



Gender Fluidity and Queer Identity In Modern Literature: A Study of Thomas Glave's *Among The Bloodpeople* and Sarah Schulman's *The Cosmopolitans*

Dr. Saba Hassan¹, Asher Ashkar Gohar², Shahid Ali³

¹Ph.D. in English, Email: Sabahassan1011@gmail.com

²Lecturer in English, Edwardes College Peshawar, Email: ashergohar92@gmail.com

³BS English, Dept. of Applied Linguistics and Literature, University of Peshawar,
Email: alikhanshahid132@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Gender Fluidity, Queer Identity, Performativity, Diaspora Literature, Urban Stories, Lgbtq+ Representation, Modern American Literature.

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Saba Hassan,
Ph.D. in English,
Email:
Sabahassan1011@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The study focuses on gender fluidity and queer identity representation in modern American literature by comparing the texts *Among the Bloodpeople* (2006) by Thomas Glave and *The Cosmopolitans* (2016) by Sarah Schulman. Drawing on Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, this paper examines how the authors negotiate the complex interrelationships among sexuality, race, diaspora, and urban queer lives. The analysis of the research suggests the use of narrative tools and methods that break heteronormative patterns and reveal the real lives of people belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. The results show that both authors use different yet similar ways of exemplifying queer subjectivity: Glave through fragmented accounts of the Jamaican diaspora and corporeal violence, and Schulman through the banalities of gentrified urban locations. The gap in the research was the inadequate comparative scholarship that examined how African diasporic and Jewish-American queer narratives construct gender fluidity in distinct ways, yet are characterized by resistance to normative identity categories. The paper furthers the field of queer literary studies by showing how modern literature serves as a site of resistance and visibility, as well as a space for the renegotiation of gender and sexual identities outside binary categories.

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, literature has undergone significant transformations in how gender and sexuality are conceptualized (Wrede, 2015). This change mirrors broader cultural shifts towards understanding identity as transient, performative, and fluid. Queer literature now serves as a critical space for examining diverse forms of gender performance and sexuality, challenging the heteronormative frameworks that have influenced literary creation and criticism (Regan & Meyer, 2021). Within this context, Thomas Glave and Sarah Schulman

produce work that directly questions established ideas about gender, sexuality, and belonging through innovative storytelling and an honest portrayal of marginalized experiences.

The novel *Among the Bloodpeople* (2006) by Thomas Glave is a series of linked narratives that cross geographical and temporal borders and explores the experiences of queer Black men and women throughout the African diaspora. The experimental design of the collection, which incorporates prose, poetry, and testimony, is a display of the discursiveness of diasporic identity and the violence against queer bodies of color. The work of Glave lies at the intersection of a variety of marginalities, with clashing racial identity, sexuality, and colonial history, which define the individual and group subjectivities.

The Cosmopolitans (2016) by Sarah Schulman is a modern adaptation of Cousin Bette by Balzac, but sets the nineteenth-century story of social ambition and jealousy in the twenty-first-century New York City, specifically the gentrifying neighborhoods. With her depiction of queer characters as they work their way through the labyrinth of friendship, desire, and city change, Schulman analyzes sexuality in relation to class, gentrification, and the displacement of communities. Her piece sheds light on the daily struggles of the LGBTQ+ people in the fast-paced urban environment that offers hope and, at the same time, endangers extinction.

Research Problem

Although the study of queer literature has attracted increasing scholarly interest in recent years, comparative studies that examine the effects of various cultural contexts and identity locations on the portrayal of gender fluidity and queer subjectivity are lacking. Although the work of Glave has been discussed within the framework of postcolonial and diaspora studies, and the works of Schulman have been analyzed through the prism of lesbian feminist and urban studies, there is scant research on how these two works, though different and interrelated, formulate the concepts of gender fluidity and queer identity. This study aims to resolve the issue of how race, diaspora, class, and geography intersect with queerness, and the results yield diverse literary representations that share some similarities and variations in their specific articulations of culture.

Research Questions

The research questions that guide this research are as follows:

In what ways do both Glave and Schulman express gender fluidity and queer identity through their works, and what are the narrative strategies that they use to break down the normative ideas of gender and sexuality?

How is the intersection of race, class, diaspora, and urban geography formed to build the queer subjectivity in *Among the Bloodpeople* and *The Cosmopolitans*?

What can the theory of gender performativity, introduced by Judith Butler, say about the gender and sexuality representations in these literary works?

What do African diasporic and Jewish-American queer literary traditions have in common with each other, and in what ways do they differ regarding gender fluidity?

Significance of the Study

The study is relevant to various fields of literary and cultural study. On the one hand, it adds to the academic literature on queer literature in the 21st century by offering a comparative analysis of various cultural traditions and the position of identity within them. Second, it discusses the understudied connection between diaspora studies and queer studies by showing how issues of displacement, migration, and cultural memory intersect with gender and sexual identity formation. Third, analyzing the origins of gender and sexual matters as a marginalized experience, applying Butler's theoretical framework to literary works that have centralized marginalized queer experiences, this study extends performativity theory to the context of intersectional identity formation.

This study offers significant pedagogical models for teaching modern literature and queer studies, highlighting how literary texts foster resistance and reimagination. In an era of increasing challenges to LGBTQ+ rights and visibility, examining literature that centers queer lives and normative structures becomes not just academic but a matter of pressing political urgency. Furthermore, this work addresses critical gaps in comparative literary studies by bringing together rarely paired authors to reveal unexpected parallels and contradictions within contemporary queer literary writing.

Literature Review

Gender Performativity and Queer Theory

Queer theory has significantly shaped literary approaches to understanding gender fluidity and queer identity, particularly since its emergence in the early 1990s. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) criticized the essentialist concept of gender, arguing that gender is produced through repeated acts and styles of the body rather than being innate or natural. According to Butler (1990), gender is the repetition of stylization of the body, a series of repetitions within a highly strict regulatory frame that crystallizes over time to form the impression of substance, of a natural kind of being (p. 33). This paradigm has been extremely useful to literary theorists who examine how gendered subjectivity is represented and constructed through texts.

Later scholarship has broadened Butler's original formulations to include the intersections of gender performativity with race, class, and colonial histories. *Terrorist Assemblages* (2007) by Jasbir Puar introduced the concept of homonationalism in which some types of queerness are included in nationalist and neoliberal endeavors, and some are pathologized and marginalized. *Disidentifications* by Jose Esteban Muñoz (1999) discussed the ways in which queer people of color negotiate the dominant culture by disidentifying with and taking themselves up against dominant forms without necessarily assimilating on the one hand, or completely opposing it on the other. These conceptual formulations are important theories that can be used to explain the cross-relationships between race and ethnicity and queerness in literature.

Queer Literature and the African Diaspora

African diasporic literature, exemplified by Thomas Glave's work, foregrounds the complex theme of sexuality, which often conflicts with nationalist and cultural discourses that define homosexuality as the opposite of Black identity. Authors such as E. Patrick Johnson and Mae Henderson have examined how African American and Afro-Caribbean queer writers negotiate the dual oppression of race and homophobia, establishing spaces that Black queer writers can employ. Johnson's *Black. Queer. Southern. Women.* (2018) highlights the intersectional identities at play and the unique cultural performance and resistance they generate.

The study of Caribbean queer literature has revealed the specific issues affecting individuals in the LGBTQ+ group in the postcolonial world, where homophobia is frequently defended with references to the traditions and cultural identity. The article *Island Bodies* by Rosamond King (2014) explores the Caribbean erotic performance and writing on the basis that the relation of Caribbean people towards sexuality is complicated and resists the sexual regulation of the colonial regime as well as the homophobic discourse of the present day. Glave and his work, which borders Jamaica and the United States, are involved in these intricate negotiations but does not sanitize the violence queer people have to face in the diasporic communities.

City Queer Literature and Gentrification

The works of Sarah Schulman can be viewed as a long-standing exploration of queer urban living and, specifically, of New York City. Academic research into urban queer literature has examined how cities have served as sites of freedom and localities of exclusion for LGBTQ+

communities. The article by Christina Hanhardt, *Safe Space* (2013), follows the history of LGBT anti-violence activism in New York City, demonstrating that the discourse of safety has frequently perpetuated racial and class-based inequalities among queers. In her non-fiction book, *The Gentrification of the Mind* (2012), even Schulman writes about the urban change and how it has pushed out the queer community and cultural memory, especially about the AIDS crisis.

Scholars have studied Schulman in relation to her activist stance and her challenge to lesbian feminist culture. Merl Storr and Julie Scanlon analyze Schulman's novels as archives of lesbian cultural production that resist mainstream LGBT assimilationism and the erasure of radical queer histories. However, to my knowledge, few scholars have focused directly on *The Cosmopolitans*. One possible reason is that the text remains relatively new, leaving much to analyze about how this work builds on and revises Schulman's previous themes.

Gender Fluidity in Contemporary Literature

Literary studies of the recent past have taken greater note of how gender fluidity, non-binary, and transgender experience are represented in modern fiction. Critics like Susan Stryker and Aren Aizura have demanded that more attention be paid to non-binary genders as represented in literature, examining narrative techniques that subvert established gender categories. *Disturbing Attachments* (2017) by Kadji Amin criticizes the progressive temporality commonly ascribed to queer studies and proposes focusing on forms of gender and sexual expression that do not fit into narratives of liberation and visibility.

Nonetheless, a considerable literature on gender fluidity has concentrated on explicitly transgender texts or texts that focus on the themes of a gender transition and has paid little attention to how contemporary literature captures fluid, performative, and non-normative gender expression in more subtle and varied ways. These two works introduce characters with gender performances that challenge binary concepts without always identifying as transgender men and women, which implies the necessity of analytical tools that can respond to such less rigid portrayals.

Research Gap

Although research exists on queer theory, African diaspora literature, urban queer writing, and gender fluidity as separate fields, little scholarship examines how these areas intersect in modern literature. Specifically, there has been minimal analysis of how African diasporic and Jewish-American queer literary traditions each construct the concept of gender fluidity, either through distinct or complementary approaches. Furthermore, while Butler's notion of performativity is foundational in gender studies, it has rarely been applied in comparative literary analysis that foregrounds racial and ethnic diversity. This study addresses the gap by asking: How do differing cultural traditions represent gender fluidity? In what ways does performativity manifest across various racial and ethnic backgrounds in literature?

This study fills these gaps by offering a sustained comparative analysis that traces two important contemporary works that have never been analyzed simultaneously, both of which engage the questions of gender fluidity, queer visibility, and opposition to structures of normativity. Placing the diasporic narratives of Glave into dialogue with the urban chronicles of Schulman, this paper will shed light on the construction of literary representations of queerness in the context of geography, race, class, and cultural positioning and pinpoint the shared resistance and imaginative strategies.

Methodology

Research Design

This study will undertake a qualitative research approach that applies textual analysis, focusing on literary texts and employing comparative literary criticism. It grounds itself in the interpretive paradigm, acknowledging that the interaction among text, reader, and culture creates meaning rather than objectively excavating mathematical information about literary

texts. This method most effectively discusses literary portrayals of identity because it recognizes the role that interpretation plays in illustrating how texts shape meaning regarding gender and sexuality.

Comparative analysis serves as the main methodological approach for this study. I compare how Glave and Schulman represent gender fluidity and queer identity to highlight both shared and culturally specific strategies for countering heteronormativity. This methodology is well-suited to address the research questions, which focus on the similarities and differences between the two texts.

Data Collection

Among the Bloodpeople by Thomas Glave

The Cosmopolitans by Sarah Schulman

Theoretical Framework

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity, as developed in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and later expanded in *Bodies That Matter* (1993) and *Undoing Gender* (2004), grounds this research. Butler's framework provides a theoretical lens for understanding how repetitive performances, rather than inherent essence, construct gender. According to Butler, regulatory regimes generate gender norms through repetition, which, in turn, creates opportunities for subversion and change.

Performativity, as discussed by Butler, is especially useful in literary analysis, in that it gives attention to these two aspects of identity formation: the citation and repetition aspect of identity, which is also citation and performative in its own right in literature. Literature is gender performance; it is also gender performance in the sense that it uses the strategies of narrative, characterization, and narration. Through the frames Butler uses to analyze the texts by Glave and Schulman, this study will discuss how literary representation can shed light on, critique, and reconsider the performances upon which gender and sexuality are made.

Textual Analysis

Gender Performativity and Fluidity in *Among the Bloodpeople*

Among the Bloodpeople by Thomas Glave gives a fluid nature to gender and sexuality as embodied experiences, which are not categorically fixed, yet have the trace of violence and colonial history. The experimental shape of the collection (the use of prose, verse, and fragments of testimonials) reflects the instability of gender categories and the disjointedness of the diasporic identity. The narrative techniques adopted by Glave echo the claims by Butler in her argument that gender is performatively produced through repetitive acts; this also shows how racial and colonial violence effect the possibilities of gender performance.

The same sex desire in the story, *Whose Song?* by Glave, is presented in the most corporeal words that do not focus on identity categories but rather underline the sensation of the body. The narrator talks of an experience with a man: And so that, seeing his face touching yours, seeing his lips on yours; seeing his hands there, in the shadows, on the something you have learned to call yourself (Glave, 2006, p. 45). This text highlights some of the main attributes of Glave's approach to depicting queer identity. First, the second-person narration makes the impression of a direct address involving the reader in the experience through the distance of fixed identity. Second, the characterization of the body as something that you have learned to call yourself implies the artificial nature of bodily identity and the distance that exists between the experience of embodiment and the classification of the body into language.

This is followed by a reflection on the impossibility of giving names to desire in terms of available constructs: You cannot say what it is you are when you see him walking towards you in the afternoon light. You cannot give it names, as the words that they have provided you with are not yours, were never yours, will pin you down in meanings that you did not select" (Glave, 2006, p. 47). In this case, Glave describes the violence of imposed identity categories and how the very language could be a place of oppression when it imposes

experience into predetermined meanings. The character's non-commitment to employ the words that they have provided symbolizes some form of opposition to mandatory classification, despite the fact that it also sets the difficulty of expressing desire in the first place.

The way of gendering that is exhibited in *Among the Bloodpeople* is the presentation of characters that disturb binary categories without directly stating non-binary or transgender identities. A character such as Carlton is an enactment of masculinity, both hypermasculine and queerly infused, especially in the manner he treats other men. According to Glave, he was walking with such a swing of the hips that gave off a sense of swagger, confidence, and something more—something the others saw but did not wish to say out loud (2006, p. 112). This something else that cannot be named is the ineffability of gender presentation that goes beyond normative categories. The swing of Carlton is neither masculine nor feminine, but alludes to a gender embodied as a style that cannot be assigned to dichotomous categories.

The story also describes Carlton's physical nature: his hands were large, coarse with work, unmistakably masculine. Yet even the manner in which he held them, with palm upwards, fingers a little curled--there was something tender there, a responsiveness that defied all the meaning of his body there (Glave, 2006, p. 115). This focus on the inconsistency of bodily signifiers and their performances shows that gender operates through a variety of, even conflicting, signs that can never be fully integrated into a consistent identity. The hands of Carlton are masculine (in their size and roughness), yet they do not (as per gesture and placement) contradict masculinity, indicating the complexity of any performance of gender.

The physical brutality and violence that is committed against queer bodies in the text of Glave shows us an understanding of how gender transgression is policed. Within the article *Accidents*, Glave presents a violent assault on a homosexual man, explaining how they beat him, beat him, beat him to the point of his face being like a face, his flesh like a flesh (2006, p. 78). The recurrence of beat him underlines the unremitting quality of homophobic violence and how the face and flesh turn into something other, implying how violence tries to make queer bodies abject and unintelligible. This text shows how Butler believes gender norms are upheld by means of violence and exclusion, and that those bodies which do not fit what is considered a norm have material effects.

In *The Story of Them*, Glave also creates a love story between two men, which underlines the physical and emotional aspects of their relationship and avoids romantic idealization. The narrator explains how they taught each other their bodies bit by bit, painstakingly, like one does when he or she learns a tough language- the vocabulary of scars, the grammar of pleasure, the syntax of need, etc. (Glave, 2006, p. 156). Such a long metaphor of the body as language supports the idea proposed by Butler that gender and sexuality are systems of signification that they has to learn and play with. The scars mention are an indication that these bodies bear a history of trauma, and the terms of pleasure and need are some indications that erotic and emotional aspects co-exist with the pain.

The narrative goes on: Michael had his hands on Jerome's back and followed along the raised lines where the belt had hit him years ago. The way Jerome trailed his fingers along the red, swollen mark on Michael's arm, where the father had hit him, without uttering a word, is testimony (Glave, 2006, p. 157). In this case, the touching of each other's bodies is both a lovemaking and a violent witnessing at the same time. The scars are the mute witness, indicating the assumption that the body itself is a statement of the punishment exercised on it because of many sins, maybe gender and sexual nonconformity. This connection and understanding exist because they are made to understand and see one another's wounded bodies.

The author of *A Reckoning*, Glave, explores the relationship between a queer son and his mother, portraying the painful bargaining over visibility and acceptance. Mother replies, I

know what you are. I have always known. You do not need to say it, you do not need to carry it on your body like a brand on which everybody can read it" (Glave, 2006, p. 183). This sentence shows that the mother wants her son to be in the closet, where his sexuality will be hidden, even though this is information that she knows but does not need to be revealed publicly. Her mention to wear it on your body indicates that gender and sexual identity are directed as body performance that others can interpret, and she asks him as a way of punishing those performances to take them back to the normative displays.

The son replies, but on my body. It is in my body. It is my body. How can I not wear what I am?" (Glave, 2006, p. 184). This is a statement that is strong enough to dispel the line between being and performance, and it clearly shows that his sexuality is not just a role of what he is playing but of essence. But his formulation, too, recognizes that what he is must be worn - must be enacted and manifested, to become socially a reality. This conflict between visibility and security, between the expression of self and survival, runs through the collection of Glave.

Queer Urban Gender Fluidity in *The Cosmopolitans*

Cosmopolitans by Sarah Schulman explores gender fluidity in the context of the present-day urban queer community in New York City, examining the characters' sexuality and gender in the face of fast-gentrifying neighborhoods. Schulman uses a more traditional realist narrative structure, unlike Glave's experimental form; however, her work continues to provoke normative theories of gender, sexuality, and relationships.

The main character of the novel, Bette, is a middle-aged lesbian whose gender presentation and sexuality are difficult to define. Schulman explains how Bette looked: she wore her manness the same way other people wore perfume: not as a disguise or defense, but as a pronouncement, as something that sprang inside of her (2016, p. 23). This definition presents gender as performative and natural, and at the same time hints at its artificiality. Masculinity is a sort of garment, makeup, or an act. It is this analogy of masculinity as perfume, which is quite suitable, considering that Butler has conceived gender as a stylized repetition of practices, that perfume needs to be applied over and over to retain its presence, and so does gender.

The story goes on: When she entered a room, people did not overlook her. Not that she was beautiful--which indeed she was once, or so she thought--but because she occupied space which women were not of. When she sat, she spread her legs. She did not even raise her hand to speak. She gazed on women in the same manner that men gazed on women, straightforward and judgmental" (Schulman, 2016, p. 24). This passage lists certain performative activities in which Bette performs masculinity: the occupation of space, unwanted speech, and the male gaze bounced off the female body. All these are a violation of the feminine gender construct, and their combination forms the masculine gender reconstruction of Bette.

The characters in Schulman's work live in a queer social world where notions of gender and sexuality are multiple and fluid. The masculine or feminine behavior of a man in different settings, as seen in the character of Earl, a friend of Bette, reflects what could otherwise be construed as gender fluidity. At home, Earl has softened, and his voice is higher and his gestures are less restrained. He made himself big in front of the world, straightened his posture, lowered his voice, and acted like a man the world wanted him to be (2016, p. 67). This example of code-switching between public and private performance demonstrates Butler's dual concept of gender performativity and shows how social context shapes the possibilities of gender expression.

The novel has detailed Earl's performance: he had been taught at a tender age that it was not only survival of the fittest but also survival of the best performers. At the bodega, at the DMV, passing the police — he had manhood like a uniform. But here, in this apartment,

where no one save those who loved him could be, he had been content to make himself other. Not a woman, not exactly. But not the man that they requested either. Something in the middle, something nameless" (Schulman, 2016, p. 68). This text underlines the forceful aspect of normative gender performance- one needs it to survive, and one needs to master it. It also proposes, however, that gender fluidity is created in the privacy of space, where it is love that takes the place of surveillance. The expression 'something without a name' recalls the characterization of identity that Glave makes, which falls outside the accessible categories. The relationship between the queers in the novel shows conflicting tendencies between various ways of treating gender and sexual identity. Younger characters in the text are fluid and do not believe in labels, whereas older characters, such as Bette, are still attached to lesbian feminist identity politics. This conflict between generations is shown in one of the conversations when one of the younger characters, Mariel, tells Bette, I do not really consider myself a woman. I mean, I do, but not in that way. Much more complex than that, really" (Schulman, 2016, p. 143).

Bette answers in a disoriented manner: You are a woman. Look at you. You're a woman who loves women. That makes you a lesbian. Why do you want it to be more complicated? (Schulman, 2016, p. 143). Bette's answer shows that she has an investment in fixed identity types that were created during decades of lesbian feminist activism. To her, making a lesbian identity statement was a political statement that involved brawn and had tangible effects; it is something that she finds hard to comprehend since the young queers appear to deny the very labels that their ancestors took so hard to bring into the light.

Mariel tries to clarify: I do not even need it to be complex. It already is complicated. Gender is complicated. Desire is complicated. Identity is... I do say, these words, woman, lesbianism, these words do not suit. They are somewhat correct but not quite clothes, they are bound in awkward places" (Schulman, 2016, p. 144). This identity clothing metaphor once more highlights the performative aspect of identity —those roles and performances one has—and shows that they are not necessarily able to embrace the richness of experience. The image of binding implies the restrictive character of categories as well as the physical discomfort they might create.

Queer desire, as portrayed by Schulman, emphasizes its fluidity and multiplicity. Characters follow relations between gender presentations and sexual orientations, and they do not succumb to the urge to determine desire based on the strict frameworks of identity. Hortense's character has sexual relations with both men and women, and Schulman shows this without pathologizing or justifying it as the way to defend bisexuality. Rather, the desire is characterized merely as a reaction to specific people, not to gender categories: She wanted who she wanted. Information about the individual, such as their age or line of work, was provided, but it did not predetermine anything (2016, p. 189).

The story talks about Hortense's inner world: when she was in men, she did not feel any less queer. She did not feel like one more among women. She was like herself; she wanted another person, and the need to want was a logic in itself, with nothing to do with the categories that other people attempted to attribute to it (Schulman, 2016, p. 190). In this text, a theory of desire predominates and transcends the categories of identity. The desire of Hortense possesses its own logic, which cannot be categorized externally, which hints at the fact that lived erotic experience is, in any case, more complex than the frameworks of identity that can be placed on it.

Schulman describes how Bette is involved with a younger woman, Nepthys, in a way that not only defies the rule against age-appropriate relationships but also flouts the expectations of butch-femme relationships. The first impression of them is as follows: When they first meet, the story tells, Nepthys gazed at Bette with open admiration, the sort of gaze that both acknowledged and admired the masculinity in Bette instead of being disgusted by it or

seeking to find some female beneath the surface (Schulman, 2016, p. 102). This frank appreciation implies that Nepthys does not understand gender presentation by Bette as a failed femininity but as a successfully performed masculinity. The term imagined femininity underneath denies the idea that masculine women are actually feminine underneath, rather the masculinity is the truth, and the feminine is merely a mask to conceal it.

Their fledgling affair is defined by the demand Nepthys makes on her agency and want: I am no femme in search of daddy. I am well aware who I am and what I desire. I want you. Not because you're like a man. You are you, and that is why I say you are like you (Schulman, 2016, p. 118). This statement denies both the heteronormative scripts that would make Bette a man-substitute and essentially the ideas that would make her less than her biological sex. Rather, Nepthys demands the specificity of Bette, her likeness, indicating that gender identity is ultimately unique and cannot be reduced to general terms, even though it is shaped by recognizable performances.

Intersectionality: Queer, Class, and Race

Intersectional analysis is essential to understanding how queer identity and gender fluidity operate within different social contexts. The queerness of Glave's characters is inextricably linked to Black and diasporic identity, whereas Schulman situates queerness within issues of class, gentrification, and urban displacement.

The protagonist in *The Final Inning* by Glave illustrates how experiences of same-sex desire are deeply intertwined with racism and the vulnerabilities faced by Black queer men. The text highlights that Blackness is the first marker seen by others, which, when combined with gender and sexual identity, results in layered discrimination.

Schulman's text uses the theme of gentrification to explore the intersection of queerness, class, and urban life. The work exposes how older queer residents are displaced by wealthy newcomers, highlighting issues of privilege and the changing landscape of queer spaces.

Narrative Strategies and Resistance.

Distinctive narrative techniques in both works challenge heteronormative storytelling by presenting alternative understandings of gender and sexuality. Glave employs nonlinear, fragmented narratives that reflect traumatic, diasporic temporalities and resist traditional queer developmental arcs.

The very fact that Balzac's nineteenth-century novel has been adapted by Schulman into a queer contemporary context is a performative act of queering literature. By transferring heterosexual jealousy and social climbing to a lesbian social world, Schulman demonstrates that allegedly universal human feelings and struggles in canonical literature are equally effective in queer settings. This approach breaks the paradigm that queer literature is all about queerness, showing instead that queer characters can experience the full spectrum of complex human emotions.

Neither text accepts what Halberstam (2011) describes as "straight time," the heteronormative time governed by reproduction, fluidity into family, and developmental milestones. While the characters in Glave are suspended in time and undergo repetitive returns rather than following a linear trajectory, the protagonist in Schulman is a middle-aged man who resists the discourse of maturation and settlement. He remains engaged in untidy emotional struggles—experiences that heteronormative temporality would typically deny people of his age. These temporal disturbances, present in both texts, serve as forms of opposition to the normative institutions that attempt to subjugate and govern the lives of queers.

Violence, Susceptibility, and Resistance

Both texts confront the realities of violence faced by queer individuals and illustrate multiple forms of resistance. Glave's work is notable for depicting homophobic and racist violence, showing such acts as part of an ongoing pattern rather than isolated incidents.

Glave also demonstrates resistance through the formation of queer communities and the perseverance of desire despite risk. For example, in *Commitment*, a couple's persistence despite social rejection becomes an act of defiance.

Schulman's portrayal of violence centers on gentrification, AIDS history, and intra-community struggles, framing these as threats to queer existence. The characters' efforts to preserve memories and spaces represent their resistance to erasure.

Belonging, Community and Kinship

Alternative kinship structures emerge as central to queer survival in both works. Glave depicts chosen families formed in the absence of biological acceptance, emphasizing the support and recognition they offer, despite their fragility.

Schulman's novel foregrounds queer community networks, examining how they are built, maintained, and sometimes fall apart. The complexities of these relationships challenge stereotypes of queer isolation and instead highlight the richness of queer social life.

Both texts ultimately argue that community is vital for queer resistance and survival. While not idealizing these communities, the works underscore the unique resources they provide to their members.

Conclusion

This comparative study reveals how *Among the Bloodpeople* by Thomas Glave and *The Cosmopolitans* by Sarah Schulman use narrative innovation to explore gender fluidity and queer identity across different cultural environments, challenging heteronormative expectations.

The research establishes that Glave addresses gender fluidity through experimental narrative forms reflecting diasporic fragmentation and violence, while Schulman employs realism to examine negotiations of identity within rapidly changing urban contexts.

This study's intersectional analysis demonstrates that race, class, diaspora, and geography shape possibilities for gender and sexual expression. Glave illustrates inextricable links between queerness, Blackness, and colonial history, while Schulman situates queerness amid urban and class displacement.

Both texts serve as sites of resistance to both heteronormative and homonormative systems, though each locates resistance differently. Glave focuses on desire, kinship, and witness, while Schulman emphasizes community perseverance and opposition to erasure.

The comparative approach used in the study has revealed fruitful tensions and surprising harmonies between African diasporic and Jewish-American queer literary histories. Although these customs have varied historical developments and cultural backgrounds, they share common survival, memory work, and reimagination methods due to violence and marginalization. Both Glave and Schulman use the history of their respective cultural traditions of displacement, persecution, and resistance to create literary texts that do not render queer lives exceptional or tragic but instead demand their complexity, commonality, and strength.

This paper is important to queer literary theory because it shows that modern literature fulfills various roles: as a repository of marginalized identities, as a critique of norms, as a space of resistance, and as a place of envisioning other forms of being and belonging. The literary works discussed in this case are not merely reflections of preexisting gender and sexual identities but are also involved in creating opportunities to interpret and experience gender and sexuality. Thematic issues, formal innovations, and ethical investments enable Glave and Schulman to construct literary spaces in which gender fluidity may be experimented with, queer subjectivity may be expressed in all its complexity, and readers may be exposed to other ways of living that do not rely on prevailing cultural suppositions.

The research's implications include the skills of literary scholarship and the broader cultural interpretation of gender and sexuality. In the case of literary studies, it illustrates how

comparative analysis can be useful in exploring various cultural traditions in queer literature and how it is necessary to consider intersectional identity construction in textual analysis. In the case of gender and sexuality studies, it demonstrates how literary representation can illuminate theoretical constructs, such as performativity, and also exposes the inadequacy of these constructs to provide a comprehensive picture of lived experience.

The comparative method could be extended to other contemporary queer authors with different cultural backgrounds in future studies to determine the influence of the global context on the representations of gender fluidity and queer identity. Moreover, reception studies that examine how real readers respond to these texts might be particularly useful for understanding how the representation of literature circulates in culture and influences perceptions of gender and sexuality. The connection between literary presentation and political activism is a topic that can be researched to understand how texts like those by Glave and Schulman are involved in broader LGBTQ+ rights and social change movements.

To sum up, *Among the Bloodpeople* and *The Cosmopolitans* are both notable additions to modern queer writing, with an intersectional, subtle approach to gender fluidity and queer identity that neither simplifies nor assimilates. Their unique and complementary styles demonstrate literature's ability to create a space of resistance, visibility, and reimagination in which other ways of being and belonging can be created. Their writings provoke the reader to doubt the normative notion of gender and sexuality as well as testify to the experimental experiences of queer people, who must negotiate between several oppressive and enabling systems. Therefore, they demonstrate the political and cultural significance of queer literature during the period of constant fight to be fully recognized and equal.

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