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MICHAEL LUCEY

Genet's *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs:* Fantasy and Sexual Identity*

> Le fantasme est le soutien du désir, ce n'est pas l'objet qui est le soutien du désir.
>
> Fantasy is the support of desire; it is not the object that is the support of desire.
>
> —Jacques Lacan

> Le problème n'est pas de découvrir en soi la vérité de son sexe, mais c'est plutôt d'user désormais de sa sexualité pour arriver à des multiplicités de relations. Et c'est sans doute là la vraie raison pour laquelle l'homosexualité n'est pas une forme de désir mais quelque chose de désirable.
>
> The problem is not to discover in oneself the truth of one's sex but rather to use sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships. And no doubt that's the real reason homosexuality is not a form of desire but something desirable.
>
> —Michel Foucault

Jean Genet's novels and plays clearly demonstrate the extent to which he worked with and theorized the concept of fantasy in order to understand how it might both determine and reflect one's place within sexual, racial, and other social structures of identity. The novels—and perhaps even more directly, the plays—also pursue, at least implicitly, the question of what it might mean to intervene in a fantasy, even at its most fundamentally structuring level. In what would such an intervention consist, and what might it accomplish, either on the level of personal identity or on the level of social relations?[1] In investigating

*Thanks to Katherine Bergeron, Timothy Hampton, Leslie Kurke, and Celeste Langan for reading a much rougher version of this article, and pushing me toward some needed refinements. Thanks, as well, to the students in my Genet seminar at Berkeley for helping me formulate my ideas, and to Scott Durham for editorial suggestions.

1. The critic who turns to an early novel like *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* [*Our Lady of the Flowers*, 1943] will only see Genet examining fantasy's structural relation to sexuality and politics. In *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*, as in a work like the 1950 film *Un chant*

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the analysis of fantasy performed in Genet's novel, *Notre-Dame-des Fleurs*, I'd like to demonstrate a certain tension, or indecision, one that would allow me to position Genet somewhere in a space between my two epigraphs: between, on the one hand, the potential conservatism—when a fantasy structure takes on an air of unchallengeable, seemingly atemporal fixity—that might be adduced from some of Lacan's formulations as to the basis of desire and sexual identity[2] and, on the other, the insistence on a relation to unspecifiable, unfixable, mobile futurity that characterizes some of Foucault's formulations on the same topic. Let me try to reformulate this as a question: in accounting for what we are able to eroticize, are we accountable only to some preestablished fantasmatic ground, or are we accountable to some future condition as well? Asking the question this way allows us to see a little of what is at stake socially as well. A fantasy is socially sedimented. How might we understand the ways a fantasy could be nourished by, anchored in, responsive to, in advance of, or left behind by the historically and geographically specific culture in which it is obliged to realize itself? I would like, in what follows, to point to Genet's conservatism in conceptualizing both fantasy's social sedimentation and its relation to sex and identity, and yet also to point to his careful registering of *something else*, something that denies an easy, atemporal fixity to fantasy and, by destabilizing the fantasmatic

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d'amour [*A Song of Love*], it is difficult not to notice—and feel uncomfortable about—the extent to which the relation between *race* and fantasy receives *none* of the critical attention Genet devotes to sexuality. Genet's critical reflections on the relation between race and fantasy are not clearly articulated until the 1958 play *Les nègres*, (Isère: M. Barbezat, 1958); *The Blacks*, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Grove Press, 1960). That relation will then continue to preoccupy Genet throughout the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, through his final, posthumously published text, *Un captif amoureux* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986); *Prisoner of Love*, trans. Barbara Bray (London: Pan Books, 1989).

2. The conservatism I'm referring to is quite evident within Genet's work. Such conservatism can certainly be adduced from the Lacanian text, though it need not be. (In an earlier analysis of Gide's *Les faux-monnayeurs*, for example, I have tried to use some Lacanian theorizations of sexuality to point to a certain necessary kind of instability within the experience of sexual identity that I also look at in the pages ahead. See chapter 4 of my *Gide's Bent: Sexuality, Politics, Writing* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1995]). But analyses that take some "originary fantasy" as providing the stable contours, the *given* form, of a scene that generates sexual identity (whatever mobility the "sexual subject" has within that scene) do risk a certain conservatism, and Genet's confrontation with that conservatism is what interests me here. For important discussions of ways of understanding the links between fantasy and sexual identity, see Judith Butler, "The Force of Fantasy: Feminism, Mapplethorpe, and Discursive Excess," *differences* 2/2 (1990): 105–25. See also Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 3–8; 157–81.

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ground on which any sexual identity could rest, further destabilizes the relation between fantasy and its cultural location.

BROTHERLY COUPLINGS

Consider a sexual fantasy that seems to be shared between the character Divine and the narrator of *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*. The fantasy provides an image of a particular kind of nonpenetrative sexual relation between men that is apparently legible to—but not *available* to—all the queer characters in the novel; as an image, it successfully bridges a gap between an individual desire and a socially legible form of relation. Specifically assigned a place in *Divine's* fantasy world and in that of the narrator (fantasy worlds that overlap so consistently they seem to have been formed together in the same social crucible), the following "scene" contributes to a sense that the novel provides, *through the same images*, both an ethnography of a community and a repertory of that community's fantasies:

> To love each other like—before they separate—two young boxers who are fighting together (not warring) [*qui se battent (non combattent)*], tearing off each other's shirts and, once naked, stupefied by their own beauty, think they are seeing themselves [*se voir*] in a mirror, stand there for a second openmouthed, shake—with rage at being caught—their tangled hair, smile [*se sourient*] a moist smile, and cleave to each other [*s'étreignent*] like two wrestlers (in Greco-Roman wrestling), interlock their muscles in the precise connections offered by the muscles of the other, and flop down onto [*s'affalent*] the mat until their warm sperm, spurting high, maps out on the sky a milky way where other constellations which I can read become inscribed: the constellations of the Sailor, the Boxer, the Cyclist, the Fiddle, the Spahi, the Dagger. Thus a new map of the heavens is outlined on the wall of Divine's garret, where, after each time masturbating, she flings her come. [40/89][3]

3. I'm citing from the Arabalète edition of *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* (Paris: L'Arbalète, 1948), as reprinted in 1986. It contains passages not present in either the Gallimard Folio (1976) or the Gallimard *Œuvres complètes* (vol. 2, 1951) editions of the novel. The text used for both Gallimard editions excises both a substantial number of long erotic passages and innumerable words and phrases from sentences throughout the book. The Arbalète 1986 reprint contains more or less—but not exactly—the same text as printed in 1948. (There was an original and secret 1943 edition of the novel that I have not consulted.) The pagination and some punctuation conventions differ between the 1948 and 1986 Arbalète texts I consulted, and there are some variants on the level of individual sentences. See, on this subject, Mathieu Lindon, "Genet régénéré," *Libération* [Paris] 30

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What is the nature of such a "constellation"? Who are these two boxers so carefully enclosed in this fantasmatic description that relies on three verb forms: a third person plural present that disallows them from distinguishing between themselves, and infinitives and present participles that keep them enclosed within this perfect moment? (The reliance on reflexive verbs that keep the two boxers mixed up is important in this regard as well, and perhaps explains the narrator's oddly stated preference for "se battent" instead of "combattent.") This would seem to be an erotic script that never changes, that suffers no inflections. Can the constellations that Divine flings onto her wall then never overlap or interpenetrate, never shift?

Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs indeed sometimes suggests that erotic scripts are strictly segregated from each other and unmodifiable. Even though a given script may be accessible to large numbers of people, those people will not always and everywhere be entitled to rewrite it any way they please. This scene of the two boxers, for instance, even though apparently the private collaborative construct of the narrator and Divine, is intimately related to the sexual practices of two other characters, Notre-Dame and Mignon. When Mignon and Notre-Dame meet, some thirty pages after Divine "constellates" the boxers on her wall, the pair heads off together to "a hotel on the Avenue de Wagram. Wagram, battle won by boxers!" (73/125). Inhabitants of the fantasy constellation we had thought to be the narrator's and Divine's, this pair seems, as we shall see, at least initially to be at ease within the fantasy. They inhabit together—as if satisfied therein—the fraternal, nonpenetrative roles elaborated initially for us within Divine's daydreams. The *ease* of subjecting oneself to one's "own" fantasy will, however, be increasingly open to question as the novel proceeds.

Roughly a third of the way into *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs,* shortly after the reader first meets the eponymous hero of the novel, the narrator—in prison awaiting the conclusion of his own trial, passing his time constructing his elaborate sexual/ethnographic fantasies about a bunch of Montmartre queers—tells the reader that what he'd really like to do, but cannot (or will not), is to show Notre-Dame (the "adoles-

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September 1993: 26. As much as possible, I will cite the published English translation: *Our Lady of the Flowers,* trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Grove Press, 1963), but as it is based on the less complete Gallimard text, I will frequently provide my own translation of certain passages it does not include, or modify the translation of passages it reproduces in truncated form. The first page number in parentheses is to the 1986 Arbalète text, the second to the Grove press translation.

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cent murderer" of the following passage) giving Mignon a blow-job. As it turns out, he says there is something he cannot show only as a way of getting to show it:

> Mingling their gestures in this dream, Darling [Mignon] and Our Lady of the Flowers [Notre-Dame] quietly wove a brotherly friendship. How hard it is for me not to mate the two of them better, not to arrange it so that Darling, with a thrust of the hips—rock of unconsciousness and innocence, desperate with joy [*désespéré de bonheur*]—deeply sinks his smooth, heavy prick, as polished and warm as a column in the sun, into the O-shaped mouth of the adolescent murderer, crazed with gratitude [*fou de reconnaissance*], gorged with sperm, thinking, "Oh, Darling, all of it, because it's you!"
>
> That too could be, but will not. Darling and Our Lady, however rigorous the destiny I plot for you, it will never cease to be—in the very faintest way—tormented by what it might also have been but will not be thanks to me. [74/126–27]

We might ask a number of questions of this passage. What, we might ask, would be "better" about joining them in a fashion different from the "brotherly friendship" that the narrator insists is characteristic of their relation? When the narrator says that it is "thanks to me" that the two men will not find themselves coupled in another, apparently sexier fashion, what kind of agency is he demonstrating? What degree of control does he have over his own fantasy? Finally, if this coupling is to be disallowed, why is space given to its very description?

The narrator's digression on a virtual blow-job that cannot—must not—take place between Notre-Dame and Mignon (because it would contravene their brotherly nonpenetrativeness) immediately precedes a passage where Notre-Dame confesses to Mignon two facts: that he has killed a man, and that he is called Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs. Mignon has a confession of his own to make: that he lives with a gal, Divine, and that that gal is a guy. As the narrator puts it, "Both of them needed a rare flexibility to extricate themselves without damage from the snares that threatened their mutual esteem" (74/127). That is to say, there is, in these confessions, enough material to render impossible this "brotherly friendship" they are building, one that seems to depend on their shared sense of their proper, impenetrable masculinities. The confession of the name, "Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs," is, in this regard, the most difficult of the three. Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs's murderous past confers a certain prestige; Mignon is enough of a man not to worry too much about the fact that he lives with a queen named Divine. But

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how is Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs's masculinity, how is the pair's brotherhood, to survive the revelation that Notre-Dame has been given a queen's name by his buddies? It survives only because of Mignon's delicacy, for he sees the peril of the gender crisis that faces the pair and chooses nonetheless to pursue their friendship: "Darling realized the gravity of such a confession, felt it so deeply that he wondered whether Our Lady was going to puke up pricks sticky with come" (74/127). As if partly complicit in the narrator's avowed/disavowed desire that Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs be involved in giving a blow-job, Mignon imagines Notre-Dame's avowal of his name as equivalent to an admission of sexy past performances of that very act. Mignon's delicacy consists in choosing to "ignore" Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs's sexual past as they move on to a fraternal future. That delicacy is more, it seems, than the narrator's own desire for them to couple otherwise can overcome:

> Darling drew Our Lady toward him, and, the better to grapple with him, struggled with him briefly [*pour le mieux étreindre, fit avec lui une courte lutte*]. I would like to dream them both in many other positions if, when I closed my eyes, my dream still obeyed my will. But during the day it is disturbed by anxiety about my trial, and in the evening the preliminaries of sleep denude the environs of myself, destroy objects and episodes, leaving me at the edge of sleep as solitary as if I were alone one night in the middle of a stormy and barren heath. Darling, Divine, and Our Lady flee from me at top speed, taking with them the consolation of their very existence within me; for they are not content merely to flee; they do away with themselves, dilute themselves in the appalling insubstantiality of my dreams, or rather of my sleep, and become my sleep; they melt into the very stuff of my sleep and compose it. [75/128]

This passage suggests that it might not be exactly "thanks to me" in any easy sense that Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs never gives Mignon a blow-job. In fact, it almost seems clear that, were it up to the narrator, the blow-job would happen. Yet even though this is the narrator's fantasy, he apparently cannot just produce any scenario he wants. Even though the characters of this novel exist only in the narrator's mind, even though they form his sleep, nonetheless the dreams occasioned by sleep will not provide every possibility. The novel thus seems to distinguish here between two kinds of fantasy. It is no problem for the narrator to fantasize consciously about Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs fellating Mignon. But for a conscious fantasy to be generative within the novel, it would seem to need to correspond to some other level of fantasy

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totally impermeable to the conscious desires of the narrator, and in that fantasy Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs and Mignon will engage in only brotherly couplings. It may well be that the narrator's "me" deeply depends on that other level of fantasy for its own consistency. In that case, it may well be "thanks to me," that is, thanks to what I am and am capable of imagining because of the fantasmatic ground of my own imagination, that certain couplings come to representation, while others flee it.

VOUS, TU, AND THE ENDS OF EROTICISM

Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs is thus evidently not a novel about the *freedom* of fantasy even within a prison. Fantasy itself proves to have a frustratingly complex relation to constraint. *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* in its form explicitly investigates the nature of fantasy: the conditions of its production, the space of its elaboration, the temporalities it engages, the work it does on identity structures. The novel has as one of its generating principles the contrast between a social *vous* and a personal *tu*. "Weidmann *vous* apparut dans une édition de cinq heures," it begins. [Weidmann appeared before you in a five o'clock edition.] A few pages later: "Le souvenir que je donne volontiers en pâture à mes nuits, c'est *le tien*." [The memory that I gladly give as food for my nights is yours.] The novel apparently addresses itself simultaneously in two directions, and this doubling proves to anchor the desiring structure the novel elaborates. The *vous* and the *tu* are necessarily complicit, however antagonistic their relation. The sexual fantasy of *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* is elaborated *in relation to* the *tu*, but is equally clearly elaborated *in the presence of* and under the influence of the *vous*. The search for the place of freedom within the structure of fantasy in this novel might be seen as a search for a possible relation to a *tu* independent of any *vous*, a relation that could be the foundation of a new community or a set of friendships. Such a relation would apparently be free of the constraints of the socius—the space of the *vous*—even while existing within its space and within its vision. But one of the major obstacles to any relation to a *tu* free of contamination by the vision of a social *vous* will be the apparently unavoidable fact that for Genet it is the presence of the *vous* that provides the eroticism of the relation to the *tu*.[4]

4. Genet seems to be using *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* to ask a version of the question Butler asks in "Phantasmatic Identification and the Assumption of Sex": "How do we

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Consider, for example, the narrator's address to the *vous* when he is describing a moment of turmoil in Divine's relation to Mignon:

> Nos ménages, la loi de nos Maisons, ne ressemblent pas à vos Maisons. On s'aime sans amour. Ils n'ont pas le caractère sacramentel. Les tantes sont les grandes immorales. En un clin d'oeil, après six ans d'union, sans se croire attaché, sans penser faire mal ni faire du mal, Mignon décida d'abandonner Divine. Sans remords, qu'un peu d'inquiétude que peut-être Divine ne consentît plus à le revoir. [59–60]

> Our domestic lives, the law of our Homes, do not resemble your Homes. We love each other without love. Our homes do not have the sacramental character. Fags are the great immoralists. In the twinkling of an eye, after six years of union, without considering himself attached, without thinking that he was causing pain or doing wrong, Darling decided to leave Divine. Without remorse, only a slight worry that perhaps Divine might refuse ever to see him again. [110]

Read one way, this passage suggests an ethnographic bent to the writing in *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*. I will show you how we live, our customs, our morals, all with their own logic different from yours, where words like "love" function within a different signifying economy. How would such a reading of the novel—as a representation of the social and sexual protocols of a particular historically and geographically situated sexual community—overlap with a reading of the novel as the investigation of the limitations of a given fantasy? That very overlap constitutes the ground for a third kind of reading of the novel: as an inquiry into the ways personal fantasy structures are also social mappings. That is to say, *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* confounds two projects, that of describing the particular fantasy that structures the narrator's psyche, and that of describing the world in which that fantasy structure is able to operate, to make sense. This productive confusion allows the novel to pose the question as to whether arriving at an understanding of the limitations of one's fantasy structure and even mounting an effort to disrupt or transform that structure could contribute to a certain kind of social transformation.

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pursue the question of sexuality and the law, where the law is not only that which represses sexuality, but a prohibition that *generates* sexuality or, at least, compels its directionality? Given that there is no sexuality outside of power, and that power in its productive mode is never fully free from regulation, how can regulation itself be construed as a productive or generative constraint on sexuality?" See Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 95. I have found this chapter, and *Bodies That Matter* more generally, immensely helpful in trying to think about Genet.

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Certain statements Genet would make later in life would appear to suggest that he abandoned an investigation of the relations between eroticism, sexual identity, and fantasy because he decided that, in fact, pushing erotic fantasy structures to their limits was never transformative. In an interview from 1964, for instance, Genet is asked a question having to do with the poetics of his writing, his relation to pornography and eroticism, his thoughts about censorship. The interviewer refers to his definition (from *Pompes funèbres*) of poetry as "the art of employing shit and getting people to eat it." He replies:

> You've recalled for me that definition I once gave of poetry. I would no longer define it like that. If you want to understand something—not a lot—about the world, you need to free yourself from resentment. I still feel a little bit of resentment towards society, but less and less, and I hope soon to be totally free of it. Basically, I don't give a damn. But when I wrote that I was feeling resentful and so poetry consisted in transforming material people thought vile into material accepted as noble, through the use of language. Today the problem is different. You [*vous*] no longer interest me as an enemy. Ten or fifteen years ago I was against you. Now I am neither for you nor against you. I am in the same time [*en même temps*] as you, and my problem is no longer to oppose myself to you but to do something in which we will be caught up together. Today I think that if people are touched sexually by my books, it is because they were badly written, because the poetic emotion should be so forceful that no reader could be moved sexually.[5]

Genet here links the erotic charge of his earlier writings to a position of *ressentiment* in relation to the social *vous*. This attitude can be clearly seen in the "Nos ménages, la loi de nos Maisons, ne ressemblent pas à vos Maisons" passage from *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*, and in *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* more generally. In the 1964 interview, Genet suggests both that this attitude of *ressentiment* grounds his earlier erotic imaginary, and that there is now a different attitude he would prefer to assume, where erotics would not figure as heavily (if at all), because the consequences of the erotically based relation to the social *vous* are, upon reflection, no longer consequences he wishes to pursue. This is not to say that he is suggesting that he has renounced his famous posture as *hors-la-loi*, but rather that this posture should find its way into writing "poetically" and not "erotically."

5. Genet, "Entretien avec Madeleine Gobeil," *L'ennemi déclaré. Textes et entretiens*, ed. Albert Dichy (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), 17.

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The ambivalence about sexuality and eroticism present in this interview is, I hope to show, present in *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* as well. That is to say, it's not just a late arrival in Genet's work, even though he only speaks about a radical shift away form eroticism regularly in the 1960s and beyond. Perhaps the most direct, programmatic statement of the ambivalence comes in the piece "Ce qui est resté d'un Rembrandt déchiré en petits carrés bien réguliers, et foutu aux chiottes," published in 1967, in which Genet declares:

> Eroticism and its furors seemed to me definitively rejected. . . . "Erotic quests," I told myself, "are only possible when you imagine that each individual has his own individuality, that it is irreducible, and that the person's physical form gives an account of it, and only of it." . . . Still, I wrote all of that without ceasing to be troubled, to be belabored by those erotic themes that were familiar to me and that dominated my life. I was sincere when I spoke of an investigation starting from this revelation that "every man is every other man and I'm no different"—but I knew that I was writing that as well to rid myself of eroticism, to try to dislodge it from me, to distance it in any case.[6]

The revelation Genet refers to here came during an experience of a dissolution of the self that he claims was profoundly antierotic. He assigns the experience to a particular moment during a train journey sometime around 1953,[7] a moment when his gaze crosses that of an ugly old man sitting across from him:

> I could only translate what I experienced in these terms: I was flowing out of my body and through my eyes into the traveller's *at the same time [en même temps] that he was flowing into mine.* . . . This unpleasant experience was not repeated again, neither in its immediacy nor its intensity, but its after-effects have never ceased being perceptible within me. What I experienced in the train compartment seemed to me like a revelation: once the accidents—in this case repellent—of his appearance were put aside, this man harbored and then let me reveal what made him identical to me. [22–23; Genet's emphasis]

Genet relates the antierotic nature of this experience to a sense of the ugliness of the man with whom he shares a train compartment. The

6. Genet, "Ce qui est resté d'un Rembrandt déchiré en petits carrés bien réguliers, et foutu aux chiottes," *Œuvres complètes*, vol. 4 (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), 30–31. For a translation of a long passage from this essay, see Edmund White, *Genet: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 401–03. Where possible, I have relied on this translation, with minor modifications.

7. For biographical information on the event, see White, 400–03.

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words he uses to describe the man in the Rembrandt essay are *"sans grâce," "laids," "ignoble même"* [graceless, ugly, even ignoble]. Now to anyone used to reading Genet, used to his effort to construct a situation of extreme disgust and abjection and then to eroticize the object that assumes that disgust and abjection, there seems nothing unusual about this scene. It would seem precisely to prepare for a (poetic?) effort to eroticize the object in front of him. Yet such a trope is refused—or perhaps displaced—as Genet insists that this sense of an absolute exchange, a profound identity, between himself and his ugly fellow traveler could not be erotic. When Genet writes "je m'écoulais de mon corps, et par les yeux, dans celui du voyageur *en même temps que le voyageur s'écoulait dans le mien,"* the *en même temps* of which he speaks would seem to be the same *en même temps* he speaks of in the passage I cited above from the 1964 interview where he says "maintenant je ne suis ni pour vous ni contre vous, je suis *en même temps que vous* et mon problème n'est plus de m'opposer à vous mais de faire quelque chose où nous soyons pris ensemble, vous comme moi." The *en même temps* would thus appear to be outside of eroticism, perhaps even antithetical to it. Such, at least, is the suggestion renewed by the final words of the essay "Ce qui est resté d'un Rembrandt . . . " even though this text's paradoxical ending manages once again to slip in the eroticism it had apparently been placing at a distance:

> But I knew I was writing that as well to rid myself of eroticism, to try to dislodge it from myself, to distance it in any case. An erect penis, swollen and vibrant, thrusting out of a thicket of black, curly hair, and then what follows: thick thighs, then the torso, the entire body, hands, thumbs, then the neck, lips, teeth, nose, hair, at last the eyes which call out as if to be saved or annihilated in amorous passion, and all that struggling against a so fragile glance capable perhaps of destroying this All-Powerful [*et tout cela luttant contre le si fragile regard capable peut-être de détruire cette Toute-Puissance?*]. [31]

For Genet, an antierotic relation gets figured as a sustainable or sustained detumescence. Sustainable or sustained since the relation of erections to choice or volition is necessarily vexed, importantly tied up with fantasy, which—as we have seen—has its own equally problematic relation to volition. The erection that comes, willy-nilly, at the end of "Ce qui est resté d'un Rembrandt . . . ," inextricably bound up with the glance that might bring it to an end, marks precisely this problem of sustaining even a theoretical will to deny eroticism.

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The experience of the nonerotic gaze, described in all its unsustainability in "Ce qui est resté d'un Rembrandt . . . ," has no easy temporal relation to the experience of eroticism; that is to say, it is not an experience that comes *after* an extended experience of eroticism and its frustrations; it is not an experience that easily *displaces* eroticism in some temporal succession. The two experiences have always been in tension within Genet's writing. Consider, for example, a passage from the infamous central scene in *Pompes funèbres* (a novel written a few years after *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*), the fantasy of Paulo and Hitler having sex together:

> "He's going to kill me," thought Paulo. . . . That thought made him lose his hard-on [*cette pensée le fit débander*] and Hitler was stupefied to see the magnificent member, beneath his very eyes, soften, diminish, melt, collapse into the hairy brown balls. He was astonished, humiliated. His clever fingers searched out, among the folds of this soft flesh, a solid base, and with utmost care he managed to bring the sex back to its accomplished and perfect form. But once he had it in hand, firmly gripped, he didn't release it until it had spit up its come.[8]

This passage seems to imagine a hard-on as coerced and to imagine the loss of a hard-on as offering an appropriate, if unsustainably brief, resistant response to a certain erotics for which the fantasy figure of Hitler serves as foundation. But even before this erotics gets complicated by the specific political allegories present in *Pompes funèbres,* a certain resistant detumescence has already been figured in *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs*—both in the character of the old man Notre-Dame has murdered, and in the character of Divine herself.

We will see, in what follows, that Notre-Dame is a character who somehow brings trouble to the seemingly stable fantasies of the people he encounters, just as he often seems himself yet to be fixed within any fantasy of his own. But the trouble he *brings* will be perhaps more interesting than the trouble he *represents,* even though I want to look at both. That is to say, for me, the most analytically challenging fantasmatic trouble within the novel will occur in the *wake* of Notre-Dame, and, in particular, in the figure of Divine, who falls out of eroticism because of him.

8. Genet, *Journal du voleur, Querelle de Brest, Pompes funèbres* (Paris: Gallimard [Biblos], 1993), 662. This edition seems to be the most complete. It contains numerous passages, such as this one, not extant in the English translation *Funeral Rites,* trans. Frechtman (New York: Grove Press, 1969).

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DETUMESCENCE

In the scene where Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs is sentenced to death for the murder of that old man—a scene that underscores the way Genet's politics of resentment find a certain fantasmatic erotic fulfillment within the space of a courtroom—Notre-Dame himself becomes the perfect spokesman for the erotics of erection:

> He was truly great. He said:
>
> "The old guy was washed up. He couldn't even get a hard-on." [*L'vieux était foutu. Y pouvait seument pu bander.*]
>
> The last word did not pass his jaunty little lips. Nevertheless, the twelve old men, all together, very quickly put their hands over their ears to prevent the entry of the word that was big as an organ, which, finding no other orifice, entered all stiff and hot into their gaping mouths. The virility of the twelve old men and of the judge was flouted by the youngster's glorious immodesty. [219–20/288]

But a complete reading of the novel does not sustain the image of Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs as a person who easily and consistently represents, fits in with, or confirms, the erotics he speaks for at novel's end. He might equally well be seen as a person around whom the *limits* of the fantasy that structures this erotics are forced to reveal themselves. For he fits only in the most awkward ways into that fantasmatic structure: this is already revealed in the problems the narrator was having coupling him with Mignon. Why should this boy with a girl's name get to remain the masculine, fraternal jerk-off buddy of Mignon instead of assuming the queen's role of somebody like Divine? When, in the courtroom, he offers as a justification for his crime the fact that his victim/client could no longer get it up, it might seem that we could then read him as having accomplished an apprenticeship over the course of the novel. Perhaps he has successfully regulated his sexual practice according to the narrator's own structure of resentment, assimilating and incorporating into his own fantasmatic structure not only that resentment but also the distribution of roles within the queen community of Mignon and Divine that the novel describes with such ethnographic precision. With the internalization of that resentment would come the recognition of the dependence of the erotic charge of his practices on the existence of judges and juries.

Yet, as I will examine in more detail shortly, Notre-Dame seems also to contravene the sexual structures in place in Montmartre, and provokes a crisis for Divine in so doing. Not only that, but his encoun-

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ter with the old man he kills harbors other complexities. By occurring under the sign of detumescence ("L'vieux était foutu. Y pouvait seument pu bander."), the encounter becomes a precursor to the de-eroticizing scene in the train that Genet will write of later—precursor, too, in that it is not without resources for a sudden subsequent upsurging of eroticism. After the murder, in a hotel room down the street, Notre-Dame makes use of those resources:

> D'elle-même, la main de l'assassin cherche sa verge qui bande. Il la caressa par-dessus le drap, doucement d'abord, avec cette légèreté d'oiseau qui volète, puis la serre, l'étreint fort; enfin il se branle et jouit, décharge, dans la bouche édentée du vieillard étranglé. Il s'endort. [68][9]

> All by itself the murderer's hand seeks out his stiff penis. He strokes it through the sheet, gently at first, with the lightness of a fluttering bird, then grips it, squeezes it hard; finally he beats off and comes, discharges, into the toothless mouth of the strangled old man. He falls asleep. [119–20]

Again, the relations between eroticism and fantasy, between hand, mind, and hard-on, between eroticism and de-eroticism, seems impossible to unravel. It's not as if Notre-Dame decides to masturbate. A hard-on and a hand—the careful grammar of the passage indicates—seem to do that by themselves. And the sentence carefully leaves vague the extent to which the masturbation depends on an articulated fantasy. The mouth of the dead man occurs in the sentence almost as an afterthought, as if it stumbles into visibility only as the sentence stum-

9. The middle sentence of this citation is a good example of the confusion among various editions, since it is different in each. I have cited it from the 1986 Arbalète text. In the 1948 Arbalète text, it reads:

> Il la caressa par-dessus le drap, doucement d'abord, avec cette légèreté d'oiseau qui volète, puis la serre, l'étreint fort; enfin, il se branle et jouit, décharge, croit-il, dans la bouche édentée du vieillard étranglée. [116]

In the text of both the Gallimard Folio and the *Œuvres complètes* edition it reads:

> Il la caresse par-dessus le drap, doucement d'abord, avec cette légèreté d'oiseau qui volette, puis la serre, l'étreint fort; enfin il décharge dans la bouche édentée du vieillard étranglé. [Folio, 107]

I find the 1986 Arbalète version the most successful. It is clear that the texts of the novels published by Gallimard in the Folio collection and in the *Œuvres complètes* (and the texts of the English translations made from these) are lamentably untrustworthy, and should no longer be used. Interestingly, the texts of *Pompes funèbres* and *Querelle de Brest* published in the Gallimard Imaginaire and Biblos collections are more complete than the versions in the *Œuvres complètes*. Unfortunately, the English translation appears to have been made from the less complete version.

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bles through a couple of commas and concatenated verbs, "jouit, décharge, dans la bouche," one verb not sufficing to bring the fantasy to representation, the order of dependency between fantasy and masturbation remaining undecided.

The old man and Divine will be linked by the novel in its typically indirect, temporally convoluted way, where characters seem somehow to stand in for fantasmatic needs that one thought were elaborating themselves at different times and on entirely distinct planes of the novel. Divine actually gives Notre-Dame a notable blow-job, almost as if she *were* the old man. She doesn't have a hard-on when she does so. After that detumescent scene between Divine and Notre-Dame is recounted in the latter part of the novel, Notre-Dame will avow in court—in one of the novel's concluding scenes—that the old man could never get it up, something we didn't "know" at the "time" the murder was recounted near the beginning of the novel. The erotic state of detumescence within the novel thus links together—from a place outside any "progress" within the novel—a whole series of crucial scenes that question the functioning of fantasy.

Consider, in this regard, a long sex scene (absent from the English translation) between Divine and a soldier, Gabriel, the Archangel.[10] At the outset of that scene, Divine is playing hard to get: "Divine slips away, laughing, but her penis, that normally—when hard—she can keep hidden between her thighs, betrays her. She gives in" (96). By the end of the scene she is, in fact, no longer hard, and the scene at this point clearly echos the encounter between Notre-Dame and the old man:

10. White suggests (apparently incorrectly) that this long sexual encounter is only part of a "lost" early version of *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs:* "But textual evidence reveals that Genet progressed from the explicitly erotic to the allegorical or poetic. Although the earliest known version of *Our Lady of the Flowers* is now 'lost' (presumably in a private collection), it surfaced briefly at an auction, and a holograph passage in Genet's handwriting was printed in the catalogue. This passage, written at top speed without erasures, is a highly erotic account of oral sex between Divine and the 'archangel' Gabriel, a soldier. In later versions Genet replaced it with a chaster, more allegorical passage in which Gabriel is compared to a centaur and Divine to a nymph. Obviously the direction of many revisions was away from the crudely pornographic, in keeping with Genet's imagined reader, a middle-class heterosexual man" (207). While the passage in question is not present in the Gallimard version of the novel (nor in the English translation), both it and the centaur/nymph paragraph that follows it are present in the 1948 Arbalète edition, and in the updated 1986 Arbalète edition that was available at the time of White's writing. White's assumption that explicitly erotic scenes have no role in the "allegorical" or "poetic" projects of the novel also seems untenable given both the evident theoretical projects of *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* and the ongoing writing of erotic scenes in texts such as *Pompes funèbres* and *Querelle.*

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> "If you don't take it, I'll strangle you." (He's panting.) "I'll squeeze. Don't make me squeeze, take it."
>
> He presses up against the mouth. It opens a bit, then closes, withdraws, smiles. Divine's neck is between the hands of the breathless Archangel:
>
> "Hurry up, hurry up, or you're dead."
>
> Divine has never been so light, holy, so detached from the ground. She's no longer hard. [*Elle ne bande même plus.*] (97; my translation)

One notes the extreme variability of the relation of detumescence to eroticism. The relation shifts almost whimsically between possibilities: detumescence as annoying impotence (the old man and Notre-Dame), detumescence arriving as part of an erotic fantasy that pushes beyond its own boundaries, pushes outside of eroticism itself (Divine and Gabriel), detumescence as a fearful fall out of both fantasy and eroticism (Paulo and Hitler). It is a version of this final possibility that Notre-Dame will ultimately provoke in Divine.

The title character of *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs,* especially in his relation to Divine, is the figure the novel uses to ask most clearly a series of difficult questions about sexual identity, its fixity, and its relation to fantasy. It may well be the case that fantasy is a scene or syntax in which the subject exists in desubjectivized form.[11] It would not necessarily follow that in any given process of subjectivization, any path—to any erotic possibility the fantasy scene might offer—would be open to the subject. *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs* makes this point through the portrayal of a series of sexual confrontations with Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs. In these confrontations, other characters in Genet's novel, and especially Divine, find their own sexual identities in flux, or imagine for a moment that they might. The novel thus comes to pose a number of complex questions about sexual experience itself: is sexual experience the place where sexual identity gets discovered, shaped, assumed, consolidated, continued, disrupted, or transformed? How could one

11. I am referring to the influential formulation of Jean Laplanche and J.-B. Pontalis: "Fantasy is not the object of desire, but its setting. In fantasy the subject does not pursue the object or its sign; one appears oneself caught up in the sequence of images. One forms no representation of the desired object, but is oneself represented as participating in the scene although, in the earliest forms of fantasy, one cannot be assigned any fixed place in it (hence the danger, in treatment, of interpretations which claim to do so). As a result, the subject, although always present in the fantasy, may be so in a desubjectivized form, that is to say, in the very syntax of the sequence in question" ("Fantasy and the Origins of Sexuality," in *Formations of Fantasy,* ed. Victor Burgin, James Donald, and Cora Kaplan [London: Methuen, 1986], 26–27).

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decide between or among those possibilities? The novel never does. Is a sexual experience always irrevocably contained within a fantasy structure? Will any desired sexual experience be entirely assimilated by the syntax of a given fantasy, so that desired sexual experiences necessarily constitute themselves as repetitions of the same fantasmatic syntax, a syntax that never shifts? Consider Divine's meeting with Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs:

> Until this moment, she had loved only men who were stronger and just a little, a tiny bit older, and more muscular than herself. But then came Our Lady of the Flowers . . . she was smitten with him. . . . She thought she had been virilified. A wild hope made her strong and husky and vigorous. She felt muscles growing. . . . She tried for male gestures, which are rarely the gestures of males. She whistled, put her hands into her pockets, and this whole performance was carried out so unskillfully that in the course of a single evening she seemed to be four or five characters at the same time. . . . Finally, to crown her metamorphosis from female into tough male, she imagined a man-to-man friendship which would link her with one of those faultless pimps whose gestures could not be regarded as ambiguous. And to be on the safe side, she invented Marchetti. [79–80; 132–4]

Marchetti starts out as an invention of Divine, her buddy, and one who will top Notre-Dame for her, providing a fantasmatic pivot around which she, as Marchetti's buddy, might participate in this "topness" in order to be able to have a sexual relation with Notre-Dame. As we are about to see, her sexual gambit doesn't work. But her creation of Marchetti does. The novel takes him up and uses him as a character on more or less the same plane as Notre-Dame or Mignon or Seck Gorgui. But he will become Notre-Dame's buddy, not Divine's. She's not a top. She can't have buddies. (It's somewhat of an open question as to why this "rule" carries such force for Divine—when a character like Notre-Dame or the protagonist of a later novel like *Querelle* seem to be elaborated in such a way as to throw that very rule open to question.) Divine thus finds herself in the same predicament as the narrator: she can't always couple people—even ones she imagines—in the way she wants. Here is what happens, for instance, when she tries to fuck Notre-Dame:

> Our Lady was not aware of anything he was provoking. One day when the two were alone in the attic apartment, Divine decided to fuck Our Lady, who, amused, out of politeness played along in every way. . . . She was about to stick it to him with her slightly limp dick—he kept on

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> smiling, amused—when the lump of the adolescent's hard cock, jammed up against her belly, forced Divine into a delirious state she knew all too well, an abandonment to masculinity. She let herself slip, grabbed Our Lady's dick in both hands and, holding it good and tight, guided it, stuck it inside herself. Forever smiling, it was now Our Lady's turn, mounted on her, to say what he had often heard Darling say to her: "Let's go, little girl, give yourself to me, you have to." . . . Divine was beaten. . . . In short, she regained her soul [81; my translation]

It's easy enough to describe what is going on here. Divine had imagined she might alter her sexual identity (not terribly radically, one would have to say), play with her desire, whereas this turned out not to be possible, just as it turned out not to be possible, in the larger narrative frame, for the narrator to couple Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs and Mignon any old way he wanted.[12] Yet Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs is apparently not subject to the same fixity, or at least not yet. He seems still to be apprenticing in sexual identity. And to the extent that he does assume an identity during the book, it is one that crosses categories in a way Divine (and almost every other character, for that matter) cannot. That is to say, here, while fucking Divine, he imitates his buddy/mentor Mignon, but later in the novel, when he goes out to a drag club with Seck and Divine, both he and Divine are wearing dresses:

> The dress sheathes Our Lady's body, which is naked under the silk. He rather likes the way he looks. . . . He bends down, turns around, looks at himself in the mirror. The dress, which has a bustle, makes his rump stick out, suggesting a pair of cellos. . . . Our Lady is acclaimed by his pals. He had not realized that his firm buttocks would draw the cloth so tight. He doesn't give a damn that they see he has a hard-on, but not to such a point, in front of the fellows. He would like to hide. He turns to Gorgui and, slightly pink, shows him his bulging dress, muttering:
>
> "Say, Seck, let me ditch that." . . .
>
> Gorgui . . . takes the murderer by the shoulders, and jams him, squeezes him up against himself, fits in between his mighty thighs the stiff protuberance that is raising the silk. [159; 219–20]

12. Cf. Butler's comments about the "constraints" on a desiring being: "Every such being is constrained by not only what is difficult to imagine, but what remains radically unthinkable: in the domain of sexuality these constraints include the radical unthinkability of desiring otherwise, the radical unendurability of desiring otherwise, the absence of certain desires, the repetitive compulsion of others, the abiding repudiation of some sexual possibilities, panic, obsessional pull, and the nexus of sexuality and pain" ("Phantasmatic Identification and the Assumption of Sex," 94). Divine's predicament seems related but different: she can *think* of desiring otherwise, she can even *desire* to desire otherwise, but she can't actually *do* it.

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Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs everywhere threatens to cross the categories of top and bottom, categories that it would seem were essential both to Mignon and to Divine in imagining themselves in relation to him. Here it is the very dress Notre-Dame hesitates to wear ("What'll the guys say?") that provokes his erotic admiration of his own buttocks; in the hiding of his own excitement, he "penetrates" Seck while seemingly offering no threat to the virility of his mighty-thighed partner. This unpredictable crossing of top/bottom, penetrator/ penetrated, culminates in the scene, a few pages later, where, in bed with both Seck and Divine, Notre-Dame gets fucked by Seck while Divine fellates him. Or, more exactly, Divine starts giving him a blowjob, but then is forced to realize that Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs wants to get fucked at the same time:

> Ses mains passèrent sur les fesses de Notre-Dame, et voici que Divine comprit. Gorgui chevauchait l'assassin blond et cherchait à le pénétrer. Déjà son membre intelligent était planté, son membre dur et gros, plus dur et plus gros que celui de Notre-Dame, et un désespoir terrible, profond, inégalable la détacha du jeu des deux hommes. . . . Un furieux mouvement s'ébranla au-dessus de Divine. Notre-Dame avait retrouvé sa bouche, et cette bouche s'ouvrit enfin, immense, terrible, pendant que s'y écoulait le chaud liquide de Notre-Dame, plus vigoureux encore parce que Gorgui le baisait. . . . «C'est la vie», eut le temps de penser Divine. Il y eut une pause, une sorte d'oscillation. L'échafaudage de corps s'affala dans le regret. Divine remonta sa tête jusqu'à l'oreiller. [Sa rage et sa honte.][13] Elle était reste seule, abandonée. Elle n'était plus excitée, et pour la première fois elle n'éprouva pas le besoin d'aller aux cabinets finir avec sa main l'amour indiqué. [171–72]

> She ran her hands over Our Lady's buttocks, and behold! Divine understood. Gorgui was mounting the blond murderer and trying to penetrate him. His intelligent member, his thick and hard member, thicker and harder than Our Lady's, was already in, and a terrible, profound, unparalleled despair detached her from the game of the two men. . . . A furious movement started above Divine. Our Lady had found her mouth, and that mouth finally opened, huge and terrible, while Our Lady's warm liquid flowed into it, all the more vigorous because Gorgui was fucking him. . . . "That's life," Divine had time to think. There was a pause, a kind of oscillation. The scaffolding of bodies collapsed into regret. Divine's head climbed back to the pillow. Her rage, her shame. She had remained alone, abandoned. She was no longer excited,

13. This interesting fragmentary sentence is only to be found in the 1948 Arbalète text.

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> and for the first time, she did not feel the need to go to the john to finish off her requisite lovemaking with her hand. [233–34]

There is no self-evident reason for Divine not to find this way of being in bed with Seck and Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs an erotic experience. It is not as if elsewhere in Genet such a scene couldn't have worked for everyone involved. Nor, I think, is it sufficient to critique Divine's (and Genet's) sexual conformism: bottoms (Divine) shouldn't mix sexually with other bottoms (Notre-Dame—if that's what he is). More interesting is to register the collapse of eroticism itself for Divine, even as it *doesn't* collapse for Notre-Dame and Seck.

The scene itself offers multiple explanations for the collapse, and one is, evidently, Divine's superfluity—or not exactly that. She's handy to have around, but the fantasy that seems to be taking hold for Notre-Dame and Seck is not her fantasy, and the two fantasy orders seem rigorously exclusive of one another. The narrator tries to explain this by analogy to a scene he was once told about, of a prostitute being fucked simultaneously by two brothers:

> One day he and his brother made love with a young whore, one in front, one behind. Their movements matched each other. But when the young woman tried to kiss the mouth of the brother lying in front of her, she was ashamed to find the mouth already taken by that of the other brother. They had linked up above the woman's head. [172; my translation]

The antierotic "shame" shared by both the woman and Divine would appear to result from their sudden perception of not participating in the scene they had thought they were in. As if they thought they had negotiated one contract only to find another actually to be in force. If for the woman it is the transgression of the kiss of the two brothers that provokes the shame, for Divine it is her touching Notre-Dame's buttocks, and realizing at that moment that the two "buddies" she is in bed with are also joined in a way buddies aren't supposed to join.

To understand why eroticism fails in this moment, why Divine's fantasy cannot take hold or cannot be sustained in the face of the now penetrative fraternity Seck and Notre-Dame are elaborating above her, is again to ask questions about the permanence of fantasy and the permanence of sexual identity and about the odd unresponsiveness of desire to what we imagine we want. It might seem initially that all that is registered here is the same permanence and rigidity of Divine's sexual identity that we observed in her earlier failure to fuck Notre-Dame.

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I wouldn't dispute that reading, except to note that she is perhaps having another experience at the same time: the experience of a necessarily nostalgic relation to what had been her own sexual identity. What Divine experiences here is what the narrator experienced in one of the passages I cited at the beginning of this essay: his characters run away from him, "leaving me at the edge of sleep as solitary as if I were alone one night in the middle of a stormy and barren heath. Darling, Divine, and Our Lady flee from me at top speed, taking with them the consolation of their very existence within me; for they are not content merely to flee; they do away with themselves, dilute themselves in the appalling insubstantiality of my dreams. . . ." So it is for Divine as her erotic world collapses: as the bodies of Seck and Notre-Dame fall apart after their pleasure, for Divine it is the sustainability of eroticism itself that seems to dissolve, fantasy itself that falls into regret: "There was a pause, a kind of oscillation. The scaffolding of bodies collapsed into regret." When we are told that Divine had time to think, "That's life," the time she had to think that thought is not some quick moment seized during the postcoital bliss of her two partners. It's rather a moment within the time of fantasy itself, a moment within that fantasy's own failure, as it dissolves—in the face of its own unworkability—into rage and shame. It is not a *narrative* time in which Divine finds herself thinking "That's life"; rather it is the moment within an ongoing experience of sexual identity where that identity is felt as an obstacle, a failure, a dispossession.

One is in theory never firmly subjectivized in one's own fantasy; similarly, one is never *present* to one's own sexual identity. To the practical experience of these theoretical assertions, Divine adds the cruel experience, when faced with her unwitting participation in what is for her a novel distribution of sexual roles and identities, of an end of fantasy itself. It is often by imagining we could know their origins that we fantasize about modifying our fantasies, and thereby restructuring or abandoning our sexual identities. It is often by narrativizing our identities that we express a longing simultaneously to talk our way into and out of them. We are immensely resourceful at figuring or imagining a before or an after to fantasy or to identity. (Within *Notre-Dame-des-Fleurs,* figures such as Alberto, Solange, and Ernestine often seem to function as part of such projects.) Genet's work, on the other hand, when it is most interesting, might trace, *within* a particular fantasy, the experience of its inability to sustain itself, *within* a particular experience of sexual identity the failure of its totalization and a

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certain inevitability of its temporal collapse. The portrayal of Divine's fall into this unsettling experience—one of uncertain but perhaps also inevitable access, where a subject's relation to past and to future threatens to become incoherent, might be one of those intermittent moments within Genet's work we might productively label queer.

At the outset of this essay, I referred to my sense of Genet's conservatism in conceptualizing matters of sexual desire and identity. I am aware of the oddity of insisting on Genet's conservatism when he is so often taken as an icon of various kinds of erotic and political radicalism, and in conclusion I'd like to specify a bit more the fluctuations between erotic conservatism and radicalism that for me characterize the projects of Genet's novels. For instance, when we read Notre-Dame as a character who breaks open a rigidly structured system of sex roles to which Divine seems irrevocably attached, I don't think we would best construe this as a progressive movement toward a more friendly, brotherly, versatile erotic future, in which Divine endures as a relic of a surpassed queer erotic formation. To read that way would certainly allow one to place Divine as a sexual conservative, as a person who exemplifies Lacan's dictum: "Fantasy is the support of desire; it is not the object that is the support of desire."[14] When her fantasy collapses, her desire disappears. We might say that it wasn't Notre-Dame whom she desired; it was the possibility (which became an impossibility) of Notre-Dame *within a certain fantasy* that sustained her erotic world. We could then also choose to see Notre-Dame as exemplifying Foucault's suggestion that we "use sexuality henceforth to arrive at a multiplicity of relationships," Notre-Dame as embodying a certain queer indeterminacy as to what might happen in bed with whom. Such a reading would not go far enough in accounting for Notre-Dame's (and Genet's, in all the novels) indebtedness to an erotics of virile domination. That erotics enables a large part of the spectacle for the social *vous* that structures the implicit readership of the novel—a *vous* figured in the jury so overwhelmed by Notre-Dame's courtroom appearance. Likewise, such a reading doesn't take into account the erotic experience I have tried to foreground here that seems most to challenge that social *vous*. That experience is Divine's, at the moment fantasy,

14. Jacques Lacan, *Les quatre concepts fondamentaux de la psychanalyse,* in *Le séminaire de Jacques Lacan,* vol. 11, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller (Paris: Seuil, 1973), 168. The epigraph from Michel Foucault may be found in "De l'amitié comme mode de vie," in *Dits et écrits 1954–1988,* vol. 4, ed. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 163.

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with all its social overdeterminations, collapses. It is an experience of sexual identity built upon the unstable ground of a fantasy that never achieves permanence. The identity, the fantasy, and the relation between them can all on occasion be experienced as socially and historically delimited. All three can be experienced as both necessary and in large measure inaccessible to one's self. Yet perhaps the moment of fantasy's collapse, as experienced by Divine, holds open the best possibility we see within Genet's writing for a radical renegotiation of one's relation to the various fantasmatic instantiations of the *vous*. That such moments are rare, unpronounced, and evanescent within the baroque erotics of Genet's novels should not blind us to their potential.

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