

Patricia  
Yaeger

Circum-Atlantic Superabundance:  
Milk as World-Making in Alice Randall  
and Kara Walker

**W**hen is something too much? If one wished to define an aesthetics of excess, what would be its formal principles, and how would one recognize excess as excess? In Madison Smartt Bell's *All Souls' Rising* (1995), we encounter the frightening spectacle of a slave rebellion too ferocious for words: a group of rebel Saint-Dominguen blacks celebrate victory by drinking white men's blood:

The bowl was in fact a scooped-out cranium, with a dried scalp clinging to its underside, and the trailing hair. . . . Jeannot stood up ceremoniously, holding the brimming skull out from himself like a chalice. . . . "How sweet—the blood of the white people." He raised the skull to his lips and drank, blood running from the corners of his mouth and separating into threads as it mingled with the oil on the bare skin of his chest.<sup>1</sup>

This is excess, right? But in the first chapter of Bell's novel, excess comes unstrung; we encounter the too detailed description of a slave woman who is not finished with parturition (the afterbirth still inside her body) before her white owner crucifies her for infanticide—for refusing to breed for his profit. The owner-crucifier decapitates her corpse and cuts off her hands and feet—a scene horrific, excessive. And yet as we witness the slave-owner's feral anger at his loss of capital, excess looks exactly like verisimilitude—like brutality surfeited with the real. The narrator tells us that this woman has been crucified with the nail she used to kill her newborn before it was fully detached from her: another turn of the screw, a detail grisly and plausible.

What counts as an aesthetics of excess in a world that thrives on

excess? In the circum-Atlantic world, as Joseph Roach says, “[E]ntire populations existed as actual or potential commodities and . . . the triangular trade in human flesh, manufactured goods, and raw materials rapidly produced a superabundance unprecedented in both extent and maldistribution. The enduring effects of this superimposition still operate in the fiercely laminating adhesion of bodies and objects, in which the exchange of human flesh signifies the prolific availability of all commodities.”<sup>2</sup> In *All Souls’ Rising*, Bell captures this circuitry where flesh and commodity seem forever commingled. When the slave-owner Arnaud pours the wine “liberally, or rather caused it to be poured, by making minute gestures with a finger. . . . [his guest] was slightly unnerved by the silent presence of the slave behind his chair; whenever he thought of reaching for anything on the table the slave would move to anticipate him.”<sup>3</sup> Desire quivers, the commodity comes—or rather, white desire quivers, black servitude answers, and all matter vibrates, as if both slave and commodity, or white and black desire, or owner and commodity, were one.

The Western literature that has “laminated” myths of New World plenitude has, from its outset, been surcharged with a confidence about superabundance. Roach tells us that in John Dryden’s *The Indian Emperour* (1665), the “curtain-raising version of the New World burgeons with youthful energy, fecundity and plenitude”:

VASQUEZ: Methinks we walk in dreams on fairy Land,  
 Where golden Ore lies mixt with common sand;  
 Each downfall of a flood the Mountains pour,  
 From their rich bowels rolls a silver shower.<sup>4</sup>

This seventeenth-century fantasy of New World silver gives way to vegetable beauty a century later in Moreau de Saint-Méry’s *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l’Isle Saint-Domingue*. By 1797 the slave market is said to brim with cassava, sweet potato, yams, oranges, custard apples, papaya, and “the monstrous apricot.”<sup>5</sup> Joan Dayan suggests that “Moreau’s catalogues reveal the wondrous ‘species’ of plants, animals, and vegetables available for consumption. He delights in describing ‘an infinity of things’: the fruit of the calabash tree or gourds carved in ‘an ingenious or bizarre way’; the truffle’s perfume stunning the gourmand from afar; two cocks making war with their sharp beaks even though their feet are bound.”<sup>6</sup> This tactile sense of surfeit or fecun-

dity marks numerous North and South American texts that cultivate the stunning, violent abundance of a world made from the excess of Europe's circum-Atlantic trade.

These fecund landscapes that multiply on the page, that take too many words to describe, permeate twentieth-century representations of the American South. In Eudora Welty's "No Place for You, My Love," two northern travelers stumble through the painful enchantments of too much greenery, choirs of biting insects, and the weather's superabundance as they take a trip south of New Orleans:

Here was a heat that ran deeper and brighter and more intense than all the rest—its nerve. The road grew one with the heat as it was one with the unseen river. Dead snakes stretched across the concrete like markers—inlaid mosaic bands, dry as feathers, which their tires licked at intervals that began to seem clocklike.

No, the heat faced them—it was ahead. They could see it waving at them, shaken in the air above the white of the road, always at a certain distance ahead, shimmering finely as a cloth, with running edges of green and gold, fire and azure.

"It's never anything like this in Syracuse," he said.

"Or in Toledo, either," she replied with dry lips.<sup>7</sup>

From Welty's jeweled adjectives to Faulkner's superfetation of clauses to the maze of run-on sentences in Gayl Jones's *Mosquito* (1999), there are countless Southern texts that are guilty of pleasurable overdoing, of vowels too rich and plots too avid, of gothic exploits verging on melodrama or landscapes so heat-saturated the page burns in the hand.

When U.S. Southern writing starts to go wild, how much is this virtuoso experiment, the offspring of Faulkner and Welty proving they can? And how much is this a reflection of what drives both the Latin American baroque and the U.S. Southern gothic—namely, all those commodities and skeletons refused a common epistemological ground—that is, a style that mimics the profligate expenditure that has gone into this culture's making? How much of this thematic or stylistic abundance reflects something long-standing about a hemispheric experience of surplus, superfetation, or superabundance that has become both myth and fact about the southern stretches of Europe's New World? Welty's prose overdoes it beautifully; her world is filled with too much:

Two little boys . . . circled round and shrieked at the dog . . . and hung over the stools at the bar. One child had a live lizard on his shirt, clinging like a breast pin—like lapis lazuli. . . .

In the thickening heat they danced on while Baba himself sang with the mosquito-voiced singer in the chorus of “*Moi pas l’aimez ça*,” enumerating the *ça*’s with a hot shrimp between his fingers. He was counting over the platters the old woman now set out on the counter, each heaped with shrimp in their shells boiled to iridescence, like mounds of honeysuckle flowers. (“NP,” 475–76, 478)

With Welty’s azure road and lapis lizards we return to Dryden’s fantasy of bejeweled New World surplus and then travel through Moreau’s vegetal fantasies of tropical verdure in Baba’s hot shrimp and honeysuckle brine. But Welty also finds destitution in this mosaic. Landscape is never simply landscape; it suggests a history of ongoing plenitude for white people coupled with scarcity for blacks. Their bodies coated with mosquitoes, their faces “dark,” the white couple chance upon “two people—a Negro couple sitting on two facing chairs in the yard outside their lonely cabin—half undressed, each battling for self against the hot night, with long white rags in endless, scarflike motions” (“NP,” 479). What happens to circum-Atlantic excess when we try to look at this battle from the black couple’s perspective? Below New Orleans, Welty’s narrator comes up against her limit; she finds something seething and large: “a face, a head, far down here in the South—south of South, below it. A whole giant body sprawled downward then, on and on” (“NP,” 480). When we look away from white writing, what sprawls “south of South,” down below? When Africans were hauled into Haiti, they did not encounter surfeit or superabundance but deprivation, scarcity, self-emptying. As Dayan comments in her magisterial *Haiti, History, and the Gods*, seventeenth-century Haitian slave codes declared that “though their labor produced the sugarcane, slaves were prohibited from selling it for any reason or at any time (article 18). . . . [T]hey could not even ‘display for sale at a market or . . . carry to specified houses with a view to selling any kind of commodity, either fruits, vegetables, wood, fodder for the feeding of animals, and manufactured items without express permission of their Masters’ [article 19]” (*HHG*, 208). Commodities had to be drained of exchange value “when in the hands of slaves” (*HHG*, 208). If slaves were named in these early slave codes, it was to become legal absences, negations.

During the nineteenth century, when slaves finally wrested the right to sell their own goods in the marketplace, slave-owners still devised multiple deprivations. The woman crucified for infanticide in *All Souls' Rising* loses not only her life but also her right to a proper burial. Her postmortem mutilation was a common and punitive practice. Numerous Ibos in Haiti tried to commit suicide for the promise of a "longed-for return to Africa" after death. Slave-owners tried to thwart such escape by desecrating dead bodies so they "could not travel" (*HHG*, 261).

Although dispossession is the rule, we still find a high proportion of white writers describing the greediness and "excess" of both enslaved Africans and freedmen in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. During America's Reconstruction, influential whites worried that freedmen, who had been forced across the Atlantic to maximize profit and production, might whittle away the material basis of Southern superabundance.<sup>8</sup> As Colonel J. Sprague, Assistant Commissioner of the Florida Freedmen's Bureau, complains, "The men are averse to their women and children going into the field as common laborers, desiring them rather to attend to housework, as they express it, like *White* folks. If this prevails it will reduce the working force in the cotton fields one half."<sup>9</sup> A family reduced to a fraction now seems monstrous, but during Reconstruction, whites deemed black domesticity, in itself, grotesque and extravagant. Even in the postslavery world, black laborers should still "be required to have their meals cooked in a common kitchen by the plantation cooks, as heretofore. At present, each family cooks for themselves. . . . *The extravagance in wood and the loss of time* by this mode must be apparent to all" (*BWR*, 69). For white families such expenditure was routine, but blacks owed their labor to the products, the sweetmeats, of white profit. As Thomas Carlisle intoned a decade before Reconstruction: "[I]f Quashee will not honestly aid in bringing-out those sugars, cinnamons, and nobler products of the West-Indian Islands, for the benefits of all mankind, then I say neither will the powers permit Quashee to continue growing pumpkins there for his own lazy benefit."<sup>10</sup> And if the Caribbean was fashioned by the Creator for growing sugar, the southern portion of North America became cotton's bitter cradle. If freedmen gained the rights to a mule and forty acres, prominent whites argued that the South would be ruined. They were anxious that blacks would all become subsistence farmers, failing to produce the surplus labor that a capitalist

circuitry needs: “To make their titles [to the land] perpetual is to give over to uncertain cultivation, by a race supposed to exist only for the convenience of another, the most valuable cotton lands. . . . a conclusion deemed inadmissible and monstrous” (*BWR*, 14).

When circum-Atlantic artists of color engage in an aesthetics of excess, they are responding to a different on-the-ground economy than the material myths driving Welty or Faulkner. Coming from a history of superdeprivation, how much is the flaunting of words (Patrick Chamoiseau, Derek Walcott, Shani Mootoo) a sheer assertion of beauty in the face of captors and capitalists—willing a space beyond a history of scarcity? How much is an extravagant style (Gayl Jones, Toni Morrison, Sarah Wright) the product of influence, of taking Faulkner’s words and spinning them backwards? When is thematic excess (Alejo Carpentier, Alice Randall, Kara Walker) a virtuoso act—an expenditure for the sheer pleasure of extravagant speaking? In a cramped economy, to pile image upon image, word upon word, becomes one way of taking up property, reclaiming space.

These queries about the material sources of style seem unanswerable and circular, just as the world they come from seems circular. Money changed hands; bodies came; sugar was made; ships came; sugar went; bodies were rent; more sugar was made, more Africans came. For a while, the circum-Atlantic world seemed constructed from an unlimited circulation of goods and bodies, from unlimited acts of waste and expenditure: from flesh made into profit, loss made into productivity, productivity made into cinnamon, cotton, coffee, sugar, tobacco to be traded for more European goods so the cycle could begin again.

But if “a whole giant body sprawled downward then, on and on,” something else, more bizarre, was also starting to speak. The scraps and relics of the desecrated bodies of slaves became down payments; the anatomized, infanticidal mother became food for spirits (deliberately decapitated as well as crucified so that her spirit could not return whole to Africa): the ground itself groaned with ghostly capitalists, with bizarre acts of conquest and consumption. As Dayan argues, these part-bodies

variously called “ebony wood,” “pieces of the Indies,” “heads of cattle,” [were] buried indiscriminately in the savannah and fields, [and] returned as zombi spirits, baka, or lougawou, condemned to wander the earth in the form of cats, dogs, pigs, or cows. What links

these evil spirits is the capacity for transformation into things that are not human. . . . These “monsters” are the surfeit or remnants of an institution that turned humans into things, beasts, or mongrels. In this regenerative, reinterpreted, and vengeful history, dislocated bodies return to find their place. What whites called “superstition” and “fetichism” turned out to be something more akin to the journeys of bodies that relocalize themselves as spirits and consumers, taking up space, greedy for goods, services, and attention. (*HHG*, 258)

Could the excesses of black artists who portray the American South be contiguous with this “ebony wood”: a strategy for turning deprivation and death into new circuitry, a space not just for relocalization but for hyperproduction?

While African Americans and Afro-Caribbeans were once defined as superfluous, as an expendable economic resource, I want to argue that this imagined superfluity has been met in twentieth-century Afro-Southern and Afro-Caribbean art with *superfluidity*, with fictions that open the floodgates to “the colonial difference”—foregrounding histories cast aside by canonical modernity.<sup>11</sup> This superfluidity takes weird, vagrant forms. In Kara Walker’s paper silhouette *Untitled (Milk and Bread)* (1998), we’re reminded that it was not only cotton futures that made the U.S. South affluent but also the milk of black women who, as wet-nurses, were converted from human beings into modes of production. In the left foreground of this flat, panoramic silhouette, the disproportionate body of a baby girl crawls into view (see fig. 1). Even before she becomes a woman, she is encumbered by a huge, distorted breast that drags her to the earth, while on the ground beside her swims a drop of milk—her lost birthright, her destined labor. This tiny, productive body mimics the proportions of the grown-up black woman behind her, whose breast milk falls into a metal milk jug: already someone else’s property. The cumulative power of these silhouettes mimics Alejo Carpentier’s definition of the New World Baroque in which visual and literary surfaces brim with excess: “The central axis . . . is surrounded by what one might call ‘proliferating nuclei,’ that is, decorative elements that completely fill the space of the construction . . . all architecturally available space: motifs that contain their own expansive energy, that launch or project forms centrifugally. It is art in motion, a pulsating art, an art that moves outward and away from the center, that somehow breaks through its own borders.”<sup>12</sup>



**Figure 1** Kara Walker, *Untitled (Milk and Bread)*, 1998. Installation view, Forum for Contemporary Art, St. Louis, Missouri. Collection of Rachel and Jean-Pierre Lehmann, New York. Courtesy of Sikkema Jenkins and Company; and Detail from *Untitled (Milk and Bread)*.

Beyond the central axis of the churn, bizarre figures leap toward a heat return randomly fixed to the museum wall, while Walker breaks the boundaries of prudent representation by insisting on the proliferation of black women's milk as stolen biopower.

We witness a similar obsession with breast milk in Alice Randall's *The Wind Done Gone*—a novel marked, like Walker's silhouettes, with strange body language, extraoedipal family geometries, and an excess of milk. While Bell's rebellious Haitians declare victory by drinking white men's blood, Randall and Walker explore what it means to live in a black-and-white world made from black women's milk. That is, both artists use women's superfluids to think foundationally about the reproductive sources of a plantation economy where slaves made a world in the midst of superdeprivation. Their account of milk is not just descriptive but epistemological; it involves rethinking the liquid basis of global economies. Economic accounts of the Americas describe the fungibility of New World commodities such as cotton, sugar, and silver as the font of globalization and modernity. As Enrique Dussel argues in *The Invention of the Americas*: "Modernity began in certain medieval European cities under the impetus of the Renaissance proponents of the Quattrocento. But modernity could only take off when sufficient historical conditions were in place: 1492, its empirical spreading over the world, its organization of colonies. . . . Modernity came to birth in 1492."<sup>13</sup> But this "birth," a set of circumstances "pivotal to Europe's establishment of world hegemony," also had its source in the labors of slave women who served as wet-nurses for black and white children.<sup>14</sup> While Walker folds and multiplies this African source of New World abundance into her smooth silhouettes, Randall runs at the mouth and asks, how is human milk transformed into wealth or exchange value? Is it culture, nature, or some undertheorized source of consumption? Both artists parody dominant cultural forms (the belle-worship of *Gone with the Wind*, the prudish outlines of nineteenth-century silhouettes) to explore the alienated labor of the wet-nursing woman and child. By compressing these traditional forms into odd shapes, white people's conventions fray and multiply. As Monika Kaup suggests in her reading of Carpentier's "Baroque machine," "[W]hat makes theories of the New World Baroque so interesting is that they challenge standard assumptions in postcolonial discourse about the dichotomy of cultures of colonizer and colonized: in the New World Baroque, the expressive forms of decolonization are folded from the colonizer's forms. In his book on Leibniz, Deleuze singles out the



**Figure 2** Kara Walker, *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven* (detail), 1995. Collection of Jeffrey Deitch, New York. Courtesy of Sikkema Jenkins and Company.

Baroque fold as a device for the creation of worlds: ‘The Baroque refers not to an essence but rather to an operative function. . . . It endlessly produces folds.’<sup>15</sup> In the suppurating creases of the plantation romance, the anaesthesia of black base and white superstructure intermingle in a circum-Atlantic poetics of excess.

Walker’s paper silhouettes enlarge the stereotypes describing black culture to create a world where slaves are not only victims but also consumers. In *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tab-*



**Figure 3** Kara Walker, *Consume*, 1998. Collection of Jean Crutchfield and Robert Hobbs. Courtesy of Sikkema Jenkins and Company.

*leau of Eva in Heaven* (1995), three black women suckle one another's breasts (see fig. 2), while in *Consume* (1998), a black woman suckles her own breast as a little white boy sucks on her proliferating lower organs (a fetishistic amalgam of bananas, breasts, and penises [see fig. 3]). Similarly, Randall takes a contrasting set of plantation stereotypes and loads them with commodity fetishism. Gerald O'Hara calls

the mulatto heroine of Randall's novel his "Cinnamon," while her mother (also known as Mammy to readers of *Gone with the Wind*) gets caressed as his "coffee." In this novella the question of objects and excess are in the air—the excess of Southern commerce, the surfeit of mammy's milk, as well as the disproportionate, romantic continuo of Margaret Mitchell's never-ending novel.

Randall's satire is not so much a fine novelistic response to Mitchell as it is a great work of literary criticism. In *Gone with the Wind* we wonder, why doesn't Ashley Wilkes love Scarlett as much as the other white boys in her neighborhood love her? Randall explains that Ashley lusts after black boys, not white girls; his marriage with Melanie is a fiction, a convenience. Is miscegenation a heterosexual act in Southern lives and fiction? Not at Belle Watling's, where you find black and white prostitutes tumbling in and out of bed with one another, and Belle herself in love with Scarlett's black sister. Is the white belle the invention of white Southern men, the lady on a pedestal required to bring on the Klan, to uphold the virile hard-on of the Confederacy? No, the belle is the invention of black women, a machine for wreaking vengeance. Randall's Scarlett "was Mammy's revenge on a world of white men who would not marry her dark self and who had not loved her Lady. Did [Scarlett] see how she had been weaned to pick up hearts and trained to dash them down, both with casual ease? Who convinced her to conquer: Had Mammy ever told [Scarlett] the truth about [Ashley]? No."<sup>16</sup> Like Walker, Randall seizes upon the restricted economy of slavery as a condition of scarcity and remaps it as a general economy where whites become superfluous. White culture becomes the object of potlatch, of extravagant black expenditure.<sup>17</sup>

In *The Wind Done Gone*, Randall shifts Mitchell's black characters from background to foreground; the white family members become puppets of the black agents who really run the plantation (although these agents are still faced with the problem of internal colonization, of performing white culture and reinforcing white dominance better than the white landholders themselves). In Randall's novel, the slave named Garlic seizes sovereignty. In Mitchell's novel, Garlic is a minor character called Pork; as father to Dilcey, he gets only a few lines: "Well, Miss Scarlett, mah Dilcey ten' ter Miss Melly's chile. Mah Dilcey got a new chile herself an' she got mo'n nuff fer both." Through Pork's stereotyped rhetoric, Mitchell rationalizes black women's nutritional deprivation and the deaths of their children. Of course Dilcey can nurse Melanie's child; she is superabundant; her own boy is fat and

black. Besides, if something should happen to this child, there would still be a surplus of slave children to go around:

“You’ve got a new baby, Pork?”

Babies, babies. Why did God make so many babies? . . .

“Yas’m big fat black boy. He—”

“Go tell Dilcey to leave the girls. . . . Tell her to nurse Miss Melanie’s baby.”<sup>18</sup>

Is it any wonder that Garlic in *The Wind Done Gone* is a steady milk drinker? Mitchell’s text leaves gaps, hollow sections in which Randall’s black characters can (like Dayan’s Voudoun practitioners) “re-localize themselves as spirits and consumers, taking up space, greedy for goods, services, and attention.” Following the path of Sherley Anne Williams’s *Dessa Rose* (1986), where a white woman nurses a black child, or Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*, where Sethe never stops aching and angering about the white men who have stolen her milk, or Morrison’s *Song of Solomon* where Afro-Southern habits of nursing earn “Milkman” his name, Randall invents a new phenomenology of breast milk as it crosses racial lines. In Randall’s novel, it is Ellen O’Hara, Scarlett’s white mother, who longs to suckle Mammy and Gerald’s brown daughter. Jealous of Mammy’s motherly relation to Scarlett and Gerald’s sexual passion for Mammy, Ellen responds to her exclusion from this triangle with milk feasts shared by Mammy’s and Gerald’s brown daughter, Cynara. Like Ellen, Cynara hovers outside the enforced love triangle of slave-owner, white daughter, and black wet-nurse. When a black woman wet-nurses a white child, we encounter her milk as white culture’s surplus labor: the body stolen to make a marriageable, exchangeable daughter. But Randall multiplies Mitchell’s traffic in women. The plantation’s white mistress also wants to play wet-nurse to her own wet-nurse’s brown child. She

pulled me onto her lap and I suckled at her breast till her warm milk filled me. As always, it was a cheering surprise for both of us. We had been sharing these little spurred-by-envy suppers all my memory, but each time the milk came and how long it came without running out was a mystery to us both. Later, when I slept beside her, she said, “You’re my little girl, aren’t you?” (*WDG*, 16)

Cynara *does* belong to Ellen, body and soul. Ellen commands Cynara to drink a glass of fresh milk—followed by the offering of her own indented pink nipple:

Lady called from the next room, “Mammy, send Cindy up with some cool water and a glass of sweet milk. . . . I walked in with what she wanted. Lady made herself comfortable in her rocking chair. “Are you hungry?” I nodded. She handed me the glass of milk. I hesitated. “You can drink it.” I took the glass and drank. She took the glass and drank right after me. . . . I was astounded. I didn’t know the word then, but that’s what I was.

“Help me unbutton my dress; I want to wash.” I helped her take off her dress. Her bared breast was just a little thing with a dented nipple almost as big as the circle it stood in. The circle was that tiny. “Are you still hungry?” I nodded again. (*WDG*, 15–16)

In this erotic scene, Randall uses milk allegorically to posit the inadequacy of white reproduction. Torn out of her context (like the silhouette of Walker’s breast-heavy baby), the toddler Cynara labors to help Ellen O’Hara produce milk. Is this necessary or surplus labor? Or have we waltzed out of ordinary cycles of consumption and commodification altogether? In Walker’s *Untitled (Milk and Bread)*, a black woman steals butterfat from her churn and dances away, while in the right foreground a fat (white?) toddler pours the milk back into the ground to make a landscape. In Walker’s and Randall’s proliferating art, milk is always a superfluid that even Ellen O’Hara wants to produce: a form of black biopower that creates a black and white world.<sup>19</sup>

In Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind*, the source of this milk recedes like a white impasto on the walls of Walker’s silhouettes. Scarlett blushes when she talks about Melanie’s milk with Pork, her father’s valet:

“Miss Melanie’s baby will die if he doesn’t get something to eat.”

“Miss Melly ain’—kain—?” Pork paused delicately.

“‘Miss Melanie has no milk.’ Dear God, but Mother would faint at [my saying] that!” (*GW*, 402)

In contrast, *The Wind Done Gone* bubbles, sings, simmers with the flow and flood of milk. Initially Mammy nurses both Scarlet and Cynara: “What did I suck in on Mammy’s tit that made me black, and why did it not darken Other’s berry?” (*WDG*, 162).

In *An Abbreviated Emancipation (from the Emancipation Approximation)* (2002), Walker complicates this question as one black woman suckles another—suggesting well-sated hunger and pleasure. The white woman standing nearby seems to toss them a laurel crown while she squeezes (or masturbates with?) her own empty breast (see fig. 4).



**Figure 4** Kara Walker, *An Abbreviated Emancipation* (from the *Emancipation Approximation*) (detail), 2002. Installation view, University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor. Courtesy of Sikkema Jenkins and Company.

Is successful suckling a form of pleasure or labor power that white women envy? If the answer is yes, this reflects more than the pleasure of nursing (for many women, uneven at best). Instead, Walker's images insist that black women's lactation is an epic and overlooked source of colonial, and thus European-American, modernity. When the Middle Passage ended, when white or creole families reproduced, black women provided new children to serve them and the milky means to maintain them. For Randall and Walker, this act has erotic and epochal implications.

Both writer and artist celebrate the superfluidity of the periphery in odd ways, by depicting the world-making properties of black women's labor and milk. Randall submits to the lock-step of narration, of bildungsroman, while Walker interlaces old silhouettes with the contorted hyperbole of the neo-baroque, filling old forms with revelatory multiplicity. Despite these asymmetries, each artist remains fixed on lactation as an unspoken connection between the races. If these insur-

gent acts of suckling seem overdone, it is because both writer and artist imagine milky excess as the viewer's best route for exploring the underpinnings of white violence and superabundance. And in the context of the plantation world, both textual and imagistic excess start to look hyperreal. Superlactation, and its attendant death or exhaustion, was a powerful source of "Americanity" ("the pivotal role the Americas have played in Europe's construction of the first world-system").<sup>20</sup> This lactation helped forge the baroque family system characteristic of New World *mestizaje*: a series of interlocking dyads and triads that conventional Freudian theory could not hope to map.

I have begun to argue that the hyperfolded, tradition-crumpling art of Walker and Randall participates in a neo-baroque superfluidity in which milk has the power to initiate new genealogies, unexpected forms of rivalry and sisterhood, as well as old forms of capital. For Randall's narrator, "all women are niggers. For sure, every woman I know was a nigger, whether she knew it or not" (*WDG*, 177). But some women have the power to command suckling as labor, while others are surfeited (uncomfortably, happily, can we know?) with milk's white excess. Still others are helpless against the parasitism of enslaved lactation. Walker's *Means to an End—A Shadow Drama in Five Acts* (1995) outlines five traumatic events. In the very last frame, a white man is about to murder or rape a prepubescent black girl. But the first frame is equally predatory. Walker records the costs for a black woman who is forced to suckle a parasitic white boy already in knickers—his portly body glued to her own (see fig. 5). Walker's perverse panoramas present a sinuous background for similar plot twists in *The Wind Done Gone*. Mitchell tells us that Tara's grounds contain a graveyard where, after the three white O'Hara sisters were born, "then followed three little boys, each of whom died before he had learned to walk—three little boys who now lay under the twisted cedars in the burying ground a hundred yards from the house, beneath three stones, each bearing the name of 'Gerald O'Hara, Jr.'" (*GW*, 59). A literary critic might ask why Mitchell indulges in this explosion of dead sons. Do they represent a critique of white flaccidness and morbidity in the pre-Civil War South, or the anemia or deanimation of a white male tradition that is about to be defeated? This question is reined in by the assumptions one brings to Southern history.

The nineteenth century knew enormous rates of infant mortality caused by pneumonia, influenza, smallpox, diarrhea. But Randall con-



**Figure 5** Kara Walker, *Means to an End—A Shadow Drama in Five Acts*, 1995. University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor. Museum purchase made possible by the Jean Paul Slusser Memorial Fund, 1996/2.4.1–5.

finds our assumptions about the dead. At Mammy's grave, Cynara asks Priss:

"Why are you shivering?"

"It gives me the heebie-jeebies to stand out in that graveyard. It's strange, all those little [O'Hara] boys buried right next to you Mama."

"Why strange?" . . .

Miss Priss let her voice drop real low. . . . She kind of hissed in my ear. "Your Mama killed those boys soon as they were born."

"Why would she do that?"

"What would we a done with a sober white man on this place?"  
(*WDG*, 62–63)

Mitchell's sad detail becomes comical as Mammy, the faithful servant, turns murderess. The plot becomes both frightening and plausible as we intuit a gap in Mitchell's story, a hollow section that can absorb another phantasm. (That is, for all its long pages and pangs and romantic excess, there are a thousand places this plot can be folded.) We are also reminded that the first frame of Walker's *Means to an End* leads directly to frame five. The boy who attacks his mammy's breast becomes the man who attacks his mammy's daughter. While Walker conjures past traumas—"baka or lougawou, condemned to wander"—from dead ground or water, Randall's text revives an African American storyline as excessive and plausible as Margaret Mitchell's.

So when Mitchell says that "Scarlett looked at her father . . . and . . . found it comforting to be in his presence" (*GW*, 33), Randall retextures this closeness by reminding us that Mammy's shared body fastens them together. Every time Gerald and Scarlett are near, we witness the emptying breasts of the brown woman who connects them as well as an uneven family geometry in which Gerald's object of sexual desire is both Cynara's mother and Scarlett's wet-nurse, a scenario that has, as its byproduct, this triplet's distancing from Ellen O'Hara, a white lady on a pedestal, and from its black sister and daughter. As the baby Scarlett runs to Mammy to nurse,

[t]he rosebud mouth attached to the black moon in the brown breast, the curving back of the loving woman lifting the child to her pleasures, as the child, awake, untouched by stays and hoops, stands on tippy-toe to get her fill of pleasure, all raven-haired and unashamed of hunger. Him laughed. For his first-born daughter the

pangs of hunger were as delightful as a mosquito bite, something to scratch in the next moment, the promise of pleasure to come.

He didn't see me hiding behind Lady's skirts or see the look Mammy gave me over Other's head. Planter only saw his daughter taking pleasure where he himself had done. (*WDG*, 14)

Cynara, the narrator of *The Wind Done Gone*, experiences her greatest pain on the periphery of her biological family. "Mammy always called me Chile. She never called me soft or to her softness. She called me to do things, usually for Other, who she called Lamb. It was 'Get dressed, Chile!' and 'What's mah Lamb gwanna wear?'" (*WDG*, 5). When Cynara reaches puberty, Gerald O'Hara sells her and writes a letter to the new owner transforming her from daughter into an object of sexual exchange.

Later, when she is sold at auction, Cynara cannot forgive Mammy for the hours she stands bare-breasted at the slave block in Savannah. For all the power Mammy has in "Planter's" household, why couldn't she protect her own daughter's body? This is a question of the first order, easily answered. As John Irwin tells us, and *Absalom, Absalom!* and Gail Jones's *Corregidora* (1975) teach us, miscegenation and the incest accompanying it create a cycle of imprisoning repetition.<sup>21</sup> Cynara is sent away so her father, Planter, will not rape her—and so that someone who is not her father can. *The Wind Done Gone* enfolds *Gone with the Wind*; the dialectical relation of plenty and scarcity that has driven a U.S. Southern economy gets worked out in metaphors of milk and miscegenation. And when miscegenation is presented from a black women's perspective, it looks very different from Faulkner's agon, as if Randall is asking, what would it have been like for *The Sound and the Fury*'s Clytemnestra if, already deprived of milk, she watched her mother nurse Sutpen's white children, Judith and Henry? What would this have been like for their white mother, Ellen Coldfield? Suddenly huge spots of vacancy or indeterminacy open in Faulkner's story—his plenitude hovering over an abyss of unsaid connections and deprivations.

Similarly, in *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven*, Walker shows three slave women and a child suckling one another, suggesting the close circuitry of deprivation and abundance in the plantation world.<sup>22</sup> Striding next to them is a black child whose trailing excrement changes into landscape and impinges on the next silhouette, where Little Eva threatens both herself and a



**Figure 6** Kara Walker, *The End of Uncle Tom and the Grand Allegorical Tableau of Eva in Heaven* (detail), 1995. Collection of Jeffrey Deitch, New York. Courtesy of Sikkema Jenkins and Company.

small black boy with an ax. As if in response, a black girl threatens to ram a stick up Eva's furbelowed behind (see fig. 6). Although there are too many images to take this in all at once, we can read Eva's aggression in this last tableau as a response to the superfluidity of the first two images. The nursing women and defecating child are all fluent producers, while Eva—who occupies the pinnacle of aggression—can make nothing but violence. Meanwhile, in Walker's *Camptown Ladies* (1998), a white woman feeds off the streams of bodily waste flowing from a plump putti-child: its body made piss-perfect by the milk of the black woman who holds it (see fig. 7). Her breast also gives off liquid—milk, tears, or even a blacked-out balloon of speech—a comma, a black comedy. Once again both Walker and Randall rescript lactation as epic, as world-making.

Does this point need to be made again and again? Why resurrect this riot of lactation image by image? Because in *Gone with the Wind* (a text that markets white ideology), African American women's bodies, their breasts, are depicted only as backdrop: as ground that never breaks into figure. The labor of giving white children milk is utterly normalized; the dispossession of the body's most nourishing fluids becomes the background, the repressed:

The door opened softly and Dilcey entered, Melanie's baby held to her breast, the gourd of whisky in her hand. . . . Her faded



**Figure 7** Kara Walker, *Camptown Ladies*, 1998. Rubell Family Collection, Miami, Florida. Courtesy of Sikkema Jenkins and Company.

calico dress was open to the waist and her large bronze breast exposed. Held close against her, Melanie's baby pressed his pale rosebud mouth greedily to the dark nipple, sucking, gripping tiny fists against the soft flesh like a kitten in the warm fur of its mother's belly. (*GW*, 408)

Walker makes this white fantasy of a black woman's fur-like flesh even more fetishistic in an image in *An Abbreviated Emancipation (from The Emancipation Approximation)*. Wearing the skeletal frame of a hoop skirt, a slave girl sucks on her own S-shaped tail (which also doubles as ribbon or whip [see fig. 8]). In pantaloons made shaggy by lace-like fur, this child resembles a zombie spirit bewildered at her own status as commodity fetish. But even though her primitive tail-sucking and hoop-skirt fragments mark her marginal status, she also represents a powerful image of the artistic gaze, an artist-figure hungry and suckling herself into being.<sup>23</sup> In *Consume*, Walker creates an even more hyperproductive "African" woman who attempts to feed herself even as she is sucked dry by a little white boy who feeds at her ring of fruity penises, or low-slung banana breasts. This boy is



**Figure 8** Kara Walker, *An Abbreviated Emancipation* (from the *Emancipation Approximation*) (detail), 2002. Installation view, University of Michigan Museum of Art, Ann Arbor. Courtesy of Sikkema Jenkins and Company.

another white parasite, but his passivity suggests that he is in thrall to her Josephine Baker–like body, impregnated by her culture. Are these appendages meant to be a fantastic evolutionary response to the wet-nurse’s superdeprivation? Here and elsewhere, Walker sets out to disturb and give pleasure while acknowledging the great cost to Afro-Caribbeans and African Americans who have—physically and spiritually—created white culture.

We have already encountered Randall’s reestimation of the moment when a white “rosebud” mouth attaches itself to a black woman’s body. In *The Wind Done Gone*, the breast is not only the epochal site of culture-making, it is also deprivatized; it becomes beautiful. “The

black moon in the brown breast” is a figure of profound psychic comfort or trauma, depending on one’s weight in this social scale. Most important, this “moon” does not represent a “part-body” but flesh and nourishment that moves with “the curving back of the loving woman lifting” a child. Seeing her mother’s body whole while watching Scarlett suck, Cynara also wants to be Scarlett, to have access to excess, to her own mother’s milk that makes Scarlett run. A scene of labor and exclusion is simultaneously a scene of eros and identification, and a strange and unexamined sisterhood, a ghostly mother and daughterhood, is born out of cross-racial envy and work.

She was old enough to talk. She walked right past me, past Lady, she walked right past Lady and me, over to Mammy, reached up for Mammy, and my Mama reached down to pull Other up onto her hip. Other reached the top of Mammy’s dress and pulled out my mother’s breast. “I want some titty-tip,” she said, and I ached in some place I didn’t know I had, where my heart should have been but wasn’t. . . . I flushed in a rage of possession as those little white hands drew the nipple toward the little pink mouth, then clasped on. (WDG, 13)

Cynara aches, Lady clutches at her cinched waist and staggers back, the text is possessed by rhythms of possession and dispossession. Every time the milk starts to flow, the dyads multiply, fray into triangles, quadrangles, pentangles as characters project desire and anger in all directions so that “she” (my white half-sister and nonrelation) “ran home to my mother” while “I” am always forced to get my birth-father’s hugs via displacement from Rhett and Scarlett’s “Bonny Blue” daughter who “had Planter’s mouth, and . . . gave me Planter’s kisses” (WDG, 17).

I have argued that Walker’s and Randall’s art shares with the New World baroque the property of creating new folds or structures from the stereotypical forms of the nineteenth-century silhouette and twentieth-century U.S. plantation romance. I have also argued that the reenactment of this thematic and imagistic excess is one of the markers of circum-Atlantic aesthetics, that is, an art concerned with the Atlantic commercial slave-sugar-cotton-tobacco trade and its aftermath. We can define this neobaroque habit of superfluidity as the result of several overlapping phenomena. The first is the fact of epistemological impasse—of New World art made out of the simultaneity

of black, white, and mestizo cultures involving contradictory ways of knowing. According to Walter D. Mignolo, “[A]t the moment when capitalism began to be displaced from the Mediterranean to the North Atlantic (Holland, Britain), the organization of knowledge was established in its universal scope” and reduced to the geopolitical spaces of Western Europe, erasing the possibility of “thinking about the conceptualization and distribution of knowledge ‘emanating’ from other local histories (China, India, Islam)” or South America, the Caribbean, and the American South.<sup>24</sup> When these local histories start to emerge, it is often as a rising tide, an insistent overspeaking. In challenging a monochromatic take on the blues, the narrator of Jones’s *Mosquito* gives explanation after explanation; she rides a polychrome speech wave:

Y’all ain’t listened to no true blues singers I says. ‘Cause that ain’t the whole of the blues repertoire. . . . it ain’t just about who done who wrong. They sings about work, they sings about the railroad, they sings about the whole world, they sings about sweet honey, they sings about the rooster. They is evil and mean men and women in the blues. They is the boll weevil blues. They is good men and women in the blues. . . . There is people sings about working in the turpentine farms and them that sings about working in Detroit in Mr. Ford’s factory. They is blues that sings about St. Louis, Mississippi and Chicago. . . . about Mr. President and the WPA. They’s blues songs about womens being glad for they sweet honey mens and mens being glad for they sweet honey womens. . . . There’s I’m tired of Jim Crow songs and songs about the good Lawd’s children. There’s I am what I am songs. And some people sing in the blues just ‘cause they know the song blues. I think you is writing them blues novels just ‘cause you knows the song.<sup>25</sup>

To bring the epistemic array of blues lyrics to light, *Mosquito* can’t stop: there is too much to say. If this is “productive” overwriting—a quest to expand the reader’s knowledge about “sweet honey mens and women’s,” other writers work in the domain of creative destruction—disrupting and recreating Western modernity to make way for a dirtier transmodernity: a worldview that takes into account the periphery, that wraps the colonial cosmos in folds.

Second, literary excess (too many words, too many themes, a surfeit of plots, characters, or rhetorics) can be a direct response to the



**Figure 9** Kara Walker, *Slavery! Slavery!* (detail), 1997. Installation view, Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota. The Peter Norton Family Foundation. Courtesy of Sikkema Jenkins and Company.

hypermaterialist role that the Americas played in Europe's creation of a first-world system. Here the economic and psychological "gift" of superabundance or surplus value confronts the death, exhaustion, and alienated labor that are its source.<sup>26</sup> The result is a hyperactive literature where digression, repetition, conquest, and counter-conquest get acted out not only all at once but again and again. Walker's bizarre paper silhouettes offer a striking visual analogy. In *Slavery! Slavery!* (1997) a black child in orientalist garb perfumes the rear end of a white or creole woman carrying a black mask (see fig. 9). When juxtaposed with its neighboring silhouettes, this perfume changes into its opposite; it emerges as ordure, while the Spanish moss hanging above the pair seems an exhalation of the economy that surrounds them. In the center of this tableau, a naked slave woman spews fountains of jet-black liquid from genitals, breast, mouth, and back. Her liquidity seems helpless: an abundant, Eurocentric delight. In producing someone else's pleasure, she balances precariously on the body of a satyr-slave who is contorted and confined within the fountain's decorative base. He rests, in turn, on an upturned skull. In these silhouettes, the appearance of superabundance has, as its underside, an unimaginable superdeprivation.

A third source of scriptive superabundance seems more innocent and is grounded in the environment itself. Strolling through the thick, vegetative emerald of St. Lucia, as the air thickens, rain falls abundantly, and “all round there was an overwhelming green,” Derek Walcott tells a story about the editor Leon Wieseltier’s visit to the island. In “looking around at. . . the palm trees, the banana plantations, the mounds of red-brown earth, the Caribbean Sea at the foot of the mountains,” Wieseltier said to Walcott: “Oh, I see, you’re minimalist!”<sup>27</sup> That is, Walcott’s restless poetry seems spare compared with St. Lucia’s verdure. And yet even here excess and deprivation can work together. Walker’s rich landscapes often emanate from the silhouetted bodies of enslaved Africans. In *Camptown Ladies*, a slave woman melts into earth, while her black companion’s ankles merge with the tufting grass.

Are Walcott’s and Walker’s worlds synonymous? No. As numerous scholars have taught us, conditions within circum-Atlantic slave regions have not been identical. The slave trade ends at different moments, family and plantation systems differ, the relation to indigenous people, and to the varying status and colors of blackness and mestizaje differ wildly, as well as access to industrialization, mechanical modernity, and the art-historical influence of the Spanish or Portuguese baroque that mingled with indigenous images and dominated Latin American cathedrals and cultural practices. At the same time, a black art focused on the U.S. South joins the preoccupations of Caribbean and Latin American art exploring the histories of Afro-modernity. These texts multiply to excess our knowledge of the disjunctive sources of circum-Atlantic superabundance. They also challenge or enfold encyclopedic western theories.

Let me give a final example. If we add race to Freud’s theories of Oedipus or Electra and think of women’s labor and desire in the everyday mix of miscegenation, we are forced to make Freud’s theories more baroque or entangled, to throw away the clean geometry of the Oedipus, with its triangular logic of father and son as rivals for a singular mother, and to replace it with what, for now, I’ll call “the polygonal Pallas complex.” (In *The Wind Done Gone*, Pallas is Mammy’s given name.) When a black child (Cynara) and white mother (Ellen O’Hara) hover outside the triangle of white owner, white daughter, and black wet-nurse-mistress (Gerald O’Hara, Scarlett, and Mammy), they open the Freudian triangle to a pentangular scene of counter-eros and counter-labor where desire and anger multiply instead of coalesc-

ing into binary antagonisms. Thinking back as a grown woman, Cynara sees Lady at seventeen as “the oldest child on the porch.” “Never certain of feeding, I did not welcome hunger. I looked and wanted to suck; Lady looked and wanted to suckle-feed. We were both envious. . . . She pulled me onto her lap and I suckled at her breast till her warm milk filled me” (*WDG*, 15). A white woman bares her breast for pleasure; it is the black child’s *job* to suck. And yet because of this work, Cynara may have won her battle with Scarlett: “[I]t was a comfort to know. . . . that Other died without ever once seeing her mother’s breasts, breasts on which I sucked” (*WDG*, 102). Cynara refuses to be called “Cinnamon,” Planter’s devouring name. She moves back three steps to contemplate her world’s strange oralities. “Other,” or Scarlett, cannot step back. As she runs to Pallas-Mammy, she never sees who she is or what she wants. She is too blinded by whiteness to see the quiddities, the beauties and traumas of color. She will always miss the brown moon in the white breast, the black moon in the brown one. Created from human flesh translated into milk, she comes from a long line of white women afraid to say its name: “‘Miss Melanie has no milk.’ Dear God, but Mother would faint at that!” But Cynara knows, as Scarlett does not, that Ellen O’Hara would not faint. In Randall’s *The Wind Done Gone*, Ellen herself is mestiza, mixed race, and her desire to suckle a brown child becomes an act of greed and reparation: greed for the plenitude that whites project onto black bodies, reparation for the damage done to herself and her ancestors when Euro-Americans declare that whites alone are worthy of doing the dance that is capitalism’s damage, of garnering from the circum-Atlantic world its superabundance.

University of Michigan

## Notes

- 1 Madison Smartt Bell, *All Souls’ Rising* (New York: Pantheon, 1995), 233.
- 2 Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1996), 124–25.
- 3 Bell, *All Souls’ Rising*, 15.
- 4 Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, 145, 146. See also *The Indian Emperour*, in *Plays: The Indian Emperour, Secret Love, and Sir Martin Mar-all*, vol. 9 of *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. John Loftis (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1966), 30–31.
- 5 Médéric-Louis-Élie Moreau de Saint-Méry, *Description topographique*,

- physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l'Isle Saint-Domingue* (*A Topographical, Physical, Civil, Political, and Historical Description of the French Part of the Island of Saint-Domingue*), 3 vols. (Philadelphia, Chez l'auteur, 1797); new ed. by Blanche Maurel and Étienne Taillemite (Paris: *Societe de l'histoire des colonies françaises [Society of the History of the French Colonies]*, 1958), 1:433–436; quoted in Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1995), 220.
- 6 Joan Dayan, *Haiti, History, and the Gods* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1995), 220. Further references will be cited parenthetically in the text as *HHG*.
  - 7 Eudora Welty, "No Place for You, My Love," in *The Collected Stories of Eudora Welty* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1980), 471; further references to this story will be cited parenthetically in the text as "NP."
  - 8 This is not meant as a refutation of C. Vann Woodward's argument about the penury that descended on the South both materially and imaginatively after the U.S. Civil War, nor do I wish to overlook the uneven market conditions that existed before and after the war (see C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1968]). Instead, *superabundance* describes the South's imagined ideal, in which the restricted economy of black slavery, wage labor, or tenancy would yield a general economy for whites of plenitude and easy expenditure.
  - 9 Colonel J. Sprague, quoted in Gerald David Jaynes, *Branches without Roots: Genesis of the Black Working Class in the American South: 1862–1882* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986), 69; further references will be cited parenthetically in the text as *BWR*.
  - 10 Thomas Carlyle, "Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question" (London, 1853), in *Carlyle: The Nigger Question; Mill: The Negro Question*, ed. Eugene R. August (New York, 1971), 31; quoted in *BWR*, 12.
  - 11 For a detailed discussion of capitalism and superfluity (as luxury economy and as expendable resource), see Achille Mbembe, "Aesthetics of Superfluity," in *Johannesburg, the Elusive Metropolis*, special issue of *Public Culture*, edited by Achille Mbembe and Sarah Nuttall, 16 (fall 2004): 378.
  - 12 Alejo Carpentier, "The Baroque and the Marvelous Real," in *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, trans. Tanya Huntington and Lois Parkinson Zamora (Durham, N.C.: Duke Univ. Press, 1995), 93.
  - 13 Enrique Dussel, *The Invention of the Americas: Eclipse of "the Other" and the Myth of Modernity*, trans. Michael D. Barber (New York: Continuum, 1995), 138.
  - 14 For a fuller discussion of Dussell, see Monika Kaup, "Neobaroque: Latin America's Alternative Modernity," *Contemporary Literature* 58, no. 2 (2006): 134.

- 15 Monika Kaup, "Becoming-Baroque: Folding European Forms into the New World Baroque with Alejo Carpentier," in *CR: The New Centennial Review* 5, no. 2 (2005): 115.
- 16 Alice Randall, *The Wind Done Gone* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001), 54. Further references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text as *WDG*.
- 17 In *The Wind Done Gone*, whites have little or no agency; there is no white act that doesn't have its origin in African American dreaming. In white writing, whites are often credited with all agency, while blacks become dupes or shadow figures. Randall reverses Mitchell's figure and ground, so that while Garlic was educated (waiting in Harvard yard for his master), Gerald O'Hara is just a poor Irishman. The syncretism Paul Gilroy describes between an Atlantic world constructed by black *and* white thinkers is taken to the next degree; see *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1993). Garlic becomes an architect and shrewd businessman; Mammy is a murderess loyal to her own needs who makes Scarlett into a temptress, a mantrap, to achieve revenge in a world of white men.
- 18 Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind* (New York: Avon, 1973), 402–3; further references are to this edition and will be cited parenthetically in the text as *GW*.
- 19 In an interview with Elizabeth Armstrong, Kara Walker has commented that the scene of women and girls suckling one another in *The End of Uncle Tom* is about the nurturance of large historical forces as they meet stereotypes. Her suckling references "History. My constant need . . . to suckle from history, as though history could be seen as a seemingly endless supply of mother's milk represented by the big black mammy of old"; see "Kara Walker Interviewed by Liz Armstrong 7/23/96," in *No Place (like Home)*, exhibition catalogue, ed. Elizabeth Armstrong et al. (Minneapolis: Walker Art Center, 1997), 106.
- 20 This is Monica Kaup's definition of "Americanity" as a term that Aníbal Quijano and Immanuel Wallerstein discuss in "Americanity as a Concept, or the Americas in the Modern World System," *International Social Science Journal* 44, no. 4 (1992): 549–57. See Kaup's excellent discussion in "Neobaroque," 134, n. 7.
- 21 See John T. Irwin, *Doubling and Incest/Repetition and Revenge: A Speculative Reading of Faulkner* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1975).
- 22 Both Walker and Randall evoke the *recherché* voice of French feminism: Helene Cixous's exclamation that "women are more body—hence more writing," the fun and funk of having two mouths in Irigaray's "When Our Two Lips Speak Together," or Cixous's insistence that women write in milk and night. French feminists cancelled the epistemological force of their writing by calling woman a "dark continent." Still, we can admire Walker's and Randall's courage in reentering this territory where *Beloved*

- gets rewritten as well as *The Sound and the Fury*. In *The Wind Done Gone*, when Ellen drinks from a glass of milk right after Cynara, when she presents her indented nipple, milk becomes the arena for organizing overlooked kinships—exposing the “one drop” rule to new scrutiny.
- 23 Robert F. Reid-Pharr argues that Walker’s images of children shock because Walker means to disturb notions of childhood innocence. Her critics have “missed the point. The black girl whom Walker creates . . . ought to be understood not as a subject whom we already know . . . but instead as a newly emerging subject who barely knows herself. . . . Thus, like the artist, both inquisitiveness and a species of naïve cruelty are a part of her nature. She is fascinated by all aspects of the culture in which she is immersed, not simply those that are respectable or correct” (“Black Girl Lost,” in *Kara Walker: Picture from Another Time*, ed. Annette Dixon [Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2002], 35).
- 24 Walter D. Mignolo, “The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 101 (winter 2002): 60–61.
- 25 Gayl Jones, *Mosquito* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), 275–76.
- 26 For a list of other sources of baroque New World literature, see Alejo Carpentier, “The Baroque and the Marvelous Real.”
- 27 Derek Walcott, quoted in Hilton Als, “The Islander: Derek Walcott Is Writing a Poetry of the Caribbean,” *New Yorker*, 9 February 2005, 45.