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THE POLITICS OF RACELESSNESS IN RICHARD
WRIGHT'S *THE OUTSIDER*

BY LÁLE DEMİRTÜRK

Considered to be the first existentialist novel written by an American, Richard Wright's *The Outsider* (1952) is also the first in the Wright canon which does not directly address racial issues. While the protagonist, Cross Damon, is black, "he is not primarily concerned with his plight as black; he is a thinking, questioning man in the perplexing twentieth century" (Clark 211). Being the first truly existentialist work in American literature, *The Outsider* is "a novel that did not deal primarily with the question of what it means to be a Negro, but rather with the broader question of what it means to be a modern man in twentieth-century, Western, industrialized society" (Henderson 388). When the novel came out, Wright observed that it was "the first literary effort of mine projected out of a heart preoccupied with no ideological burden save that of rendering an account of reality as it strikes my sensibilities and imagination. . . . My hero could have been of any race. . . . I have tried to render my sense of our contemporary living as I see it and feel it" (Wright and Fabre 577). The black male protagonist Cross Damon's real problem may not be his racial identity, but he lives under the similar conditions of other urban blacks. Although Wright's main concern in this novel lies in an exploration of what freedom means to the individual regardless of race—or that the protagonist *could* be of any race—Damon *is indeed* black. Paul Gilroy rightfully claims: "More than any other book of Wright's, *The Outsider* elaborates a view of blackness and the relational ideologies of race and racism which support it" (160).

The first novel written by Wright in Paris, the novel received mixed reactions. Wright's depiction of the identity problem of "the alienated individual in a hostile and oppressive society" (Walker 230) seemed to appeal to most of the Europeans who lost faith "in the old cherished values that sustained the life of Western civilization" (Maduka 162). After his recent break with the Communist Party, Wright focused on humanistic concerns. Unlike its popularity in Europe, the novel elicited negative responses from many American critics. Roi Ottley of the *Chicago Sunday Tribune Magazine of Books* believed that Cross Damon was driven "by no discernible motives—racial, political or religious—even though the author would have us believe he is a rational person" (qtd. in Fabre 369). Critics, including Max Eastman, John Henry Raleigh, and Granville Hicks, all found the novel a weak literary work with no real aesthetic value to it (Fabre 370-71). The critics were partially correct in pointing their negative responses to the novel, for, as Darwin Turner suggests, the novel "fails to evoke the emotional intensity which stunned readers of *Native Son* in 1940" (40).

In 1952 Wright's editor at Harper's suggested some titles for the novel, such as "Between Dreams,' 'Out of This World,' 'Man Upside Down,' 'Last Man' and 'Colored Man.' Later he suggested 'the Outsider,' 'God's Slave,' 'Two Thousand Years' and 'the Crime of Cross,' and finally 'Beyond Freedom' and 'Innocence at Home.' It was the Harper salesman who decided upon *The Outsider* in November, 1952" (Fabre 368).

In *The Outsider*, Wright abandons the familiar racial plot of his earlier works, and hence "violates the conventions of racial protest writing by expressing fantasies that do not involve the focus on racial oppression typically found in canonical black novels" (Tate 7). In a country where sub-personhood is associated with race, and where being black connotes a history of racial oppression, Damon's refusal to think of himself as a member of a race

seems to bring about a highly political discourse. Being the central issue in America, race is inevitably “the marker of entitlement or dispossession, civilization or barbarism, normative inclusion or normative exclusion, full or diminished personhood” (Mills 127). A history of institutional inequities and denigration of African Americans stapling them to a lower economic status within the socio-political space created by the white supremacist power structure redefines the assignment of personhood on racial lines: “But race is a *contingently* deep reality that structures our particular social universe, having a social objectivity and causal significance that arise out of *our* particular history” (Mills 48). Since race in the United States represents a social and political reality, racial identification predetermines how people experience reality in a society where the conceptual terrain is itself racialized.

Since a society, in Bhikhu Parekh’s words, “is not a collection of individuals, but a system of positions” (qtd. in Mills 27), people have racialized experiences in a racialized society, regardless of what they feel about their race-ness in an orbit where the social space is “*raced*” as dominated by the members of a certain race. The space assigned to the white people defines “home” in terms of whiteness in demarcating the social space in assigning privileged domain to its white citizens. Within a racial paradigm where space, race, and personhood are closely linked with each other, whiteness operates by marginalizing blackness. The white self-conception is bound with the repudiation of the black Other, while the social space allocated to the black Other determines the position of the Other as a nonconformist. If race makes a difference in intersubjective relations in a country where gender and race are fundamental aspects of identity, then the evasion of the race issue or the assertion of racelessness transforms *The Outsider* into a “race novel” with deep political implications. As Toni Morrison contends,

[Statements that emphasize] the meaninglessness of race to the American identity, are themselves full of meaning. The world does not become raceless or will not become unracialized by assertion. The act of enforcing racelessness in literary discourse is itself a racial act. (*Playing* 46)

Traditional African American writing has always presented race relations through the eyes of a marginal man, but in *The Outsider*, we see an untypical marginal man defying any racial categorization.

The plot summary of the novel centers on the 26-year-old postal clerk Cross Damon, a black intellectual. Failing to deal with the clash with his mother's rigid view of Christianity, he feels equally trapped by his pregnant mistress, Dot—who is under 16 and threatens him with a rape charge if he does not divorce his wife—and Gladys, who would never consent to divorce without getting a considerable amount of his money and property. Unable to deal with these attacks on his individual freedom, he enjoys being mistakenly identified as dead in a train crash and leaves for New York City, where he moves in with Gil and Eva Blount, members of the Communist Party, since the Blounts want to desegregate the apartment building managed by the Fascist Langley Herndon. In the course of the novel, he kills four people—Joe, Gil, Herndon, and Hilton—besides causing Eva's suicide and his mother's death from a heart attack. District Attorney Ely Houston's spotting him to be the murderer is to no avail because of a lack of evidence. He is finally killed by Communist Party members as a tragic consequence of his deep urge to be an insider.

In this context, the reason why *The Outsider* has never been black enough for black reviewers was that "it did not focus on a politicized racial loss" (Tate 11). If this is the case, then how are we to read a "raceless" work in which the discourse on race is suppressed with few explicit racial signifiers, where the textual meaning, as the intersubjective product of the text and the reader, has to be produced

by the enigmatic absence of race? Here, the dominant/conscious plot and the suppressed story seem to work against each other: The dominant plot has no visible connection with race-ness, whereas the suppressed story addresses it. The ambivalent relationship between the two discomforts the reader as much as Damon himself does. A racially black man, Damon's preoccupation is not race in a predominantly white society which "racializes" difference. This seemingly (de)racialized plot turns the novel into a forceful political statement on the issue of race. When a black man feels restricted by the binding imperatives and designations of the familial past dictated by his wife, mistress, and mother, and steps out of the box that society has created for him because of his refusal to conform to the stereotype and hence into sameness, then he is saying to us that his blackness (or self-conception) is an "unhomely" space (Bhabha 141). This requires a redefinition and relocation of home, notwithstanding the deconstruction of the political implications of racial identity in an effort to make a home for itself. The question is, How can a black man search for meaning and freedom without confronting the race issue? Since a black intellectual like Damon refuses to inhabit the location that the color-coded power structure ascribes to him and seeks home as an outsider, race constitutes "a salient source that informs our way of reading" in defining the novel as a black text (Tate 6).

In a society where race signifies and generates power relations in "othering" the black Subject, the title of the novel itself predetermines Damon's position as the outsider *even before* we enter into the text. Our expectation of the black Other is to see Damon already pushed to the margins of society, whereas the black Other marginalizes him as he makes a choice to ironically remain on those very margins that society has designated for him. What we find in him is not a type but a fully individuated entity: the quintessential "other" of America prefers a fluid positionality and oppositional consciousness. Refusing to oc-

cupy a prestructured social space, he represents the black male as a dominated social location as his individuality alters the social meaning of race. The negative construction given to the conception of “home” in his familial past calls into question his racial identity or the masculinist black identity, whose political implication is the domain to explore dominant meanings of race-ness in modern America. Mapping the field of race/gender, Damon’s refusal to question his relationship to racial identity politics is a political attempt to claim his personhood.

Powerless in making changes in his personal life from the very beginning of the novel, Damon stands emotionally distant from his friends. His mother has tried to teach him to be selfless—“Son, can’t you deny yourself sometimes and not hurt others?” (28)—and named him after the cross of Jesus, a pun on the name because his individuality is literally crossed out in his relations with people. He is repelled by his mother’s failure “to challenge the lack of freedom and individualism that prevailed in African-American life” (Miller 183). Repressed by negations of his selfhood, he instinctively chooses to love himself more than others. The past relationship between Gladys and Damon highlights how he views the problematics of race-ness. In her adolescent years and later in a party where Gladys encounters both whites and blacks, she feels totally dislocated, as opposed to Damon, who never feels uneasy in a racially mixed environment—“whites don’t scare me” (66)—because he does not share her color consciousness. After his argument with Gladys about Dot, he goes to see the union secretary, Finch, while feeling disgusted with the cultural and social meanings assigned to his whiteness: “He suddenly hated Finch’s whiteness, not racially, but just because he was white and safe and calm and he was not” (89). Finch’s sneering at him and his sexually stereotyping blacks—“You colored boys get into a lot of trouble on the South Side” (89)—make him feel indignant with being categorized.

The train accident gives Cross the opportunity to obliterate his past, "killing his original identity in order to reveal his second self" (Fabre 372), so that he can operate within the domain of freedom. Earlier in the novel Damon's feeling that he can be "brutal when trapped in situations involving his self-respect" (37) becomes real in the scene where he kills his friend, the black postal clerk, Joe, out of fear that Joe may expose him. His sense of insecurity and his urge for freedom seem to set new perils for him: "The outside world had fallen away from him now and he was alone at the center of the world of the laws of his own feelings. And what was this world he was?" (148). This question is left unanswered in his mind, even after he prevents the white woman from tossing the pitcher into the black waiter Bob Hunter's face on the train to New York. To the two white men on the train, Father Seldon and District Attorney Ely Houston, he is Addison Jordan. In a deep philosophical discussion with Damon, Houston's claim that blacks are outsiders and therefore will be "centers of knowing" (164) addresses the problematics of Damon's selfhood: He certainly ponders on the association between being free and being an outsider in the case of blacks. Damon's own "outsiderness," an alternative positioning to his trapped self, seems to end up in his search for a new name, Lionel Lane, that he picks up from a colored cemetery. With this "simulated identity," Damon, an outsider at heart, starts masquerading himself as a social participant. Fitting into the stereotype at the birth certificate office, he successfully acts out the role of a *subservient black*, making the white clerk feel superior. In calling on his knowledge of how white-on-black race relations operate, he functions as a trickster figure in outwitting the white man: "In his role of an ignorant, frightened Negro, each white man . . . would project out upon him his own conception of the Negro and he could safely hide behind it" (217). Although he emotionally does not identify with the black community, his obsession with his non-identity as

an obstacle in relating to others represents a disoriented self.

Unlike Bob Hunter—"Race means a lot to me" (221)—Damon has never been interested in the racial unity of blacks: "There was no racial tone to his reactions; he was just a man, *any* man who had had an opportunity to flee and had seized upon it" (109). Understanding the plight of blacks and how the white laws have historically stifled them, Damon later thinks that he will be "somewhat at home with Communists, for they, like he, were outsiders" (223). However, his meeting Gil Blount is a new threat to his self-conception as Gil "acts like a God who is about to create a black man" (237) and imposes sexual stereotyping on Damon. Gil's observation of Damon's glance at Eva turns into a tolerant smile inviting his rage: "He thinks I've never met a white girl before . . ." (238).

Herndon, on the other hand, is a fascist who believes in the "biological inferiority of the Negro" (264) in finding a philosophical rationale for his disgust with blacks. As Gil wants to turn his ideological struggle with Herndon into a sensational power struggle, Damon envies Gil's exercise of power over others while also hating the vicious tone in his voice. The way power operates in real life enables Damon to think about how people like Gil can wield their personal power "directly upon the lives and bodies of others" (267). Since Damon starts falling in love with Eva, he also hates Gil for emotionally "abusing" her. As Sander Gilman contends, "[t]he 'white man's burden' thus becomes his sexuality and its control, and it is this which is transferred into the need to control the sexuality of the Other, the Other as sexualized female" (256). Damon certainly murders Herndon because of his racist negation of his identity, but he murders Gil to destroy the "white man's burden" that enslaves Eva. On the other hand, however honest and non-racist Eva is in her love for Damon in the course of the novel, she simply cannot de-racialize her mind-set in failing to see black people as people beyond race. Her color-

coded thinking informs the racialized image of people to which Damon stays totally blind. In the conversation over lunch at the Blounts' apartment, Eva is surprised that he is interested in her non-objective paintings: "I'd not have thought that a colored person would like non-objective art. Your people are so realistic and drenched in life, the world" (275).

After killing Gil and Herndon, Damon once again assumes the role of a subordinated individual. When the white man Menti wants him not to "forget the lynchings" (326), the whole scene becomes ironic because Damon never fits into this racial master narrative, even though his skin-color serves as a pretext for Menti and Hilton to sustain the ideological apparatus of the Party. Hilton's stereotyping of blacks becomes evident in how the Communist Party sees Damon as a type rather than as an individual: "You are a Negro . . . and coping with the racially charged behavior of white Americans are a part of your learning how to live in this country" (330). For the first time Damon feels he is racially trapped by the white supremacist attitude: He "was black and in the baleful eyes of the men who were coming, he had no right to be here in a white apartment building in a white neighborhood. . . . As a Negro, he was not even free enough to choose his own allies" (334). Lieutenant Farrel's asking Menti and Hilton whether they are color-blind or not is as prejudiced as the Communist Party has been to blacks such as Bob Hunter in an early scene. Gil's ultimatum to Bob about being deported back to Trinidad, after Hilton gives Party's orders to him—"Don't think that you are indispensable because you're black and the Party needs you" (240)—and later Bob's wife Sarah's complaint that blacks are exploited by the Party had come true. Eva's belief in the natural honesty of blacks, untouched by "the cynical world of political deceptions" (317), sounds unreal after Damon murders Gil and Herndon. Yet Eva becomes an agent through whose unquestioning support he starts

questioning the very core of himself: “If the actions of Gil and Herndon were monstrously inhuman, then was not what he was doing also devoid of humanity?” (318). In murdering them, he had destroyed the very humanitarian principle upon which that freedom was based.

He again reenacts the black stereotype in the white mind as he lies to Menti: “I’m a Negro, Menti; I’m trying to learn . . . how to live” (455). After Eva’s suicide, this role-playing no longer protects him from the verbal attacks of Houston, who sees him as an “individual mob” (564). Since Houston is the only one in the novel who understands Damon’s real motivation for these murders, even if he cannot legally prove them, he almost becomes Damon’s psychological profiler: “Even a man like you cannot be as indifferent as he would like” (566). Damon has acted as Sambo in the birth-certificate scene but acts as a *savage brute* in murder scenes, fitting the white stereotyping of blacks in each case. He kills Gil and Herndon—who both want to control the world—to liberate Eva and himself, and he kills Hilton not to share the destiny of Bob Hunter. His actions are always controlled by social oppression, and his emotional dependence on Eva does not change this situation. His repudiation of the tyranny of authoritarianism is an act of refusal to inhabit an oppressed location in order to legitimize his search for the narrative of freedom. His belief that he can create a new identity by assuming a new name does not guarantee his freedom, as he soon discovers that relations of power are indeed racially defined.

Divested of power at the beginning of the novel, Damon is surrounded by bounded realms of household, family, and job. Stifled by images that others have constructed of him with a dead-end/low-paying job at the P.O. without even the opportunity to take evening classes, he confronts racist insults of white superiors, who boldly patronize him. He disparages Gladys, Dot, Mom, and later Hattie—whom he helps by exposing the two men who cheat her—as all weak, but he himself feels disenchanting within an unsus-

portive black community (i.e., mother, wife, lover) and ends up with a dislocated self. Likewise, Communist Party members stand for fixed representations of cultural and political identities that reproduce what could be called a predictable context for social and ideological practices. Eva's diary shows that blacks are victims of the Party with no viable means of enjoying social respectability. Liberated from his racial conditioning, Damon's position delineates what happens to a black man when he is rootless. Clowning in getting a birth certificate or in dealing with Menti, he manipulates whites' stereotypes of blacks. His negatively charged blackness defines his exilic status, for his color signifies the disappearance of the subject behind the signifier "nigger." His position as a black intellectual in Chicago and later in New York represents the politics of exclusion, where his inability to cast off his racial conditioning constitutes the motivation behind the acts of murder. Violence, as "the mode of control used by civilized oppressors" (Ward 524) in his struggle for power, inadvertently (unintentionally) invokes the replication of racist dynamics. At the end of the novel, he faces the reality that he is still too powerless to make any significant changes in his personal life as much as in society at large. His quest for freedom is futile because in the cityscape of racial division, all choices in us are inevitably affected by racial considerations, and therefore the state of liberty is not necessarily a state of authorization. Motivated by the desire to avoid his stigmatized fate, he does not know how to struggle with the oppressor other than by killing him. Utilizing freedom savagely, he "casts aside almost all societal codes of behavior only to realize in the end that human restrictions help humanize man. Neither man nor society can accommodate completely free individuals, for they are threats to human existence" (Clark 212).

Damon can dream about freedom after his "simulated death" (McMahon 297) in the train crash—an incident that divests him of the social signifiers of his race located

within the matrix of power relations. Denying his racial identity and creating a simulated self, Damon substitutes “signs of the real for the real itself” (Baudrillard 4). Freedom as the central crux of all black self-definitions has complex conceptual mappings in African American culture. As Wright suggested in an interview, “[e]very Negro in America carries all through his life the burden of race consciousness like a corpse on his back” (Smith 32). Damon’s racial identity, that which makes him a black American, is not built on a shared language of history and experience but, on the contrary, represents a burden. As he abandons his racial identity by refusing to inhabit the cultural territories of race, he negates the respect for individuality due to race and color that determines the racialized difference. Racial and sexual stereotyping of black men has been manipulated by white supremacy to retain the status quo. In choosing to live without social boundaries and social prescriptions, Damon strips himself of the historical connotations of his racial identity only to find out that “[a]lone a man is nothing” (585). He finally realizes that “however imperfect society may be, he cannot live without relating to others. It is ironic that [he] is determined to be an outsider but in his heart wants to be an insider” (Hakutani 139-40). The lack of referentiality to blackness enables us to see how Damon refuses to have racialized thinking that has long forced African Americans into social invisibility. Reminding us of Michel Foucault’s statement that “power is ‘always already there,’” and that “one is never ‘outside’ it” (141), he realizes at the end that freedom and marginality do not coincide because the margin transcribing “boundarylessness” is not a domain of freedom: Living on the margins does not guarantee transgressing boundaries when a body represents blackness only outside of its context. Space as pivotal to racial identity constitutes the representation of the black man as evil incarnate—(ab)using women, abandoning family and evading employment—and provides the black masculinist

identity with a struggle over the formation of black subjectivity. As Hayden White suggests, "history is the nightmare from which Western man must awaken if humanity is to be served and saved," in the course of which "historical consciousness must be obliterated" (31). This statement is quite reminiscent of Damon's experience as he rebels against the tyranny of historical consciousness. Fixated on "othering" his "raceless" otherness, he tries to manipulate and perhaps own a world of slipping signifiers in choosing to monopolize otherness like the white man.

Removed from the racist/racial domain, Damon refuses to confront his past, which confers a "racialized" universe of discourse. The narrator of the novel grants us the space to define him as an "other" and to marginalize him from the very beginning. However, the intriguing issue in the text becomes a marginalized positioning that invites the question of "marginal to what?" If we start the text with the assumption that the outsider is Damon, then we are also making an assumption about ourselves as insiders. Being cultural insiders/readers draws us to a position where we invest the text with our Subject-constitution at the center. And this assumption is certainly at stake when we know that social reality is an arbitrary construct. The slipperiness of color lines produces a context capable of producing different readings of the black identity in the white mind. What we see in the novel is the subject-constitution of the black individualist or "the marginal individualist" (Spivak 120) in Damon, who stands on the fringes of the society out there but at the center of the narrative we read. He may feel "tangential to the society but certainly *not* to this narrative. As the marginal individualist by choice, he signifies "a disclosure of the margin" (Spivak 173) in a racialized society in which the placeholder is white supremacy, even if he steps outside the realm of necessity and enters into the realm of freedom. If freedom and personhood are the privileges assigned to the Subject and ensured by the Other, Damon constitutes

himself as the Subject in devouring its Other by stepping outside of the binding force of tradition. Since identity is a necessity for social recognition, leaving that social construct behind and borrowing someone else's "identity" (that of the late Lionel Lane) shows that he has to make a place to inhabit, a homely space. However "raceless" Damon feels, he knows that he is one of the "colored boys" for whites—a type, even though he is not happy with this form of social recognition. As Gayatri C. Spivak suggests, "the margin . . . is the impossible boundary marking off the wholly other" (173). Hence, Damon re-maps the borders of difference—"We're different from what we seem . . ." (585)—when the possibility of an alternative vision is invoked and expands the boundaries of the margins in defining an identity forged in the absence of social ties. If "only the marginal can speak for the margin" (Spivak 171), then Damon can use the power of allocating meaning to his life. Since he refuses to identify with racial labels, we are forced to question our assumptions about the social construction of racial labels.

As Damon constitutes himself as a "raceless" Subject, the politics of race informs the manifest text at a different layer of perception. If a black male protagonist is socially dead in the train accident and becomes Charlie, Addison Jordan, and Lionel Lane, respectively, then Damon ceases to be an individual within a context where he appears as any colored man, regardless of various individual names he assumes, whereas to us as readers he is the same individual. As Ferguson states, "[t]he power of the center depends on a relatively unchallenged authority. If that authority breaks down, then there remains no point relative to which others can be defined as marginal" (Ferguson 10). When we as readers look at the text as the cultural insiders while standing outside the text in relationship to an outsider who is at the center (in) the text, we are repositioned as the outsiders to the outsider who is positioned as the insider of the margin. Since that is how we

fluctuate in eyeing each other as insiders and outsiders, we are continuously caught in the vortex of signifiers: "Margin and center can draw their meanings only from each other" (Ferguson 13-14).

Although the true home that the homeless self seeks can be located on the margins, the paradox of "homelessness-as-home" (JanMohamed, "Worldliness" 113) is captured by the border intellectual, Damon, who chooses to situate himself on the border from the perspective of the nation's margin. Racializing otherness entails an exclusive drawing of boundaries—an act which constructs the Other as a relational notion. As a resistant Subject, he has to break the bonds of filiation in reconstructing his social location as a resisting individual. As a black intellectual, Damon is forced to constitute himself *as* the border, for the negation of his agency in the white society was central to his formation. Otherness and powerlessness go together as Damon is trapped in the often confounding cage of otherness. The novel defies the racial storyline as it addresses the discourse of race as the very pretext for the politics of exclusion. Since Damon cannot fit the stereotype, he constantly disrupts it. The very existence of the stereotype defines the other through its image in the white mind. Damon's resistance to conform to the stereotype disrupts the principles upon which the white mind-set is built. If "[s]ubjectivism about race," in Charles W. Mills' words, means that "since racial designations are arbitrary . . . one can choose one's race" (49), Damon's choice lies on negating his own race, reinforcing the disruption of any possible association between race and identity. In doing so, he challenges the racial paradigm demarcating the racial divide: What we see in him is the acknowledgement of otherness as a political choice.

We encounter the otherness of the other within the sociocultural context of American society, bearing the legacy of colonial oppression, exploitation, and marginalization. Starting with the institution of slavery in the past, color

always meant something with the ascribed racial difference as the distinguishing feature of colonial domination. How individuals/societies deal with the Other and Otherness, what sort of barriers they erect, and what reactions and repercussions the processing of Otherness has on the structures and self-understandings of the "Own" is an important issue here. Whiteness is associated with a number of subject positions, functioning as a pseudo-universal category. Its pervasive non-presence makes it necessary to study whiteness on a relational basis in the context of blackness or other non-white categories. If we transpose this statement into the context of *The Outsider*, the pervasive non-presence of blackness or racial issues makes it necessary to study blackness on a relational basis within the context of whiteness. The positionality of "the other" "is premised on a *relation*. To be other is necessarily to be other to" (Attridge 22). The relational implication is that the other is always transforming itself from the unknown into the known, from the outsider to the insider. The act of reading is a mode of responding to the referentiality of the other in the process of which "the mind . . . lets itself be carried to the borders of its accustomed terrain by the text. And the other here, once again, is a relation or relating rather than an object; it is the act-event . . . of my reading . . . of this particular event" (Attridge 25). The act of our reading reifies our allegiance to "seeing inwardness from the outside" (Levinas, qtd. in Bhabha 150). As we enter from the outside, we start encountering the "insiderness" of the outsider, who consistently fights against the historical denial of his "insiderness."

A black who refuses to adopt racially instigated self-perception between himself and us, as the readers, and who steps outside of racial conditioning, certainly blurs the "racing" of the social sphere. Damon "resists the racist attempt to fit him into the hegemonic mold reserved for 'niggers'" (JanMohamed, "Negating" 287). In defining the social boundaries of a non-racial identity, he creates a po-

litical borderline space from which he refuses to see himself as an insider, forgetting that outsiders are often insiders, "being often citizens, residents, workers, or just part of the society's economic system, and serving to fulfill certain functions . . . for that society and system" (Figueroa, 39). The complexity of the black male intellectual's positioning lies in his ignoring the racial divide at the foundation of the social structure in which he is located. Functioning as "the guardian of the margin" (Spivak 189), he owns otherness and claims it politically in order to gain the freedom to cross borders and form alliances with other colonial drifters (i.e., Communist Party members) beyond race. In relating to us as readers, the other maintains its otherness and becomes the text itself, which ironically continues to disrupt binary oppositions, those fierce boundaries that are responsible for creating the category of the Other. The racialized vision we offer in contextualizing the Other repositions us also as both inside and outside of the culture of the text. We resist reading a character who resists conforming to "the hegemonic mold" and therefore to our very racialized vision. Here is a black intellectual not fixated on racial reasoning, refusing to inhabit a position limited to the narrow confines of identity politics. He disrupts the static divide between margin and center as we start reading the text with a positionality on the center while gradually learning to speak to the "unhomely" site of the borderline space. Our expectation of the "Subject [as] always centered" (Spivak 323) is challenged, and our positioning in relating to the otherness of the Other is inverted, while we are forced to decenter ourselves in understanding our own Subject-formation. Damon's effort to construct multiple, shifting identities helps us understand the "in-between" spaces that African Americans inhabit or create, for the "unrepresented pasts . . . haunt the historical" (Bhabha 147) moment of the text in which our private selves encounter the social sphere in *The Outsider*. Damon's attempt to designate his "un-

homely” self on the border turns into an act of affirming that “the outsideness of the inside” (Bhabha 152) constitutes a poignant but contingent terrain to be opened up, as the novel itself becomes the communal space in which the Other forcibly enters into the world of the Self to divest it of its power to dispossess its others.

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