are also in a process, and that is what intersectionality is concerned about. Additionally, categories might vary in degrees of relevance based on the context of investigation and the primary theme of the research. Some categories might not be underlined in a study but can still be of implicit or covert importance. In this respect, Matsuda's concept of asking "the other question," i.e., asking about the possible relevance of categories that do not demonstrate themselves as visibly relevant in the selected texts by Petry. This research will analyze her texts by following an intersectional reading approach to her fictional African American masculinities. The last section of this chapter is devoted to the adaptations of intersectionality in literature. It also seeks to establish a connection between the mainstream images of African American masculinities in American society and Petry's works.

1.3. Intersectionality in Literature: A New Direction

Studying masculinities in literature has been a growing interest for scholars since gender studies started to pay noticeable attention to the lives of men in the 1980s. As a part of her endeavor in inviting scholars of masculinity studies in the global North to consider a world-centered perspective of producing knowledge about masculinities rather than an exclusive and limited metropolitan viewpoint, Connell refers to Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) in "Margin Becoming Centre: for a World-centred Rethinking of Masculinities" (2014) to emphasize the significance of literature in contributing to knowledge production about masculinities. "Imaginative work does not directly report social experience. But it builds on social experience, it documents cultural problems, and in some circumstances may be the most forceful way to present a troubled reality" (Connell 2014, 221). Similarly to the ways Achebe's novel can be read as a fictional account of what Nigerian masculinity means in the post-colonial era, works of literature can be considered to study certain existing cultural phenomena about masculinities in a given society – even if in an indirect manner. Todd W. Reeser rearticulates how masculinity and literature are very closely related in the way that "literature can reveal aspects of masculinity that might not come out or be visible in daily life or in other types of cultural artifacts" (2015, 11). Following the same rationale, this dissertation builds on masculinity studies to tackle the fictional representations of African American masculinities in Petry's oeuvre. I investigate how Petry subverts existing cultural constructions about black men by redefining their traditional conceptualizations and societal positioning in her writings.

During a Q&A session at the conference "Constructing New Masculinities" at the University of Barcelona with masculinity studies scholars, such as Robert Reid-Pharr, Jeff Hearn, Lynne Segal, Todd W. Reeser, Stefan Brandt, and Michael Kimmel as participants, Kimmel was asked about the new directions in masculinity studies. Despite referring to the social science scholars' interest in studying the characteristics of the social construction of masculinities within racial/ethnic groups as one direction, Kimmel highlights the increasing number of works on masculinities done in humanities as the second new direction. He states:

> People are returning to canonical texts and are re-engendering them and beginning to tease out the ideas of gender, the ideas of masculinity and femininity that we missed the first time If there was a work about women or if it was a work by a woman we see gender but if it is a work about men and by men we rarely interrogate gender. I think you, the CNM, have been at the forefront within the representations in film and literature and I think that's been so exciting, because when you are the dominant version you think that your idea of masculinity bubbles up from your body, bubbles up from your genes, there's no images, there's no stereotypes, no ideology involved, this is just my testosterone speaking. This is my brain chemistry speaking. And to see that my ideology, my idea of masculinity was constructed through the consumption of images, and of texts and the ways in which these texts work, I think is an important part of decentering hegemonic masculinity. This is what I've seen in the journal, I've seen both of these happening, I've seen a tremendous amount of interest in localizing different versions of masculinity through ethnographies through close readings of texts. In the humanities, these close readings have shown that what we consider normal are in fact ideological productions. (Kimmel 2017, 206–7)

Close reading of particular literary texts can pave the way to destabilize certain masculinities as their representation can support and justify their social construction. Following this, Petry's texts are analyzed with the notion that race and gender reiterate patterns from social life that construct norms with white heterosexual, class-privileged masculinities as the invisible and general norm. The main interest of this research is not only to pose a challenge against the racialized and gendered world of Petry's characters. It also aspires to reinforce the significance of her work in dismantling these gendered and racialized aspects of this world, strengthening her vital role as a black female voice fighting different forms of bias against African American masculinities.

Despite the availability of extensive diversity of books on literary representations of masculinities from different periods and of types, they lack an intersectional scope. What has been missing in the studies to the date, according to Josep M. Armengol, Marta Bosch-Vilarrubias, Àngels Carabí, and Teresa Requena-Pelegrí in *Masculinities and Literary Studies: Intersections and New Directions*, is the intersections between masculinity studies and their literary representations. They argue for "an innovative methodological approach to the subject of literary masculinities" to prove the possibility of applying an "interdisciplinary masculinity perspectives"

and aspire to link the splitting gap in the existing masculinity scholarship between "the Social Sciences and the Humanities in radically new and profound ways" (2017, 2). This new direction is one possible way to adopt intersectionality in humanities. Following the same logic of linking the gap between the two disciplines, this direction paves the way for intersectionality as developed in social theory to be utilized in literary criticism.

Intersectionality has been implemented on African American literature mainly to address issues of discrimination, oppression, and stereotypes. For instance, Amber West (2012) utilizes intersectionality as an approach in literary criticism to study black feminine identities in African American theater. In "Power plays: Two black feminist playwrights (en)counter intersectionality," West analyzes the main characters of Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro* (1964) and Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide / When the Rainbow Is Enuf* (1976) according to the lenses of intersectionality by highlighting the ways their race, class and sexuality shape their marginalized identity. The female protagonists of these plays rely on non-verbal motifs of suicide, such as their bodies and dancing, to resist the grip of the intersectional categories that deem them as outsiders. For instance, West argues that by depicting Sarah, *Funnyhouse of a Negro*'s main character, as a suicidal figure, Kennedy aims to "depict the complex and distinct manner in which black women experience intersecting forms of oppression" (2012, 140). Hence, intersectionality can be adopted as a tool to uncover the issues of oppression in literary texts and can also provide possible venues to empower the oppressed characters. The same logic and methodologies can be considered while applying intersectionality to the representations of African American masculinities in Petry's works.

Other scholarly works have depicted the fictional constructions of black masculinities from an intersectional perspective to combat stereotypes. Christopher Breu's "Freudian Knot or Gordian Knot? The Contradictions of Racialized Masculinity in Chester Himes' *If He Hollers Let Him Go*," explores Chester Himes' violent and, allegedly, transgressive depiction of African American masculinities in *If He Hollers Let Him Go* (1945). Breu focuses on what he calls the "negative intersectionality" of race, gender, class, and sexuality in Himes' novel, which, as he argues, must be recognized as a pioneering model for the contemporary theorizations of intersectionality. "In tracing Himes' representation of negative intersectionality in *If He Hollers Let Him Go*," he writes, "I want to argue that it has much to teach us about what is missing from most current theorizations of the intersections of race, gender, class, and sexuality in American culture" (Breu 2003, 768). *If*

He Hollers Let Him Go is a rewrite of the hard-boiled, traditionally predominated by white male protagonists, to illustrate the life experiences of a black man in the 1940s American society.

Breu demarcates intersectionality as "negative" because the intersection of race with other categories oppresses black masculinities and does not work as an empowering site for them, as shown in contemporary discourses about intersectionality. He posits that the main reason Bob Jones, the black male protagonist of Himes' novel, cannot lay claim to "hard-boiled" white masculinity is that he is stereotyped as a black rapist which is both a myth that segregates black men and a white people's fantasy that prevent black men from achieving normative manhood. "Rape—just the sound of the word scared me, took everything out of me, my desire, my determination, my whole build up," Bob ponders in the novel (Himes 1997, 138). In Bob's case, his sexuality is racialized, and he becomes more marginalized when class intersects with his race. No cultural change is gained in Himes' novel as it ends with Bob being stigmatized as a sexually violent man. Breu justifies Himes' depiction of a violent black male protagonist to provide a better understanding of racialized black masculinities by considering the dialectic between the negative and positive dimensions of their representations. He writes, "we must find the positive political potential buried in the rigorous negativity of Himes' aesthetic […] this positive potential is linked to the very power of negative representation itself […] they provide a site of transference for a cultural praxis of collective working-through" (Breu 2003, 790). Petry's representation of negative images of African American masculinities can contain a positive prospect. They are positive in leading to alternative ways for black men to define their masculine identities away from stereotypes that catalyze their marginalization and annihilation.

Josef Benson's book, *Hypermasculinities in the Contemporary Novel*, addresses hypermasculinity as an intersection of many qualities. Hypermasculine as a form of African American men had been available before WWII but was appropriated by both novels and Hollywood films after WWII. Benson dismisses these masculinities as not progressive and in need of a reevaluation. By providing a close reading of hypermasculine examples of African American men in novels written by Cormac McCarthy, Toni Morrison and James Baldwin, he argues that for these characters to fail as hypermasculine in the selected texts is healthier than embracing a white hegemonic masculine ideal. The authors martyr the main characters for the same end: subverting a hegemonic masculine ideal. Baldwin's *Another Country* (1960) portrays Rufus, an African American man whose hypermasculine identity is an intersection of his race with his

sexuality. According to an intersectional reading of the novel, the closeted gay Rufus experiences a failed interracial relationship because of his insecurities with Leona, his white and straight lover. Similarly to Morrison's protagonist in *Song of Solomon* (1979), Rufus embraces a hypermasculine force to compensate for his threatened manhood; however, this "glorification of violence" is "endemic to the character for its dangerous seductiveness and potential for black male ruination" (Benson 2014, 105).

Rufus, as a literary example of African American men, is constructed based on the intersection of his race and sexuality, perpetuated by the power of stereotypes. There is an intersectional relationship between the hypermasculinities and stereotypes; as Benson writes, "Rufus and other black men who embody a hypermasculine persona in order to overcompensate for their feelings of emasculation due to systemic racism or homosexual desire perpetuate the very stereotypes they feel they must live up to" (2014, 107). Rufus is seen to embrace his sexual prowess as a tool to fight against racism and to confirm his masculinity. However, when the two intersect, his downfall is an inevitable destiny. As Benson's major objective of the book is "calling for new visions of American masculinity across racial, sexual, and gendered lines, defining itself not in terms of binaries but rather in terms of hypermasculine failure" (2014, 137), it can be concluded that African American masculinities can be studied in novels from an intersectional perspective which provides the potential to study the categories of race gender and sexuality.

Intersectionality allows for a more detailed analysis of stereotypical masculine positions as it untangles the different social categories perpetuating certain stereotypes of black men. This research attempts to go away from intersectionality's emphasis on the criminological and mimetic aspects of the studied group of masculinities to focus on their representations in Petry's work in more subtle and progressive ways. African American men in Petry's fiction lend themselves to different stereotypes which can be approached inersectionally. Since I rely on stereotypes as an analytical category, I will discuss them briefly from an intersectional viewpoint. The intersection of the social categories of race, gender, class, and others leads to viewing African American masculinities in oppressively stereotypical images. Crenshaw refers to this notion in "Beyond Racism and Misogyny: Black Feminism and 2 Live Crew" as "representational" dynamics of intersectionality which is perpetuated by the power of the "readily available" images about black people in the mainstream American society (1997, 249–53).

Black people have been viewed according to certain stereotypes as "reduced to the signifiers of their physical difference – thick lips, fuzzy hair, broad face and nose and so on" – as discussed by Stuart Hall as "racialized regime of representation" that "have persisted into the late twentieth century" as adopted by cartoonists, filmmakers, and writers of literature (1997, 249). Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* sets forth stereotyping black people as one of the bases of Western ocular-centrism. He critiques ocular-centrism as dominating vision in a given society and that it is an everyday habit of seeing others based on the perceivers' biased perspectives, such as seeing black people in racialized terms. It is the way racism subordinates black people into a "crushing objecthood" that render them an "object among others" (Fanon 1986, 109). Viewing black people stereotypically, as Ralph Ellison writes in *Invisible Man* is "a matter of the construction of a set of inner eyes […] which racialists look through their physical eyes upon reality" (1952, 3). According to both Fanon and Ellison, stereotyping is the way white people view black people according to specific images that they have built up in their minds.

Maurice O. Wallace links the appearance of stereotypes about African American masculinities to the ways African American male representation has been interrupted by an assumption of either being seen or unseen. Wallace uses the term "spectragraphia" which he defines as "a chronic syndrome of inscribed misrepresentation of black men [...] in an optically inflected framing of black men" (2002, 30). He argues that African American men have been "enframed," i.e., seen in specific frames, since the eighteenth century and have been objectified by these frames. In other words, these frames can be elucidated as a mental representation of African American men in an exaggerated belief associated with a categorization, defined by any number of criteria, such as race, gender, profession, age, and other categories. The interrelated nature of stereotype as consisting of multiple categories practically paves the way to be investigated under the lenses of intersectionality in this dissertation.

"Conceptual and Logical Issues in Theory and Research Related to Black Masculinity" by Clyde W. Franklin (1986) tackles the marginalization of African American men and their state of being regarded as less masculine than white men due to the power of stereotypes, prior to the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Franklin outlines that the available roles they needed to conform to were white western norms, the Afrocentric models of masculinity, and racially oppressive roles – is stereotypical ones. The latter is "permeated with sexism, irresponsibility, intraracism, and other individually dysfunctional and societally disorganizing elements" (Franklin 1986, 163). Franklin

in his renowned "'Ain't I a Man?': The Efficacy of Black Masculinities for Men's Studies in the 1990s," studies these constructions of African American masculinities as the byproduct of their internalization of a hegemonic masculine ideal and that they are "masculinities produced by a society that still seems ambivalent about extending male privileges and statuses to Black men" (1991, 279). Petry's studied texts contemplate African American masculinities as subjected to marginalization, demonization, and even extermination as part of white America's patriarchal regime practiced by white men and women. Black men are, as described by Stephanie Brown and Keith Clark, a "repository of all that America fears, hates, and loves" (2003, 733). To further elaborate on the experience of being a man and black in the US, they refer to James Baldwin's aphorism "if the black man didn't exist, whites would have invented him" (quoted in Brown and Clark 2003, 734). The black man has been regarded as a necessary object for white people to project their anxieties on or construct themselves against – a point implied in Baldwin's wryly aphoristic quote and documented in the literature written about black men in the US. Black men are the most potent "screen against which white men" project "their fears of emasculation" and define their masculinities (Kimmel 2006, 65). The masculinity of black men is marginalized in relation to white men's ideals, such as American hegemonic masculinity.

Ideals of manhood in the US captured by mainstream society through the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which included expectations regarding race, economic position, educational level, among others, most of which African American men at the time could not meet. For example, with the growing demands of the suburban consumer American society during the mid-twentieth century, black men face massive unemployment, exacerbating their insecurities. According to the dogmas of patriarchal masculinity, these men fail as providers and protectors of their families. The focus is on their bodies and lack of intellectuality, chiefly achieved by racist and sexist stereotypes. It is the "imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" which makes black males appear as "dumb or as we called it growing up in the fifties, appearing to be slow (meaning not quite bright)" (hooks 2004, 32).

The stereotypes which oppress black masculinities render influential in an intersection of racism, sexism, and other unequal societal factors and in relation to American hegemonic masculinity. In an attempt to reclaim their manhood and combat marginalization, some black men became outrageous and transformed their rage into violence in the 1940s - 50s. They grew anxious and insecure about falling into the trappings of gender failure. Housewives' rushing back into the

workplace from which they had been pushed before the war, and the highly corporeal consumerist and urban/suburban American society increased their sense of masculine angst. Black men were too self-conscious that failing as breadwinners and fathers meant becoming "homosexuals, juvenile delinquents and communists – self-spineless dupes of a foreign power who were incapable of standing for themselves" (Kimmel 2006, 156). The emphasis was on what the man had, not whom the man was, doubling the conflict for asserting their masculinity.

The logic behind stereotyping lies in four main aspects "the construction of otherness and exclusion," "stereotyping and power," "the role of fantasy," and "fetishism" (Hall 1997, 257). These aspects are essential for preserving specific orders in a society: social and symbolic. Irén Annus posits that stereotyping serves as a strategy to "cement individuals to permanent social, economic and political positions" based on their race/ethnicity affiliation in the US society (Annus 2005). For instance, white masculinities other and exclude African American masculinities via stereotypes to preserve their hegemony and discursive power. This group of masculinities is excluded from the norm and othered. Black people (men and women) have also been fetishized as hypersexual, among many other examples, to provide pleasure to white people. Stereotyping has remained "a signifying practice" that "is central to the representation of racial difference" (Hall 1997, 257). Different stereotypes have been used to oppress and dominate African American men and women. The latter group is usually depicted as the mammy, the matriarch, the sexual siren, and the welfare mother/queen (Collins, 1991; Bobo, 1995; Woodard and Mastin 2005, 265–6).

The male counterparts of these are numerous. The Sambo, who is the silly and childish clown of the minstrel shows dates back to the nineteenth century and originally appeared in Helen Bannerman's *The Story of Little Black Sambo* (1899). The old uncle/Uncle Tom is a negative depiction of black slave men as compliant and sympathetic to white people, and it was portrayed by Harriet Beecher Stowe as the title character of her novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852). The stereotype of black men as excessively obedient and servile to white people first appeared under the name of Uncle Remus as well, who is the fictional narrator of Joel Chandler Harris's collection of African American folktales (1881). African American men have also been stereotyped as the Mandingo, also known as the Black Buck/Brute, usually an aggressive and sexually driven man, and as the deviant, a criminal black man. The Mandingo "conjures up associations of illicit interracial sex and/or the myth of the well-endowed black stud" (DeVos 2013, 6). The stereotypical characteristics of this stereotype have the lion's share in Petry's works – many of her black male

characters are type-casted as violent, sexually driven, and deviant. The Mandingo is a pervading stereotype that both openly and tacitly jeopardizes the black male characters of Petry's fiction. It is dismantled into constituent parts in an attempt to subvert its dichotomous component of being sexually driven and violent. Petry showcases how some black men internalize this stereotype to define their masculinity. Even those characters who do not comply with this stereotype pay for the permeating confluence of it with their lives due to how they are viewed in society.

Stereotyping is the main barrier in African American men's endeavors to realize what the dominant US society considers normative manhood a la hegemonic masculinity. According to Janice Cools' "A Profeminist Approach to African American Male Characters," to study American masculinities in the post-industrial era is very challenging and to study African American masculinities is even more troublesome. This is mainly due to the ways the stereotypes around black masculinities have taken a life of their own since then. They have become very validated and deepened in the social construction of the American society's definition of African American masculinity. "Black males are viewed as […] uncivilized and subhuman […] and sex obsessed," are among some of the stereotypes that hinder the African American's way of achieving "normative manhood" (Cools 2008, 33). Cooper narrows down the popular stereotypical representations of African American masculinities in media and movies as "bipolar". He contends that these representations mainly alternate between a crime-prone and hypersexual one referred to as a "Bad Black Man" and another who associates with white norms and distances himself from blackness, referred to as a "Good Black Man". Cooper relies on an intersectional analysis of representations of heterosexual black men to study the predominant images portraying them as either the completely "threatening Bad Black Man or the fully assimilationist Good Black Man". These depictions are two-fold in the sense that they swing from one extreme polar to another with little room for nuanced images. The binary nature of these representations can be elucidated in an intersectional approach because they are produced by the combinations of the general narratives about blackness, race, and the particular narratives about black masculinity.

Accordingly, a good black man is one who necessitates an assimilative incentive and look up to white ideals of masculinity, hegemonic masculinity, in constructing his masculine identity. While a bad black man is one who protests against the white ideals and, thus, confined in stereotypical traits by the society. In other words, the dichotomy of good vs. bad equates with the earlier mentioned list of stereotypes, including Uncle Tom vs. the Mandingo, about black men.

This research attempts to argue that by depicting nuanced representations: more human-like and everyday-like examples, Petry's representations of African American masculinities fill in the empty space caused by depicting black men in binary oppositions. She represents portrayals of African American men that are intricately complex and relatively sophisticated which can surpass this dichotomous dilemma of viewing them as only passively acquiescent or notoriously tough/masculine. The prevalence of the negative depictions of African American men preserves the status quo by tempting them to accept the current identity hierarchies. The good black man is usually compliant and passive, and the bad black man is a threat that needs to be contained and controlled. Categorizing black men work in favor of certain members of the US society and are used to determine the hierarchical differences among them.

All in all, intersectionality provides a language for theorizing the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, and other social categories in constructing identities and bringing about new perspectives to investigate oppression that is not fully covered in prior one-dimensional theoretical frames. I implement intersectionality as a heuristic concept, a reminder of the complex and multilayered interactions of the intersections of the categories, to study African American masculinities. An intersectional reading method of Petry's black male writers indicates the significance of subverting stereotypical images as a pivotal point in Petry's writings. It highlights Petry's endeavor in combating the banal positions of the black men and depicting them as performing more progressive social roles. Analyses are conducted in the same direction as the representational issues of masculinities in literary history to make a possible connection between the social and literary implications of African American masculinities. This is to indicate that this research is motivated by the new direction in masculinity studies to revisit and reexamine the literary representations of African American masculinities to question their social counterparts. This logic is a counterargument to support the dissertation's reliance on an intersectional reading. It paves the way to use intersectionality as a method developed in social theory and applied in literary criticism.

Chapter 2. Relocating Ann Petry Beyond the Mid-century African American Protest Fiction

If Ann Petry is an understudied author in scholarly research, her black male characters are even more understudied as critical attention is usually paid myopically to her black female characters. This statement does not intend to undermine her vital role in depicting the experiences of being a woman and black in mid-century US society. Rather, it connotes that studying her black male characters leads to a fuller appreciation of Petry's plight for racial justice, her unrestrained aesthetics, her political inclinations, and her writing career as a whole. This chapter discusses the reception of how Petry's writings add to the ongoing debates about the constructions of black male characters in mid-twentieth-century African American letters. The chapter shifts focus from the reception of her works of fiction in the first section to her rarely discussed non-fictional pieces and her white life novel in the second and third sections to find out more about her aesthetics and political tendencies. It interrogates Petry's strategies to challenge stereotypical representations of African American masculinities, which can serve as a base for in-depth analyses of her fictional works in the subsequent chapters.

The first section of this chapter investigates issues of the African American novel in the post-Harlem Renaissance era. It reads Ann Petry in connection with the major voices of that period, such as Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison, and James Baldwin. I attempt to showcase how her writing project aligns with these writers' key concerns and stress how it diverges from their bounded scope. I argue that Petry's fictional works – novels and short stories – exhibit different stages in her dealings with the tradition of the mid-twentieth century African American protest novel. Her wandering away from the protest novel form is connected to the Harlem renaissance traditions of narration and storytelling and her interest in experimenting with modernist forms of writing. The emphasis shifts to her non-fictional writings in the second section. "Harlem" and "What's Wrong with Negro Men?" are analyzed as two of her journalistic practices with insights into her political disposition and pressing interest in composing positive examples of African American masculinities. The section tackles instances of how Petry changes sociology into art which fits into the intersectional perspective of this project.

2.1. Petry's Divergent Aesthetics and the Bounded Scope of Protest Fiction

This section documents a brief epoch in African American literary history – when Petry's works are published – to provide a careful reconsideration of her forgotten texts in light of both "readerly expectations and writerly subversions", in Stephanie Brown's words in *The Postwar*

African American Novel: Protest and Discontent, 1945–1950 (2011, 33). This section thus also reflects on how Petry attempted to make a difference in mid-twentieth-century African American fiction. She wrote during a difficult time for any African American writer to publish, yet, she did and was successful. She published short stories, novels, and children's literature. Petry's obituary written by Hazel Arnett Ervin – the author of *Ann Petry: A Bio-bibliography* (1993) – covers the most important biographical details about Petry from her birthdate in 1908 to her death in 1997. It denotes Petry as one of the "most sought-after African American writers" of her time and that her "literary significance" is "recognized" in the 1980 "collected letters of Arna Bontemps and Langston Hughes" (Ervin 1997, 71). Brought up by educated and well-to-do parents who ran their own pharmacy, Petry earned a degree and career as a pharmacist in Old Saybrook, Connecticut, New England, until she moved to New York with her husband, George Petry, in 1938. She began to work as a journalist in several newspapers and magazines in Harlem, New York, such as *The Crisis* and *The Amsterdam News*. Petry is regarded as the first African American woman to be a staff writer for the latter. Her painstakingly vivid images of Harlemites dwelling on the hostile streets of Harlem, discussed in the second section, can be attributed to her journalism profession. She is also considered the first African American female writer to sell more than one million copies of her debut novel, *The Street*, which proclaimed her a celebrity. As she indicates in an interview with Mark K. Wilson, the sudden fame drove her to return to her hometown to avoid the spotlight. "Well, I had suddenly become famous in a way which I think it would be very difficult to describe, and I hated it! I mean, I just didn't feel that this ... I couldn't, I couldn't cope it", states Petry (Petry 1988, 80). She secluded herself and spent the rest of her life in privacy.

Petry's preference not to share her personal life with the public is reaerated by her daughter, Elisabeth Petry, who tributed a biographical book to her mother, stating, "[m]y mother did not want this book to exist" (2009, 15). Jean-Christophe Cloutier (2019, 213) describes Petry's decision to leave New York and sabotage her archives are "idiosyncratic" as she destroyed or let her manuscripts be destroyed due to insufficient storage. She was unwilling to share what she considered private and sacred with the public. Petry's individualistic preference is not the reason behind her underrepresentation in American letters. Reading Petry's fictional and non-fictional writings reveals her literary prolificacy and exhibits a critical awareness of the most pressing social and political issues of her age. This assumption discredits the prevalent perception of Petry's image as a socially detached and remote writer. Compared to her contemporaries, her writing style stands

out, and her language is different. She is very current in her writing, i.e., she is not locked up in time as much as other male writers of the same period, such as Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison, feel to be. Her writing is psychological, and the narrated events and described places are essential to her, but only as far as they can assist in portraying the feeling of experiencing life and being a specific woman and man.

Nonetheless, the scope of Petry's works had been overshadowed by her most acclaimed and anthologized short story, "Like a Winding Sheet" (1945) and *The Street,* for decades since their initial publications. The commonalities between these two works surpass their thematic focus regarding their cri de coeur for protest. They also are connected in that "Like a Winding Sheet" granted Petry a Houghton Mifflin Literary Fellowship to fund her writing project of *The Street*. One possible hypothesis behind the singularity of these two pieces in representing Petry and dominating her oeuvre is related to the protest aesthetics in the 1940s. These works directly reflect the then-current literary discourses and are easily connected to the literary history period. Thematically, they fit into the victimization narratives of black male and female characters as inscribed in the rubrics of protest fiction. Hence, this dissertation proposes that Petry's other undervalued writings, such as *Country Place* (1947) and *The Narrows* (1953), are more comprehensive in their dealings with masculine identity constructions and more complex in their stylistic aspirations.

Literary history exhibits the African American novel of the 1940s according to a dichotomy of protest fiction in the works of Richard Wright contrasted with more aestheticizing and modernist tendencies through the works of Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin. In his 2011 book, *What was African American Literature: The W.B.D. Du Bois Lectures*, Kenneth W. Warren characterizes African American literature from the early to mid-twentieth century as more concerned with exclusively social issues and an emphasis on universalism: racial inequality as a human problem. Warren reiterates W. E. B. Du Bois' call upon literary authors, critics, and other intellectuals in his work as in *The Dawn of the Dusk* to write in favor of deconstructing the saliency of race in their lived experiences in the Post-Jim Crow US. As a result, their texts were the study and contestation of what race had done to them and their fellow people.

Warren finds the investment in literature, literary criticism, and historical writings to promote social justice appropriate. It is further argued that what marks African American writings to exist as literature is the writers' endeavors to fight against all forms of segregation and to serve

as an indicator of the forward progression of the race. African American literature "– again, often despite itself –succumbs to the temptation to shore up a specialized intellectual understanding by insisting on its efficacy as a contribution to the race as a whole" (Warren 2011, 139–40). Racial injustice has been a prominent and decapitating feature of the black experience throughout US history. It appeared in variant forms: slavery until the late nineteenth century and disfranchisement in the early decades of the twentieth century.

The black authors of the 1940s and 1950s faced radical shifts in the political milieu that affected their writing projects in various ways. Warren lists "Myrdal consensus, McCarthyism, the cold war and the bourgeoisification of formerly black radical thinkers" as reasons that led to diminishing the black writers' active involvement with different political movements such as international Marxism, Pan-Africanism and other decolonizing campaigns in the later years of the 1940s and early years of 1950s (Warren 2011, 93). Nonetheless, the writers, including Petry, kept following Du Bois' blueprint in utilizing their texts instrumentally to advance the race. This, in many instances, led to an imbalance between the style and content of the works produced under the label of protest fiction. This genre, as Jerry W. Ward Jr. states in "Everybody's Protest Novel: The Era of Richard Wright" violates both language and credibility, and prioritization is granted to "the good of society" at the expense of stylistic characterizations of the text (Ward Jr. 2004, 175). This is where there is an apparent confusion between literature with sociology. It is what Henry Louis Gates Jr. terms "the confusion of the realms": "The critic became social reformer, and literature became an instrument for the social and ethical betterment of the black person" (Gates Jr. 1987, 30).

Ward Jr. denotes the term "protest" "as a pejorative code word for works of inferior artistic accomplishment". He utilizes it as synonymous with other terms such as "the problem novel, the sociological novel, or the novel grounded in social realism". In addition, he considers it more of a "position" on the writers' behalf than a "genre" on itself (Ward Jr. 2004, 173–4). This type of novel, according to C. Hugh Holman's classical *A Handbook to Literature*, "centers its principal attention on the nature, function, and the effect of the society in which the characters live and on the social forces playing upon them" (1936, 502). In other words, the social problems of gender, race, and class disparity are prevalent in the social protest novel, and their effect on the characters is rather dramatically depicted. It represents social issues such as politics and the economy as the catalysts for the sufferings of the portrayed characters on a daily basis. Oppression, class struggle,

and segregation are among the major concerns of this genre. An individual or a group is usually shown to be striving in an assumed society. The characters aim at change and aspire to progress; however, their success or failure in their pursuits highly depends on internal and external factors. Based on the agenda of this definition, the novelist takes the role of a passive observer and reporter who appears to have little power over the characters' lives and fatal destinies. Donna Campbell argues that in such novels, "characters whose fates were the product of their heredity, their environment, and chance circumstances," and that these coinciding factors "rarely worked in their favor" (Campbell 2011, 499).

Protest fiction, exemplified in Wright's *Native Son* (1940), is described in W. Lawrence Hogue's *Discourse and the Other* as "writing about certain themes – social maladjustment, the individual and his environment, criminals, murder, violence, and death – that dominate critical practices, at least at this period in American literary history, defined more worthy and 'universal' than the quest for identity, personal freedom, and happiness" (1986, 30). Despite Hogue's dichotomy, the characters of protest fiction are in a fierce quest to maintain their identities and achieve freedom and happiness – which are not achieved often – against all the odds of American society. Wrightian novels are built on the premises of protest fiction, showcasing the African American positions as being at the mercy of all these social and hereditary conditions that this genre is supposed to portray about the middle-class and lower-class male and female protagonists at the turn of the century.

The image of Bigger Thomas in *Native Son* is a controversial example of what it means to be an African American man in the mid-twentieth century. Critics argue that Bigger is violent and sexually driven and confirms negative stereotypes of black men. Wright's strong belief in employing the novel to express social problems is apparent in his 1937 essay "The Blueprint for Negro Writers". He writes,

> This problem, by its very nature, is one which must be approached contemporaneously from two points of view. The ideological unity of Negro writers and the alliance of that unity with all the progressive ideas of our day is the primary prerequisite for collective work. On the shoulders of white writers and Negro writers alike rest the responsibility of ending this mistrust and isolation. (Wright 1980, 411)

The novel in the practice of Wright means African American authors unite in their writing against the debilitating social conditions of their day. He also invites his fellow white writers to work with the black ones to fight social injustice.

Wright's opposition has been censured by critics and writers alike, as in the case of James Baldwin's *Notes on a Native Son* (1957). Criticizing Wright, Baldwin discloses what is lacking in Wright's portrayal of Thomas Bigger. He articulates his disapproval of framing characters in categories that limit their potential to achieve their basic human rights. He dismisses the protest novel as the characters face the jeopardy of accepting their doomed humanity due to being born black. He contends:

> For Bigger's tragedy is not that he is cold or black or hungry, not even that he is American, black; but that he has accepted a theology that denies him life, that he admits the possibility of being a sub-human and feels constrained, therefore, to battle for his humanity according to those brutal criteria bequeathed him at birth. But our humanity is our burden, our life; we need not battle for it; we need only to do what is infinitely more difficult – that is, accept it. The failure of the protest novel lies in its rejection of life, the human being, the denial of his beauty, dread, power, in its insistence that it his categorization alone which is real and which he cannot be transcended. (Baldwin 1957, 23)

In contrast to Wright's inclination toward this genre and his insistence on it as a blueprint for his contemporary African American writers, Baldwin opposes this stance through the essay "Everybody's Protest Novel" and all the questions he poses about the aesthetic practices of the protest novel genre. According to Baldwin, blackness should be depicted as a human problem, not a social one, as in the protest novel. A more nuanced and complex type of fiction is required, representing more multifaceted images of black masculinities to challenge the undercurrent issues of racism and stereotypical images of black men in US society.

Petry's approach to the protest genre can be traced in defense of her debut novel, *The Street* (1946), leading her to write the essay "The Novel as Social Criticism" in 1950. While Baldwin dismissed the protest novel as mere propaganda and that it prioritized social issues over style and characterizations, Petry insists that all novels are propaganda in a sense and that it does not subside the writers' awareness of the socially invested issues of their time. The novel as propaganda differs from the protest novel in terms of resolution. Similarly to the latter, the propaganda novel deals with social, political, economic, or even moral problems but advocates "a doctrinaire solution" (Holman 1936, 419). Though Petry's novels do not always have a strict resolution for her protagonists' plight against racial injustice, it can be inferred that it is Harlem Renaissance intellectuals' models that Petry follows, not Wright's. This point will be further elaborated on later in this section regarding Petry's linkage to Harlem Renaissance.

As part of her quest to write about the conditions of racial inequality in the mid-twentieth century US, Petry attributes Wright's influential role in the novel to social criticism. She places Bigger Thomas with a variety of well-established literary characters that "[p]eople still discuss them, argue about them, as though they had had an actual existence" (Petry 2019, 489). She also posits that any novelist who plans to write about race relations must "reread *Native Son*" (Petry 2019, 490). However, the persistent argument is Bigger Thomas remains a social categorization, not a character, restricted in his stereotypical status. Petry believes that blackness is a social problem but attempts to balance the problem's social aspects and what Baldwin refers to as a human problem. In other words, she brings the psychological dimensions of her black protagonists to the front of her texts. Nonetheless, the social factors are buttressed by Petry as the reason for the psychological rifts experienced by her characters. This research relies on intersectionality to further explore the effects of sociological and deterministic factors on constructing Petry's black male characters. The transition in her texts from protest fiction to modernist forms adds more layers and sophistication to her portrayals of black masculine identities. Such nuances are better detected through the lenses of an intersectional reading of her corpus.

Petry does not follow Baldwin's blueprint in representing blackness as a human problem, as she pioneered this direction almost a decade earlier than him. However, Baldwin is credited for this direction as his work is acknowledged and received more critical attention. The mutual ground between Petry and Baldwin exceeds depicting blackness as a human problem in their fiction. They focus on the intersection of race with other categories, such as sexuality, in Baldwin's case. He does not exclusively reveal this intersection in his black characters but also illustrates how it provides an alternative way to observe whiteness. In *Giovanni's Room* (1956), Baldwin writes beyond the restraining scope of Wright's blueprint by exploring a new genre: the white life novel. This type is written by African American authors but outlines white characters in a predominantly white setting. Baldwin primarily narrates the story of David, a white gay American man living in Paris. It aims at disrupting the consensus around the ideal and hegemonic forms of white masculinity by depicting subtly unstable and anxious white male characters in the post-war era. Similar issues are stressed in Petry's novel *Country Place,* published a decade earlier. These novels are categorized among a more aestheticizing genre than the protest novels published during the mid-century.

This aestheticizing genre can be explained in terms of the modernist novel as in the tradition of Henry James. Ágnes Zsófia Kovács argues in "Recanonizing Henry James: Colm Tóibín's The Master" that James' "experiments with perspective and his focus on the process of personal experience […] paved for Modernist prose" (Kovács 2007). According to David Trotter's "The modernist novel," key characteristics include techniques such as the streams of consciousness, psychological analysis, and dramatic presentations of the characters' impressions. The story is narrated through the consciousness of some character(s); this leads to discarding the author's ubiquity and omniscience. These techniques are omnipresent in James' novels - *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903), and *The Golden Bowl* (1904) - which can be denoted as Jamesian psychological novels of consciousness as they "create centers of consciousness through which the apprehension of events is filtered" (Trotter 2005, 71). Petry's aesthetic agenda – read in the light of Jamesian conceptualization of modernist fiction – goes beyond the horizons of Wright's school of writing.

Reading Petry's modernist fiction vis-à-vis a Jamesian modernist novel model is stressed by Heather J. Hicks, who posits that "the parallels between the works of James and Petry" in terms of modernism offer "an excellent sounding board" for Petry's works (2002, 91). This argument can be supported by two factors: her unique artistic style of unraveling her narratives and portraying her main characters and the influence of the Harlem Renaissance on her writing career. Her fictional writings are characterized by a deep interest in excavating characters' psychology, multiple points of view, and discontinuity and breaks in the narrative. A particular scene in her fiction encompasses various improvisations and a seemingly spontaneous and contingent correspondence between one event and the next. The irony, a major characteristic of modernist prose, is also a tool used by Petry to either ridicule certain characters, as in her short story, "The Bones of Louella Brown" (1971), or to empower some characters, as in *The Narrows* (1953). Petry's style serves as one justification that she should not be placed beside the deterministic representations of the protest genre, as there is more in her works. By the end of her career, there is a highlight of the psychological sides of her characters, and she writes about gender exemplified in African American masculine identities in a much more different way than she started.

In addition to Wright and Baldwin, the mid-twentieth century witnessed the prominence of another African American fiction writer, namely Ralph Ellison. These three writers gained unprecedented popularity in the US, and Brown (2011, 3) regards Wright and Ellison as the most

significant representatives of African American fiction from 1940 to 1965. According to Quentin Miller, these writers became the heirs and the critics of the Harlem Renaissance after the publication of Wright's *The Native Son* (1940), Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952), and Baldwin's *Go Tell It on the Mountain* (1953). They showed "a willingness to regard the past critically and skeptically, or to recognize the achievements of their predecessors while refusing to worship them" (Miller 2016, 83). One common thread between their work is urban blight, mainly in either Chicago or New York as the primary locus of their novels, highlighting their black characters' struggle against poverty and the burdens of their lofty dreams of achieving a decent life.

While reflecting on how Wright's *Native Son* changed the trajectory of writing African American fiction, Miller regards Petry's *The Street* as complementing Wright's novel by "redirecting its angry intensity to frame female experiences" (Miller 2016, 90). Although Petry's indicated novel is primarily Luttie Johnson's story, a black female who dreams of finding a way out of her impoverished life by residing and working in the Harlem streets, the novel is also centered on the lives of men. The Super and Boots Smith, two black men who attempt to take advantage of her, can be classified as negative depictions of African American men who, similarly to Bigger, are aggressive and sexually driven. However, Petry portrays them as men burdened by an intersection of race prejudice with their impoverishing economic status. They, as a result, turn to the privileges of their gender, directing their anger toward the less powerful members of their race, usually women, as a compensatory reaction.

Herman Beavers studies Ellison's novel alongside Baldwin's in terms of their treatment of "men who are injured by their circumstances and thus forced to find ways to give narrative shape and breadth to the damage done to them." That is to say, their black male characters are seen to make a space for themselves in the narrative to stand out as "agents, actors and subjects" (Beavers 2004, 190). Bigger's ineffability in voicing his most crucial experiences is a deficiency in his character. When faced with the crowd towards the novel's end, Bigger cannot defend himself, reflecting his hopelessness about the fixed frames the white people view him. His experience defies expression and hinders his way to assert his masculinity against the stereotypical entrapments – the unnamed narrator in Ellison's *Invisible Man* and Link Williams in Petry's *The Narrows* use language as eloquent and sophisticated enough to reflect on their real dilemmas as men living in the 1950s. In parallel to Ellison's unnamed narrator, Link is an educated man who deliberately fights against stereotyping and is aware that his individual decisions and fate are closely related to

that of race. Despite possessing good personal traits and educational background, he is ill-fated as his masculinity is shaped by the intersecting force of the categories of race, gender, and class on the different structural, political, and representational levels, all working against him.

Ward Jr. considers Petry's *The Street* a "womanist or feminist complement to Wright's exploration of the city and race". He argues, "but it more important that Petry's novel is itself within the tradition of black women novelists' engaging issues of race, gender and class as in Dorothy West's *The Living is Easy* (1948)" (Ward Jr. 2004, 186). Petry's deliberate attachment to this genre can be justified following what Brown calls "a desire for historical coherence and a need for more efficient marketing" (Brown 2011, 13). As a black writer, it must not have been easy for her to write in an environment dominated by white publishers and readers. As only a limited number of the middle-class black audience could afford to buy books, she had to tailor her works within her time's publishing framework to meet the market's requirements. Since Wright's novel became the landmark signifier of that period, Petry and other writers used their debut novels to respond to the protest genre either obliquely following it or defiantly departing from it.

Despite being referred to as "a native daughter" by Miller and a "feminist" complementary to Wright by Ward Jr., the blueprint for Petry's novels is not always *Native Son.* Petry's reputation as a member of Wright's school of writing and as a female descendant of his work has restricted interpretations of her work. Nonetheless, my counterargument is that Petry's oeuvre begins with protest aesthetics, but she attempts to free her works from the limits and confinements of this genre in her later works. *The Narrows* can be an example of Petry's refutation of this realm and her innovative effort to write with an essentially modernist method. However, this novel is still not entirely free from the effects of the social protest novel as Douglas Field tackles this issue in his review, "Novels from Both The Zenith and The Nadir of Protest Fiction". He reviews the most recently published version of Petry's first and third novels and three of her non-fictional essays by the Library of America, edited by Farah Jasmine Griffin in 2019. He writes: "Ann Petry's sharp observations about class, racial pride and love are at times jostled out of focus by the large cast of characters, many of whom slide back in time to reflect on the past. *The Narrows* (1953) which was her final work of adult fiction, is haunted by the mode of social protest, even as it strives to break free" (Field 2020, 3).

I argue that reading Petry's work in terms of the Wright/Baldwin opposition does not lead to a just evaluation of her writing career and that she diverges from the Wrightian school of writing.

Her writing extends in a different direction. Her trajectories of writing fiction are more extensive and progressive, exemplified in her experimenting with different aesthetic prospects and contesting gender defined in essentialist ways. She implements a novel approach to African American masculinities by portraying them as multiple, unsettled, and fluid. There are examples of African American men of different ages, abilities, looks, and sexualities. They are men whose masculinities are contingent. They are continuously shaped and reshaped by the intersectional power of race, gender, and other categories based on certain contexts. There are examples of men whose sexual identities are defined by an implied fluidity, such as Malcolm Powther in *The Narrows*, who is represented as a mixed amalgamation of gendered traits: a father of three, a cuckolded husband, and an effete dandy. Powther will be further analyzed in chapter four of this dissertation.

There is more than the confining scope of naturalistic leitmotifs of protest fiction in Petry's novels. Keith Clark, in *The Radical Fiction of Ann Petry*, contends that: "naturalism and its various synonyms – environmentalism, determinism, protest – still represented the discursive brush that would tar and taint the reception of Petry's immensely nuanced and, unbeknownst to many readers and critics, transgressive and progressive body of writing" (Clark 2013, 4). What is transgressive in Petry according to Clark is her "radical aesthetic agenda" as she experimented various subgenres of literature and mixed them in the body of her works. For example, she "employs the conventions of terror literature to show how the lives of WASPs occupying a seemingly halcyon New England hamlet can be as nightmarish and pathological as those blacks confined to a plantation-like, predacious Harlem (Clark 2013, 4–5). Clark refers to Petry's unhinged artistic skills in her two novels from the forties, *The Street* and *Country Place*. These elements are overlooked dimensions of her works and can serve as proof that her fictional trajectories are certainly more expansive than the pigeonholing possibilities of the protest. *Country Place* (1947) is a tangible example of this radical divergence which will be elucidated in more detail in the next chapter as an attempt to suggest that Petry is much more concerned and interested in the content of her work than the form. The debate over what should have been the appropriate form for the African American novel is still current and always provokes heated and unexpected negotiations among critics. It can be observed that this debate is multifaceted: it does not only engage with issues about society, politics, and aesthetics but also the practical needs of the literary marketplace back then.

Two major facts – Petry's divergence from a tradition of protest fiction and her persistent sense of concern over the lives of the poorest black people – indicate the political atmosphere of Harlem in the 1940s, as presented in her works. Her connection with black activists influenced her political disposition. She was acquainted with Adam Clayton Powell, the first black congressman from Harlem, who is documented in her non-fictional essay "Harlem". She was also a friend to actresses like Ruby Dee and Ozzie Davis; both were known to be diligently interested in politics and the issues related to the working class. Her non-fiction works, discussed in the second section of this chapter, help position her as a writer nonbounded by the deterministic essence of protest fiction as she depicts an example of progressive African Americans despite all the social conditions. These pieces were published in journals founded during the peak periods of the Harlem Renaissance and are evidence of her linkage to it as a literary movement, as these journals adopt the ideologies and beliefs disseminated by Harlem Renaissance intellectuals.

Petry is connected to the aesthetics of the Harlem Renaissance too. There is a link between the practice of the Harlem Renaissance of composing fiction and her work. Harlem Renaissance is a politicized adventure but not as fatalistic as protest fiction. The writers have something to reach, fight for, and a voice to articulate as racial pride. They grow skeptical about the promises of wartime rhetoric in offering social justice to African American people and pursue their objectives of achieving justice with an acute determinism and in a more urging manner than the writers of the earlier decades. The political aspects of their writings are omnipresent in how they demonstrate "inequalities […] to re-establish the terms of racial hierarchy that existed for much of the twentieth century" (Warren 2011, 5). In "The Negro Artist and Racial Mountain" – published in 1926 – Langston Hughes deliberates the anecdote of a young African American poet who declares he does not want to be an African American poet, but instead, just a poet. Hughes mainly composes this piece to invite his fellow artists to show pride in their racial legacy and stresses the importance of oral tradition in the works of his predecessors. Hughes writes:

> And within the next decade I expect to see the work of a growing school of colored artists who paint and model the beauty of dark faces and create with new technique the expressions of their own soul-world. And the Negro dancers who will dance like flame and the singers who will continue to carry our songs to all who listen — they will be with us in even greater numbers tomorrow.
> Most of my own poems are racial in theme and treatment, derived from the life I know. In many of them I try to grasp and hold some of the meanings and rhythms of jazz. (Hughes 1986, 3)

Hughes's oral tradition is also a major factor in Petry's works which supports my main argument about how her works should be approached and add to the latest reception of her. Similarly to Zora Neale Hurston, the vernacular voice and the use of oral tradition are conspicuous elements in her fictional writings.

Clark describes Petry's aesthetics as "more Faulknerian than Wrightian," but what sets her apart "from both these Anglo- or African American masters" is "her emphasis on shared stories and voices" (Clark 2013, 5). In her autobiographical essay, Petry highlights the necessity of oral and familial stories during her upbringing in the hostile milieu of New England, which became an essential technical part of her writing. She writes:

> These stories transmitted knowledge, knowledge on how to survive in a hostile environment. They were a part of my education. As a writer, I am really the product of what Reynolds Price (*A Palpable God*) calls a "powerful oral-narrative tradition […] A need to hear and tell stories is essential to the species – second necessary after nourishment and before love and shelter. Millions survive without love or home, almost none in silence – the sound of story is the dominant sound of our lives." (Petry 1988, 259)

Based on this, the outstanding technical features of Petry's work are storytelling and the necessity of communicating it with an audible voice. Petry's assertion that the source of her stories is from familial narratives or "powerful oral-narrative tradition", a Harlem Renaissance fiction writing technique, implies a significant point. The source of her multifaceted representations of African American masculinities is not a mere mimicry of hegemonic white versions of masculinity or simply reiterating the mainstream negative stereotypes about black men. Instead, she depicts her models from black men in her daily lives, a point which will be further discussed in the second section of this chapter or from the stories she was told during her rearing. Petry's writings show resistance to the reductive labels and an inclination to a feminist aesthetic interest in African American masculine identity construction and subjectivity. In addition to following Hughes's blueprint in "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," what sets Petry apart from Wright and other mid-century writers is that she contemptuously disregarded conventional styles of writing and succeeded in freeing herself from the confining expectations of the audience, resulting in her dedication to her own terms.

Farah Jasmine Griffin places Petry in *Harlem Nocturne: Women Artists and Progressive Politics* with two female artists, Pearl Primus; a choreographer and dancer, and Mary Lyn Williams; a composer and pianist, as among the New York's most celebrated artists of the 1940s

New York. This trio's work is considered by Griffin as highly innovative, communicating the aspirations of black people's everyday lives. According to Griffin, the prevailing themes of Petry's work include "the desire for equal citizenship, for adequate housing, for access to educational and economic opportunity, and for freedom from racial violence and police brutality" (Griffin 2013, 19). All these points connect Petry to a more modernist aesthetics of writing and that she is not a direct heir or counterpart to Wright, as secondary criticism shows. Compared to the protest aesthetics of *The Street*, *The Narrows* is in the tradition of Ellison and Baldwin, whose first novels were published in 1952 and 1953, respectively, which dethroned the genre of the protest novel and were considered "formally complex, modernist works that focused on the individual psychology of their characters" (Griffin 2013, 94). Similarly to Ellison and Baldwin's novels, Petry's later novels are considered highly modernist and transcend the protest novel genre. Petry takes a mutual interest in both form and content of her psychologically and formally complex works. Her work includes anger, but it is not the threshold of black life. She adds irony and comedy as techniques to reflect on the tragedies of his main characters.

Finally, the transition in Petry's fiction in terms of genre is also related to the socio-political milieu of publishing her works. Her protest novel – *The Street* – reflects on the spirit of the Popular Front age, while her modernist novel – *The Narrows* – is better suited to the Containment Culture tenets. Petry's studied works display constructing African American masculinities of the mid-twentieth twentieth following a transition from the radical cultural practices that Michael Denning refers to as "The Cultural Front" to the conservative constraints of cold-war culture that Alan Nadel terms "Containment Culture". Denning uses the term "the cultural front" to refer to a movement that started during the Great Depression and prolonged throughout the Cold War years. This movement witnessed the publication of politicized works "produced by the communist artists and intellectuals […]. The novels, plays, films, and musicals written and performed by the radical artists within and without the cultural apparatus used a repertoire of styles, genres, and conventions" (Denning 1997, xx). While Nadel relies on "*Containment Culture* […] to articulate with anecdotal clarity some of the narratives […] filled with repressed duality, attempted to reconcile with cult of domesticity with the demand of domestic security. Setting up a mythic nuclear family as the universal container of democratic values" (Nadel 1995, xi). He denotes the term to study issues of fiction and films produced in the Cold War period to highlight the tension

between the dominant culture and the prevalent demographic changes in the aftermath of World War II.

(African) American masculinities are formulated in accordance with the shift in society from "the Cultural Front" to the "Containment Culture". There is a direct connection between the sociopolitical changes of this distinct period of US history and the configuration of certain types of masculinities. In the process of containing communism which was believed to demolish gender boundaries and encourage self-indulgence, ideas against what America represented in this era, masculinities were contained in a specific division of tough/soft for order to prevail. "By exploring the nexus between cultural and political life in the 1940s and 1950s, we begin to understand why and how an exaggerated cult of masculine toughness and virility surfaced" K. A. Cuordileone writes (2000, 516). This exaggeratively rugged ideal of masculinity is a byproduct of the domestication of homes in the postwar years, the rise of materialism led by consumerism, and the prevalence of the nuclear family. A remarkable expansion of the middle class and suburban life occurred during the transition to a mass and universalized culture. These factors tested males' autonomy by reinscribing an unachievable gender role ideal of a successful breadwinner – husband and father. The American masculinities of the 1940s and 1950s are constantly anxious to surpass the hard/soft binary and acclaim to the set of expected societal roles of a breadwinner in a nuclear family. This transition is apparent in Petry's works, which reflect on her times' social and political changes. She amends her writing style to cope with these changes and moves from the confinements of post-World War II protest fiction towards a more modern and psychological genre in the latter part of her career. In addition, Petry's representations of African American masculinities correspond to the change in her aesthetics: she portrays more positive and progressive images of black men in her later works.

This section highlights three elements of literary history as my main thesis statement. Firstly, Petry's three novels exhibit different stages in her dealings with the tradition of the protest novel. Secondly, her wandering away from the protest novel is linked to the Harlem Renaissance traditions of narration and storytelling, akin to the modernist psychological conceptualizations of novel. Thirdly, her male characters' performances of masculinity offer more varied ground for analysis than her women focused on so far in scholarly research. These timely evaluations pave the way to investigate new and underrated horizons in the works of Petry. As an inheritor of the Harlem Renaissance and a writer who diverged from protest fiction aesthetics, Petry is studied

according to key terms borrowed from intersectionality. For instance, her representations of African American masculinities provide a fresh and alternative look at how black men were/should have been and indicate her progressive and prospective vision. Such representations contributed to developing her aesthetics of composing the black novel and to the agendas of black nationalists and feminists in the later decades. Her black male characters are more than what race dictates to them, and the reach of her work goes beyond race; nevertheless, race remains a prominent feature in determining them, along with gender, class, and even sexuality.

Petry portrays her black male characters against the backdrop of Wright and other mid-century authors' representations, bounded by anti-familial, antisocial and violent illustrations constructed in relation to inexorably white American masculine ideals. She, instead, brings about a shift in this relational nature of masculinities by focusing on the relationship between one black man and the other and between black men and their (black) society. For instance, the black men of *The Narrows* transcend the overshadowing idea that white masculinity is the solitary standard for black male subjectivity. She articulates the importance of black men's lives to their families, community, and, most significantly, each other. In this way, she provides alternative ways for her black male characters to define their black masculinities away from the oppressive definitions of hegemonic white masculinity. Petry's non-fictional writings will further explore this idea in the forthcoming section.

2.2. "What's Wrong with Negro Men" in "Harlem" and other Black Nexuses

Reading Ann Petry leads to knowing more about Harlem though not much is known about Petry herself and her life in this black neighborhood of New York. She moved to Harlem in 1938, after getting married to George Petry, and started to work in the major black papers of that period, such as *Amsterdam News* and *People's Voice*. Her love and dedication for this neighborhood and its residents' issues are omnipresent in her chronicles of Harlem life in her journalism, novels, and short stories. Parts of her fiction are based on the stories she covered as a newspaper reporter; the story of the Harlem riots of 1943 is fictionalized in her 1947 short story "In Darkness and Confusion". Similarly, the stories about children who have been left alone at home while their mothers had to work are documented in her narrative account of Lutie Johnson and her son Bub in *The Street*. There are four factors of wide contribution to Petry's prolific productivity in the 1940s: WWII, the Double V Campaign, the Second Great Immigration of African Americans, and the Popular Front in politics, art, and culture. The latter is an association formed during the Great

Depression era but continued through the war years to support African American writers fighting racial injustice and deconstructing stereotypes in their writing.

Though despite being a part of the associations above and an editor in several prestigious journals engrossed in left-wing politics, such as *The People's Voice* from 1941–1944, a pro-communist paper, "Petry may have been seeking to demonstrate the way her political views were steeped in values of the Judeo-Christian tradition that preceded Marxism, and would have distanced herself from the kind of radical politics that eventually fell out of favor." Other female writers and artists active during this period such as Zora Neale Hurston, Nella Larsen, Jessie Fauset, Bessie Smith, and Josephine Baker, among others, "explicitly linked their art and their public profile to a political movement" (Griffin 2013, 21–2). Petry differs from these artists in that she is more concerned with shaping the history of New York and its people in her fictional and journalistic writings by providing perspectives that were absent from official records. Nonetheless, Petry's fighting against the marginalizing effects of race, gender, and class to demonstrate the psychological complexity of the urban poor remains a political endeavor. The painstaking details and vivid images of Harlem in her fiction come from her first-hand experiences of those loci where certain daily events occurred to working class and working poor African Americans living between 110th to 150th streets. There is not only a sense of specific Harlem settings dwelled by a black crowd in her journalistic or fictional pieces but also a focus on specific (progressive) black figures to set an example for her readers, as in the two essays explored in this section.

"Harlem" with the subtitle "A medieval ghetto in the heart of the biggest, richest city in the world" was originally published in the April issue of *Holiday* in 1949, an American travel magazine published from 1946 to 1977. The subtitle is deleted in the most recent version, edited by Griffin and published by the Library of America in 2019. A quick look at the table of contents of the fifth volume of *Holiday* dedicated to New York reveals that Petry's article stands out as the solitary socio-political representative of African American lives torn between poverty and misrepresentations. Petry goes against the grain in this essay and refuses the prototypical image of Harlem – a place dwelt only by the criminal and the poor.

Petry gives a clear geographical sense of this rather diverse ghetto by making a disparity between its different locales. She exhibits the different sides of Harlem in a dichotomy of The Hill vs. The Hollow. The first is "a moneyed class which lives largely in and around the section known as the Hill — a high, hilly area, overlooking the Hudson River to the west and the Polo Grounds

to the northeast" (Petry 2019, 767). This class includes successful African American doctors, lawyers, dentists, real-estate operators, businessmen, and their families. They lead a luxurious lifestyle, reside in modern and spacious houses, and their children attend private schools. People of this class drive the recent 20th-century brand speed cars and spend vacations in Canada, Mexico, New England, Bermuda, England, France, and Sweden.

Contrasted to the Hill, The Hollow "is that central area in Harlem which welcomed the first influx of Negroes at the turn of the century" (Petry 2019, 769). The houses in this area are too old, narrow, and dim to be properly habitable by any standards. The descriptions of the houses and streets in this section resonate with scenes from *The Street.* Petry accurately transforms the real feel of these residences to her readers in her novel. There are commonalities in the lives of the dwellers of the two sections of Harlem: "law is an enemy, visible, hateful — a fat cat in a blue uniform, twirling a nightstick" (Petry 2019, 770). Her fictional tendencies are apparent in her use of highly figurative language, as in using animal imagery to refer to white copes, and she uses many tropes throughout the piece. White police chasing blacks with a stick or a gun is articulated in many of her fictional writings.

Insights about her understanding of class can be perceived in this non-fictional piece: her disinterest in Marxism and Harlem as a miniature of US society. She approaches the various residents of Harlem by dividing them into two distinct classes: "And if you subscribe to the theory that class distinctions in America are based on wealth, then Harlem can be said to have an aristocracy" (Petry 2019, 767). This statement sounds rather hypothetical and ironical as Petry does not abide by the seemingly simplified distinction of the classes, based on income, in America. It is more complicated than that for her. She stresses that it is more than these two classes and that there are a "thousand varied faces" of it. Petry's ambivalent attitude towards Marxist ideology can be understood in the same way as her resistance to trendy political and literary categorizations. She was closely associated with leftist circles in Harlem in the 1940s but was concerned that these dogmas may lead to a redundant treatment of the real issues they were meant to redress: racial justice and the welfare of the poor black people.

In *Revising the Blueprint: Ann Petry and the Literary Left*, Alex Lubin focuses on Petry's relation to the "literary Left" from the late 1930s to the mid-1950s. Based on the progressive political connotations of Petry's fiction and essays, he argues that Petry should be read "as an important link between the Popular Front and the Black Arts Movement [...] In Petry, we are able

to see how Marxist social realism could be infused with an analysis of black nationalism and black feminism in order to lay the groundwork for writers like Gloria Naylor and Toni Morrison" (Lubin 2007, 6–7). This claim is reiterated differently by scholars of African American literature such as Clark (2013) and Griffin, who writes, "The Novel as Social Criticism, like Zora Neale Hurston's essays of the thirties, was an important early presentation of aesthetic theory by a black woman thinker. Along with Hurston, Petry helped to pave the way for novelist-critics like Toni Morrison" (Griffin 2013, 94). Petry's conception of class surpasses the usual strict Marxist divisions as she approaches it from the perspective of a black national feminist. Her dealings are more inclusive and considerate, especially towards individuals under the poverty line – dimensions not covered by other writers/critics and highlighted in this study from an intersectional viewpoint.

Petry does confirm the diversity of Harlem but does not confirm it as a "melting pot". She honestly talks about the hostility between the African Americans and the Puerto Ricans, the two largest majorities. There is also hostility between them and other minor ethnicities, such as Italians, "the Italians living east of Third Avenue" (Petry 2019, 770). Alternatively, she aims to provide a different picture of Harlem – not the usual impoverished neighborhood of people of color. She writes:

> And yet in this place of unhappy repute an astonishing number of boys and girls have lived long enough to grow up; and some of them have even achieved international fame. Bill (Bojangles) Robinson, Walter White, Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois, Channing Tobias, Judge Jane Bolin and A. Philip Randolph live here. Duke Ellington writes music about the place, and many of his bandsmen call Harlem home. When Lena Horne, Rochester, and Joe Louis are in New York they stay in Harlem. (Petry 2019, 767)

By referring to Du Bois and other artists in this paragraph, she accentuates the intellectual side of Harlem as part of her refutation of the negative stigmatizations. The overarching point here is that it is part and parcel of her writing career to challenge the mainstream negative depictions of black life.

Petry chronicles the vital role of *Amsterdam News* as one of America's greatest newspapers and "the most widely read Negro newspaper in New York" (Petry 2019, 768). In a rather than interesting way, Petry contrasts the stories covered in this paper to the *New York Sun* editors' biased stories about Harlem. She exemplifies this case in the articles written by Dan Burley, one of the editors-in-chief of the *Amsterdam News.* "Burley poked fun at a curious assortment of people: fighters, singers, dancers, actors, night- club entertainers, Hill aristocrats and a demimonde composed of kept women and gentlemen with no known source of income" (Petry 2019, 768). By

documenting Burley's periodical reports in Harlem, she deliberately underlines the sense of reflection the intellectual Harlemites had in dealing with the serious issues pertaining to black life in Harlem. There is a noteworthy censure of whatsoever considered inappropriate by the residents of this black section of New York. Petry implies that the current issues of their lives are reflected on from an insider's perspective which is more aware and just than an outsider's.

Furthermore, Petry writes against falsified tales of how Harlemites spend their daily life: "carving each other with knife and razor. Sometimes they carve out a financial empire instead" (Petry 2019, 769). The role of the managing editor and founder of *Amsterdam News* is highlighted in this piece as well. Petry refers to Adam Clayton Powell as "Doctor Powell, who was an X- ray specialist until his retirement about eight years ago, is president and editor of the Amsterdam, a Dewey-appointed member of the State Athletic Commission, and executive vice-president of the Midway Technical School, a newly opened trade school" (Petry 2019, 769). It can be said of him that he is a progressive example of masculinity, one that Petry censures its counterparts in "What's Wrong with Negro Men?". However, Powell is absent in her fictional representations of African American masculinities. This absence is justified by Petry's interest in the lives of the impoverished black (wo)men. There are exceptions for some middle-class men, as in her short story "The New Mirror". It would have added more layers if she had depicted characters like Powell in her fiction. Reading figures like him in her non-fiction, in parallel to her fiction, adds to Petry's vision of how masculinities should be. This is to suggest that a fuller view of Petry's project of subverting the negative depictions of African American masculinities is clearer when these figures are studied in her non-fiction.

She writes about George Jackson in this piece for the same end behind her portrayal of Powell. George is a black man living in Harlem by describing him as an "American Negro, neither rich nor rags- and- tatters poor. He is a typical New Yorker in that he was born somewhere else" (Petry 2019, 72). He is a typical African American New Yorker for Petry because he has immigrated to New York, most probably from the south. Typical is the main word here. Indeed, George Jackson is a next-door Harlemite guy whom one can see wandering on Harlem's streets. Significantly, Petry documents him in this piece as part of her project to clear all the charges against the prejudiced ways outsiders view Harlem and to reflect on how a typical Harlem citizen's masculinity is/should be. George Lester Jackson was an American author, activist, and convicted criminal.

According to Petry, he is impelled into politics as it is a substantial factor behind his impoverished living conditions and limited prospects. This is telling about Petry's interest or involvement with politics. She was probably motivated by the same reasons as Jackson to be involved in left-wing politics as part of her fight for social justice. Petry stresses two more facts about this masculinity in "Harlem": he is religious and is surrounded by fear.

> George Jackson is a man with deep religious convictions. On Sunday mornings, he dons his best suit and goes to church. He walks through quiet streets. The stores are closed; the bars and grills are shut down. He meets other churchgoers: scrubbed kids, women wearing white gloves, men dressed in their best dark suits. One Hundred and Twenty- fifth Street, which the day before was overflowing with housewives seeking bargains, with children and sight- seers and beggars, is now as deserted as a village street […] He knows there is too much fear around — fear of the police, and an equally great fear of one's neighbors, as evidenced by special locks on the doors of the apartments and iron bars at the windows that open on fire escapes. (Petry 2019, 773–4)

For Petry, it makes no difference whether Jackson dwells in the luxurious parts of Hill or the poverty-stricken clutters of Hallow; whether he is educated or not, he is equally overwhelmed by the same anxieties and fears. He is a black man who is made aware of his position, marked by his race, in a racially biased society in all instances. Petry even uses Jackson figuratively to give a larger scope of the lives of the people in Harlem and the restricted chances of black men to achieve their masculine identities without being violated and oppressed.

The concluding remarks of this essay are, "[s]ometimes its past has been glorified; more often it has been censured. But looked at head on, its thousand faces finally merge into one — the face of a ghetto. In point of time it belongs back in the Middle Ages" (Petry 2019, 775). This piece is primarily on rejecting the banal images of Harlem and providing a multilayered view of it from within. Nonetheless, it can be argued that it is dedicated more exclusively to two masculine figures – Powell and Jackson – in which Petry sets them as models for other male Harlemites. She credits the progressive roles played by these black men but mostly in social and political domains. Not even a scant detail is mentioned about their private lives. No insight is given about their relationships with women in the more private spheres. This man-woman relationship dimension and its contribution to configuring black masculinities are thoroughly covered in her second studied essay in this section.

In 1947, "What's Wrong with Negro Men?" was released in the March issue of *Negro Digest*, a magazine for the African-American market from 1942 to 1976, first published locally in Chicago, Illinois, and later renamed *Black World*. Petry is introduced as "author of the best-selling

novel *The Street* and executive secretary of Negro Women, Inc." in a footnote. In this sarcastic article, Petry mocks certain attitudes of African American men of the 1940s, which she deems anachronistic. She critiques their irresponsibility towards their families, their insensibility towards household tasks, their encyclopedic frame of mind, their indulgence in homosocial leisure, their excessive self-conceit, and, most notably, their essentialist understanding of gender roles. For Petry, these problems are related to one predominant issue in the African American men of her time: their sexist mindset. She writes:

> The average Negro male likes to think of himself as a creature of the Twentieth Century, completely at home in eight-slender cars and transcontinental planes, properly adjusted to the idea of television and radar and bombs. Yet his attitude towards women comes straight out of the Dark Ages. In this respect he is as medieval as his white brother. (Petry 1947, 4)

There are two recurrent dominant features from Petry's earlier studied article "Harlem" in her description of black masculinities in this paragraph: the reference to consumer society and Middle Ages. While the consumer society, demonstrated in terms of new brand cars, television, and other equipment, serves as a barometer for the extravagance level of the Hill class of black people in the previous piece. It serves as an indicator of the maturation of black men's mentality following the advancement in technology in this essay. Middle Ages is used in "Harlem" to showcase the deteriorating and penurious life conditions of the Harlemites. Petry refers to it in this sociological study to mark the contrast between African American man's seemingly developed life and conspicuously backward frame of mind. The black man, analogous to "his white brother," is "medieval" in his considerations of women's position and effective role in the society.

Even more problematic is the black man's denial of this attitude and his claim of being "a progressive" and displaying "advanced thinking" regarding women's exceptional qualities. Petry challenges these claims by suggesting "to observe his actions at home" (Petry 1947, 4). He does not make enough money in most cases and refuses to contribute to the domestic chores. He is a man who knows everything about everything, and ironically enough, he is even aware of what is wrong with being black. He rarely shares his free time with his wife after the long work hours; rather, he either plays poker with other men or visits his girlfriend. He allows himself to judge any woman's body and appearance while being too perfect to be judged by others. When he finds it wanting to make a justification behind his behavior, he refuses to perform what is known to be "woman's work" (Petry 1947, 5).

Petry further satirizes black men's insistence to see themselves as superior to black women and always to justify it. She goes on:

> Deep down in his heart he subscribes to the ancient belief that there is a special place in the world for women, and certain kinds of work for which they are eminently suited […] This characteristic behavior is motivated by his belief in the God-given superiority of the male. He is convinced that the little woman will worship at his feet no matter what he does, or how he looks. After all is it not a great privilege for her to be permitted to wash his clothes and look after his house? (Petry 1947, 5–6)

These men prefer to attach their privilege to their male gender by relying on an essential reading of gender roles. The word "eminently" is significant here: it echoes Simone de Beauvoir's argument about "woman as immanence" in *The Second Sex* in 1949, though Petry's article precedes it by two years. Beauvoir argues that men are allowed to set goals and work to achieve them, while patriarchy does not give women this same chance – making men more transcendent and women more immanent. In this respect, a woman is defined in patriarchal terms and is molded by the "Eternal Feminine," which dictates a set of values, beliefs, practices, and foundations that women are supposed to follow and condemns any woman who does not (de Beauvoir 2001, 1411). This division of roles comes from the patriarchal nature of the society in which men believe God grants them superiority. The question Petry raises at the end is loud and accentuates the sardonic tone of her writing. She ridicules this partial and essentialist attitude to the extreme and implies an urgent termination of it. The woman is described as "little" as a euphemistic strategy on Petry's side to indicate her oppression and unjust treatment by the man, despite his doings and looks.

This instance also provides insights into Petry's progressive feminist initiative in constructing the masculine identities of her fictional black male characters. This initiative can be further elucidated in light of Alice Walker's womanism concept, grounded in power and oppression analysis from an intersectional vantage point. Petry is one of the female writers who "have concern, in a culture that oppresses all black people […] for their fathers, brothers, and sons […] affirmed connectedness to the entire community and the world, rather than separation" (Walker 1983, 81). This progressive feminist initiative focuses on the liberation of black women but also embraces the significance of the community as a whole and the interconnectedness of social issues related to both men and women. Thus, Petry exhibits a disposition to a feminist aesthetic interest in African American masculine identity construction and subjectivity in her writings. She redefines black men in non-essentialist gender roles in many instances throughout

her texts and accentuates the socially constructed nature of masculinities. An intersectional reading method supports recognizing how race, gender, and other categories contribute to African American men's experiences in Petry's work. It heralds Petry's unconventional conceptualization of black masculine identities in the midcentury US, relevant to the current feminist issues.

Petry assigns a part of her essay to comment on the intersection of black men's looks with the previously mentioned problems, a dimension that adds more complication to the whole equation. She ridicules their appearances as follows: "He may be short and wide, like the hippopotamus, or tall and bony like the giraffe, but deep down in his heart he knows himself to be a handsome talented brute. Married or single, he looks in a mirror he sees not his own image but a cross between Joe Louis, Paul Robeson and Dean Dixon" (Petry 1947, 6). Using animal imagery to describe the different shapes of African American men in this paragraph is also a mutual characteristic in her essay "Harlem". In addition, she refers to Joe Louis; the African American professional boxer, Paul Robeson; the African bass-baritone concert artist, stage and film actor, athlete, and activist, and Dean Dixon; the first major African American orchestral conductor in American classical music. She sets them as exemplary models for what a good-looking black man looks like. Apart from serving as a historical reference of this article's period, the importance of these names lies in the point that Petry sets entirely black standards of beauty in men.

The black man also feels uncomfortable sharing the same workplace with a (black) woman. As Petry notes, "[n]o matter what his occupation, he will tell you he does not like to work with women" (Petry 1947, 6). This is also a reference to the changes in American society under the influence of consumerism. This reaction can be read in line with Kimmel's argument that the masculinization of the workplace vs. the feminization of the home during this period "allowed insecure middle-class men to feel like men, both in the homosocial workplace and when they returned to their homes" (Kimmel 2006, 36). Black men are afraid of the idea of having more women joining the marketplace and, thus, stress the idea of separating the two spheres: private and public.

There must have been examples of African American men who were more progressive and could transgress the traditional gender roles than the mocked examples in this piece. These are not the only examples that recur in Petry's fiction; there are more broadminded characters in her fiction that men from Petry's own life could have inspired. She talks about her father in an autobiographical essay as follows:

> My father was Peter Clark Lane, Jr. (1872 – 1949), licensed pharmacist (1895), storyteller, tenor in the choir of the congregational Church, fancy figure skater, expert swimmer, collector of old drug bottles, occasional gardener; he wore the highly polished shoes of a city dude. In the summer h wore bow ties and stiff straw hats, known as boaters. (Petry 1988, 259)

It is apparent from how she describes her father's taste in fashion that he does not abide by essentialist gender constructions as other black men described in the studied piece. He seems to be a typical dandy in his fashion sense, and his interests in activities like skating and gardening place him in roles that can arguably be considered more feminine than masculine in an essentialist sense. However, even if it is not a valid argument, what is worth noting here is that Petry's father represents a different range of behaviors than other black men. He is not the usual competitive, individualist, and isolated black man. These unorthodox signifiers are rendered in Petry's complex fictionalizations of African American masculinities.

John Forbes is described by Keith Clark as an "effete butler" "whose racial and sexual anxiety may have contributed to his suicide" and is most likely based on her father's character in Petry's short story "Has anybody Seen Miss Dora Dean?" (2013, 17). In a final note to articulate that the attitude of the "negro" man has not advanced yet, she makes a final reference to Dromio of Syracuse's speech in William Shakespeare's *As You Like It,* "she's the kitchen wench, and all grease, and I know not what use to put her to but to make a lamp of her and run from her by her own light" (Petry 1947, 7). What is wrong with these men is an intersection of traditional and essential beliefs of gender roles with the patriarchal nature of the American society that they attempt to fit into. For Clark, "Just as Zora Neal Hurston would articulate new protocols for black masculine literary subjectivity, Petry too denounced black men's belief in the God-given superiority of the male" (Clark 2013, 9). "What's Wrong with Negro Men?" can be read as an early black feminist censure of black men's chauvinistic attitudes towards women. It provides invaluable insights into Petry's long-standing concerns about leading men to more liberal and egalitarian ways of living. Her plea to her fellow black men to move towards progressive positions in society is a discursive and expansive theme rearticulated in her fiction. All in all, these two non-fictional pieces serve as key sources for the critical introspection of this dissertation in terms of understanding Petry's social and political dispositions in her fictional writings.

Chapter 3. Revisiting Black Masculine Stereotypes in *The Street* and Destabilizing White Masculine identities in *Country Place*

This chapter exhibits Petry's portrayals of (black) male characters in accordance with the category of the selected novels. The focus of the chapter is two-fold. On the one hand, it investigates Petry's representations of African American masculinities as sexually driven and violent, two dimensions of one of the most prevalent and oppressive serotypes about black men in US society: the Mandingo. It mainly focuses on the sexually driven side of black men in *The Stree*t as the violent side of the Mandingo is to be covered in the male protagonists of "Like a Winding Sheet" and "In Darkness and Confusion" in chapter five. Nonetheless, being sexually driven implies a tendency toward violence as well. Read together as examples of protest fiction; these works provide a fuller view of Petry's project of portraying her black male characters in fixed frames and as pathetic victims. The current chapter attempts to inspect why the studied black men maltreat black women in the racially prejudiced and menacing milieus of New York during the WWII. Petry's black male characters are represented as sexually driven, showcasing black men as primarily targeted by toxic violence and victimized by the patriarchal oppression in the US society. These men are violated and destructed by the same violence they practice on others. An intersectional reading method disentangles the entwined nature of some race-based and gender-based reasonings for discrimination against black women.

On the other hand, the chapter analyzes *Country Place* as a white life novel. Published one year after *The Street*, this novel stands out as an example of how Petry transgresses the confinement of the protest genre category and problematizes white masculinities as the traditional norm. Petry challenges assumptions about whiteness as a universal convention in the US and aims at making the white race visible and gendered by representing insecure and anxious white (male) characters in *Country Place*. Portraying white male characters in this novel is linked to Petry's wider project of constructing African American masculinities in *The Street* and her other works and functions as a backdrop for them. The depictions of white masculinities in this novel serve as a juxtaposition for the black masculinities in her other works. The objective of highlighting the destabilized side of the novel's white masculine identities is to question the traditional ways of defining Petry's fictional black male characters in relation to hegemonic masculinity ideal.

I analyze the Super and Boots Smith in *The Street* as black men who sexually violate women to make amends for their feelings of marginalized masculinities in the first section of this

chapter. These men have their minds set on the idea that women can make up for their lack of masculine recognition. They think of the woman, regardless of her desires and aspirations, as an object to fulfill their own impulses. This chapter unravels the interconnected effect of race with other social categories, such as gender and class, in contributing to constructing these masculinities. It adopts an intersectional reading approach to unfold how the black male characters in this novel perform their masculine identities. That is, a two-step strategy of identify-by-explaining, and asking the other question about the categories' intersectionality leads to avoiding the taken-for-granted one-dimensional frameworks and investigating the process through which categories such as race take on multiple gendered/classed meanings. In other words, blackness is of more intricate significance when it is gendered and classed. I deliberate how Petry revisits categories, stereotypes, and classifications which stand as static indispensable tools of inequality and are hard to subvert. Nonetheless, she provides nuanced representations of black men in the light of the inescapability of these deterministic forces. These characters' masculinities are deliberated in terms of Connell's concept of marginalized masculinity. They are men who strive to compensate for their feelings of inferiority in relation to hegemonic forms of masculinity – white by default. They attempt to fulfill this compensation by focusing on their virility and how to consummate it with other (black) women. This section aims to argue that these black masculinities fail to transcend the stereotypical representations of black men despite Petry's unquivering efforts to portray the inevitable forces turning them into sexually driven and violent. Furthermore, I argue that the protest genre of the novel renders effective in the sense that it frames these characters as black men who are determined to fail as types, stripped of their individual status.

While in the second section of this chapter, I posit how Petry destabilizes white masculinities and challenges their norm status by which African American masculinities are constructed in her fiction. The ways the white men attempt to conceal their anxiety and insecurity – which can be explained as feelings of uneasiness and distress in men due to the ways they perceive themselves as less masculine in comparison to rigid and traditional standards of masculinity à la hegemonic masculinity in society – by discriminating against less powerful members of their community will be contextualized according to Michael Kimmel's (2006) concept that American manhood of the mid-twentieth century is defined in terms of excluding others and The Kinsey Report (1948) about the sexual patterns in American males. In addition, this section exhibits how *Country Place* serves as a medium to reflect on her interest in going

beyond the usual blacks' problems with the whites in the forties to tackle the white's problems with other whites, marking another phase of her political project. By excavating issues of masculine anxiety and insecurity in several white characters, Petry endorses the progressive politics of her works in exposing racial prejudice and almost buried subjects related to white identity and power.

3.1. Sexually Driven Black Men in *The Street*: Types or Individuals?

Petry's critical stance behind portraying the sexually driven side of her black male characters in *The Street* can be read in relation to her much-discussed interview with James W. Ivy for the February issue of *The Crisis* in 1946. Petry refers to her incentive behind writing this novel, stating, "I hope I have created characters that are real, believable and alive" and that she aims to show African Americans "as people with the same capacity for love and hate, for tears and laughter, and the same instincts for survival possessed by all men" (Ivy 1946, 49). However, Petry's impetus has been obscured by the classifications of the novel as a mere protest in scholarly criticism (Miller 2016; Beavers 2004; Ward Jr. 2004). There have been different readings of the novel beyond protest. Heather J. Hicks reiterates Petry's motive behind composing the novel and infers that "[w]hat, Petry's novel asks here, is the value of recognizing or understanding racism in a profoundly racist society?" (2002, 97). Petry's incentive behind this novel and her crucial questions concerning racism have added to the novel's status as a milestone in her oeuvre. By the same token, the novel has placed Petry among the canonized African American authors, as indicated by Farah Jasmine Griffin in *Read Until You Understand*. Griffin writes, "Ann Petry's *The Street*, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, and James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*, collectively, and beautifully, portrayed the difficult story of our nation" (2021, 14). Placing Petry's novel next to Ellison and Baldwin's works implies Petry's divergent aesthetics beyond the protest genre.

Clare Virginia Eby (2008, 34) argues that Petry balances the protest elements with the humanitarian sides of her primary and secondary characters alike as the novel "repeatedly deviates from the main story to explore the personal histories of characters who strike Lutie as insignificant, inimical, or even lacking humanity" to make the reader sympathize with them and reconsider them more as people than "abject". For Joy Myree-Mainor, the novel focuses on "[b]lack women whose quests for personal autonomy are thwarted by a society that negates their sense of morality and self-definition, characterizing them instead as always-already immoral and sexually explicit"

(2011, 48). The novel surpasses the protest limitations in Keith Clark's words who posits that it does not "concentrate microscopically on a single victim and the violence that society inflicts upon him or her" and that "Petry presents Lutie's story as the central one, but it also functions organically, spawning others' as well" (1992, 503).

Societal limitations and deterministic life conditions are targeted at large in the reception of the novel. It is usually Lutie – the black female protagonist – who is focused on, either as a sociological category in early criticism a la the protest novel tradition or as a human in more current pieces. I shift the focus to the male characters and revisit how they are presented within outside the limitations of protest fiction stereotypes of racialized men. By the help of an intersectional analysis of aspect of race in relation to gender, sexuality, class and age in her black male characters, I assert that how Petry resists the confining narrative techniques of protest and reinforces the humanity of these characters against the genre's categorizations. Stylistically speaking, this is a gesture towards modernism's fragmentation as she dedicates a considerable space of narrative to the minor characters – men and other women – to present their own side of the story in the form of interludes. In addition to that, she includes multiple perspectives in the narrative, and shows a noticeable interest in the private psychologies of the characters. Each chapter is introduced through a character's consciousness in which insights are given about their most intimate hopes and fears. These stylistic features align with the thematic dimensions of the text in the sense that they reflect the secondary characters' essential role and affirm their humanity as individuals.

Petry's attempts to make a balance between "the traditional emphasis on exterior, material conditions" with "analysis of interior, psychological state" in *The Street* (Eby 2008, 35) – this balance is more apparent in her later and modernist works such as *The Narrows*. To articulate it other words, Petry works against the predominant narratives of racialized and gendered stereotypes of black men and takes a step closer to unveiling the personal/humane side of her black male characters. This section builds on the argumentations of the critiques mentioned above to investigate the decapitating intersectional effects of racism, classism, sexism, and other social forces on the black male characters of the novel instead of focusing on naturalistic realism as reflected on in the indicated critiques. However, I argue that the novel remains in the realm of protest and naturalism especially with regard to Jones William and Boots Smith, whose lives are shaped by the extremely deterministic environment of their society and fail to claim their individualistic rights.

Th Street narrates the story of a single black mother, Lutie Johnson, who tries to raise her eight-year-old son, Bub, on 116th street in Harlem, New York, in the 1940s. In this poverty-stricken street, Lutie moves in a circle, always ending up with the same conclusion: a shortage of money is the main reason behind the miserable living conditions of the black people and hers in this neighborhood. Despite her self-determination to improve her life, many misfortunes hinder her. Her husband, Jim, who is unemployed and is supposed to take care of her son, cheats on her while she works as a maid for the Chandlers, a white family in Lyme, Connecticut. After breaking up with Jim and getting a job as a clerk in an office in Harlem, she decides to rent a flat on 116th street, only to be chased by different men. Being exceptionally good-looking and young, Lutie is desired and pursued by Jones William, Boots Smith, and Junto. The first two are the superintendent of her building and the conductor of a music band, respectively. Both are black and work for the latter, the white real estate owner in the vicinity. Despite turning them down constantly and showing no indication of interest in them, Lutie struggles to stay safe and sane against the tireless ways these men try to take advantage of her, and this inevitably turns to lethal violence.

My objective is to address the representation and positioning of the Super and Boots Smith as black men who have been viewed by criticism in terms of determinism on the one hand and the protest novel on the other. I plan to focus on them as restrained in societal stereotypes as I intend to analyze them as sexually driven men from an intersectional perspective in the remainder of this section. I read them according to the lenses of a two-step strategy of applying an intersectional reading method where I identify the categories, explain them, and ask the other question about them. In the first two steps, the interconnected effect of race with other categories such as gender, class, age, and others is underlined and regarded as the reason behind their marginalization in relation to American hegemonic masculinity. The function of the third step is to unravel categories that are not visible at first and expose multiple positions and power inequalities which can be invisible in the representation.

Jones William is the superintendent of a building on 116th street in Harlem, where Lutie Johnson resides, and he is often referred to by the name Super in the novel. During her first encounter with him, Lutie describes the Super as too tall and skeletal from hunger or disease to be a normal human being. He is further described by her as “unusual, extraordinary, abnormal” (Petry 1986, 23). He is a desolate black man who looks to be in his fifties and spends most of his time taking care of the residential building’s general maintenance. He has received almost no education

and has been in various blue-collar jobs. Lutie observes his hands as "dull, scarred, worn flesh – no smoothness there. The knuckles were knobs that stood out under the skin, pulled out from hauling ashes, shoveling coal" (Petry 1986, 14). In addition, other characters commonly attach animal traits to him. Lutie calls him "a hungry dog" (Petry 1986, 54), and Min, his black partner who is old and toothless, compares the way he breathes to the "hissing sound" of a snake (Petry 1986, 257). The initial image of the Super inferred from these attributes – from the perspectives of these two women – is that he is deprived of humanity. The Super's viewpoint of himself and his aspirations in two chapters of the novel clarifies why he is this way but does not add positive inclinations to his image.

The Super's race intersects with his economic imperatives and sexual compulsions in constructing his masculinity. This intersection creates a relentless inner struggle for him and deters his chances of leading a decent life. As a reaction to his desperation, he becomes complicit with the patriarchal and racist ideology of US society and chooses to perform the powers of his gender. He sexually violates any black woman within his reach, which I read as his counterstrategy to recompense for his marginalized masculinity. He is presented in the novel as not being aware that to battle the debilitating effects of racial discrimination against him, he must battle both racism and sexism. Eventually, it runs the risk of legitimating his marginalization status quo. Petry provides a detailed background of the Super's jobs and chronicles his lonely life as a man who lives in basements and sleeps in boiler rooms for years. He has worked on cleaning ships, as a night watchman, and finally as a superintendent in Harlem as he hopes to be surrounded by people all the time. Despite managing to move from the basement to a two-room flat on the first floor of the building, he gets lonelier in Harlem as his hunger for communication with other people is not quenched. He stays more accustomed to the dark basements than the streets outside and works even harder to secure his job and rent-free place in the building.

Race can be identified as the foremost category in shaping the Super's masculinity but the problematics his masculine identity get more serious when he grows older in age. That is, an explanation of the intersection of his oppressive racial position with other categories such as age leads to a wider image of his frustration as an anguished masculinity. Petry writes:

> But now that he had an apartment of his own, he had grown so much older he found it more and more difficult to get a woman to stay with him. Even women who wanted a refuge and who couldn't hope to find one anywhere else stayed only three months or so and then were gone […] It was all of three years since he had had a really young woman. The last young round one left after three

> days of his violent love-making. She had stood in the door and screamed at him, her voice high and shrill with rage. "You old goat!" she said. "You think I'm goin' to stay in this stinkin' apartment with you slobberin' over me day after day?" […] After her the succession of drab, beaten, middle-aged women started again. As a result he wanted this young one—this Lutie Johnson—worse than he had ever wanted anything in his life. He had watched her ever since she moved in. (Petry 1986, 66)

His old age intersects with the other social factors of his life and makes it more difficult for him to secure the one thing he believes makes him the man he wants to be: a young and desired woman. His failure to maintain a relationship with a woman reflects his destructive and menacing misuse of his power as a man against women. The animal imagery persists here again and adds to the point that he is more of an animal than a human being. Such images serve as a subtext for the idea that blackness is deviant and strengthen specific social patterns about black men.

Petry provides glimpses into the Super's thoughts, revealing that he is even more horrifying on the inner side than the external. Reading such details about his life can be very discomforting. However, they help to construct his sense of subjectivity and humanity which are continuously questioned by other characters throughout the novel. His decision to leave behind his menial jobs and migrate to New York comes solely from his hunger for human communication. He is a part of the influx of the black immigrants from the South in search for a better life in the wake of WWII. The Super reveals that the tenants do not like him in his building and that he scares women. He comes to understand the reasons behind his desperation in life, knows about his volatile moods, and consents to the fact that he is a threat to other women. He, thus, plans to be very careful in appearing friendly and gentle while advancing toward Lutie and courting her. For the Super, the first step to get her is to get rid of Min, the only woman who stays with him longer than the others. When he enters his place and does not see Min, the idea that she might have abandoned him is unbearable. He wants to be the one who puts her out and that "if a creature like Min didn't want him there was no reason for him to believe that Lutie would have him" (Petry 1986, 83). Calling Min a "creature" resonates with other characters' discerption of him as non-human. For instance, Lutie thinks about finding another place where "no half-human creature like the Super" resides (Petry 1986, 160). The Super looks down upon other women as objects and desires to overpower them. He also understands that women perceive him as a man who does not possess the required qualities to be appealing.

The Super's frustration about his black masculinity can be better elucidated when the other question is asked about the power of other invisible systems of oppression such as hierarchical

disparity in his life in relation to others from higher social classes. He is black and old, but he is also regarded as an instrument by other black tenants of his building. Hierarchy is the reason behind this maltreatment: they think of him as inferior because of his job. They refuse to see him beyond his occupation and communicate with him only when they need something fixed. His race intersects with his age and lower-class status, which denies him dignity. He fantasizes about women continuously and even starts talking to himself after meeting with Lutie. The Super "thought she, Lutie, had the key. And he followed her through the street, whining in his throat, nuzzling behind her with his sharp, pointed dog's face" (Petry 1986, 139–40). His insistence on getting Lutie can be understood in two ways. Firstly, the lack of any form of meaningful communication with other people and, thus, the lack of sympathetic ties leads him to approach Lutie. His fantasies about Lutie are not bodily but somewhat sexually fetishistic, as he constantly dreams about having an intimate conversation with her. He does fancy her voluptuous breast and curves, but he is more after romantic contact with her. He plans to give her presents and even tries to be nice to her son as one way to win her affection. Hence, when his last woman leaves him, he feels vulnerable, and his sense of insecurity intensifies. He, thus, decides he will get Lutie against all odds. His illusions are laid bare, which give insights into how dangerous he can be as a lonely human being, banished from everyone's sympathy and kindness.

Secondly, he thinks of Lutie as his last chance to recompense for his marginalization of masculinity. This motif can be understood with reference to what bell hooks denotes as black men who are psychologically unstable and obsessed with sex to the extent that they are on the verge of losing their sanity as they fail to "fulfill the phallocentric destiny in a racist context" (1992, 89). The Super can be classified as one of these black me who has absorbed white supremacist patriarchal definitions of masculinity out of his fears of subordination. hooks describe this overtly sexist attitude of constructing one's masculinity as "a shift from emphasis on patriarchal status (determined by one's capacity to assert power over others a number of spheres based on maleness) to a phallocentric model, where what the male does with his penis becomes a greater and certainly a more accessible way to assert masculine status" (1992, 94). The Super seeks ways to prove his masculinity based on his maleness prowess as he has already failed to assert it otherwise. As building a family and being a caring provider are not very likely chances for him to preserve his masculinity, he decides to follow this phallocentric ideal of masculinity by possessing this young woman he thinks he can physically dominate. Furthermore, he is unable to preserve any sense of

autonomy in the face of the interconnected effect of his race, impoverished living conditions, and growing age. His heteronormative and sexist attitude is crystalized in his refusal of the idea of being walked out on by a woman – Min – and his attempt to assault another – Lutie.

I argued above that the Super's longing for Lutie is not mainly carnal, but when she dismisses all his gestures of kindness with grudge and disgust, he decides to take advantage of her against her will. During the most crucial moment for him, Lutie is unable to understand the Super while he initiates a conversation with her in the dark hallway of their building, saying: "You're sweet. You're so sweet. You little thing. You young little thing" (Petry 1986, 170). His excitement hinders the clarity of his speech, and he sounds baffling to Lutie, who warns him from getting any nearer to her and decides to run out of the building as the main entrance is within her reach. He ignores her protest and advances toward her, grabbing her waist.

> She grabbed the balustrade. His fingers pried her hands loose. She writhed and twisted in his arms, bracing her feet, clawing at his face with her nails. He ignored her frantic effort to get away from him and pulled her nearer and nearer to the cellar door. She kicked at him and the long skirt twisted about her legs so that she stumbled closer to him. […]
> She screamed until she could hear her own voice insanely shrieking up the stairs, pausing on the landings, turning the corners, going down the halls, gaining in volume as it started again to climb the stairs. And then her screams rushed back down the stair well until the whole building echoed and re-echoed with the frantic, desperate sound.
> A pair of powerful hands gripped her by the shoulders, wrenched her violently out of the Super's arms, flung her back against the wall. She stood there shuddering, her mouth still open, still screaming, unable to stop the sounds that were coming from her throat. The same powerful hands shot out and thrust the Super hard against the cellar door. […]
> "Shut up," Mrs. Hedges ordered. "You want the whole place woke up?" …
> "You done lived in basements so long you ain't human no more. You got mould growin' on you," she said to Jones. (Petry 1986, 170–71)

His attempt to push Lutie towards his private space – the cellar – and accomplish what he considers his last chance of asserting his masculinity is taken away from him with the interference of Mrs. Hedges. The latter is a huge black woman with a red bandana who sits in her street-facing window and watches over everyone on 116th street. She runs her apartment as a mediocre brothel and is a close friend of Junto. She describes the Super as less than a human with "mould grown" on him; i.e., his humanity is covered with rust. She tells Lutie that he is "cellar crazy" after the incident, an idea reiterated by Min, who thinks he has gone "queer" for spending long periods in cellars and basements. Mr. Hedges threatens the Super to stay away from Lutie as Junto is interested in her. She asks Lutie if she ever wants to make more money; a white man wants her to be nice to him. The Super subdues Mrs. Hedges' intimidation as she gains power from Junto. In other words, the

Super fails to get full access to the white patriarchal masculinity in relation to Junto, who is the epitome of white hegemonic masculinity. The Super decides to avenge himself out of anger by leading Lutie's son toward juvenile delinquency.

The Super's attempted rape of Lutie signifies his failure to claim the patriarchal phallocentric masculinity and reflects on his heteronormative attitude as he seeks to legitimize his manhood by sexually dominating a woman. This aggressive act is his endeavor of combatting the intersectional of societal racial discrimination with economic inequity, blocking his way from achieving any sense of satisfying manhood. His attempted rape also confirms the sexually driven stereotype about black men and that Petry confirms the racist/sexist iconography that had depicted the black male as a sexual beast throughout US history. However, Petry justifies the Super's drives – as well as Boot Smith's, as shown later – and unfolds his life experiences as being determined by the intersectional effect of the social factors of his psychological rift. Jacqueline Bryant affirms this argument by describing the Super and other black men in the novel as victims. She writes, "the black men of 116th Street reflect in response to a community invasion, for their mirror concern for the victim, and readiness for battle" (2002, 453). While Don Dingledine puts it bluntly that "Petry wants her readers to have sympathy for Jones as well as for his victims" (2006, 91). The Super is read by Kari J. Winter (1999, 105) "as a terrifying character. Born into economic hardship and forced to spend his life underground in cellars, furnace-rooms, and dingy apartments, Jones has been read as a revision of Richard Wright's Bigger Thomas and could be read as a twisted prototype of Ralph Ellison's invisible man".

The Super is confirmed as a sexually driven black man, which is regarded as a traditional black male stereotype of protest fiction, known as the Mandingo. However, I argue that Petry refines her representation of this stereotype in the way she alters its constituents. The Mandingo is usually young, Northern, in great shape, and desired by other women. Thus, the Super does not claim the perks of the Mandingo: the intersection of his old age and Southern background cancels substantial elements of this stereotype. Furthermore, Petry reveals the damaging consequences of giving in to such a black masculine stereotype and accentuates this notion in her portrayals of other black male characters in *The Street*.

Petry coerces the idea that the Super and other black men who emphasize the sexually driven stereotype are victimized by their deterministic environment, exemplified in the character of Boots Smith. Smith differs from the Super in several aspects: he leads a jazz music band in the

Casino, a club owned by Junto, drivers a luxury car, and resides in a building that "loomed high above all the other buildings and could be seen from a long distance" (Petry 1986, 285) at Edgecombe Avenue, the fancy part of Harlem. In contrast to the Super, who gets money in driblets, Smith has succeeded as a black man who lives extravagantly. An intersectional reading of his character reveals that he is disadvantaged by his color despite his seemingly secured occupation and income. Similarly to the Super, he has to constantly proclaim his masculinity and react against the social hierarchy in the different milieus of life. However, his social status falls short of reinforcing his masculinity when his race intersects with his gender and class, especially in relation to white hegemonic masculinity. Driven by the same motive as the Super, he treats black women as sexual objects to indemnify his masculine incompetence. Though he is relatively younger than the Super, he has been frustrated with the discriminatory and oppressing US society.

During his first meeting with Lutie at the Junto Bar, while offering to pay for her drinks, Smith gently covers her hands to extract the slips. "She looked down at the hand. The nails were clean, filed short. There was a thin coating of colourless polish on them. The skin was smooth" (Petry 1986, 110). In contrast to the Super's worn and torn hands, Smith's hands indicate that he earns a living in white-collar jobs. Lutie describes him as "wearing a brown overcoat. It was unfastened so that she could get a glimpse of a brown suit, of a tan-coloured shirt" (Petry 1986, 110). One possible reading of his appearance is that he is not a conventional masculinity and can be described as a dandy. Polishing his nails, which was a more feminine act than masculine back in the 1940s and is debatably still, suggests that he does not conform to society's strict and rigid masculine ideals. While getting closer to Lutie, it is revealed that he entails the same normative and sexist attributes as the Super. He is a vain man whose interest in his looks is one way to overcompensate for his wretched past life circumstances. He is likened to a cat three times during his first encounter with Lutie: "He was standing so close to her, watching her so intently, that again she thought of a cat slinking through grass […] a cat slinking quietly after its prey […] Boots striding along cat-footed" (Petry 1986, 112–13). In other words, Petry describes Smith in animal imagery the same way as the Super to highlight that he is a man who is driven by his instincts and impulses. He decides to take advantage of Lutie deceivingly by offering her a singing job in his band. His approach to Lutie differs from that of the Super, but his intention is the same.

In addition to comparing Smith's behavior to that of a sneaking cat, Lutie states that "his eyes stayed expressionless" during their chitchat (Petry 1986, 113). This impression lingers in

Lutie's mind about him as she shows her uneasiness about how "his expression was unreadable" every time they meet (Petry 1986, 287). While he offers her a ride uptown to Hudson way, Lutie contemplates his speeding:

> They were going faster and faster. And she got the feeling that Boots Smith's relationship to this swiftly moving car was no ordinary one. He wasn't just a black man driving a car at a pell-mell pace. He had lost all sense of time and space as the car plunged forward into the cold, white night.
>
> The act of driving the car made him feel he was a powerful being who could conquer the world. Up over hills, fast down on the other side. It was like playing god and commanding everything within hearing to awaken and listen to him. […]
>
> And she knew, too, that this was the reason white people turned scornfully to look at Negroes who swooped past them on the highways. "Crazy niggers with autos" in the way they looked. Because they sensed that the black men had to roar past them, had for a brief moment to feel equal, feel superior; had to take reckless chances going around curves, passing on hills, so that they would be better able to face a world that took pains to make them feel that they didn't belong, that they were inferior. (Petry 1986, 116)

The first trait about Smith noted in the novel is that he imposes his space as he "elbowed space for himself" to sit next to Lutie at the bar. The same idea is rearticulated in the above block quote that Smith uses force to be seen. He frantically derives until he gets delusional that he is a mighty deity who can disturb the white world with the way his car breaks out suddenly and dramatically over the streets. Lutie observes that Smith regards the car as more than just a vehicle. It is his way of showing the white people he can be as equal and superior as they are, even in a remote space, momentarily created by exceeding the speed limit. When he is stopped by a white cop, instead of giving him a speed ticket, Smith shows him a card that obliges the cop to release him with a smile.

Smith brags about his fancy car and exhibits his reckless driving as one way to accomplish his masculinity. He enters a race with other cars and passes them to overcome his sense of inferiority. Lutie further perceives:

> She stopped staring at the road ahead to look at Boots. He was leaning over the steering wheel, his hands cupped close on the sides of it. Yes, she thought, at this moment he has forgotten he's black. At this moment and in the act of sending this car hurtling through the night, he is making up for a lot of the things that have happened to him to make him what he is. He is proving all kinds of things to himself. (Petry 1986, 117)

Smith is carried away by the idea of competing with other cars to the extent that it becomes a competition to prove his frustrated masculinity against the white men. He, for a while, forgets he is black as his possession of the car and his control over it grant him a power that is stripped from him in other surroundings. The car becomes his space where he can set all the wrongdoings of his

past life right and, most importantly, proves he exists as an equal to other men driving on the same street. This aspect of his masculine identity can be further elaborated in light of Messerschmidt's presupposition that "protest masculinities are constructed as compensatory hypermasculinities that are formed in reaction to social positions lacking economic and political power (2019, 87). In this respect, Smith protests against the unequal hierarchical relations with other white masculinities as the intersection of his race with his gender deprives him of the privileges of his masculine power despite his abundant economic resources. He rejects his non-hegemonic masculine status through the lavish display of his material possessions, such as his attire, car, and highly ornamented house, to compensate for the feeling of marginalization in parallel to white hegemonic masculinity. When this approach proves efficient in only specific settings, he turns to black women in his immediate black surrounding as an alternative to contend with his marginalized masculinity.

An intersectional reading of Smith's masculinity in terms of hegemony hypothesizes the complex process in which he is marginalized based on his race when white masculinity enters the picture. The white man gains his sense of power from his race solely despite Smith's potential characteristics to claim hegemony, such as looks, age, and money. I argue that Petry enhances the idea that race overcomes other categories in constructing Smith's masculine identity. His gender and class become racial categories that are rendered meaningful through racial domination. Consequently, his masculinity is constructed from exceedingly complex interactions of his gender and class, dominated and perpetuated by his racial position. Race takes the role of the master category in Smith's masculinity construction and is positioned on a lower hierarchy rank when he confronts his white employer – Junto. Despite his growing interest in Lutie, whom he even considers marrying to get her, Smith is forced to give up on her when Junto shows interest in her. In a chapter preoccupied with his streams of consciousness, Smith reflects on his manifold thoughts and feelings towards Junto and other white people, divulging his vulnerability in relation to white masculinities.

Smith feels outrageous and repulsed at the prospect that Lutie may sleep with a white man and contemplates the possibility of turning him down. He enters a loop of fragmented thoughts about his first job as a piano player in Harlem bars and a porter of Pullman cars before being hired by Junto. He also ponders the way Junto prevented his drafting into the army. While convincing him to join the army, Junto asks Smith if there were no separate army, he would still have held back from his decision. Smith answers:

> "Hell, no. Look, Junto"—he remembered how he had leaned toward him across the table talking swiftly and with an energy and passion that sent the words flooding out of his throat. "For me to go leaping and running to that draft board a lot of things would have to be different. Them white guys in the army are fighting for something. I ain't got anything to fight for. If I wasn't working for you, I'd be changing sheets on Pullman berths. And learning fresh all over again every day that I didn't belong anywhere. Not even here in this country where I was born. And saying "yes sir," "no sir," until my throat was raw with it. Until I felt like I was dirt. I've got a hate for white folks here"—he indicated his chest—"so bad and so deep that I wouldn't lift a finger to help 'em stop Germans or nobody else." (Petry 1986, 186).

Smith does not believe winning the war against the Germans will bring about any changes to the lives of black people in the US. The idea of joining a segregated army where black soldiers would serve the white with "brooms and shovels" is out of the question for him. Race is a salient aspect in segregating all domains of life in the US, including the army. He clearly exposes his hatred for white people, and he is not willing, at any rate, to be patronized by any white man the same way he has been patronized in his job at Pullman. Paradoxically, Smith satisfies his ego by relying on his feelings that Junto is different from other white men, as there is no indication in his manner making Smith aware that he is black. This satisfaction stems from Smith's observation of Junto as a white man who – more or less like himself – fails to claim the dividends of American hegemonic masculinity. Junto refers him to a doctor who performs "a slight, delicate, dangerous operation on his ear" and presents the medical letter to the draft board (Petry 1986, 187). His willingness to take such a health risk indicates his frustration with the systemic denials of his individualistic and humanitarian rights and that he is only seen in terms of his color.

While Junto waits for a reply about stopping to pursue Lutie, Smith remembers his humiliating job as a porter again. The degrading way he was called "[p]orter! Porter this and Porter that. Boy. George. Nameless", comes back to his mind. He "got a handful of silver at the end of each run, and a mountain of silver couldn't pay a man to stay nameless like that. No Name, black my shoes. No Name, hold my coat. No Name, brush me off. No Name, take my bags. No Name. No Name" (Petry 1986, 190). He has to make a tough decision between staying Junto's right hand – which entails giving up on Lutie - or returning to a life where he is emasculated and anonymous – where he is called either boy or no name. He finally decides that "[o]ne hundred Lutie Johnsons didn't weigh enough" for him to go back to a life of crawling to whites again (Petry 1986, 190). Besides reconsidering his past professions, he reminisces about Jubilee, his black lover who cheated on him with a white man. He remembers her as he "somehow he had got into the habit of touching" the scar on his face "when he was thinking very hard" (Petry 1986, 195). After finding

out about the affair, he slaps and kicks Jubilee so violently that she slashes his check open with a knife as an act of defense. He remembers how that incident "left him less than a half man, because he didn't even have a woman of his own, because he not only had to say yes sir," but he also "had to stand by and take it while some white man grabbed off what belonged to him" (Petry 1986, 194). The scar on his face makes him think about the superior white men of the Pullman – and now Junto – who keeps invading his private life and taking what belongs to him. Junto overpowers him and reminds him of his inability to get access to the privileges of his masculinity, defined in terms of his gender's intersection with his racial inferiority, in the presence of other white men like him.

It can be inferred from his last thought that, as in the Super's case, Smith objectifies women as a defense mechanism for his marginalized masculinity. Exposing his inner thoughts and injuries of the past serves as a technique to perceive him as more than just a sexually driven man and that his scarred face is a constant reminder of his wounded humanity. However, his past atrocities neither write him off as a stereotype nor justify his taking advantage of Lutie when she pleads for his support. Lutie's son gets caught by police and is detained in a reform school after stealing mail for the Super. While Lutie asks Smith for 200 dollars to allocate a lawyer for her son, Smith invites her to his place and plans to set her up with Junto. She refuses and frantically screams at him. Smith asks Junto to leave and promises to make her change her mind. Smith amuses himself with the idea of sleeping with Lutie first so that he will avenge himself upon Junto. He thinks, "he's white and this time a white man can have a black man's leaving" (Petry 1986, 303). This drive for revenge resonates with the Super's: it implicates their cowardly ways to exploit those less powerful and insinuate their toxic masculinist attitude, preventing them from letting go and reconciling with their restricted power as black men.

Smith starts to hit on Lutie, who is furious and frustrated to the extent that she could kill someone. She is backed into a corner and is utterly shocked that Smith thinks of the possibility of her snatching "an opportunity to sleep with either or both of them" (Petry 1986, 306). She tries to flee from Smith and pushes him so hard that he slaps her on the face twice and takes her against all her protests.

> When she remembered there was a heavy iron candlestick on the mantelpiece just behind her, her vision cleared; the room stopped revolving and Boots Smith became one person, not three. He was the person who had struck her, her face still hurt from the blow; he had threatened her with violence and with a forced relationship with Junto and with himself. These things set off her anger, but as

> she gripped the iron candlestick and brought it forward in a swift motion aimed at his head, she was striking, not at Boots Smith, but at a handy, anonymous figure—a figure which her angry resentment transformed into everything she had hated, everything she had fought against, everything that had served to frustrate her.
>
> He was so close to her that she struck him on the side of the head before he saw the blow coming. The first blow stunned him. And she struck him again and again, using the candlestick as though it were a club. He tried to back away from her and stumbled over the sofa and sprawled there. (Petry 1986, 308).

Smith dies anonymously as he has lived most of his life. He has always been preoccupied with a fear of subjugation, only to be violated by the woman he aspires to dominate as a form of resistance against the incapacitating forces of racism in society. Myree-Mainor considers Smith as "the symbol" of Lutie's "multifaceted oppression […] to channel her repressed sexual desire into violence. Thus far, all the men with whom she has relationships offer no outlets for sexual expression" (2011, 57). This adds to the idea that Smith and other black men in the novel objectify women in the phallocentric conceptions of their masculinity construction. Lutie murdering Smith with a candlestick is also significant: it is a phallic symbol representing that Lutie fights against Smith's phallocentric violence with violence and, ironically, uses violence as a means of expressing her oppressed sexuality. To put it differently, Smith's violence is inflicted on him, and he is murdered with the same instrument he wants to utilize in dominating Lutie.

Junto prevents both Smith and the Super from what they think could have made them feel better about themselves and the men they want to be. An intersectional viewpoint of his masculinity delineates how Junto is placed on a higher level of hierarchy based on his race and class. He is older than the two black men and is considered by other characters, including Lutie, as a deformed man in physique who is "squat, turtle-necked" (Petry 1986, 116). Despite the negative effect of the intersection of his looks and age, he gains his power from his color and money. The Super and Smith are inferior to him as both rely on him for their financial resources. Junto represents the prejudiced white power persecuting black people, especially women. Ironically, the Super and Smith are represented as black men who are complicit to this racist ideology and, most likely, acquire it from Junto and their other white employers. Both black men feel jealous and less masculine at the thought of Lutie sleeping with Junto. For Hicks, "Junto is not one man but a figure for power that feeds on the color line but is not reducible to it. Importantly, Junto is the one major character in the text from whose eyes we never see events. We are denied the possibility of under-standing him as a single, coherent consciousness" (Hicks 2003, 28). While

Gale Wurst denotes him as “invisible, invincible and omnipotent” (Wurst 1994, 21). Building on these two outlooks on Junto, I argue that he takes the role of an abstract entity rather than an actual character, blocking the black characters’ way from their pursuits. He is omnipresent in all black vicinities and social life scenes, but; at the same time, he does not allow anyone to overpower him. He constantly reminds the black characters in the novel of the segregated US society in the 1940s. Junto, Smith, and the Super are also depicted in a juxtaposition of the street and a wall in the novel. The novel’s title is a metaphor for the impoverished and dehumanizing life conditions in black ghettos.

Smith and the Super metamorphosize into the street that swallows up Lutie and all her hopes and self-determination for a better life. They “represented everything she had fought against”; looking at them, “she felt she was gazing straight at the street with its rows of old houses, its piles of garbage, its swarms of children” (Petry 1986, 305). In contrast, Junto represents the wall that prevents the two black men and Lutie from progressing with their lives. Lutie continuously refers to the existence of an imaginary wall between her and the Chandlers, the white family she serves. She describes it as not “quite high” that she could see over it; however, it is always there as a reminder of their race and class disparity. After learning about Junto’s proposal, she thinks: “Junto has a brick in his hand. Just one brick. The final one needed to complete the wall that had been building up around her for years, and when that one last brick was shoved in place, she would be completely walled in” (Petry 1986, 303). Junto is an extension of the racial discrimination against her that has been built up for years. Letting him “shoving that last brick” which is again a phallocentric action expressing Lutie’s fears of being sexually contaminated by a white man will deprive her of all her dependence and racial pride.

Petry’s allegory of the wall is inspired by Du Bois’ concept of “the Veil of Race” that segregates white and black America (Edwards 2009, 55). Petry’s version of Harlem, which can be a place of prosperity and hope, is also a place of alienation and frustration. Manuela Matas Llorente reads the wall as that “of white prejudice” which contributes “to design a shelter where African Americans can recreate their identity once they are freed from the contempt in the eyes of the downtown world, they instantly become individuals” (Llorente 1996, 111). Though Llorente argues that Harlem is a place where people like Lutie feel free, I maintain, the wall, completed by Junot, is that of discrimination and prejudice which buttresses Smith, the Super, and Lutie’s oppression likewise.

The deterministic life conditions and unnatural effects of racial inequality serve as factors to elucidate the reasons behind the Super and Smith's sexual assaults on Lutie; however, they do not transcend the sexually driven stereotype. The common ground between these two black men is that they represent a compensatory model of masculinity driven by sexism. They coerce white domination as they conform to white culture's dogmas of asserting masculinity complicity. They pose no challenge to hegemonic masculinity and look up to it as masculine ideal: the Super decides to quit his job, and Smith yields to Junot's orders. Petry succeeds in portraying complex black male characters and is able to stir the readers' sense of sympathy. However, they fail to respond effectively to each other and other women as they are engrossed in the white power structure. They lack the awareness that to fight the racism oppressing them; they must fight against both racism and sexism. They are not aware of the intersectional nature of the racism in their lives and turning to their gender as site of empowerment oppresses them on both race and gender levels. By relying on gender as an indicator of privilege, they reinforce the sexually driven stereotype on a micro-level and strengthen the white subordination of them on a macro-level.

The representation of Smith and the Super in *The Street* can be elaborated in terms of Hall's idea that "within the complexities and ambivalences of representation" (1997, 274) that Petry tries to contest the sexually driven stereotype from within. She does not compose new or alternative content, but instead aims to let stereotypes function against themselves by revealing how the Super and Smith damage the lives of others and their own. They are violated and destructed by the same violence they practice on others. On a wider level, they exhibit how black men are targeted by lethal violence and victimized by the patriarchal oppression in the US society. An intersectional reading of the considered African American men's masculinities indicates they all are doomed to fail as individuals. They have to struggle daily against different personal, social, and even institutional levels of inequality, reinscribed in their race, gender, class, and other categories. Both the Super and Smith in The Street remain types destined to fail in transcending to individuals with potential constructive humanity. Nonetheless, the nuances of these black masculinities are better elucidated when read according to a two-step strategy of applying intersectionality. Race functions as the master category in their masculine identity construction which aggravates their potential when it intersects with other categories of gender, class, age, and sexuality. Asking the other question unravels the interplay between the explicitness of their marginalized race with the implicitness of their stereotyped gender. These men fail to combat their social marginalization as

they adopt a white ideal of masculinity based on violence. Nonetheless, Petry highlights the intricate and subtle sides of their masculine identities confined by the relentlessness of a racially discriminatory and economically oppressive environment.

The dramatic anticlimax of the novel, where Lutie murders Smith and, thus, ruins both her life and her son's, poses another question about the inevitability of violence in the protest genre framework. In the rather bleak conclusion of the novel, Petry describes Lutie's drawing on the window of a train, escaping to Chicago desperate for any hope on the horizon, as "a series of circles that flowed into each other" (Petry 1986, 312). It hints at the deterministic life conditions for her and other black people in all places and that, in a sense, all the streets are as cold, cruel, and corrupt as 116th. Black people cannot claim their individualistic self-construction rights as they remain types, "the Negro was never an individual. He was a threat, or an animal, or a curse, or a blight, or a joke" (Petry 1986, 144). The adversarial effects of these images impede the progress of black masculinities in other works written by Petry, analyzed in the subsequent two chapters. In her second novel, Petry moves toward a different direction in terms of (sub)genre and thematic concerns – as deliberated in the following section.

3.2. Insecure and Anxious White Masculinities in *Country Place*: Raceless Writing

In a letter to Carl Van Vechten, a white writer, portrait photographer, and member of the Harlem Renaissance who provided support to many black writers, Zora Neale Hurston deliberated the reason behind writing her 1948 novel *Seraph on the Suwanee* as being related to breaking "that old silly rule about Negroes not writing about white people" (quoted in Hemenway 1977, 308). Petry's project of writing *Country Place*, a novel that features central white characters, can be understood in terms of the same motivation as Hurston's. Published in 1947, *Country Place* does not only break the "old silly rule" hindering African American writers from writing outside their color line; but also adds a complementary dimension to the evaluation of her artistic skills as a writer and her political thinking about the most pressing issue of her age – race, gender, and class – which are laid bare in the dominant and privileged members of the American society. This section sets out to credit Petry's experiment with writing beyond the protest school and her endeavor to tackle rarely discussed issues related to white people from a black author's perspective.

Along with Frank Yerby's *The Foxes of Harrow* (1946), Zora Neal Hurston's *Seraph on the Suwanee* (1948), Chester Himes' *Cast the First Stone* (1952), Richard Wright's *Savage*

Holiday (1954), and James Baldwin's *Giovanni's Room* (1956), Petry's *Country Place* can be classified as a white life novel, a term that describes works written by African American writers centrally featuring white characters (Fikes 1995, 105). These works were successful when first published; some of them are even the most popular African American novels of the post-war era, such as *Knock on Any Door* (1947) by Willard Motley and Yerby's earlier mentioned novel (Brown 2011, 37). Langston Hughes praised these works and quoted them as indicating a "superior achievement" in the special edition of *Phylon* dedicated to the black writers' role in the plight against racial oppression in the aftermath of WWII. Hughes mentioned Petry, among other writers, to show his contentment "to see Negroes writing works in the general American field, rather than dwelling on Negro themes solely" (Hughes 1950, 311). These novels play an essential part in our current understanding of American identity constructions of the postwar era. They reflect the spirit of the age in the sense of serving as counter-narratives to the texts written about white people from the perspectives of white writers, depicting racism as aberrant. These white life novels showcase how racism was both normal and ordinary in mid-century US society; the black and other marginalized identities are represented as either contained in the mainstream society or obliterated by it.

Country Place has received mixed reviews since its publication. It was praised by some reviewers for its apparent lack of racial themes, while others dismissed it as a less solid novel than her first one – *The Street*. Petry was expected to invest in the unprecedented success of this novel by focusing on similar themes in her subsequent works. As in her previous works, Petry makes a powerful connection between storytelling and the construction of reality in this novel. Reviewers observed the shift in narrative viewpoint from the first to third person as resonating with melodramas and that the novel's ending was rather forced and inconsequential. For instance, Richard Sullivan attested in the *New York Times Book Review* of 1947 that there was a "technical defect" in the narrative as the reviewer questioned the narrator throughout the novel and was left skeptical about "what the alleged narrator imagines the facts to have been" (1947, 12). More recent reviews still approach the novel differently. On the one hand, Hillary Holladay, Petry's biographer, reads the novel as realistic, highlighting the author's interests in "possibilities of perspectives" as in her reliance on the balance between a third-person narrator and her authorial control (1996, 30). On the other, Laura Dubek considers the novel a "parody" that exposes a small American white community and melodramatizes their vice and malice among themselves and in relation to othered

members (2004, 75). Emily Bernard credits Petry's potential in her subversive and divergent writing techniques in imagining "a new society in which traditional, small-town American culture would join forces with changing racial and ethnic demographics to combat the ideologies of the shameless pursuit of materialism and white supremacy" (2005, 108). These different reviews serve as a departure point for this section to build on the usually overlooked aspects of Petry's *Country Place*, such as the subversive aesthetics and, most significantly, its approach to the struggle against racism.

Petry's life experiences have contributed to the novel's general insights. She had to cope with her husband's troubles as a returning veteran – George Petry, to whom the novel is dedicated. Despite her middle-class status, she was a small, predominantly white town member and suffered from racial discrimination. These autobiographical details are communicated in Petry's portrayal of racialized members of the narrated small town, white fragility, and class fracture. With a clear focus on the social problems of marriage and family in post-World War II America, the novel narrates three marriage stories in the fictional town of Lennox, Connecticut. It is usually read to be the town of Old Saybrook, Connecticut, Petry's birthplace and home for most of her life. Johnnie Roane is a young, emotionally injured veteran who returns home to a less-than-honorable wife, Glory, who is having an adulterous relationship with Ed Barrell, who works at a gas station and is known as Lennox's notorious womanizer, taking care of the war-widowed women of the town. While a hurricane hits the town hard – which documents the 1938 deadliest and most destructive hurricane to strike Long Island, New York, and New England and experienced by Petry – Johnnie finds his wife undressed in the arms of Ed in his secluded cabin. The second marital relationship is that of P. Mearns Gramby and Glory's mother, Lillian, nicknamed Lil, who is insensitive, social-climbing, and is also in an illicit affair with Barrel. Lil's husband is Bertha Gramby's son, the town's wealthiest citizen residing in "the largest house in Lennox" (Petry 2019, 3), whom Lil detests and perceives as a hindrance while aspiring to achieve social and material status. Lil attempts to murder her diabetic mother-in-law by leaving a box of chocolates near her usual sofa and taking her insulin needle and stash. The African American maid Neola saves Mrs. Gramby, and Lil's planned murder is exposed.

Much of the novel is narrated by George "Doc" Fraser, the town's pharmacist, and Tom, also known as "The Weasel" Walker. The latter is the only driver of the "town taxi" and exposes the sexual secrets of the town's citizens, despite his disreputable past. White characters are at the

forefront of the text; however, minorities play a role in it. At the end of the novel, Neola is Mrs. Gramby's African American housekeeper who gets married to "The Portegee," the Portuguese gardener of the Gramby House. Also, Mrs. Gramby's employees include an Irish cook and a Jewish lawyer, David Rosenberg. As Mrs. Gramby returns from filing her will – the novel's rather sentimental and contrived final scene – she falls, concurrently hitting Ed, and they both die on the city hall steps. All the novel's characters meet in a climactic moment for the first time to witness the reading of Mrs. Gramby's will. She bequeaths land to the Catholic Church, $500 to The Weasel, her diamond ring to Doc Fraser, and $6000 to Johnnie. She wills the mansion plus $500 per year for upkeep on the house and $1,000 to her cook, Neola, and her Portuguese gardener.

This novel moves away from the black people's problems of the 1940s, which literary critics believed to qualify an author in terms of their race. Instead, it deals with a less discussed subject matter, if discussed at all: the problems white people have with other whites. Petry's decision not to invest in the success of her first novel and to experiment with a less-established narrative form is unusual. As she had commented in the newly launched black mass slick *Ebony* (an African American version of *Life*) one year before the novel was published, she wanted to experiment with different forms of writing and various techniques in composing her narratives (quoted in Rabinowitz 2014, 140). This novel demonstrates that Petry is not a strict proponent of the protest novel. However, a close reading of *Country Place* reveals that it is not entirely devoid of the quintessential racial plight and implies Petry is still loyal to the genre of protest fiction. She does not deviate into a wholly new direction but rather de-centers the black victimization narratives to shed a clear light on the vulnerabilities of the whites and their tendencies towards racial and sexist attitudes as a refuge where they can cover these weaknesses.

I argue that the objective behind Petry's project of raceless writing is to dismantle the dichotomy of black/evil vs. white/goodness. Furthermore, *Country Place* can fall into the same categorization of addressing an "immensely important moral debate" in Toni Morrison's renowned critical study *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*. Morrison exposes the ideas of whiteness and blackness as mutual constituents constructed by society in her analyses of the white American Willa Cather's 1940 novel *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* in connection to Hurston and Wright's white life novels. Similarly, Petry's novel contributes to what Morrison stresses as questions about white identity and power and considers "an almost completely buried subject" (Morrison 1992, 20). Petry's text showcases the multifaceted process in which white

identities are constructed by viewing black or non-whites as others based on race or class. Dismantling the dichotomy of black being connected to evil and critiquing white determinism are recurring themes in Petry's other two novels.

Thomas L. Morgan regards Petry as an "adherent" to Dunbar's white deterministic vision in his article, "Black Naturalism, White Determinism: Paul Laurence Dunbar's Naturalist Strategies". Morgan argues that "Petry's *The Street* shares numerous narrative strategies with Dunbar in terms of examining the power and influence of white determinism on black subjects" (Morgan 2012, 29). He mainly focuses on the struggles Lutie Johnson, the female protagonist of the novel, faces in making a life for herself and her son. She seems to be torn apart between freeing herself from "the physical and mental economic constraints of 1940s Harlem" and following Benjamin Franklin as a model of a successful American. She is well aware that in a society dominated by white people, she and other African American members do not stand much potential for the betterment of their life. This suggests that African Americans live in a world that constantly reminds them of their inferior status and are second-class citizens. Their chances of securing a decent life, as in Lutie's case, are determined by white social power and control. This point is one of the assets of protest fiction; a category applied to *The Street*. As Morgan states that "Dunbar's white determinist strategies are still valuable when attempting to de-naturalize the biological assumptions silently informing white perceptions regarding African Americans" (Morgan 2012, 31), Petry is drawn to the same idea in her fiction and attempts to subvert it. In *Country Place*, she chooses to rely on the perspectives of the white characters as an attempt to tackle this subject matter by representing white's naturalist and determinist perceptions about the othered members of the US society.

Petry directs her artistic lenses toward racializing, gendering, and classing the dominant members of the US society: the white people who consider themselves the norm. Accordingly, Petry challenges assumptions about whiteness as a universal convention and aims to make race visible by representing destabilized white (male) characters in this novel. Multiple anxieties about white maleness are addressed in this white life novel. Indeed, Petry contests the very idea that white masculinities are always stable, static, and (hetero)normative by excavating issues of masculine anxiety and insecurity in various white characters: Doc George Fraser; the narrator, Johnnie; the returned veteran, The Weasel; the only taxi driver in the town and P. Mearns Gramby; the upper class and only heir to the Gramby House. Studying these characters in accordance with

the lenses of intersectionality, these men's race, class, and gender work as sites of privilege to hide their anxious and insecure masculinities.

Doc Fraser presents himself as a sixty-five-year-old bachelor of "medium" height, weight, and even baldness. He is bound to the drugstore he owns, which his family had run for three generations in the town. Doc is rarely seen out of this almost enclosed space and gets his bits of narrative from his observations of what characters buy from his store or what had been prescribed to them. The other ultimate source of their stories, primarily sexual affairs, is provided by his confidant, The Weasel. From the opening pages of the text, he does his best to give the impression that his narrated accounts of the characters' lives are to be as objective as they can be:

> I am neither a pessimist nor an optimist. I think I have what might be called a medium temperament.
> It is only fitting and proper that I should openly admit to having a prejudice against women—perhaps I should say a prejudice against the female of any species, human or animal; and yet, like most of the people who admit to being prejudiced, I am not consistent, for I own a female cat, named Banana. Though I am not devoted to her, I am well aware she is much closer to the primitive than a male cat. (Petry 2019, 1)

Doc Fraser's impartiality as a narrator is questioned immediately as he deliberately voices his "prejudice against women". Additionally, his feline preferences and absence from the most consequential actions of revelations of the novel implicate him as being too much of an outsider to give a credible account of the narrated events of the story. He disguises his unstable masculine identity in his misogynistic jargon and prejudiced rhetoric. His words are self-contradictory, which renders his narrative reliability dubious at best.

His masculinist, race- and class-specific chauvinism make him a compromised storyteller whose narrative cannot be taken at face value. His prejudices are even more apparent when it comes to his encounter with characters of different races or ethnicities. He describes Neola as following:

> Because of the dim light, I did not recognize Neola when she came in later the evening. The doorway was so shadowed that I couldn't tell whether it was a man or a woman who had opened the door […] Neola's skin is dark brown, and she had on a dark coat. Even after she was inside and moving toward me, I could not identify who or what she was. I saw a hurrying figure coming at me so fast that I instinctively moved back, away from the counter, close to the shelves behind me. (Petry 2019, 223–4)

His prejudice against Neola is apparent in his phraseology. He cannot tell for sure whether she is a man or a woman, a claim justified by the dark atmosphere of the store. Doc still insists that Neola

remains obscure to him even after a close-up contact with her. He cannot determine her gender and dehumanizes her by referring to her with the impersonal pronoun "what". This racist attitude is common among many other characters in the novel. In Lilli's words, for instance, "[i]f Neola was white and didn't have that dead-pan expression on her face, she wouldn't be bad-looking. Not anything to rave about, but she'd get by in a crowd" (Petry 2019, 61). For Lilli, Neola cannot be labeled as a beautiful woman by the white beauty standards. What is more regressive than this opinion is her comment on Neola's divorce from her husband: "Who ever heard of a nigger divorce" (Petry 2019, 68). Such instances serve as evidence that the novel is not entirely devoid of race-inflected problems.

The racist remarks by Doc and other white characters in describing Neola reflect white people's prevailing normative racist views and their need to discriminate against non-whites to feel better about themselves. The ways Doc and other white men attempt to conceal their anxieties and insecurities by discriminating against less powerful members of their community can be contextualized based on Michael Kimmel's idea that American manhood of the mid-twentieth century is defined in terms of excluding others. According to Kimmel, excluding blacks and women serves as a ground for American manhood in the mid-century to define itself and dismiss men of other races and ethnicities, "the non-native born and the genuinely native born" as not "real" American and "couldn't, by definition, be real men" (Kimmel 2006, 62). That is to say, characters like Neola serve as a "screen against which" Doc and other white (male) characters project "their own fears of emasculation" (Kimmel 2006, 65). A reading of Doc as a white male reveals that he is both discriminatory and anxious. Racial othering is achieved through gendered representations of characters like Neola. Doc's fears of emasculation are projected in his inability to take any risk to step beyond his drugstore and get involved in any relationship that surpasses the druggist-customer one with others. Such behavior stems from his insecure masculinity. His anxiety can be detected in his perception of himself as someone who feels inadequate in parallel to the traditional societal standards of masculinity and feels rather tense when confronted with other men in the novel.

Doc is as emotionally unstable and as love-starved as the other characters. This side of his masculinity is shown explicitly in his antagonistic relationship with the gossipy taxi driver, The Weasel. Similar notions of anxiety and insecurity can be applied to Doc's close friend, The Weasel. They share the same biases against women and racist views against other minorities in the town.

They both think having a woman defines their masculine identities and that a womanless man is excluded from the (hetero)normative and patriarchal orthodoxy emblematized by their society. For this reason, Doc hides his fears of emasculation by expressing his desire to marry Mrs. Gramby. Similarly, The Weasel gets involved in illegal sexual conduct with a special-needs girl. During his visit to the bedridden Mrs. Gramby, Doc observes: "I have often expressed a dislike for females. But Mrs. Gramby was as fine a specimen of humanity as I have ever known. Had she been younger I would have married her. But she was almost twenty years older than I; and it would have been a most unsuitable match" (Petry 2019, 230). The marriage he hypothetically aspires to would not have been possible for the class divide between him and Mrs. Gramby. This exposes another inconsistency in Doc's character, which is the main reason behind his hatred of her son. Despite his middle-class status and successful business, he feels insecure about himself compared to Mearns Gramby.

Driven by the same impulse, The Weasel rapes the underaged and mentally unstable Rose Marie. "For reasons best known to himself, The Weasel struck up an acquaintance with one of these girls. Perhaps he has the normal male sexual urge caged inside his abnormal wizened body. Or perhaps he set about the conquest of a large female as a kind of perverted compensation for his own smallness" (Petry 2019, 138). Rose Marie functions for The Weasel as Mrs. Gramby does for Doc: she becomes a necessary fabrication for the taxi driver. It helps him legitimize his claim to heteronormative masculinity. However, her mental impairment, similarly to Mrs. Gramby's advanced age, places her outside the classification of desirable women. It also indicates that these two men are insecure enough to flirt or engage in a relationship with whom they consider desirable women. Both male characters describe each other with adjectives that make them appear more masculine than the other. Despite being unusually and queerly close to each other, there is an implicit competition between the two towards gaining masculine purgatives. Doc frequently calls attention to The Weasel's "little hands," while the latter describes Doc as an obese and asexual man.

On a different note, Petry plays a pioneering role in tackling taboo and controversial issues like rape in two instances in the novel: The Weasel's sexual assault of Rose Marie and Johnnie Roane's sexual relationship with his wife against her will. "This is what rape is like – to hold a woman close to you, and force your body on hers, ignoring her protests" (Petry 2019, 30). Petry proleptically depicts how postwar traumatic stress makes men excessively aggressive towards

women: Johnnie, an alienated young World War II veteran, sexually assaults his wife on his first night at home. Clark praises Petry for addressing "marital rape at a time when few if any African American authors dared broach the subject for fear of being salacious or sensational" (2013, 160). *Country Place* situates Petry as a writer whose progressive writing deserves more critical attention, such as exploring the psychological damage rape can leave on women. By the same token, she documents the severe effects of war trauma on men as in her portrayal of Jonnie Roane.

Petry's depiction of Jonnie Roane as a troubled veteran resonates with other literary and cinematic depictions from the same period. The problem of the traumatized returning veteran is brilliantly laid out in William Wyler's 1946 movie *The Best Years of Our Lives*, which also takes on troubled marriages, class divisions, disability, and alcoholism among white people in a small Midwestern city. David A. Gerber, in his article "Heroes and Misfits: The Troubled Social Reintegration of Disabled Veterans in The Best Years of Our Lives," hails "[t]he movie's most brilliant and, for its audience, most unanticipated representations involve the struggle of Homer Parrish, a Navy veteran and bilateral hand amputee who uses two metal prosthetic hooks in place of the hands he lost in battle" (Gerber 1994, 546). In a similar fashion to Wyler's representations of Homer Parrish, Johnnie Roane is portrayed by Petry as a traumatized returned veteran. He experiences severe anxieties, undergoes difficulties adjusting to his new civilian life, and becomes mentally injured by the constant rejection of his wife. In contrast to Homer, Jonnie does not get physically mutilated in war. Nevertheless, his trauma is as acute as Homer's. They both experience anger, confusion, and passivity as they attempt to adjust to their new lives.

As his presupposed raced and patriarchal entitlement is aggravated by his lack of any potential female partners, Doc's impairment as a male storyteller is questioned by other perspectives. Petry's pervasive voice throughout the novel contradicts his voice, especially concerning issues related to women. Glory is given space in the narrative to present her illicit relationship with Ed: "Even now I am not certain I understand him, or understand any men like him, who pursue women. His wife had been in a tubercular sanitarium for twenty years or more and during those years he took to hunting female as though they were big game" (Petry 2019, 100). Petry sympathizes with Glory's struggle in her marriage in contrast to Doc's castigating judgments about her infidelity. Petry does not condemn the female characters of this novel. Glory's refusal of her husband can be read in the context of her refusal to participate in traditional marriage; Ed provides the sexual fantasies lacking in her marriage.

Besides, Petry ridicules Doc on a narrative level in the way she infuses her tale with ironic statements about him. He takes refuge in his store, which is attached to his house, and is unusually attached to his cat, showcasing his insecurity to step beyond his safe space and feline partner. Petry also provides counterparts to challenge his sexist views about women and even exacerbate the very reliability of his narrative. The Portuguese's viewpoint in expressing his considerate love and respect for Neola exemplifies this matter.

> It's the storm he thought. I did what men always do in the midst of violence; I went straight toward my heart's love. But Neola – what of Neola? Did this mean then he was far more concerned about his plans than about her? […] No, it hadn't been the plants that sent him forth into this black and evil night. He had hoped that his battle with the wind and the rain would crack Neola's calm, that her concern for his welfare would be little bridge across which he would walk straight to her heart. (Petry 2019, 178)

The third marital bond between Neola and the gardener introduced at the novel's end is successful. Petry locates the possibility for a happy marriage and family in the promising relationship between Neola and the Portuguese, problematizing the very concept of white family values in Lennox, a country place in New England.

Doc Fraser, The Weasel, and Johnnie Roane practice destabilized white masculinities due to their insecurity and anxiety. Mearns Gamby is as insecure and anxious as these three men and practices masculine destabilization likewise. The forty-seven-year-old is married to an unfaithful woman, Lil, and brought up by a domineering mother. He is portrayed as an irredeemable hypochondriac "addicted to vitamin pills and mouth washes" under the influence of his mother. "When he finished Yale he talked of living in Chicago or San Francisco – some Western city. He said the East was too old, too worn out, too familiar". Mrs. Gramby coerces him into remaining in the town and working in his father's law firm, making "it impossible for him to leave binding him closer and closer to her" (Petry 2019, 83). In this respect, Mrs. Gramby plays the role of an overbearing and overprotective matriarch who is the reason behind the emasculation of her only son.

As a final attempt to free himself from his mother's control, already in his forties, he marries Lil to shore up his destabilized masculine identity. Nonetheless, Mrs. Gramby does not allow them to have their privacy, even in their bedroom, as she demands that all doors remain open for her cats to walk around the house. "Petry's unflinching examination of white men's psychosexual lives exemplifies how the cultural preoccupation in African American letters with

racial representation perpetuated the belief that the best and most useful African American literature depicts the race" (Clark 2016, 94). Reading Mearns Gramby as a destabilized white man, it becomes more apparent that Petry provides an alternative way of looking at the upper class and white members of the US society. She dismantles the materialistic privileges of class and essentialist constructions of race. Neither Gramby's whiteness nor his economic power can secure his status as a normative white man. An intersectional reading of his character in terms of his white masculinity reveals that Petry melodramatizes him as a precarious and vulnerable white male character. Despite his race supremacy and class status, Mearns Gramby is disadvantaged in terms of his gender: the simultaneous and interacting effect of his gender with his whiteness and wealth diminishes his claim to the socially embraced and valued models of masculinity, such as American hegemonic masculinity.

Despite being members of the upper class, Mrs. Gramby and her son's psychosexual bond infers a discourse about reading white families in a society exalting nuclear family ideals and the revival of domesticity. They can be as problematic and liable to failure as families of lower classes and marginalized races. However, the problems are usually seen as pathological in the latter cases. They may be more acute because they are exacerbated by either the race or economic status of the family. Petry discusses a key filial issue of the postwar era in this mother-son relationship: the role of women in catalyzing and redeeming society's deterioration. Mrs. Gramby, for instance, can be viewed in terms of "momism," a concept coined by Philip Wylie in his 1942 notorious study Generation of Vipers "to describe a cultural phenomenon of maternal over-protection apparently responsible for an overly feminized American masculinity as well as a host of other social problems" in postwar America (quoted in Dubek 2004, 60). Mrs. Gramby's obsessive love and over-protection of her son can be understood in this context. Her figure as a matriarch leads to both feminizing her son and the failure of her own household.

This mother-son relationship can also be read in the context of Alfred C. Kinsey's infamous report *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male,* which reflects the spirit of the period when both the report and Petry's novel were published. Mrs. Gramby exemplifies the mothers mentioned in Kinsey's study who "is afraid to send her boy away to college" (Kinsey et al. 1948, 404), and is also one of those mothers who are "primarily responsible for the care of these boys; and, to a large degree, they are the ones who control moral codes, schedules for sex education […] It is obviously impossible for a majority of these women to understand the problem that the boy faces in being

constantly aroused and regularly involved with his normal biologic reactions" (Kinsey et al. 1948, 269). However, Mearns Gramby's case is much about the struggle between his patriarchal masculinity confronted with his mother's femininity (matriarchy): he could not have found a real partner, got married, and lived a happy life in town away from his mother. According to Doc, Mrs. Gramby is held responsible for Mearns' insecurity and anxiety. To put it bluntly, Doc embodies the voices of the infamous male writers such as Wylie and Kinsey, who condemns matriarchy as a deceptive catalyst behind the emasculation of American men in 1940s. Mearns fails to claim traditional patriarchy in the home and the prerogatives of his maleness in public life due to his lack of individual initiative, autonomy, and career achievement. His class privilege falls short in asserting his security as his gender renders him vulnerable in a society embracing ideals of masculinity that entail control over one's world in a private sphere and authority over others in public spheres.

Petry's plot-driven novel and stock white (male) characters underpin the dilemmas of being white in a country place in New England. People are bigoted, immoral, unfaithful, racist, and evil in this town. At the same time, Mrs. Gramby is represented as a kind-hearted woman as opposed to bigotry, racism, and anti-Semitism. The narrative shows that "[w]hen the town was younger, when she was growing up, a man was judged solely by his actions; not prejudged because he was born in Russia or in Poland" (Petry 2019, 86). During her conversation with the taxi driver, more is revealed about this side of her character:

> 'That's very interestin',' The Weasel said politely. 'But I don't see what it's got to do with Jews. Now you take that Jew lawyer – he don't get no business from here in Lennox, but he gets just enough cases trickling in from other towns to keep him here. What's he want to come here for? Why don't he stay where he was? Next thing, he'll have all his relations here. I ain't got anything personal against him, but I just don't see it.'
> 'I assume because he came here because he wanted to live here. And he stays here for the same reason that you and I stay. We like the place. The Jew, as you call him is a man like yourself. With the same desires, the same weaknesses,' she said severely.
>
> Then her voice lost its firmness. She murmured half to herself, 'Subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer.' (Petry 87-8)

Despite being a conservative woman and an overbearing mother, Mrs. Gramby reveals a progressive vision of judging other people: she is more concerned with their moral codes than their racial or ethnic groups. For example, she marginalizes Lilian and Glory for being adulterous and immoral while appreciating the Jewish lawyer, her African American maid, and her Irish cook for

their various praiseworthy traits. She is considerate enough to pay for their loyalty and devotion by bequeathing her house and money. According to Emily Bernard (2005, 104), "[i]n *Country Place*, the representation of traditional values as inherently anti-racist echoes arguments made by numbers of postwar antiracist educators who insisted that racism and religious bigotry contradicted America's 'Judeo-Christian' and democratic principles". This claim can be a valid reading of Petry's political aspirations behind this novel, as she believed that her understanding of issues related to racism and other forms of bigotry is steeped in a "Judeo-Christian belief" (Griffin 2013, 21).

Country Place, inspired by Petry's experiences as an eyewitness to the 1938 Hurricane and her returned veteran husband, delineates Petry's project in dealing with race issues on a broader level. Petry goes beyond the usually expected frame of writing about African American people protesting against the debilitating effects of racial injustice. Instead, she explores an entirely uncovered terrain for her as a writer. She composes a text in which (male) white characters have the lion's share to showcase their race-inflected insecurities and accentuate their intricate relations with other (white) community members. It can be argued that Petry infused this white life novel with progressive politics to expose racial prejudice and widen the definitions of racism. Petry wrote the novel about white culture and relied on various conventions to do something more than comment on black pathology with respect to white society.

Country Place delves into the underbelly of white social order to showcase its problematics. Petry fictionalizes a small society where the dominant white Americans join the marginalized racial and ethnic minorities in combatting materialistic ideologies and white supremacy. As exemplified in the character of Mrs. Gramby, Petry implies an inclusive side of US society. *Country Place's* pioneering thematic concerns and subversive aesthetics are usually overlooked due to the novel's subgenre classification. Petry's destabilization of white masculine identities from the perspective of a black female author contributes to her agenda of disrupting white vs. black and male vs. female binaries and functions as a backdrop for her depiction of African American masculinities – explored in *The Street* and *Country Place* in the two sections of this chapter. Petry battles the restricting narrative techniques of the protest genre and strengthens the humane side of her black male characters – an idea initiated and developed in this chapter and thoroughly problematized in the next.

Chapter 4. Reinforcing Progressive and Diverse Black Masculinities in *The Narrows*

This chapter sets forth the progressive aspects of Petry's depicted black masculinities in terms of their self-consciousness about their racial affiliations and persistent dedication for social reform in *The Narrows*. These masculinities define their identities in more liberal terms and embrace less oppressive positions in society than the black male characters of Petry's protest fiction, such as the Super and Boots Smith in *The Street*. Not all of the progressive black male characters in this chapter succeed in their pursuits of asserting their masculine identities as they remain marginalized by an unsubdued intersection of their race with other social categories. However, they resist the hierarchical disparities and American hegemonic ideals of masculinity. These characters are non-assimilationists, refute stereotypes, and exhibit a determined will for social justice. The chapter reinforces the diverse aspect of Petry's black masculinities as the studied black male characters are of a range of different social classes, ages, abilities, and sexual orientations.

I analyze the black male characters of this chapter according to an intersectional reading method. I identify race as a master category and explain how its intersected effect with other categories leads to problematizing their masculine identities in relation to other (white) men and women. The other question helps to investigate these categories' interconnectedness further and results in recognizing imperceptible strands of inequality and discrimination. This intersectional perspective better explicates the multiple and diverse representations of African American masculinities. In the first section of this chapter, I start with studying the intersections between the canonical categories of race, gender, and class in constituting – Link Williams – the main character of *The Narrows* as a politically progressive black man.

The focus is shifted to investigate the role of the less discussed intersectionalities, namely, age, ability, and sexuality. It seeks to showcase a different range of impediments Malcolm Powther, Weak Knees and Howard Thomas, the supporting black male characters of Petry's novel, face in the second section. At the same time, they exemplify manifold, unsettled, and fluid black masculinities. They transcend the overshadowing notion that white masculinity is the only available role model for black male subjectivity. Petry highlights the totality of black men's lives in relation to family, community, and other black men. It accentuates unprecedented features about black men in *The Narrows* and is a step toward more nuanced representations of African American masculinities in Petry's oeuvre.

Reviewers have focused on both the progressive themes and modernist stylistic tendencies of Petry's *The Narrows*. Shortly after its publishing in 1953, Charles H. Nichols reviewed it in *Phylon,* describing Petry's narrative method as "a kind of impressionistic stream of consciousness" (1953, 437). Margaret B. McDowell argues that it offers "a wider perspective for an assessment of Ann Petry's achievement than does a consideration of *The Street* alone. In *The Narrows* Petry experiments with conveying the depths of psychic consciousness, with communicating emotional conflict through interior monologue, and with juxtaposing memory and present experience" (1980, 135). Joy Myree-Mainor writes, "*The Narrows* ultimately suggests that black Americans must possess a consciousness that identifies and opposes hegemony, rather than one that unintentionally reinscribes race, class, and gender hierarchies through passivism and assimilation" (2010, 193).

Thematically, the novel is acclaimed by critics likewise. For instance, Cynthia Callahan labels it as a novel ahead of its time (2018, 103). This vantage point supports the idea that Petry's discussed novel goes beyond the scope of social protest and is more of a modernist genre as Petry covers the psychological dimensions of her characters pedantically, relies on extended metaphors and allegories in narrating events, and infuses her text with ironical implications. Michael Barry (1999, 144) considers the "folkloric and blues elements" in this novel as "potentially progressive elements". These two elements are embodied in the ghost that Weak Knees sees and Mamie Powther's singing of blues, connecting Petry directly to the schools of Harlem Renaissance fiction. Such instances reaffirm that Petry's aesthetic agenda is more comprehensive than social realism and is informed by elements from her Harlem literary lineages.

Petry advanced with her writing career at an age where "urban realism and male-dominated sociological writings dominated the black literary and intellectual traditions" in the 1940s (Myree-Mainor 2010, 176). Based on this, I attempt to exhibit how Petry attempts to free herself from such confinements as a woman in the shadow of men when discussing race and racial justice. Directing attention back to masculinity, I run the risk of maintaining the shadow of male counterparts/vision cast on the female writers' perspective. However, I attempt to stress how Petry breaks down the monolithic idea of black masculinities posited in the traditional view of black men vs. black women's relation, thereby expanding the critique of the male vs. female dichotomy. Accordingly, this chapter pursues to delve into how Petry represents the black male characters in *The Narrows* as African American men who favor social reform. They define their masculine identities in

liberating ways, such as moving away from essentialist gender role positionings, refusing to assimilate with white hegemonic ideals of masculinity, and defying the oppressive power of stereotypes in their life. Petry provides an array of black men, constructed as an intersection of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and age in US society.

The novel is the story of an interracial couple set in Connecticut, New England, in the 1950s. Camilla Treadway Sheffield, the only heir to the Treadway estate, married to Captain Bunny Sheffield and working as a fashion reporter, is a white woman who introduces herself as Camilo Williams to Lincoln Williams. The latter is the twenty-six-year-old handsome black man known as Link. He is a Dartmouth Phi Beta Kappaa graduate with a major in history, but he is working in The Last Chance, a bar in The Narrows, the fictional black section of the town of Monmouth. Link is an orphan without knowledge about his biological parents and is raised by the prudish Abbie Crunch. When he is only eight years old, Abbie, stricken by grief over her husband's sudden death, forgets about him for three months. Having nowhere to go, Link goes to The Last Chance Bar, across the street from where he lives with Abbie, and is informally adopted by the bar's owner, Bill Hod, and the cook, Weak Knees. Link grows up as Hod and Weak Knees' protégé as they contribute remarkably to his identity as a black man who is proud of his racial heritage. After he returns to live with his adoptive mother, Link meets Camilo and falls in love with her. However, Link breaks up with her when he discovers her real identity and marital status. Overwhelmed by jealousy and rage, Camilo accuses Link of raping her and has him abducted by her husband to face a brutal destiny. Link as black man who is brutalized for his racial progression and individuality is the focus of the next section.

4.1. Brutalized Black Masculinities: Race, Gender, and Class

The categories of race and gender, perpetuated by class, are the major forces in shaping the African American masculinities in the novel based on specific dynamics of their intersection. Link is viewed in the broader scope of being a black man in a racist white society to investigate how his masculinity is shaped and periled by the forces of the abovementioned categories. Link is approached as an embodiment of black masculinities in the 1950s, mainly according to the lenses of an intersectionality analysis model. Despite his education and dedication to hard work, Link is limited in his will to change his fatal destiny, decided by the debilitating power of whiteness. Petry describes his growing up as "the seesaw process of reaching manhood, let go of something, hold on to something else, learning, growing, until finally he grew all the way up. Or had he? Or did

anybody? Ever?" (Petry 1999, 85). Link eventually achieves nothing as he carries a manifold underprivileged, constrained by his race, gender, and class. He is even deprived of his life for falling in love with a white woman who is superior to him in race and class. From the novel's beginning, Petry suggests that Link and the men of his generation are different from the previous generations of black men. It is confirmed that he, like the other men of his time, is "brutalized" by "something," in the words of Abbie Crunch.

> She supposed the young colored men of Link's generation couldn't have manners like Mr. Powther's, though she didn't know why. Wars and atom bombs and the fact that there was so much hate in the world might have something to do with it. There were times when she had thought that rudeness was a characteristic of Link's; that other young men had a natural courtesy he would never have. Then she would see or hear something in The Narrows that suggested all these young men were alike—something had brutalized them. But what? (Petry 1999,13)

Abbie, however, is not sure about the exact reason(s) behind this process of brutalization, as she ends her contemplation on Link and other men's nature by asking "what" that "something" could be. Is it war or atom bombs or hate that have led Link not to be a man of manners and gentility, like Malcolm Powther, Abbie's tenant, married to Mamie? This question at the novel's start is significant on two levels: Petry provocatively inclines the readers to follow the assumption that this "something" requires scrutiny and, on a linguistic level, it is a multilayered factor, not easily grasped in one comprehensible word. "Something" is a referent to all the factors mentioned in this paragraph, but it exceeds that in Link's case. For Link, it is all the factors, but it is also on the two levels of generality: the structural intersection of race, gender, class in certain social settings, and individuality. In other words, he and other black men of his generation carry the burdens of history that race, gender, and other circumstances impose on them.

On an individual basis, Link Williams is an Apollo-like figure. He is attractive, with straight hair, very smooth skin, and marked facial features. He is well-built, has a pleasant-sounding muscular voice, and has a good sense of humor, which makes him pleasant to be around. Additionally, in the words of his adoptive mother, his manners do not match his good looks. This emphasis on Link's looks from the novel's start indicates that his looks could work against him and not be in his favor. The intersection of his good looks with his race is seen to be the problem: he is too good-looking to be born black or maybe to survive as a black man. On top of that, Abbie presumes that Link is not the conventional type of black man. He does not conform to the manners and roles that men his age should typically follow. He has a sense of self-autonomy that scares her; he does not seem to be aware that being black and handsome in a white-dominant world

requires a particular set of behavior. The belief that Link has in himself comes from several factors. Bill Hod and Week Knees influence Link's rearing noticeably. They mark a dramatic shift from Abbie's conservative methods of bringing Link up. They even give the young Link a nickname, Sonny, to which he starts to reply spontaneously. Weak Knees and Bill Hod re-educate Link on the subject of race, which is a fundamental phase in shaping his character as a man. In contrast to Abbie's education on the subject, both convince him cordially to attach positive attributes to blackness:

> Ebony was the best wood, the hardest wood; it was black. Virginia ham was the best ham. It was black on the outside. Tuxedos and tail coats were black and they were a man's finest, most expensive clothes. You had to use pepper to make most meats and vegetables fit to eat. The most flavorsome pepper was black. The best caviar was black. The rarest jewels were black: black opals, black pearls […] They taught him that he can laugh at a white person too. (Petry 1999, 145)

Weak Knees and Hod's positive inclinations of race function as a counterstrategy to substitute the dominant "negative imagery" in "popular representation" about blackness and black people with "positive" ones (Hall 1997, 272). Petry attempts to subvert the racialized modes of representation in her depiction of black characters who choose to redefine their positions by unfollowing the stereotypical script of the prevalent negative images of blackness in their society. These characters, instead, take pride in their race and individualistic potential in circulating positive qualities of blackness. Hod and Weak Knees enable Link to appreciate his blackness and perceive the significance of it in his life. As a result, he comes to good terms with understanding his blackness and starts to view it with valuable and beautiful connotations.

In addition, they help Link to feel less guilty about his blackness and reconcile with all the extreme ideas Abbie instilled in his mind. Link learns from the two men to no longer answer for the entire race whenever he commits a mistake. Under the influence of Abbie, Link was burdened by his race and always had to double his effort not to let "The Race" down and be better than the white people. It can even be seen that Abbie tried to push Link to adopt the same white lifestyle she had always adopted – a black woman, but white in all her manners. Abbie's rearing comes from her perspectives of black patriarchy and masculinity in relation to black femininity: she is an elder black woman who instills ideas in him which are valid for her generation, not Link's. That is to say, she attempts to pass on her attitude of how a man should be from the point of view of an oppressed and persecuted black femininity on levels of sexism and racism in 1950s American

society. However, she is not necessarily fully aware of her oppressed status as she tries to bring Link up according to rigid white American family values.

In her essay, "It is all in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race and Nation," Patricia H. Collins (1998) challenges the oppressive systems constructed by the American family and transforms them by following the same logic of oppression those systems adopt. Collins (1998, 78) states that "[f]amily language also shapes everyday interactions: African-American strangers often refer to one another as "brother" and "sister"; some black men refer to each other as "bloods". In hip-hop culture, "homies are black males from one's neighborhood, or home community." This is the same strategy Bill Hod and Weak Knees adopt with Link in helping him to free himself from the constraints of the family values he acquired from Abbie. They start with the power of black language, which is clear in how they rename him: Link, a shortening of Lincoln – named after the American President who abolished slavery – becomes Sonny, and they teach him more about the black vernacular. This, as Collins stresses, is a "political framework" in which the whites are excluded and it works as a "rhetoric" that "finds a home in what many African-Americans consider to be the most radical of Black political theories" (1998, 78). Hence, this stage in Link's life serves as a subculture where he chooses his family based on shared black history and values, not biological kinship. Having a family of choice is one way to resist the sanction of the legal and institutional system in the 1950s containment culture. He abandons the value system of the black bourgeoisie, an assimilation of white-class values disseminated to him by Abbie. Most significantly, he constructs his masculinity unaltered by the hegemonic white ideal and the coercing intersection of race, gender, and class. Link develops a strong sense of racial pride; he refuses to assimilate with readily available white models of masculinity. He also grasps a sense of the politics of racial exploitation; he becomes aware of defining his masculinity against the white-created stereotypical frames of black men.

Link reconciles some of the traumatic experiences of his school days with Hod's help. He reflects on a particular incident when he fakes sickness to skip school as his teacher has assigned the role of Sambo in a minstrel to him.

> It was Miss Dwight, Miss Eleanora Dwight, who decided that his class would give a minstrel show, to raise money, to help raise money for the Parent Teachers' Association. She gave him a part in the show. When the other kids heard her read the lines that would be his, they laughed until they almost cried. He was the butt of all the jokes, he was to say all of the yessuhs and the nosuhs, he was to explain what he was doing in the chicken house, Ain't nobody in here, boss, but us chickens; he was to be caught stealing watermelons; he was to dance something that Miss Dwight called the

> buck and wing; he was to act sleepy and be late for everything. His name in the minstrel was Sambo. (Petry 1999, 134)

The script of the performance, as delineated in the narrative, entails a number of mainstream stereotypes about black men. The clown-like, easily-frightened, chronically-idle, comically-inarticulate, and normally-lazy Sambo in the minstrels has a racially degrading stereotype about young and older black men. Characteristics like obedience and benevolence, typically Uncle Tomish, are added to Link's role in the play. On top of that, his story of stealing watermelons refers to how Southern white men regard it as a symbol of black men's poverty after Emancipation. It has also been connected to black men eating watermelons, stealing, or fighting over them, as depicted in popular newspapers and postcards in the South.

Hod enables Link to heal from these stereotypes' traumatic and degrading insinuations by providing a counternarrative. Hod embraces Link's decision to be absent and, thus, skips playing the role of Sambo. In addition, he starts to narrate the story of the Chicago riots to him as one way to show him how black should stand up for themselves and not succumb to white peoples' will, even if they were of a higher rank and authority. He "told about Ma Winters, an old woman who ran a rooming house on the South Side, in Chicago; and how white men broke down the door and surged into the downstairs hall; and how Ma Winters stood at the top of the stairs with a loaded shotgun in her hand, not shouting, not talking loud, just saying, conversationally, "I'm goin' to shoot the first white bastard who puts his foot on that bottom step. And did" (Petry 1999, 144). The moral Link grasps from this anecdote is that a black person can defend their rights and principles with courage without worrying about what others would think of him as the representative of "The Race". "The burden of race lifted a little from his own shoulders" (Petry 1999, 144). This story destabilizes the degrading tenets and humiliating situations around Link's life and grants him a chance to boost his self-esteem and build up a clear sense of racial pride. To put it differently, Link develops into a well-adjusted black man and adapts a rather complex understanding of his masculine identity. On the other hand, Hod's influence contributes to Link's mounting pride and disillusionment, manifesting in his subsequent confrontations with white men and women. The effective interconnectedness of his black race and the positive inclinations of his gender, acquired in an exclusively black subculture, collides with a range of different challenges in the broader white world.

His preoccupation with the idea of racial inferiority leads Link to be interested in the history of race in high school and to choose it as his major at college. Link's perspective on the history of

race, shared by Petry, is crucial in understanding one's self. Link's interest in history as an adolescent helps him to "resolve his confusion about his Black identity" and to help him find out about his origins, as McDowell argues in her article, "The Narrows: A Fuller View of Petry". She states that understanding the history of slavery, for example, provides the "Blacks with a key to their own history and identity". Link repeatedly self-identifies with the oppressed, the enslaved, throughout history as an attempt to achieve "spiritual liberation" (McDowell 1980, 138). His second motif behind specializing in history is that he lacks knowledge about his genealogical past. One reason he is imaginative is that he does not know who his parents are. Thus, he relies on having a collective sense of history with his people and turns to his imagination to fill in specific details about his personal history "[s]ometimes I look at my own movies" is one his refrains in the novel (Petry 1999, 145). Link has all the qualities to make his dreams come true: he is intelligent, educated, and even kind, but he carries the curse of color. The key reason behind his brutalization is his race, which he either stresses out or entirely forgets about in pursuing his life. It is, then, more than "double-consciousness," to quote Du Bois (Edwards 2009, xiv), who argued that black people are internally conflicted in the way they observe themselves through the eyes of a racist white society; this leads to their failure in grasping the sense of their lives as black men in a white world. Link accepts and embraces his color as part of his identity and eventually overcomes the sense of double-consciousness that hinders the way of black people from accomplishing themselves. Instead, he believes he can achieve his dreams, mainly of having a life with his white lover, Camilo.

During his first meeting with Camilo in The Narrows, Link is confused to see a white woman driving a Rolls Royce in a black neighborhood late at night and questions her intentions. They meet when Camilo, followed by Cat Jamie, the creepy black man on the cart, runs into Link and asks him for help while he is standing on the river bank in front of his house. When she runs into his arms, he ironically recalls all the negative stereotypes white women attach to black men, such as that of the rapist. He contemplates that she must be scared of being raped by him.

> She's scared, he thought. She's scared deaf, dumb, and blind. She thinks I'm going to rape her. I'm due to rape her, or try to, because I'm colored and it's written in the cards that colored men live for the sole purpose of raping white women, especially young beautiful white women who are on the loose. How do I know she's on the loose? Well, what the hell was she doing at the dock? She'd scream for help if there was anybody to hear her, and there isn't, so she's braced herself, waiting. (Petry 1999, 79)

Link amuses himself further with the idea of her screaming while being scared and "on the loose" and is physically and mentally prepared to be attacked. Then, he questions her intentions and feels uneasy about a white woman lurking in a place that is supposed to be dangerous. This implies that despite being in a black vicinity and alone, Link is not quite sure of Camilo's vulnerable position. This is due to the representational intersectionality dynamics of race and gender between the two: on the one hand, Link is stereotyped as all black men raping white women; on the other, white women are superior to men of a different race.

They meet again in The Last Chance Bar and develop a passionate romance as both become almost oblivious of their many disparities. Camilo's fascination with Link's color is the main reason she is attracted to him; being with Links puts an end to her curiosity about black people. During their intimate moments, she caresses his skin and tells him that it is the most beautiful skin. "I remember the first time I saw a colored woman. When I was a little girl. I wondered if the color would wash off, and then I wondered if she was that color all over. Or was it just the face and hands" (Petry 1999, 263). Link's color serves as a site for both her seduction and power. The point here is that Camilo is typically white in dealing with their entire love affair. In several situations, Link almost orders Camilo to drive her car and disapproves when Camilo acts like an executive during their car trips to New York. He also refuses that Camilo should pay for everything during their dates. This implies that class disparity plays an essential role in their relationship. Link's inferiority is the outcome of his race, strengthened by his lack of sufficient income, an indicator of his lower class.

In their patriarchal society, Link is superior because of his gender, while Camilo has the upper hand because of her race. In this sense, race is a robust indicator of Link's inferiority in this unequal relationship. Link's presupposition about Camilo being in a position of power does not come only from her whiteness; she is also a wealthy upper-class member. In providing an account of the history of hierarchies of race and gender in the US, bell hooks tackles several fundamental issues related to racism and feminism, such as the status of white women in patriarchal American society that is described as "both racially and sexually imperialistic". "In such a society, the woman who is seen as inferior because of her sex can be also seen as superior because of her race, even in relationship to men of another race" (hooks 1982, 141). In order to skip the patriarchy and feel she is the one in power, the white woman turns to her race which grants her this privilege. She shifts from her gender oppressing her to her race, which makes her superior to men of a different color.

hooks' adequate reading of the psyche of white women interested in black men applies to Petry's depiction of the same subject matter in Link and Camilo's unfolding relationship. Additionally, hooks' reading of interracial is valid in deciphering the black masculinity vs. white femininity tensions between Link and Camilo. During their evolving relationship, they forget about their different racial backgrounds until some tension is added to the scene.

However, the background soon appears: the night Abbie finds Camilo sleeping in Link's room and kicks her out of the house, Camilo, a woman of no resources at that very moment, reacts to this act by swearing outrageously at Link and referring to his color, "you black bastard" (Petry 1999, 257). Gender hierarchy plays a pivotal role in this incident: it places Link in a higher position than her, as she is a married woman whose reputation is at stake. Her fury and feeling of powerlessness lead her to turn to her whiteness as a site of defiance and power by insulting Link on a racial basis. The racialization of Link's gender works in Camilo's favor as it rearranges the hierarchical positions of the two. Because of his racialized gender, she is placed on a higher power grid than Link despite his patriarchal status.

Problematic as the issues of race, class, and gender can be due to their invisibility to the privileged ones, asking the other question in the intersectionality model for studying African American masculinities can mark out these invisible categories. This step of applying an intersectional model disentangle the way the categories intersect on a structural level, forming an area of deprivation and oppression. Link's gender might work in his favor, as he is in a patriarchal society, but not his race. Race outweighs gender in his relationship with Camilo and marks him as underprivileged. After discovering Camilo's true identity, Link cannot stand the idea of being possessed by her and confronts her.

> "Yeah. Until I found out I was just one of a collection. Back in the eighteenth century I would have been a silver-collar boy. Did you ever hear about them? The highborn ladies of the court collected monkeys and peacocks and little blackamoors for pets. Slender young dark brown boys done up in silk with turbans wrapped around their heads and silver collars around their necks, and the name of the lady to whom they belonged was engraved on the silver collar. They were supposed to be pets like the peacocks and the monkeys, but in the old oil paintings, the lady's delicate white hand always fondled the silkclad shoulder of the silver-collar boy. So you knew they were something more useful, more serviceable -" (Petry 1999, 315)

Link cannot let go of what he believes makes him the man he wants to be: his self-esteem and racial pride. She is a white woman who acts superiorly to him based on the privileges of her race. Link refuses Camilo, as he finds it his duty not to let down the race this time – he believes an

unequal relationship with a white woman is an affront to his race. Additionally, his moral responsibility towards his race and personal integrity hinders his way of going further with Camilo, as she is a married woman who exploits him. Being majored in the history of slavery at college is another critical phase of Link's life and, hence, his rejection of this relationship. It qualifies him to read his love relationship in a broader context. It is an unequal relationship; its traces go back to the beginning of black enslavement. Link cannot accept being the 1950s version of the "young dark boys" at any rate. His education raises his sense of awareness about the connection between his individual life chances and the advancement of his race in general. He is aware of his subordination in relation to Camilo in many respects.

An intersectional analysis of his black masculinity in parallel to Camilo as white femininity reveals how Camilo's race and economic surplus resources reinscribe him as inferior black masculinity in a new form. It creates a more intricate context than the enslavement of black boys back in the eighteenth century. Link is enslaved in more abstract ways, and his subjugation to this relation on a micro level adds to his subordination on the macro level of the race. Kenneth W. Warren writes that the more education a black person had, the more likely he had "the fear that the actions of a single individual will reflect badly on the group as a whole is a standard feature of the racial situation in the U.S. social order, where racial stereotypes still have currency" (2011, 138). The actions of Link implicate the race, and the upward/downward progression of the race also implicates him. Based on Warren's argument, I argue that Link is committed to a racial agenda that increases his consciousness about combating the persistent implications of black men's subordination through stereotypes that have been rendered current and oppressive since their coinage. In this respect, he represents a positive version of black masculinities. Despite the many obstacles in his life and his initial belief that his love can break all boundaries, he develops a pivotal sense of awareness toward his race. Petry represents Link as an African American man who is politically progressive. His education and black communal ties make him critically conscious that black people are subordinate to white people on a racial and economic basis. More critically, he holds himself responsible as an individual whose fate is linked to that of his race, and he acts accordingly.

Petry works against the representational dynamics of the intersectionality of race and gender as Link rejects any form of negative typecasting of black masculinities. In his interracial

love relationship with Camilo, he refuses to compromise or jeopardize his masculine identity by scumming to the mainstream stereotype's insinuations on black men.

> "No, I'm not. I'm trying to show you how this thing looks from where I sit. You think there's something wrong with me because you tagged me for your collection of muscle boys and I stood up on my hind legs and shook the tag off—"
> "Collection?" she said. "Collection of muscle boys? What are you talking about?"
> "Stevedores. Prizefighters. Big-muscled chauffeurs. The he-men boys with the big muscles that the little millionaire girls lay up with overnight or for a weekend, after they begin to get bored with their husbands but still don't want to divorce them."
> "You don't mean that," she said, slowly.
> "But I do.
> You're not in love with me. You think you are because I ran out on you. And it should have been the other way around. So you're kind of frantic." (Petry 1999, 316)

Link's listing of stevedores, prizefighters, and muscled black men touches upon the inexorable and inescapable Mandingo stereotype embraced by the Super, Smith, and Johnson, as discussed in the previous chapter. As a black man, Link is regarded hypermasculine by Camilo, an example of how he is marginalized through the process of racializing his gender and sexuality. The intersection of these categories' dynamic and interactive nature limits his masculine potential. Link comes to the realization that Camilo is no different from other white people looking upon black men in terms of "spectragraphia," a term coined by Maurice O. Wallace. Wallace (2002, 30) argues that white people view black men according to frames they have long created visually according to their "socially conditioned eye". The white racialists alternate between different oppressive stereotypical images in viewing black men to feel more positive about themselves. Camilo is puzzled by the idea of seeing her "spectragraphic" inclinations of Link are not as fixed and static as she expects them to be. Link surpasses her limited racial fetishized objectification of his gender by his persistent rejection of performing certain expected roles. Instead, he performs "an aggressive improvisation on the very stereotype that objectifies and restricts his subjective possibilities" (Wallace 2002, 160). He consistently refutes the stereotypes through his eloquent and articulate lingual expression throughout his affair with Camilo.

Link differs from the black male characters in Petry's protest fiction as he resists the dangers of reducing to a type. He instead clings to his individuality by embracing a positive attitude towards his race and rejecting the social stigmatizations of his gender. Unlike the black men in *The Street*, Link does not turn to the privileges of his gender to assert his masculinity. This infers that he is aware that his gender and race work intersectionally in legitimizing his inferior status in relation to Camilo. Submitting to the stereotypes around his gender lessens his chances of

combating racialization. Patriarchy does not function the same way for him because of his color as it does for white men. Link's masculinity is not privileged because it is racialized. Hence, Link is an example of an African American man in Petry's work who does not abide by the binary of black vs. white. He breaks up this binary opposition as he does not define his masculinity in relation to white models and, instead, looks up to black models in his immediate surrounding.

Link's masculinity is further challenged when his interracial love relationship becomes a public issue. This relationship destabilizes other people's – including Camilo and her husband's – sense of themselves and reveals their most delicate insecurities. To react against the destabilization of their already fragile identities, they decide to resist the affronts of this relation and determine it. Consequently, Link enters a new matrix where his masculinity is endangered in relation to hegemonic masculinity. Unable to stand the discomfort of being rejected by a black man, Camilo accuses him of rape at the same spot they first met. After she is pushed away by Link, she screams and hits him, to which he reacts similarly. They catch the attention of two police officers and Jubine, a white photographer and Link's friend. He is known to be hunting for any incident in The Narrows. Jubine takes a picture of their heated and agitated quarrel. "He rumpled the mongrel tabloid newspaper between his hands, tossed it out of the car window. Jubine had tried the case, handed in a verdict, with his goddamn pictures. He'd made the Treadway girl look like a whore and made the nigger look like Apollo" (Petry 1999, 365). What triggers more anger in the white people when seeing the tabloid, particularly Camilo's husband and mother, is how the photo is taken: Link is idealized as the handsome Greek Apollo, and Camilo is shamed as a prostitute. Camilo's husband, Captain Sheffield, suffers from a psychological breakdown when he finds out about his wife's affair with a black man. With Malcolm Powther's help, the Treadway's black butler, Camilo's husband manages to abduct Link and accuses him of raping his wife. While still in handcuffs and having a gun directed to his face, Link refutes the accusation and states: "We were in love," he said, casually, conversationally" (Petry 1999, 406). Shortly after, he shoots Link four times with a forty-five. It never occurs to Captain Sheffield that his wife could have an affair with a black man, and he blindly believes in her narrative of rape. The power of stereotypes paves the way for the credibility of Camilo's story. However, the irony in this situation is that Link subverts the usual miscegenation taboo by conducting a sexual relationship with a white woman's full consent. He does not conform to white norms and subverts the myth of black men as rapists.

Link contests Captain Sheffield's hegemonic masculinity as well. Though the latter is superior to him in terms of race, gender, and class, Link's affair with his wife implies his inability to meet his wife's sexual needs. Link does transcend the stereotype of a black brute as Camilo and her husband fail to view him according to their "spectragraphic" constructs. Instead, he questions the integrity of their values and family ties. Instead of their expectations that he might be showing any tendency towards being aggressive or physically threatening, Link acts with a collected demeanor and balance. In a rather casual and sympathetic way, he addresses Camilo's husband and tells him, "why don't you keep your wife home – at midnight? … Captain Sheffield?" (Petry 1999, 402). Overall, Link poses a challenge to the very racial order that condemns any interracial bond and accentuates the failure of white people to frame him in certain stereotypes. Michael Barry suggests that "Link is inconsistent with white people's expectations, a black man with pride, too beautiful to live, able to look with pity on a cuckolded husband. He is sacrificed by those in power in order that they might suit their own convenience" (1999, 150).

In this respect, he is brutalized for his black masculinity because he dares to enact his sense of autonomy and racial pride in the presence of a white man of hegemonic masculinity. Since Captain Sheffield cannot bear being cuckolded by a black man, he is not satisfied with murdering him only. Robyn Wiegman argues that white men find the notion that the black male is of a higher sexual aptitude and that he is more desirable than they are unbearable (Wiegman 1995, 82). By referring to the "rope," after Camilo's husband shoots Link, Petry portrays the scenario of lynching metaphorically: "There was a body on the floor of the car in the back, a body wrapped up in a thin worn rug, tied with heavy rope" (Petry 1999, 413). Elaborating such a theme with an extended metaphor, Petry goes beyond the bitter reality of such criminal commitment and signifies its social and psychological motives. The castrated body of the black male symbolizes a site of normality and the punishment of forbidden desires and taboos. It does not only prevent the threat represented by black men for the white. The over-determination of white men to apply this kind of punishment indicates their troubled psychology, blinded by the scenarios of black men sleeping with their wives.

Camilo's husband is not the only version of white masculinity Link struggles against in his life. As a 12-year-old boy, Link works in the house of the Valkills and is molested by Mr. Valkill, a white pervert. Through his experience of molestation, Link becomes conscious that his blackness is seen as related to erotic fetishization by the white and that his masculinity is a subject

of racist prediction in their eyes. When Link is asked to wear a Japanese Kimono for a tea party, Mr. Valkill's hidden instincts are revealed firstly in language when he says, "how attractive a Japanese Kimono can be" (Petry 1999, 392). Then, when he tries to touch Link, Link flees and decides never to return. Link's refusal certifies his objection to the manipulation of white people. Tyler T Schmidt (2007,156) posits that "Link's flight from the Valkills can be read as a form of racial protest against the hegemonic domestication" of black men in the 1950s, and the image of Link wearing a Kimono is a reference to feminizing the potent black masculinities by the bohemian white perverts.

The homoeroticism in the character of Link takes a dangerous form since he is subservient in the act of perversion, which could have affected his sexuality for good. Being advised by Hod and Weak Knees always to protect himself, especially when surrounded by white men, Link resists this act of molestation. What Mr. Valkill does to Link is related to both the traditional stereotyping of black men and the danger of white men domesticizing black men. Link escapes both, but he remains vulnerable in some other ways. His struggle to legitimize his masculinity in the face of other white hegemonic masculinities is aggravated by his interracial affair with Camilo, and results in his brutal murder. The very forces that shape his masculinity are, at the same time, the core reason behind his catastrophe when faced with other forms of hegemonic masculinity.

In a broader sense, Link as an African American man in the 1950s is represented by Petry as being shaped by the intersecting force of the categories of race, gender, and class. The intersection of these categories renounces his autonomy and oppresses him fatally. Petry's portrayals of African American masculinities in *The Narrows* are more diverse – as studied in the following subsection – when other categories, such as ability, age, and sexuality, intersect with the already oppressing matrix of race, gender, and class.

4.2. (Un)tangling A Complex Matrix: Age, Ability, and Sexuality

African American men have always attempted to constitute their masculine identities in relation to American hegemonic masculinity ideals on a sociohistorical basis. As argued earlier in this dissertation, these black men take up themes of hegemonic masculinity and adjust them in their own contexts, usually ones of poverty. Analyses are conducted in this section by following Jeff Hearn's (2011) hypothesis that addressing the neglected intersectionalities can lead to undoing a hegemonic concept of masculinity. By going beyond the intersections of the three canonical categories in constructing African American masculinities, I argue that Malcolm Powther, Weak

Knees, and Howard Thomas, as examples of the elderly, differently-abled, and gay black male characters respectively, are more delicately deprived of the values of hegemonic masculinity. The categories of age, ability, and sexuality hinder their way to reworking patterns of masculine hegemony, on the one hand. They represent alternative black masculinities, constituted away from the sanctioned and oppressive white models, on the other. They add to Petry's depiction of nuanced and diverse representations of black masculinities as they are more human-like and everyday-like examples. They bridge the gap between embodying black men as either good or evil. By investigating the challenges these black male characters face in their pursuit of achieving their masculinities, their intricately complex and relatively sophisticated portrayals of black masculinities surpass the dichotomous dilemma of viewing them as only passively acquiescent or notoriously tough/masculine. In other words, they transcend the stereotypical depictions about black masculinities.

Malcolm Powther, referred to by Mal in his black community, is a short, svelte, dainty dresser and a soft-spoken black man in his fifties. He is the hardworking butler at the Treadway estate who rents the top floor of Abbie's house. Abbie holds him in great esteem as he is everything a black man should be. He is married to Mamie, a robust black woman interested in singing the blues and mother to his three children. Mamie does not represent a traditional wife and mother model as she is openly in an affair with Hod and her children are not exclusively the source of her happiness. When Mal does dare to confront Mamie about her infidelity, she says rather indifferently, "I can always go live somewhere else" (Petry 1999, 212). Mal alternates between the traditional roles of father and mother to his children: he is a provider and affectionate parent. He puts his three sons to sleep through fairy tales about blond princesses saved by princes "in disguise" who are "small in stature but quick in movement" (Petry 1999, 175). He rotates between the white and black worlds: he is extremely conservative with his white employers and complies with Mamie, whom he regards as the source of his happiness and what makes his life bearable.

The intersection of Mal's blackness, fluid parenting roles, and domestic servile position diminishes his prospects of claiming assertive masculinity. Like William in "In Darkness and Confusion," Mal struggles to proclaim his masculinity in both private and public spheres. He fails as a patriarch; his wife domesticates him, and he is overpowered at work as a butler. However, Mamie is different from Pink in the sense that she is desired by other men of younger ages and has a more appealing physique. Thus, Mal's pursuit of securing his masculinity aggravates when his

age and looks are accentuated in relation to other men, particularly those of a younger age and appealing body.

Mal feels incomplete and frustrated about his masculine vigor and sturdiness when he thinks of losing Mamie to men with superior qualities. He ponders:

> Link Williams. Mrs. Crunch's nephew, or whatever he was, the tall arrogant young man who did not look like Bill Hod but resembled him, the way he held his head, the way he talked, even the eyes.
> Bill Hod was no threat. At least he told himself that all the time; he told himself over and over again, as he hurried home on his days off, that Bill Hod would never encumber himself by permanently annexing a woman, not even Mamie Powther. And the closer he got to the house, the more convinced he became that Mamie had now, finally, gone off with Hod. But she hadn't. And then he would be certain that she never would, and the knowledge would last about a week or ten days and then he would begin to wonder and to doubt, and hurry home to make certain. But Link Williams, Mamie— […]
> Link Williams belonged to the Copper breed, so did Hod. You could tell by looking at them, by listening to them, that they weren't to be trusted, that no woman was safe around them, not really. Mamie. For instance, it wouldn't have been safe to leave Mamie around Old Copper. What the dickens was he thinking about anyway, mind all in a jumble. (Petry 1999, 169–70)

Based on this, Mal classifies himself as someone who neither belongs to the group of white masculinity, exemplified in Old Copper, his white employer, nor to the group of black masculinities. The latter enjoys the perks of hegemony to an extent based on their looks, conspicuous in Hod, and, most importantly, based on age epitomized in Link Williams. He pinpoints Link as the most untrustworthy around his wife as he is the youngest among the three mentioned masculinities. The presence of Link in the same house or around his wife makes him more aware of his age, increasing his anxiety.

In "Men Who Cry in Their Sleep: Aging Male Hysteria in Martin Amis's *London Stories*," Lynne Segal posits "so gendered is the stigma associated with old age that it creates distinct problems for men, making them feel feminized, simply because they are old […] aging turns men into women" (2017, 79). Accordingly, Mal is frightened by growing old, and this fear is associated with his loss of manliness. He feels more fragile and less masculine due to his waning physical potency and deteriorating virility. Segal further argues:

> Of course men, like women, have never possessed any authentic inviolability, but in their youth it is perhaps easier for some to imagine themselves invulnerable, or at the very least, it is easier for them to perform in the world as though this is the case. The problem with this strategy, however, is that sooner rather than later, the realities of men's obvious vulnerability become undeniable. (Segal 2017, 86)

Mal becomes aware of his vulnerable masculinity in relation to Link, who is younger and in better shape. His vulnerability is inevitable with having a young and handsome black man around. He places Link and Hod on the same level of power as Old Copper – the white upper-class estate owner. Link and Hod's age and look qualify them to compete with white hegemonic masculinity to court a woman like Mamie. According to Mal, their rather conspicuous manliness also makes the three men alike. His mind is "all in a jumble" as he thinks of his vulnerable masculine incompetence in relation to these men. His confusion stems from his overconcern about comparing himself to other men, and he is almost hysterical about how unequal the comparison is. The reference to Old Copper is a significant point too. Ironically, both are old but experience masculine power differently. Old Copper's class affiliation and whiteness guarantee his hegemony on several levels. While Mal's growing age, class status, racial inferiority, and looks deprive him of any hegemony on all levels. In addition, this reference implies that Mal looks up to him as a model of masculinity.

Another reason for Mal's vulnerability in parallel to men of younger ages and more attractive looks is his repressed desire for them. One night he finds Hod in his house after he returns from work. He describes him as a man "put together like a statue, no fat on him anywhere, tall, broad of shoulder, narrow of waist, a man with a quick graceful body and a face like the face of one of the early popes, in a small dark oil painting that hung in Old Copper's library" (Petry 1999, 202). Hod's statue-like body points out Mal's little and frail body and increases his sense of insecurity. In addition, the way he refers to specific details in Hod's appearance, such as the broadness of his shoulders and the gracefulness of his waist, implies Mal's admiration of him. There are other references in the novel, such as the way he takes pleasure in looking at and caressing Mamie's clothes or folding her handkerchiefs in specific patterns, "slowly, carefully, force of habit making him square them up, line them up, one on top of the other" (Petry 1999, 170). Mal's over-fastidiousness and admiration for Hod's physique do not necessarily imply he has homosexual proclivities. The point here is to stress how he is a relatively complex example of African American masculinities and is a manifold combination of characteristics that are not classified traditionally as masculine. He practices the social role as of a nurturing mother with his children and is a self-indulgent dandy who dresses pedantically and over-fastidiously. His role in the novel is vital as it highlights how Petry aims to outdo the expected categorizations of black male characters. Mal performs multiple roles; he is a loyal and obedient servant to the whites, a

loving and caring father of three, cuckolded husband who does not do anything about it, and, lastly, becomes a kidnapper who collaborates against the members of his race.

The matrix that shapes aging black masculinities from a lower class gets more complex when disability manifests itself as the most prominent. An example of this in Petry's novel is "a colored man named Weak Knees, who walked as though he were drunk, and did the cooking in The Last Chance" (Petry 1999, 15). Other characters focus on the slow and unsteady manner this man walks due to his crooked legs. He has a "high-pitched" voice with a "note of reverence in it" (Petry 1999, 84). On top of all, he is a traumatized man who talks to an imaginary friend in severe agitation moments. He "believes he killed his friend. It happened years ago in Washington. They were wrestling with each other, just for the fun of it, and Eddie, who was Weak Knees' best friend, fell and struck his head, and died" (Petry 1999, 107).

To overcome his guilt and disability, Weak Knees develops a positive attitude about his many misfortunes and finds sanctuary in his job as a cook and in taking care of other members of his black community. Steve Robertson, Lee Monaghan, and Kris Southby argue that disability makes one's sense of masculinity unstable. They write:

> […] masculinity and disability are said to exist in a state of conflict: the elements of strength, stamina, authority and potency associated with hegemonic masculinity practices are considered antithetical to the experiences and representations of men with impairments […] Within Western culture, the Cartesian split between (male) mind and (female) body reinforces a view that men's bodies are expected to (naturally) function well, without overt attention, and are therefore simultaneously dissociated from their identity whilst being an integral part of it. The gender identity options open to men with impairments are seemingly left as 'failed', 'spoiled' or in need of reformulation. (Robertson et. al 2020, 154)

Weak Knees fails to claim a traditional form of masculinity. This failure is the outcome of the intersection of his race with his economic situation and is augmented by his physical impairment. His body does not function well as his knees are weak – the literal meaning of his tag name. However, he possesses a prudent mindset, shown in how he reformulates his masculinity in non-hegemonic patterns. He does not define his masculinity in terms of domination and power and departs from socially conventional norms. The high-pitched crackling sound of his laughter, revered demeanor, passionate dedication to cooking, savoring dishes, and decision to raise Link with the tough Hod are a range of roles that diverge from the persistent representations of black masculinities as aggressive, not communal, and anti-familial. He works as an alternative to these

masculinities as he plays the role of a nurturing parent, performs non-violent masculinity, and, similarly to Mal, entails more socially feminine traits.

The reformulation of Weak Knees' masculinity takes positive dimensions in his way of stressing the healing potential of communal love. At a time when the nuclear family is the norm in postwar US society, Weak Kneed and Hod decide to casually adopt Link and construct a form of family based on racial affiliation and shared history rather than kinship. This family bond works as a redemptive site for the young boy, and it also provides healing potential for Weak Knees. By adopting Link, he fathers a son that he might not be able to conceive biologically, and it recompenses for his lack of masculine virility. Callahan argues that Hod and Weak Knees' inclination to "protect a vulnerable child and, in the process, creating enduring familial bonds with him contrasts starkly to negative stereotypes of dysfunctional black families that circulated at the time" (2018,110). This act of protection provides a counterimage of black men as unaffectionate and inconsiderate fathers in black families. Weak Knees sets an example of a black man who, despite his stereotypical feminine characteristics and disability, is capable of communicating love and establishing potent bonds with his fellow black men. Addison Gayle (1975, 197) gives credit to the way "Petry paved the way for future black writers […] to examine the relationship between black man and black man, instead of those that primarily concern men and society". In this respect, Petry portrays a black man who is resilient in combatting the oppressing matrix of his masculinity and chooses to build ties with black men in his instant surrounding instead of looking up to other white models of masculinity in society.

Weak Knees' willingness to co-parent Link with Hod implicates his reconciliation with the idea of taking a role that is not traditionally masculine. Hillary Holladay regards Hod as a "powerful father figure" and Weak Knees as a "motherly figure" for Link (1996, 84). In contrast to the black male characters of Petry's protest fiction, Weak Knees refuses to assimilate with the predominant white ideology as a source for empowering black men. He relies on preserving racial identity even if it assumes less traditional masculine standards. This is apparent in his quest to dismantle black people's reverence for white people as he narrates this story to Link:

> "Name-a-God, Sonny, lissen to this. Here's a bank teller, just a ordinary smart white boy, free of course 'cause he's white so he done stole hisself thirty-five hunnerd dollars. Done fixed himself so he ain't goin' to be able to cuddle any little gals and he's goin' to have to eat that slop they throw at 'em in jailhouses for the rest of his natural—all for thirty-five hunnerd dollars. White folks sure is smart. Tee-hee-hee." The kitchen was filled with his highpitched cackling laugh. Link had never heard white people laughed at before and it made him uncomfortable at first. (Petry 1999, 144).

He instills views of racial pride in Link and helps him not to look up to white masculine ideals. To survive his hostile circumstances, Link finds a model of masculinity in Weak Kneed, which is differently-abled in the sense that it contrasts with the typically violent and domineering models.

Weak Knees paves the way for a new discourse on African American masculinities based on alternative race and community togetherness assessments. An intersection of his physical disability with his race, class, and gender completely dispossesses him of hegemonic masculinity. Nonetheless, Weak Knees radicalizes the prevalent tenets associating blackness with subordination in the ways he draws his power from blackness and teaches Link to follow suit. He becomes an example of black men who display an exceptional ability to dismantle the stigmas around the black community, family, and men. It can be inferred that Petry suggests that if other black men stop embracing forms of masculinities based on aggression and toughness, they stand a better chance to redress their fears and insecurities in relation to other men. Like Weak Knees, they can find new ways to relate to them, especially those in their immediate milieu.

The third neglected and intricate intersectional category deterring black masculinities' claim to hegemony is sexuality. Petry depicts Howard Thomas as a gay black man in *The Narrows* to outline the unwavering challenges a man has to face when his sexuality intersects with other categories. Michael Kimmel argues in "Masculinity as Homophobia: Fear, Shame, and Silence in the Construction of Gender Identity" that gay men have been represented as "sexually insatiable" in the American white culture and that "homophobia is intimately interwoven with both sexism and racism" (1997, 216–17). Hence, Howard is observed by other characters as less than masculine due to the intersection of sexist and racist ideologies in US society. Following Connell's viewpoint on masculinities as being multiple and complex, Rusty Barrett (2020, 244) posits that these masculinities "originally presumed a fairly uniform hegemonic form of masculinity that was hierarchically positioned above various other forms of masculinity. Given the centrality of heterosexuality to normative understandings of masculinity, gay male masculinities naturally fell on the lowest rung of the masculinity hierarchy". Hierarchical positions are decided based on a man's performance of heteronormative masculinity, presumably white, middle-class, and straight. Howard is dismissed as a man with no access to hegemony and is placed below other hegemonic forms of masculinity.

Howards works as an assistant for Frances Jackson, Abbie's close friend, in a mortuary. Abbie meets Howard when Frances asks her to replace her in taking charge of a funeral arrangement. Abbie describes him as follows:

> Looking at him now, as he hovered in the doorway, she thought he was built like a eunuch, or what she thought a eunuch would be built like, very tall, very fat, soft fat, too broad across the hips, and he had a waddling kind of walk. […]
> The skin on his face was like a baby's skin, a kind of bloom on it. Amazing skin. A peculiar color. Almost the exact color of the fuzzy redbrown hair, not much of the hair left, he was getting bald, hairline receding, so that seen close to, without a hat, and she had never seen him hatless before, he appeared to have a high domeshaped forehead, a forehead that just never ended. And he had a moustache, a feather of a moustache, which seemed to have just taken rest, for a moment, over what in a woman would have been an incredibly pretty mouth. Baby's skin. Woman's mouth. (Petry 1999, 224–25)

Abbie discharges Howard from the socially given category of men and labels him as gender neuter. This assumption on her behalf is based on his mannerism, behavior, and appearance. For Abbie, masculinity is connected to a rough physique and acting in specific gendered codes. His soft skin and woman-like mouth strike her. This is a traditional way of viewing men from a hegemonic perspective of masculinities. Abbie, the epitome of a bourgeoisie black woman embracing white values, distinguishes Howard as an emasculated man. She even bullies him openly by calling him "Mrs. Thomas," an act she unconcernedly refers to as "a slip of the tongue" (Petry 1999, 232) and to which Howard reacts indifferently.

Abbie's homophobic attitude is shared by Frances as well, who denotes Howard as a "fool" with unusual decisions and unpredicted actions:

> Abbie said, "Your assistant, Howard Thomas, seems quite self-assured. Very capable."
> "Howard's a fool. He's half educated. And there's no bigger fool in the civilized world than a half educated colored man. He was going to be a lawyer and he ended up an undertaker. From law court to mortuary is a long jump. Anyway, he drinks brandy to keep from thinking too much about how and why he made the jump. I'm always afraid he'll show up at a funeral so far gone in drink that he'll do something outrageous."
> "Is he married?"
> "Married!" Frances snorted. "Good heavens, no! He doesn't like women. (Petry 1999, 237)

According to Frances's assimilationist ideals, Howard is the least rational black man in a civilized world where black people are respected in terms of their educational qualifications and professional credentials. Her exaggeration in expressing her disapproval of his decision to leave the law firm is connected to the repulsive notions she holds against him on racist and sexist levels. She considers him an affront to the race for not securing a decent profession and is banished from

the realm of real men as he is not interested in women. Howard's sexual orientation remains ambiguous in the novel, but the indications showcase him as a man who fails to meet the criteria of heterosexuality. Frances' reference to his drinking problem indicates the difficulties he must have faced/been facing in his hostile society. Abbie's bullying of him implies that it could have been the same reason that forced him to make the "jump" from being a lawyer to an "undertaker". He has grown a sense of indifference towards the homophobic remarks as he must have been exposed to much worse ones from other white people at college. He has also developed a chronic drinking problem as a self-defense mechanism: it is his strategy to ease his pain and control his anger, described as "outrageous". Howard is a frustrated black man whose sexuality intersects with other factors. He is dismissed as less masculine because he is not heterosexual. The reader does not get much insight into Howard's proclivities and aspirations – he appears in a short episode in the novel. However, this short episode adds extra volatility to Petry's representations of African American men.

Analyzing these three black male characters from an intersectional perspective and regarding their access to hegemony implies they are the most vulnerable. They cannot maintain any level of power because of an intersection of their race with ability, age, and sexuality. The overlap of these categories leads Mal towards vengeance: he sells off Link to white people. It leads Weak Knees to subvert the white or the patriarchal ideals of hegemony and move towards reconciling with traditionally less masculine traits. However, this overlap leaves Thomas the most helpless as he is positioned on the lowest rung of the hierarchy in his society. The point, however, behind depicting such a variety of black men is that Petry is unpredictable in crossing boundaries and dealing with issues with a sharp vision and pioneering initiative. Mal, Weak Knees, and Howard are examples of African American men of different ages, abilities, looks, and sexualities. They are men whose masculinities are contingent: continuously shaped and reshaped by the intersectional power of their race, gender, and other categories based on certain contexts. They are multiple, unsettled, and even fluid, as in the case of Mal and Weak Knees, who switch between different masculine and feminine roles. These characters transcend the overshadowing notion that white hegemonic masculinity is the solitary role model for black male subjectivity as Petry delineates the totality of black men's lives in relation to family, community, and other black men, which is a step towards refining the representations of African American masculinities. Reading this diverse and multiple displays of masculine roles and positions leads to a better appreciation of

Petry's understated feminism. She delves into the prospects of an intersection of ability, age, and sexuality in accordance with black men's already oppressive matrix of race, gender, and class. Hence, Petry lays bare the raced, gendered, and sexualized experience of African American masculinities in the racially prejudiced and patriarchal mid-twentieth century American society.

This chapter concludes that Petry's portrayals of African American masculinities in *The Narrows* transcend the stereotypical representations of black male characters depicted in her other texts, overshadowed by the tenets of protest fiction. *The Narrows* exemplifies Petry's comprehensive and modernist aesthetics in depicting black male characters who are politically progressive and find constructive alternatives to combat the interconnected effect of their race and gender, aggravated by other categories. An intersectional reading method modeled in a two-step strategy reveals the progressive aspects of Petry's black male characters. It helps to read Link Williams as a black man who follows a racial agenda, raising his awareness about fighting the determined implications of black men's marginalization. He embodies a positive version of black masculinities, defined away from confining stereotypes. The investigation of the neglected intersectionalities in the novel reveals that Mal, Weak Knees, and Howard contribute to the diversity of African American masculinities and exemplify more human-like and everyday-like black men, filling the gap between depicting black men in a good vs. evil binary. Besides the unprecedented images of black men in *The Narrows*, Petry's short fiction – discussed in the next chapter – adds new dimensions to Petry's demonstrations of African American masculinities. The following chapter is an additional intervention to pinpoint Petry's subversive aesthetics: her attempts to reform black masculine rage and her reliance on portraying positive African American masculinities vis-à-vis folk materials and (jazz) music.

Chapter 5. Reforming Black Rage in *Miss Muriel and Other Stories*

Miss Muriel and Other Stories is a collection of short stories by Ann Petry which has been published in 1971, 1999, and, most recently, in 2017 by Northwestern University Press. Despite the success of the collection and its frequent publishing, it has been more neglected than her novels. Gladys J. Washington writes in his study "A World Made Cunningly: A Closer Look at Ann Petry's Short Fiction" that "of the few critics who treated Miss Petry's fiction, almost none have given more than a brief consideration to the short stories" (1986, 16). However, there has been an increasing interest in her short stories by African American literature students and critics alike, though not a considerable one yet. A Yemisi Jimoh considers Petry "the second black woman to publish a collection of short stories" after Alice Dunbar's *The Goodness of St. Rocque and Other Stories* in 1899 (Jimoh 2002). Jamilah Lemieux considers the collection "as a painstakingly look at African American life since 1940s" and that Petry "creates a loosely interwoven world of Black folks striving to make the best of often devastating circumstances" (2017, ix). Hence, studying selected short stories by Petry leads to exploring a more comprehensive viewpoint about her constructions of black masculine identities and insightful evaluation of her writing tradition. The short stories alternate between Petry's early attempts with protest fiction and her divergent aesthetics of modernist forms. Thus, they follow the main line of argumentation in this dissertation. The deterministic and naturalistic elements of the protest overshadow the first two short stories. While the last two are in the tradition of Harlem Renaissance black fictionists.

The intersection of racism, poverty, and white (police) brutality in the black male protagonists of Petry's short stories results in what Price M. Cobbs and William H. Grier termed "black rage" in their 1968 book, *Black Rage (2000, xvi).* Critics from multidisciplinary fields have discussed it as a defense mechanism formed from a black man's perception of his ill-fated condition. Paul Harris defines it as "a legal strategy which exposes environmental hardships to explain why a person commits a crime" (2001, 34). Black rage lies at the heart of the protest fiction framework and is the threshold of the failure of its characters in going beyond the stereotypical depictions of black people. Accordingly, even a pacifist and moderate black person may develop disparate levels of rage under certain circumstances. Lutie Johnson in *The Street* lets her black rage out desperately to combat the intersectional impairment of racial injustice and sexual oppression.

This chapter complements how Petry refines the portrayals of African American men in her writings. In her short fiction, I juxtapose four black male protagonists to deliberate how they endure the inexorability of violence in their lives. I underline Petry's reforming of rage in black men by comparing those who translate it into violence to those who find alternatives to letting it out. The chapter divides black male characters into two categories. The first category includes Johnson, in "Like a Winding Sheet," and William Jones, in "In Darkness and Confusion," who practice violence as a reaction to their piled-up rage. While the second category comprises pacifist black men: Kid Jones in "Solo on the Drums" transforms his rage into a constructive medium, and Samuel Layen in "The New Mirror" represents a gentle black man. The chapter develops gradually from the most violent black male characters to the least/non-violent ones.

To problematize these black male characters' practice of black rage, I look into their masculinities in an intersected manner. These characters are caught in marginalized to subordinate masculine positions, depending on specific contexts of representation. Their race is identified as a marker of their masculine marginalization, explained in terms of its intersection with gender, class, age, and looks. Other systems of discrimination and oppression are disclosed by asking the other question. I regard Johnson in "Like a Winding Sheet," and William Jones, in "In Darkness and Confusion," as black men who harbor violence and practice it as a self-defense mechanism to conceal their feelings of masculine marginalization in the first section. They turn to violence after they fail to accomplish the socially expected male roles of fatherhood, providing, and protection. They vary in their acts of concealing their marginalization and practice of violence. Yet, they face the inevitability of violence as the only option to let out their rage toward their marginalized position. The second section foregrounds original aspects to Petry's portrayals of African American masculinities regarding their middle-class affiliation and privilege in "Solo on the Drums" and "The New Mirror". In addition, it emphasizes Petry's reliance on the traditions of African oral traditions and music which links Petry's project of fiction writing to Harlem Renaissance aesthetics.

5.1. From Moderation to Rage: Violent Black Men in "Like a Winding Sheet" and "In Darkness and Confusion"

This section embarks on providing intersectional analyses of two black male characters in Petry's "Like a Winding Sheet" and "In Darkness and Confusion," anguished between their potential as humans and marginalization as masculinities. I argue that despite the subtle interplay of

moderation and rage in these characters, they achieve a sense of assumed self-realization as they perform their masculine angst in the most unpredictable violent ways. “Like a Winding Sheet” was published in 1945 and awarded Petry the Houghton Mifflin Literary Scholarship that funded her writing of *The Street*. It has been the most anthologized piece by Petry and is included in *Black Writers of America: A Comprehensive Anthology* edited by Richard Barksdale and Keneth Kinnamon (1972) – a collection that made the way for subsequent anthologies of African American literature.

Johnson’s life is introduced in one day, which starts with his failed attempt to “get up before Mae did and surprise her by fixing breakfast” due to his exhaustion (Petry 2017, 198), and ends with his denouncement of beating her brutally due to his frustration in “Like a Winding Sheet”. The story is a dramatization of unbridled violence as the subtotal of the prejudiced humiliations of racial discrimination added to the demoralizing job environments. Johnson transfers his failure to access the patriarchal purgatives naturally granted to white men in his society into deadly violence spilled over his wife. Petry portrays him as a conflicted black man torn between two modes of masculinities: the moderate and nurturing husband and the strictly domineering patriarch. Reading his masculinity intersectionally reveals how his black race is an explicit element of his psychological rift. When it intersects with his indecisive gender positions, it results in an implicit force that divides his male subjectivity between two poles. As he is looked down upon in stereotypical frames and economically exploited, he is pushed to turn his moderation into a black rage as a compensatory reaction. The transformation in his character from a caring and understanding black man to a dominant and violent one takes place as a piling-up process throughout the narrative.

At the beginning of the short story, there are several indications that Johnson and Mae’s day is not ordinary. While in bed, Johnson exchanges affectionate words and looks with his wife. The latter replies to his remark that “it’s a nice morning,” with “[y]ou mean afternoon, don’t ya?” Since they both work night shifts in industrial plants, they sleep after sunrise and wake up around 4:00 PM. Mae then describes the way he is covered in sheets with giggling, “[l]ooks like a winding sheet […] A shroud”. A comment that makes Johnson involuntarily look at the contrast between the color of “his arms silhouetted against the white of the sheet” (Petry 2017, 199). The contrast between his blackness and the whiteness of the sheets is striking and symbolic. He and his wife are aware of their blackness as a state of inferiority in a white-dominated world. The metaphor of

the shroud indicates the futility of Johnson's life and lack of prospects. He feels he is entangled in a sheet that keeps reminding him of his limited motivation for a better life and, thus, freeing himself from the sheet and getting ready for work after his wife's urging reminders that he has been late three times the week before. Mae checks the calendar to find out that it is Friday, the thirteenth. She instantly has a premonition while she and her husband are in the corridor and about to leave the house. Petry uses the first part of this couple's day as a foreshadowing for the unpleasant events that lurk in the rest of the day in both the metaphor of the winding sheet and Mae's superstitious belief that something bad is going to happen to them.

Johnson arrives at work late again because he spends "fifteen minutes arguing before he could convince her she ought to go to work just the same. He had to talk persuasively, urging her gently, and it took time. But he couldn't bring himself to talk to her roughly or threaten to strike her like a lot of men might have done. He wasn't made that way" (Petry 2017, 200). Petry highlights the considerate and gentle part of Johnson in the way he argues with his wife. He communicates patiently with Mae despite his ability to force her to change her mind. However, since he is not molded like those aggressive men, he will not consider it as an option to treat Mae. His moderation lessens after being exposed to the outer world in the second part of the day. He works in a factory where he has to "walk ten hours a night, pushing" a "cart" (Petry 2017, 201). It is hard physical labor, and his body grows wearier and feebler each night. The description of the strenuous work and the wretched workers of this plant in New York overshadows the enslavement of black people in the sharecropping system in the Southern plantations. Eva Tettenborn (2004, 157) argues that Johnson's "work reinscribes his social position that makes it painful for him to uphold the integrity of his body and soul". Johnson reflects on his demoralized will and emotional pain of racial subjugation as he desperately envisions more humane work environments for black workers.

In addition, his masculine anxiety intensifies as he is utterly disturbed by having a white woman boss, Mrs. Scott. His psychological rift exacerbates as he observes this woman as a direct threat to his gender as a man. This incident can be further elaborated with reference to the changing gender and workplace roles of the 1940s US consumer society. Kimmel argues that "separate spheres" helped to allow some men "to feel like men, both in homosocial workplace and when they returned to their homes" (2006, 35). In this respect, Johnson is an advocate of the idea of keeping the workplace masculinized and the home feminized and, by default, obeys "The Cult of

True Womanhood," which overpowers women in social spheres and grants him power based on the assumed biological power of his gender (Kimmel 2006, 39). Johnson defines his black masculinity in terms of his success as a provider, tested by his wife's equal share of work and provisions at home and his female boss's display of hierarchy and degradation at work.

Johnson's black masculinity is challenged in relation to his white female boss as she hegemonizes him in the way she observes his identity as an intersection of his race, defined in stereotypical frames, and his lower social rank bound to laborious work. Mrs. Scott is masculinized in terms of Johnson's reference to her by her family name and her parade of hegemony. The boundaries that draw the lines between the male vs. female gender power are somewhat distorted in this man vs. woman relation. In other words, Mrs. Scott represents white hegemony in men and women, limiting his possibility of practicing masculine power or control. Johnson indicates her authoritative voice, which "cut across the machine sounds – harsh, angry," calling him. She approaches him and reproaches him for being late. "And the niggers is the worse. I don't care what's wrong with your legs. You get in here on time. I'm sick of you niggers" (Petry 2017, 202). Her racist slur shoots a rush of blood to his head, telling her, "I ain't letting nobody call me a nigger" after he "stepped closer to her. His fists were drawn back in a thin line" (Petry 2017, 202). Out of intimidation, she steps back from him. As a white woman, she sees him as a dangerous black man whose impulses are unrestrained and unexpected.

After being humiliated by his boss, he feels exasperated insofar that his hands "had developed a separate life of their own which he had no control". He comforts himself with fantasies of beating her face with his hard fists, but "the only trouble was he couldn't hit a woman" (Petry 2017, 204). This last sentence becomes a refrain in his mind, reminding him to stay balanced. He is liable to violence but holds back from it as he abhors the idea of physically abusing a woman. Keith Clark draws a resemblance between Johnson and Jack Johnson; the latter was the first black heavyweight champion known for defeating white fighters and thus defeating white society. "Since dark-skinned Jack Johnson came to embody a quasi-white masculinity through sanctioned violence, wealth, and very public dalliances with scores of white women, perhaps the character Johnson unconsciously imagined a reinvigorated subjectivity through these same hypermasculine though ultimately debasing means" (Clark 2013, 66). I infer from Clark's comparison that Jonson entails one of the essential elements of the pervasive stereotype about black men: the Mandingo. As Jack Johnson came to be noted as the epitome of the Mandingo for the very reasons mentioned

by Clark, Johnson's incentive for beating Mrs. Scott represents the violence component of this stereotype. Johnson's fantasy of hitting his white boss is his solitary means by which he can avenge himself and verifies his domination over her. Mrs. Scott is a far-fetched medium where Johnson can spill over his black rage and perform his assumed white patriarchal domination. Consequently, rage piles up in him, and his body shows more reflexes of letting it out.

The last stop in his work is lining up before the paymaster to get his wage, another humiliating act he wishes he could avoid by receiving his money decently in an envelope. On his way home, he comes across a coffee shop where aperitive cups of coffee are served and decides to buy one before getting on the subway in Harlem. He asks for a coffee after a long wait in line. "The white girl looked past him, put her hands up to her head, and gently lifted her hair away from the back of her neck, tossing her head back a little. "No more coffee for a while," said she (Petry 2017, 206). The white girl refuses to sell him coffee only because he is a black man, and he is undoubtedly aware of it. His hands start to tingle again, and he forces himself to put them down, repeating his mantra, "he couldn't hit a woman". Finally, he gets on a crowded subway and is "bursting with pain and he told himself that it was due to anger-born energy that had piled up in him and not been used and so it had spread through him like poison – from his feet and legs all the way up to his head" (Petry 2017, 208). By the time he gets home, he is consumed with rage after being subjected to agonizing work stress, racial assaults, and public humiliation.

Johnson realizes his compassion has diminished and is too irritable to accept his wife's usual humorous remarks. After Mae asks him not to sit on her overall and invites him to eat, calling him "an old hungry nigger trying to act tough," he "sent his fist shooting straight for her face" and continues:

> There was the smacking sound of soft flesh being struck by a hard object and it wasn't until she screamed that he realized he had hit her in the mouth – so hard that the dark red lipstick had blurred and spread over her full lips, reaching up toward the tip of her nose, down toward her chin, out toward her cheeks.
>
> The knowledge that he had struck her speed through him slowly and he was appalled but he couldn't drag his hands away from her face. He kept striking her and he thought with horror that something inside him was holding him, binding him to this act, wrapping and twisting about him so that he had to continue it. He had lost all control over his hands. And he groped for a phrase, a word, something to describe what this thing was like that was happening to him and he thought it was like being enmeshed in a winding sheet – that was it – like a winding sheet. And even as the thought formed in his mind, his hands reached for her face again and yet again. (Petry 2017, 210)

In this gut-punching plot twist, Johnson, the moderate, is transformed into a wild and brutal abuser and feels perplexed about himself. It can be either of Mae's two remarks which trigger the furious rage inside him – calling him by the "N" word or describing him as an old man. Undoubtedly, the derogatory slur gets under his skin and rewinds the pressures of his day inside his mind. Being called old by his wife underpins another level of his insecure masculinity and aggravates his psychological dilemma to the extent that he erupts with a fury. Johnson feels he cannot assert his masculinity in the work/public sphere as his race intersects with his lower-class status, placing him on the lowest power grid. He feels as helpless in his private sphere as his age worsens his race and class intersection. As a result, he ends up violating the only kind and loving person in his life as his last frantic effort to alleviate his masculine marginalization.

Johnson's beating of Mae involves sexual implications as well. Using phrases like Mae's "soft flesh" and "struck by hard object" implies Johnson's impulse to dominate his wife sexually. This anticlimactic scene grows terrifying and disturbing as Johnson slowly realizes he is violating her fatally, and yet, goes on. His lack of a language to articulate his brutal act and the metonymic shifting of his violence into his hands suggest his perplexity about his ability to perform black rage. The multiple anxieties which cause his nervous breakdown keep hunting him throughout his day "like a winding sheet" igniting more violence every time he considers stopping. Petry's portrayal of this domestic abuse in a black family is controversial. Petry delves into the psychic of Johnson to thoroughly cover the unbowed frustrations leading him to a cul-de-sac. She invites the reader to evaluate this representation sympathetically. Read in parallel to the sexually driven men in *The Street*; Johnson contributes the complexity and completeness of the representations of African American masculinities in Petry's fiction. Petry covers black men's violent dimension and warns about its destructive consequences. Johnson remains restrained in the stereotypical characterizations of protest fiction. In other words, being sexually driven and violent are the two sides of the same coin. Like the Super and Smith, Johnson remains restrained in the stereotypical characterizations of protest fiction. The interrelated effect of his race with his gender, class and age on both personal and state levels tests his moderation to the maximum and transforms it to an unbridled rage. Black men direct their rage into other media, such as the white world, as in the case of Petry's subsequent analyzed short story.

George R. Adams considers "In Darkness and Confusion," published in 1947, as one "of the most noteworthy examples of sociology transformed into art" which "recreates the Harlem riot

of 1943" (1972, 54). As argued in chapter two, Petry's other works such as the earlier discussed short story and *The Street* are inspired by her journalistic coverage of the Harlemites' life conditions, pushed to the peripheries of New York city. These three texts are of a sociological background which make Petry's work most suited for a sociologically oriented intersectional analysis. Beverly A. Smith reiterates Adams' opinion about "In Darkness and Confusion," classifying it as a novella rather than a short story. She describes it as a "type of document that reflects the attitudes of Harlem's blacks before and, to some extent, during the riot in the midst of the Second World War" (Smith 2001, 3). Petry depicts this historical event thoroughly as it occurred while Petry was working as a journalist in Harlem. Her skills as a journalist are apparent in capturing this civil upheaval in minute detail. The actual riot "lasted for about twelve hours, cost six lives, and destroyed nearly two million dollars worth of property," triggered by a white cop gun firing a black soldier who tried to stop the cop from beating a black woman (Smith 2001, 16). Petry fictionalizes the incident as witnessed by her main black male character, William Jones. The first part of the riot is narrated through his perspectives and marks a turning point in his life. I analyze his characters in accordance with Petry's tropes of darkness and confusion in the course of two days as portrayed in the short story. Like Johnson, the narrative centers around William's transformation from moderate to violent masculinity. I argue that his acquisition of black rage serves as a resolution of his lack of perception about defining himself according to his racial affiliations and his impotence as a marginalized black masculinity.

William Jones embodies a series of roles in this short story. He is a devoted husband, affectionate father, blue-collar worker, and frequent daydreamer. He has been pushed to the limit in his everlasting combat against the darkening and confusing adversaries of racial injustice and economic inequality in the context of WWII US society. Like Johnson, his psychological struggle worsens when he finds himself failing in performing his many gender roles and, thus, maintaining his masculine prowess. William resides on the top-floor tenement on 125th street in Harlem with Pink, his wife, and Annie May, his niece-in-law. The way William describes the heaps of trash, the aimless wandering of black men and women, and the crowds of children on this street resonates with Lutie's reflection on 115th street. The prospects of William's family members for better life chances, like Lutie's, are squeezed in the dark, narrow, and dilapidated buildings in their black ghetto. William observes that there is not much life on this street, and even its trees are intimidating: "Even those were a source of danger, for at night shadowy, vague shapes emerged

from the street's darkness, lurking near the trees, dodging behind them. He had never been accosted by any of these disembodied figures, but the very stealth of their movements revealed a dishonest intent that frightened him" (Petry 2017, 260). The street's darkness is more of an abstract construct in William's mind. He dwells in darkness on both literal and metaphorical levels. On Saturday morning – the day before the riot – he feels surprisingly agitated by July's heat and the unknown density of his twenty-first-year son, drafted in Georgia. He concerns himself about his overweight wife, who has a heart problem, and the stairs are too steep and tiresome for her. He also worries about the eighteen-year-old Annie May's leaving jobs and late sneaking into the house every night. Finally, he condemns himself for failing to perform his role as a providing husband and father by securing a decent place for his family and stopping his son from joining the army.

His role as a husband and father are the leading causes behind the darkness in his life. As a husband, he feels inadequate in terms of his income and physique compared to his wife's earnings from a job at a white Navy family and heavily-built stature. William contributes to the domestic chores like Pink does to the earnings. Pink has the upper hand in decision-making as William never comes to understand why they adopted Annie May in the first place. His indecisiveness and gentle disposition become conspicuous when he tries to intimidate Annie May to stop coming back home late and settle into one job. William warns her that she "ain't too big to get … whipped" and in which she replies with a giggle "[y]ou and who else?" (Petry 2017, 256). Pink's reaction to her niece's remark is a roar of laughter which provokes anger in him, but all he does is bang the kitchen door behind him as he leaves. William's sense of inadequacy heightens when Annie May tells him in another quarrel, "I don't know why auntie Pink married a little runt like you for, anyhow" (Petry 2017, 271). It becomes clear that he is particularly insecure about any observation concerning his height and looks. He starts to torment himself, thinking: "What'd she have to say that for, anyway, he asked himself. Five feet wasn't so short for a man. He was taller than Pink, anyhow. Yet compared to Sam, he supposed he was a runt, for Sam had just kept on growing until he was six feet tall" (Petry 2017, 272). His insecurity stems from his worries about not being tall enough to control his family members and compete with his son. Pink's steady income, strong personality, and sturdy figure amplify William's role as a provider.

Pink is not the only woman who subdues him; the memory of his subjugation by two white women lingers in his mind which reflect on the intersected influence of his race and class on a government institution level. The first one is the inhuman and indifferent reaction of the nurse who

helped Pink deliver her late child. “You people have too many children anyway,” this is how the nurse condoles the grieving parents. “It’s too bad your eyes ain’t white, too” is all that William could say to her before walking out of the hospital. The second incident is with the school principal, who tells him that Annie May is “a slow learner” and that is why it is for her own good that she quit high school. William listens to her silently and feels enraged after he leaves the school. He blames himself for not being able to defend Annie May. “If he could only have found the words he could have explained that Annie May was bright as a dollar” (Petry 2017, 265). These two figures embody the everyday instances of bullying black people based on racism. They also embody the institutionalized racism in Harlem’s educational and medical systems. In such instances, Petry represents the confusion element in William’s characters as he feels bitterly disturbed by them but cannot articulate or analyze them. Like Johnson in “Like a Winding Sheet,” William feels frustrated and furious for not being able to refute the humiliation. Unlike Jonson, though, he cannot let his rage out in his female-dominated household. In this respect, he can be regarded as an antithesis of Johnson. His anger, thus, piles up and leaves him in darkness about his lack of access to (black) rage. William fails to live up to his society’s sanctioned paradigms of patriarchal masculinity to physically intimidate his niece, wife, and other white women.

William adopts white masculine models to define his male subjectivity and follows white ideals in relation to work. He, as a waged worker, lives in confusion. He works as a porter in a drugstore owned by a white druggist in Harlem. While wiping the drugstore’s floor with a mop, he gets fully and deeply engrossed in his thoughts about his son. He has not received any letter from him for a while, and there was nothing in the mailbox today before leaving for work. It saddens him that his son, born in New York, a high school graduate, a basketball star, and his last hope to climb the social ladder, is stationed at a military camp in the heart of the segregated Jim Crow South where lynching of black men is still prevalent. William’s fears about his son being drafted into the South are not only his manifestation of the black soldiers’ horrid condition there. “Although segregation followed black soldiers from the draft boards, to the battle fields, and even to the veterans’ hospitals, the worst effects of racism were felt in the Southern training camps where white military police and red-neck sheriffs used violence and intimidation to enforce Southern standards of race relations on blacks, many of them raised in the North” (Smith 2001, 7). He also recalls the great expectations he and his wife had for Sam who “wasn’t going to earn his living with a mop and a broom. He was going to earn it wearing a starched white collar and a shine

on his shoes and a crease in his pants" (Petry 2017, 258). Seeing the profit Mr. Yudkin, his employer, makes, he thinks, "maybe when the war was over Sam ought to study to be a druggist instead of a doctor or a lawyer" (Petry 2017, 263). Adams describes "William's introjection of white middle-class values in his plans for Sam" as one way by which Petry "subtly points out the unreality of William's vision by counterpointing to William's "white" illusions the Black reality which William is subconsciously aware of" (1972, 55).

William's confusion about the reality of the limitations of being black in a highly racist society and his rejection is apparent in his reaction to his hostile and prejudiced white boss. While Mr. Yudkin notices William's recurring distraction while working and addresses him as follows:

> The man who owned the store would say to him sharply, "Boy, what the hell's the matter with you? Can't you keep your mind on what you're doing? And he would go on washing windows, or mopping the floor or sweeping the sidewalk. But his thoughts, somehow, no matter what he was doing, drifted back to Sam. (Petry 2017, 259–60)

His passive stance to his boss's degradation reflects his developing a cold reaction towards the racial discrimination he has been subjected to daily. In addition, he somehow condoles himself by relying on his dreams for Sam as his way out of humiliation. William is entirely emasculated by his boss, who belittles him as a "boy". His black masculinity is brought down to the lowest levels of marginalization in relation to his white middle-class employer. Mr. Yudkin maintains his sense of hegemony over William based on the latter's inaccessibility to power and resources. In this short story, approaching discrimination against him as a black male character intersectionally leads to perceiving how the racism directed against him is stereotypically gendered and historically significant. The gendered aspect of racism directed against William is evident in his being dismissed as a boy. According to Kimmel, manhood as a term "was synonymous with adulthood. Just as black slaves were "boys" as one strategy to make them "infantilized and thus emasculated" (Kimmel 2006, 14). Petry brings the plantations of the old South to the modern North to reflect on the different forms of racial injustice throughout US history: slavery until the late nineteenth century and disfranchisement in the 1940s. William's many passive attributes and pacifist stance associate his image with stereotypes like Uncle Tom in Mr. Yudkin's mind. His blackness is defined based on his gender, normally viewed in stereotypical frames, and his lower class which regulates his prerogative to power.

Being racialized and economically exploited, William is pushed to perform his gender as a reactionary category to make up for his lack of race recognition and economic payoff. However,

Pink does not allow him to let out his violence and dominates him in different ways. After his long and tiresome day at work, he decides to go to the barbershop to get his hair cut and get distracted. The men have had a special bond with barbershops as a homosocial space where they can enact their gender and express themselves. “Traditionally, it has functioned as an unmonitored venue where they can verbally enact an unfettered masculinity, holding forth in subjects from sports to war to women” (Clark 2013, 193). The liveliness of the place and the men’s chatter juxtaposes with William’s work’s stifling atmosphere. It is the reason William and other black men abhor jobs as bell hooks refers to as “less desirable” and that “performing jobs society deemed menial with bosses and supervisors harassing and persecuting them was not fulfilling” (1992, 93–4). In the barbershop, William feels free from the restraints of his tedious job and the domestication of his wife. He starts getting engaged in talks with other customers. He avoids the violent discussions as “he knew he would be violent, and he always avoided those discussions because he didn’t like violence” (Petry 2017, 266). He enjoys the peace of mind he wished for until he meets Scummy, a black soldier in the South, there. Scummy informs him that Sam,

> “got shot by a white PM. Because he wouldn’t go to the nigger end of a bus. He had a bullet put through his guts. He took the MP’s gun away from him and shot the bastard in the shoulder.” He put the newspaper down and started toward the door; when he it he turned around. “They court-martialed him,” he said softly. “He got twenty years at hard labor. The notice was posted in the camp the day I left.” Then he walked out of the shop. He didn’t look back. (Petry 2017, 268).

William’s fears about the South become a dreadful reality, and his ideal dream for his son cannot motivate him anymore. Sam’s being racially segregated in the South, shot and detained, is a form of state violence directed against black people. William experiences different forms of violence: he is violated by white people in his daily life and by the government, whom he holds responsible for his son’s misfortune. The state violence is more subtle and oppressive than the first form and increases William’s confusion as his helplessness increases. He struggles with telling Pink of this misfortune, which is why he pretends to be asleep in bed when she arrives late from work. He lies in darkness, sullen by the heavy burden yet, confused about what to do for his son.

On the morning of the next day, while Pink is at church, William decides to grab a drink at some bar in Harlem. The first beer he takes gets so hard into him that he starts to daydream; he engages in a loud monologue with himself as if another William is responding to his concerns and questions. Nevertheless, William’s moderated version of masculinity prevails until he witnesses the shooting of a black soldier at the hands of a white cop in the lobby of a hotel next to his bar.

> He stood still, watching them. The anger that went through him was so great that he had to hold on the bar to keep from falling. He felt as though he were going to burst wide open. It was like having seen Sam killed before his eye. Then he heard the whine of an ambulance siren. His eardrums seemed to have been waiting to pick it up.
>
> "Come on, what you waiting' for?" He snarled the words at the people milling around the lobby doors. "Come on!" he repeated, running toward the street.
>
> The crowd followed him to the 126th street entrance of the hotel. (Petry 2017, 281)

William becomes a vessel for black rage; not only does he spill it over the very deterministic street which has confined him for years, but he also passes it to other Harlemites and leads them into a protest. Driven by anger complied and never resolved, he turns it outward to gain his individuality and free will back. Though he feels confused about the sudden power he displays as a leader of the mob, "[i]t frightened him at first" (Petry 2017, 282). He gains power from his black fellows, and his psyche as a black man is changed. He walks out of the darkness and confusion that has clouded his visions for his entire life. Finally, it dawns on him to realize the power of communal ties and the necessity of adopting black values in defining his experience as a black man, even if it means black rage.

His feelings of self-achievement and black communal power are momentary when he is verbally abused by his wife, who also joins the mob. The first thing Pink tells William, directing the riot, is, "[w]hat you doing out here in this mob?" He finally tells her about the injury and detention of their son in Georgia. Pink starts wailing and leading the protest herself by throwing a "big bottle of soda high in the air" mightily, which "made a wide arc and landed in the exact center of the plate-glass window of a furniture store. The glass crashed in with a sound like a gunshot" (Petry 2017, 287). She starts vandalism and looting acts, and other protesters follow suit by smashing the windows of other stores and taking other material possessions from stores. Nonetheless, he and other rioters seem to redress their multiple racial and economic inflicted problems. In Hillary Holladay's words, the riot is their "pathetic reaction to an institutionalized racism far beyond their control" (1996, 120). This serves as a justification for the Harlem Riot, one of Petry's main concerns behind her depiction. William's assertive masculine power is challenged and shifts into a follower position in Pink's presence. His sudden political enthusiasm during the riot revives his sense of masculine power, which remains valid until his contact with his domineering wife. "The feeling of great power and strength left him. He was so confused by its loss that he decided this thing happening in the street wasn't real. It was so dark […] he almost

convinced himself he was having a nightmare" (Petry 2017, 288). The riot becomes a material manifestation of the confusion in William's mind, and he gets delusional about the reality of it as his power diminishes. He gets discouraged and less rebellious after being exposed to much violence. He convinces his wife to return home as he can no longer bear seeing blood oozing from his wife and other rioters' hands while looting.

In the short story's conclusion, Pink falls on the pavement and dies while William watches her helplessly. Then, finally, he urges her to get up and speak to her hysterically.

> She didn't answer. He leaned over and touched her gently. Almost immediately afterward he straightened up. All his life, moments of despair and frustration had left him speechless – strangled by the words that rose in his throat. This time the words poured out.
>
> He sent his voice raging into the darkness and the awful confusion of noises. "The sons of bitches," he shouted. "The sons of bitches," (Petry 2017, 295)

Petry implies William's moderation as a black man in her choice of diction. Adverbs like "gently" are omnipresent in the short story in describing William's various actions, especially concerning his treatment of Pink. He transforms into a rioter but does not seem to be fully recovered from the violence he has suppressed. Only after Pink's death, thus, the demise of her power over him, does he feel enraged again, and then breaks out into a new mode of his existence. William's cursing is the most unexpected act from a man who has stayed silently passive and confusingly delusive about his life. He becomes aggressive after all. Petry suggests it is unavoidable for black men not to turn to violence even if they were interested in it the least, which is a key element of social protest fiction. For one thing, his black rage – his defense mechanism – is a white hegemonic masculine value. There is a sense of inauthenticity in his conceptions of sanctioned masculinity and prospects for life betterment as they are acquired from his white oppressors like Mr. Yudkin. As a performer of black rage, William's race links his masculine power to structures of domination in a way that oppresses him subtly. William, like Johnson, remains restricted in the violent stereotype about African American masculinities. The intersection of his race with his gender, class and age makes his life more challenging. Other black men find alternatives in verbalizing their rage, as in the case of the black male characters in the next section.

5.2. Black Men as Jazz Performers: The Harlem Renaissance Legacy in "Solo on the Drums" and "The New Mirror"

The social marginalization of African American masculinities endures despite their participation in the masculine domination of women, as in the case of Johnson in "Like a Winding Sheet" who

decides to perform his gender prerogatives but is subordinated by his race and class. The male protagonists of the two studied short stories in this section differ from Johnson as they enact an egalitarian attitude towards women and are members of the middle class. The matrix that shapes their black masculinities is less tight as they lead a relatively comfortable and decent life. They stand a chance to defy their socially marginalized status as black men as they seem privileged by class. Their class affiliation places them as individuals on a higher grid of power in society. However, I argue that race remains a salient category that overpowers their class status and augments stereotypical images of their gender in certain representations contexts. Despite their class privilege, the racialization of their gender persists, perpetuated by the power of conventionally oppressive frames.

These black male characters contribute to Petry's positive representations of African American masculinities. They turn to African folk materials and music as constructive strategies to defy their frustrated masculine identities and battle the socially oppressive stereotypes. These two short-fiction pieces by Petry reflect on the Harlem Renaissance legacy in her writing career, , which is the motif behind studying them together in this section. The influence of the Harlem Renaissance on Petry's writing is discussed in chapter two as a factor inducing a thematic change in her aesthetics and distinguishing her writing style from that of protest fiction. In addition to analyzing the effects racism can inflict on the black bourgeoisie, the significance of "Solo on the Drums" (1947) and "The New Mirror" (1965) rests in Petry's employment of oral storytelling and narratives intertwined with blues and jazz music. These African and American traditions have contoured the lived experiences of black people constructively and uniquely in the US.

Petry showcases a tangible example of a text discerned by oral tradition techniques in "Solo on the Drums". These techniques determine the structure of the narrative, trigger the development of events, and portray the main character in both controlling and liberating manners. Gayl Jones emphasizes the role of the oral traditions in this piece of short fiction by illustrating how it "lacks chronological and sequential dramatic scenes, but the storyline achieves flexibility and intricacy from the musical African American oral traditions of jazz and blues" (2004, 49). The short story is highly lyrical, and there is a careful balance between the narrated events and the rhythm of the drums. The omniscient narrator tells the story of Kid Jones in fragmented sentences, characterized by short phrases and anaphoric expressions as an attempt to move along with the music he plays. The entire story takes the form of an interior monologue inside his mind as his thoughts diverge

from performing to his wife's decision to leave him for the Marquis of Brund, the piano player in his band. Paul Devlin (2015, 115) denotes that "the effects of a jazz performance on an emotionally troubled character" is the main focus of this short story. Kid Jones' state of mind in the present time is revealed while he plays a solo on the drums, and his past life – childhood memories, war experience, and marital life – is depicted in flashbacks while other musicians take over.

The short story opens while he enters the Randlert Theater on Broadway and comes across his name written underneath the orchestra's name. Though the people rushing into the theater recognize his name with a smile, he is no longer excited about the sight of his name. Being abandoned by his wife undermines the value of his name, an idea articulated in music-like patterns of "Kid Jones. The name – his name" (Petry 2017, 235). His middle-class association, established in his celebrated name and successful career, does not deter the consequences of losing his wife on the stability of his masculinity. Rather, it heightens his feelings of doubt about his masculinity as he starts to contemplate how his race and gender have constantly debilitated his progression in life. He goes inside with not much determination and feels incomplete. After putting on a "cream-colored" suit and preparing his music, "he glanced in the long mirror in his dressing room. He hadn't changed any. Same face. No fatter no thinner. No gray hair. Nothing. He frowned. Because he felt that the things that were eating him up inside ought to show. But they didn't" (Petry 2017, 236).

Petry hints at a transformation that has already taken place in Kid Jones prior to joining the orchestra. She prepares the reader to foresee how his pent-up emotions will be transacted to his performance. The show begins with him hitting the drums slightly and repeatedly, followed by regulated numbers of horns on the piano and notes on the trumpets. His mind drifts to the morning when his wife breaks out the news to him, and her words reecho in his mind, following the music patterns played by the band. "The voice was trapped somewhere under the roof – caught and held by the trumpet. "I'm leaving I'm leaving I'm leaving" (Petry 2017, 237). Similar expressions dominate the narrative in response to the music being played while Kid Jones reminisces or contemplates certain events: "Close. Close. Close […] Kill. Kill. Kill" (Petry 2017, 238-39). According to Jones, these repeated expressions are "blues-speech-interpolations," infused as interludes between jazz music, function as a motif to underline themes of "identity and recognition" which are "archetypal in all blues and dramas" (Jones 2004, 52). Based on this argument, Kid Jones attempts to present his identity equalized with his name's worth and recognize

his intense pain by verbalizing his emotions into anaphors. In this respect, he stands out as a black man who understands his wound and seeks the cure through the power of music.

As the musicians progress with their performance, the struggle intensifies within Kid Jones, primarily while he does his solos. As the rhythm gets faster, Kid Jones begins "to feel as though he were the drums and the drums were he" (Petry 2017, 238). Hitting the drums makes him feel like he is being beaten by something/someone. The metamorphosis of the drums into him infers that his identity is defined in terms of his talent, and he drives his power from it. The drums are the source of his self-expression, self-worth, and self-identification. The drums also grant him a medium to let out his rage:

> When he hit the drums again it was with the thought that he was fighting with the piano player. He was chocking the Marquis of Brund. He was putting a knife in clean between his ribs. He was slitting his throat with a long straight blade. Take my woman. Take your life.
> The drums leaped with the furry that was in him. The men in the band turned their heads toward him – a faint astonishment showed in their faces.
> He ignored them. The drums took him away from them, took him back, and back, and back, in time and place. […] Grandma died. […] The war goes well with the men with bad smells and the loud laughs. (Petry 2017, 239)

The language is violent, immoderately resonating with the leveling-up aggression inside Kid Jones. In response to his repressed rage, his improvising and spontaneous moves on the drums take him to a remote setting. It is a place where he is finally free from the debilitating effects of his status as a black man who has suffered from a bitter past and been subjugated by dehumanizing stereotypes while drafted into the army.

His current masculine identity is seemingly in a better state as he enjoys the surplus of middle-class life and has a prestigious profession. However, he is liable to violence as he is ready to explode with it for being walked out on by his wife. He entertains the idea of slitting the piano player's throat with a blade, an act that is translated into his overwhelming and unexpected beatings on the drums. In other words, aggressive fighting is replaced with creating art as his anger is directed at the instruments. Paul Gilroy asserts in *The Black Atlantic* that the transformative potential of black music lies in forming a "distinctive counterculture of modernity" (1993, 36). The role of idiomatic rhetoric in music is reiterated by the scholars of African American letters, such as Jerry W. Ward Jr., who argues that it offers a "way to understand that self-recovery lies in the act of metaphorizing trouble" and that music is "an act of self-realization that has the power of transformation" (2007, 194). Kid Jones, a renowned and professional jazz drummer, deploys music

as a channel to let out his bridled emotions and energies and voice his countless disappointments. He represents an alternative to the stereotypes of violent black men by converting his black rage into art.

The individual inside Kid Jones takes over again as he gets back to his senses and controls the drums again. He does not allow his black rage to overpower him as he "hadn't become part of them. He was still himself. Kid Jones. Master of the drums. Greatest drummer in the world. Selling himself a little piece at a time. Every afternoon. […] This time, playing like this after what had happened in the morning, he had sold all of himself – not just a little peace" (Petry 2017, 241). The story's ending implies some uncertainty about the healing potential of the music as Kid Jones thinks of himself as a commodity, being all sold out. Playing the drums provides him with a space where he can be creative and transform his frustrations into art. In addition to that, it is where he gets his resources too. He has manipulated his painful memories and devastating current life to entertain a strange audience. However, these thoughts underline his progressive frame of mind and his political consciousness about his status as a black masculinity. Most significantly, he confronts the man he holds responsible for his misery in a pacifist manner and retreats from violence.

Johanna X. K. Garvey refers to the powerful implications of black music in "Solo on the Drums," especially "when rooted in an African past". She writes that "[t]he connection back to African culture preserved in drumming proves the most available and effective means of self-expression—just as drums during slave times allowed the enslaved to communicate and thus were outlawed by those in power to prevent insurrection" (Garvey 2000, 123). Petry uses oral traditions in this short fiction because black culture with roots in Africa functions as a site of contestation and subversion of the patterns of the dominant systems. Kid Jones, a black man wounded by his racist and hostile environment, attempts to heal through music. His frenzied performance on the drums metamorphosizes his pent-up pain and aggression into a healing potential. Petry portrays Kid Jones as a character who participates thoroughly in securing a space in his world to present himself as an individual capable of challenging societal stereotypes. The same initiative discerns Samuel Layen's life in the remainder of this section.

Samuel Layen is a pharmacist and solo jazz singer in the Church choir in "The New Mirror". Petry constructs this black male character in a narrative interwoven with African folk materials such as tales, rites, and medicinal heirlooms. The African folk materials are not exclusive to his short piece; it is a recurring theme in Petry's fiction. *The Street* illustrates how Min – a black

female minor character who is insecure and resourceless – is empowered by an African medicinal doctor in Harlem who helps her to abandon her abusive black male partner and start an independent life. Samuel lives with his wife, teenage daughter, and druggist sister-in-law in a two-stories house and runs his drugstore, which is the front extension of the building. They are the only admittedly black family in the all-white town of Wheeling in New York. They lead their lives with relative comfort and less devastating problems as their filial ties are potent. The narrative chronicles a day in the Layens' life when their composed façade of an integrated family is pushed to limits due to Samuel's absence from 9:00 AM to 9:15 PM. Tensions build up in the members of the family upon the hanging of a "new-glass mirror […] just the day before. A new electrical fixture had been installed over the mirror. My mother had had these changes made so that my father could have shaved downstairs" (Petry 2017, 59). Samuel and his daughter suddenly become aware of the disparity of their dark visage in the mirror set against a white wall, which reflects how they stand out in a dominantly white neighborhood. Petry relies on the mirror as a leitmotif for Samuel's sense of "double consciousness" throughout the story to draw on how African Americans have struggled to appreciate and value themselves compared to the white members of society. Samuel and the rest of his family always behave consciously about their underappreciated status in their public associations. They keep their carefree and open family lifestyle separate from the reserved and stylized behavior of the drugstore in a deliberate way.

Samuel resides in a vast and bright house with a spacious backyard with cherries, flowers, and birds singing in the trees. The focus on the modern design of the house fine furniture, and the abundance of food during the meals indicates their middle-class status. It contrasts sharply with Harlem's drabbed and dark flats in Petry's previously studied short stories. However, the general setting of this story is not bleak as in the previously analyzed pieces. Samuel's debut scene occurs when he enjoys a spring morning under the cherry trees, enjoying the sun and listening to the bees. "When we finally went into the house and sat down to breakfast, my father said (just as he said every spring) that the honeybees buzzed on one note that it was E-flat just bellow middle C but with a difference" (Petry 2017, 61). The tone of the short story is set from the opening pages in a way that underlines the importance of the oral dimensions of the story. The references to the musical notes E-flat and middle C indicate Samuel's interest in music and the importance of his auditory abilities in capturing the sounds around him. In a broader sense, Petry structures a narrative where the sounds in the story matter, and "the sound of story is the dominant sound of

our lives" (Petry 1988, 259). Storytelling recurs in other works by Petry which is linked to her familial bonds and African roots as discussed in chapter two. For instance, Mal narrates bed stories to his three sons in *The Narrows*. Petry relies on this technique to showcase how Mal transforms the ways he envisions different versions of himself as a hero into an audible voice to his children. Those stories entail a survival potential for him. On a narrative level, the sound of his stories is audible to the readers as they are listening to Petry narrating those oral stories through Mal as a storyteller.

Instances of oral aesthetics can be found in the short story as Samuel's wife tells her daughter how her father's family moved from New Jersey to New York. They are "like a separate and warlike tribe – arrogant, wary, hostile […] Whenever anyone approached them on the boat, they executed a kind of flanking motion and very quickly formed a circle, the men facing the outside, the women on the inside" (Petry 2017, 74–5). This story which occupies about two pages is passed orally from the husband to the wife and, finally, to the daughter. This highlights storytelling as a technical feature in Petry's work, her reliance on a powerful oral-narrative tradition initiated in the works of her Harlem Renaissance ancestors. Samuel and his family preserve their heritage and show pride in the tribal inclinations practiced by his parents' family in New Jersey. He also saves dried herbs in the backroom of his drugstore, inherited from his forebears, which have been kept for hundreds of years. On top of that, his decision to choose pharmacy as a career extends his African medicinal heritage, "a few generations out of Africa, where his ancestors had obviously been witch doctors" (Petry 2017, 69).

Samuel's daughter cherishes her father but is constantly disturbed by the fact that he has only three teeth left in his mouth. She habitually cuts out pictures of tooth-revealing male actors and secretly leaves them on the prescription counter so her father can see them. The day her father disappears, she links those pictures and his absence. Her aunt and mother speculate about what could have happened to him as he has always been punctual and prompt. They imagine dreadful scenarios and decide to report him as missing at the police station. However, the family feels too reluctant to report him:

> I wonder what my mother would say to the state police. "My husband is missing. He is a short, broad-shouldered black man, bald-headed, fort-eight years old? Would the state police snicker and say, "Yes, we would hardly expect you, with your dark brown skin, to be married to a white man. Wearing what when last seen?" "Light gray summer suit and polka-dot bow tie, highly polished black shoes." The gravel path that bisects the village green was very dry this morning – no mud. So there would still have been polish on his shoes. But not if he were drowned. But who would

> drown him. Drowned himself? Surely she will say that he has only three teeth, three teeth only – one in the upper jaw and two on the lower jaw. (Petry 2017, 80)

Almost a decade after *The Narrows* and two decades after "In Darkness and Confusion," state violence epitomized by white police is still a current issue. The fifteen-year-old daughter doubts the police's difference in her father's case. Interracial marriage remains taboo despite the radical spirit of the 1960s with regard to race relations. Petry does not make any explicit reference to the Black Arts Movement but implicitly establishes the still ongoing unbearable and agonizing strife the black people face in liberating themselves against a racist society – a primary goal on the agenda of activists during this period. On a different note, the attention to Samuel's race, age, and looks is a noteworthy feature of this block quote. Regardless of how well-dressed he is, his blackness stands out for the police. His class entitlement does not salvage his reputation against all the usual typecasted frames of missing black men of lower classes.

Race predominates the intersectional effect of class and other categories, as Samuel's daughter is terrified by the idea that the police might think her father has committed suicide for reasons known to the public. The dysfunction of black families due to matriarchy or drinking problems could have led him to exterminate his life. E. Franklin Frazier (1966) views black men as irresponsible and deviant in *The Negro Family in the United States*. Frazier contends that black families are not structured according to the patriarchal American system as women replace black men as leaders of their families under the influence of the history of slavery and racial oppression. He suggests that it is "an absence of fathers and other role models, which in turn was the cause (in urban areas) of juvenile delinquency, illegitimacy, and a slew of other social problems (quoted in Rogers et al. 2015, 416). The same issue is raised by Daniel Patrick Moynihan (1965) in his book *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action.* In this Moynihan report, the author links the impairment in the black men's performance in their male roles to the saliency of matriarchy in African American communities. As a result, black men grow aggressive and irresponsible in these matriarchal subcultures stricken by poverty: "The combined impact of poverty, failure and isolation among Negro youth has had the predictable outcome in a disastrous delinquency and crime rate" (Moynihan 1965, 38). These accusations are invalid in Samuel's case as his family is based on shared love and respect, and he does not drink. His absence is due to other more personal issues related to his fears of being judged by other (white) people.

Samuel's short stature and almost toothless jaws, i.e., his looks, intersect with his race and age, creating more struggles for him in other settings. The narrator describes his singing at the church as follows:

> On Sundays he went to church. He went in through the rear entrance and into the choir loft from the back about two minutes after the service started. There was a slight stir as the ladies of the choir and the other male singer (a tall, thin man who sang bass) rearranged themselves to make room for him. He sang a solo almost every Sunday, for he had a great big, beautiful tenor voice. On Sundays, he smelled strongly of aftershave lotion, and on weekdays he smelled faintly of after-shave lotion. (Petry 2017, 69).

Entering the church from the back door and discreetly joining the choir indicate Samuel's self-consciousness about being black in an entirely white setting. The reference to the lotion implies his carefulness about smelling good and looking proper all the time. His insecurities as a black man are intensified compared to the other solo male singer. The bass singer is taller in shape and, most significantly, white. Though Samuel possesses a beautiful voice and enjoys singing, he cannot overcome his feeling of being observed and judged. There is a tacit competition between the two men for the purgatives of masculine hegemony. This competition is also an essential aspect of proving his masculinity as Kimmel argues that masculinity is a rivalry for power and privilege which "emerge as men among men" (2006, 100). Samuel loses this rivalry as his racial inferiority worsens the already unbalanced contentious homosocial enactment due to his looks and, probably, age.

His overt concern about his looks and sense of "double consciousness" makes him disappear for an entire day to buy dentures. After finally seeing how he looks in the new mirror while shaving, he likens his toothless mouth to different images "it was the mouth of the nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, the mouth of gravediggers in *Hamlet*" (Petry 2017, 85). He starts to think of how the white people see him while performing his solo. He is aware of how white people racialize the gender of black people according to certain stereotypes – he feels appalled with the idea of being viewed as the humorously depicted Shakespearean gravediggers and acquiescent nurse. Petry further reflects on Samuel's decision to get a pair of false teeth through the perspective of the narrator:

> I thought, Well, now perhaps the reason my father hadn't wanted to replace his teeth was that one of the images of the black man that the white man carries around with him is of white teeth flashing in a black and grinning face. So my father went toothless to destroy that image. But then there is toothless old Uncle Tom, and my old black mammy with her head rag is toothless, too, and without teeth my father fitted that image of the black man, didn't he?

So he was damned wither way. Was he not? And so was I. And so was I. (Petry 2017, 87)

The reason which has held Samuel from getting false teeth is his concerns about the stereotypical image of the grinning Sambo. The power of this stereotype has intimidated him to the extent that he goes almost toothless. However, he then realized that he could be enclosed in the images of the toothless Uncle Tom. Ironically, Samuel alternates between two stereotypes: he becomes the grinning Sambo while applying his denture and ends up as an Uncle Tom while taking them off. Thus, he is not saved from the humiliation he thinks he will be exposed to. In addition, the daughter is burdened by "double consciousness" as the father. Their black middle-class codes fall short of protecting them from white disdain as the mortifying effect of the stereotypes lingers in their minds. Nonetheless, Samuel represents a new dimension to Petry's array of African American masculinities: he is a devoted husband, caring father, successful pharmacist, good singer, and a person with strong bonds with his African traditions and roots.

A two-step strategy of analyzing the black male characters of this chapter unravels how race overcomes the other social categories, such as class, in their lived experiences and marks out their marginalized masculine status. The intersection of their race with gender, is embodied in the ways they are reduced to certain stereotypical characteristics. The gendered aspect of their race is aggravated when their economic statuses enter the picture, as in the case of Johnson and William Jones. Samuel and Kid Jones experience racial discrimination in more subtle manners. Performing for mostly a white audience leaves them in doubt about their social positions despite their middle-class affiliation and business success. On the one hand, the inevitability of violence – a central component of protest fiction – is implied in the characters of Johnson and William Jones. On the other, Kid Jones finds alternatives to avoid transforming rage into lethal violence. Samuel does not practice any level of violence. He and Kid Jones are successful in their profession and deploy African folk materials and music as media to heal and overcome the destructive power of stereotypes.

Conclusion

This dissertation has started out to investigate the representation of African American masculinities in Petry's oeuvre, problematizing major critical conventions that position Petry's oeuvre as naturalist protest fiction. The dissertation has set about to apply the method of intersectionality for the analysis of Petry's African American male characters as the critical lens through which the social positionings of her male characters can be re-examined. The dissertation has argued that Petry represents African American masculinities as multilayered and complex to contest traditional conceptualizations of African American masculinities. Along with challenging white role models for black masculine identities, the dissertation has examined how Petry subverts stereotypes about this group of masculinities.

I have argued that Petry's works transcend the restricted latitude of protest fiction, which primarily revolves around the victimization of a single protagonist and society's inflicted adversarial atrocities upon this character. Instead, Petry populates her stories with various characters, introducing manifold narrative perspectives and her characters – major and minor – are reciprocally essential to the development of the plot. Thus, Petry's fictional texts are more modernist and in the tradition of Harlem writers in their multiple and interwoven storylines than that of the protest school. As argued in the dissertation – based on other critics' readings – Petry's projection of blackness as multilayered, not singularly-layered, pioneers a tradition carried on by writers such as James Baldwin, Gloria Naylor, and Toni Morrison.

The dissertation has addressed a fundamental question about Petry's reception in literary history and her position in American letters. Petry's work is traditionally read as being on the margin of Wright's naturalist project with a focus on her dynamic representations of black female characters in recent criticism. Shifting the focus to male issues runs the risk of a conservative old male focus in early critical reception. However, this study has delineated a sensitive reconsideration of the dominant male stereotypical positions as in the case of the Mandingo, from an intersectional perspective. The dissertation has exhibited how Petry's black male characters offer versions of protest fiction stereotypes as in her early fiction, not yet far removed but later fully problematized. For instance, the Super's age and regionalism intersecting with his race in *The Street* write him off the Mandingo stereotype. More radical examples surface in *The Narrows*: Weak Knees defines his black masculinity more liberatingly despite his conspicuous disability. He

refuses to assimilate with American hegemonic masculinity as an ideal and chooses more traditionally feminine roles to construct his masculinity.

An intersectional reading of Petry's representations of African American masculinities has accentuated a subversive potential dimension, not fully grasped in the previous scholarship on her oeuvre. This subversive potential is showcased in the ways she redefines black men against the dehumanizing matrix of their race, gender, class, age, ability and sexuality in American society. She empowers them within the same matrix as the intersection of these categories helps them move beyond hegemony-dominated and reductive configurations of their masculine identities. Petry delineates gender in her portrayals of black male characters in non-essentialist attributes and abandons the masculinist style of protest fiction. She focuses on pinpointing the individualistic side and shared social behaviors of her male protagonists in their black communities. Petry's texts have been analyzed by following a two-step strategy of identify-by-explaining the categories and asking the other question to expose multiple positions and power inequalities that can be imperceptible in representing African American masculinities. Black masculine power/subordination is measured in relation to Connell's concept of American hegemonic masculinity and (black) femininity. The studied black masculinities are regarded as marginalized as they are discriminated against because of unequal hierarchical relations, decided based on an intersection of their race with gender, class, and other social categories.

This dissertation has expanded the scope of critical attention to Petry's work in journalism by inspecting two of her non-fictional pieces: "Harlem" and "What's Wrong with Negro Men?". Petry's journalistic practices are reflected in her distinctive consideration of details in describing specific loci, events and characters. Her experience as a reporter in journals like *Amsterdam News* and *People's Voice* contributed to Petry's fiction, as a considerable part of it is grounded in the stories she covered as a newspaper reporter. She fictionalizes the story of the Harlem riots of 1943 in her 1947 short story "In Darkness and Confusion". *The Street*'s account of Lutie Johnson and her son Bub documents her firsthand experience with stories about children left alone at home while their (single) mothers had to work. These pieces are generally about rejecting the banal images of Harlem by providing a complex view of it and are dedicated more specifically to constructing black masculine identities.

In addition, these essays contribute to a fuller view of Petry's project of subverting the negative depictions of African American masculinities. Adam Clayton Powell and George

Jackson, as progressive examples of African American masculinities in "Harlem," are the opposite of the backward and sexist mindset of black men Petry censures in her sarcastic essay "What's Wrong with Negro Men?". They are black men conscious of their racialized identities in a white society. Ultimately, Petry figuratively relies on them to provide a larger scope of the lived experiences of Harlemites and the impediments to accomplishing their masculine identities. Petry ridicules the black men's partial and essentialist attitude and calls for an immediate end in "What's Wrong with Negro Men?". This piece is a significant early black feminist critique of black men's prejudiced attitudes towards women. It offers invaluable insights into Petry's long-standing concerns about raising black men's awareness, inviting them to consider liberal and egalitarian ways of treating women. Her appeal to black men in moving toward progressive societal positions is a ubiquitous and extensive theme in her fictional works.

Petry's reliance on oral storytelling and jazz music elements knotted into her narratives in novels and short stories have also been discussed in the dissertation. Oral traditions and black culture with roots in Africa function as a site of contestation and subversion of the patterns of the dominant systems for black men and women. The intervention of African (American) oral tradition – as in familial modes of storytelling and music – and multiple characters and their viewpoints in narrative distinguishes Petry's writing style from that of her male contemporaries. Her characters' reliance on oral traditions and music in the postbellum urban North can be juxtaposed with the folk beliefs and blues African American people embraced in the dehumanizing circumstances of the antebellum South. Investing in this technique indicates a subversive element as it provides the characters with a remedial potential to overcome their debilitating life conditions. Petry's deployment of family narratives and African American oral traditions, as in "The New Mirror," and other black forms of expressions, such as jazz music, as in "Solo on the Drums," reinforces the omnipresence of Harlem Renaissance aesthetics and legacy in her works.

This dissertation has pointed out how Petry's black male characters are neither confined to the dehumanizing stereotypes of black men as passively and humorously compliant nor the pathological presumptions about them as aggressive, violent, criminals, and rapists. Petry does not represent them as solely tragic and desperate figures whose only access to their humanity is through enacting violence on others. She demonstrates them as something more than the mainstream stereotypes and provides insightful elaborations about their potential for social reform. These masculinities display an interdependence and spiritual connection they aspire to accomplish

with their families and communities, as in *The Narrows*. The aspects of gender egalitarianism and fatherhood are covered in her process of constructing African American masculinities, as in her short fiction. Petry plays a role in raising awareness about the negative influence of adopting stereotypes and emphasizing social and political consciousness leading to the advancement of the black community.

Reading Petry's works beyond her marginalized position in relation to other black male writers of protest fiction can be supported by her discerning agenda of renouncing the intersectional effect of racial discrimination with classism and the essentialist and patriarchal dimensions of the gender roles as exemplified in the studied texts of this dissertation. It can be inferred that Petry's agenda anticipated the 1960s black nationalist movements reinforcing her political disposition to combat the debilitating effect of race, gender and class in her oeuvre.

The dissertation formulates new considerations about Petry's position in the canon of African American literature. The first step towards a more comprehensive and inclusive evaluation of Petry is to study her beyond the reductive labels of protest genre and native daughter to Richard Wright. Secondly, her most anthologized and critically-acclaimed works, such as "Like a Winding Sheet" and *The Street*, do not represent her entire body of work. They limit the interpretation of her progressive aesthetics, her experiments with innovative styles of writing fiction in *Country Place* and delineating black masculine identities in non-essentialist methods in *The Narrows*, and selected short stories from *Miss Muriel and Other Stories*. Petry's nuanced portrayal of black masculinities opens up unprecedented ways of unraveling their stereotypical representation as an intersection of race, gender, and class.

Petry's work has started to gain more critical attention posthumously, and several important books are dedicated to scrutinizing her literary legacy (Ervin 1993; Holladay 1996; Lubin 2007; Clark 2013; Griffin 2013). The Library of America published two of her novels and three non-fictional pieces in an edited volume by Farah Jasmine Griffin in 2019, indicating a modern and growing interest in Petry's works. This study aspires to contribute to locating Petry on the map of African American letters and enlisting her as a representative of the black novel written during the mid-twentieth century. Petry embodies a black female author whose unique perspective on African American novelistic practice and sociopolitical sensibility slowly prevails throughout the twentieth century. Her oeuvre continues to open new horizons for the next generation of (black) writers to follow and scholars to ponder.

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