

Alterrains of “Blackness” in *At the Bottom of the River*

“Darkness Was over the Surface of the Deep”

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and the earth was formless and void, and darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters.

Then God said, Let there be light and there was light and God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness. And God called the light day and the darkness he called night.

—Genesis 1:1–5

I grew up in this extraordinary light, this blinding, thick light of the sun, that seems to give off a light that makes things transparent. But the sun is almost hellish, really. Sometimes it would turn from something wonderful, the light of the sun, into a kind of hell.

—Jamaica Kincaid, from *Vorda*, “I Come”

In the beginning: the biblical creation myth recounted in the book of Genesis imagines blackness, as darkness, with a priori, fundamental, even foundational attributes, suffusing it with dynamism, energy, and kinetic potentiality. In the biblical account of Genesis, there are three fundamental divine separations—light from darkness; sky from water; land from sea. The proclaimed separation of created light (“Let there be light,” 1:3) from darkness is primary; the separation of heavens from waters secondary; and the division of land from sea tertiary. Kincaid reminds her readers that these divisions are acts of (divine and human and ideological and mythic and historical) power;

however, even within myth, there is an indivisible a priori. In Genesis, darkness is the a priori. Darkness precedes light; darkness exists prior to created light; it is a priori, before. Within biblical accounts of creation, the a priori darkness casts a fundamentally ambivalent shadow over divine creation: if it exists a priori, before creation, then it exists outside of the reach of God's creative hand. Kincaid draws on this fundamental ambivalence—the a priori nature of darkness within the created universe—to establish darkness as a field outside of divine or human intervention, a source of energy, power, and unbound nature that precedes the created world. As such, it remains beyond creation, even as it is separated or divided from creation (“And God separated the light from the darkness,” 1:4).

Mythic conceptualizations of “blackness” as genesis (or as generative) figure prominently in Kincaid's first book, a collection of short stories entitled *At the Bottom of the River*, which was published in 1983.¹ Composed of ten interlocking short stories, seven first published in the *New Yorker*, the collection astounded critics with its breathtaking lyricism, fluid images, and innovative lines of poetic prose, even as it confounded critics and readers alike with its abstract language, its abstruse and ethereal narratives, and its recesses of metamorphic meaning. Opening with the terse, dialogic story “Girl,” the collection explores the mother-daughter melodrama so often a central motif in Kincaid's literary texts, but it also creates alternate states of existences: alternarratives in which a girl becomes a man who married “a red-skin woman with black bramblebrush hair and brown eyes” (11), in which “blue bells fall to the cool earth; dying and living in perpetuity” (19); in which a girl throws stones at a monkey who throws the stones back (44); in which a child “passing through a small beam of light . . . [becomes] transparent” (49); in which the girl's mother grows “plates of metal-colored scales on her back” (55); and “a world in which the sun and moon shone at the same time” (77). It is the shapeshifting creatures and polyvocalic tones, the stunning metamorphoses, of the stories that fascinate and singe. And these cryptic stories seem shattered mirrors into the writer's own imagination.

This chapter explores those profound recesses of metamorphic meaning, particularly as refracted through the alterrains of blackness: Kincaid's “blackness” figures as a cosmological a priori, never fixed but ever shifting and creating new terrains of beings and becomings. In this sense, blackness is like “darkness over the surface of the deep” as in the biblical myth from Genesis. It is primordial, yet unformed; formless, yet formable; a fecund materiality, yet also creative movement and kinetic potency. Philosophical meditations on blackness, however, are never fully distinct from racialized, ideological parameters of postcolonial states of existence. For Kincaid, blackness as a racialized category is never an essential, ahistorical, transcendent, or fixed social or political category: like philosophical notions of blackness, and Kincaid's literary inscriptions of blackness, it too is malleable and change-

able. These ideas have inflected Kincaid's postcolonial literary politics and have shaped her writings of fiction, autobiography, and biography as well. Interviewed by Allan Vorda, Kincaid notes, "By Nature, I'm the sort of person who is never the same" ("I Come" 95). Speaking to Emily Ippolita, Kincaid comments again upon the malleability of subjectivity and selves but also of racialized identities: "I have quite a few people running around in me who are not only Black" ("Room" 154). In a 1993 interview with Donna Perry, Kincaid refers to *At the Bottom of the River* as a "very unangry, decent, civilized book," and she adamantly states, "I would never write like that again," before hesitating, "I don't think," and then qualifying her first statement: "I might go back to it" (133). This chapter reads Kincaid's words—in the interviews and in the text—as foils or ruses: neither are so straightforward nor simple. I return here to the stories in *At the Bottom of the River*, specifically the short story "Blackness," for two interrelated reasons: one, the stories have not garnered the critical attention that their lyrical and poetic brilliance deserve; and two, in their subtle and sophisticated texture, these stories are also powerfully erosive of colonial ideals, if not explicitly, then in more intricate and nuanced ways. As Kincaid comments about the stories in *At the Bottom of the River*:

I think when I was writing those stories I really wanted to disregard certain boundaries, certain conventions. These were stories written in my youth. (I think of the time before I had children as my youth.) These are stories in which I had endless amounts of silence and space and distance. I could play with forms and identities and do things then that I can't do now because I don't have the time to plumb that kind of depth. They were attempts to discard conventions, my own conventions, and conventions that exist in writing. I still try to forget everything I've read and just write. That was what that was about, and it really doesn't bear close interpretation from me. The reader would have to do that. (Vorda 1993, 87)

Covi's article "Jamaica Kincaid and the Resistance to Canons" is one of the most engaging if early critical discussions of the stories in *At the Bottom of the River*, and she too underscores the importance of the story "Blackness" to the collection:

Particularly fascinating is the story "Blackness" in which the disruption of binary opposition is devastating: everything is ambiguous, multiple, fragmented. Blackness is the night that "falls in silence" as well as the racial color that "flows through [her] veins" (BR, p. 46), but above all it is what cannot be defined—a signifier that escapes its signified by a continuous shifting, "for I see that

I cannot see" (BR, p. 46). It is identity together with the annihilation of the self, "I am swallowed up in the blackness so that I am one with it . . ." (BR, p. 47). And the self is "powerful" at the moment when the "I" is "not at one with [it]self," and can say, "I felt myself separate" (BR, p. 47). This story ends in a crescendo that is a celebration of the narrative "I," but what kind of "I" is it who ends its song with the words, "I am no longer 'I'" (BR, p. 52)? "Blackness" disrupts the concept of identity as One—of phallic identity. Like the ambivalence of the mother's body that is One and Other at the same time (herself and the child she bears), this "I" can say: "the blackness cannot be separated from me but often I can stand outside it . . . blackness is visible and yet it is invisible" (BR, p. 46). It is neither the silence of the repressed Slave, nor the voice of the Master, because, like the "silent voice," "conflict is not part of its nature" (BR, p. 52). And her child can stand in front of the mirror looking at her skin without color (BR, p. 49), while the "I" is "at last at peace," "at last erased" (BR, p. 52), living in the oxymoron of the silent voice. (347)

While Covi offers a feminist analysis of Kincaid's "Blackness" as an epistemological category of meaning that ultimately disrupts the binary oppositions that are the metaphysical ground of phallogocentrism, the critic does not elaborate—and possibly even elides—other possible readings of the story as understood existentially, philosophically, politically, or even racially within a critical race lens. This chapter thus explores the racial and existential parameters of Kincaid's "Blackness" by drawing parallels to Frantz Fanon's philosophical inquiries into the racialized colonial contours of blackness in the chapter "The Fact of Blackness" from *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (*Black Skin, White Masks*), as well as suggesting possible lines of intersection between Kincaid's story and the philosophical writings of Martin Heidegger and Emmanuel Levinas on ontology and ethics, respectively. Fanon, a anticolonial scholar, analyst, and revolutionary leader, participated in the liberation struggles of the Algerian Revolution to win independence from French colonial rule. Influenced by the psychoanalytic writings of Jacques Lacan, the existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, Martin Heidegger's ontological metaphysics, and a contemporary of Emmanuel Levinas, Fanon also had an extremely prolific record of intellectual, scholarly production before his life was tragically abbreviated in 1961 by leukemia at the age of thirty-six. During his short lifetime, Fanon wrote and published several groundbreaking anticolonial works, including *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (1952) (*Black Skin, White Masks*), *L'An V de la révolution algérienne* (1959) ("The Fifth Year of the Algerian Revolution," translated into English and published under the title *A Dying Colonialism*), *Les damnés de la terre* (1961)

(*The Wretched of the Earth*), his best known work of anticolonial Marxist struggle, and *Pour la révolution africaine: Ecrits politiques* (*Toward an African Revolution: Political Essays*), which was posthumously published in 1964.

While Fanon challenged the colonial relations of power, his philosophical contemporary Levinas also challenged the traditional metaphysical relations of self and other in the wake of the Holocaust and the systemic regime of power manifest in the abhorrent Nazi extermination of European Jewry. A student of Heidegger before the war, Levinas radically diverged from Heideggerian teaching following World War II and the Shoah, or Holocaust. In this intellectual and political turning away from Heidegger, Levinas moved in his philosophical thought from the ontological ground of *Dasein*, as conceptualized in *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*), to an ethical ground figuring *l'Autre*, or alterity, as a primary beginning, or "first philosophy." This philosophical shift from self (*soi*) to others (*autrui*) marks Levinas' major divergence from Heidegger. For Heidegger *Dasein* experiences its being through contemplation of its nonbeing, the "possibility of its impossibility," through contemplating its own death and mortality—a *Sein-zum-Tode*, or "being-towards-death"; in contrast, for Levinas, time is experienced in *la mort de l'autre*, or "the death of the other" in which the receding of the other into death—a ceasing of the other's gesturing toward me through his or her face (*visage*)—is experienced as the temporal movement toward infinity that cannot be totalized by being or time. Levinas' exploration of time, subjectivity, and ethical relationality through face-to-face, or *vis-à-vis*, alterity began with the publication of *Le Temps et l'Autre* (1947) [*Time and the Other*], and was extended in longer philosophical works such as *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l'extériorité* (1961) [*Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*], *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence* (1974) [*Otherwise Than Being, or Beyond Essence*], *Éthique et Infini* (1982) [*Ethics and Infinity*], and *Dieu, la mort, et le temps* (1993) [*God, Death, and Time*].

Kincaid's own ethical-textual engagements with historically-determined and ideologically coded ideas about self, others, subjectivity, objectivity, colonial and postcolonial relations, as well as metaphysical constructions of whiteness and blackness, strikingly parallel the philosophical works of Levinas and Fanon, as I argue later in my reading of the short story "Blackness." To undertake these comparative intellectual and textual analyses, I begin by discussing Fanon's *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* for the existentialist and ontological theory of racialization (or as the anticolonial critic defines it: epidermalization)² that it articulates, and specifically, for the ways in which his theory resists race, racialization, and systems of racist and racial oppression within colonialist discourse. I also read Kincaid's short story "Blackness" for its literary representations of blackness, theorizing her figurations of blackness directly through Fanon's concept of 'le Noir,' (*Black Skin, White Masks*), "the black," and more obliquely, through Luce Irigaray's notion of

le feminine, “the feminine.” This *théorie métisse*, or hybrid theoretical frame, perhaps radically, brings together Fanon’s revolutionary writings and Irigaray’s French feminist writings: Anglo-American feminist critics have, for the most part, rejected the former, and transnational feminists of color have critiqued the latter. There is a symmetry of thought, however, within these two theorists’ writings, as Irigaray’s theories have been clearly influenced by Fanon, though this fact remains unnoted in feminist scholarship about her writings. I also sketch out philosophical and textual parallels between Kincaid’s story “Blackness”—with its impersonal evocations of “there is” and “there are” that elude rigid definitions of autobiographical subjectivity and nonfiction notions of selfhood—and the Heideggerian notion of *es gibt* (the German equivalent of “there is”) and the Levinasian notion of *il y a* (which also translates into English from French as “there is”).

Kincaid’s theorizations and representations of blackness—like Levinas’ *Temps et l’Autre* (*Time and the Other*) (1947), and like Fanon’s *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* (*Black Skin, White Masks*) (1952)—are decisively philosophical and political. While I secondarily discuss Kincaid’s philosophical encounters with Heidegger and Levinas in this chapter, the intellectual engagement with Fanon remains primary. Where Fanon’s “The Fact of Blackness” critiques the paralyzing gaze of whiteness for blackness, Kincaid’s “Blackness” eludes such paralysis and displaces the fixed sociopolitical definitions of blackness and black identities. In call-and-response fashion, Kincaid’s “Blackness” is the subversive response to Fanon’s call for black movement away from and outside of the societal strictures of racialized identity, or the “fact of blackness.” Within this chapter, I define Kincaid’s poetic movements of blackness politically and philosophically through alterity and difference as the alterrains of “blackness.”

“L’Expérience vécue du Noir”
(“The Fact of Blackness”): Fanon’s *Le Noir*

L’homme n’est pas seulement possibilité de reprise, de négation. S’il est vrai que la conscience est activité de transcendance, nous devons savoir aussi que cette transcendance est hantée par le problème de l’amour et de la compréhension. L’homme est un OUI vibrant aux harmonies cosmiques. Arraché, dispersé, confondu, condamné à voir se dissoudre les unes après les autres les vérités par lui élaborées, il doit cesser de projeter dans le monde une antinomie qui lui est coexistante.

[Man is not merely a possibility of recapture or of negation. If it is true that consciousness is a process of transcendence, we have to see too that this transcendence is haunted by the problems of love and understanding.]

Man is a yes that vibrates to cosmic harmonies. Uprooted, pursued, baffled, doomed to watch the dissolution of the truths that he has worked out for himself one after another, he has to give up projecting onto the world an antinomy that coexists with him.]

Written in 1952, Fanon's *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* interrogates the position of man (*l'homme*) in the construction of Western discourses. The above passage—speaking of Man's transcendent consciousness, Man's antinomous projections onto the world that subsumes the other (*l'autre*) into the self (*Moi/soi*)—could be easily mistaken for Irigaray's ideas about the *monosexuelle* relationship between "woman" (*la femme*) and "man" (*l'homme*), and clearly, Irigaray's theory of *hom(m)osexualité*⁴ is influenced not only by De Beauvoir, but also by Fanon's work on "man" (*l'homme*) and "the black" (*le Noir*). Like Fanon, who states that the "le Noir n'est pas un homme" ("the black is not a man"), but rather "une zone de non-être" ("a zone of nonbeing") (26), Irigaray argues that *le féminin* is a masculine construct that merely *hom(m)osexually* mirrors back to *l'homme* his own ontological "being," whereas she reasons that "La femme, comme telle, ne serait pas. N'existerait pas, si ce n'est sur le mode du *pas encore* (de l'être). Et c'est dans les (encore) *entres* du devenir de l'être, ou des êtres, que quelque chose de son aspécificité pourrait se repérer" (207) ("Theoretically there would be no such thing as woman. She would not exist. The best that can be said is that she does not exist yet. Something of her a-specificity might be found in the *betweens* that occur in being, or beings" [166]).⁵ Similarly, both Fanon and Irigaray affiliate this negativity with a shifting ground for rethinking subjectivities, a disruptive "outside" to phallogocentric and colonial constructions. "En dehors de ce procès" ("Outside of this process"), Irigaray writes, "rien (n'est): la femme" ("is nothing: woman") (208). Fanon also identifies, let us recall, the ontological space of *le Noir* with metaphysical subversion: *le Noir* [est] "une région extraordinairement stérile et aride, une rampe essentiellement dépouillée, d'où un authentique surgissement peut prendre naissance" (26) ("a zone of nonbeing, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity where an authentic upheaval can be born" [8]). This passage illustrates the symmetry of ontological negation as described by Fanon in *le Noir* and by Irigaray in *la femme* (or *le féminin*).

Structurally, there is a symmetry between Fanon's ideas on race and Irigaray's thoughts on gender: a symmetrical relationship exists between *le nègre* and *le Noir* in Fanon and *la femme* and *le féminin* in Irigaray. Fanon's *le Noir*, like Irigaray's *le féminin*, offers a deconstructive strategy for reading the "blind spots" of white histories and mythologies.⁶ *Le Noir* and *le féminin*, in colonialist and masculinist discourses, are structured as *inessential* ("une zone de non-être"), like colonialist constructions of Africa as an "essential nothingness," "the unexplored territory," "the wide enormous blank"; in this

sense, both are simultaneously empty and yet overdetermined categories. Within colonialist and masculinist discourses, le Noir and *le féminin* form “blank” slates for the inscription of myriad “natures,” of multifarious (and often contradictory) stereotypes. The constructs of le Noir and *le féminin* are thus palimpsests for the inscription, erasure, reinscription, and even obfuscation of “homme-blanc” definitions, and the theoretical lenses offered by Fanon and Irigaray expose these discursive forms of erasure and dispossession. Clearly, Fanon’s analysis of the racial constructions of le Noir, and Irigaray’s deconstructive analysis of gendered constructions of *le féminin* reveal that these ideological systems have, if not an absolute outside, at least a structural or discursive outside.⁷ Le Noir or *le féminin* are not fixed identitary categories, but rather discursive and ideological constructions—and thus empty or unoccupied, if also totalized. As such, these constructs are necessarily nonrepresentational of real subordinated people; indeed, in the case of *la femme* (“woman”), it is a construction that has been deployed in such a way as to violently erase “Third World” women and women of color. Kincaid’s “Blackness” parallels the theoretical lenses of Fanon and Irigaray in its deconstructive reading of traditional conceptions of blackness and its refiguring of blackness as fluid, malleable, and shifting. Kincaid’s “blackness” subverts the colonialist palimpsest that these theorists describe, as she rewrites blackness for herself.

Although Fanon’s important theoretical work, particularly *Black Skin, White Masks*, has been sharply criticized, even rejected, by many feminist critics, Kincaid’s writings engage the revolutionary thinker, indirectly if not directly. On a more direct level, African diasporic feminists have also reinitiated important critical dialogues with Fanon’s contributions to anticolonialism and revolution. T. Dean Sharpley-Whiting’s *Frantz Fanon: Conflicts and Feminisms* offers a necessary rejoinder to feminist (mis)readings of the revolutionary, anticolonial, and critical race theories of Fanon, focusing on the receptions of his work within postmodern academic feminist thought (what Sharpley-Whiting refers to as “Euro-American lit-crit feminists”), within Algerian (or North African) feminist thought, and within radical black feminist thought. She opens with a critique of “Euro-American” feminist dismissals of Fanon’s work on the (reductive) grounds that it is misogynist and homophobic. Such (mis)readings, Sharpley-Whiting illustrates, are based on cursory readings of Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*, particularly the passages on Capécia; these feminist dismissals, moreover, show little or no knowledge of Capécia’s own autobiographical writings, which Fanon critiques for its interpellation of white, French ideals. Sharpley-Whiting also engages Arab feminist critiques of Fanon’s writings in *A Dying Colonialism*, specifically his representations of Algerian women around the issue of the veil (*haïk*, or *hijab*). Although Sharpley-Whiting contextualizes her engagement in Fanon’s involvement in the Algerian Revolution, she interrogates her analysis of Arab women and

the veil not exclusively through the writings of Algerian feminists (such as Helie-Lucas) but equally through the writings of other North African (such as Nawal El Saadawi and Fatima Mernissi) and Middle Eastern feminists (Evelyn Accad and others).

Sharpley-Whiting also addresses the radical black feminist readings of Fanon's revolutionary thought, particularly those of Linda Jo La Rue, Frances Beale, and bell hooks. Whereas the first two groups of feminist thinkers critique Fanon for his gendered and cultural biases, the readings of Fanon by radical black feminists emphasize his censure of institutional (and national) sexism, revealing his profemale statements regarding revolution and egalitarian societies. For these radical black feminists, Fanon's work offers a point of critique for misogyny they perceive among black nationalist leaders. For hooks, whose work (according to Sharpley-Whiting) bridges the second and third waves of feminist thought, Fanon is a thinker and a revolutionary to be engaged, not dismissed. Sharpley-Whiting furthers her own analysis of Fanonian thought precisely through hooks' instrumental readings of Fanon as intellectual, as activist, and as revolutionary, *not* as (feminist) adversary. Kincaid's writings may be brought into this conversation, if more obliquely; her story "Blackness" may be read as an aesthetic, philosophical, and political response to Fanon's "Fact of Blackness," and indeed, I read it as such in this chapter.

It is at the site of a discursive (and embodied, in Fanon's terms, *epidermalized*) site that I would like to enter my own engagement with Sharpley-Whiting's readings of Fanon: that of the problematic of *le Noir*. Sharpley-Whiting writes that "*Le Noir* poses a particular problem. While it is used throughout the text to mean 'the black man,' as it is generally followed by 'il,' at times it simply means 'the black'" (26fn4). Throughout *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon argues that *le Noir* is the ontological negation of white man's (*l'homme blanc*) "being." Fanon refers to colonial interpellation in corporeal terms—the "*épidermisation de cette infériorité*" ["epidermalization of this inferiority"] (28). He also describes the split subjectivity as a "manichean struggle" between "black" and "white," based largely on a visual corporification of the colonized psyche, his *image*: "La conscience morale implique une sorte de scission, une rupture de la conscience, avec une partie claire qui s'oppose à la partie sombre. Pour qu'il y ait morale, il faut que disparaisse de la conscience le noir, l'obscur, le nègre. Donc, un nègre à tout instant combat son *image*" ("Moral consciousness implies a kind of scission, a fracture of consciousness into a bright part and an opposing black part. In order to achieve morality, it is essential that the black, the dark, the Negro vanish from consciousness. Hence a Negro is forever in combat with his own *image*") (194; emphasis mine). This construct is one dialectically and institutionally imposed on the "black man"—a force that negates his own being, a force that is epidermalized through the disparities of power inherent

in colonialist and racially hierarchized systems of hegemony and dominance. Fanon's theory of racialization (or *epidermalization*) must be contextualized within the rhetoric of colonial discourse, specifically as he frames definitions of "blackness" around the ontological centers of negation/absence and affirmation/presence. Fanon's essay discusses "blackness" and "whiteness" as racial constructs in a colonial or imperial context.

Within this frame, I would like to suggest a rereading of Fanon's statement about the "woman of color," in which he claims, "I know nothing about her" (*Black Skin, White Masks* 180).⁷ If le Noir is configured within white-male-colonialist systems of power as the "being of non-being," a "zone of non-being" that reflects white-male being, then perhaps Fanon's point is that la Noire has no place at all within these systemic exclusions: she is the radically negative, the subaltern, or completely excluded. In this sense, Fanon suggests: within the white (critical) imaginary, Capécia is mask only. Fanon's le Noir and Irigaray's *le féminin*, then, function as deconstructive strategies for reading the fissures and absences within colonial, patriarchal histories; however, I resist universalizing these negative or deconstructive strategies for reading. Kincaid's "Blackness" aesthetically, philosophically, and politically refigures black (female) becomings that resist Capécia's (colonial) masking. Ultimately, I propose a syncretic method for reading historical erasures, while theorizing intense nomadic flight within these historical fields. It is through these overlapping frames, then, that I propose a reading of Kincaid's cryptic and lyrical short story "Blackness" (from *At the Bottom of the River*), because Kincaid's story refigures and redefines the terrains of blackness and black identities, eluding the negative ontological definitions of le Noir and *le féminin* while evading and annihilating the traps of "white masks." Ironically, as Jennifer De Vere Brody notes in *Impossible Purities: Blackness, Femininity, and Victorian Culture*, "The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), 2d ed., . . . includes the following meanings under the word *black*: 'Black; . . . a word of difficult history. In OE. [Old English], found also . . . with the long vowel blāce, blācan and thus confused with . . . blāc shining, white . . . [the] two words are often distinguishable only by the context, and sometimes not by that.'"⁸ Kincaid's narrative highlights these etymological and philosophical ambiguities in displacing the absolutism of whiteness and blackness as historically defined.

I remain equally invested in understanding *how* Fanon's revolutionary ideas in *Peau Noire, Masques Blancs* are formulated precisely through his use of style—the essay's narrative complexity and its disruptive critiques of genre, and through such critiques of genre, his incisive critiques of race and racial constructs within colonial, imperial rhetoric and reality. Fanon's "Fact of Blackness" textually hybridizes many forms or genres of writing: philosophical treatise; political manifesto; literary criticism; analytical psychology; and, of course, autobiographical prose. What makes Fanon's essay so interesting—in addition, of course, to his brilliant social, political, and psychological theo-

rizations of race—is the narrative complexity of the piece. The first half of the essay addresses the experience of the black man as a “spectacle” in white men’s eyes. In this section, Fanon describes the process of *épidermalisation* as a violent process that fragments the body and the psyche of the black man. Under the white man’s eyes and scrutiny, the black man feels himself to be nothing, nothingness, the negation of whiteness.

As a hybrid genre, Fanon’s essay (and indeed, most of the essays comprising *Black Skin, White Masks*) refuses the regulatory (i.e., policed) boundaries of genre, traversing the terrains of treatise, manifesto, critique, analysis, and autobiography. The voices are multiple, intricately layered, and intertextually woven; the narrative is contradictory, multivalenced, cacophonous. The voices that we hear are Fanon’s and others; ultimately, the voices that we hear are others’ and even our own. Fanon’s pluriphonic text does not mirror the schizophrenia of a self fractured, as much as it echoes a world that is schizophrenic, fragmented, segregated, and racially divided. Within this hierarchical world view—or, to borrow the German term, as Fanon does, this *Weltanschauung*—racial boundaries are defined by external difference that then creates and forcibly erects an ideological system of internal (or intrinsic) difference. More on this idea will follow, but first I would like to explore the implications of Fanon’s theory of racial codifications for the defining of boundaries within genre theory.

Social, political, racial segregation creates, in Fanon’s writing, the fractures of genre itself. Where genre theory usually (and insularly) demarcates the domains of genre as discrete, bound, separate, unique, Fanon exposes these boundaries and codifications as “impossible purities” (to borrow the words of Brody) grounded in hierarchical notions of difference and sameness. That this demarcation of genre and genres is also about racial difference and the demarcation of men is clear from Fanon’s text: “The white world, the only honorable one,” Fanon writes, “barred me from all participation. . . . I shouted a greeting to the world and the world slashed away my joy. I was told to stay *within bounds*, to go back where I belonged” (114–15). Fanon’s essay incorporates many voices—those dominant, those subterfuge—and it is a manifest attempt to break down barriers, boundaries, and genres: an attempt to *be* and to talk back.

“Genres are not to be mixed. I will not mix genres. I repeat: genres are not to be mixed. I will not mix them.” So begins the French poststructuralist philosopher Jacques Derrida’s important essay, “The Law of Genre.” Noting the fundamental and constitutional divisiveness of genres, Derrida further notes that genres *as genres* are defined by difference:

As soon as the word “genre” is sounded, as soon as it is heard, as soon as one attempts to conceive it, a limit is drawn. And when a limit is established, norms and interdictions are not far behind:

“Do,” “Do not,” says “genre,” the word “genre,” the figure, the voice, or the law of genre. And this can be said of genre in all genres, be it a question of a generic or a general determination of what one calls “nature” or *physis* (for example, a biological *genre* in the sense of *gender*, or the human *genre*, a genre of all that is in general), or be it a question of typology designated as non-natural and depending on laws or orders which were once held to be opposed to *physis*, according to the values associated with *techne*, *thesis*, *nomos* (for example, an artistic, poetic, or literary genre). (“The Law of Genre” 52)

This law, however, as a law of genre, is not exclusively binding on the genre *qua* category of art and literature. But, paradoxically, and just as impossibly, the law of genre also has a controlling influence and is binding on that which draws the genre into engendering, generations, genealogy, and degenerescence. (“The Law of Genre” 70)

The question of the literary genre is not a formal one: it covers the motif of the law in general, of generation in the natural and symbolic senses, of birth in the natural and symbolic senses, of the generation difference, sexual difference between the feminine and masculine genre/gender, of the hymen between the two, of a relationless relation between the two, of an identity and difference between the feminine and masculine. (“The Law of Genre” 70)

This Derridean passage echoes one in Fanon’s “Fact of Blackness,” the factuality or absolutism of which parallels the latter’s “law.” Discussing white resistance, above all, to miscegenation (do we not already see the etymological and fundamental symmetry of race and genre in this word?) and quoting, while parodying the pseudoscience of “race” (pervasive in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries), Fanon writes:

But on certain points the white man remained intractable. Under no conditions did he wish any intimacy between the races, for it is a truism that “crossings between widely different races can lower the physical and mental level. . . . Until we have a more definite knowledge of the effect of race-crossing we shall certainly do best to avoid crossings between widely different races.” (“The Fact of Blackness” 120)

In a later passage, he further parodies the genetic biases of such racialized sciences, referring to the thickness or thinness of chromosomes supposedly linked to cannibalism (120). But the imbrications of race and genre extend

further. Boundaries of race, genre are walls to divide, but what walls out likewise walls in. Fanon writes: "I was walled in: No exception was made for my refined manners, or my *knowledge of literature*, or my understanding of the quantum theory" (117; emphasis added). This "*knowledge of literature*," as Fanon well knows, is also a knowledge constructed according to racial difference, according to genre. Confronted by an inebriated French man on a train who laments the loss of "French virtues" (121), Fanon sardonically adds that "it must be said in his defense that he stank of cheap wine; if he had been capable of it, he would have told me that my emancipated-slave blood could not possibly be stirred by the name of Villon or Taine" (122). The reference to Hyppolite Taine is significant: it was Taine, following Herder and other German romantics, who first theorized the importance of race and nation for art, literature, and genre. Questions of race, nation, and belonging may not be dissociated from those of aesthetics—as Fanon astutely reveals and as Kincaid also, if differently, reveals.

The second half of the essay addresses the 1930s transcontinental and pan-Africanist literary movement grounded in the writings of Aimé Césaire and Léopold Senghor, *Négritude*, and the French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre's "Orphée Noir," the preface to Senghor's collection of African poetry, *Anthologie de la nouvelle poésie nègre et malgache* (133).⁹ In this preface, Sartre adopts the German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's notion of a dialectics of history, a three-part evolution of historical movement. In the first historical phase, a thesis is posited; in the second phase, the thesis is countered by its antithesis; and in the third phase, the diametrical elements are synthesized. Hegel's dialectic of history has been critiqued as a theory that posits history as a teleological, evolutionary movement of time. "Teleological" means moving toward a specific end point, a *telos*. "Evolutionary" refers to the idea that history and thus civilizations evolve from less civilized forms to higher forms. (It is worth mentioning here that in Hegel's schema, the less "evolved" civilizations were non-Western; and the most "evolved" civilizations were Western. In fact, for Hegel the "Orient" represented the phase of "pre-historical" and Africa the "a-historical"—a *dark continent* without history or civilization. I address Kincaid's intellectual wrestling with Hegel and Hegelian notions of history more extensively in the second chapter of this book.) Specifically, Fanon critiques Sartre's essay for the way that it reiterates the negative ontology of the black man, positing it as the antithesis to Western civilization, whiteness, and the positivity of *l'homme*, the French word for "man" or "human." Sartre posits the black man again as "nothingness," merely a minor term—or the antithesis—in a dialectical process. Now that I have spoken generally about the essay—its narratological complexity—as well as its thematic and ideological preoccupations, I want to return to Fanon's extremely important idea about racial formation as it occurs at the interstices of language and society, of body and psyche: *épidermalisation*. For Fanon, *épidermalisation* is

a form of triple consciousness that leads to self-dissection and ontological negation and psychological paralysis.

“On that day, completely dislocated . . . ,” Fanon writes, “I took myself far off from my own presence, far indeed, and made myself an object,” yet, he laments, “All I wanted was to be a man among other men . . . I wanted to be a man, nothing but a man” (112, 113). The tripling experienced in the “historico-racial schema” distorts body and soul. Fanon writes, “My body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white winter day” (113). For Fanon, it was *not yet* the dawn or morning of the black man’s being and becoming, but rather the “mourning” or grief of “crushing objecthood.” “If I were asked for a definition of myself, I would say,” Fanon writes, “that I am one who *waits*” (120).

Kincaid’s “Blackness” refigures, even disfigures, genre, opening alternative possibilities for rewriting the potential becomings of blackness and black identities through the disruptions of genre as a discrete, bound system of classification. Fanon’s essay ends on an eloquent note, one tinged with hope and possibility yet paradoxically, also despair and uncertainty. At end, Fanon witnesses the black man at a crossroads, “straddling Nothingness and Infinity” (140). If Fanon ends the chapter “The Fact of Blackness” at a point liminal to peril and possibility, Kincaid moves beyond a history of blackness defined by limit, peril, and oppression into creative presents and futures imbued with possibility and promise. Kincaid, thus, enters her voice into Caribbean contestations of historical horizons. This “quarrel with History,” as Édouard Glissant defines it, marks both an ending and a beginning—a staid past, a future becoming; or as Derek Walcott writes in the essay “The Muse of History”: “The shipwrecks of Crusoe and of the crew in *The Tempest* are the end of an Old Word. It should matter nothing to the New World if the Old is again determined to blow itself up, for an obsession with progress is not within the psyche of the recently enslaved. That is the bitter secret of the apple. The vision of progress is the rational madness of history seen as sequential time, of a dominated future. Its imagery is absurd” (*What the Twilight Says* 41).¹⁰ This Caribbean “quarrel” with History (capital H) is elaborated at greater length in chapters 2, 5, and 6. In the next section, I trace Kincaid’s revisions of blackness, being, and becoming—or her reponse to Fanon’s study of *le noir* in *Peau Noire*, *Masques Blancs* generally, and his call to “plow the deep silences” of blackness and to wrest “opportunities like a miner seeking veins of treasure” (48). Kincaid’s short story “Blackness,” then, was written for Fanon’s “one who *waits*” (120).

A priori “Blackness”: Kincaid’s Lyrical “I”

Kincaid’s short story “Blackness” probes blackness as both a postcolonial racialized identity category and a metaphysical definition. Kincaid’s creative

articulations of blackness draw on biblical motifs of darkness as a priori, un-created substance: blackness, or darkness, precedes *ex nihilo* creation—or the divine force and dynamism of creation—that produces something (creatures, essences, elements) from nothing: it is precursive, before, outside of time even (if one accepts the Augustinian notion of space and time as created dimensions or the material parameters of the created world that are called into being alongside and in simultaneity with that world). Blackness, as darkness, gestures toward the infinite and the eternal, even as it may only be palpably experienced and visibly descried within the parameter of space and time. Kincaid thus reverses the axiomatic, commonplace, or traditional metaphysical relations of black-white, blackness-whiteness, dark-light in which the former term—forgetful of the biblical order in Genesis—is subordinated to the latter, which has been historically valorized and privileged. Does darkness so war against light, and a priori essence mitigate against created substance, as evil with and against good? Kincaid seems to refuse this metaphysical *mêlée*, even as she acknowledges its historical encounters and even restages its performative battles.

Drawing on Antiguan folklore and obeah, Kincaid also explores blackness as metamorphic, transformative, and aleatory. The narrative voice alternates from being to nonbeing, from self to others, from subjects to objects: like blackness, the narrating *I* moves through these contradictory spaces, but remains bound and irreducible to none of them. Comprised of four fragmented sections, "Blackness" explores the alterrains of identity and being, loss of identity and nonbeing, or "the small shafts that fall with desperation in between" (48). "Blackness" swirls around two intertwined centers of gravity—blackness as identity and blackness as a metaphysical category. Although I refer to each narrative heartbeat separately, the two pulses "merge and separate, merge and separate" (to evoke Kincaid's words from another story in the collection, "My Mother"), propelling the reader through, at times synchronous—and at other moments, asynchronous—states. Through its metamorphic pulsations, "Blackness" is conceptualized as paradox—both negation and affirmation, genesis and apocalypse. Blackness vacillates across oppositional poles of being, nonbeing, and identity, masking truth with fiction and fiction with an alterreality. Kincaid's fictional alterrains (or alterrains) open autobiography to alterity, or otherness, and to the powerfully deconstructive movements of alterbiography. As the story begins, a soft blackness "falls in silence"; at the end of the story, silence enfolds, and ultimately erases, the self, but this erasure also, paradoxically, affirms self, and she reposes in the "silent voice" of blackness, not blackness itself.

Each of the four interwoven sections in the story "Blackness" are a reflection of blackness. The opening section is a contemplative passage exploring blackness sensately, lyrically, philosophically, and corporeally. Using synaesthesia—the fusion, even confusion, and overlay—of sensory experiences, Kincaid explores blackness as an ontological and subjective

category. Multiple senses are explored here—aurality, touch, sight—and blackness pervades all experiences. In the second section blackness delves into subterfuge terrains, territories dreamed, and landscapes imagined. In sleep and dreams, on battlefields of window frames, the girl creates worlds of difference, of “hunter and prey,” of brilliance and blindness. The third section, less directly self-reflexive than the first two sections, still swirls obliquely through self- and alterterrains as it moves from mother to daughter to mother to daughter and back again, straining the boundaries of self and other, subjects and objects, space and time. Self is defined and problematized, in alterrelation with mother, daughter, a “hunchback boy,” and even through divine apotheosis. In the fourth section of “Blackness,” Kincaid’s lyricism is hymnlike, incantatory, and the narrator sings psalms of self and silence and self-erasure. The refrain, “Living in the silent voice, I am,” blurs the boundaries of life and death, being and nonbeing, self and not-self. Moving through senses, elusive thoughts, and paradoxical states, “Blackness” defines and redefines its own contradictory terrains.

Recall Kincaid’s words to Ippolita: “I have quite a few people running around in me who are not only Black” (154). How might we interpret this idea in relation to “Blackness”? Kincaid evokes in this phrase both the strictures and the open horizons of blackness as identity and as metaphysical category. And as Kincaid intimates to Allan Vorda in conversation: the parameters of identity and community as black are also universalized, resisted as marginal or marked differentially: “I come from a place where most of the people are black. Every important person in my life was a black person, or a person who was mostly black, or very deeply related to what we call a black person. So I just assume that is the norm and that it is other people who would need describing” (81–82). These comments are related, it seems, to the author’s creative literary refigurings of blackness in the short story. Blackness is both foundational and yet malleable.

“Blackness” begins with synaesthetic movement, fusing the senses of sight and touch: the color or the state of blackness is experienced through touch and through sound: “How soft is the blackness as it falls. It falls in silence and yet it is deafening, for no other sound except the blackness falling can be heard” (46). Confounding “blackness” as a state of being (or nonbeing), Kincaid’s opening lines express blackness as movement: “How soft is the blackness as it falls” (46). Although blackness may traditionally, within Western frames, connote austerity or sterility, here blackness is soft. The blackness is not only synaesthetic, blurring sensory experiences; it is also paradoxical: “it falls in silence and yet it is deafening” (46). Not only does the silence deafen; it eclipses all other sounds, even through its deafening silence. Building on this synaesthetic moving image, Kincaid writes, “The blackness falls like soot from a lamp with an untrimmed wick” (46). Blackness falls, expiring “like soot” from flame, evoking ashes, dust, and

death. Again, blackness is paradoxical: "[T]he blackness is visible and yet it is invisible, for I see that I cannot see it" (46). Only in this line does blackness become visible, invisible, and only in this line, does blackness stand in relation to an I. Evoking Fanon's black epidermal visibility that creates black ontological invisibility (in *Black Skin, White Masks*), Kincaid writes, "[F]or I see that I cannot see it." Yet the blackness moves, expands, "fills up a small room, a large field, an island, my own being" (46). Blackness is movement, force of nature, geopolitical transformation: it falls or fills; it falls as night falls over a "large field"; it expands, filling an "island" (or many islands within the Caribbean, as the Atlantic Slave Trade's violatory expanse filled American islands with African people). In this last line, though, blackness is more intimately connected with individual identity as it falls and fills "my own being." Still, the speaking I refuses the totalization of identity by blackness: "The blackness cannot be separated from me but often I can stand outside it." I and "blackness" are intimately linked, and although the blackness is inseparable from the I, the I is not inextricable from the blackness. I may "stand outside of it." As blackness moves, so the I moves, outside and even beyond.

Following a series of lines imbued with repetition and difference, lines that reiterate the syntactical pattern, "The blackness is not . . . , though I . . . ," Kincaid writes: "The blackness is not my blood, though it flows through my veins" (46). The line rejects and critiques the nineteenth-century racialized sciences that theorized racial difference as biological, as genetic, as "in the blood," yet, she writes, "[blackness] flows through my veins." Blackness flows through I's veins, but not as blood; rather, it flows as being and nonbeing or as the annihilation of being, all the possible and variable meanings of blackness. I says, "The blackness enters my many-tiered spaces and soon the significant word and event recede and eventually vanish: in this way, I am annihilated and my form becomes formless and I am absorbed into a vastness of free-flowing matter" (46). The body, as form of being, and its "many-tiered spaces" are penetrated by blackness, "and soon the significant word and event recede and eventually vanish." But what is the "significant word"? *Blackness*? And what is the "event"? the blackness as it "enters [her] many-tiered spaces"? And why do they "recede and eventually vanish"? The lines are ambiguous; still, Kincaid proceeds with precision and specificity: "*in this way*, I am annihilated and my form becomes formless" (47; emphasis added). As the "significant word" ('blackness?') and the "event" ('blackness enters?') "recede and eventually vanish," so "I [is] annihilated." A word, an event, a vanishing—of blackness, of I. A movement from being (blackness; I) to nonbeing (vanishing; annihilation) in which "form becomes formless" (47). From being nonbeing; from form formlessness. Through this metamorphosis, the lyrical voice claims, "I am absorbed into a vastness of free-flowing matter." This act seems to reverse creation, yet it disavows *ex*

nihilo creation, returning to that from whence it proceeded, “free-floating matter,” raw materiality, blackness. This loss of form is not a loss of materiality, though, but a metamorphosis of being and incarnation and a transformative loss of individuality: “In the blackness, then, I have been erased. I can no longer say my own name. I can no longer point to myself and say ‘I.’ In the blackness my voice is silent” (47). I is without identity, without being, and without voice. And yet, I speaks, and speaks of self, even if through the loss of self, and refers to “my own name,” even as I never discloses it. Paradox. In blackness, self escapes self; I is erased; I eludes identitarian terms imposed by others and by society (recall Fanon’s *le Noir*) and redefines self through annihilation, erasure, and even fusion with blackness in a cycle of identity, being, nonbeing, and above all, redefinition of these terms: “First, then, I have been my individual self, carefully banishing randomness from my existence, then I am swallowed up in the blackness so that I am one with it” (47). The blackness precedes creation and persists after annihilation of form, individuated existence, and contingent forms of being: it is necessary, a priori, divine. And Kincaid’s “blackness” manifests an apophatic gesturing toward what cannot be positively defined yet also an apotheosis. As an individual self, I banishes “randomness from my existence”: I acts; I is discrete, separate, individual; I elects what shall constitute self and banishes “randomness.” Then, blackness falls, fills, “enters my many-tiered spaces” (46): I is “swallowed up in the blackness; I loses individuality, but I still exists, “one with” the blackness that has engulfed I. Kincaid seizes the language of neo-Platonic emanence and return in order to apotheosize blackness. Yet the lyrical voice of blackness also descends from ethereal heights to world-bound matter below.

Moving from personality to impersonality, from individuality to blackness, I speaks of the “objective” world in the next paragraph. Kincaid underscores this shift from the personal to the impersonal with the impersonal subject-verb constructs “there is” and “there are.” The next paragraph begins with the impersonal, “there are small flashes of joy that are present,” before returning to the personal, “in my daily life” (47). These joys include “the upturned face to the open sky, the red ball tumbling from small hand to small hand, as small voices muffle laughter; the sliver of orange on the horizon, a remnant of the setting sun” (47). The spatial references are external to self—“the open sky,” “the horizon,” “the setting sun”—yet these spaces are mapped by bodily spaces—“the upturned face,” “from small hand to small hand.” The impersonal not only eclipses the personal; color also seems to eclipse blackness, yet blackness still encompasses all. Blackness is complemented by vibrant colors: the “red” of the ball, “the sliver of orange.” The references are both vast (“open sky,” “horizon”) and minute (“small hand to small hand,” “small voices”). The objects are still, as in the “upturned face” and “the sliver of orange on the horizon,” and yet motive, as with the “red

ball tumbling" and "the sun setting." Kincaid reiterates the "still motion" of the objects and the objective world in the line that follows: "There is the wide stillness, trembling and waiting to be violently shattered by impatient demands" (47). Evoking again the impersonal construction "there is," the scene that Kincaid describes is one of "wide stillness" yet one that trembles and waits "to be violently shattered" (47). By whom, the reader asks? Or by what force of nature? "By impatient demands," Kincaid writes (47). But whose? Suddenly, forcefully, subjectively, the personal emerges within the impersonal as "impatient demands" that appear and reappear as parenthetical questions: "('May I now have my bread without the crust?' / 'But I long ago stopped liking my bread without the crust!')" (47). A child asks, impatiently demands, "May I now have my bread without the crust?" A child answers, impatiently demands, "But I long ago stopped liking my bread without the crust!" The crust, darker and harder, is removed at the "impatient demands" of the child, then refused: "But I long ago stopped liking my bread without the crust!" From the impersonal scene of "there is," or "there are," to the parenthetical insularity of "impatient demands," questions and answers posed in parenthesis, Kincaid's "Blackness" refuses the divisions of subject and object, of self and others, of interiority and exteriority, of internal and external spaces; these spaces are interpenetrating, traversing one another.

The impersonality of Kincaid's "there is" philosophically parallels and textually engages, however differently, both Heidegger's notion of *es gibt* ("there is") and Levinas's notion of *il y a* ("there is"). Heidegger's conceptualizations of *Da-sein* (the "there-being") as the "being of being" and the "meaning of being" in *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*) is related to his impersonal notion of *es gibt* (or "there is"). For Heidegger, *es gibt* represents the manifold, plenitude of being as being-in-the-world that is intellectually and etymologically related to the notion of the *gift*—or the *given*—in German, since the impersonal phrase *es gibt* is derived from the verb *geben*, "to give." *Es gibt*, in Heideggerian thought, thus represents the primordial "generosity" in and of ontological existence. (Heidegger explicitly theorizes the valences of *es gibt* in sections 2, 44, and 63 in *Sein und Zeit*.) In contrast with this positive philosophical valence of the there is in Heidegger's ontological thought as the "joy of what exists, the abundance," Levinas describes the there is (from the French phrase *il y a*), in a conversation with interlocutor Philippe Nemo, as "something resembling what one hears when one puts an empty shell close to the ear, as if the emptiness were full, as if the silence were a noise. It is something one can also feel when one thinks that even if there were nothing, the fact that 'there is' is undeniable. Not that there is this or that; but the very scene of being is open: there is. In the absolute emptiness that one can imagine before creation—'there is'" (Levinas, "The 'There Is,'" *Ethics and Infinity* 47). Nemo, in drawing a direct contrast with

Heideggerian conceptualizations of *es gibt* as foundational generosity, presses Levinas on this philosophical contradistinction, asking, "For you, on the other hand, there is no generosity in the 'there is'?" to which the philosopher evocatively and metaphorically replies:

I insist in fact on the impersonality of the "there is," as "it rains," or "it's night." And there is neither joy nor abundance: it is a noise returning every negation of this noise. Neither nothingness nor being. I sometimes use the expression: the excluded middle. One can say of this "there is" which persists that it is an event of being. One can neither say that it is nothingness, even though there is nothing: *Existence and Existents* tries to describe this horrible thing, and moreover describes it as horror and panic.

[. . .]

Which nevertheless is not an anxiety. . . . Other experiences, all close to the "there is," are described in this book, notably that of insomnia. In insomnia one can and one cannot say that there is an "I" which cannot manage to fall asleep. The impossibility of escaping wakefulness is something "objective," independent of my initiative. This impersonality absorbs my consciousness; consciousness is depersonalized. I do not stay awake: "it" stays awake. Perhaps death is an absolute negation where "the music ends" (however, one knows nothing about it). But in the maddening experience of the "there is," one has the impression of a total impossibility of escaping it, of "stopping the music." ("The 'There Is,'" *Ethics and Infinity* 47–49)

The 'there is,' for Levinas, is thus a form of material detachment (similar to that of Simone Weil's notions of *solitude*), a dissolution of being without the escape of being into nonbeing or nothingness and an impersonal anonymity of consciousness and experience that is not yet indifference. If for Weil, though, *solitude* is the monastic, even saintly or hagiographic escape from the evil of the *social*, for Levinas, the ethical and thus social relationship¹² with *l'autre*, alterity, or with *l'autrui*, the other breaks with and evades the horror of *solitude* experienced in the annihilating moments of *il y a*, the 'there is.' Like Maurice Blanchot, Levinas regards the *il y a* as a "clamor" or "murmur" that "is no longer being, . . . and no longer something, . . . neither being nor nothingness" ("The 'There Is'" 50). For Levinas, then, the *tertium quid* ("third substance") or *tiers exclus* ("excluded middle") is that which remains inassimilable to and outside of the dichotomized poles, *being* and *nonbeing*, or *nothingness*: it is an *otherwise than being*, essentially that unknowable and incalculable domain that death brings and that is experienced temporally as the "to come" (*à-venir*) that is the unknown future (*avenir*) of death.