"Who knows the lives and minds of the people who live in the alley?" asks the opening page of Willard Motley's 1947 novel, *Knock on Any Door*. Is Motley using the contemporary fixation on documenting the "abberant" lives of racial minorities in Chicago's South Side? Or is he making fun of this same trend, implying that nobody can ever know the lives of the poor? Or is he critiqueing readers of African American biography as ethnography, readers who engage in projects of both pathologizing and celebrating Blacks for nonnormative sexual practices? All three attitudes – critique, exploitation, and mocking irony – persist in the tone of Motley's portraits of racial and sexual minorities and their relationship to the city. Anne Petry's 1953 novel *The Narrows* also simultaneously exploits and critiques sensational narratives of the "perverse" sexual practices of the African American urban poor, focusing on an interracial affair between a Black bartender, Link Williams, and a married white Heiress, Camilo Treadway. Both Petry and Motley take the physical places of both normative and nonnormative sexuality very seriously, placing their characters in conflicts with their neighborhoods, domestic spaces, and even their bedroom furniture. In Chicago and New York, between 1920 and 1930, as waves of African American migrants moved to urban centers, these impoverished communities became a key area of societal investigation (by social workers, "Bureaus of Social Hygeine," and urban planners).[1] In both cities, "vice" districts of the outlaw sexualities migrated into African American neighborhoods and brought new communities into being around nonnormative gender, racial and sexual practices.[2] "Vice districts" were areas where the usual codes of erotic object choice

[1] scholars such as Robert Ferguson and Siobhan Sommerville who have cogently argued that 20th century projects of racial and sexual categorization and narrativization can not be understood separately.
[2] Kevin Mumford, Interzones: Black/White Sex Districts in Chicago and New York in the Early Twentieth Century (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 27.

(gendered and racialized) broke down, making space for interracial couples, homosexuals, and subversions of societal decorum. Motley and Petry use these spaces as scenes of the danger and appeal of modernity, with its breakdown of normative domestic heterosexuality and its spatial impermanence.

In this paper, I consider two African American authors of the post-war period, Willard Motley and Ann Petry, who refashion these narratives of the African American neighborhood to trouble the boundaries between racial and sexual transgressions and the normative space of the heterosexual home. Both Motley and Petry simultaneously exploit and critique the sexualization of geography that is a convention of slumming narratives. While Motley belongs more directly to a gay male tradition of nonnormative gender and racial portraits, Petry's *The Narrows* also destroys the reformist illusion that normative, heterosexual households are the way to uplift "the race." Petry's reclaiming of the domestic space for homoerotic attachments between women runs alongside her critique of the heteropatriarchal assumptions that usually organize "home." Calling attention to the ways that "vice" in embedded in the very marital trappings that reformers urge onto urban Blacks, Petry powerfully subverts the heterosexual/homosexual binary that structures the idea of certain races, or certain neighborhoods, as inherently "perverse."

Willard Motley's 1947 novel *Knock on Any Door* also provides a trenchant critique of heteropatriarchal models of "home" through descriptions of the married home as a sterile space of violent gender and racial policing. Like the earlier tradition of slumming narratives, the reader of *Knock on Any Door* is encouraged to form a kind of

homoerotic attachment to Nick, the story's "no good" protagonist.[3] As Kevin Mumford explains in *Interzones*, slumming narratives (such as *Nigger Heaven*, *The Walls of Jericho*, or *White Women/Colored Men*) are characterized by black/white homoeroticism and the sexualization of the African American neighborhood as a specific space or geography.[4] Motley's vision of Chicago's street life involves a fantasy of multi-racial community that embraces interracial and homosexual attachments. Motley was unsurprisingly encouraged in his literary endeavors by Carl Van Vechten,[5] the author of *Nigger Heaven* and a great influence in the continuation of homoerotic multiracial literature.[6] Because of the novels' engagements with Popular Front aesthetics, as well their slightly queer sensibility in regards to both racial and sexual binaries, *Knock on Any Door* and *The Narrows* have been mostly overlooked within traditional versions of African American *and* Gay literary history. While neither novel provides unambiguous images of the racially and sexually perverse subject, both draw attention to the dangers of contemporary domestic ideologies and their conflations of gender, sexuality and race into knowable and manageable categories.

Knock on Any Door's protagonist, the "pretty boy" gangster Nick Romano is an Italian-American, working class alter-boy turned police murderer. While his defense

[3] John Hughes, in *The Negro Novelist* (1953), writes "The characterization of Nick is the achievement in this book. He has a magnetism which works for him at all times in a rather satisfactory way. Somehow the author transmutes this same magnetism to the reader, and despite all of his obviously antisocial attitudes, Nick attracts and exacts sympathy." Qtd. in .....

[4] Mumford, 27-31, 147-150.

[5] Correspondence between Motley and Van Vechten can be found at Northern Illinois University, and are excerpted in James R. Giles, "The Emergence of Willard Motley in Black American Literature," Negro American Literature Forum 6.2 (1972): 31-34.

[6] For further treatment of this tradition, see Siobhan Sommerville, Queering the Color Line: Race and the invention of Homosexuality in American Culture (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000) which contains a discussion of Jean Toomer's *Cane* as a passing story about both racial and sexual disidentification. For discussion of Van Vechten's impact on the publication of both James Weldon Johnson and Nella Larsen's first novel, *Passing*, see John K. Young, Black Writers, White Publishers: Marketplace Politics in Twentieth Century African American Literature (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 2006) 37-45.

lawyer provides the classic Marxist analysis of how Nick's poverty caused his slide into "no good" street life, the novel provides other explanations for the kinds of relations between men that the street allows and the domestic space makes impossible. Motley portrays the Nick's home as a strictly patriarchal space that attempts to fix racial categories through imposing standards of masculine heterosexuality while refusing the material resources needed to maintain these standards. Nick's father is simultaneouly stripped of his ties to his ethnic community and his means of supporting his family when his Italian foods store falls victim to the depression: "Then they were poor."[7] After this fall, nothing in the Romano household lines up with normative gender, sexual or racial normativity.

Abbie Crunch, the female protagonist of *The Narrows,* opens the novel by preparing herself meticulously for going for groceries – straightening her gloves and hat before a full length mirror. Abbie's opening monologue also illustrates the symbolic meanings of the street as opposed to her house, Number Six Dumble Street. The street, where most of the novel takes place, runs alongside the River Wye. Abbie reflects, "Fortunately the river hadn't changed," but remains, "a sparkling blue river just at the foot of the street, a beautiful river" (4). She continues,

> Even the street was beautiful. It sloped gently down toward the river. But the signs on the buildings dispelled the illusion of beauty. . . . Room for Rent, Lady Tenant Wanted, Poro Method Used, Get Your Kool-Aid Free, Tenant Provide Own Heat, Rooms Dollar and Half A Night. Rooms. Rooms.[8]

Abbie's description of Dumble Street introduces the novel's symbolic contrasts between modernity and nature, as well as homelessness and home that dominate *The Narrows*.

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[7] Willard Motley, Knock on Any Door (New York: Appleton-Century Company, 1947), 9.
[8] Anne Petry, The Narrows (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988) 4.

"The signs tell the story of the change" from Dumble street as an ethnic White immigrant neighborhood to almost wholly Black. It is not only that the signs, with their neon lights contrasting the natural light of the moon, represent the placelessness of the African American poor within bootstraps narratives about immigration, but the specific signs on Dumble street concretely show the transience of its population. Dumble Street's abundance of "Rooms" and more "Rooms," seems connected to the way that moving to Dumble Street guarantees Petry's characters a life of sordid Police negligence or corruption. Both the changefulness of the neighborhood and its diversion from "nature" can be read as about sexual perversion. But Abbie's thouhgts of the river as providing "the illusion of beauty" points up the emptiness of the facades of normative gender and sexual relationships in *The Narrows*.

Abbie is particularly offended by one particular sign and place on Dumble Street. She observes that the sign outside "The Last Chance," the bar right across the street from Abbie Crunch's house, is a bright red neon, "a horrible color in the sunlight."[9] The contrast between Petry's descriptions of the neon signs and the natural beauty of the river highlights that Dumble street is indeed "the last chance" for home most of The Narrows characters. Abbie reflects, "The people who lived here near the waterfront fumbled and they mumbled and they stumbled and they tumbled, ah, yes, make up a word – dumbled."[10] Thus the language used to describe and name the street comes together with its inhabitants actions, which are anything but firm, stable and homely. In contrast to Dumble Street, the Treadway Mansion's stability (in being entailed through the generations of the family) and isolated privacy allows the Treadways to shield themselves

[9] Petry, 4.
[10] Petry, 21.

from the lives of the people of Monmouth while exploiting their labor in making guns needed in the Cold War arms build-up.[11] At this point in the novel, Abbie lays out a seemingly neat contrast between the unruly space of Dumble Street and her house as a domestic haven of decorum.

Petry both uses and undermines this distinction. In *The Narrows*, Dumble Street's residents struggle to possess not only their houses, but each other. Petry makes the two into inseparable processes, pointing out the way that normative sexuality commodifies not only the domestic sphere but the gender and humanity of its characters. Link's literal homelessness comes together with his needing to escape into motion pictures that provide the fantasy of "conquering the world." Petry shows how Black urban displacement and modernism come together with post-war narratives of masculinity in the first conversation between Link and Camilo Williams;

> "Honey," he said, "I'm the day man behind the bar in The Last Chance. And I'm perfectly content to be just that and nothing more. Any itch I ever had in my soul, any run-around I ever had in my heel, I lost when I grew up. You only get those world-conqueror ideas when you're eight years old. After that – uh-uh."
> "Why did you feel as though you could conquer the world?"
> "I don't know exactly. That was a long time ago and I was just a kid. All I remember is that I had seen a new world, found a new world, a new continent, and like all discoverers I decided to conquer it, make it mine."[12]

Despite Link's claims that he has grown out of such mass-marketed narratives of masculinity, his actions belie his words. Not only does this scene take place in a car, a key symbol in *The Narrows* of both Link and Camilo's desire to escape the clutches of

[11] Michael Barry usefully observes that "More houses are going up in the carefully groomed area at the edge of town where the Treadways live because that is where the millionaires live. Malcolm Powther comes to live on Dumble Street because the building he has lived in before has been condemned." Micheal Barry, "'Same Train Be Back Tomorrer': Ann Petry's The Narrows and the Repetition of History," MELUS 24.1 (1999): 150.
[12] Petry, 78.

respectable, domestic heterosexuality, but Link also clearly views his white passenger as another such conquerable continent. Camilo Williams/Treadway (we only learn her real last name as Link does in the middle of the novel) also uses her car to escape from home and its implied class, racial and gender values. Camilo's gender-bending behavior as a driver, the way she claims to "own the road" like she owns the rest of the Monmouth world, marks her as an unhappily married woman. Later in the novel, Link stumbles out of The Last Chance bar, after refusing to be scared of Bill Hod and announcing that he is in love (thus breaking from the codes of Black masculinity which dominate The Last Chance. Link stands outside the bar laughing, "because once again he felt as though he could conquer the world."[13]

In his discussion of the "modern technology" of the movie theater, through the mutual masturbation scene from *Native Son,* Roderick Ferguson ties the automobile and the movie theater more directly together as symbols of modernity and the racial and sexual perversions it creates; "Like the automobile, the movie theater helped American youth commit social transgressions."[14] Link and Camilo's mutual desire to escape their normative heterosexual homes is dangerously close to signaling a kind of homosexuality, the kind on display in Wright's imagination of the movie theater – where two black boys masturbate together in front of the image of the white female heroine, inaugerating them into a system of heterosexual masculinity where they are taught to both own their sexual partners and also that the most desirable partners are those they can not have, like white women.[15] Link's rejection of Abbie's household, then, symbolizes both his perverse and

[13] Petry, 98.
[14] Roderick Ferguson, Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004) 47.
[15] Ferguson, 47-49.

modern desires, brought out in his first communicating with Camilo inside an automobile.

The terms of power in Link and Camilo's relationship are set up in this initial encounter. They come together in their desire to escape sexuality restrictive homes, but once they look for a stable room to spend the night in, their racial and class power differentials begin to fester. Link can't get over Camilo's importing nice furniture, specifically a bed, into their hotel room. In lingering on the symbols of domestic sexuality (particularly the bed that Camilo buys for the hotel room) as manifestations of Camilo's power over Link, and setting this scene of travel as the couple's first and perhaps only opportunity for communication as equals, Petry ironically points up the effects of Fordist economic organization in terms of race and sexuality. Inside the car, or along a mechanized assembly line, people are interchangeable. But once you try to set up house, codes of race and sexuality reassert themselves. Thus, Petry calls attention to the racial and gendered power relations imbedded in home-making, imbalances which make heterosexuality about ownership in the Treadway mansion and the hotel in New York.

Bedrooms are key sights for the downfall of Nick Romano as well. Nick, the novel's "pretty boy" gangster protagonist, refuses his family's attempts to make his life into an alter-boy becomes respectable husband narrative. Nick's aversion to the normative heterosexual bedroom is forecast early in the novel, in a scene of homosocial sexual discovery. As the group of boys "with curious and excited eyes" sneak into an alleyway to peer into the bedroom window of "Old man Snyder" and "his wife," "Nick didn't look. He stood huddled into a tight knot. He only looked at the shadows against the

shade – big, convulsive, distorted."[16] Motley portrays the marriage bed as a space of surveillance and fear. Nick's refusal to watch the couple having sex, his running away from the window, reveals his breaking with the norms of his friends. Nick does not aspire to be married, symbolically protesting the normative domesticity of his parents plans for him, much as Link refuses the terms of masculinity that Abbie's house represents.

Instead of joining in the growing white ethnic upper-working class domestication (funded by government programs that enabled working class families to buy houses in the suburbs), Nick joins a multiracial, homoerotic gang on West Madison. The streets provide Nick with a version of family not bound to a particular house, but instead a bonding between a homosocial/homoerotic male network whose bonds house and feed Nick in a myriad of locations – flophouses, the Nickel Plate, Pastime. Their outlaw mentality binds Nick to his friends on the street, alongside mutual obligations (monetary and emotional). They share a life of secrets and hiding from the surveillance of the law and their families. Nick explains, "when he was with the fellows he forgot all about home; he was happy . . . The street pulled you back. It got in your blood."[17] In the novel's schematic separation of home life (images of walls, enclosure, isolation, enforced heterosexual masculinity and femininity, poverty and hunger) and street life (danger, movement, homoerotic male bonding), we can see a direct parallel with the "perverse" interracial sexual relationship in *The Narrows* – one that can never lead to marriage or "home," but instead allows for escape. Discourses of "home" for African Americans in the 40s and 50s were heavily weighted with the weight of racial salvation through

[16] Motley, 118.
[17] Motley, 284.

heteropatriarchal assimilation into national norms. Ferguson explains, "As African American gender and sexual practices were made into social phenomena, it then followed that those practices could be reformed through state intervention."[18] Like Nick at the bedroom window, Motley is turned off by the idea of fixing up the heterosexual unit as a way to reform the entire race. *Knock on Any Door* focuses on the way that doing just that, knocking on any door of the urban poor, is a dead end in terms of trying to understand Nick, whose most vital relationships take place on the streets. This makes Nick's story even more appealing, as it cannot be captured in the mass produced normality of domestic heterosexuality.

Nick's marriage leads not only to his wife's death (Emma kills herself lying in their marriage bed), but also to Nick's confession for murdering Riley as his guilt about Emma breaks his emotional resolve to hide the truth from the jury. Motley's portrait of Emma and Nick's wedding predicts the homoerotic attachment to movement and fear of heterosexual enclosure that will undoes both characters. In the wedding ceremony itself, streetcars going by repeatedly interrupt Nick's intent focus on the wedding ring in his pocket, "Behind the heavy drapes a streetcar clanged by on 12th Street and Nick was so scared that he wished he was on it."[19] Emma and Nick's house, and in particular their bed, resembles death more than new life. Nick can treat Emma well until the heterosexual script takes over, "He was nice to her as he could be all evening. But that night in bed he failed her again."[20] Motley traces these failures directly back to Nick's life on the street, as he confesses to Emma that "I can't be a real husband to you. . . . (because) I was no good from the time I was sixteen. There were men and women. A lot

[18] Ferguson, 78.
[19] Motley, 267.
[20] Motley, 288.

of them."[21] Motley highlights how the "husband" is a character that disallows a sexual past with other "men *and* women," the space of "home" within this model does not accommodate any sexual/gender/racial ambiguity. Like the river in Petry's contrast of natural beauty to modern disruption, the space of the woods gives Motley an alternative, "natural" space to contrast to both the domestic home and the public streets.

The woods release Nick's wife, Emma, from the gender and sexually regulative space of her home. The woods provide a symbolic contrast in the novel for the death and foreclosure of possibilities represented in marital homes. In the woods, Emma and Leo "pulled off all their clothes. With their bodies naked, with their belly buttons like the belly buttons on gingerbread men they went into the water. With the sun on your body, with the warm wind tickling your back and your small, narrow hips it was nice. But you didn't tell Mommy about it" (224). Motley's use of free indirect discourse in this passage (a fitting contrast to the omniscient narrative perspective employed in the scenes of Nick's trial), makes the woods into a space of cross-gender play for not only Emma and Leo, but for readers as well. Throughout Emma's section, Motley connects readers to Emma's story by foregrounding the literariness of her life – books provide her scripts for heterosexuality. Motley uses this readerly identification to bring us closer to the experience of Emma's tragic transition from tomboy to heterosexual woman. Like the space of the street and bars in Nick's developing masculinity, the woods give Emma a sexual and gender freedom that allows her to live out "perversions" such as incest, even if only imaginatively.

[21] Motley, 296.

The woods is also where Emma and Nick spend their first, chaste night together, where Nick follows Emma deep into the woods."[22] "The woods were like home to Emma," providing a space where she can tell Nick her experiences of the broken urban home and her mother's drinking. The smell of beer that pervades their kitchen is a remnant of failed American dreams played out in the failure of the heterosexual family, even before the family fails the house fails: "Inside their house the coldness smacked through worse than outdoors. Outdoors you were running and playing. In the house to keep warm you had to go to bed or sit with your chair almost on top of the stove."[23] Motley shows how the urban poor are not suffering from lacking morals as much as lacking funds to support stable sexual relationships. As the 1950s standard for masculinity became more linked with consumerism and financing a domestic unit, the poor were virtually disallowed from the normative terms of heterosexuality.[24] The marriage bed is literally a space of death for women like Emma and her mother, who standards of gender and class tell them not to work but they also can't afford to be supported by their husbands.

Like Willard Motley in *Knock on Any Door*, Petry's critique of heteropatriarchy highlights the space of the domestic home as a space of death. Abbie's standards of decorum within her home kill not only her connection to Dumble Street and any gender or sexual ambiguity that represents, but also indirectly kill her husband (The Major). In *The Narrows*, the editor of the local paper, Peter Bullock, is enslaved to his wife's capitalist-domestic ideology. Motley does not take us behind the scenes of the newspaper

[22] Motley, 252.
[23] Motley, 225
[24] For more on homosexual and other "perverse" reactions to Cold War, "organization man," standards of masculinity, see Robert J. Corber, Homosexuality in Cold War America: Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997) 23-55.

reports on Nick's trial, but "the press men" bet on Nick's trial and punishment. Like Bullock, their wealth is intimately tied to the destruction of the protagonist.[25] In *Romance and Rights: The Politics of Interracial Intimacy, 1945-1954*, Alex Lubin explores America's post-war denial of the possibilities for African-Americans to control a private sphere. Rachel Peterson has recently expanded on this point, highlighting Petry's critique of the media as a falsified public sphere that served merely to create another privacy shield for whites who controlled its coverage of their crimes.[26] Bullock's paper acts as just such a shield. Furthermore, his decision to publish stories that villify Link in the end comes from his need to pay the mortgage on the "modern" house that is a parody of "Hearth" and "Home," where he burns specially treated wood for "Decorative effect."[27] Not only is his domesticity depleting his life of "home" and warmth, but it also sets Link's murder into motion in order to serve these same empty domestic ideals. Through Bullock, Petry links these processes of domestic consumption to the commodification of the public sphere.

The Treadway Butler, Malcolm Powther, also gets caught up in simulating "home," only he makes a home-scene for his employers, Bunny and Camilo Treadway. Powther thinks that his attempts to stage the Treadway marriage as domestic bliss will save him from association with Link and the rest of Dumble Street. Powther sees himself as the savior of not only the aesthetics of the Treadway house, but the Treadway marriage and dynasty in the union of Bunny and Camilo. Powther "reminded himself, as he always did whenever he felt a little low in his mind, that though he was constantly

[25] Motley, 463.
[26] Rachel M. Peterson, Invisible Hands At Work: Domestic Service, Meritocracy and the Exposé in Ann Petry's Novels and Journalism (Unpublished manuscript soon to be released by Univ. of Minnesota Press), 6-10.
[27] Petry, 46.

defeated at home, he was a conqueror, a victor at Treadway Hall," and this victory makes up for his wife infidelity by linking him to the equally cuckolded Bunny. Both Powther and Bunny are emasculated because they cannot own their wives, whose sexual excesses or perversions unravel any attempts to keep them at home. No amount of aesthetic work by Powther can introduce real feeling into the Treadway marraige, or his own.

In a technique reminiscent of Motley's portrait of a wedding, Petry forcasts the failures of Camilo and Bunny Treadway's union through a picture taken by Jubine, the novel's "communist" photographer. Jubine's aesthetic is about the street, he gets the best photos because of an uncanny ability to be out in the way when things are happening – not at home, or working to finance a home. Peter Bullock tries to explain the power of Jubine's photography to his wife,

> He took the honey to Vogue, all light and shadow, the Treadway girl and that man she married, whoever he was, perfect down to the last cufflink . . . . But he brought me the shot with the peons crowding into the picture, one with no legs practically sitting in the bride's dress, squatting in the folds of the wedding gown.[28]

Jubine's photographs highlight the connections between the disabled man (Cat Jimmie) and the Treadway fortune that pays for such a "perfect down to the last cufflink" wedding, as Bullock explains that Cat Jimmie is a WWI veteran. Throughout the novel, Cat Jimmie has rolled along Dumble street, trying to look up women's skirts. His injury leaves him no other sexual pleasure, distorting his intense masculine sexuality into a kind of predatory voyeurism.

Jubine's photo of Cat Jimmie, "squatting in the folds of the wedding gown," does more than connect his disability to the Treadway fortune. The image reveals the emptying out of sexual desire from the jewels and finery of the wedding gown's

[28] Petry, 48.

whiteness. It is also significant that Cat Jimmie literally chases Camilo into Link's arms, showing how the presence of nonnormative sexuality and even violence cannot be erased by the wedding's finery. In the figure of Cat Jimmie, Petry critiques the perversion of desire caused by war and capitalism, and links this to both the perverse and domestic desires of the relationship between Link and Camilo.

Number Six Dumble street, despite Abbie's meticulous care, is also eventually undone by perversity. Abbie aims to give Link a more normative, "white" life, symbolized by buying him a house on the other side of town: "She had picked out a house for him, a brick house, on the other side of town. The instant she saw the For Sale sign on it, she'd managed to marry Link to a nice girl, and get them moved into the house, all in her mind."[29] Petry calls attention to the way the house is "For Sale," highlighting the classy and abstract quality of Abbie's hopes for Link's domesticity. In a similar way, Link's body and desires are irrelevant to the story Abbie wants to script him into. At this point in the novel, Abbie still believes that the equally mass-produced "brick house" and "nice girl" can capture all of Link's desires.

The violence of Abbie's reaction to discovering Link and Camilo in bed is worth quoting extensively because it highlights the meanings she has invested in both her home and her bedroom:

> Someone was laughing, outside, on the street. Dumble Street. She slammed the front door, banging it shut. Where am I?
> She went back into her room, closed the door, still wanting to shout at the girl, even though she was gone, How dare you, dare you, in my house, tramp, in my house, yellow hair on my pillowcases, the bridal ones, the ones that I made with my own hands, as part of my trousseau, with lace edges, filet lace, that I crocheted, smiling, dreaming about my wedding day.[30]

[29] Petry, 243.
[30] Petry, 250.

It is hard to tell whether Abbie is more outraged at Link and Camilo's transgressive affair, or by the fact that they have had sex in her house, on her bridal bed sheets. Abbie's attempts to insulate her house (and her marriage) from Dumble Street and the sexual perversion the street signals have failed in Link's choice of a partner, so much so that she does not even recognize her surroundings any more. Abbie wonders "Where am I?"[31] She can bang the door shut, but the laughter and excesses (sexual, alcoholic, and even musical) of Dumble Street have already defiled the sanctity of her lace pillow cases.

In the above passage, Petry combines short, powerful sentence fragments within Abbie's memories of the Major and Bill Hod's voice to give the reader the sense that time is moving incredibly slowly yet Abbie's emotions and memories are rushing upon her to rapidly to capture in full sentences. Abbie's thoughts emphasize the breakdown of rationality in the face of all she has attempted to keep separate – the sexuality of the street and of Bill Hod and her memories of her marriage and her own heterosexuality. Abbie also remembers her husband's dying words "The house...," and feels Link's bringing the "harlot" into the house is a violation of the Captain's memory. Abbie seems powerless is the face of overwhelming misunderstandings about men, and further debilitated by her attempts to make all men into one voice. This passage also highlights how much mental work and emotionally energy Abbie has expended making meanings of safety and respectability out of items of housekeeping like sheets and pillowcases. The repeated phrases of "my house" and "I made" point up Abbie's physical and psychic labor in imagining her domestic space.

[31] Petry, 250.

Abbie's associations with her house are first broken by Mamie Powther's entrance. The character of Mamie Powther personifies the sexuality that exceeds the space of both the home and the street, private and public spheres. Kimberly Drake, in her exploration of Mamie as a Blues Woman, forcefully argues that Mamie's sexual agency creates a space of life and change within Abbie's home. Drake points to Petry's contrasting the Treadway mansion as "a model of domestic perfection but lacking in life of any kind," and Mamie's kitchen which makes "the house (into) a haven of delicious food and playful affection."[32] Drake concludes that Mamie "transcends the 'home/street' (place/placeless) duality altogether by constructing her identity around her own sensual and emotional pleasure and moving freely between home and street."[33] Petry's narrative also moves freely amongst public and private spaces that her characters intend to keep separate, as the violence and loneliness of consumerist domesticity undoes the boundaries between class and racial groups. While Mamie's entrace signals a new incursion of Dumble Street into Number Six, the work Abbie has done previously shows the precariousness of the houses' division from the neighborhood.

Petry also shows how Mamie also draws out the sexual desires of all the novel's characters, including Abbie's desires the have remained hidden underneath gloves and similar trappings of respectability. Abbie's observations of Mamie washing her clothing in the yard betray this possibility of queer desire,

> There was an almost hypnotic rhythm about her movements, Abbie found that she, too, couldn't look away. . . Wind whipped the clothes back and forth, lifting the hem of Mamie Powther's short cotton dress as though it peered underneath and liked what it saw and so returned again and again for another look. . . . I don't believe she's got a thing on under that dress.[34]

[32] Hazel Arnett Ervin (ed.), The Critical Response to Ann Petry (Connecticut: Praeger, 2005) 256.
[33] Ervin, 258.
[34] Petry, 23-24.

As Abbie becomes mesmerized by Mamie Powther's movements and near nakedness, Petry shows how Mamie exceeds her domestic space while also exceeding the bounds of heterosexuality.[35] The word "too" in this passage points out the almost universal invitation of Mamie's sexuality, even the wind itself is attracted to her. Petry sets this scene in the context of laundering clothes, using the contrast between Abbie and Mamie's housekeeping practices (she is trying to get Link away from the door and thus away from the wiles of Mamie's "washing dance") to highlight connections between aesthetics of home-making and sexuality.

Abbie's homemaking is all about policing the sexual boundaries of the house, represented later in the novel by her reflections that she was trying to find Link a "good girl, (one of) the ones who went to church, the ones who wanted husbands and homes and children."[36] Mamie Powther's short cotton dress is another aesthetic choice that values pleasure and comfort over concealment of desires within the confines of narratives about ownership that make husbands, homes and children into useful items for the practice of signifying respectability. Unlike Powther, who sees Mamie as a conquest that he can never fully own and thus desires all the more, Mamie is unconcerned with ownership and

[35] Mamie's excessive embodiment might be thought of as the other half of the dialectic of abstract universalism, mandated for proper citizenship and authority as shown by Lauren Berlant in "National Brands/National Bodies: *Imitation of Life*" from Hortense Spillers (ed.), Comparative American Identities. New York: Routledge, 1991) 110-140. Berlant's disagreement with Deborah McDowell about the possibility of queer desire between the two female protagonists in Nella Larsen's *Passing* is relevant to this paper. McDowell shows the erotics between Clare and Irene, while Berlant argues that "there may be a difference between wanting someone sexually and wanting someone's body: and I wonder whether Irene's xenophilia isn't indeed a desire to occupy, to experience the privileges of Clare's body, not to love or make love to her" (111). Unlike Irene, Abby does not seem to objectify Mamie's body in this scene as much as she desires the movement of Mamie's body and fantasizes about dancing with her. Abbie's desire for Mamie is also set in the same scene with her fears about Link's desire for Mamie, which is clearly sexual in the novel. There is also a difference in the setting of the scenes – Clare and Irene must try to "pass" as they sit in the lobby of the Drake Hotel, while Abby watches Mamie from the screened in door of her kitchen. While Petry casts much of Abby's domesticity as a facade, Mamie is not "wearing" the body of a sexualized black woman as much as she is moving through that body and expressing her voice within it.

[36] Petry, 243.

normative relations to her home, husband or children. Like Emma in the woods, Mamie is representing something natural and productive in this scene, set against Abbie's attempts to limit sexuality within her home.

While Mamie can be thought of as a similar symbolic device to Emma in Knock on Any Door, she also shares with Nick (and with Link) an inability to pretend to be anything other than what she is. This comes out most clearly in her choice of bedroom furniture, which Abbie judges as "appalling," vulgar, and out of place "in Number Six Dumble Street."[37] Mamie's pink bed, with cupids and grapes adorning the headboard, symbolically stand against both Abbie's hand sewn lace bridal sheets and also Camilo's transplanted Treadway bed in the illicit couple's hotel room. Mamie's sexuality symbolizes comfort, self-affirmation, and openness to shifting power relations between (and amongst) men and women. Just as Weak Knees, the chef at The Last Chance, argues that in Russia nobody would get up in arms about Paul Robeson marrying a white woman, Mamie enacts a sexuality that doesn't respect marriage or perversion as narratives. Her bedroom fits this aesthetic of pleasure. Through Mamie's deliberate aesthetic choices and her almost universal sexual attractiveness, Petry critiques the idea that reformers should (or could) "uncover" the "vice" hidden in certain racialized neighborhoods. She argues, instead, that the "vice" of uncontrolled or unmonitored sexuality is a production of the very narratives that attempt to monitor it by policing perversion through racial and sexual categories.

By trying to lock Link into a normative sexual future, Abbie only adds to his desire to escape into a narrative of perverse sexuality. But Petry also shows how Link fails to fully cast off the normative gender and racial associations of Abbie's vision – he

[37] Petry, 25.

still attempts to own and control Camilo and feels emasculated when he can't. Camilo and Link cannot make a home together, not only because of their racial and class difference, but also because they both define their "home" space and their sexual relationship in terms of purchases. In contrast to Motley, whose disavowal of the domestic sphere is routed in a protest of the lost homosocial bonding that was actively discouraged in the postwar period due to the development of a Fordist organization of production and consumption,[38] Petry's engagement with the domestic sphere recuperates the space as a place for homosocial attachment and labor. We can most clearly see her protesting given models of Black middle-class domesticity based in consumerism by locating her in conversation with the popular stories of her era. Through this dialogue with popular stories in magazines such as *Tan Confessions* and *Half Century Magazine*, we can see Petry's critique of consumption as a sterile form of sexuality, producing only evacuated exteriors of "home" rather than vibrant and welcoming spaces.

In the 1920s, drawing on earlier turn of the century models of ways to address racism, narratives about African American women in urban areas showed all migration routes leading "home." After brief periods of interacting in public, urban entertainment, the heroines of these popular stories settled down to furnishing their homes and families with the latest products and the latest ways to uplift the Negro race through proper mothering. In fact, the middle class aspirations of the family registered more in terms of education and Christian values than material possessions.[39] Noliwe Rooks has observed

[38] Introduction to "Homosexuality in the Cold War"

[39] See, for example, "Talks About Women" a column from Crisis magazine written between 1910 and 1914 by "Mrs. John E. Millholland". For a history of such stories and their relationship to African American women's domestic aspirations, see Noliwe M. Rooks, Ladies Pages: African American Women's Magazines and the Culture that Made Them (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press) 114-136. For discussion of the relationship between Women's Club movement and the "Nadir" political climate, see E. Francis White, Dark Continent of Our Bodies: Black Feminism and the Politics of Respectability

a turn in these narratives coexistant with post-war organization of urban life and labor, "By the 1950s, stories of urban love and marriage took a decidedly different turn . . . the point of getting or staying married was to ensure access to a husband's earnings in order to participate in the culture of consumption."[40] Drawing attention to the labor of homemaking, through her portraits of domestic servants and the character of Abbie Crunch, Petry unsettles and critiques this popular narrative of home as carefree consumption.[41]

The fragility of popular domestic narratives is foregrounded in what we have already seen as Petry's emphasis on the ways that Abbie must constantly work to resignify her house as "respectable" and divide it from its setting in Dumble Street. That work of domestic isolation erases any real understanding between her and her husband (the Major), as she does not see the Major's important connections to the neighborhood. Camilo's attempts to "own" the domestic servants in the hotel are paralleled with her attempts to "own" her sexual relationship with Link (if not Link himself) in Petry's description of their hotel room, another transient and tragic domestic space. After Camilo charges him with rape, Link reflects on the ways that their domestic space predicted the racism and sexism that caused their downfall:

(Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001) 81-117. The conversations amongst feminist historians (in the 1970s and 1980s) about the uses of the domestic sphere have not been fully explored in terms of African American literature, although the symbolics of the American home and its sexual/gender impositions are important to authors as different as Charles Johnson and Toni Morrison. Queer theorizations of "home" have tended to highlight the more openly rebellious establishment of alternative kinship structures (ala Motley) rather than queer attempts to reclaim the space of home for erotic pleasures, seeing this return "home" as always already going "back into the closet" as opposed to the march into the streets. In "Beyond the Closet as a Raceless Paradigm," Marlon Ross discusses this opposition as a white-European paradigm that erases the intragender experiences of groups other than elite, white gay men.

[40] Rooks, p. 115.

[41] Petry's literary contemporary, with whom she had contact in Harlem, Alice Childress was working at this time with domestic workers union, so it seems likely that Petry's portraits of housework and homemaking were in dialogue with Childress' column in THE ASDSAFSDF if not with labor struggles.

> We have made love to each other, we have lived together, I suppose you could call it living together in that suite in The Hotel that you turned into a replica, smallscale, of course, but a replica of Treadway Hall, . . . creating a silken bower for the silver-collar boy. I lay beside you and thought you were like a pink and white figure straight out of one of those Fifth Avenue store windows. . .[42]

In this revision of his earlier thoughts on being "in love with Camilo Williams," Link reflects on how her ownership of their story was historically predicted and materially manifested in her control of their domestic space. Link and Camilo commodify their own story and each other. Motley also shows his male protagonist being exploited by a sexuality that is profoundly linked to the space of the hotel room – renting perversion for one night – except Nick's clients are primarily gay men.

As opposed to Owen, *Knock on Any Door*'s most developed homosexual character, Nick meets and sleeps with a progression of "phonies," who supply him with his lifestyle of being "used to having money in (his) pockets all the time" (151). These "respectable businessmen" take Nick to hotels and register him as "son or brother," a move that highlights Motley's critique of empty family rhetoric and ties this critique further to the failures of permanent homelike spaces in the novel. The "phoniness" of these exchanges serves as a forcefull indictment of the sexualization of class exploitation. They can be read alongside the intensely homoerotic moment of Tommy's beating on stage at reform school, described in detail twice in Knock on Any Door, the first time while Nick witnesses the beating:

> Tommy's small hands worked clumsily with his belt. The pants fell down to his shoetops, a circle of blue around his ankles. The immature legs were skinny. His small, narrow buttocks were exposed for everyone to see. The hard light beat down. . . Tommy grabbed his ankles. The skin tightened out across his behind. Fuller (the superintendant of the reform school)

[42] The Narrows, 316.

> raised the strape. Nick saw the muscles coil into a knot in that one arm. Goose pimples gathered on the surface of Nick's skin and he sucked his lips back in between his teeth. The whip posed above Tommy's bare buttocks like a snake about to strike.[43]

Even without Motley's later use of this episode as an intertext for Nick's execution, the scene clearly interpolates all the male students at the reform school within a masochistic relationship between Fuller and Tommy. Nick evinces here an extreme degree of empathy for Tommy, who he wants to emulate, side with, and also save from harm. But he also witnesses Tommy's nakedness as parallel to his own, lost within a corporate world where masculinity means being cut off from or having power over other men, and then using that power to finance a leisure life of heterosexual domesticity.

Tommy's sin in this system of masculinity is his connection to the other boys, including his "Negro" friend Sam. Tommy famously claims "I'll talk to anyone I want," when the other boys tease him for talking to Sam. This interracial male solidarity prefigures their escape from reform school, where the boys band together to distract the guards and all run in different directions at once. In the turning point of his masculine journey, we see Nick rejecting his father's example of power for the homosocial bonding Nick joins in reform school. In drawing his allegiance with Tommy, Nick's physically weak but morally steadfast reform school counterpart, Nick simultaneously breaks with the life of familial obligations and the life of the law, "He'd never be sorry for anything he ever did again. He'd never try to reform now. He was on Tommy's side. All the way. For good. Forever" (60). Nick's perversion and his connection with a multiethnic group of boys at the reform school is the downfall of not just the school but also any chance for Nick's successful heterosexual domestication.

[43] Knock on Any Door, 59.

Within the literary conversation of the 1940s, both Motley and Petry participated in a Popular Front aesthetics that promoted a mixing of "high" and "low," or "popular" and "literary" culture.[44] Popular Front aesthetics also promoted an anti-racist, ethnic pluralism that at times resembled "sentimental or corny negations of particular ethnic or racial affiliation"[45] that functioned as a fantasy of multicultural solidarity.[46] Within "scandalous" stories of racial and sexual adventure, Petry and Motley both harness some of the Popular Front's critiques of mass media and racial segregation while also drawing from the racial and sexual perversity of slumming narratives. When the *Daily News*, which frequently featured racist stories, condemned Harlem as a "vice area" that white soldiers ought to avoid (reportedly in concert with U.S. military warnings) Petry recorded the outraged responses of Harlem residents. Petry further expressed her own indignation by walking a picket line with other members of Negro Women, Inc. outside of the *Daily News*, (rachel, p.10) using the street as a space of homosocial solidarity in protest of "vice" control measures that simultaneously policed sexuality and race. While the streets also offer Nick a similar kind of interracial homosocial sphere, a haven of relief from his home life and his parent's attempts to make him into a good husband, Motley admits that the other fellows in the gang don't like Nick's hanging out with "the phoneys." Nevertheless, the specific homosexual character of Owen seems omnipresent in their hangouts, revealing a kind of mutual tolerance for those who also live "outside the law."

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[44] Smethurst, 27.
[45] Smethurst, 28.
[46] Of course, the Popular Front was a complex and varied literary approach to culture, and for the purposes of this paper I cannot consider Motley or Petry's political negotiations of high and lowbrow culture in more detail. What interests me is the way two specific novels, Knock on Any Door and The Narrows tap into the sexual promiscuity of Popular Front aesthetics.

Owen has a connection to the streets – he lives in the same neighborhood and frequents the same bars as Nick and his gang. But Owen also serves as a safe and secure relationship for Nick in the novel. A neatly made bed dramatizes this safety and security in Owen's apartment night Nick finally leaves home for good, incensed by his father's beatings. Nick is welcome at Owen's for as long as he needs to stay; "his bed was made down on the sofa, fresh sheets, a woolly blanket tucked all the way around, a fold of the blanket thrown back to a soft pillow with a clean slip, its creases still showing" (182). This available bed, especially in contrast to the one in Nick's father's house, where Nick lay being beaten a few pages earlier, is a sign of respect for Nick's needs and desires. Owen closes his bedroom door. While Owen clearly wants sex from Nick, he also wants something else, another kind of connection that Nick describes as "being near him" (189). Being near Owen, while still "outside the law" of normative heterosexuality, is also a space of confession for Nick of his homosocial bonds with Tommy. The violent masculinity of the gang won't tolerate such stories, which would undermine their fantasy of power enabled by their ability to support/buy sex from street women.

In *Knock on Any Door*, both heterosexuality and homosexuality are for sale. Nick remarks of his homosexual clients, "He played them and threw the money away on girls" (151). Owen's apartment is not only a haven from the demands of heterosexual masculinity and its constant disavowal of the homoerotic undertones of the life of the street, but also a from "trade" homosexuality and its sexualization of unequal class relations. Owen's apartment thus fosters nonnormativity, as the one place in this world where Nick feels safe and secure in his attachments to men. Significantly, Nick's sister also comes to Owen's apartment to confess her interracial sexual relationship, which is

disallowed from the marriage and family script just as much as Nick's interracial gangs of men. Owen and Nick's relationship and his sister's failures at normative heterosexuality provide cover for each other's rejection of the Romano family and its sexual/gender/racial values. As Ferguson notes about this period in the history of Chicago as both a city and a center for sociological research, "miscegenation, juvenile delinquency, prostitution and homosexuality constituted a constellation of nonheteronormative functions" (35).

The Narrows is also interested in the nonheteronormative desires of modernity. The character of Frances Jackson personifies the most sustainable form these desires, providing an alternative to both the destructive and even fetishistic "perverse" relationship between Link and Camilo. In her brief introduction to The Narrows, Nellie McKay explains Frances Jackson (F.K. Jackson) as part of "that stalwart band of black women of all classes – feminists before the word was even known to their generations. . . the women who, in spite of external limitations, made a way for themselves and others where none previously existed."[47] This captures something about F.K. Jackson that she shares with Owen – an improvisational approach to gender and sexual roles. Kimberly Drake explains F.K. Jackson's privileged class position as securing a type of respectability, in line with Black female heroines of the late 19th century, "An asexual middle-class domesticity, then, is the literary 'safe space' for black female characters, a place which protects them from sexual objectification so that they can work to transform and protect the reputation of other black women."[48] But The Narrows offers at least one queer explanation for Frances' independence, hinting that her "way" may not be entirely

[47] The Critical Response to Petry, p. 164.
[48] Ervin, p. 240.

"asexual." Link explains Frances' possible lesbianism rather explicitly, while reflecting on the possibility that all women are alike in their desire for the "demon lover":

> F.K. Jackson? Impossible to think of her hunting a mate, handsome or otherwise. She was too brusque, too selfsufficient. Perhaps she, in her own person, was the dark handsome lover, and to her Abbie had been the ChinaCamiloWilliams that the male hunts for and rarely ever finds; and even if he finds her, never quite manages to capture her.[49]

Within the thematic networks of *The Narrows*, "ChinaCamiloWilliams" is a combination of China, a local brothel owner who is possibly also Link's mother[50], and Camilo Williams, the white heiress who Link desires but can never possess because she will always have more money and power than he does.

Link's model for (hetero)sexual relations is all about possession and domination, he thinks of all women as one, rather amorphous and abstract, sexual object named "MamiePowtherChinaCamiloWilliams."[51] This model of sexual relations leaves no room for Frances desiring a connection with Abbie that does not involve capturing her, mapping normative heterosexuality onto their relationship and turning Frances into "the male." In Link's thinking, Frances' "selfsufficiency" makes her into the opposite of a conquerable female object, thus Link thinks of her as male. Link's imagination of lesbianism echoes Freudian and 19th century sexological discourse about the female "invert" as in between male and female genders.[52] Thus Petry shows how Link scripts the lesbian couple into popular narratives of the relationship between men and women, but also points to the problematic racism that comes with these sexual narratives, as

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[49] The Narrows, 142.
[50] AW
[51] Find one instance and then talk about these linkages and how they decrease when he falls in love, but still some things are retained, as we saw earlier in the sexualization of space.
[52] see Ferguson, or Bland and Doan

Frances becomes not only more male as "the dark handsome lover" but also racialized. The dehumanizing effects of being cast in terms of these narratives are further emphasized in Link's language of "the male" who "hunts a mate." Link feels shut out of Frances and Abbie's union in a way he did not while the Major was around, and he could still be Abbie's center of attention: "He thought, Yes, the two of them together – but what about me?" (113). The lesbian couple of Miss Frances and Abbie has shut Link out of the home – his eviction papers are given by seeing this couple together, not merely by the Major's death and Abbie's grief.

Link's narrative of ownership as sexuality and "home" also has no place in Abbie's relationship to Frances, which is mostly about taking care of each other and each other's houses while they are away (mentally or physically). In contrast to Link's desires, which portray women solely as objects to be consumed and possessed, Petry portrays Frances and Abbie's relationship as an erotic scene of caregiving. Abbie's bed becomes the setting for a kind of radical interdependency that assures both women that they have a home with each other:

> Abbie was in bed, flat on her back in the big mahogany four-poster bed, and the lamp by the bed had a tan-colored cloth draped over the shade, so that the light in the room was very dim. F.K. Jackson sat beside the bed, holding Abbie's hand, murmuring to her in a soothing voice.[53]

Frances' soothing voice seems to say "There, there, there, Yes, yes, yes, I know, I know, I know, I'm here, I'm here, I'm here."[54] Like the dimly lit room, Frances' voice is not quite focused into words. The sound of her voice, cooing "sounds that must have been words," tells Abbie that someone understands her pain, knows her suffering, and is there

[53] Narrows, 112.
[54] Narrows, 113.

to support her in grief as Frances has always and will always be there to support her. As opposed to the Major, whose death in bed comes from Abbie's not knowing him, and who kicks constantly in the night, fighting sleep, Frances takes Abbie into her shawl, physically and psychically shielding Abbie from the intensity of her pain. Significantly, Frances is able to do this because she knows Abbie's story, somehow she knows enough to join in Abbie's feelings and in her bed. Although Frances' father and Link want to cast her in the male role because of her intellect and independence, Petry makes it clear in this scene that her connection to Abbie is possible through her feminine voice.[55]

Mamie's character seems the most vocally present in the novel. Mamie is always singing or humming as she goes about her housework. Blues women have a long tradition of representing African American, female sexuality in subversive terms through the spaces they opened up as performers. Recent scholarly attention has turned to other ways that Black women signified their sexuality, focusing on aesthetic labor and domestic spaces. In a recently published dissertation, Afei lakjsflkjasfd has argued that Black female authors of the 1940s use a multiplicity of low and high cultural aesthetics to carve out "a space outside of the sexual in which they feel erotically empowered despite their intersecting racial, class and gendered inequities."[56] Xiomara Santamarina has also worked to bring our attention to modes of resistance based in black women's laboring subject positions. In her readings of 19th century authors such as Sojourner Truth, Eliza Potter and Harriet Wilson, Santamarina concludes "these women (Keckley, Truth, Eliza Potter, Harriet Wilson) and their texts speak to the emergence of multiple black feminist traditions in the nineteenth century, earlier than suggested by

[55] Voice and Mamie as a blues singer, see Ervin (the one essay)
[56] dissertation, p. 19.

twentieth-century studies that focus on blueswomen and migrants."[57] Certainly for artists such as Ann Petry, with close ties to the left, housework and domestic labor was a topic of concern in the post-war period. Alice Childress, a fellow Harlem author, published her "Conversations from Life" column in Paul Robeson's Freedom newspaper from August 1951 until the paper's close in 1955.[58] Mildred, the column's protagonist, is a domestic servant and proud to do housework. In addition to musing on her white employers, "what Africa wants," local politics, and critiquing popular representation of Blacks, Mildred talks about her job and how important domestic workers are to the community: "Of course, a lot of people think it's smart not to talk about slavery anymore, but after freedom came, it was domestics that kept us from perishin' by the wayside."[59] Mildred especially appreciates her employers who don't think of themselves as above housework, in particular one white woman who is "not afraid of a little work herself, and many a day we've worked side by side on jobs that was too much for me to handle all alone."[60] Petry ties into this contemporary discourse with her portrait of Bullock and his wife, Lola.

As I mentioned previously, Petry's creation of Bullock, the newspaper editor who villifies Link in order to keep support from Treadway advertisements and thus afford his luxurious modern house, unites her critique of popular cultural stories about black masculinity with the vision of uplifting the race that would deny connections to such black men as Link in favor of domestication and class respectability. In the scene where

[57] Belabored Professions, p. 166.
[58] A collection of these columns was later edited and published in book form as *Like One of the Family: Conversations from a Domestic's Life*
[59] LOOTF, p. 37
[60] Unfortunately, Mildred learns later that working alongside the white woman also means listening to her questions about and remarks on "*Negroes*, how sorry she felt for their plight, and what a *fine*, *honest*, *smart*, and *attractive* woman was workin' for her mother and so forth and so on and so forth..." (Childress, p. 20). For more on Childress, see Mary Helen Washington "" in Left of the Color Line...

Bullock is weighing his options about printing stories about Link and losing the Treadway business, Petry pauses for a reflection on his wife's role in Link's downfall:

> Lola had to have someone to do the cleaning and the dusting, someone to do the washing and the ironing, someone to do the cooking. . . . Suppose I'd said no to Mrs. Treadway. Would Lola, could Lola, do her own washing and ironing and cooking? Would she? Could she? No.[61]

Bullock's "No" seals Link's fate in the public opinion, and also ties Petry to Childress' efforts to unionize domestic workers in Harlem (most of whom were poor, black women). *The Narrows* does paint a rather starkly class divided Black community, but in the end Abbie's willingness to look after Mamie's children and share in the house's domestic labor makes her a part of Dumble Street despite her protestations otherwise.

The ending of *The Narrows* also indicates that this lesbian subtext to Frances and Abbie's relationship only works because they keep separate homes. Petry emphasizes the ritual of the women kissing each other while saying "come in, come in" in their foyers (233). When Francis invites Abbie to move in with her, Abbie realizes that becoming dependent on Francis (and her housekeeper, Miss Dorrit), would turn her "into a doddering old woman." She replies, "Thank you very much. But I'm not that old, or that feeble. I'll be all right. If the time ever comes when I feel I can no longer live here alone, why I'll let you know."[62] Link is right in thinking that Frances will never fully possess Abby while they still work to maintain their own homes. Abbie's self-possession and self-fashoining are symbolized by her ability to make decisions about the plants and furniture in her house. Petry represents this decision as of a piece with Abbie's wanting to make a home for J.C., the son of Bill Hod and Mamie Powther. Abbie knows that she

[61] Narrows, 371.
[62] Narrows, 422.

has to make a more welcoming "home" for the irreverent J.C., using her house less as a tool for surveillance as she tried to do with Link. Frances and Miss Dorris also take in J.C., making a new kind of family structure that spans the two households.

While Motley's alternative homosocial and homosexual environment takes place along West Madison and Taylor Street, *The Narrows* reclaims housework as a space of connection between women. Motley's realist narrative techniques turn domestic space into a foreboding realm of enforced heteropatriarchy, while Petry's realism lingers over the details of domestic spaces in order to reveal them as empty facades. Set against the sexual and gender permissive spaces either outside home or between homes, both these novels reveal the violence of state efforts to police race through sexual surveillance. Petry and Motley also both critique common understandings of racial uplift as normative heterosexuality, showing how such visions of heterosexuality only shove the "undomesticated" sexual other into the mercy of state and police sponsored reform movements. In both novels, beds matter because of how they are made (or not made), who gets to sleep in them (or not), and what the experience of the bedroom is for its occupants. Owen and Nick, as well as F.K. Jackson and Abbie make nonnormative relations of intimacy into spaces of mutual support and gender experimentation.