

# **SO MANY OTHERS: RECONSTRUCTIONS OF WHITENESS IN THE LITERATURE OF THE AMERICAN SOUTH, 1880-1920**

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## **Abstract**

The study explores reconstructions of whiteness in the literature of the American South, offering a deconstructive approach to whiteness. Navigating its way through contemporary scholarship on whiteness, it questions the conflation of whiteness with white identity, which locks its interpretations within the white versus black dichotomy. Adopting a place specific approach, the thesis situates its discussion in the Post-Reconstruction South, proposing that whiteness is not a homogeneous category, but rather its constructions are unique to particular locales. The thesis engages with the works of such nineteenth century southern writers as Thomas Nelson Page, Ellen Glasgow, Charles Waddell Chesnutt and Alice Dunbar-Nelson. Although immersed in the tradition of the region, these writers are positioned on the opposite sides of the colour line, and an examination of their unique narrative positions allows for an objective delineation of southern whiteness. Combining 'white' and 'black' perspectives, the discussion explores what constitutes the southern variety of whiteness and the ways in which these writers reconstruct it. Following Richard Dyer's identification of perfect whiteness with the figures of Christ and the Virgin Mary, the study argues that whiteness consists in replicating these biblical paradigms in the ordinary. In the South, these models of whiteness are conflated with notions of antebellum gentility and apotheosised in the figures of the gentleman planter and southern belle, who are involved in the process of mimetic reconstructions of the divine and genteel ideals. Casting whiteness as a composite of distinct totalities that resist unification into an organic whole, the thesis argues that the desire to replicate the biblical and genteel models is perpetuated by a conviction of intrinsic 'blackness' that needs to be exorcised. Such awareness blights reconstructions of whiteness, transmuting them into sites of rupture and transgression. Haunted by the preconceived perfection of the divine and antebellum paradigms, the southern gentleman and lady are transformed into inadequate approximations, while whiteness proper remains elusive.

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## Chapter one: In the wilderness, or encounters with whiteness

Yah-yah-yah jes' listen to dat! If I's imitation, what is you? Bofe of us is imitation *white* – dat's what we is – en pow'full good imitation, too – Yah-yah-yah! – we don't mount to noth'n as imitation *niggers*.<sup>1</sup>

### Definitions that homogenise

In *Moby-Dick* Herman Melville asks, ironically, of whiteness: 'What could be more full of meaning?'<sup>2</sup> Full of meaning it may be, but it would be equally important to ask why its meaning, or meanings, can be so elusive. Melville struggles gamely with the proliferation of its trans-cultural significations that range from innocence, mourning, blankness to alterity, finally conceding that 'not yet have we solved the incantation of this whiteness and learned why it appeals with such power to the soul'.<sup>3</sup> Though he does not reach a univocal conclusion, Melville's attempt at defining whiteness is not a failure. On the contrary, its merit lies in the identification of the arbitrariness and ability of whiteness to transcend the mere visibility of colour. What turns *Moby-Dick* into a fearsome creature and an alluring object of pursuit is not his otherness, which is natural, but Ahab's skewed perception and inflated pride. A century and a half later, whiteness remains equally perplexing, and continues to generate and fuel debates among scholars, frequently with contradictory results. Post-colonial theories link whiteness with dominance and with the ensuing subjugation of the racial other; while sociological scholarship identifies it as

<sup>1</sup> Mark Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, ed. Malcolm Bradbury, *Penguin Classics* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969), 103.

<sup>2</sup> Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick* (1851), ed. Harrison Hayford and Hershel Parker (New York: Norton, 1967), 43.

<sup>3</sup> Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 169. The chapter titled 'The Whiteness of the Whale' is particularly rich in Melville's insights into whiteness.

interlinked with race, class and gender as well as being culturally contingent. The diverse nature of these approaches notwithstanding, the common consensus they reach suggests that it is the inter-discursive, composite nature of whiteness which created, and which perpetuates, the construct to its status as a norm and culminates in its ‘invisibility’. Despite the identification of the interdependence of these discourses in the construction of whiteness, they are approached selectively, and there is a tendency evident to privilege one over others. Historically, the origin of the concept of whiteness in the United States is linked with the Post-Reconstruction South and, inevitably, slavery. Consequently, the role of chattel slavery in the construction of whiteness is overemphasised, while white indenture takes second place or is eschewed altogether. The emphasis laid on the peculiar institution encourages a reductive assumption that whiteness is inextricable from the binarity of black and white, diminishing the significance of its social, cultural and historical inflections. The complexity of the construct, or what Mike Hill terms ‘The epistemological stickiness and ontological wiggling’, leads to the emergence of ambiguous, if not contradictory, definitions; while simultaneously fostering a reluctance to explore whiteness on other than general level and, inadvertently, promoting its ‘universality’.<sup>4</sup>

Exemplary of the ambiguity and complexity is Rebecca Aanerud’s account in ‘Fictions of Whiteness: Speaking the Names of Whiteness in U.S. Literature’. Aanerud’s assertion that ‘*whiteness* has multiple meanings and significations, not the least of which is race’ is immediately qualified by the caveat that discussions of whiteness are only applicable to those who are deemed non-white, which facilitates the perception of white as ‘being

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<sup>4</sup> Mike Hill, ‘Introduction: Vipers in Shangri-La’, in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, ed. Mike Hill (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 3. The volume is cited in the bibliography.

unraced – or to stress the political, being normal’.<sup>5</sup> Although Aanerud’s heteroglot approach to whiteness emphasises that ‘Its formulation depends on the changing relations of gender, class, sexuality, and nationality’, she appears unwilling to elaborate on how these discourses cooperate with one another to produce it. To complicate matters further, she sees whiteness as a racialised identity, while concurrently asserting that ‘its construction and interpretation are informed by historical moment, region, political climate, and racial identity’.<sup>6</sup> The pertinence of her statement as far as the construction and interpretation of whiteness are concerned is tempered by the equation of whiteness with ‘identity’. In her account, white identity is both synonymous with whiteness and a prerequisite for whiteness. Such interchangeability of white identity and whiteness is not unique to Aanerud, and it is the unholy fruit of the tendency to inscribe whiteness with universality.

A similar ambiguity plagues Valerie Babb’s delineation of whiteness in *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature and Culture*. Babb initiates her discussion with the declaration that ‘to study whiteness and its history in the U.S. is to study intentional “whitewashing” of American character’.<sup>7</sup> While such ‘whitewashing’ is an overt, historically-grounded process aimed at promulgating homogeneity and conformity, covertly it implies a contingent nature of whiteness. Although Babb makes an important distinction between white skin and whiteness, asserting that whiteness ‘is more than an appearance’, she simultaneously complicates her stance by adding that ‘it is a

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<sup>5</sup> Rebecca Aanerud, ‘Fictions of Whiteness: Speaking the Names of Whiteness in U.S. Literature’, in *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, ed. Ruth Frankenberg (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 35; and Aanerud, ‘Fictions’, in *Displacing Whiteness*, 36.

<sup>6</sup> Aanerud, ‘Fictions’, in *Displacing Whiteness*, 37.

<sup>7</sup> Valerie Melissa Babb, *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature and Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 5.

system of privileges accorded to those with white skin'.<sup>8</sup> Whiteness, in Babb's terms, both goes beyond and is circumscribed by physical appearance. Consequently, Babb writes, 'whiteness is more than the classification of physical appearance, it is largely an invented construct blending culture, assumptions and attitudes'.<sup>9</sup> Notwithstanding her claim that 'race can ignore shared physical resemblance and categorise on the basis of assigned social legacy', Babb's definition, while highlighting the constructedness of whiteness, still preserves physical appearance as an integral part of any claim to whiteness.<sup>10</sup> For Babb, the inclusion of the white hue in the designation of whiteness is historic. American whiteness, Babb remarks, is essentially an 'English creation, arising in response to migration, encounter, and a need to sustain established social structures in a new environment'.<sup>11</sup> The shared experiences which 'turned Puritans into pilgrims sharing a special bond with God' became instrumental in laying foundations and later mythologizing the concept of American whiteness.<sup>12</sup> The close proximity of and interactions with 'African servants and slaves' rendered 'less visible differences of class, religion, and ethnicity subordinate to the more visible differences of physical appearance'.<sup>13</sup> The religious and ethnic self-definition gave way to racial self-definition and, consequently, not only led to the privileging of the white hue over others, but also contributed to establishing it as a norm. Consequently, the visible difference, according to Babb, played a crucial role in defining and normalising whiteness.

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<sup>8</sup> Babb, *Whiteness*, 9.

<sup>9</sup> Babb, *Whiteness*, 10.

<sup>10</sup> Babb, *Whiteness*, 10.

<sup>11</sup> Babb, *Whiteness*, 47.

<sup>12</sup> Babb, *Whiteness*, 59.

<sup>13</sup> Babb, *Whiteness*, 59.



Like Babb, Henry A. Giroux, in 'Racial Politics and the Pedagogy of Whiteness', sees whiteness 'as a cultural practice [that] promotes race-based hierarchies'.<sup>14</sup> However, Babb and Giroux's arguments remain equally ambiguous when it comes to establishing or defining a difference between whiteness and white identity. Whereas for Babb, the foregrounding of white identity was achieved by 'using nonwhiteness to give whiteness form'; for Giroux, whiteness is 'a complex marker of identity defined through a politics of difference subject to the shifting currents of history, power, and culture'.<sup>15</sup> What is more, Giroux continues, whiteness 'gains its meaning only in conjunction with other identities' such as 'class, gender, age, nationality, and citizenship'.<sup>16</sup> Giroux's proposition emphasises the contingency of whiteness and simultaneously problematizes its discourse by positing it both as 'a marker of identity' and an 'identity.' Notwithstanding the fact that both concepts may be seen as historically, culturally and socially constructed, whiteness, to quote Babb, operates 'as a system of privileges accorded to those with white skin', whereas white identity does not necessarily rest upon privilege.<sup>17</sup> Linking whiteness with white skin and, consequently, physical appearance, conveys a sense of ontic presence – a sense of corporeality which does not sit comfortably alongside designations of whiteness 'as a system of privilege'. On the contrary, whiteness as 'an invented construct blending culture, assumptions and attitudes' reaches beyond the immediate corporeality and into the realm of the symbolic. This symbolic whiteness contains within itself a promise of truth founded upon an assumption of the existence of inherent, irreducible and transcendent values, upon the attainment of which whiteness proper may be attained. To Jacques Derrida, truth itself is an 'agreement [...], a relation of resemblance or equality between a re-presentation and a

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<sup>14</sup>Henry A. Giroux, 'Racial Politics and the Pedagogy of Whiteness', in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 295.

<sup>15</sup> Babb, *Whiteness*, 66; and Giroux, 'Racial', in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 311.

<sup>16</sup> Giroux, 'Racial', in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 312.

<sup>17</sup> Babb, *Whiteness*, 9.

thing'.<sup>18</sup> Truth, then, materialises as contingent, its meaning suspended between an idea and its representation. While the representation acts as a vessel of truth, it also bars access to the truth beyond representation so that 'It is only worth its weight in truth, and truth is its sole standard of measurement.'<sup>19</sup> Consequently, this presupposed truth, in a movement of doubling up, acts both as an ideal and a censor. The possibility of such symbolic truth behind conceptions of whiteness is not analogous to universality. To the contrary, Derrida suggests that 'it is worth only as much as the discourse it fixes and freezes along its surface,' and 'it is also worth only as much as the logos capable of interpreting it'.<sup>20</sup> The symbolism of whiteness functions only through the discourse it promotes and, as such, becomes both sustainable and sustained through the perpetuation of its own logos. This logos of whiteness is enmeshed in the discourse of nonwhiteness, signifying as an antithesis to truth, whereby 'the object is to reconstitute the presence of the other by substitution'.<sup>21</sup> The reconstitution of the other consists in substituting the values of the presupposed truth for a perceived and preconceived notion of non-truth. Through such substitution, neither whiteness nor nonwhiteness is delimited by the binary opposition of colour, and both transcend the ontically-grounded racial identity. Such perpetuation through reconstitution, fuelled by the very presupposition of the existence of the symbolic truth of whiteness, culminates in mimesis which, according to Derrida, 'is commanded by the process of truth'.<sup>22</sup> Whiteness is therefore mimetic to the extent that it consists in the reconstitution of this presupposed truth, which engenders a paradox whereby 'what is imitated is more real, more essential, more true, etc., than what imitates'.<sup>23</sup> The symbolic meaning of whiteness that is caught up in the act of reconstitution or mimesis becomes

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<sup>18</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Continuum, 2011), 206.

<sup>19</sup> Derrida, *Dissemination*, 200.

<sup>20</sup> Derrida, *Dissemination*, 202.

<sup>21</sup> Derrida, *Dissemination*, 199.

<sup>22</sup> Derrida, *Dissemination*, 206.

<sup>23</sup> Derrida, *Dissemination*, 205.

more important than the physical and subjective being in whom the reconstitutions of this symbolism are engendered; whiteness transcends the corporeal subject, though it remains the driving force shaping subjectivity. This constant movement of reconstitution results in, as Derrida observes, ‘The dissemination of the whites’, but ‘not in the dissemination of whiteness’.<sup>24</sup> While it may produce myriad subjects whose identities are engendered in the reconstitution of whiteness, whiteness retains its wholeness and remains within the realm of the symbolic. If, as Judith Butler believes, ‘the identity of the subject is to be found in the intentionality of its desire’, then, in Babb’s terms, the desire for whiteness appears analogous to the desire for privilege.<sup>25</sup> The notion of privilege becomes assimilated into the logos of whiteness and signifies as a characteristic of the ideal. The identity of the subject will be ontically determined before its desire for whiteness, based on a recognition of the ‘system of privilege’, can be formulated. This notion of privilege will always be context dependent, grounded in the discourses of class, gender and culture, as well as, but not exclusively, subject to one’s identification as white. Whiteness, then, is like Desire, for it denotes ‘*absence* of Being’, and ‘not a Being that *is*’.<sup>26</sup> Whiteness proper can only signify in the realm of the symbolic as that which is desired, while the identification of the ‘system of privilege’ marks an awareness of whiteness and its lack in the desiring subject.

Among the characteristics added to the composite of whiteness Babb includes ‘civility, culturation and piousness’, as well as ‘sexual restraint’ in men mirrored by the ‘asexuality’ and ‘weakness’ of women – attributes which are, in social and cultural terms, predominantly associated with the upper classes.<sup>27</sup> By highlighting the opposite yet

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<sup>24</sup> Derrida, *Dissemination*, 265.

<sup>25</sup> Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 67.

<sup>26</sup> Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, trans. James H. Nicholls, Jr, ed. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1969), 40.

<sup>27</sup> Babb, *Whiteness*, 68; and Babb, *Whiteness*, 76.

complementary attributes informing the constructions of femininity and masculinity, Babb draws attention to the formation of gender values within the discourse of whiteness ‘in which males were empowered and females disempowered’.<sup>28</sup> According to Babb, these traits were explicated in juxtapositions with ‘savage brutality’, ‘rape’, and ‘race’ which characterised those who were mostly, but not exclusively, racial others.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, to reduce the explication of these qualities to comparisons with racial others is to deny their strong European connotations which reach back in time to the ideals of courtly love and chivalry, evoking the age-old dichotomy of nobility versus plebeians. According to Babb, however, such contrasts were essential to casting ‘the capacity for romantic love, love of family, social and personal responsibility and the desire for freedom’ as ‘racial traits that characterized white American character’.<sup>30</sup> Such an ‘appropriation of the universal’, she argues, contributed to ‘making the ideological nature of whiteness less discernible’.<sup>31</sup> This universalization of whiteness, Babb writes, was systematically disseminated through a body of didactic literature, eugenics displays, and institutions like settlement houses, which conveyed the message that ‘regardless of class, by approximating certain standards of belief and behavior, skin color could be parlayed into an asset advancing a transformation into authentic “Americanness”’.<sup>32</sup> Explicitly, white skin marked the first step on the path to the transformation into Americans; while, implicitly, this transformation relied on replicating white, Protestant values.<sup>33</sup> Such metamorphosis, if it were attainable, would entail and encourage mimicry which, according to Homi K. Bhabha, renders the colonial

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<sup>28</sup> Babb, *Whiteness*, 74.

<sup>29</sup> Babb, *Whiteness*, 82.

<sup>30</sup> Babb, *Whiteness*, 170.

<sup>31</sup> Babb, *Whiteness*, 170.

<sup>32</sup> Settlement houses were establishments founded by members of the middle or upper classes. They served a didactic purpose of educating the newly-arrived white immigrants how to become Americans. Thanks to settlement houses, ‘A specific system of values was recast as simply being American [white Protestant], and the ways in which this system excluded groups who did not have white skin or taught participants in the settlement houses to devalue these groups became imperceptible.’ Settlement houses promoted an illusory sense of homogenous Americanness, in Babb, *Whiteness*, 140-49; and Babb, *Whiteness*, 148.

<sup>33</sup> Babb, *Whiteness*, 148.

subject ‘almost the same but not quite’.<sup>34</sup> Mimicry, in this instance, constitutes an effect of whiteness and indicates its colonising power, albeit not in terms of bondage. Melville succinctly refers to this insidious, colonizing facet of whiteness as a ‘dumb blankness full of meaning’.<sup>35</sup> For Melville, like for Derrida, this innocuous rhetoric of whiteness, its seeming blankness, conceals ‘the totality, however infinite, of the polysemic series’.<sup>36</sup> While its significations are shaped ‘according to the horizon of meanings that surround, sustain, and create it’, whiteness retains its power to perpetuate the illusion of homogeneity.<sup>37</sup> Babb echoes Derrida’s sentiment when she declares that ‘The ideology that fuels whiteness strips us of our individuality and makes us formulaic representations of what we imagine one another to be.’<sup>38</sup> This illusory and utopian sense of sameness that whiteness promotes is an effect of representation bearing little, if any, resemblance to the ideal. In turning its subjects into ‘formulaic representations’, whiteness produces a simulacrum which Frederic Jameson defines as ‘the identical copy for which no original has ever existed’.<sup>39</sup> Deriving from a replication of an image, simulacrum not only ‘masks the *absence* of a basic reality’, but also ‘bears no relation to any reality whatever: it is its own pure simulacrum’.<sup>40</sup> Simulacrum is then mimetic in that, like mimesis, it ‘is lined up alongside truth: either it hinders the unveiling of the thing itself by substituting a copy or a double for what is; or else it works in the service of truth through the double’s resemblance’.<sup>41</sup> Like mimesis, simulacrum both defers the meaning of truth and reaffirms the existence of truth through its very act. In the replication of this preconceived truth, or

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<sup>34</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, ‘Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse’, in *The Location Of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 86.

<sup>35</sup> Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 169.

<sup>36</sup> Derrida, *Dissemination*, 260.

<sup>37</sup> Derrida, *Dissemination*, 257.

<sup>38</sup> Babb, *Whiteness*, 168.

<sup>39</sup> Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 18.

<sup>40</sup> Jean Baudrillard, ‘Simulacra and Simulations’, in *Literary Theory: An Anthology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 368.

<sup>41</sup> Derrida, *Dissemination*, 201.

‘the standards of beliefs and behavior’, simulacrum ‘produces mere “reality effects”’ which are ‘inaccessible otherwise than by simulacrum’.<sup>42</sup> Not only is the truth of whiteness revealed as a simulacrum, but also one that produces ‘reality effects’. The presence of the mimetic act reifies the non-presence and non-corporeality of whiteness which, subsequently, is interminably reproduced as a simulacrum, producing its own ‘reality effects’ inscribed within the logos of class, gender and race. These discrete simulacra concurrently reiterate the notion of the universal truth of whiteness and disseminate it through the acts of mimetic replication resulting in whitenesses. These diverse whitenesses are necessary ‘to mark the non-being, the nonreal, [and] the nonpresent’ of the concept of ideal whiteness.<sup>43</sup> In replicating what is believed to be real, simulacrum, to paraphrase Baudrillard, substitutes ‘the visible machinery of icons’ for an intelligible idea of whiteness and stimulates desire for its attainment.<sup>44</sup> Although Babb recognises the indispensability of such replications to the genesis of American mytho-history, she continues to term whiteness as ‘deracialized and universalized’.<sup>45</sup>

Notwithstanding her feminist approach to whiteness in *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*, Ruth Frankenberg broadly defines the construct as ‘a location of structural advantage, of race privilege’.<sup>46</sup> Echoing Babb, Frankenberg perceives whiteness as ‘a “standpoint”, a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society’ as well as ‘a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed’.<sup>47</sup> Frankenberg’s conception of whiteness highlights its socio-cultural and racial

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<sup>42</sup> Derrida, *Dissemination*, 217.

<sup>43</sup> Discussing Mallarmé’s notion of idea, Derrida concludes that ‘The ideality of the idea is here for Mallarmé the still metaphysical name that is still necessary in order to mark non-being, the nonreal, the nonpresent,’ in *Dissemination*, 218.

<sup>44</sup> Baudrillard, ‘Simulacra’, 367.

<sup>45</sup> Babb, *Whiteness*, 169-70.

<sup>46</sup> Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 1.

<sup>47</sup> Frankenberg, *White Women*, 1.

aspect as a norm. As she pertinently observes, ‘whiteness often stood as an unmarked marker of others’ differentness – whiteness not so much a void or formlessness as a norm’.<sup>48</sup> Although Frankenberg sees gender and sexuality as relational categories, the norm she refers to has been historically occupied by white men. The constructions of both were informed by race and culture, but ‘femininities were constructed *in relation* to masculinity’.<sup>49</sup> Despite remaining relational, the parameters defining female whiteness are circumscribed and policed by male whiteness. In her ‘Introduction: Local Whitenesses, Localizing Whiteness’, Frankenberg complicates her definition of whiteness, adding that it is ‘a construct or an identity almost impossible to separate from racial dominance’.<sup>50</sup> Essentially, Frankenberg, like Babb and Aanerud, leaves the line between whiteness and white identity purposefully blurred, although she explicitly grounds whiteness in racial dominance. Consequently, Frankenberg links it with hegemony, observing that ‘it is in those times and places where white supremacism has achieved hegemony that whiteness attains (usually unstable) unmarkedness’.<sup>51</sup> Such unmarkedness materialises as an effect of colonisation, whereby the ‘apparently stable Western or White self [...] is an effect of the Western discursive production of Others’.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, Frankenberg stresses that whiteness as ‘a normative space [...] is constructed precisely by the way it positions others at its borders’; while Babb, discussing captivity and criminal narratives, similarly proposes that ‘they cement images of what whiteness is by creating images of what whiteness is not’.<sup>53</sup> The ‘invisibility’ of whiteness is attained through marking others, possibly regardless of skin colour, through the demarcation of boundary spaces.

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<sup>48</sup> Frankenberg, *White Women*, 198.

<sup>49</sup> Frankenberg, *White Women*, 85.

<sup>50</sup> Ruth Frankenberg, ‘Introduction: Local Whitenesses, Localizing Whiteness’, in *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, ed. Ruth Frankenberg (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 9.

<sup>51</sup> Frankenberg, ed., *Displacing Whiteness*, 5.

<sup>52</sup> Frankenberg, *White Women*, 17.

<sup>53</sup> Frankenberg, *White Women*, 231; and Babb, *Whiteness*, 70.

## Contexts and monsters

Such boundary spaces become the focus of John Hartigan Jr's discussion of whiteness in *Odd Tribes*. While Hartigan's discussion follows the well-trodden path of defining whiteness as an ideology that 'both names and critiques hegemonic beliefs and practices that designate white people as "normal" and racially "unmarked"', his analysis of the concept is based on the exploration of 'white trash', emphasising class distinction and stereotyping.<sup>54</sup> Hartigan proposes that 'the recognition and replication of sameness and similarities' both aids the projections of 'collective identity' and becomes an integral part of the process of establishing otherness.<sup>55</sup> The seeming homogeneity that such replications promote is underlain with heterogeneity and manifested in distinctions of class. Though it consists in replications, whiteness is not homogeneous but it 'is constituted and reproduced by distinct political, economic, and social forces, operating with differing impacts at local, regional, national, and international levels'.<sup>56</sup> A similar observation is made by David R. Roediger in *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness*. In this primarily historical account of working class whiteness, Roediger notes that 'race is given meaning through the agency of human beings in concrete historical and social contexts, and is not a biological or natural category'.<sup>57</sup> Crucially, Roediger continues, 'while race is ideologically constructed, it is constructed from real, predictable, repeated patterns of life'.<sup>58</sup> Whiteness, then, does not rely on unmarked privilege, but on class and class stereotyping stemming from political, economic and social forces particular to a given time and place. Recognising the uniqueness of these discourses, Hartigan advocates a place-specific approach to whiteness

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<sup>54</sup> John Hartigan Jr, *Odd Tribes: Toward a Cultural Analysis of White People* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 1.

<sup>55</sup> Hartigan, *Odd*, 12.

<sup>56</sup> Hartigan, *Odd*, 13.

<sup>57</sup> David R. Roediger, *Towards the Abolition of Whiteness* (London: Verso, 1994), 2.

<sup>58</sup> Roediger, *Towards*, 5.



with an emphasis on the meanings of region, class and race. Hartigan's detailed analysis of the invidious appellation of 'white trash' demonstrates how class became racialised through the process of stereotyping and naming as well as localization. Hence, for Hartigan, 'class, like race is culturally constructed', and racialised, it may be added.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, in 'What Is "White Trash"?', Annalee Newitz and Matthew Wray observe of 'white trash' that 'It is externalized by class difference but made the same through racial identification.'<sup>60</sup> The concurrent externalization and racialization of 'white trash' are products of stereotyping which is 'replete with references to dangerous and excessive sexuality; rape (both heterosexual and homosexual), incest, and sexual abuse'.<sup>61</sup> These vicious stereotypes are employed to erase any degree of similarity which may be conveyed by the adjective white, and frustrate any claims 'white trash' may lay to whiteness proper. White Appalachians, as Suzanne W. Jones observes, were also subject to virulent stereotyping in the nineteenth century, when adjectives such as 'lazy' and 'shiftless' were employed to convey their sub-humanity.<sup>62</sup> The portrayals of black people which reinforce 'familiar stereotypes ranging from lazy and shiftless to the menacing and dangerous' are not therefore solely responsible for perpetuating the myth of whiteness celebrating it as 'superior, moral, wholesome, stable, intelligent, and talented'.<sup>63</sup> Stereotyping works indiscriminately to 'deny the intellectual and human dimension' of not only 'blackness', as Maurice Berger suggests, but also white people.<sup>64</sup> It is precisely for this reason that, as Hartigan points out, the stereotyping of poor whites 'was not solely formulated, nor did it hinge on, sharp contrasts to blackness', but acknowledged their Nordic or Saxon origins.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Hartigan, *Odd*, 35.

<sup>60</sup> Annalee Newitz and Matthew Wray, 'What Is "White Trash"?', in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 169-70.

<sup>61</sup> Newitz and Wray, 'What Is', in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 171.

<sup>62</sup> Suzanne W. Jones, 'City Folks in Hoot Owl Holler: Narrative Strategy in Lee Smith's *Oral History*', in *Southern Literary Journal* 20.1 (1987): 101.

<sup>63</sup> Giroux, 'Racial', in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 295; and Maurice Berger, *White Lies: Race and the Myths of Whiteness* (Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1999), 97.

<sup>64</sup> Berger, *White Lies*, 135.

<sup>65</sup> Hartigan, *Odd*, 78.

Saxon origin does not guarantee inclusion into whiteness if it is devoid of its symbolic and material attributes. Kate Davy, in 'Outing Whiteness', shares Hartigan's view, declaring that 'whiteness is manifest and performed at the intersection of class'.<sup>66</sup> Whiteness, then, can be effected through demarcations of class on social, economic, and regional bases.

Nevertheless, in terms of the American South, the presence of the racial other should not be underestimated, since the possession of slaves guaranteed one's acceptance into the august class of cavaliers which formed the pinnacle of southern aristocracy. As Ritchie Devon Watson Jr points out in *Normans and Saxons: Southern Race Mythology and the Intellectual History of the American Civil War*, the southern aristocratic myth rested on 'the conviction that the region's slaveholders had descended almost entirely from the English Cavalier aristocracy'.<sup>67</sup> Slavery, however, was crucial 'to the preservation of their high and noble genealogical inheritance'.<sup>68</sup> The possession of slaves was a marker of whiteness proper, to which only landed southern cavaliers of 'superior' genealogical lineage could lay a claim. 'White trash', though possibly descended from the same old English stock but decidedly less affluent, could harbour no such aspirations. While the presence of the peculiar institution placed the cavaliers and 'white trash' at the opposite ends of the southern social spectrum, there is no doubt that the two classes also constituted markers of identification for each other. The respective disdain and admiration with which the two classes were likely to view each other was instrumental in the tainting of whiteness with monstrosity. For Hartigan, the essence of the monster manifests itself as 'a physical effect of desire to both maintain and transgress the social propriety and decorum that are

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<sup>66</sup> Kate Davy, 'Outing Whiteness: A Feminist/Lesbian Project,' in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 210.

<sup>67</sup> Ritchie Devon Watson, Jr, *Normans and Saxons: Southern Race Mythology and the Intellectual History of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 15.

<sup>68</sup> Watson, *Normans and Saxons*, 15.

constitutive of respectable class identity’.<sup>69</sup> Firstly, Hartigan’s definition hints at the contingent nature of monstrosity by emphasising the existence of conventions which, when transgressed, result in monstrosity; secondly, it points to an intrinsic drive or desire that inaugurates the act of transgression while sustaining an awareness of the action.

Monstrosity, then, speaks with a forked tongue. On the one hand, it materialises as a matter of belonging; while on the other, its essence lies in transgressing the preordained decorum or boundary, in which case its discourse might be linked to those of performance and passing. Werner Sollors, in *Neither Black Nor White: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature*, defines passing as ‘the crossing of any line that divides social groups’.<sup>70</sup>

However, he points out, the discourse of passing has become frequently associated with “‘passing for white”, [...] “crossing over” the color line in the United States from the black to the white side’.<sup>71</sup> Historically, Sollors continues, passing ‘developed from the motif of the parvenu and the migrant as it combined with the age-old one of role-playing’.<sup>72</sup> The association of passing with the figure of the parvenu appears indicative of the social and class origins of the discourse. According to Sollors, the subject who passes is considered ‘a “counterfeit” X, a “pseudo” X, a “phony” X, or an “impostor”’.<sup>73</sup> The terms Sollors employs to characterize a ‘passer’ suggest that passing produces slippage which may be detected, revealing the monstrosity of the ‘impostor’. The idea of ‘passing for’ presupposes the existence of an ideal of which the ‘passer’ is aware, and which he hopes to attain through the act itself. Similarly to Sollors, Valerie Rohy, in ‘Displacing Desire: Passing, Nostalgia, and Giovanni’s Room’, sees passing as ‘a performance in which one presents

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<sup>69</sup> Hartigan, *Odd*, 48.

<sup>70</sup> Werner Sollors, *Neither Black Nor White: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 247.

<sup>71</sup> Sollors, *Neither Black Nor White*, 247. Racial passing, or passing for white, is discussed by Samira Kawash in ‘*The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*: (Passing for) Black Passing for White’; and Martha J. Cutter’s ‘Sliding Significations: Passing as a Narrative and Textual Strategy in Nella Larsen’s Fiction’, in *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*, ed. Elaine K. Ginsberg, (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1996).

<sup>72</sup> Sollors, *Neither*, 257.

<sup>73</sup> Sollors, *Neither*, 249.

oneself as what one is not, a performance commonly imagined along the axis of race, class, or sexuality'.<sup>74</sup> For both Sollors and Rohy, passing is grounded in deception. However, contrary to Sollors, Rohy declares that passing 'is only successful passing', for, 'unlike drag, its "performance" so impeccably mimics "reality" that it goes undetected as performance, framing its resistance to essentialism in the very rhetoric of essence and origin'.<sup>75</sup> For Rohy, then, not only does passing materialise as a narrative of verisimilitude, but also one that disrupts and subverts the other two grand narratives which she identifies as 'heterosexuality and whiteness'.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, Rohy continues, passing as a figure 'insists that the "truth" of racial identity, indeed of identity as such, relies on the presence or possibility of the false'.<sup>77</sup> In Rohy's terms, notwithstanding the accepted status of whiteness as the norm, its signification will be contingent upon the possibility of the false, namely nonwhiteness, not necessarily designating the binary opposition of blackness. Curiously, the discourse of monstrosity subverts the concept of the 'truth,' whereby non-monstrosity would materialise as the 'truth', while monstrosity would signify as the false. It is noteworthy, however, that a recognition of the 'truth' would be essential for passing to occur. If, according to Rohy, 'passing then invokes origins only to displace origins', its discourse belies the idea of true origins and, consequently, positions the grand narrative of whiteness within the realm of simulacra.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, as Rohy points out, 'passing is not a false copy of true identity, but an imitation'.<sup>79</sup> Whiteness, to paraphrase Melville, has 'no famous author' and 'no famous chronicler', and constitutes, instead, nostalgic manifestations 'for a point of origin' which passing and monstrosity can evoke; it is always

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<sup>74</sup> Valerie Rohy, 'Displacing Desire: Passing, Nostalgia, and Giovanni's Room', in *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*, ed. Elaine K. Ginsberg (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 219.

<sup>75</sup> Rohy, 'Displacing', 226.

<sup>76</sup> Rohy, 'Displacing', 227.

<sup>77</sup> Rohy, 'Displacing', 226.

<sup>78</sup> Rohy, 'Displacing', 228.

<sup>79</sup> Rohy, 'Displacing', 225-26.

rewriting the *ürtext* of whiteness.<sup>80</sup> The words of Roxana – a manumitted white slave and one of the protagonists of Mark Twain’s *Pudd’nhead Wilson* – aptly illustrate the status of whiteness as an imitation: “‘Yah-yah-yah jes’ listen to dat! If I’s imitation, what is you? Bofe of us is imitation *white* – dat’s what we is – en pow’full good imitation, too – Yah-yah-yah! – we don’t mount to noth’n as imitation *niggers*.’”<sup>81</sup> Roxana’s words invoke the paradox inherent in the discourse of passing, namely the awareness of being what one is not. Since monstrosity, like passing, derives from the act of transgression, it also materialises as an imitation of the presupposed ‘truth’, or non-monstrosity. Indeed, a certain duality obtains within the discourse of monstrosity. On the one hand, monstrosity results from the transgression of the established decorum; while on the other, it is grounded in the awareness of the committed transgression, which will be both occasioned and informed by the ‘monster’ or ‘passer’s’ a priori position within the preordained social and cultural order, quite possibly as a result of stereotyping. Regardless of its success, the monstrosity of passing lies in the passer’s awareness that, to quote Peggy Kamuf, ‘truth cannot but must be known’.<sup>82</sup> Inevitably, monstrosity, rooted in the awareness of the act of transgression, is not only implicitly tinged with the false, but also, inadvertently, reaffirms the existence of putative norms. After all, as Hartigan succinctly puts it, ‘no one is white trash unless so labelled by someone else’.<sup>83</sup> Since whiteness consists in the replication of ‘formulaic representations’, monsters are subject to a similar process of myth-making and stereotyping, which reifies their monstrosity. Hartigan restricts the appellation to poor whites who, he claims, were seen as both ‘a form of otherness’ and ‘a disturbing mirror of racial sameness’; who, as Newitz and Wray assert, externalised ‘the difference within, the

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<sup>80</sup> Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 100; and Rohy, ‘Displacing’, in *Passing*, 228.

<sup>81</sup> Twain, *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, 103.

<sup>82</sup> Peggy Kamuf, ‘Dendritic’, in *Monstrism*, spec. issue of *Oxford Literary Review* 23 (2002): 80.

<sup>83</sup> Hartigan, *Odd*, 114.

white Other that inhabits the core of whiteness'.<sup>84</sup> Monstrosity occupies an intraracial boundary space, whereby its discourse, at least partly, relies on racialising others in the absence of racial others, rendering blackness superfluous to its construction.

Ross Chambers proposes in 'The Unexamined' that 'who is marked and who is not is ultimately a matter of context'.<sup>85</sup> According to Derrida, 'there is nothing outside context', whereby context encompasses the discourses 'of "life," of "speech," of "writing,"' or indeed 'the entire "real-history-of-the-world'.'<sup>86</sup> Indeed, Derrida concludes his definition by boldly stating that 'no meaning can be determined out of context'.<sup>87</sup> This notion of inextricability of meaning and context belies the existence of a universal meaning and emphasises its contingency. Arguably, Derrida's definition may be expanded, or narrowed, by the inclusion of place, not only as a geographic locale, but also as a factor which is both influenced by and influencing the other discourses he enumerates. While Chambers substitutes 'markedness' and 'unmarkedness' for stereotyping in his discussion of whiteness, in view of Derrida's definition, not only do these categories materialise as relative, but also multi-discursive constructs. Like Hartigan, Chambers confines his discussion to social relations which he considers 'mediated by the phenomena we call power and desire'.<sup>88</sup> These phenomena, Chambers continues, produce effects, one of which 'is to distribute to unmarkedness the privileges of normalcy and unexaminedness and to reserve for markedness the characteristics of derivedness, deviation, secondariness, and

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<sup>84</sup> Hartigan, *Odd*, 82; and Newitz and Wray, 'What Is', in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 170.

<sup>85</sup> Ross Chambers, 'The Unexamined', in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 188.

<sup>86</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Afterward: Toward an Ethic of Discussion', in *Limited Inc*, trans. Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 1988), 136. Derrida here reformulates his previous assertion 'which for some has become a sort of slogan, in general so badly understood, of deconstruction', in 'Afterword', 136. The phrase in question is 'There is nothing outside of the text [there is no outside-text; *il n'y a pas de hors-texte*]', in *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 158.

<sup>87</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Living On', trans. James Hulbert, in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, (London: Continuum, 2004), 67.

<sup>88</sup> Chambers, 'The Unexamined', in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 188-89.

examinability, which function as indices of disempowerment (although, oddly, not always of undesirability)'.<sup>89</sup> For Chambers, unmarkedness is inextricably bound up with unexaminability, while both contribute to the signification of whiteness as a 'blank category'.<sup>90</sup> Consequently, as an unmarked or 'blank category', whiteness 'has a touchstone quality of the normal, against which the members of marked categories are measured and, of course, found deviant'.<sup>91</sup> Whiteness preserves its status as a 'blank category' precisely because its meanings are sustained through the distinctions it engenders. As a result, the presence of these context-dependent effects and their manifestation across the discourses of class, gender and race reifies the absence of whiteness proper. Whiteness, Chambers succinctly observes, 'is not itself compared with anything, but other things are compared unfavourably with it, and their own comparability with one another derives from their distance from the touchstone'.<sup>92</sup> Berger echoes Chambers when he proposes that white people 'continually reinforce their own authority and social standing by seeing themselves in positive contrast to an inferior, negative, or even dangerous blackness'.<sup>93</sup> The similarity of argument notwithstanding, Berger's proposition appears somewhat reductive in its reliance on the binarity of whiteness and blackness, thus emphasising its visual and racial dimension. While whiteness relies on racialisation, the latter need not include racial others; discursively 'blackened' whites will suffice. Those discursively 'blackened' form 'the marked categories' and 'may therefore be compared with one another'.<sup>94</sup> Through a constant and interminable succession of comparisons of the marked categories, whiteness attains its 'aparadigmatic' character.<sup>95</sup> This 'aparadigmaticity' of whiteness, engendered by comparisons with nonwhiteness, will

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<sup>89</sup> Chambers, 'The Unexamined', in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 189.

<sup>90</sup> Chambers, 'The Unexamined', in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 189.

<sup>91</sup> Chambers, 'The Unexamined', in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 189.

<sup>92</sup> Chambers, 'The Unexamined', in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 189.

<sup>93</sup> Berger, *White Lies*, 166.

<sup>94</sup> Chambers, 'The Unexamined', in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 189.

<sup>95</sup> Chambers, 'The Unexamined', in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 189.

therefore signify as a product of context which facilitates the analogies. As products of context, such comparisons will be subject to continually shifting meanings across time, space and place, undermining the notion of the universality of whiteness and highlighting its contingent and relational nature. However, Chambers asserts, there exists a dependence between the unmarked and marked categories, whereby ‘the marked categories’ relation to the unmarked ones that define their paradigmaticity is that of a *plural* (having the characteristic of paradigmaticity) to a *singular* (having the characteristic of incomparability).<sup>96</sup> The singularity of whiteness is inextricably bound up with the plurality of marked categories, so ‘that the difference between white and nonwhite depends [...] on there also being differences among the multiple categories’.<sup>97</sup> The discursive paleness of whiteness is not only “tinged” with nonwhiteness’, but it is also evoked in response to its classifications.<sup>98</sup> Exemplary of such ‘nonwhiteness’ will be the discourse of class, whereby the lower classes are ‘blackened’ by virtue of occupying a socially inferior position in relation to the ruling classes. As long as the marked categories of nonwhiteness are defined, and differences engendered by them are both sustainable and sustained through unfavourable comparisons, whiteness as an aparadigmatic category may be effected. However, according to Chambers, in order to ensure that its claim to ‘the invisibility of an aparadigmatic norm will not be examined’, whiteness ‘needs to be not only indivisible [singular] but also invisible’.<sup>99</sup> The invisibility and singularity of whiteness, Chambers suggests, are achieved through the process of pluralization and homogenization of the other, whereby ‘the other is *pluralized* in order to produce whiteness as indivisible and singular’ and, concurrently, ‘the groups that compose this pluralized other are

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<sup>96</sup> Chambers, ‘The Unexamined’, in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 189.

<sup>97</sup> Chambers, ‘The Unexamined’, in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 190.

<sup>98</sup> Chambers, ‘The Unexamined’, in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 191.

<sup>99</sup> Chambers, ‘The Unexamined’, in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 191.



*homogenized* in this new relation, through what is called *stereotyping*'.<sup>100</sup> Paradoxically, pluralization introduces difference as an essential prerequisite for markedness, while homogenization, through stereotyping, solidifies this difference and translates it into familiar terms. The process of homogenization of the other is the characteristic *modus operandi* of the colonial discourse – one that does not necessarily distinguish along the lines of skin colour. Theodore W. Allen, in *The Invention of the White Race: Racial Oppression and Social Control*, observes that

The assault upon the tribal affinities, customs, laws and institutions of the Africans, the American Indians, and the Irish by English/British and Anglo-American colonialism reduced all members of the oppressed group to one undifferentiated social status, a status beneath that of any member of any social class within the colonising population.<sup>101</sup>

To Allen, such practice constitutes '*the hallmark of racial oppression* in its colonial origins'.<sup>102</sup> In the second volume of the work, *The Invention of the White Race: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America*, Allen expands this definition of racial oppression by adding that 'It is a system of rule designed to deny, disregard, delegitimize previous or potential social distinctions that may have existed or that might tend to emerge in the normal course of development of class society.'<sup>103</sup> Racial oppression involves a recognition of the distinctiveness of the oppressed groups, which is analogous to pluralization, before they can be homogenized, and their belonging to an 'undifferentiated social status' within the colonial hierarchy fixed. What is more, such homogenization, as an integral part of the *modus operandi* of racial oppression, simultaneously frustrates the development of a class society. Racial oppression and class oppression become

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<sup>100</sup> Chambers, 'The Unexamined', in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 192.

<sup>101</sup> Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, 2 vols. (London: Verso, 1995-97), 1.32. Each volume contains a subtitle: *Racial Oppression and Social Control* and *The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America* respectively.

<sup>102</sup> Allen, *The Invention*, 1,32.

<sup>103</sup> Allen, *The Invention*, 2.177.

interchangeable, formed through the processes of pluralization and homogenization, which may be evinced in the usages of the terms ‘Negroes’ and ‘niggers’. As Roediger observes, it was a commonly accepted and ‘longstanding’ southern practice to distinguish ‘between respectable “Negroes” and disreputable “niggers”’.<sup>104</sup> The black population was first divided into ‘Negroes’ and ‘niggers’ and thus pluralized. However, both groups would have been subject to stereotyping, and consequently homogenized. Such homogenization through stereotyping would have erased whatever familiar connotations of respectability the term ‘Negroes’ might have invoked. Indeed, as Chambers points out, ‘the other is constitutively split between familiarity and strangeness’.<sup>105</sup> Homogenization engenders the perception of the discursively marked others ‘as a function of their group belongingness, [whereas] whites are perceived first as individual people (and only secondarily, if at all, as whites)’.<sup>106</sup> Effectively, Chambers continues, for white people, ‘Their essential identity is thus their individual self-identity, to which whiteness as such is a secondary, and so a negligible, factor.’<sup>107</sup> Although to Melville, ‘Wonderfullest things are ever the unmentionable’, this negligibility does not detract from the appeal of whiteness or diminish the desire for it; quite the contrary, it mythologizes the construct.<sup>108</sup>

Importantly, Chambers, unlike Babb, Frankenberg or Aanerud, distinguishes between whiteness and white identity. Chambers stresses this point, declaring that ‘whiteness is not a classificatory identity, but just an unexamined norm against which such identities are defined, compared, and examined’.<sup>109</sup> In Chambers’s terms, while whiteness materialises as a standard according to which the legitimacy of claims to white identity is measured,

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<sup>104</sup> Roediger, *Towards*, 149.

<sup>105</sup> Chambers, ‘The Unexamined’, in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 196.

<sup>106</sup> Chambers, ‘The Unexamined’, in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 192.

<sup>107</sup> Chambers, ‘The Unexamined’, in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 192.

<sup>108</sup> Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 97.

<sup>109</sup> Chambers, ‘The Unexamined’, in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 197.

both remain distinct though interdependent. Moreover, he adds, ‘the category of the individual [individual identity] shares with the singularity of whiteness the quality of undividedness’ which culminates in ‘*in(di)visibility*’ of whiteness that encapsulates its ‘unmarked, unexamined quality’.<sup>110</sup> Notwithstanding the contingency and heterogeneity of its individual interpretations, whiteness as a concept remains ‘*in(di)visible*’. Paradoxically, and possibly inadvertently, its dependence on the marked groups positions whiteness on the margins. This is not to say that whiteness is marginal, or indeed marginalised, but rather, to suggest that its meaning, or more appropriately meanings, appear undefined until the processes of identification, pluralization and homogenization of the marked groups are effected. After all, as Chambers observes, ‘one classifies oneself as a member of the category of the unexamined through the very act of examining others’.<sup>111</sup> Such positioning would simultaneously reify the unexaminability of whiteness and confirm its status as a ‘blank category’. This dependence on the marked categories for signification endows whiteness with ‘the indecision of that which remains suspended, neither this nor that, between here and there, and *hence* between this text and another’.<sup>112</sup> Not only is the process of marking a tool of effecting whiteness, capable of freezing its meaning, but it is also an effect of whiteness. The contingency of its meanings upon the effects it produces fixes whiteness within the realms of ambiguity and undecidability.

This ambiguity of whiteness is further accentuated if placed in opposition to the category of ‘absolute blackness.’<sup>113</sup> For Chambers, both ‘blank whiteness and absolute blackness [...] lie outside the sphere of examinability,’ whereby ‘one is unexamined “norm”, and the

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<sup>110</sup> Chambers, ‘The Unexamined’, in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 192.

<sup>111</sup> Chambers, ‘The Unexamined’, in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 194.

<sup>112</sup> Derrida, *Dissemination*, 247. Derrida here attempts to deconstruct Mallarmé’s conception of the word ‘floating’.

<sup>113</sup> Chambers, ‘The Unexamined’, in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 193.

other is unknowable “other” (or extreme of otherness)’.<sup>114</sup> To this end, blackness is invested with

the special status [that] derives from an ambiguity: it forms part of a (white/black) dichotomy while simultaneously functioning as only one category – the “extreme” one – among those that constitute whiteness’s pluralized other. The special status of whiteness derives from its being opposed to blackness as an absolute term, and so it lies (unlike blackness) outside the pluralized group that constitutes its others.<sup>115</sup>

Blackness, as a concept, is indispensable to the construction of whiteness, for it can be moulded to tarnish the marked categories. In evoking the age-old dichotomy between black and white, Chambers emphasises the complexity of whiteness which accommodates intraracial and interracial relations. In its capacity to transform others, whiteness may be compared to ‘a destructive agent’ who ‘has no identity without a world to be destroyed,’ who ‘endeavours to destroy all living things, [yet] ends up paradoxically dramatizing his essential dependence on the world of the living’, or indeed the marked groups.<sup>116</sup> The meaning of whiteness comes into signification at a boundary space which emerges at the intersection between the site of the unfavourable comparison and the presupposed norm. Since whiteness is ‘a complexly constructed product of local, regional, national, and global relations, past and present’ as well as ‘historically constructed and internally differentiated’, it is not only historically, but also geographically contingent.<sup>117</sup> Regional whiteness, informed by mythologies unique to a given place, will always be different from the national model, the model thus rendered intrinsically unstable. Any deviations from the national, or indeed regional, model may be viewed as instances of monstrosity that render conformity unattainable. Hartigan makes a similar observation, noting that ‘people actively shape and rework meaningful structures and they typically do so in distinct places, where

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<sup>114</sup> Chambers, ‘The Unexamined’, in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 193.

<sup>115</sup> Chambers, ‘The Unexamined’, in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 193-94.

<sup>116</sup> Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, 38.

<sup>117</sup> Frankenberg, *White Women*, 237; and Frankenberg, ‘Introduction’, in *Displacing Whiteness*, 4.

the multiplicity of encounters and the mutability of the landscape often militate against stock ideological reflexes'.<sup>118</sup> Place not only influences the perceptions of, but also facilitates adaptations of, meaningful structures, aiding the emergence of distinct regional ideologies which frequently diverge from putatively accepted truths.

### **A matter of place**

It is with an emphasis on such adaptations that Angelo Rich Robinson discusses the interconnectedness of place and whiteness within clearly demarcated temporal and spatial boundaries in 'Race, Place, and Space: Remaking Whiteness in the Post-Reconstruction South'.<sup>119</sup> Robinson argues that in order to reclaim whiteness 'southern writers strategized to again use black "inferiority" to justify their need for a separate "space" to keep blacks in their "place"'.<sup>120</sup> Moreover, Robinson continues, 'This thinking was certainly continued during segregation when Jim Crow laws "raced" space.'<sup>121</sup> What becomes immediately evident is that place functions dually. Firstly, it signifies a clearly demarcated space, racialised in this instance, within which blackness can be contained and policed, consequently acting as a boundary between those with a claim to whiteness and those excluded. Secondly, place could be constructed in terms of region within which such boundaries are effected. The existence of such policed spaces within a region may contribute to the ways in which whiteness is constructed as well as manifested, which will then render it unique to that particular location. One needs to look no further than stereotyping or naming to find a case in point. As Hartigan demonstrates, the northern synonyms for white trash included 'mean whites', 'crackers', 'sandhillers' and

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<sup>118</sup> Hartigan, *Odd*, 272.

<sup>119</sup> Angelo Rich Robinson, 'Race, Place, and Space: Remaking Whiteness in the Post-Reconstruction South', in *Southern Literary Journal* 35.1 (2002): 97-107.

<sup>120</sup> Robinson, 'Race', 98.

<sup>121</sup> Rich Robinson, 'Race, Place, and Space', 101.

‘clayeaters’, terms which entered circulation in the nineteenth century.<sup>122</sup> Aside from the derogatory connotations each of the terms carries, they all convey a degree of regional stereotyping. Importantly, since they were coined by regional outsiders, they reveal the interdependence between the process of naming and place, in some cases linking physical characteristics of a place such as clay, hills, or occupations of the inhabitants of a particular region, with poverty.<sup>123</sup> Presumably, such appellations could not have been applied to the northern poor, since they tended to be associated with industrialised, urban areas. By contrast, as Roediger points out, the term ‘redneck’ has evolved from a direct need to distinguish white outdoor workers from the emancipated slaves. The former, Roediger continues, adopted a ‘narrow-brimmed wool headgear’ as opposed to ‘broad-brimmed straw hats’ favoured by former slaves, an attempt at distinctiveness which resulted in sunburnt, or red, necks. However, he continues, ‘By 1900, *red-neck* had come into use as “a name applied by the better class of people to the poorer [white] inhabitants of the rural districts of the South”’.<sup>124</sup> As Roediger demonstrates, the genesis of ‘redneck’ stems from a desire to maintain the difference between a white and black worker, which would have been erased by the emancipation of the slaves. Although Roediger sees the “‘wool-hat-boy” [...] as a textbook case of self-identifying white working class racism’, the need to adopt a visibly different attire and the subsequent ease with which it ceased to convey the

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<sup>122</sup> Hartigan, *Odd*, 61; similarly, Newitz and Wray note that the term ‘white trash’ ‘originated as a black-on-white labeling [sic] practice and was quickly appropriated (by 1855) by upper class whites,’ in ‘What Is’, in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 170. One of Charles Waddell Chesnutt’s stories collected in the volume *Conjure Woman and Other Conjure Tales*, ‘Lonesome Ben’, features ‘a white woman wearing a homespun dress’, stuffing her pockets with clay. When asked about what the woman intends to do with the clay, Uncle Julius, the narrator of the tales, replies: ‘She’s gwinter eat it [...] w’en she gits outer sight’, 148. Interestingly, the eponymous Ben, a runaway slave who lacks courage and intelligence, also resorts to eating clay, which not only suggests that the activity, and possibly the appellation, could cross the colour bar, but that it also derived from a lack of certain attributes in those thus termed. The collection is cited in bibliography.

<sup>123</sup> John A. Burrison proposes that the term ‘cracker’ derives from Gaelic ‘craic’ and it was in circulation in Elizabethan England. In the United States, the term was applied to cowboys of Florida and Georgia who used bullwhips with a cracker tip to herd cattle; while African Americans employed the term to poor white southerners, in ‘Crackers’, in *The New Georgia Encyclopedia*, (Athens: University of Georgia, 2002), Web, 10 December 2010.

<sup>124</sup> Roediger, *Towards*, 136-37. Roediger cites a study conducted by Billy Bowles and Remer Tyson concerning the etymology of the term ‘redneck’.

black-white dichotomy suggest that the difference was perceived in social and class terms, rather than racial ones.<sup>125</sup> Rather tellingly, in adopting a particular style of headwear to enunciate their difference, white southern workers seem to have disregarded the obvious marker of difference, namely skin colour. Ironically, not only did the wool hat become a symbol of whiteness for white southern workers, but also an indicator of their nonwhiteness since it marked them as inferior in relation to the middle and upper classes. As Hartigan observes, in ‘Who Are These White People?: “Rednecks”, “Hillbillies”, and “White Trash” as White Racial Subjects’, the eponymous terms inscribe ‘a charged form of difference marked off from the privileges and powers of whiteness’.<sup>126</sup> Moreover, since ‘The stratification of power and privilege within whiteness hinges upon rural versus urban identity and the relative degrees of education versus “backwardness”’, such appellations ‘work to animate these key contours of difference within’ its rhetoric.<sup>127</sup> Though the wool hat might have served as an accessory of whiteness, there is little doubt at which end of the spectrum it, as a tangible sign of their ‘backwardness’, would have positioned ‘the wool-hat-boys’. Unlike ‘crackers’, ‘mean whites’ or ‘sandhillers’, the etymology of the term ‘redneck’ demonstrates how naming could also work from within a region, not only in terms of self-identification, but also stereotyping. The evolution of such geographically-grounded appellations testifies to the unique conceptions of whiteness born out of particular, regional practices and affinities.

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<sup>125</sup> Roediger, *Towards*, 137.

<sup>126</sup> John Hartigan, Jr., ‘Who Are These White People?: “Rednecks”, “Hillbillies”, and “White Trash” as White Racial Subjects’, in *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism*, ed. Ashley W. Doane and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (London: Routledge, 2003), 95.

<sup>127</sup> Hartigan, ‘Who Are These White People’, in *White Out*, 96.

The development of the whiteness-place dialectic is traced by Grace Elizabeth Hale in her seminal work *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*.<sup>128</sup> Situating her discussion in the Post-Reconstruction South, Hale proposes that the region, despite 'its treasured and cultivated distinctiveness', contributed to making whiteness 'the deepest sense of what it means to be an American'.<sup>129</sup> The turning point, Hale observes, came with the abolition of slavery which served to 'make the invisible visible, to give whiteness a color'.<sup>130</sup> According to Hale, slavery 'founded and fixed the meaning of blackness more than any transparent and transhistorical meaning of black skin founded the category of slavery'.<sup>131</sup> More importantly, it resulted in grounding this 'racialized difference in the law, in the legal status of a human being as a person or as chattel'.<sup>132</sup> In other words, the nature of slavery did not derive from blackness, as understood in racial terms, rather, blackness had to be racialized in order to perpetuate the rhetoric of bondage. As Hale pithily observes, race was 'this bastard child of the Civil War'.<sup>133</sup> The discourse of slavery established a unique dynamic of power which, Hale notes, rested not on the 'white versus black' dichotomy, but rather, its connotations: 'slave versus citizen, dependent

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<sup>128</sup> Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999).

<sup>129</sup> Hale, *Making*, xi.

<sup>130</sup> Hale, *Making*, 3.

<sup>131</sup> Hale, *Making*, 4.

<sup>132</sup> Hale, *Making*, 4.

<sup>133</sup> Hale, *Making*, 50; Allen observes that during the English occupation of Ireland throughout the seventeenth century, the capture and sale into bond servitude of Irish men, women and children was a common and legal practice endorsed by the English Council of State: 'If the English did not establish their regime in Ireland on a system of chattel bond-labor as they did in the Plantation colonies in America, it was simply a matter of relative "cost/benefit ratio."' Bond-servitude was also an accepted practice in England, where in 1606 'not only thieves and vagrants but free coalminers and salt-pan workers were made bond-slaves by law', whereby 'the Privy Council legally bound those workers to their masters, for life, unless they were sold along with the mine or saltworks, or were otherwise disposed of by their owners', in *The Invention*, 1.72-75. Similarly, Allen notes that in 1547 an anti-vagrancy law was passed in England under which a person, when convicted, was 'branded with a *V*, and made a slave for a period of two years [...]. The law specified that the slave was to be driven to work by beating, and held to the task by chaining [...]. Such a two-year slave who failed in a runaway attempt was to be branded with an *S* and made a slave for life,' in *The Invention*, vol. 2, 20. These examples reinforce Hale's argument that slavery as an institution was not founded upon skin colour, but rather derived from the place occupied within the social hierarchy as well as the functions associated with it.



versus independent'.<sup>134</sup> Little wonder that the abolition of slavery and subsequent 'Reconstruction amendments', Hale continues, severely undermined the accepted *status quo* and, consequently, 'By the end of Reconstruction, all southern men possessed the same legal rights in the newly reunited nation.'<sup>135</sup> Indeed, before the abolition of the peculiar institution, Allen observes, 'in the South freedom was a racial privilege'.<sup>136</sup> However, 'By making freedom a *human right* Negro emancipation had destroyed it as a racial privilege.'<sup>137</sup> By extending the right to freedom to the black population, the Emancipation Act erased the criterion distinguishing self-proclaimed Americans from those whom they deemed unworthy of the appellation. The idea of racial privilege, then, did not derive from skin colour, but rather it was quantified by the concept of freedom which happened to be the prerogative of those who deemed themselves white and American citizens. The reinvention of blackness in the postbellum era provided another criterion against which whiteness could have been reasserted.

Although 'A New South' may have emerged out of the chaos of Reconstruction, its essence, however, lay 'in the distant timelessness of the past'.<sup>138</sup> 'The "Old South"', Hale continues, became synonymous with 'the antebellum past' and it 'provided white southerners' with 'a strangely other time and space within which to deny and escape the present and then to reconstruct the foundations of racial difference'.<sup>139</sup> The Old South, then, became an imagined place, characterised by 'nostalgic celebrations of a golden age of racial innocence', with "those old plantation days" transformed into a golden age of

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<sup>134</sup> Hale, *Making*, 4.

<sup>135</sup> Hale, *Making*, 5.

<sup>136</sup> Allen, *The Invention*, 2.254.

<sup>137</sup> Allen, *The Invention*, 1.143.

<sup>138</sup> Hale, *Making*, 50.

<sup>139</sup> Hale, *Making*, 44.

perfect race, class, and gender harmony'.<sup>140</sup> Conjured up out of an imagined place and time, the Old South is a simulacrum: a systematically mythologized and 'whitened' replica of a utopian image. Since, according to James Branch Cabell's memorable words, the Old South 'died proudly at Appomattox without ever having been besmirched by the wear and tear of existence,' the New South materialises as a desired reconstruction of an already imagined region.<sup>141</sup> Ironically, the artificiality of the construction of the Old South, while highlighting its status as a simulacrum, furnishes it with a timelessness and placelessness which concurrently detach it from its geographical location and facilitate its signification as 'an essential part of the national whole'.<sup>142</sup> It is within this re-imagined trope of the Old South, or as Hale puts it, 'within a time and space imagined as a racially innocent plantation pastorate, where whites and blacks loved each other,' that, 'the making of modern southern whiteness began'.<sup>143</sup> Grounded in the fertile soil of the Old South, southern whiteness appears as phantasmagoric as its place of origin.

Imagined whiteness may have been, however, the means through which it was systematically reasserted and reified – namely segregation, black-figure iconography and lynching – were not. All three, according to Hale, may be linked with growing consumerism and commodification. While 'the culture of segregation', Hale asserts, was created 'in large part to counter black success, to make a myth of absolute racial difference, to stop the rising', its presence 'made racial identity visible in a relational and systematic way' and countered 'confusion of appearances created by the increased

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<sup>140</sup> Hale, *Making*, 52-53.

<sup>141</sup> Cited by Richard Gray, in *Southern Aberrations: Writers of the American South and the Problems of Regionalism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 42.

<sup>142</sup> Hale, *Making*, 4.

<sup>143</sup> Hale, *Making*, 54.

visibility of a well-dressed, well-spoken black middle class.<sup>144</sup> On the one hand, the clearly demarcated spaces policed one's place within the new social order, while seemingly erasing class differences already existing within the white society, and those emerging within the black society. On the other hand, such marking of space brought both whiteness and blackness into equal 'visibility'. Indeed, as Hale demonstrates, inseparable from the notion of distinct white spaces was the implication that 'somewhere there existed a separate black one'.<sup>145</sup> Paradoxically, segregation granted a degree of autonomy to the black population, which belied the attempts to return it to the antebellum status of the slave. Although segregation could not reverse the tide of black emancipation, or as Hale puts it, 'could not make middle-class blacks poorly clothed, poorly educated, and poorly spoken', it could, through the marking of space, render them 'easily identified by all whites of all classes as inferior'.<sup>146</sup> Not only did the act of marking blackness through the policing of space render it identifiable, it also reduced the spectre of sameness that the newly emerging black middle class embodied. 'With the color line,' Hale observes, 'whites literalized the metaphor of keeping blacks "in their place"'.<sup>147</sup> Despite the rigorous demarcation of space, Hale demonstrates that the binaries mandated by Jim Crow laws were frequently transgressed, albeit to enunciate whiteness. One locale of such transgression was the white home which, according to Hale, 'continued as a site of racial mixing through the employment of African American domestic labor' and, consequently, 'remained a space of integration within an increasingly segregated world'.<sup>148</sup> The domestic

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<sup>144</sup> Hale, *Making*, 21; and Hale, *Making*, 130; it is noteworthy that in English-occupied Ireland, 'By the 1860s housing in Belfast was almost completely segregated', in Allen, *The Invention*, 1.131. Allen's observation demonstrates that segregation does not need to be grounded in racial difference, if the latter is perceived as a skin colour other than white, but that it can be effected on the basis of perceived social inferiority.

<sup>145</sup> Hale, *Making*, 199-200.

<sup>146</sup> Hale, *Making*, 131.

<sup>147</sup> Hale, *Making*, 136. Hale borrows the phrase 'in their place' from W.E.B. Du Bois's statement on spectacle lynching: 'Every white man [and woman] became a recognized official to keep Negroes "in their places"', cited in Hale, *Making*, 199.

<sup>148</sup> Hale, *Making*, 94; while Roediger notes in *Towards* that 'Jim Crow and lynch law [...] existed alongside traditions of biracial unity, and African American culture of opposition and a fragile presence of white

worker, embodied in the figure of mammy, provided ‘the fiction of continuity between the Old South and the new southern world, anchoring the emerging white middle class within a romanticized conception of the antebellum plantation elite’.<sup>149</sup> Like the Old South, mammy was invested with a timeless quality. The figure of mammy, Hale asserts, became a symbol of class status and whiteness, whereby ‘being white meant having black help’.<sup>150</sup> Not only did mammy, quite efficiently, supply a link to the idyllic past, but she also helped to resurrect ‘another crucial New South fiction, the southern lady – an image of white purity and gendered passivity’.<sup>151</sup> Paradoxically, the returning of mammy to her stereotyped antebellum place not only led to stereotyping, but also mythologizing of the fiction of white southern lady. Incidentally, Hale notes, the resurrection of the image of white southern lady facilitated the invocation of ‘that another white image of blackness, “the black beast rapist”’, against which white masculinity could be reconstructed and the purity of white femininity reinvented.<sup>152</sup> Indeed, bell hooks, in *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*, notes that the story of the black male rapist was essentially a white man’s invention that served to reclaim the preconceived nobility and chivalry ascribed to white masculinity.<sup>153</sup>

Effectively, ‘Mammy’s racial passing,’ her crossing of ‘the line between increasingly segregated places of whiteness and blackness,’ enabled the passing of both white men and women.<sup>154</sup> Since, as Babb and Frankenberg suggest, the discourse of whiteness relies on

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liberalism’, 56. Felipe Smith notes of segregation laws: ‘Hotel parlors and restaurants had come under Jim Crow restraints earlier than public transportation because as private establishments they clearly suggested extensions of white domestic space,’ in *American Body Politics: Race, Gender, and Black Literary Renaissance* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), 100. Paradoxically, as Hale points out, the white domestic space was the one that was most frequently transgressed.

<sup>149</sup> Hale, *Making*, 101.

<sup>150</sup> Hale, *Making*, 103.

<sup>151</sup> Hale, *Making*, 105.

<sup>152</sup> Hale, *Making*, 115.

<sup>153</sup> bell hooks, *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (London: Turnaround, 1991), 58.

<sup>154</sup> Hale, *Making*, 106.

the empowerment of men and the disempowerment of women, or femininity being constructed in relation to masculinity, then the figure of mammy, as an antithesis to the purity of white femininity, inadvertently evokes the stock image of white southern lady, against which white southern masculinity can be reclaimed.<sup>155</sup> Judith Lorber argues in 'The Social Construction of Gender' that 'the physical differences between male and female bodies [...] are socially meaningless until social practices transform them into social facts'.<sup>156</sup> In other words, masculinity and femininity are empty categories unless they are invested with socially and culturally constructed meanings. Like whiteness, both must be socially effected in order to signify. The figure of mammy supplied the means of effecting southern femininity, and inadvertently its opposition – masculinity. Considered in Rohy's terms, mammy's passing both invoked the origins of the southern masculinity and femininity and displaced these origins as, within the discourse of the New South, mammy was a free citizen; while, simultaneously, the white conceptions of the trope of mammy expressed, to borrow Rohy's phrase, a 'nostalgia for a point of origin'.<sup>157</sup> Ironically, while providing the link to the point of origin of female and male whiteness, the black mammy also facilitated the passing of the two constructs and fixed them both within the realm of, in Rohy's words, 'the false', as did evocations of the black beast rapist.<sup>158</sup> Arguably, such universalized and reconstructed femininity and masculinity that transgress the boundaries of not only class, but also of history, result in a counterfeit whiteness. Indeed, to Hale, 'Without mammy, in a complicated layering of ways, southern whiteness was meaningless.'<sup>159</sup> Although Hale enunciates the functions of blackness in the constructions of whiteness, rather than its racial aspect, it is evident that for her, blackness materialises as

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<sup>155</sup> Babb, *Whiteness*, 74; and Frankenberg, *White Women*, 85.

<sup>156</sup> Judith Lorber, 'The Social Construction of Gender', in *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed., ed. Paula S. Rothenberg (New York: Worth Publishers, 2001), 52.

<sup>157</sup> Rohy, 'Displacing', in *Passing*, 228.

<sup>158</sup> Rohy, 'Displacing', in *Passing*, 226.

<sup>159</sup> Hale, *Making*, 114.

indispensable to the assertions of whiteness. In other words, through the preconceived functions assigned to blackness, resulting partly from stereotyping and partly necessitated by the pecuniary circumstances of the black population, whiteness is established; while the very act of naming the functions of blackness becomes synonymous with effecting whiteness. In this respect, both blackness and whiteness materialise as cultural constructs, locked within the dichotomy of cause and effect. This mutually defining relationship is clearly illustrated by the paradigms of the black mammy and the black beast rapist, whereby the stereotyping of particular aspects of blackness led to the emergence of distinct stereotypes of whiteness. For the latter to be effected, blackness had to fit and function within the white mould circumscribed by acts of stereotyping. Interestingly, if stereotyping, as Hartigan points out, cloaks the deviations from the presupposed norm with familiarity, then the general application of terms like ‘Auntie’ and ‘Uncle’ to black women and men, carries both familiar and familial connotations; it reluctantly embraces black men and women as inherent members of the extended white family, while reifying their status as other.<sup>160</sup> Ironically, such familial connotations, like mammy, inadvertently cross the colour line.<sup>161</sup> ‘Uncle’ and ‘Auntie’ were not the only terms that succeeded in crossing the boundaries established by Jim Crow. As Roediger notes, ‘White male workers could turn out not to have “any manhood”, if they “turned nigger” by “blackening themselves” as scabs.’<sup>162</sup> ‘Turning nigger’ denotes a deviation from the preordained decorums of whiteness, while, simultaneously, it underscores the transracialness of the term. Roxana, in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, is sensitive to this plasticity of ‘nigger’ when she observes of her white son: “‘Ain’t nigger enough in him to show in his finger-nails, en dat takes mighty

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<sup>160</sup> Katherine Lumpkin, cited by Hale, in *Making*, asserts that “‘Auntie” and “Uncle” [were] generic terms we were wont to use for Negroes whose names we did not know’, 96; while hooks points out in *Yearning* that ‘the word “auntie” was used by whites to address black women in slavery, reconstruction, and the apartheid period known as Jim Crow’, 123.

<sup>161</sup> bell hooks, *Yearning*, 58.

<sup>162</sup> Roediger, *Towards*, 162

little – yit dey’s enough to paint his soul.’”<sup>163</sup> It is therefore the presence of metaphorical blackness that undermines whiteness from within.

Although the constructions of ‘southern whites’ gender and racial identities existed in opposition to a darkness inside and out’, the threat of the metaphorical blackness had to be exorcised and found expression in a new form of stereotyping that went hand in hand with commodification and growing consumerism: from minstrelsy to black-figure advertising.<sup>164</sup> Minstrelsy, Hale argues, ‘separated black identities from African bodies, making a representation of blackness a commodity and, simultaneously, ‘placed stylized black racial imagery at the centre of commercial popular culture’.<sup>165</sup> Consequently, ‘Selling stereotyped representations of blackness became crucial to the proliferation of mass entertainment forms’ and, it may be added, became crucial to whiteness.<sup>166</sup> Not only did the ‘blackened-up men [stride] jauntily [...] across the color line,’ but in doing so, they disseminated images of blackness against which whiteness could be shaped.<sup>167</sup> ‘Advertisers’ black-figure iconography’, as Hale points out, ‘helped create an increasingly national market for branded and mass-produced consumer products by constructing the consumer as white’.<sup>168</sup> As a result, the implicit whiteness thus promoted ‘became the homogenizing ground of the American mass market’.<sup>169</sup> Effectively, the status of the presupposed white consumer was reaffirmed through the promulgation of black-figure iconography which, inadvertently, became linked with the products themselves. Like the consumer products, the black figures used to promote them, coincidentally conjured up by white advertisers, were conceived of as commodities. Although whiteness became, in

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<sup>163</sup> Twain, *Pudd’nhead*, 158.

<sup>164</sup> Hale, *Making*, 115.

<sup>165</sup> Hale, *Making*, 153-54.

<sup>166</sup> Hale, *Making*, 154.

<sup>167</sup> Hale, *Making*, 153.

<sup>168</sup> Hale, *Making*, 168.

<sup>169</sup> Hale, *Making*, 168.

Hale's terms, 'the homogenizing ground of the American mass market', its constructions would have remained arbitrary and contingent upon the interpretations and re-interpretations of the black-figure iconography. Despite the homogenizing image of whiteness that such advertising and entertainment forms promoted, whiteness itself would have remained ambiguous, subject to class and regional interpretations.

The commodification of the black body, in its most sinister incarnation, reached its apex in the spectacle of lynching. Lynching, Hale observes, 'reversed the decommodification of black bodies begun with emancipation', whereby 'blacks themselves became consumer items' and 'the sites of their murders became new spaces of consumption'.<sup>170</sup> Lynching might be seen as an (un)natural progression from blackface minstrelsy. Whereas blackface minstrelsy aimed to ridicule, lynching, in the most gruesome manner, evoked the days of slavery, when the black body first and foremost signified in monetary terms; lynching reverted the black body to its former status as a commodity. Since, Hale continues, 'Whites were not blacks, and blacks were still humans who could be tortured and killed with impunity,' the spectacle glorified white superiority by stripping the black population of its subjectivity and turning them into 'the objects of white desire'.<sup>171</sup> According to Lacan, 'If there is something that grounds being, it is assuredly the body.'<sup>172</sup> Such objectification of the body leads to a denial of its ontological being. What is more, lynching constituted a perverse case of 'enjoyment' at the ultimate expense of the black body through 'stripping' it of its subjectivity. Lacan observes that 'To enjoy a body [...] when there are no more clothes leaves intact the question of what makes the One [signifier], that is, the question of

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<sup>170</sup> Hale, *Making*, 229.

<sup>171</sup> Hale, *Making*, 226; and Hale, *Making*, 230.

<sup>172</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: On Feminine Sexuality, Book XX, Encore 1972-1973*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1999), 110.



identification'.<sup>173</sup> Lynching as an act of 'enjoyment' of the body of the other erases the question of his identification, in this instance as a free man. In Butler's view, 'Violence to the Other appears as the most efficient route by which to nullify the Other's body.'<sup>174</sup> And since, to nullify a body is synonymous with stripping it of its being and essence, such a body can then be returned to its antebellum status of a chattel. Interestingly, Butler notes that 'By negating *this* living object, [...] self-consciousness comes to view the object as no longer existing'.<sup>175</sup> Lynching, then, becomes counterproductive in that the destruction of the black body impoverishes the act of re-appropriation of southern whiteness, for it removes the symbolic object of antebellum privilege. Paradoxically, lynching placed both the white and black bodies outside the law: the former as the law-giver, and the latter as the object. Lynching, like Bakhtin's notion of carnival, 'celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order' and acted 'as a feast of becoming, change and renewal'.<sup>176</sup> The change consists in a concurrent reversal of the de commodification of the black body and subversion of the newly-established order, resulting in a renewal of a sense of antebellum whiteness, albeit its 'charred' version. Importantly, Hale notes, lynching, 'as a cultural form transgressed the color bar', as did blackface minstrelsy, black-figure iconography, mammy, as well as 'Uncle' and 'Auntie'.<sup>177</sup>

Moreover, lynching, just like the narrative of mammy, contributed to the reconstruction of antebellum fictions of white masculinity and femininity, for 'Beyond reversing the de commodification of black bodies', it 'also reversed the desexualization that also began

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<sup>173</sup> Lacan, *Encore*, 6.

<sup>174</sup> Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, 52.

<sup>175</sup> Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, 37.

<sup>176</sup> Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. H. Iswolsky, in *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov* (London: Arnold Hodder, 2002), 199.

<sup>177</sup> Hale, *Making*, 230.

with emancipation'.<sup>178</sup> Since the spectacle centred on 'the castration of the black beast rapist in exchange for the violated white "virgin"', it served to restore the antebellum gender roles, effectively recasting white masculinity and femininity in the Post-Reconstruction context.<sup>179</sup> Once again, the repeated evocations of the black beast rapist stereotype facilitated the re-enactment of the mythologized white southern masculinity and femininity. Furthermore, Hale observes, 'lynchings helped ease class tensions,' as 'poor whites, too, experienced a racial power that contradicted the inferiority of their class positions'.<sup>180</sup> Similarly to carnival, the spectacle 'marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions'.<sup>181</sup> Grotesque as the idea might appear, lynching, to paraphrase Bakhtin, was not a spectacle seen by people, but one in which they participated 'because its very idea embrace[d] all the people', or at least those who classified themselves as 'people'.<sup>182</sup> Like carnival, lynching erased class differences and conveyed a sense of unity which was underpinned by a renewal or return to the antebellum conception of whiteness and its feminine and masculine incarnations. Intrinsic to the spectacle is a collective awareness of a 'sensual, material bodily unity and community' among the white spectators.<sup>183</sup> This simultaneous awareness of individuality and

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<sup>178</sup> Hale, *Making*, 231.

<sup>179</sup> Hale, *Making*, 231. Smith observes that 'Lynching's carnivalized "scene of the low Other" creates a new identity not through the substitution of the grotesque body of the black condemned in place of a classical body, as Bakhtin would have it, but by the juxtaposition of antithetical classical and grotesque.' Whereas for Hale, the castration is a substitution of the mutilated black body for the violation of the sacred white female body; for Smith both are antithetical in that they are associated with a lower bodily stratum and, thus, both are juxtaposed in the spectacle of lynching without the possibility of one being exchanged for the other. The antipodal figures of white woman and black man 'called forth', according to Smith, 'as the new personation of the sovereign white populace the figure whose role was to reenact in a ritualized form upon the body of the black condemned the violence of southern "Redemption"', in *American Body Politics*, 151-52. However, I would suggest that the juxtaposition of the two figures, both contaminated by the association with the lower bodily stratum, calls forth an ideal of femininity, different from the 'violated woman'. Since the carnival implies an inversion of order – the grotesque instead of the classical – the ideal thus invoked reverts to the classical by virtue of dissociation from the grotesque 'violated woman' vindicated in the ritual.

<sup>180</sup> Hale, *Making*, 236; hooks also notes, in *Yearning*, the parallel between 'domination and castration' as one of the 'gendered metaphors for colonization', 57. In this instance the castration, or lynching of the black male body symbolises its return to the colonized order and marks its inferiority.

<sup>181</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, in *The Bakhtin Reader*, 199.

<sup>182</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, in *The Bakhtin Reader*, 198.

<sup>183</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, in *The Bakhtin Reader*, 225.

community is asserted through the destruction and objectification of the black body – an act that, through its evocation of the antebellum white privilege, succeeds in producing a ghost of whiteness. Indeed, such mitigation of inferiority and seeming unification of class that lynching promoted constitutes, as Allen observes, ‘a general principle of social control’ which aims to alleviate the disparity existing between ‘the interests of the intermediate stratum’ and ‘those of the ruling class’.<sup>184</sup> Thereby, ‘certain inviolable spheres of development are apportioned to people of the middle stratum, which afford them an appropriate degree of independence and security’.<sup>185</sup> In Allen’s terms, the ‘certain invaluable spheres of development’ refer to the Homestead Act of 1862 which made purchase of land an exclusively European-American perquisite, consequently transforming it into white or racial privilege.<sup>186</sup> Lynching, in briefly erasing class differences among the white population served a similar purpose; it afforded a sense of security and inviolateness conveyed by the temporarily shared solidarity of being white. In other words, lynching, like black-figure iconography, through making blackness visible, concealed the heterogeneity of whiteness. In blurring class divisions, lynching conveyed a sense of empowerment to whites, thus helping to, in Hale’s words, ‘maintain both white privilege at home and a sense of southern distinctiveness within the nation’.<sup>187</sup> However, this temporary rebirth of whiteness that lynching facilitates is characterised by ambivalence, for it suggests the death of the ideal of antebellum whiteness in the Post-Reconstruction era.<sup>188</sup> This ambivalence of whiteness consists in its concurrent evocations of death, both in physical and metaphorical terms, which culminates in the revival of a particular, antebellum, and also ‘dead’, sense of whiteness. Since the grotesqueness of the spectacle of

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<sup>184</sup> Allen, *The Invention*, 1.153.

<sup>185</sup> Allen, *The Invention*, 1.153.

<sup>186</sup> Allen, *The Invention*, 1. 153; and Allen, *The Invention*, 1.138.

<sup>187</sup> Hale, *Making*, 284.

<sup>188</sup> According to Bakhtin, the ambivalence of carnival abuses precisely because ‘while humiliating and mortifying they at the same time revived and renewed,’ in *Rabelais*, in *The Bakhtin Reader*, 203.

lynching ‘cannot be understood without appreciating the defeat of fear’, the liberated black body acts as the receptacle of fear, and only when it is vanquished can the death of the antebellum ideal of whiteness be redeemed.<sup>189</sup> Death, then, becomes both the leitmotif of the discourse of whiteness and therein lies its ambivalence: in its evocations of death as a renewing force. Emerging from, and locked within, the struggle between life and death, whiteness forms a part of a cycle of life and becomes naturalised.

The South, as a region, created its own mythology and methodology of whiteness, legitimized through segregation, and systematically performed and reified through lynching, both of which distinguished it from the national model or the ‘universal Yankee’ model.<sup>190</sup> Those who subscribed to the ‘universal Yankee’ model, ‘were bound by a common and exalted Anglo-Saxon racial heritage’ and were characterised by ‘the Puritan capacity for common sense, pragmatism, and dedication to duty and hard work’, as well as ‘the love of liberty’.<sup>191</sup> In southern estimation, these were the very characteristics of the ‘churlish Saxons who predominated north of the Mason-Dixon Line’.<sup>192</sup> By contrast, the southern, regional model, promoted ‘the ethos of the gentry – with its conceptions of gentility, cultural refinement, and social stratification,’ with ‘aristocratic southern lords and ladies ruling benignly over hordes of inferior but contented Negro slaves’.<sup>193</sup> The transformation of the ‘contented Negro slave’ into emancipated southern citizen during Reconstruction irrevocably shattered the pillar which supported the genteel way of life, and destroyed a vital aspect of southern whiteness. Lynching, by placing the black body on

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<sup>189</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, in *The Bakhtin Reader*, 209.

<sup>190</sup> The term ‘universal Yankee’ was coined by Robert Walsh, a journalist from Philadelphia, in 1822 and by 1860 was in wide circulation in the North. Cited in Watson, *Normans*, 125-26.

<sup>191</sup> Watson, *Normans and Saxons*, 124-25.

<sup>192</sup> Watson, *Normans and Saxons*, 45. The term Mason-Dixon line refers to ‘latitude 36 degrees 30 minutes’ north of which, following the Missouri Compromise of 1820, slavery was forbidden in the United States, in Watson, *Normans and Saxons*, 2.

<sup>193</sup> Watson, *Normans and Saxons*, 95; and Watson, *Normans and Saxons*, 99.

centre stage and turning it into an object of inferiority, constituted an attempt to recover this lost aspect of southern whiteness which rested on the notion of aristocratic gentility. Not only did the peculiar institution become instrumental in projections of such gentility, but it also marked the southern way of life as superior to the northern one thereby cementing the irreconcilability of the two models. If, as Chambers demonstrates, the homogenization and pluralization of others result in assertions of whiteness, then within the southern context, the homogenization of whiteness is a by-product of segregation, black-figure iconography and lynching. However, within the southern context, pluralization may be said to have been not so much forgone as simplified through commodification, which reduced the pluralized groups to two: black mammy and black beast rapist. Crucially, in Derrida's terms, segregation, black-figure iconography and lynching may be seen as 'congeneric in that they do not show anything at all, and are *conjoined* around an absent focus'.<sup>194</sup> It is not that they do not show anything as such, but that they all derive from an absent focus: whiteness, and effect it through bringing blackness and its connotations, whether it be the black beast rapist or mammy, to the foreground. In placing blackness at the centre of the narrative of whiteness, not only did segregation, black-face iconography and lynching begin to signify as the effects of whiteness, but they also contributed to what Babb, Frankenberg, Hartigan and Chambers term as 'invisibility', or 'unmarkedness'. These effects of whiteness entered signification through making blackness visible, and effectively, at least in Hale's terms, designated the South as the birthplace of whiteness and, through black-figure advertising, facilitated its spread nationwide.

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<sup>194</sup> Derrida, *Dissemination*, 252.

Place generally, and according to Hale the South in particular, materialises as a crucial factor to the formation of whiteness. In *Indians, Environment, and Identity on the Borders of American Literature: from Faulkner and Morrison to Walker and Silko*, Lindsay Claire Smith suggests that conceptions of self or group-consciousness and, in this instance, the meanings of whiteness, should be sought not in colour or blood, but ‘in the various traditions that influence these in-between places, or borderlands’.<sup>195</sup> These various traditions are understood as mythologies bound up with specific places, partly grounded in and influenced by historical and cultural experiences, as well as adapted to a particular locale. In the context of the South, and the broader history of the United States, such traditions will be closely linked to discourses of diaspora and involve a reinvention of place. While Smith discusses place with a particular emphasis on Native American and African American experience, such a limitation may lead to a fatuous conclusion that white people, regardless of their aspirations to whiteness, are ‘placeless’. An equally reductionist assumption may be reached, as Peter Kolchin notes, by ignoring the representations of whiteness that exclude the experiences of ‘nonwhites’ and ‘whites-in-the-making’ and the inattention to ‘historical and geographical context’.<sup>196</sup> If constructions of whiteness emerge at the boundary space between what is considered white and what is not, then assimilating both the white and nonwhite perspectives, and limiting the analysis of the construct to the South as a place instrumental in ‘shaping American notions of race’, should contribute to dispelling the myth of its homogeneity.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> Lindsay Claire Smith, *Indians, Environment, and Identity on the Borders of American Literature: From Faulkner and Morrison to Walker and Silko* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 13.

<sup>196</sup> Peter Kolchin, ‘Whiteness Studies: The New History of Race in America’, in *The Journal of American History* 89.1 (2002): 172.

<sup>197</sup> Peter Kolchin, ‘Whiteness Studies’, 172.

Certainly, Patrick D. Murphy, in 'Anotherness and Inhabitation in Recent Multicultural American Literature', does not deny white people a place.<sup>198</sup> Essentially, Murphy, like Smith, adopts an ecocritical perspective. Instead of the concept of 'absolute Other' propagated by colonialism, he suggests the model of 'I as another', which recognises the common humanity between the colonisers and the colonised.<sup>199</sup> However, he continues, the 'absolute Other' concept prevailed simply because it allowed the colonisers to view the natives in familiar terms as primitives and, consequently, justified expansionism and displacement.<sup>200</sup> In Murphy's terms, to facilitate the construction of whiteness in the South, the otherness of blackness needed to be suppressed and returned to the position of the absolute other. Such repression became characteristic of the region and was, according to Hale, instrumental in the forging of whiteness. Drawing upon V.N. Vološinov's *Freudianism*, Murphy points out that the self is not constructed *ex nihilo*, but instead constitutes a product of social, political, historical, economic and environmental discourses operating in a given space and time, in which one actively participates.<sup>201</sup> According to Vološinov, 'Any motivation of one's behavior, any instance of self-awareness [...] is an act of gauging oneself against some social norm, social evaluation – is, so to speak, the socialization of oneself and one's behavior'.<sup>202</sup> For Vološinov, self-awareness is born out of socialization and it is a product of the endless positioning of oneself against social norms, evaluations and affinities. Such positioning, while influencing conformity and mimicry, invariably fosters difference. Vološinov observes that '*self-consciousness*, [...] always leads to *class consciousness*'.<sup>203</sup> Indeed, self-consciousness is inseparable from

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<sup>198</sup> Patrick D. Murphy, in 'Anotherness and Inhabitation in Recent Multicultural American Literature', in *Writing the Environment: Ecocriticism and Literature*, ed. Richard Kerridge and Neil Sammells (London: Zed Books, 1998), 40-51.

<sup>199</sup> Murphy, 'Anotherness', in *Writing the Environment*, 40.

<sup>200</sup> Murphy, 'Anotherness', in *Writing the Environment*, 41.

<sup>201</sup> Murphy, 'Anotherness', in *Writing the Environment*, 42.

<sup>202</sup> Valentin Nikolaevich Vološinov, *Freudianism: a Marxist Critique*, trans. I.R. Titunik (New York: Academic Press, 1976), 45.

<sup>203</sup> Vološinov, *Freudianism*, 45.

class-consciousness and constituent of subjectivity so that ‘*Only as a part of social whole, only in and through a social class, does the human person become historically real and culturally productive.*’<sup>204</sup> Furthermore, it is precisely ‘*this social and historical localization that makes him a real human being*’.<sup>205</sup> Both class-consciousness and its attendant stratification of society are shaped by social, political, cultural and historical discourses which are not only unique to a given place, but also linked to environmental factors. In the South, and in contrast to the North, ‘the domination of landholding by large plantations’ combined with ‘monoculture with its utter dependence upon export markets’ and its attendant ‘chattel-bond labor-force’ were direct corollaries of a conjunction of socio-historical heritage with natural environment, which resulted in the emergence of a particular social and cultural ethos.<sup>206</sup> If desire is shaped by social and historical discourses, then the desire for whiteness as an acme of privilege will be socially constructed and historically preconditioned. The formation of the desire for whiteness will be further mediated by geographic locales, encoding certain socially and historically grounded practices which support unique conceptions of privilege. Although Murphy does not disregard the influence of social and political discourses upon conceptions of self-awareness, he emphasises history and environment. To him ‘one participates in a place about which one tells stories, rather than merely observing it passively or domineeringly’.<sup>207</sup> Moreover, Murphy remarks, such active participation ‘requires retelling

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<sup>204</sup> Vološinov, *Freudianism*, 15.

<sup>205</sup> Vološinov, *Freudianism*, 15.

<sup>206</sup> Allen, *The Invention*, 2.174. Allen observes that before Virginia was settled ‘A distinction was made between those who invested money but stayed in England, and those who went to Virginia as colonists. The former were called “Adventurers,” the latter were called “Planters”’. Allen continues that ‘These Adventurers and Planters would then be free and independent Virginia landowners’, in *The Invention*, 2.53-54. The status of planter as a pinnacle of southern society was confirmed in England and the emerging planter class consisted of those who were already socially privileged. Richard Gray concurs with Allen noting that ‘The colonization of Virginia was primarily a business enterprise, financed by merchants and nobles who wanted a good return on their investment,’ in *Writing the South: Ideas of an American Region* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 1.

<sup>207</sup> Murphy, ‘Anotherness’, in *Writing the Environment*, 46.



the old tales and untelling the old interpretations by others of one's own culture'.<sup>208</sup> In other words, an active participation in a place is bound up with an active engagement with one's heritage, the retelling and the untelling of old tales. If whiteness, as a historical and cultural construct and a part of one's heritage, forms a story, then it is important how it was told, untold and retold in a particular place. Consequently, any discussion of an active participation in a place situated in the South will inevitably lead to the mythologized plantation and the peculiar institution which, literally, helped to plough 'the red earth', the possession of which guaranteed whiteness.<sup>209</sup> Viewed from this perspective, lynching and segregation in the Post-Reconstruction South constituted active tools not only in the retelling of the absolute otherness of blackness, but also of whiteness which black emancipation threatened to 'untell'.

The influence of the story of the South, both as an actual and imagined place, on the narrative of whiteness is taken up by David R. Roediger in *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*.<sup>210</sup> Roediger's meticulous historical account emphasises the interconnectedness of the discourses of race and slavery, which he perceives as instrumental in the genesis of whiteness characteristic of the American working class. According to Roediger, 'the first sixty-five years of the nineteenth century were the formative period of working class whiteness, at least in the North'.<sup>211</sup> The formation of whiteness was accompanied by 'direct comparisons between bondage and

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<sup>208</sup> Murphy, 'Anotherness', in *Writing the Environment*, 44. In 'Conserving Natural and Cultural Diversity: The Prose and Poetry of Pat Mora', in *Further Afield in the study of Nature-Oriented Literature* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000), 134-35, Murphy revises the statement to read: 'requires retelling the old tales and untelling the old interpretations by people outside one's own culture'. In terms of whiteness, the revision highlights its constructedness, which occurs in the space between the distinct regional practices and their interpretations by regional outsiders.

<sup>209</sup> Tara McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie: Race, Gender, and Nostalgia in the Imagined South* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 51.

<sup>210</sup> David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991).

<sup>211</sup> Roediger, *The Wages*, 14.

wage labor' which, fuelled by fears of dependency, resulted in the white workers' constructions of 'an image of the Black population as "other" – as embodying the preindustrial style of life the white worker hated and longed for'.<sup>212</sup> Such comparisons would not have been possible prior to the nineteenth century since, as Allen points out, "the white race" – supraclass unity of European-Americans in opposition to African-Americans did not and could not have existed'.<sup>213</sup> What facilitated such analogies was a gradual disenfranchisement of the black population, systematically implemented throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>214</sup> By the dawn of the nineteenth century, the black other would have been successfully constructed. In this light, Roediger's suggestion that the Civil War and black emancipation 'called pride in whiteness into question' appears problematic, since it implies that the black population was not viewed as other before the outbreak of the conflict.<sup>215</sup> Rather, it could be suggested that the grounds upon which this otherness was constructed underwent a radical change in the aftermath of the conflict. In the antebellum period, according to Roediger, that notion of otherness rested upon an imagined, idyllic style of life associated with the preindustrial era and the nostalgic evocations of the non-free status of the black population. In the postbellum period, however, such nostalgic recollections were irrevocably interrupted by the emancipation of the black population. Black freedom was not directly responsible for the loss of pride in whiteness, rather, it could be suggested that it removed a criterion for whiteness, one that served to differentiate whites from blacks in the antebellum era. Roediger's assertion,

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<sup>212</sup> Roediger, *The Wages*, 14.

<sup>213</sup> Allen, *The Invention*, 2.162.

<sup>214</sup> While Allen observes that African-Americans were prohibited to import bond-labourers, 'The enactment of such ban in 1670 clearly implied that it was an accepted practice prior to that time', in *The Invention*, 2.183. Elsewhere, Allen traces 'the outset of the "white race" era' back to early eighteenth century. As he observes, 'Prior to 1723, all freeholders in Virginia, African-American and European-American, were permitted to vote, with the exception of women, persons under twenty-one years of age, and non-conforming Catholics. These categories had been excluded from the franchise by laws passed in 1699 and again in 1705'. In 1723, an act was passed which 'for the first time deprived African-Americans of the vote', in *The Invention*, 1.84-85.

<sup>215</sup> Roediger, *The Wages*, 14.

though it oversimplifies the issue of black emancipation, enables him to demonstrate the way in which comparisons with the black population, but not with Native Americans, spurred the emergence of the white working class. Since ‘the mythical/historical Native American male was seen as *independent*,’ his image could not be utilised in a struggle for social upward mobility, which entailed conformity.<sup>216</sup> Interestingly, to Allen, the reasons why analogies with Native Americans did not aid the emergence of the white working class appear more pragmatic, and less associated with independence. Although the enslavement of Native Americans existed, it was practised on an incommensurably smaller scale than that of African-Americans. What thwarted its development was the ‘resistance by the Indian bond-laborers, principally by running away, which merged sometimes with the same form of resistance employed by African and European bond-laborers’.<sup>217</sup> What is more, the Native American’s familiarity with the terrain meant that such escapes stood quite a high chance of success.<sup>218</sup> Additionally, the development of the enslavement of the Native American was stunted by ‘the necessity to maintain nearby friendly, or “treaty” Indians in the buffer role between the Anglo-American colonies and the more remote “hostile”, or foreign-allied, tribes’.<sup>219</sup> The independence of the Native American was less a matter of mythologizing than expediency and had little to do with his actual independence. Rather, the notion of the independence of the Native American was a corollary of the system of colonial and racial oppression which, for economically capitalist reasons, assigned a different place in the emerging social order to Native Americans from that allotted to African-Americans. Through the mixture of resistance and cooperation, as Allen demonstrates, American Indians could be seen as ‘serving’ the colony without being deemed ‘servile’. Consequently, they did not represent values from which the white

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<sup>216</sup> Roediger, *The Wages*, 22-23.

<sup>217</sup> Allen, *The Invention*, 2.41.

<sup>218</sup> Allen, *The Invention*, 2.42.

<sup>219</sup> Allen, *The Invention*, 2.41.

worker, with his budding conviction of whiteness, needed to dissociate himself. By contrast, Roediger proposes:

Comparisons with black slaves or even Northern “free” Blacks were tempting because whites had defined these groups as servile. Thus, by considering a range of comparisons with Blacks in weighing his status as a white worker, the white laboring man could articulate a self image that, depending on his wont, emphasised his pride in independence or his fears of growing dependency.<sup>220</sup>

Effectively, in Roediger’s terms, the presence of chattel slavery, and its connotations with bondage and forced labour, provided a fertile ground upon which notions of the independence of the white working class could be nurtured. Although Roediger, like Hale, establishes slavery and its connotations, not race, as a vital point of differentiation and identification for the white working man, he simultaneously complicates his stance by adding that ‘in a society in which Blackness and servility were so thoroughly intertwined – North and South – assertions of white freedom could not be raceless’.<sup>221</sup> He further emphasises the racial aspect of slavery by claiming that it enabled ‘white workers’ to define ‘themselves by negation – as not Black and not Chinese’.<sup>222</sup> Accordingly, white workers perceived themselves as ‘free laborers because they were not slaves’, and ‘considered themselves manly/mature/middle class because they were not allegedly degraded and dissolute people of color’.<sup>223</sup> The functions of blackness, or otherness, are inextricably bound up with not only race, but also lead to racialisation of gender and class roles. This statement inadvertently contradicts Roediger’s previous assertion that the otherness of the black population was constituted solely in its evocation of the simplicity of the preindustrial era. Rather, the exaltation of the idyllic past relied on a reinterpretation of inferiority and the black other, who inadvertently occupied the position of the working

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<sup>220</sup> Roediger, *The Wages*, 22-23.

<sup>221</sup> Roediger, *The Wages*, 49.

<sup>222</sup> Roediger, *Towards*, 66.

<sup>223</sup> Roediger, *Towards*, 66.

class albeit, in most cases, without the benefit of wages, was cast as its embodiment. Allen also notes the interdependence existing between the emergence of the white working class and slavery, though, unlike Roediger, he does not link it to the idyll of the pre-industrial era. As Allen points out, ‘the intermediate status of the poor whites’ depended upon ‘the enslavement of the Negro and the concomitant fact of their own non-slave status’ which carried ‘the privileges of keeping weapons, marrying, moving about freely, and the male white privilege of assuming familiarity with Negro females’.<sup>224</sup> Since most, if not all, of these perquisites were successively denied to the black population, by default they became the characteristics of white privilege. The concomitant denial of basic human rights to the black population and granting them to poor European-Americans assigned to the latter what Allen terms a ‘buffer role’ and ensured their promotion into the “white race”.<sup>225</sup> What is more, these privileges ‘were made to appear to be conditional on keeping “not-whites” down and out’.<sup>226</sup> Arguably, the denial of basic rights to the black population became the measure of their otherness, and the idea of white privilege rested on the perpetuation of this otherness, while the memory of the peculiar institution proved a convenient tool in shaping perceptions of what designated alterity. This idea of white privilege is associated with the lower classes of whites, whether they be firmly entrenched in America or newly-arrived. Indeed, as Allen points out, ‘The ruling class took special pains to be sure that the people they ruled were propagandized in the moral and legal ethos of white supremacy.’<sup>227</sup> Such propaganda successfully diverted the poor whites’ attention from their own low social standing by elevating them above the black population. The disenfranchisement of the black population cemented the illusion of white privilege for the lower classes by becoming an inexhaustible source of unfavourable comparisons

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<sup>224</sup> Allen, *The Invention*, 1.154.

<sup>225</sup> Allen, *The Invention*, 1.14.

<sup>226</sup> Allen, *The Invention*, 1.14.

<sup>227</sup> Allen, *The Invention*, 2.251.

which shaped notions of lower-class whiteness. Effectively, the somewhat spurious idea of white privilege so graciously bestowed upon the lower classes, which, as Allen observes, was ‘the birthright of the poorest person in England’, became a racial privilege.<sup>228</sup> What is more, this systematically cultivated perception of racial privilege masked both the social and racial oppression of the white lower classes by the ruling elite. Indeed, ‘the peculiarity of the “peculiar institution” derived, rather, from the control aspect’.<sup>229</sup> According to Allen, the white race was ‘invented as the social control formation whose distinguishing characteristic was not the participation of the slaveholding class’, but ‘the participation of the laboring classes’.<sup>230</sup> Though the ubiquitous notion of white privilege rendered the distinction between über whiteness of the ruling elite and aspirations to whiteness of the working class less acute, it did not diminish the futility of such aspirations. The white working class became an integral part of ‘the buffer control stratum’ which, though it excluded the non-European, non-free proletarians, ‘was itself made up of free proletarians’ whose status did not differ much, if at all, from that of the disenfranchised.<sup>231</sup> In the rather apposite words of Marquis de Chastellux, who visited Virginia in 1782, the poor European-Americans had ‘little but their complexion to console them’.<sup>232</sup> The privilege of ‘white race’ was therefore conveyed by the upper classes upon the less fortunate or enterprising European-Americans who then became its staunch supporters. Although white, as a skin colour, may have begun to symbolise privilege and freedom, it was certainly not synonymous with whiteness. However, such privileging of white skin colour characterises a social system that epitomises ‘the art and science of colonial rule’ which seeks to ‘maximise the return on capital investment from a social order based on racial

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<sup>228</sup> Allen, *The Invention*, 2.248.

<sup>229</sup> Allen, *The Invention*, 2.12.

<sup>230</sup> Allen, *The Invention*, 2.251.

<sup>231</sup> Allen, *The Invention*, 2.13.

<sup>232</sup> Cited in Allen, *The Invention*, 2.256. In her autobiography, Ellen Glasgow makes a similar observation, noting that ‘the “poor whites” possessed nothing but the freedom of their malnutrition’, in *The Woman Within* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), 52.

oppression, while assuring its perpetuation through an efficient system of social control’.<sup>233</sup>

The perpetuation of racial oppression of African-Americans was indispensable to bestowing a sense of whiteness, based on an idea of privilege, onto the white working class who, regardless of these benefits, could not aspire to whiteness proper precisely because of their social status.

Considering the newly bestowed privileges guaranteeing a place among the ‘white race’ to the poorest of whites, it is hardly surprising that the expansion of the lexicon of working class whiteness was, as Roediger illustrates, fuelled by ‘the continuing desire not to be considered anything like an African-American’.<sup>234</sup> For Roediger, the disassociation from African-Americans and servitude is evident in the rising popularity of terms such as ‘hands’, ‘helps’, and ‘helpers’ to denote white farm or domestic workers, whereby both became substitutes for ‘servants’.<sup>235</sup> Since the terms ‘slave’ and ‘servant’, both of which were frequently used interchangeably, invoked unwelcome connotations of ‘masters’, such substitutions became ‘marks of self-assertion’ for white workers who could see themselves as ““not slaves” and “not negurs””.<sup>236</sup> According to Roediger, the terms ‘hand’ and ‘help’ become metonymic in the sense that they convey a disassociation from servitude and its connotations, whether it be of slavery or white indenture. Effectively, the terms become

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<sup>233</sup> Allen, *The Invention*, 1.53.

<sup>234</sup> Roediger, *The Wages*, 67.

<sup>235</sup> Roediger, *The Wages*, 49.

<sup>236</sup> Roediger, *The Wages*, 47-50. In the seventeenth century, ‘hand’ was used to denote ‘manual worker’, while an earlier example ‘*handþen manservant*’, which derives from Old English, suggests that derivatives of the term would have been in circulation for a considerable time before slavery was institutionalised in the United States, in *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, ed. C.T. Onions (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 425-26. However, the most compelling counterargument to Roediger’s theory can be found in Charles Waddell Chesnutt’s collection of stories, *The Conjure Woman and Other Conjure Tales*. Here, Chesnutt recreates the black vernacular speech of the nineteenth century, and the narrator of the stories, Uncle Julius, who is a former slave, frequently uses the term ‘han’s’ to refer to other slaves. The stories from the collection are discussed in Chapter 5, where it is also referenced. Similarly, in her autobiography, Ellen Glasgow recalls that her mammy ‘would make one of the colored “hands” harness a horse to an old wagon’ and they would pretend to be gypsies, in *The Woman*, 33. Both Chesnutt and Glasgow’s usage of the term and its etymology suggest that it would have been used to denote manual workers regardless of skin colour, making Roediger’s assertion specious. Kolchin, in ‘Whiteness Studies’, offers a critique of Roediger’s discussion of those terms, 156.

representative of class distinctions and conveyors of difference and tacit privilege, and all this is accomplished without reference to skin colour. Indeed, 'hand', disassociated from corporeal wholeness both transcends its ontic presence and simultaneously fetishises, through its implied functions, the privilege of being a 'hand'. Paradoxically, in doing so it reaffirms class divisions and shades of privilege, or indeed 'shades of whiteness', since being a 'hand' inadvertently evokes hierarchy.<sup>237</sup> Roediger observes a similar tendency among the white proletariat to distance themselves from the servility associated with blackness in the application of terms such as 'white slavery' and 'the slavery of wages'. Although both terms remained in wide circulation throughout the nineteenth century, their usage was directed at improving the working conditions of whites, and not in anti-slavery campaigns.<sup>238</sup> However, Roediger asserts, 'white slavery' became more popular of the two terms 'because it did not call into question chattel slavery itself'.<sup>239</sup> 'White slavery', though it evoked slavery as a form of dependency, concurrently maintained race as a crucial distinction both between black and white labourers as well as among white workers. However, the striking similarity which Roediger notes in the application of adjectives such as 'savage', 'simian', 'grovelling', 'bestial', 'lazy' and 'wild', which had previously been reserved for the African-American population, to descriptions of Irish Catholics reduces the impact of skin colour on such distinctions.<sup>240</sup> This tendency to ascribe characteristics of inferiority to particular ethnic groups to justify bond-servitude or

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<sup>237</sup> Edward Murguía and Tyrone Forman use the term 'shades of whiteness' in their discussion of preconceived notions of whiteness which lead to the emergence of hegemonic whiteness, in 'Shades of Whiteness: The Mexican American Experience in Relation to Anglos and Blacks', in *White Out*, 65.

<sup>238</sup> As Roediger demonstrates, the terms 'white slavery' and 'slavery of wages' were frequently, but erroneously, used interchangeably. They entered into circulation in the 1830s and 1840s respectively. According to Roediger, the issues with applications of 'wage slavery' lay in 'its very precision and directness', since 'many of those being described as slaves were not wage-earners' like 'tenant farmers and those imprisoned for debt', 'but the problem of the latter was precisely that they could not enter the wage labor market'. Notwithstanding its evocation of the white hue, the phrase 'white slavery' became 'favored by radical Democratic politicians [...] because it could unite various elements of their coalition – wage workers, debtors, small employers and even-slaveholders – without necessarily raising the issue of whether the spread of wage labor was always and everywhere antirepublican'. Curiously, 'white slavery' was also associated with female prostitution. Roediger, *The Wages*, 67; and Roediger, *The Wages*, 72-73.

<sup>239</sup> Roediger, *The Wages*, 73.

<sup>240</sup> Roediger, *The Wages*, 133.



class discrimination is resonant of Social Darwinism which, as Peter Dickens notes, is predicated on the assumption that ‘the success of a human being depends on his or her inborn characteristics’.<sup>241</sup> ‘It is a theory of society,’ Dickens continues, ‘in which an underclass is seen as composed of genetically inferior peoples who are in inevitable decline’.<sup>242</sup> Such genetically presupposed inferiority and degeneration carry teleological connotations, whereby some peoples are preordained to occupy an inferior position in society, which simultaneously excludes them from participation in social advancement. Since teleology, as Dickens points out, ‘overlaps with “progress”’, such peoples are deemed irreversibly atavistic and primitive.<sup>243</sup> The notion of the presupposed primitivism of certain peoples derives from polygenist thought, prevalent in the nineteenth century, which proposed ‘that many then contemporary races should be seen as still extant versions of earlier, inherently less developed, species’.<sup>244</sup> The versatility of the polygenist doctrine proved indispensable to fostering parallels between ‘black people and women with nature and with apes’.<sup>245</sup> Since, as Dickens observes, ‘Western culture is largely premised on a split between humans on the one hand and nature on the other’, such analogies intentionally exclude black people, women, or indeed the Irish, from the category of humanity.<sup>246</sup> While the widespread application of terms like ‘savage’, ‘simian’, ‘wild’, and ‘bestial’ strengthens the presupposed link of these groups with nature, it also demonstrates that in the absence of visual markers of difference, linguistic re-appropriations serve the purpose of exclusionary racialisation.

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<sup>241</sup> Peter Dickens, *Social Darwinism: Linking Evolutionary Thought to Social Theory* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), 64.

<sup>242</sup> Dickens, *Social Darwinism*, 64.

<sup>243</sup> Dickens, *Social*, 11.

<sup>244</sup> Dickens, *Social*, 14-15.

<sup>245</sup> Dickens, *Social*, 52.

<sup>246</sup> Dickens, *Social*, 48.

Since ‘white slavery’ did not call into question chattel slavery, which was primarily associated with blackness, it went a long way towards reinforcing the otherwise tenuous difference between indentured servitude, apprenticeship, farm tenancy or wage labour, all of which, according to Roediger, constituted formative parts of a ‘continuum of oppression among whites’.<sup>247</sup> This is not to say that chattel slavery, and its connotations with blackness, erased or reduced economic and social differences existing among white working classes, rather, it brought into sharp relief the notion of common whiteness which, Roediger asserts, began to signify as ‘a hesitantly emerging consensus holding together a very diverse working class’.<sup>248</sup> Indeed, Roediger proposes that ‘Blackness and whiteness’ were ‘created together’.<sup>249</sup> Though bold, the assertion contradicts Roediger’s broader argument. In Roediger’s terms, blackness as a determinant of whiteness is associated with chattel slavery and servitude. In order to be cast as oppositions, each concept needed to be constructed separately. The notion of the ideal would have been formulated before blackness could, according to Roediger, exemplify the ‘embodiment of the preindustrial past that they [white workers] scorned and missed’.<sup>250</sup> Furthermore, Roediger continues, blackness inadvertently served as a projection of ‘preindustrial joys, with entertainment powers and with “natural humor”’ which became no longer acceptable to white workers on their quest for social betterment and upward mobility.<sup>251</sup> Once established, the conception of blackness not only enabled white workers to dissociate themselves from the disparaged preindustrial frivolity, but also provided a ground upon which it could be projected, vicariously enjoyed and scorned, without compromising their claim to whiteness. In this respect, to use Babb’s expression, blackness and its connotations aided the establishment

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<sup>247</sup> Roediger, *The Wages*, 25.

<sup>248</sup> Roediger, *The Wages*, 97.

<sup>249</sup> Roediger, *The Wages*, 95; Roediger reiterates the statement that ‘Blackness and whiteness are thus created together’, in *Towards*, 64.

<sup>250</sup> Roediger, *The Wages*, 97.

<sup>251</sup> Roediger, *The Wages*, 104.

of the ‘standards of belief and behavior’, which would subsequently delineate the concept of whiteness particular to the white working class.<sup>252</sup> The process of projection was successful ‘because it enabled them [white workers] to displace anxieties within the white population onto Blacks’.<sup>253</sup> In other words, such projections were successful precisely because they left the ideal of whiteness intact.

This displacement of anxieties and simultaneous projection of redundant ideals were partly achieved through the means of blackface minstrelsy. Roediger traces the origins of blackface minstrelsy to antebellum Philadelphia, where it became a part of a social ritual during which the lower classes ‘mocked the hierarchy and compulsion associated with militia service’.<sup>254</sup> Interestingly, he adds, ‘in parts of New England, “nigger shows” quickly came to provide blackface at militia days where black faces were barred’.<sup>255</sup> Paradoxically, blackface acted as a proxy for the black population, but one that would conform to the white, already preconceived, idea of blackness, and one that could be simultaneously controlled and policed by the white performers. Indeed, Roediger aptly asserts that ‘even in the midst of revelry and even given the real desires of the crowds to “act black”, the celebrations needed to underscore continually the point that they were still white’.<sup>256</sup> Acting black, then, signified dually. Firstly, it revived a connection with the idyll of the preindustrial era, which, according to Rohy, could be seen as ‘a point of origin’.<sup>257</sup> Secondly, it served to reaffirm the whiteness of the performers who could, literally, wash the blackness off and, metaphorically, return to respectability. Similarly, Ralph Ellison notes that the ‘willful stylization and modification of the natural face and hands’, which

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<sup>252</sup> Babb, *Whiteness*, 148.

<sup>253</sup> Roediger, *The Wages*, 100.

<sup>254</sup> Roediger, *The Wages*, 105.

<sup>255</sup> Roediger, *The Wages*, 105.

<sup>256</sup> Roediger, *The Wages*, 107.

<sup>257</sup> Rohy, *Displacing*, 228.

constituted a characteristic feature of blackface, ‘was imperative for the evocation of that atmosphere in which the fascination of blackness could be enjoyed, the comic catharsis achieved’.<sup>258</sup> While the blackened faces materialise as outward signs of the cathartic experience, they simultaneously dissociate it from the whiteness of the performers which remains ‘unsullied’. According to Roediger, the image of the ‘Black South’ fulfilled the role of the ‘imagined haven standing against the deadening aspects of progress for popular Northern minstrel audiences’.<sup>259</sup> Hale concurs with Roediger by pithily asserting that since ‘nostalgia complemented progress’, the South in the aftermath of the Civil War signified as ‘both a place apart, outside the flow of time, and an essential part of the national whole’.<sup>260</sup> Roediger’s argument, in large part, follows that of Alexander Saxton in ‘Blackface Minstrelsy and Jacksonian Ideology’, who proposes that ‘the South became symbolically their [urban whites’] old home: the place where simplicity, happiness, all the things we have left behind, exist outside of time’.<sup>261</sup> However, the slave culture, as well as slaves themselves, came to be satirised in blackface, as both were perceived as close to nature – ‘part of the nature of the South’.<sup>262</sup> And through this association with nature, the South acquired a ‘timeless’ and ‘ahistorical’ quality that could be adopted and adapted to fit individual contexts of the newly arrived urban settlers.<sup>263</sup> Such evocations of the plantation South provided an antidote to the rapidly progressing malaise of the nineteenth century – ‘the collapse of society based on community’.<sup>264</sup> Capitalism and urbanization irrevocably altered the perception of society as ‘characterized by forms of communal and collective

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<sup>258</sup> Ralph Ellison, ‘Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke’, in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: a Norton Critical Edition*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., ed. Sculley Bradley, Richmond Croom Beatty, E, Hudson Long, and Thomas Cooley (New York: Norton, 1977), 421.

<sup>259</sup> Roediger, *The Wages*, 120.

<sup>260</sup> Hale, *Making*, 143; and Hale, *Making*, 4.

<sup>261</sup> Alexander Saxton, ‘Blackface Minstrelsy and Jacksonian Ideology’, in *American Quarterly* 27.1 (1975):14.

<sup>262</sup> Saxton, ‘Blackface’, 14.

<sup>263</sup> Saxton, ‘Blackface’, 14.

<sup>264</sup> Dickens, *Social*, 27.

ownership of land'.<sup>265</sup> Consequently, the whiteness that blackface minstrelsy evoked re-introduced a common sense of community among the white working class, while the mythologized South provided the lost association with land. In providing an illusion of community, blackface minstrelsy acted as a healing balm for the scars of American experience, namely diaspora, which Stephen Fender characterises as 'the idea of process – of movement and renewal – through a time of trial'.<sup>266</sup> Though they were spared the vagaries of ocean crossing, for the rural settlers who migrated to the cities, blackface, through its evocations of the rural South as the prelapsarian cradle of origin, supplied a link with a lost innocence and a style of life. Although blackface minstrelsy may have furnished the South with a timeless and ahistorical appeal, as a rhetoric it was not apolitical. Indeed, Saxton points out that it was underpinned by Jacksonian ideology promulgating 'nationalism, egalitarianism and white supremacy'.<sup>267</sup> For Saxton, the insidious influence of blackface lay in its ability to manipulate and subvert common human emotions 'such as joy and grief, love, fear, [and] longing' through the act of performance so that the white audience could simultaneously identify with and scorn 'the hopeless aspiration of the puppets to become human'.<sup>268</sup> Effectively, the nonwhiteness re-enacted in blackface became tantamount to non-humanity. Curiously, whiteness thus constructed materialises as a double simulacrum which not only attempts to replicate an image which had not existed before, but also grounds the replication in another simulacrum, namely the blackness engendered by blackface performance; it is a simulacrum of a simulacrum.

The non-humanity of blackness, both Roediger and Saxton suggest, was reified through the perpetuation of racial stereotypes. Just as the distancing from slavery was achieved through

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<sup>265</sup> Dickens, *Social*, 27.

<sup>266</sup> Stephen Fender, 'The American Difference', in *Modern American Culture*, ed. M. Gidley (London: Longman, 1996), 2.

<sup>267</sup> Saxton, 'Blackface', 23.

<sup>268</sup> Saxton, 'Blackface', 27.

the medium of language, so was the performance of blackness linguistically reinforced. According to Roediger, terms like ‘coon’, ‘buck’ and ‘Mose’ were re-appropriated and acquired new, ‘blackened’ meanings.<sup>269</sup> Indeed, Roediger asserts, not only did the appellations have ‘trajectories that led from white to black’, but also ‘each of them went from describing particular kinds of whites who had not internalized capitalist work discipline and whose places in the new world of wage labor were problematic, to stereotyping Blacks’.<sup>270</sup> Like Hartigan, Roediger emphasises the impact of stereotyping on the construction of whiteness, albeit in its nascent incarnation insofar as the emerging white working class is concerned. Whereas Hartigan’s discussion focuses on the intraracial aspect of stereotyping, Roediger’s analysis accentuates the propensity of stereotyping for blurring class and race distinctions. In blurring these classifications, such linguistic re-appropriations inadvertently reaffirm the heterogeneity of whiteness, for they are grounded in the identification of undesirable qualities in the white population. Effectively, they point to the existence of ‘shades of whiteness,’ and racialisation of class.<sup>271</sup> Through the pluralization and homogenization of others, which appear characteristic of blackface, not only is blackness marked as a repository of ‘derivedness, deviation, [and] secondariness’, but it is also a result of a metamorphosis from ‘white’ to ‘black’.<sup>272</sup> Although ‘derivedness’, ‘deviation’ and ‘secondariness’ are established as repositories of discarded

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<sup>269</sup> Roediger notes that in the early nineteenth century the word ‘coon’ ‘referred to ‘a white country person’ or ‘a sharpster’. However, after 1848, ‘coon’ emerged as ‘a racial slur’. Similarly, ‘buck’ was applied to describe a ‘dashing, young, virile man’, but in the early 1840s, its meaning shifted and was ‘unambiguously cited as a noun to refer to a Black man’. Likewise, ‘in the late antebellum period’ ‘Mose’ ‘was synonymous with the character of the “B’hoy”, the Irish and urban street pronunciation of *boy*, and one that denoted a particular type of tough, rowdy and often dandified urban youth,’ Roediger, *The Wages*, 98-99. Saxton’s defines ‘Mose’ as a ‘gallant volunteer fireman, avid participant in New York City politics, an invincible pugilist, [...] the urban hero derived from, yet standing against, older rural heroes like the New England Yankee or the half-man, half-alligator of the Southwest. [...] Essentially he stood for the new mass culture as against the “high” culture of the old elite’. Saxton, ‘Blackface’, 9. A less detailed analysis of the term ‘coon’ appears in Roediger, *Towards*, 65.

<sup>270</sup> Roediger, *The Wages*, 100.

<sup>271</sup> Chambers, ‘The Unexamined’, in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 190.

<sup>272</sup> Chambers, ‘The Unexamined’, in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 189.

‘white’ traits, they are not synonymous with ‘undesirability’.<sup>273</sup> Rather, the new industrial context has rendered them, through their nostalgic connotation with an idyllic past, incompatible with notions of white aspiration. On the surface, blackface seemingly reduces the constructedness of whiteness by locking it in the black – white dichotomy. On a deeper level, however, in a blend of parody and pastiche, blackface glorifies and validates the ‘standards of belief and behavior’ that cast whiteness as a norm. This affirmation through negation is indicative of the symbolic values that fuel the perpetuation of the construct and ensure that it is manifested in and effected through the shifting temporalities of race, class, gender, and place. Although it may be tempting to construe whiteness as universal, the myriad whitenesses that it produces undermine such claims to universality. The anatomy of whiteness varies and is contingent on the very categories that constitute its effects. To fathom even its simplified meaning – privilege – would mean unravelling its symbolism and examining the cultural, psychological and ideological mechanisms that constitute the *modus operandi* of its perpetuation.

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<sup>273</sup> Chambers, ‘The Unexamined’, in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 189.

## Chapter two: *De-constructing whiteness*

All right, make me a nigger then – but that don't mean a trashy one.' And he would have made her a neat clean respectable Negro woman, herself but black.<sup>274</sup>

### The impossible tale of a universal master signifier

Penetrating the core of whiteness would mean, to invoke Melville once again, not only solving its 'incantation' and the 'mystery' of its meaning(s), but also answering the question of what perpetuates it. Any attempt at establishing these elusive, and yet enduring, criteria will necessarily need to branch out beyond the visual aspect of whiteness, and focus instead on the effects whiteness produces which are manifest in the discourses of class, race and gender, and to examine their causality. Indeed, the very terms 'incantation' and 'mystery' indicate connotations that reach beyond the visible manifestations of race engendered by skin colour. Although race is an important factor in the discourse of whiteness, narrowing any exploration of the construct to this perspective only, even if broadened to include the racialisation of class, appears to skim its ontological surface. Kalpana Sheshadri-Crooks, in *Desiring Whiteness: A Lacanian Analysis of Race*, delves more deeply into how whiteness as a concept may be constructed by situating her discussion in the realm of the symbolic.<sup>275</sup> Shehadri-Crooks defines whiteness as the 'master signifier without a signified which establishes a signifying chain based on inclusions and exclusions'.<sup>276</sup> Furthermore, she continues, whiteness is the desire for the master signifier, for wholeness, which, located in the Real, elides language. As it is also a

<sup>274</sup> Flannery O'Connor, 'Revelation', in *The Secret Self: Short Stories by Women*, ed. Hermione Lee (London: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1989), 207-08.

<sup>275</sup> Kalpana Sheshadri-Crooks, *Desiring Whiteness: A Lacanian Analysis of Race* (London: Routledge, 2000).

<sup>276</sup> Sheshadri-Crooks, *Desiring*, 3.



historically and culturally fuelled invention, it is engendered by visual difference.<sup>277</sup> Since all subjects, in Lacan's view, are linguistically constructed, whiteness as a law installs a system of racial difference, which is unconsciously assimilated by all subjects. Since the assimilation occurs through language, it is regarded as 'natural' and 'neutral.' To Sheshadri-Crooks, whiteness as a difference constitutes the primary signifier of the symbolic order of race.<sup>278</sup> Effectively, Sheshadri-Crooks observes a duality of whiteness, whereby it constitutes both the unconscious desire for wholeness and a visible representation of difference occasioned by the presence of the other. Such difference, unlike desire, exists within the realm of the symbolic and can be articulated through language. Since it is linguistically constructed, its influence would be both naturalised and neutralised, rendering whiteness ubiquitous and 'invisible'. The casting of whiteness as a master signifier without stable signifieds carries within itself its own antagonism, for it inadvertently removes the possibility of its operating on the bases of inclusions and exclusions. However, equating whiteness with a desire for wholeness extends it to all desiring subjects, whether they be white or black. Since 'Desire', as Kojève suggests, 'is realized as action negating the given' and the essence of the desiring subject is 'becoming', the desire for wholeness through which whiteness is reproduced precludes its attainment of completeness.<sup>279</sup>

Furthermore, Sheshadri-Crooks argues, whiteness may be considered a 'transcendental signifier equated with humanness'.<sup>280</sup> Interestingly, Sheshadri-Crooks suggests that 'the notion of the proto-Aryan language [...] is the locus of whiteness' and consequently

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<sup>277</sup> Sheshadri-Crooks, *Desiring*, 20-21. According to Alan Sheridan's translation, 'the real is the impossible' and 'the real is that which always returns to the same place', in 'Translator's Note' to Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection* (London: Routledge, 2009), xii.

<sup>278</sup> Sheshadri-Crooks, *Desiring*, 24-25.

<sup>279</sup> Kojève, *Introduction*, 5.

<sup>280</sup> Sheshadri-Crooks, *Desiring*, 54-55.

humanness.<sup>281</sup> To illustrate the point, she invokes a series of lectures by the nineteenth-century German philosopher Fichte, collected in *Addresses to the German Nation*.<sup>282</sup> Fichte's *Addresses*, delivered in 1807 (in exceedingly precarious circumstances when Germany as a unified country had not yet been formed and the existing German states were under French occupation), constitute a mixture of philosophical patriotism aimed at uplifting the morale of the nation.<sup>283</sup> Essentially, for Fichte, language 'distinguishes the Germans from other peoples of Teutonic descent'.<sup>284</sup> According to Fichte:

The difference resulted immediately from the original separation of the common stock and consists in this, that the Germans still speak a living language and have done so ever since it first streamed forth from nature, whereas other Teutonic tribes speak a language that stirs only on the surface yet is dead at the root.<sup>285</sup>

In pointing out the uniqueness of the German language as a living language, Fichte concludes that all comparisons 'between the German and neo-Latin languages are void'.<sup>286</sup> Effectively, Fichte identifies the German language as the first constitutive element of German superiority, whereby 'naturalness on the German side, arbitrariness and artifice on the foreign side [Teutonic speakers of neo-Latin languages] – these constitute the fundamental difference'.<sup>287</sup> Moreover, those speaking the natural German language, and thus unpolluted by foreign influences, are characterised by 'the spirit of piety, respectability, modesty, [and] community'.<sup>288</sup> It is precisely because of these attributes that the Germans 'as an original people [...] has the right to call itself the people', a claim reified linguistically as the word "German" in its proper signification denotes exactly

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<sup>281</sup> Sheshadri-Crooks, *Desiring*, 51.

<sup>282</sup> Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Addresses to the German Nation*, ed. Gregory Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>283</sup> Gregory Moore, 'Introduction', in Fichte *Addresses*, xi-xv.

<sup>284</sup> Fichte, *Addresses*, 57.

<sup>285</sup> Fichte, *Addresses*, 57-58.

<sup>286</sup> Fichte, *Addresses*, 58.

<sup>287</sup> Fichte, *Addresses*, 67.

<sup>288</sup> Fichte, *Addresses*, 83.

that'.<sup>289</sup> In casting Germans as 'the original people', in both spiritual and linguistic terms, Fichte proposes a model for humanness. According to Sheshadri-Crooks, it is precisely in the appropriation of the 'bourgeois notion of the "ordinary" man as quintessentially German that perhaps the crux of Aryanism lies'.<sup>290</sup> Furthermore, she continues:

it is this core conflation of the Aryan as human that characterises the function of Whiteness: a signifier that not only inaugurates a system of differences, but one that attempts to signify the impossible, a core notion of humanness, or being itself – the subject beyond symbolic determinacy – that founds the anxious regime of visibility.<sup>291</sup>

Sheshadri-Crooks's equation of 'Aryaness' with humanness is problematic in that it is based on a contradictory notion of a universal subject who both transcends the symbolic order and, yet, is capable of introducing 'the anxious regime of visibility'. Indeed, Sheshadri-Crooks emphasises the point, adding that 'Fichte's use of race is not in terms of white vs. black, or even European vs. non-Europeans [...] – the grand binaries that inform race theory – but Germanic Teutons vs. other Teutons'.<sup>292</sup> Such a conflation of Germanness or Aryaness with whiteness universalises these constructs, whereas Fichte's intention is to stress the political and limit the universal to German. Since at the time Fichte formulated his theory most, if not all Germans, would have been white, the grand binary opposition or differentiating between black and white would not have constituted a part of his everyday experience and, consequently, did not merit particular attention. Although the 'regime of visibility' to which Sheshadri-Crooks refers would have operated on cultural and social bases, it, nonetheless, would have required a paradigm that could be determined, even if set at the peak of the symbolic order. For Fichte, however, it is not a

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<sup>289</sup> Fichte, *Addresses*, 85; Moore offers the following comment on the etymology of the word 'Deutsch': 'the word "deutsch" is derived from the Indo-European root *peudo*, via the Germanic *thiod* and Old High German *duitisc*, which translates as "the people"', in Fichte, *Addresses*, 85.

<sup>290</sup> Sheshadri-Crooks, *Desiring*, 53.

<sup>291</sup> Sheshadri-Crooks, *Desiring*, 54.

<sup>292</sup> Sheshadri-Crooks, *Desiring*, 53.

model German, but Germans who, linked by the seemingly universal belief ‘in something absolutely primary and original in man himself, in freedom, in infinite improvability’ combined with the conviction of ‘the perpetual progress of our race [German]’, are firmly entrenched in the symbolic order.<sup>293</sup> The transformation of the right to freedom into a German concern allows Fichte to link humanness with Germanness.<sup>294</sup> Although these traits could be construed as a form of privilege, establishing a connection with whiteness, Fichte’s universalisation of this conjunction is belied by the political undertones of his formulation. According to Fichte, ‘Those who believe in spirituality and in the freedom of this spirituality’, and ‘who desire the eternal progress of this spirituality through freedom – wherever they were born and whichever language they speak – are of our race, they belong to us and they will join with us’.<sup>295</sup> The uneasy pairing of freedom and independence of spirit with racial progress undermines the universality of the humanness that Fichte attempts to delineate, rendering the suggestion of its supra-territorial nature quixotic, or even specious. While removing territorial borders, Fichte erects social and political borders of which race forms a constitutive element, and which it is capable of transcending. Through the inclusion of ‘other Teutons’ regardless of ‘whichever language they speak’, the statement marks a departure from Fichte’s pronouncement of the superiority of the German language. Moreover, it suggests that the German language, although conducive to the cultivation of these universal qualities, is not an essential prerequisite to humanness, but that the traits themselves are. However inclusive and broad Fichte’s definition of race as transcendental and characterised by the love of freedom, spirituality and morality, it nonetheless allows for exclusions. After all, these are the traits that Babb associates with whiteness, and which Sir Walter Scott, writing in nineteenth-century Scotland, in *Ivanhoe*,

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<sup>293</sup> Fichte, *Addresses*, 96.

<sup>294</sup> Fichte, *Addresses*, 96.

<sup>295</sup> Fichte, *Addresses*, 97.

attributed to Anglo-Saxons.<sup>296</sup> Eventually, ‘Scott’s courageous and honorable feudal lords’, as Watson observes, became ‘reborn in the nineteenth century in the plantation aristocrat’.<sup>297</sup> This trans-continental re-appropriation highlights the openness to interpretation and instability of such values, which undermines their transcendentality; the question of who is excluded and how this exclusion is enforced will be dictated by zeitgeist. Fichte notes this instability by observing that even among the ‘original people’, the receptacle of humanness, there exist the classes which ‘will not even receive, as it happens in a living people, the fruits of this culture’.<sup>298</sup> As a result, these classes ‘are placed at a disadvantage compared to the cultivated classes, are considered, so to speak, a race apart, originally unequal by virtue of their mental powers and the mere fact of their birth’.<sup>299</sup> Race may be transcendental for Fichte, however he leaves no doubt as to whom he considers its finest paradigms. In casting race as a matter of class hierarchy, Fichte, inadvertently or intentionally, racialises class, a view shared by Babb, Hartigan and Frankenberg. Sheshadri-Crooks also notes that ‘Fichte’s claim to German superiority is above all coded by class’, a fact which not only undermines the transcendental nature of race, but also invalidates its claim to transcendental humanness.<sup>300</sup> Although a tenuous link between Germanness, humanness and whiteness may be established only insofar as all are defined as privileges restricted to, and definitive of, the upper classes, it is not synonymous with the interchangeability of these constructs. However, disregarding the racialisation of class allows Sheshadri-Crooks to link humanness with whiteness and cast it as the master signifier. To interpret whiteness as transcendental humanness would undermine the importance of culture and history as well as politically established borders, not to mention the impact of colonialism and the ensuing subjugation of the racial other. Such an

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<sup>296</sup> Sir Walter Scott, *Ivanhoe*, ed. A.N. Wilson (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982).

<sup>297</sup> Watson, *Normans and Saxons*, 48.

<sup>298</sup> Fichte, *Addresses*, 65.

<sup>299</sup> Fichte, *Addresses*, 65-66.

<sup>300</sup> Sheshadri-Crooks, *Desiring*, 53.

interpretation would certainly contribute to the notion of the ubiquity of the construct. Indeed, accepting whiteness as the master signifier would explain its ubiquity; nevertheless, it would also inaugurate a new enquiry into the process through which this status of master signifier can be attained, and whether such attainment is possible. If, accepting Sheshadri-Crooks's pronouncement, whiteness is the master signifier and thus originates in the unconscious, then it follows that it is also 'structured like a language'.<sup>301</sup> Sheshadri-Crooks subscribes to Lacan's theory that all subjects are linguistically constructed, however, for Sheshadri-Crooks, whiteness as the master signifier inaugurates a chain of difference which is then absorbed by all subjects. This is precisely what allows whiteness, in Sheshadri-Crooks's terms, to attain its universality. Though, according to Lacan, the master signifier 'is not just any old signifier' but one 'by which the whole of the chain subsists', it is still located 'in llanguage and nowhere else, insofar as llanguage is investigated qua language'.<sup>302</sup> Lacan equates what he calls '*lalangue*' – 'llanguage' – with the unconscious which represents knowledge that cannot be expressed through the medium of language, but it 'is something that remains indeterminate'.<sup>303</sup> Notwithstanding this interrelatedness, the unconscious transcends language and 'go[es] well beyond anything the being who speaks is capable of enunciating'.<sup>304</sup> Lacan considers the gap in the signification of the subject thus created to be '*pre-ontological*'.<sup>305</sup> And it is pre-ontological precisely because it elides language and articulation. In Sheshadri-Crooks's terms, this gap would be filled by a universal conception of whiteness, acting as the master signifier.

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<sup>301</sup> Lacan, *Encore*, 15.

<sup>302</sup> Lacan, *Encore*, 143. Fink explains that '*lalangue* is a term Lacan creates by simply putting together the feminine article *la* with the noun *langue*'. Fink borrows the translation of the term, 'llanguage', from Russell Grigg, in *Encore*, 44. Lacan applies the term 'llanguage' to refer to the unconscious which 'is made up of llanguage' and exceeds language. To this end, the term establishes a bond between the unconscious and language, while simultaneously acknowledging that 'llanguage' is a kind of 'knowledge' which can be effected, but not expressed through language, in Lacan, *Encore*, 138-39.

<sup>303</sup> Lacan, *Encore*, 143.

<sup>304</sup> Lacan, *Encore*, 139.

<sup>305</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, Book XI*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1998), 29.

However, as Butler points out, ‘the unconscious delimits the context in which any discourse on ontology can take place’.<sup>306</sup> Arguably, language delimits any discourse on ontology, for the unconscious is structured ‘like a language’. What is more, for Lacan, culture ‘could well be reduced to language’, and therefore any discourse on ontology will be contingent upon the interrelatedness of the two.<sup>307</sup> The exception would be the master signifier which, as Lacan points out, is indeterminate and pre-ontological. Consequently, whiteness cannot simultaneously occupy the position of the master signifier and universal humanness. Whereas the master signifier elides linguistic determination, whiteness cast as universal humanness is characterised by a set of qualities which Fichte identifies (and Sheshadri-Crooks endorses) as: independence of spirit, freedom and racial progress, all reserved for the upper classes. While these qualities are, in Sheshadri-Crooks’s terms, constitutive of whiteness, they cannot function as the Lacanian gap precisely because they can be articulated. To Butler, desire ‘appears as a gap, a discrepancy, as absent signifier and thus only appears *as that which cannot appear*’.<sup>308</sup> Since ‘desire is the desire of the Other’, this gap which is beyond linguistic enunciation is the Other: it is difference, that which is lacking in the desiring subject.<sup>309</sup> What is more, as Butler notes, ‘That difference is an ontological given does not imply that it is given in static form.’<sup>310</sup> The formulation of whiteness as difference, as that which the subject desires, highlights its mutability and negates its claim to universality. Contrary to Sheshadri-Crooks’s opinion, whiteness as difference cannot be reduced to a universal difference, precisely because in Lacan’s terms difference is irreducible and indeterminate, but not immutable; it is the master signifier *par excellence*. And how this difference comes into being ‘as that which cannot appear’ will be facilitated through language, functioning both as incomplete expression of the unconscious

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<sup>306</sup> Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, 190.

<sup>307</sup> Lacan, *Écrits*, 164.

<sup>308</sup> Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, 193.

<sup>309</sup> Lacan, *The Four*, 38.

<sup>310</sup> Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, 151.

and adjunct of culture, and therefore context specific. All subjects are subjects of the unconscious and desire and, consequently, of language and culture; they are not created *ex nihilo*, and neither are master signifiers that elude articulation. The significations of the subject and the master signifier will be both dependent on and the product of context, and not unidimensional or universal.

### **Soaring peaks and dark valleys: the symbolism of whiteness**

However, if what is human is perceived as universal, then equating whiteness with humanity possesses an unquestionable appeal since it enhances the idea of its normalcy. Richard Dyer, in *White*, undertakes a detailed analysis of the concepts of universality and normalcy of whiteness by drawing an analogy between the two and humanity.<sup>311</sup> Dyer's work offers a highly complex and convincing argument, tracing the origins of whiteness through its historical and contemporary representations to arrive finally at a somewhat startling and unsettling conclusion: whiteness is death – at least in a metaphorical sense. Dyer's account marks a departure from the sociologically minded discourses of whiteness. That is not to say that his account does not draw on sociological theories of whiteness. Indeed, echoing Frankenberg, Babb and others, Dyer notes that 'as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people'.<sup>312</sup> Like Chambers, Dyer emphasises the interdependence between whiteness and individuality, asserting that 'White people in their whiteness, however, are imaged as individual and/or endlessly diverse, complex and changing'.<sup>313</sup> Paradoxically, whiteness, understood as hue, unites white people even as it retains their individuality and exempts them from the process of homogenization to which those

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<sup>311</sup> Richard Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>312</sup> Dyer, *White*, 1.

<sup>313</sup> Dyer, *White*, 12.



perceived as others are subjected. Dyer ascribes the genesis of whiteness to a particular history, or, more precisely, ideology. Essentially, to Dyer the rhetoric of Christianity provided ideals which were germane to the conceptions of whiteness, though the geographical origins of the doctrine would possibly counter the argument that it 'is of its essence white'.<sup>314</sup> However, Dyer continues, despite the 'emphasis on the body in Christianity, the point is the spirit that is "in" the body'.<sup>315</sup> Consequently, 'Christianity maintains a conception of a split mind and body, regarding the latter as at the least inferior and evil'.<sup>316</sup> This idea of split is crucial to the discourse of whiteness as it simultaneously places it within the realm of the visual and the abstract. While the former may be concerned with the presupposed racial markers of whiteness, considered in terms of skin colour, gender and class (if class is seen as racialised), the latter stems from the 'motif of embodiment,' and as such possesses symbolic connotations.<sup>317</sup> Dyer's notion of embodiment attributes characteristics associated with the Virgin Mary and Christ to the construction of universal humanity which, within the discourse of whiteness, becomes analogous to white women and men. The epitome of white femininity is associated with such qualities as 'passivity, expectancy, receptivity,' as well as 'motherhood as the supreme fulfilment of one's nature', all of which constitute 'a given purity and state of grace'.<sup>318</sup> The masculine model 'is of a divided nature and internal struggle between mind (God) and body (mind), and of suffering as the supreme expression of both spiritual and physical striving'.<sup>319</sup> These ideals of whiteness 'are what one should aspire to be like and yet also what one can never be; ideals which the narrator, in a description of an upstanding

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<sup>314</sup> Dyer, *White*, 17.

<sup>315</sup> Dyer, *White*, 16.

<sup>316</sup> Dyer, *White*, 16.

<sup>317</sup> Dyer, *White*, 17.

<sup>318</sup> Dyer, *White*, 17.

<sup>319</sup> Dyer, *White*, 17.

citizen in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, refers to as that gentleman's knowledge of 'the "code"'.<sup>320</sup> Since according to Bakhtin, 'only permanent seriousness, remorse, and sorrow for his sins befit the Christian', the symbolic aspect of whiteness is inextricably bound up with 'suffering, self-denial and self-control', all of which form constitutive parts of the code.<sup>321</sup> When translated into the discourse of the South, these biblical ideals of femininity and masculinity are embodied in the stock images of the virginal southern belle and the benevolent gentleman planter who presides over his slaves with a firm but kind hand.

The 'motif of embodiment' that is associated with whiteness proper engenders its opposite, namely a process of negative embodiment which contributes to delineations of nonwhiteness. Since enshrined in whiteness proper is the idea of Christian asceticism, 'this intolerant seriousness of official church ideology', as Bakhtin points out, 'made it necessary to legalise the gaiety, laughter'.<sup>322</sup> In other words, the strictness of Christian doctrine as an epitome of whiteness necessitates the construction of nonwhiteness. However, despite its oppositional character, nonwhiteness in this instance signifies in symbolic and non-racial terms. Negative embodiment, therefore, will be characterised by a projection of ideals deemed incompatible with aspirations to whiteness onto those perceived as non-white, thus allowing them to embody that which is forbidden – that which, consequently, becomes marginalised. Negative embodiment seems characteristic of the perception which Michael Omi and Howard Winant, in their essay 'Racial Formations', term 'a worldview which distinguished Europeans – children of God, [and] human beings'.<sup>323</sup> This worldview, they continue, which has formed part of colonialism from its early days, determined 'the types of treatment to be accorded them [those perceived as

<sup>320</sup> Dyer, *White*, 17; and Twain, *Pudd'nhead*, 58.

<sup>321</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, in *The Bakhtin Reader*, 208; and Dyer, *White*, 17.

<sup>322</sup> Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, in *The Bakhtin Reader*, 208.

<sup>323</sup> Michael Omi and Howard Winant, 'Racial Formations', in *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ed., ed. Paula S. Rothenberg (New York: Worth Publishers, 2001), 12.

non-human], the expropriation of property, the denial of political rights, the introduction of slavery, and other forms of coercive labor, as well as outright extermination'.<sup>324</sup> Negative embodiment serves as a justification for the harsh treatment meted out to those who are deemed inferior. In the Post-Reconstruction era, exemplary of the concept of negative embodiment are blackface minstrelsy and its more horrific incarnation, lynching, whereby both, as, Saxton and Hale respectively point out, served as a means of displacement of undesirable and savage traits onto the black population. Interestingly, as Allen notes, in its relation to the colonial discourse Christianity also becomes a marker of civilisation. Thereby such displacements of negative traits become possible precisely because the colonised, or the discriminated against, are already 'categorised as "uncivilised"', and consequently 'regarded by the ruling class as doubtful prospects, at best, for admittance to the "Christian" establishment'.<sup>325</sup> The ensuing 'exclusion from "Christian civilization" served to excuse further oppression'.<sup>326</sup> The conjunction of Christianity and civilisation is by no means a stable and fixed category and does not guarantee preferential treatment. Although, as Allen observes, the admittance of the black population into the Christian fold severed 'the knot that tangled Christian baptism with freedom', it did not alleviate their oppression and admit them into the fold of the 'civilised'.<sup>327</sup> As an ideology, Christianity endorsed its own exclusionary practice in the United States, whereby only the Protestant denomination could provide such a worthy model of civilization marking 'The kinship of spirit between the Protestant Ascendancy and white supremacy' and the dawn of "'the white race" era' at the beginning of the eighteenth century'.<sup>328</sup> However, the conflation of Christianity and civilisation, as Dyer notes, both fostered the 'projection of sexuality on to

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<sup>324</sup> Omi and Winant, 'Racial', in *Race, Class, and Gender in the United States*, 12.

<sup>325</sup> Allen, *The Invention*, 1.31.

<sup>326</sup> Allen, *The Invention*, 1.31.

<sup>327</sup> Prior to 1667, bond servants of non-European origins could not be baptised as then 'they could no longer be accounted as slaves.' In 1667, the General Assembly of Virginia declared that baptism did not change 'the condition of the person as to his bondage,' in Allen, *The Invention*, 2.197.

<sup>328</sup> Allen, *The Invention*, 1.84.

dark races’ and became ‘a means for whites to represent yet dissociate themselves from their own [uncivilised] desires’.<sup>329</sup> Such projections salvaged the purity of whiteness as they served to expunge the darkness of white desire – that ‘something that whiteness cannot have and still be white’.<sup>330</sup> In other words, they briefly allowed whiteness to deny its own monstrosity by passing it on to others. Exemplary of such expunging of darkness from the conceptions of whiteness are the deleterious juxtapositions of black sexual virility and rape with a presupposed white abstinence and chastity. Purging as such projections might have been, they nonetheless stemmed from a recognition of the inherence of the undesirable and uncivilised traits within the white man, or white woman. As Eric Lott points out, ‘otherness is chiefly moral or psychological – a preponderance of crime, violence, obsession, and guilt – the “dark” side of the white Western self’.<sup>331</sup> The recognition of the undesirable qualities is analogous to an acknowledgement of intrinsic alterity. Since desire, as Butler observes, ‘always reveals the desiring agent as intrinsically other to itself’, the desire for whiteness which fuels such projections leads to the reaffirmation of the subject’s inherent alterity.<sup>332</sup> It is desire that both drives the striving for whiteness and foils its fulfilment through the subject’s realisation of his estrangement from the ideals of whiteness. The realisation of one’s estrangement from the ideals of whiteness constitutes the means through which the latter ‘affects itself and murders itself’.<sup>333</sup> This death of whiteness not only marks its unattainability, but also perpetuates its discourse, the incessant process of mimetic replications inseparable from striving for the attainment of the elusive ideals. Ironically, as Dyer notes, it is precisely this recognition of intrinsic otherness, of ‘The presence of the dark within the white man [which] also enables him to

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<sup>329</sup> Dyer, *White*, 28. For Roediger and Saxton such projections are both fuelled by the white working men’s desire to dissociate themselves from slave labour and underpinned by the nostalgia for the simplicity of the preindustrial era.

<sup>330</sup> Mike Hill, ‘Introduction’, in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 3.

<sup>331</sup> Eric Lott, ‘The Whiteness of Film Noir’, in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 82.

<sup>332</sup> Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, 75.

<sup>333</sup> Derrida, *Dissemination*, 238.

assume the position as the universal signifier for humanity.’<sup>334</sup> Paradoxically, the impossibility of the attainment of the ideals of whiteness inaugurates the transcendence of whiteness into the realm of the human, and thus universal. Notwithstanding its transcendence into the realm of the human, or maybe because of it, whiteness may only signify as, to paraphrase Lott, dark whiteness, tainted from within by the very impossibility of overcoming its own imperfections to attain the mythologized ideal.<sup>335</sup> According to Berger, ‘It is the awareness of the blackness in our whiteness, and the whiteness in our blackness, that most confuses us.’<sup>336</sup> Blighted by blackness, each instance of a mimetic reproduction of the ideal of whiteness is underlain by a sense of ‘difference between the imitator and the imitated’.<sup>337</sup> Through mimesis this difference ‘is at once preserved and erased’: it is that which concurrently engenders mimesis and frustrates it in that it infallibly returns the imitator to the starting point – to whiteness as difference.<sup>338</sup> What is left, inevitably, is the notion of the ideal whiteness as difference. Mimesis, therefore, marks the beginning and the end of whiteness, which is why, to borrow from Berger, it is ‘the blackness in our whiteness’ and thus difference which is the most confusing. Interestingly, for Warren Montag, it is ‘The human norm’, which is also a symbolic construction, and which ‘is always glimpsed negatively: it is what allows us to see the deficient and the abnormal without itself being seen’.<sup>339</sup> Drawing upon Rousseau and Hegel, Montag argues that ‘man is the negation of himself, and this negation must itself be negated for man to become himself’.<sup>340</sup> Montag’s formulation echoes Kojève who observes that ‘Man is negating *Action*, which transforms given Being and, by transforming it, transforms

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<sup>334</sup> Dyer, *White*, 28.

<sup>335</sup> In his discussion of film noir, Lott uses the phrase ‘white darkness’, in ‘The Whiteness’, in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 85.

<sup>336</sup> Berger, *White Lies*, 206.

<sup>337</sup> Barbara Johnson, ‘Translator’s Introduction’, in *Dissemination*, xxviii-ix.

<sup>338</sup> Johnson, ‘Translator’s Introduction’, in *Dissemination*, xxix.

<sup>339</sup> Warren Montag, ‘The Universalization of Whiteness: Racism and Enlightenment’, in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 291.

<sup>340</sup> Montag, ‘The Universalization’, in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 290.

itself.’<sup>341</sup> The subject desiring whiteness must recognise its unworthiness and, through a disavowal of it, transforms itself into a pseudo-ideal being. Whiteness, then, carries within itself its own negation which is engendered in such transformations; its humanity must first be negated before it can be accepted as the human norm. In Montag’s terms, this negation involves the other and a concurrent recognition and denial of traits which may be deemed human, but not ideal, and therefore not compatible with whiteness as espoused in the lofty paradigms of self-discipline, self-denial, chastity and sacrifice. Through a displacement of deficient traits onto others, such negative embodiment reverses the process of negation and restores whiteness to its status as the human norm, casting others as receptacles of inhumanity. However convenient, the presence of the other is not essential, for aspirations to whiteness are initiated by a recognition of blackness within oneself. In denying this blackness, negative embodiment masks the futility of the struggle for the attainment of whiteness and ensures the continuation of the process of striving for perfection.

Whiteness, then, may be seen as a synthesis of traits based on self-denial and suffering which is effected through the negation of its own difference. The distinctiveness of the subject aspiring to whiteness is further reinforced by marking others as different, which initiates the transcendence of whiteness into the sphere of the human and thus universal. Indeed, in its symbolic incarnation, whiteness, according to Dyer, aspires to ‘dis-embodiedness,’ while such being ‘without properties also suggests not being at all’.<sup>342</sup> Similarly, Jane Gaines notes that ‘a defining condition of whiteness’ is its ‘increased alienation from its own body’.<sup>343</sup> Not only does this separation of whiteness from the white body reify its position within the realm of the symbolic, but it also divorces whiteness as a

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<sup>341</sup> Kojève, *Introduction*, 38.

<sup>342</sup> Dyer, *White*, 39.

<sup>343</sup> Jane Gaines, ‘The Birth of a Nation and within Our Gates’, in *Dixie Debates: Perspectives on Southern Cultures*, ed. Richard H. King and Helen Taylor (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 184.

symbol from the visibility or ontic corporeality of white as an identity. Such ‘dis-embodiedness’ of whiteness has its roots partly in its equation with the human and the universal, and partly in the idea of normalcy associated with them. After all, it is a putatively accepted truth that what is human is ‘normal’; the fact that it also happens to be white cannot be seen as a mere coincidence, but a systematically, methodically and culturally cultivated perception. Therein lies the ambiguity of whiteness which materialises not as an identity *per se*, but a repository and marker of decorum: the object of constant striving and aspiration, a site of promise and its simultaneous denial, since as Dyer succinctly puts it, ‘Whiteness, really white whiteness is unattainable.’<sup>344</sup> Indeed, the outward perfection of the whiteness of Melville’s albino exemplifies Dyer’s point. Although ‘The Albino is as well made as other men’ and ‘has no substantive deformity – and yet this mere aspect of all pervading whiteness makes him more strangely hideous than the ugliest abortion’.<sup>345</sup> The palest whiteness of the albino confirms Andrew Bennett’s assertion that ‘Perfection is monstrous when it is.’<sup>346</sup> Since there is no perfect whiteness – ‘Its ideal forms are impossible’ – the essence of whiteness which may be defined as a process of emulation, albeit one crowned with limited success if not outwardly doomed to failure, consists in passing; in maintaining a simulation of whiteness.<sup>347</sup> It is precisely this notion of impossibility that fuels the desire for whiteness. Butler observes that ‘desire’s permanent dissatisfaction underscores our ontological status as *striving* beings’.<sup>348</sup> Perversely, this notion of unattainability of whiteness reinforces its claims to universality and humanity. Striving, then, becomes a characteristic of not only a human being, but also of a subject who aspires to whiteness.

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<sup>344</sup> Dyer, *White*, 78.

<sup>345</sup> Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 166.

<sup>346</sup> Andrew Bennett, ‘Explanations, Applications and Orientations’, in *Monstrism*. spec. issue of *Oxford Literary Review* 23 (2002):6.

<sup>347</sup> Dyer, *White*, 78.

<sup>348</sup> Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, 168.

Among the symbolic attributes of whiteness, Dyer includes enterprise, which he sees ‘as an aspect of spirit’ that is ‘associated with the concept of will – the control of self and the control of others’.<sup>349</sup> Enterprise may be cast as a characteristic feature of the exceptionalist ideal of white masculinity, with its supposedly ‘natural’ and divinely preordained ability to tame and conquer.<sup>350</sup> While the presupposed passivity inherent in the female ideal of whiteness precludes it from laying a claim to the enterprising spirit, it also, perhaps inadvertently, places it in opposition to its masculine counterpart. Such positioning further complicates any fixed notion of whiteness as it brings into sharp relief the interdependence of the two constructs. Dyer links the concept of white enterprise with imperialism, with ‘the excitement of advance, of forward movement through time, and of the conquest and control of space’.<sup>351</sup> Coincidentally, Dyer’s concept of imperialism echoes Fender’s notion of the formation of American identity, which he sees as forged through the conflation of movement, time and trial.<sup>352</sup> Since imperialism, in Dyer’s terms, lends itself to not only conquest, but also control of space, segregation materialises as a version of imperialism and an example of the enterprising spirit of whiteness. Arguably, the notion of enterprise may be the only characteristic of whiteness that escapes the process of negation. Firstly, it does not need to be negated because, ‘as an aspect of spirit’, it initiates and fuels the process of negation. Secondly, although it fuels the process of negation, it never transforms into the human norm which, in turn, eliminates the need for its negation. Ironically, in its enterprising aspirations to perfection, whiteness materialises as that which is inhuman, that which is abnormal, that which is different; while the notion of enterprise becomes the only characteristic of whiteness which is human and normal and, it may be added, masculine. Moreover, the notion of enterprise instances a correspondence between the symbolic aspect

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<sup>349</sup> Dyer, *White*, 31.

<sup>350</sup> For a detailed account of the rhetoric of American Exceptionalism and Manifest Destiny, see Deborah L. Madsen’s *American Exceptionalism* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998).

<sup>351</sup> Dyer, *White*, 31.

<sup>352</sup> Fender, ‘The American’, in *Modern American Culture*, 2.



of whiteness exemplified by the enterprising spirit and its racial facet which requires spatial reification. Whereas symbolic whiteness transcends ontic presence, its racial incarnation insists on the visibility of the discriminated against or the ‘unworthy’ and frequently, as segregation demonstrates, also of the privileged. Similarly to symbolic whiteness, the origin of its racial aspect appear shrouded in mythology – in ‘The Aryan/Caucasian myth’, to be precise, which ‘established a link between Europeans and a venerable culture known to pre-date Europe’s oldest civilisation, ancient Greece’.<sup>353</sup> In *Meditations on the Peaks*, the proto-fascist philosopher Julius Evola observes that ‘In the oldest Hellenic traditions we find that the heroes’ achievement of immortality was often portrayed through the symbolism of their ascending or descending into the mountain.’<sup>354</sup> Evola sees the act of disappearing into the mountain as ‘the material symbol of spiritual transfiguration’.<sup>355</sup> The mountain was the place where heroes attained immortality, and the latter ‘besides the Olympian gods’, was the privilege of the heroes, or, [...] was the exceptional achievement of a few superior beings’.<sup>356</sup> To be mortal and to ascend the mountain testified to not only one’s superiority, but also secured one’s place among the gods. According to Dyer, ‘The Aryan and the Caucasian model share a notion of origins in the mountains’ which results in both being associated with such virtues as:

the clarity and cleanliness of the air, the vigour demanded by the cold, the enterprise required by the harshness of the terrain and climate, the sublime, soul-elevating beauty of mountain vistas, even the greater nearness to God and the presence of the whitest thing on earth, snow. All these virtues could be seen to have formed the white character, its energy, enterprise, discipline and spiritual elevation [...], its affinity with [snowy] whiteness.<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> Dyer, *White*, 21.

<sup>354</sup> Julius Evola, *Meditations on the Peaks: Mountain Climbing as Metaphor for Spiritual Quest*, trans. Guido Stucco, (Rochester VT: Inner Traditions, 1998), 12.

<sup>355</sup> Evola, *Meditations*, 12.

<sup>356</sup> Evola, *Meditations*, 12.

<sup>357</sup> Dyer, *White*, 21.

Mountains, as a myth or point of origin, provide a link between the symbolic values of whiteness and place. However, Dyer's account is missing an important attribute of Aryan peoples, namely the desire for glory. Evola notes that 'Glory was generally the privilege of the luminous Aryan race, but more specifically it belonged to kings, priests, and conquerors belonging to this race.'<sup>358</sup> Notwithstanding glory being the privilege of 'the luminous Aryan race', its bestowal was selective and reserved for the higher echelons of Aryan society. Since only those who attained glory could ascend the mountain and claim their seat among the gods, the notion of the mountain origins propagates class divisions. Even among 'the luminous Aryan[s]' there is a clearly demarcated boundary between those who can aspire to superiority, and those who cannot. What is more, casting glory as the prerogative of kings and priests underscores its spiritual dimension, since both castes were among God's favoured. Such exclusivity of glory, the impossibility of its attainment for those occupying the lower social strata, marks its analogy to whiteness. Indeed, the concept of mountain origins might be said to have introduced the notion of opposition which became crucial to assertions of whiteness. If those who, at least in their own estimation, apotheosised the symbolic virtues, elevated themselves to the soaring peaks of *terra firma*, then naturally those who did not embody the venerated values would have been seen as occupying a decidedly less lofty position. As René Daumal shrewdly observes, 'The point is that the high knows the low, but the low does not know the high.'<sup>359</sup> While those who embody the symbolic values of whiteness are endowed with a panoptic view and knowledge of those who do not, which itself might be a marker of their superiority and privilege, 'the low' are precluded from attaining not only such knowledge of, but also a position among, 'the high'. For those who are deemed 'the low', the unattainability of whiteness is an ontological *fait accompli*.

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<sup>358</sup> Evola, *Meditations*, 14.

<sup>359</sup> René Daumal's *Mount Analogue: A Novel of Symbolically Authentic Non-Euclidean Adventures in Mountain Climbing*, cited by Renato del Ponte in 'Foreword', in *Meditations*, xii.

### Favourable climate(s)

It is ironic that the myth of mountain origins alludes to Greek mythology and Mount Olympus, and thus the very European civilisation that pre-dated Christianity; the civilisation that harboured somewhat disdainful notions of northern peoples.<sup>360</sup> Aristotle declared that ‘Those who live in a cold climate and in Europe are full of spirit, but wanting in intelligence and skill’; while Vitruvius, the Roman writer and architect, observed that ‘[N]orthern nations, being enveloped in a dense atmosphere, and chilled by moisture from the obstructing air, have but a sluggish intelligence.’<sup>361</sup> Similarly to Aristotle and Vitruvius, Evola stresses the inherent difference between ‘the Aryan-Roman and Aryan-Nordic races’ and ‘a certain “Mediterranean” human type’.<sup>362</sup> The Aryan types ‘embody a common way of being’ in which, according to Evola, all those who display a proclivity for physical exertion and endurance share. Such physical prowess and perseverance are ‘the result of a natural selection, and almost of a renewal, which occurs as the result of specific tasks, trials, and also a special environment’.<sup>363</sup> The harshness of the mountainous environment plays a crucial part in the forging of the Aryan character, insofar as it necessitates a natural selection whereby only the fittest, physically superior individuals are able to survive. What guarantees the survival of the Aryan peoples in such an unforgiving environment is ‘that lucid and perfectly mastered instinct, that style of a spirit that keeps the soul and any irrational reaction under control’.<sup>364</sup> However, this preternatural instinct does not alone account for the superiority of the Aryan race. A unique personality which is forged in action, built upon ‘relationships of real men cemented by trust, loyalty and

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<sup>360</sup> Bergen Evans, *Dictionary of Mythology: Mainly Classical* (London: Franklin Watts, 1971).

<sup>361</sup> Aristotle, *Politica*, quoted in Babb, *Whiteness*, 17; and Vitruvius, *The Ten Books on Architecture*, cited in Babb, *Whiteness*, 18.

<sup>362</sup> Evola, *Meditations*, 33.

<sup>363</sup> Evola, *Meditations*, 33.

<sup>364</sup> Evola, *Meditations*, 34.

truthfulness', takes pride of place among the luminous qualities of the Aryans. Such personality enables the Aryans 'to be simultaneously alone and with other people'.<sup>365</sup> The Aryans' unique personality enables them to retain their individuality without undermining the sense of community in which they share, a community which abides by the code of 'trust, loyalty and truthfulness'. Curiously, for Chambers, the ability of white people to retain their sense of individuality cannot be attributed to their personality; rather it is an effect of homogenizing others.

Aristotle and Vitruvius, as well as Evola, evoke the notion of opposition, of North versus South, in their respective accounts of southern or northern superiority. What is more, in the theories of Aristotle and Vitruvius, as Babb observes, 'geography [is seen] as the cause of racial inferiority of northern Europeans'.<sup>366</sup> According to Evola, however, it is precisely the harshness of the northern climate that is responsible for the resilience and superiority of the Aryan type. What these accounts reveal is the subjectivity of such constructions as whiteness which, as these instances demonstrate, appears geographically pre-determined. Interestingly, what seems absent from these interpretations is any mention of skin colour as a prerequisite for greatness, or mark of inferiority. Similarly to Fichte's account of the Teutonic superiority, Aristotle, Vitruvius and Evola focus on qualities rather than physical appearance. While to Fichte such qualities could transcend territorial boundaries, to Aristotle, Vitruvius and Evola, they are determined by the environment. Although the Aryan and Caucasian myths re-appropriate such notions of the inferiority of northern Europeans, they nonetheless preserve and cultivate the idea of the centrality of geographic locales to constructions of collective identity, as well as whiteness. Little wonder that even the first settlers, bound for the New World, set out to establish, in John Winthrop's

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<sup>365</sup> Evola, *Meditations*, 35.

<sup>366</sup> Babb, *Whiteness*, 17.

memorable words, ‘a Citty upon a Hill’.<sup>367</sup> Evidently, no other location could have connoted such a deep conviction of moral superiority, self-restraint and enterprise, and thus the values which Dyer links with whiteness, although Winthrop would have ascribed them to the enlightenment of the reformed Christian doctrine. What the Aryan and the Caucasian myths demonstrate is that the concepts of symbolic and racial whiteness were informed by, and subsequently evolved through, analogies to the natural environment, and especially its mountainous grandeur; the kind of environment which, like symbolic whiteness, cannot be attained without sacrifice and struggle.

The idea of bipolarity, of irreconcilable difference engendered by the natural environment, found a fertile ground in nineteenth-century United States and led to the development of the concepts of the North and South as distinct places which influence the dispositions of their respective inhabitants. In 1851, Emerson declared that ‘the North and South are two nations. It is not slavery that separates them, but climate’.<sup>368</sup> Emerson’s remark, echoing these of Aristotle, Vitruvius and Evola, casts climate as a crucial factor in character formation; a deciding factor of the superiority or inferiority of peoples. Southerners shared the opinion of Aristotle and Vitruvius that ‘Civilization is an exotic in all cold latitudes. It belongs naturally to temperate climates.’<sup>369</sup> This attempt at denigrating the North constitutes yet another example of the re-appropriation of the Aryan-Caucasian myth and underscores the subjective constructedness of definitions of superiority. Since civilization could only flourish in warmer climates, it is hardly surprising that the South, in southern estimation, was populated by ‘members of a distinct Cavalier-descended white race,’ who

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<sup>367</sup> John Winthrop, ‘The Modell of Christian Charity’, in *Early American Writing* (London: Penguin Books, 1994), 107. In the sermon, Winthrop paraphrases Matthew who proclaims: ‘Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid,’ in Bible: Authorized Version, Matthew. 5.14.

<sup>368</sup> Ralph Waldo Emerson, cited in Watson, *Normans and Saxons*, 133.

<sup>369</sup> “Cuba: The March of Empire and the Course of Trade”, in *DeBow’s Review* 30.1 (1861):41. The author’s name is not cited in the publication. Also cited in Watson, *Normans and Saxons*, 137.

were ‘a heroic, aristocratically descended, and honorable people,’ and in whose veins flowed ‘the genius of Chivalry and the spirit of fealty’.<sup>370</sup> Such were the characteristics of the ‘master race’ made up of the descendants of ‘the Cavaliers, Jacobites and Huguenots who settled the South’.<sup>371</sup> Although in the nineteenth-century South, such estimable qualities acquired a racial dimension, they did so as a result of direct comparisons with the North. In this instance, the notion of southern racial superiority stemmed not from skin colour, but from a conviction of moral superiority partly grounded in an adaptation of English history, and partly in an imagined ideal. Consequently, the self-proclaimed Anglo-Normans, the descendants of English Cavaliers, were utterly devoid of ‘Misanthropy, hypocrisy, diseased philanthropy, envy, hatred, fanaticism, and all the worst passions of the human heart’, which constituted ‘the ruling characteristics of New England Yankees’.<sup>372</sup> Such disparagement was fully reciprocated by those abiding above the Mason-Dixon Line who considered their southern countrymen ‘benighted barbarians and ruthless ruffians’.<sup>373</sup> However, in southern estimation, such base northern characteristics as envy and hatred of the South were direct results of ‘the coldness of their climate and the sterility of their soil’.<sup>374</sup> Thanks to the salubrious temperance of the southern climate, not only could aristocratic and lofty ideals flourish, but also a uniquely southern notion of whiteness. In the North, however, the coldness of the climate prevented their germination. While ‘the southern lady uniquely and felicitously yoked simplicity and modesty of character and intelligence and refined sophistication’, such refinements were anathema to her northern counterpart.<sup>375</sup> Instead, in the words of J.T. Wiswall, northern females were

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<sup>370</sup> Watson, *Normans and Saxons*, 77; and Watson, *Normans and Saxons*, 180; and Watson, *Normans and Saxons*, 77.

<sup>371</sup> Cited by Watson, *Normans and Saxons*, 213. Watson traces the appearance of the term ‘master race’ to *Lyrics of Loyalty*, ed. Frank Moore (New York: George P. Putnam, 1864).

<sup>372</sup> A. Clarkson, ‘The Basis of Northern Hostility to the South’, *DeBow’s Review* 28.1 (1860): 10. Also cited by Watson, *Normans and Saxons*, 20.

<sup>373</sup> Watson, *Normans and Saxons*, 173.

<sup>374</sup> Clarkson, ‘The Basis’, 11. Also cited by Watson, *Normans and Saxons*, 20.

<sup>375</sup> Watson, *Normans and Saxons*, 80.

the embodiment of ‘nervousness, fanaticism, and superstition’, all of which were the result of ‘sedentary life through winters over hot stoves’.<sup>376</sup> Clearly, in Wiswall’s estimation, the harshness of northern climate had an equally detrimental effect on the construction of northern femininity.

It is evident that the southern claim to the appellation of ‘master race’ evolved through direct references to the natural environment which was seen as instrumental in the cultivation of aristocratic qualities. Here, the grandeur of soaring peaks and the puritan vision of ‘Citty upon a Hill’ were replaced by a warm and temperate climate which facilitated juxtapositions with the North as a cold and hostile place. Such juxtapositions fostered perceptions of southern whiteness as inherently different from ‘the vile, savage, fanatical, coarse, and avaricious race of Yankees’ who ‘reckon no God but mammon’.<sup>377</sup> Curiously, to another northerner, Benjamin Franklin, the southern charge of ‘Yankee avarice’ was the fruit of ‘inculcated industry and frugality’, both of which constituted ‘the means of procuring wealth, and thereby securing virtue’.<sup>378</sup> Since the symbolism of southern whiteness is constructed in direct opposition to its northern counterpart, the struggle for pecuniary success and its attendant enterprise that Franklin praises are replaced with striving for the perpetuation of genteel ethos, which, nonetheless, still calls for self-denial. In the South, the concept of struggle, which Evola associates with the hostility of the environment and Franklin ascribes to northern industry, is partly made redundant by slavery and further mediated by the temperance of the environment, and partly because it

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<sup>376</sup> J.T. Wiswall, ‘Causes of Aristocracy’, *DeBow’s Review* 28.5 (1860): 565. J.T. Wiswall was a southern writer from Alabama and a strong advocate of the southern way of life, including slavery. Discussing the development of the southern way of life, Allen Tate, like Wiswall and Watson, links it to climate: ‘It is that soil and climate made the agrarian life generally more attractive than a barren [sic] soil and a colder climate could have ever done, and that the propitious soil and climate made it possible for a semi-feudal system of labor to take root and thrive,’ in ‘Religion and the Old South’, in *Collected Essays* (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1959), 315.

<sup>377</sup> Watson, *Normans and Saxons*, 192; and Clarkson, ‘The Basis’, 11.

<sup>378</sup> Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography and Other Writings* (New York: Bantam, 1982), 89.

appears antithetical to the genteel and aristocratic values which the region espoused. These aristocratic values were based on the conviction of ‘high and noble genealogical inheritance’, whereby ‘every farmer was a Cavalier-manqué and every slave-owning planter a de facto aristocrat’.<sup>379</sup> Noble descent and the possession of land replace struggle and enterprise in the pantheon of southern whiteness. What is striking, however, is that despite casting themselves as the ‘master race’, southerners constructed their superiority in symbolic terms. It was the qualities attributed to northerners, and not their physical appearance, that placed them in direct opposition to the self-proclaimed ‘master race’ of the South and cemented the notion of their inferiority. Chief among the attributes southerners prized, which may be viewed as a constitutive part of southern whiteness, was ‘The aristocratic concept of personal honor’.<sup>380</sup> Personal honour, as Watson observes, was ‘an article of the gentlemanly code of conduct avidly appropriated by southerners, whether they were planters [...] or shopkeepers’.<sup>381</sup> Although the gentlemanly caste constituted a fraction of the population, the notion of southern honour provided a link joining together all echelons of society while preserving the sense of individuality of each class.<sup>382</sup> The southern notion of über whiteness and its attendant conviction of the superiority of the ‘master race’ were not only products of noble descent, but also of the natural environment and place, where all the inhabitants shared in a unique sense of honour. Indeed, all southern Anglo-Normans could be united by a sense of honour precisely because the ‘Saxon-descended Puritans’ of the North ‘possessed no notion of honor’.<sup>383</sup> Aside from

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<sup>379</sup> Watson, *Normans and Saxons*, 15; and Watson, *Normans and Saxons*, 30.

<sup>380</sup> Watson, *Normans and Saxons*, 163.

<sup>381</sup> Watson, *Normans and Saxons*, 163. Franklin’s observation regarding the settlement of Georgia demonstrates how small a proportion of society the planter class constituted: ‘[the settlement] instead of being made with hardy, industrious husbandmen, accustomed to labor, [...], it was with families of broken shopkeepers and other insolvent debtors, many of indolent and idle habits, taken out of jails’, in *The Autobiography*, 98. In the nineteenth century parlance, Georgia’s inhabitants would have been branded ‘white trash’.

<sup>382</sup> Gaines observes of antebellum South ‘that the lives of very few families approximated the mythologized lives of the southern planter class,’ in ‘The Birth of a Nation and within Our Gates’, 184.

<sup>383</sup> Watson, *Normans and Saxons*, 32.



strong nationalistic tendencies that such a positioning evokes, more importantly, this contingency of symbolic whiteness on the environment places it within the realm of natural phenomena. Hailing from the South presupposes one's 'master whiteness' which is subsequently forged by the unique climate of the place. While such classification blatantly disregards the class and social forces operating within the region, such as the existence of the 'significantly numerous class of landless poor whites', it concurrently demonstrates the importance of the concept of opposition in the shaping of the symbolism of a collective sense of whiteness capable of transcending social and class divisions.<sup>384</sup>

Unlike symbolic whiteness, racial whiteness relies on a notion of privilege conveyed by skin colour or other visible markers of difference. The latter establishes a primary criterion which 'can determine who is to be included and excluded from the category and also discriminate among those deemed to be within it'.<sup>385</sup> Consequently, discriminations within racial whiteness, as Babb, Frankenberg, Hartigan and Roediger *et al* point out, will follow along the axes of class and gender, and this is why 'Colour distinctions within whiteness have been understood in relation to labour'.<sup>386</sup> Such distinctions, while introducing 'shades of whiteness', do not undermine the value of skin colour in the conceptions of the construct. The one-drop rule, however, both questions and defies the logic of categorising on the basis of skin colour.<sup>387</sup> Moreover, it inadvertently inveighs against the validity of

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<sup>384</sup> Watson, *Normans and Saxons*, 78.

<sup>385</sup> Dyer, *White*, 51.

<sup>386</sup> Dyer, *White*, 57.

<sup>387</sup> Marguía and Forman, 'Shades of Whiteness', in *White Out*, 65; Dyer, observes that 'In the US South, elaborate tabulations of degrees of blackness (mulatto, quadroon, octoroon) were developed, while in many states the "one-drop" definition was promulgated, suggesting that even as much as one drop of black blood was enough to make a person black', in *White*, 25. Allen also notes the ambiguity and arbitrariness of racial classification based on blood observing that 'In 1890, a Portuguese emigrant settling in Guyana (British Guiana) would learn that he/she was not "white". But a sibling of that same person arriving in the United States in that same year would learn that by a sea-change he/she had become "white". In the last Spanish census of Cuba, Mexican Indians and Chinese were classified as "white", but in 1907 the first United States census there classes these groups as "colored". According to Virginia law in 1860, a person with but three "white" grandparents was a Negro; in 1907, having no more than fifteen out of sixteen "white" great-great-

such judgments by subverting the notion of visibility, since what seems, to all intents and purposes, white, is considered black. Although as Dyer demonstrates, white is a category of skin colour, it is by no means a stable one. The arbitrariness of racial classification based on skin colour is noted by Kolchin who observes that ‘how humans have assigned people to one race or another has varied dramatically over time and space’.<sup>388</sup> Indeed, writing in 1751, Franklin declares:

All Africa is black or tawny; [...] America (exclusive of the newcomers) wholly so. And in Europe, the Spaniards, Italians, French, Russians, and Swedes are generally of what we call a swarthy complexion; as are the Germans also, the Saxons only excepted, who, with the English, make the principal body of white people on the face of the earth.<sup>389</sup>

Not only does Franklin’s classification erase any claims to superiority Evola’s Nordic-Aryans may harbour, but it also tars most European nations with the same brush. Arbitrary as Franklin’s classification appears, it nonetheless exemplifies how unstable racial classifications based on skin colour are. More importantly, however, Franklin’s classification of the Saxon and English as white foregrounds the veneration of the Anglo-Saxon heritage in the nineteenth century – the heritage that became pivotal to constructions of whiteness. This instability notwithstanding, Dyer declares that ‘Being visible as white is a passport to privilege.’<sup>390</sup> Davy concurs with Dyer observing that ‘whiteness becomes the dynamic [...] of racialization that feeds privilege to all whites, so to speak, without letting

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grandparents entitled one to the same classification; in 1910, the limit was asymptotic’, stipulating that “any traceable amount of African ancestry defined a “Negro””, in *The Invention*, 1.27-28. Such inconsistencies within these systems of classification demonstrate that any aspirations to whiteness based on skin colour alone are not only unsustainable, but also a matter of cultural and social heritage as well as subject to locale. Smith also emphasises the contradiction inherent in the one-drop rule, observing: ‘If “one drop” meant that every person of traceable black blood was more related to a single black ancestor than to any white ancestor, it also meant that any so-defined black person was more related to *all* black people as a class than to *any* consanguineous person defined as white’, in *American Body Politics*, 45. Thus, the ‘one-drop’ rule renders skin colour spurious to racial classification which is conducted on the basis of blood.

<sup>388</sup> Kolchin, ‘Whiteness Studies’, 158.

<sup>389</sup> Franklin, ‘Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind and the Peopling of Countries (1751)’, in *The Autobiography*, 226.

<sup>390</sup> Dyer, *White*, 44.

all white people sit at the table'.<sup>391</sup> Likewise, Berger observes the exclusionary nature of whiteness, noting that 'its power and privileges are not awarded evenly or evenhandedly'.<sup>392</sup> Regardless of the politics of exclusion operating within the discourse of whiteness, to which both Davy and Berger allude, usually enacted through the racialization of class and gender roles, being visible as white has become equated with privilege. Depending on the demands of zeitgeist, it has also held a privilege of making others visible.

### **The signifying power of absence**

Indeed, it would seem that in the discourse of white, to borrow from Shakespeare, 'nothing is/But what is not'.<sup>393</sup> According to Dyer, 'white is no colour because it is all colours'.<sup>394</sup> Similarly, Melville succinctly observes of white that it 'is not so much a color as the visible absence of color, and at the same time the concrete of all colors'.<sup>395</sup> White is a *tabula rasa* that contains within itself a spectrum of other hues, or a multitude of meanings. These meanings are heavily laden with symbolism 'with its emphasis on purity, cleanliness, virginity, in short, absence', which 'inflects whiteness once again towards non-particularity, only this time in the sense of non-existence'.<sup>396</sup> That is not to say that white people do not exist. Rather, the notion of absence inherent in the conceptions of white as a colour results in the emergence of 'the subject without properties', one that 'is nothing in particular, the representative human'.<sup>397</sup> Therein lies the ambiguity of whiteness, not only

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<sup>391</sup> Davy, 'Outing', in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 217.

<sup>392</sup> Berger, *White Lies*, 166.

<sup>393</sup> William Shakespeare, *The New Penguin Shakespeare: Macbeth*, ed. G. K. Hunter (London: Penguin, 1967), 1.3.141-42.

<sup>394</sup> Dyer, *White*, 47.

<sup>395</sup> Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 169.

<sup>396</sup> Dyer, *White*, 70.

<sup>397</sup> Dyer, *White*, 71; and Dyer, *White*, 80.

as a symbolic construct, but also as a perception of colour: in its amorphous character that enables it to be nothing in particular, yet meaningful. This ambiguity of whiteness is predetermined by its proscriptive and prescriptive nature which renders absence crucial to its construction. Accordingly, its attributes such as ‘Cleanliness [which] is the absence of dirt, spirituality [which] is the absence of flesh, virtue [which is] the absence of sin, [and] chastity [which] is the absence of sex’, culminate in the ‘purity’ of whiteness which ‘may simply be an absence of being’.<sup>398</sup> Paradoxically, this cultivation of absence itself materialises as a product of the enterprising spirit, and, as such, it reifies its presence. The notion of absence lying at the core of whiteness, both as a symbol and as a colour, echoes Jacques Lacan’s dictum of ‘I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think.’<sup>399</sup> Essentially, to Lacan, a sense of lack underpins the formation of identity, whereby a conception of self is achieved negatively, through a realisation of who or what one is not. A sense of symbolic whiteness may be realised through an identification of the presence of the undesirable qualities such as sin and dissoluteness in those perceived as non-white who then, regardless of their skin colour, are ‘blackened’. For racial whiteness, on the other hand, the visual recognition of the presence of colour other than white will serve as a confirmation of the existence of vice from which white, as a colour, is disassociated since it signifies purity and cleanliness. As Dyer pithily observes, ‘a black person who is good is a surprise, and one who is bad merely fulfils expectations’.<sup>400</sup> To Berger, such expectations are built on stereotype which in turn fuels hype. It is the latter that separates blackness and whiteness ‘into two opposing, simplistic values’, and ‘predisposes white people to see even

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<sup>398</sup> Dyer, *White*, 75; Dyer, *White*, 80.

<sup>399</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits: A Selection*, tr. Alan Sheridan (London: Routledge, 2009), 183.

<sup>400</sup> Dyer, *White*, 63. Franz Fanon makes a similar observation: ‘Nothing is more astonishing than to hear a black man express himself properly, for then in truth he is putting on the white world’, in *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 36. The sentiment is echoed by Smith who asserts: “‘guilt’ is not so much a matter of whether a black man has committed a crime as it is a matter of whether a black male has had an *opportunity* to commit a crime’, in *American Body Politics*, 123.

the most innocent black person as dangerous, sinister, or scary'.<sup>401</sup> Nonetheless, it is precisely the confirmation of such expectations that leads to a reaffirmation of one's whiteness. Arguably, the existence of, or even aspirations to whiteness, rely on a perception of otherness as a receptacle of anti-whiteness. Like the notion of whiteness, the concept of anti-whiteness cannot be reduced to colour, although colour is frequently construed to be indicative of virtue or vice. In one of her imagined conversations with God, Mrs Turpin – a heroine of Flannery O'Connor's short story 'Revelation' – when confronted with the unthinkable question of who she would rather be, 'a nigger or white-trash', somewhat grudgingly replies: 'All right, make me a nigger then – but that don't mean a trashy one. And he would have made her a neat clean respectable Negro woman, herself but black.'<sup>402</sup> Mrs Turpin's reply both subverts and reifies the notion of colour as indicative of vice. While 'trashy niggers' are indubitably exceptionable, it is clear that in her estimation skin colour does not necessarily denote the absence of such attributes characteristic of whiteness as neatness, cleanliness and respectability. Clearly, to Mrs Turpin, 'The symbology of white womanhood is not that of the fallen, disenfranchised white woman but that of the respectable white woman.'<sup>403</sup> The lack of these qualities brands 'white trash' as fallen – a doubly repugnant offence since their skin colour, historically and stereotypically, preconditions them for greatness. Indeed, the absence of these qualities marks the 'white trash's' fall from whiteness as a crime far greater than being outwardly black; it is a much lesser offence to be black and respectable than white and fallen. Indeed, devoid of the attributes of whiteness, 'white trash' externalises the darkness lurking inside 'the white Western self'.

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<sup>401</sup> Berger, *White Lies*, 98.

<sup>402</sup> O'Connor, 'Revelation', 207-08.

<sup>403</sup> Davy, 'Outing', 213.

The centrality of the notion of absence to conceptions of whiteness may lead to conclusions that the latter ‘is not a culture but precisely the absence of culture’.<sup>404</sup> The pertinence of the assertion notwithstanding, it could nonetheless benefit from periphrasis: whiteness is not an absence of culture, but a distinct culture based on a notion of absence; on simultaneous expunging and projecting of qualities deemed undesirable onto others. Indeed, in Melville’s words, whiteness is ‘the most meaning symbol of spiritual things, nay, the very veil of the Christian’s Deity [sic]’.<sup>405</sup> Such expunging and projecting, when combined with the notions of denial and suffering enshrined in Christianity, epitomise ‘the very struggle for whiteness [which] is a sign of whiteness’.<sup>406</sup> However, ‘to recapture whiteness is also to shed life, which can mean nothing else than death’.<sup>407</sup> Since, as Butler notes, the desiring subject ‘does not participate in the Life that he desires, [...] so desire becomes the experience of a kind of death in life’.<sup>408</sup> The desire for whiteness marks the metaphorical death of the subject of whiteness. Death denotes an absence *ad infinitum* and, at least in Christian mythology, becomes the means of the attainment of the ultimate reward – salvation, itself a glorious result of the desire and ‘the struggle for whiteness’.

The symbolism of whiteness as death is reified by the imagery associated with ‘the struggle for whiteness’, which may be evinced in the vampire myth. Not only are vampires ‘dead’, but ‘they are [also] pale, cadaverous, white.’<sup>409</sup> What is more, their bite brings death which ‘is signalled by [the resulting] whiteness’ of the victim.<sup>410</sup> The parasitic bite, manifested in the deathly pallor, initiates the whitening process which culminates in whiteness. However, this kind of vampiric whiteness, according to Ken Gelder, ‘produces an uncanny effect, rendering something simultaneously familiar and strange, recognised

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<sup>404</sup> Roediger, *Towards*, 13.

<sup>405</sup> Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 169.

<sup>406</sup> Dyer, *White*, 208.

<sup>407</sup> Dyer, *White*, 208.

<sup>408</sup> Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, 37.

<sup>409</sup> Dyer, *White*, 210.

<sup>410</sup> Dyer, *White*, 210.

and unknowable'.<sup>411</sup> Like the vampire, whiteness derives from, and produces, a similarly uncanny effect – that of familiarity and strangeness, of visibility and invisibility, of a simultaneous normalcy and difference. Inherent in the concept of the vampire, as in whiteness, is the notion of undecidability underpinned by a tension between an outward appearance and symbolic significance, whereby the familiarity of appearance may conceal a dearth of the symbolic attributes, transforming it into a repository of strangeness. Effectively, the undecidability of whiteness is its uncanny effect which, simultaneously, renders familiarity monstrous. Intrinsic to this uncanny effect of whiteness is a notion of transcendence, of vacillating between the 'recognised and unknowable', normalcy and difference. What is noteworthy is that one of the characteristics of whiteness, as Dyer observes, is the concept of enterprise which can be associated with imperialism and territorial expansionism as well as dominance. Inseparable from the enterprising spirit is the notion of transcendence, of transgressing preordained territorial boundaries. The vampire's immortality, which coincides with the Christian doctrine of the immortal soul, is not only capable of transgressing territorial boundaries, but also of transcending temporal ones; the vampire materialises as the coloniser *par excellence* who brings 'death' to those he conquers. In the nineteenth century, the imperialist enterprise was aided by the emergence of capitalism, and the vampire became the iconic form of 'representation of capital or the capitalist'.<sup>412</sup> What capitalism and imperialism share is the notion of enterprise associated with whiteness and the idea of transcendence. According to Marx, 'Capital is dead labour, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labour.'<sup>413</sup> Capitalism, then, constitutes a version of the enterprising spirit, one that is also capable of utilising others as well as transcending boundaries. The analogy with the vampire

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<sup>411</sup> Ken Gelder, *Reading the Vampire* (Routledge, 1994), 47.

<sup>412</sup> Gelder, *Reading*, 22.

<sup>413</sup> Karl Marx, 'The Working Day', in *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, ed. Frederick Engels, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, vol. 1, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1970), 233.

inadvertently links capitalism to the upper echelons of society, thus, simultaneously, establishing boundaries and reinforcing the existence of the ‘shades of whiteness’, or in Dyer’s terms, ‘gradations of whiteness’ grounded in material wealth – capital.<sup>414</sup> It is not coincidental that the vampire, as the embodiment of the whitest whiteness, ‘represents an excessive form of capitalism’.<sup>415</sup> This vampirism of whiteness, outwardly manifested in the whitest of white hues, is inseparable from the notion of enterprise – itself associated with constant striving, with relentless progress, leading to the accumulation of material wealth which may culminate in the attainment of the whitest whiteness. However, the inextricability of the vampiric whiteness and death indicates a sense of terror inextricable from whiteness; a sense of annihilation, of dissolving into ‘nothing at all’.<sup>416</sup> According to Dyer, it is this spectre of immateriality, inseparable from whiteness, that distinguishes it from white identity. It is the logic of whiteness, founded on the paradox that, ‘White people have a colour, but it is a colour that also signifies the absence of colour, itself a characteristic of life and presence.’<sup>417</sup> It is this vacillation between being white and ‘being nothing in particular’, the struggle for perfection haunted by the conviction of its unattainability – itself indicative of the death of the ideal – wherein lies the undecidability of whiteness. Despite its unattainability, or possibly because of it, whiteness, as Dyer demonstrates, has been widely and vividly represented, which itself may be seen as an attempt at effecting whiteness: an endeavour to ground the impossible ideal in the present.

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<sup>414</sup> Dyer, *White*, 12.

<sup>415</sup> Gelder, *Reading*, 19.

<sup>416</sup> Dyer, *White*, 207.

<sup>417</sup> Dyer, *White*, 207.



### Whiteness as eternal otherness

The question of debunking ideals is the main preoccupation of Robert Young's *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West*.<sup>418</sup> Although the work does not engage with whiteness *per se*, its pertinence lies in Young's observations concerning history and otherness. Essentially, Young perceives history as 'a bad copy,' 'a simulacrum,' and 'an historical pastiche'.<sup>419</sup> The assumption that history constitutes its own pastiche, its own simulacrum, reinforces the view that whiteness, considering its historical genesis, also signifies as a simulacrum. What is more, it leads to a further disruption of the universality of whiteness, since different locales will be informed by diverse versions of history. Consequently, regional whiteness will be different from the national model, while both will remain within the realm of the pastiche or simulacrum. Inextricable from history has been, according to Young, the creation of the other. Young traces the conjunction of history and the other back to Hegel. This tendency, stemming from Hegelian thought, to 'The appropriation of the other as a form of knowledge within a totalizing system can thus be set alongside the history (if not the project) of European imperialism'.<sup>420</sup> What Young suggests is that the creation of the concept of the other and its subsequent appropriation are inextricably bound up with the European history of imperialism. Such a supposition provides a direct link between what Frankenberg and Babb propose as the origins of whiteness, namely that it is grounded in the discourses of imperialism and dominance which, in Young's terms, translates into European imperialism; or what Dyer characterises as a sense of enterprise. Notwithstanding the validity of Hegel's 'master/slave dialectic', Young considers the opposition untenable, for it obfuscates the diversity of the oppressed groups, such as 'women, black people, and all other so-called ethnic and minority

<sup>418</sup> Robert Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>419</sup> Young, *White Mythologies*, viii.

<sup>420</sup> Young, *White Mythologies*, 4.

groups'.<sup>421</sup> Moreover, Young continues, 'As soon as there is no longer a single master and no single slave, then the classic Hegelian model is no longer adequate.'<sup>422</sup> Young's interpretation finds the Hegelian master/slave dialectic lacking and unidirectional precisely because it does not account for the proliferation of masters and slaves. However, in 'The Truth of Self-Certainty', Hegel discusses the mechanisms which fuel constructions of master and slave as distinct yet co-dependent entities, and not the unilaterality of such creations.<sup>423</sup> Indeed, in his discussion of Hegel, Kojève asserts that without 'the first Fight that ended in the appearance of a Master and a Slave', there would be no man and no history, or indeed whiteness.<sup>424</sup> The 'universal history' remains within the realm of the abstract and encompasses 'the history of the interaction between men and of their interaction with Nature' which is enacted in particular places and the result of specific desires.<sup>425</sup> While it is always 'the history of the interaction between warlike Masters and warring Slaves', the rationale for such battles will differ.<sup>426</sup> The concept of the 'Fight' does not deny the validity and multiplicity of fights which, rooted in self-consciousness and informed by the desire for recognition, operate in any given context.<sup>427</sup> The victor/vanquished dyad obtains universally, while the grounds on which the battles are fought are subject to cultural, social, and historical shifts. Echoing Hegel and Kojève, Lacan argues that 'The satisfaction of human desire is possible only when mediated by the desire and the labour of the other.'<sup>428</sup> Similarly, Butler sees desire as '*intentional* in that it is always desire *of* or *for* a given object or Other, but it is also *reflexive* in the sense that

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<sup>421</sup> Young, *White Mythologies*, 5.

<sup>422</sup> Young, *White Mythologies*, 5.

<sup>423</sup> Georg, Wilhelm, Friedrich Hegel, 'The Truth of Self-Certainty', in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller, foreword J.N. Finley (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 104-38.

<sup>424</sup> Kojève, *Introduction*, 43.

<sup>425</sup> Kojève, *Introduction*, 43.

<sup>426</sup> Kojève, *Introduction*, 43.

<sup>427</sup> For Kojève, that desire that initiates the conflict and aids the development of self-consciousness is the desire for recognition, in *Introduction*, 7.

<sup>428</sup> Lacan, *Écrits*, 29.

desire is a modality in which the subject is both discovered and enhanced'.<sup>429</sup> In the lord or master, the desire for dominance is equal to the desire for the Other, and only through the convergence of both can the notion of lordship be realised. Arguably, the satisfaction of desire precipitates the existence of the master and the slave, or the victor and the vanquished. According to Hegel, the respective self-identifications of the lord and the bondsman are locked in a mutually reciprocal relationship, whereby 'They *recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing* one another.'<sup>430</sup> The lord's self-awareness is occasioned by a negation of himself as a bondsman, and vice versa, and this instance of recognition 'is indivisibly the action of one as well as of the other'.<sup>431</sup> Therefore, Hegel continues, 'The lord relates himself mediately to the bondsman through a being [a thing] that is independent, for it is just this which holds the bondsman in bondage', whereas 'what the bondsman does is really the action of the lord'.<sup>432</sup> For Hegel, in this interrelated relationship, not only does the recognition of the signification of the Other's body precede the signification of the lord as lord, but also facilitates its positioning in opposition to the lord and becomes the reification of lordship. In Hegel's terms, the lord's self-awareness is engendered by the recognition of the bondsman's slavery, while the bondsman, through the recognition of his own bondage, fuels the creation of the lord. Although the signification of the lord's identity is realised negatively 'by requiring the Other to *be* the body that he endeavours *not* to be', Butler observes that 'before mediated self-reflection is achieved, the subject knows himself to be a more limited, less autonomous being'.<sup>433</sup> The less autonomous being in this scenario, and doubly so, is the master whose identity relies on the presence of the slave for reification. However, the master's identity as master cannot be fully realised, for the slave's presence is insufficient to support such self-definition. Having

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<sup>429</sup> Butler, *Subject s of Desire*, 25.

<sup>430</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 112.

<sup>431</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 112.

<sup>432</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 115.

<sup>433</sup> Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, 53; and Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, 8.

lost the fight, ‘the Slave is not a man’, and for the master’s mastery to be fully acknowledged, the master ‘would have to be recognized by another Master’.<sup>434</sup> Although the bondsman, through the recognition of his bondage fuels the creation of the master, his efforts are futile to the master’s self-identification as master. This assertion is crucial to the discourse of whiteness, for it undermines the role of the peculiar institution in its constructions and liberates it from the binarity of white versus black. While the possession of bondsmen may enhance the aspiring master’s claim to mastery, it cannot guarantee his recognition as master or solely validate his whiteness. Hegel goes so far as to suggest that the ‘essential nature’ of lordship ‘is the reverse of what it wants to be, so too servitude in its consummation will really turn into the opposite of what it immediately is’.<sup>435</sup> The adherence to, in this instance, ideals of whiteness transforms the lord into the bondsman, while the dependence on the bondsman as a means of evoking this symbolism of whiteness metaphorically liberates him. In Hegel’s view, therefore, the master/slave dialectic already contains a proliferation of meanings which, contrary to Young’s proposition, negates the possibility of there being one master and one slave. Not only does the master discourse invoke its opposite – slave – but it also contains it in its self-proclaimed mastery. For as long as a form of dependence exists, whether it be slavery, patriarchy or ideology, the lord/bondsman paradigm will remain functional.

This charge of unidirectionality notwithstanding, Young still sees the Hegelian model as instrumental in creating perceptions of the other. According to Young, the master/slave dialectic is grounded in ‘the phenomenological account of the constitution of knowledge that works according to the structure of a subject perceiving an object, a same/other dialectic in which the other is first constituted by the same through negation as other before

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<sup>434</sup> Kojève, *Introduction*, 46.

<sup>435</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 117.

being incorporated within it'.<sup>436</sup> What Young proposes is that for another to be defined as other, a degree of sameness must be recognised and then negated; or put differently, a degree of otherness must be acknowledged within oneself and then promptly expunged as other. This recognition of alterity within oneself stimulates the projection of the undesirable qualities onto another, effectively transforming them into an other.<sup>437</sup> Simultaneously, any degree of sameness recognised in the other must be consistently denied to frustrate the potential transformation of the other into another. Effectively, the process of negative embodiment is itself transformed into a healing negation which allows aspirations to whiteness to be sustained. Young's proposition echoes Hartigan's notion of the genesis of monstrosity which requires a degree of sameness to be recognised before the classification as monster can be effected. This sameness, then, has to be reinterpreted and negated into a recognisable, but indelible difference. Hence, the construction of monstrosity is a closely policed process and as monstrous as the idea may appear, monsters must conform. Whereas racial whiteness relies on a recognition of monstrosity in those perceived as others, symbolic whiteness, on the other hand, carries within itself an awareness of monstrosity which, in turn, propels the constant striving for perfection. This idea of the intrinsic monstrosity of whiteness consists in the recognition of an irreducible and insurmountable difference from the ideal. In other words, intrinsic difference, not sameness lies at the heart of whiteness. Monstrosity, therefore, materialises as an inescapable aspect of the discourse of whiteness which, paradoxically, not only relies on the production of monsters for signification, but is also sustained by a conviction of monstrosity. Such awareness of innate imperfection both fuels and frustrates the struggle for perfection, for it reifies the impossibility of the attainment of the ideal.

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<sup>436</sup> Young, *White Mythologies*, 6.

<sup>437</sup> According to Murphy, the term 'another' conveys a degree of familiarity which needs to be suppressed before transformation into the 'absolute Other' can occur, in 'Anotherness', in *Writing the Environment*, 40.

While monstrosity appears deeply enmeshed within the discourse of whiteness, the production of both is a historic process. For Kojève, ‘the Desire that generates Self-Consciousness, the human reality – is, finally, a function of the desire for “recognition”’.<sup>438</sup> The desire for signification is the primary and originary condition of self-consciousness and propels ‘a fight to the death for “recognition”’.<sup>439</sup> Importantly, for ‘the human reality’ to ‘come into being as “recognized” reality both adversaries must remain alive after the fight’.<sup>440</sup> The cessation of the fight does not suspend the signification of otherness which both the conflict and the formation of self-consciousness presuppose, rather it marks the beginning of a process of its reinterpretation. Similarly, Young perceives ‘the comprehension and incorporation of the other’ as constitutive components of ‘knowledge – and therefore theory, or history’.<sup>441</sup> The alterity of the other cannot be allowed to vanish and, instead, it is subsumed and familiarised so that the other undergoes a transformation into a ‘familiar other’. Young observes of being that it ‘is always defined as the appropriation of either difference into identity, or of identities into a greater order, be it absolute knowledge, History, or the state’, or, indeed, whiteness.<sup>442</sup> As a state of being characterised by the fight for betterment or privilege, whiteness is both spurred by intrinsic difference or alterity and inescapable from it. The quest for perfect whiteness is underlain by the awareness of difference from the ideal, whereas the recognition of alterity in others fuels, to borrow from Chambers, the processes of pluralization and homogenization and, consequently, serves to coalesce ‘identities into a greater order’. Similarly, those who share in the quest for perfect whiteness are also, inadvertently, absorbed into a greater order, though in this instance, as Chambers observes, their identities remain distinct. Young sees ‘War’ and its attendant ‘concept of totality’ as ‘another form of the appropriation of the

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<sup>438</sup> Kojève, *Introduction*, 7.

<sup>439</sup> Kojève, *Introduction*, 7.

<sup>440</sup> Kojève, *Introduction*, 8.

<sup>441</sup> Young, *White Mythologies*, 12.

<sup>442</sup> Young, *White Mythologies*, 13.

other’.<sup>443</sup> Through the illusion of totality that war maintains, ‘the individual takes on meaning’.<sup>444</sup> However, the seeming wholeness of war encodes a split between a symbolic totality and individual battles fought by its participants. These discrete skirmishes are, in turn, subsumed into the totality of war. To this end war, while retaining a conceptual wholeness that unites the combatants in the common cause, is eternally heterogeneous. A similar mechanism sustains the struggle for whiteness which, as a concept, is invested with a totality that occludes the singularity of its aspirants’ efforts. Just as, according to Jacques Derrida ‘there is not one single history, a general history, but rather histories *different* in their type, rhythm, model of inscription – intervallic, differentiated histories’, there is not a single whiteness.<sup>445</sup> Implicit in Derrida’s proposition is the idea of superseding a single, universal history with histories – disparate narratives that offer a proliferation of meanings as opposed to a single interpretation aspiring to universality. Derrida’s observation, when translated into the discourse of whiteness, undermines its universality and offers an alternative model of interrogation, one that will take into account disparate temporalities and lead to the emergence of distinct, ‘intervallic and differentiated’ whitenesses. Indeed, as Berger notes, ‘Like blackness, whiteness connotes multiple meanings, multiple ethnicities, multiple shades of pink, and brown and yellow.’<sup>446</sup> Berger’s emphasis on the visual aspect of race notwithstanding, the existence of multiple meanings of whiteness, or indeed, whitenesses, does not detract from Dyer’s notion of the universal model of whiteness based on Christ and the Virgin Mary who provided antecedents of perfect whiteness, but rather suggests that these paradigms will be subject to interpretations and reinterpretations. Effectively, the constant, universal model will stimulate and inform the constructions of multifarious whitenesses which will be effected and manifested

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<sup>443</sup> Young, *White Mythologies*, 13.

<sup>444</sup> Young, *White Mythologies*, 13.

<sup>445</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, tr. Alan Bass (Chicago IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 58.

<sup>446</sup> Berger, *White Lies*, 166.

differently. The meaning of the symbolic whiteness will always be mediated by difference: the intrinsic difference separating those aspiring to whiteness from the ideal, and the need to maintain difference through exclusion of those who are deemed ‘unworthy’ of whiteness: those who are branded as other.

In order for whiteness to be effected and maintained, difference needs to be perpetually reconstituted within its discourse. According to Derrida, ‘*différance* refers to the (active and passive) movement that consists in deferring by means of delay, delegation, reprieve, referral, detour, postponement, reserving’.<sup>447</sup> This notion of deferral of meaning is crucial to the discourse of whiteness, for it allows it to delay its significations through active designations of that which is excluded from this category, emphasising the arbitrary constructedness of the concept. What is more, Derrida writes, *différance* consists in ‘the movement of *différance*, as that which produces different things, that which differentiates, [that which] is the common root of all the oppositional concepts that mark our language’.<sup>448</sup> In enunciating the active role of *différance*, Derrida casts it as the agent responsible for significations of binarity, or ‘oppositional concepts’ – itself inextricable from the notion of whiteness. *Différance*, then, becomes a means of effecting whiteness through the branding of others – an act which is frequently, and possibly erroneously, equated with the ‘unspeakability’ and ‘invisibility’ of whiteness. Whiteness is not so much invisible or unspoken, rather it is *différance par excellence* which, born out of an innate awareness of difference, is effected through constructing others as different. Since, according to Derrida, ‘Subjectivity – like objectivity is an effect of *différance*, an effect inscribed in a system of *différance*’, any subjectivity aspiring to whiteness will both encode

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<sup>447</sup> Derrida, *Positions*, 8.

<sup>448</sup> Derrida, *Positions*, 9.



and engender *différance*.<sup>449</sup> The means through which *différance* may be effected will be context and place specific, frequently, though not necessarily, accompanied by terror and oppression of those cast as other.

As an inextricable part of its construction and *modus operandi*, *différance* disrupts the universality of whiteness. Notwithstanding the symbolic wholeness of Christian models of whiteness, their appropriation and implementation will signify differently, both temporally and spatially, culminating in the emergence of distinct whitenesses. Since whiteness constitutes an indeterminable movement of mimesis, ‘It is necessary’, as Derrida observes, ‘that while referring each time to another text, to another determinate system’, it ‘only refer[s] to *itself* as a determinate structure; a structure that is open and closed *at the same time*’.<sup>450</sup> Each paradigm of whiteness, though representing a totality in itself, will inevitably be inscribed with another text of whiteness which it imitates, or indeed to which it is constructed in opposition as exemplified by feminine and masculine incarnations of whiteness. In this constant referring to another text, to an antecedent, whiteness appears atavistic – its discourse is perpetuated through constant looking back. If the figures of Christ and the Virgin Mary provide such antecedents, then whiteness consists in their re-imagining in an attempt to replicate the purity of the ideal. Each instance of re-imagining, while imbued with other texts, will still preserve its totality. Only then can whiteness retain its structure of being ‘open and closed at the same time’. Such distinct whitenesses, regardless of whether they are engendered by mimetic acts or effected through unfavourable comparisons with those deemed other, will retain their singular and aparadigmatic status. Whiteness, then, operates as a system of totalities, signifying as disparate whitenesses, which constitute a part of, in Young’s terms, ‘the greater order’.

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<sup>449</sup> Derrida, *Positions*, 28.

<sup>450</sup> Derrida, *Dissemination*, 214.

Paradoxically, the universality of whiteness is belied by its singular totalities striving towards the very universality which their existence, grounded in distinct temporalities, disrupts. Moreover, Young observes of the concept of totality that it engenders its own negation, whereby ‘each element cannot express the whole because the whole is only accessible as a concept, which is precisely not expressed at all’.<sup>451</sup> This incisive observation underscores the paradox of whiteness which, as a whole, cannot be expressed precisely because it is difference and how it is effected is subject to distinct temporalities. These diverse temporalities facilitate the emergence of disparate and partial whitenesses which further thwart the reconstruction of whiteness as a conceptual whole. Since its symbolism derives from the unattainable Christian ideals, whiteness, inadvertently, oppresses and terrorises itself with the promise of a transcendence that is impossible since it signifies as inaccessible reality. This transcendence of whiteness is further frustrated through its dependence on its effects for significations. Indeed, this oppression of whiteness appears twofold. As Warren Hedges observes, it oppresses ‘by violently excluding racial others from definitions of normalcy while simultaneously narrowing the range of acceptable white behavior’.<sup>452</sup> Both the ‘acceptable white behavior’ and exclusion of others are contingent upon the notion of normalcy, and the narrowing of the latter to the Christian desire for the biblical ideals further reifies the impossibility of not only attainment, but also adherence to these models. Furthermore, since the whole cannot be expressed, then each element – each incarnation of whiteness – represents a totality in itself, which serves to disrupt both the universality of the whole and its aspirations to transcendence. Therein lies the negative totalization of whiteness – in the tension between an idea of universal whiteness and fragmentation into disparate whitenesses, both dependent on, and autonomous from, the ideal. Ironically, the very awareness of the

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<sup>451</sup> Young, *White Mythologies*, 61.

<sup>452</sup> Warren Hedges, ‘If Uncle Tom Is White, Should We Call Him “Auntie”? Race and Sexuality in Postbellum U.S. Fiction’, in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 228.

transcendental decorums will always be initiated by a need to transcend a priori difference – the intrinsic difference inescapable from the notion of the perfect whiteness as embodied by Christ and the Virgin Mary. Consequently, the totality of perfect whiteness can never be attained and only, to paraphrase Derrida, the phantasmatic process of transcendence endures.<sup>453</sup>

Although the totality of whiteness cannot be attained, its meanings are still effected, transforming it into the phantasm *par excellence*. Young observes that the phantasm ‘rather than constituting the event, hovers over its surface like a cloud, as an effect of meaning not identifiable with anything in the event as such’.<sup>454</sup> Young’s phantasm evokes Claude Lévi-Strauss’s conceptualisation of the mask, according to which ‘a mask is not what it represents, but what it transfers’.<sup>455</sup> Roman Jakobson compares the function of the mask to that of the myth in that ‘Like a myth, it excludes and denies as much as it states.’<sup>456</sup> Like a mask or a myth, the meanings of whiteness rely on naming and mythologizing what it excludes, while disassociating itself from these processes. Accordingly, lynching, blackface minstrelsy, black figure iconography as well as stereotyping, through their respective enunciation of nonwhiteness support the phantasmic status of whiteness: all constitute means of reifying and effecting whiteness without explicitly naming or referring to it. Whiteness, while effected through these events, remains unidentifiable with them as they unfold; instead, its meanings like the phantasm hover in the background to be evoked through the medium of negative embodiment. This phantasmatic nature of whiteness does

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<sup>453</sup> Derrida observes of identity that it ‘is never given, received or attained, only the indeterminable and indefinitely phantasmatic process of identification endures’, in *Monolingualism of the Other, or, the Prosthesis of Origin*, tr. Patrick Mensah (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 28.

<sup>454</sup> Young, *White Mythologies*, 82.

<sup>455</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss cited by Roman Jakobson in ‘Dear Claude, Cher Maître’, in *On Signs*, ed. Marshall Blonsky (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 185.

<sup>456</sup> Jakobson, ‘Dear Claude’, in *On Signs*, 185. In a footnote, Blonsky notes that the essay is a printed version of ‘An address given at a Tribute to Professor Claude Levi-Strauss at the US Embassy in Paris on 8 November 1978,’ in *On Signs*, 184.

not place it, contrary to putatively accepted theories, within the realm of the universal, but reifies its contingency upon the effects which facilitate its meanings. While the phantasm of whiteness fuels the representations of others, it remains both effected through, and concealed behind them. As a phantasm, whiteness occupies a decentred position, while its universal model is rendered unattainable and untenable.

This phantasmic quality extends to the biblical paradigms of whiteness. Young considers the Bible the blueprint for ‘the literary representations of reality in European culture’, although that ‘reality is [always] distant, obscure, and demands interpretation’.<sup>457</sup> While both Dyer and Young see the Bible as instrumental in the creation of European culture, to Dyer, the values embodied in the notion of universal whiteness remain unattainable, but constant. Young’s observation, however, articulates the instability of values constructed in this manner since their meanings have never been made explicit in the biblical narrative, but always deferred. Dyer’s concept of the universal aspect of whiteness can be compared to Derrida’s concept of the ‘transcendental signified’, denoting ‘the presence of a value or a meaning supposedly antecedent to *différance*’.<sup>458</sup> As transcendental signifieds, the values associated with symbolic whiteness, such as passivity and piety in women, and the struggle between body and mind culminating in perpetual striving and self-denial in men, have to both predate *différance* and predicate it. By virtue of their antecedence, these values inaugurate *différance* which, in turn, furnishes them with constancy by shifting focus to *différance* so that the latter ‘means’. What it designates precisely will always be subject to context, however, the vacillating significations of *différance* will allow these truths to retain their universality and spectrality; while *différance* is irreducible, the concept of

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<sup>457</sup> Young bases his observation on Erich Auerbach’s *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Young observes that ‘Auerbach distinguishes between two kinds of style in the literary representation of reality in European culture, typified by the difference between the *Odyssey* and the Bible’, in Young, *White Mythologies*, 105.

<sup>458</sup> Derrida, *Positions*, 29.

whiteness is reducible to *différance*. Despite their universality, the biblical antecedents of whiteness engender a polysemy of meanings by virtue of the interpretative malleability of the biblical narrative. This is not to deny the transcendental significations of the biblical values, but rather to emphasise their dependence on the interpretative process which consists in a negotiation of difference in an attempt to approximate the ideal. The following chapters of this thesis will engage with this differential condition of whiteness born out of the fusion of transcendence and interpretability of the biblical values, exemplary of which is Ellen Glasgow's portrayal of Miss Angela in *The Miller of Old Church* (1911). Born into the affluence of the aristocratic caste, Miss Angela has no equal when it comes to projecting feminine passivity. Although her passivity is grounded in the Marian paradigm, it is already a re-moulded version of it which, divested of selflessness and compassion of this biblical model, fits the genteel ethos of the Post-Reconstruction South. The reinterpreted passivity of Miss Angela's conduct becomes an adroitly employed tool that enables her to impose her will on others to safeguard the sanctity of her class, transforming her into a negative embodiment of the ideal. While the existence of the ideal makes Miss Angela's projection of whiteness possible, its interpretability also ensures the inadequacy of the replication. In Miss Angela's case, difference is constantly articulated and reconstituted, while the transcendental signified – whiteness – remains a phantasm. According to Derrida, 'Only nonexpressivity can signify, because in all rigor there is no signification unless there is synthesis, syntagm, *différance*, and the text.'<sup>459</sup> This nonexpressivity of whiteness, which theorists like Babb, Frankenberg *et al* refer to as its 'unspeakability' and 'invisibility', is effected through *différance* which also, simultaneously, signifies as an effect of whiteness. Hence, the notion of *différance* appears both interior and exterior to the discourse of whiteness: interior – as the quest for perfect

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<sup>459</sup> Derrida, *Positions*, 33.

whiteness is fuelled by a conviction of imperfection or difference; and exterior – as the significations of whiteness also depend upon those who stand outside this category. Effectively, the meanings of whiteness materialise as phantasms, hovering on the periphery, which enter signification when the interpretative process begins. Such proposition does not undermine Dyer's argument in that it does not question the existence of such universal values as female passivity, piety, purity or male self-denial as an expression of spiritual and physical striving, but merely points out that such categories can never be unequivocal and necessarily stable. Instead, they continue in constant flux, subject to shifting temporalities that fuel the reconstructions of partial whitenesses, inadvertently sustaining the phantasmatic and unattainable nature of whiteness proper.

### Chapter three: Passing Place

Past is never dead. It's not even past.<sup>460</sup>

One week in New York is warranted to break any gentleman of good manners.<sup>461</sup>

The elusiveness of whiteness and its 'ontological wiggling' have inaugurated many a quest to unravel its meaning and, rightly or wrongly, have fostered the idea that one, univocal signification may be possible.<sup>462</sup> While theorists of whiteness agree 'on the elusive, undefined nature of whiteness', there is an unwillingness to separate whiteness from race, whiteness from white identity, or whiteness from blackness.<sup>463</sup> Encoded in the last of these dichotomies is a reluctance to divorce the outward manifestation of whiteness from the marked visibility of blackness which, ineluctably, points to the racial underpinning of the binarity, whereby race is understood as variation in skin colour. If whiteness were synonymous with race, then instances of metaphorical shellacking encoded in phrases such as 'turn nigger' or 'blacken' one's character would lose meaning. Exemplary of such metaphorical shellacking is the treatment accorded to the Irish in the nineteenth century. The fact that 'Americans viewed the Irish as a degraded and savage people' was not occasioned by their lack of visible whiteness – that was beyond doubt. Rather, what 'was far more alarming' than their colour was their Catholicism, which went against the values of American Protestantism and, thus, against the norm that could be termed as a recognized whiteness.<sup>464</sup> A similar case of shellacking is recounted by Franklin in his *Autobiography*, and it predates the 'blackening' of the Irish by about a century. This time the objects of shellacking are the Quakers who constitute the majority of the governing Assembly in

<sup>460</sup> William Faulkner, *Requiem for a Nun* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1965), 85.

<sup>461</sup> Thomas Nelson Page, *Gordon Keith* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 171.

<sup>462</sup> Hill, 'Introduction: Vipers in Shangri-La', in *Whiteness: A Critical Reader*, 3.

<sup>463</sup> Kolchin, 'Whiteness Studies', 157-60.

<sup>464</sup> Kolchin, 'Whiteness Studies', 163.

Philadelphia, and whose religious convictions frequently place them in opposition to the governor. Following an altercation with the Assembly, Franklin reports, the governor was asked why he had not expelled the Quakers from the governing body. Franklin interposes and answers on the governor's behalf: 'The governor, says I, has not yet blacked them enough.' It was not for the lack of trying. Indeed, Franklin observes, '[the governor] had labored hard to blacken the Assembly in all his messages but they wiped off his coloring as fast as he laid it on and placed it in return, thick upon his own face'. Consequently, for fear of being 'negrified himself', the governor resigned from the office.<sup>465</sup> Similarly to the Irish, the blackening of the Quakers is justified and justifiable on the grounds of religious difference. Both the Irish Catholics and the Quakers materialise to all intents and purposes as white, at least as far as stereotypical manifestations of race are concerned. Yet, their aspirations to whiteness proper would have been limited at least, if not non-existent. Although both groups could be identified as white, their religion would have barred their ascent to whiteness proper. However, as the case of 'white trash' demonstrates, religion is not the only axis along which shellacking operates. What these examples illustrate is that whiteness transcends colour and that being identified or identifiable as white, as being of the white hue, is not analogous to holding a claim to whiteness. In the wake of such metaphorical shellacking, the ineluctability of the whiteness versus blackness binarity is undermined, thereby rendering superfluous the necessity of blackness, again concerned with visual manifestations of colour, to assertions of whiteness; when metaphorical shellacking can be conducted with impunity, the visual is inadvertently rendered null and void. The reluctance to separate whiteness from race fosters, on the one hand, this tendency to generalise and universalise the meaning of whiteness; while on the other hand, it repeatedly deters an engagement with what Kolchin refers to as 'The unresolved issue',

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<sup>465</sup> Franklin, *The Autobiography*, 122.



namely ‘the extent to which Americans conceived of whiteness (rather than other criteria such as religion, culture, ethnicity, and class) as the main ingredients separating the civilized from the uncivilized’.<sup>466</sup> Such conflations of whiteness, race, and white identity, Kolchin notes, ‘make sense if whiteness is to be understood metaphorically, meaning “acceptable”’.<sup>467</sup> However, if the term is intended ‘to serve as more than a metaphor’, then ‘much of such analysis collapses’.<sup>468</sup> That is not to sunder whiteness from metaphor, but rather to suggest that any analysis of whiteness as the metaphoric ‘seat of privilege’ is bound to be reductive, unless it engages with the quotidian: with how it is reconstructed. Only then can whiteness retain its status as a metaphor and ‘to serve as more’. This is precisely why Kolchin advocates a ‘greater attention to historical and geographical context’ which should include a ‘closer consideration of the South’s role in shaping American notions of race’, while expending a ‘continued effort to move beyond’ the strict binarity of race in an attempt to delineate ‘the multiple meanings of “whiteness”’.<sup>469</sup> Moving beyond the binarity of race while restricting the discussion to the South will not only de-universalise whiteness, but also illustrate the interdependence existing between the metaphor and its manifestations. Only then can the meanings of whiteness as a metaphor and its actual reconstructions be reconciled; only then can the relationship between the metaphor and the means through which it is effected in the everyday be revealed. Since Hale traces the genesis of whiteness to the Post-Reconstruction South and segregation which, through the practice of labelling space, intensified the visibility of blackness culminating in an alleged invisibility of whiteness, it becomes particularly important to establish not only how the attributes commonly associated with whiteness translate into

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<sup>466</sup>Kolchin, ‘Whiteness Studies’, 163.

<sup>467</sup>Kolchin, ‘Whiteness Studies’, 163.

<sup>468</sup>Kolchin, ‘Whiteness Studies’, 163.

<sup>469</sup>Kolchin, ‘Whiteness Studies’, 172.

postbellum southern parlance, but also how they are manifested in the everyday.<sup>470</sup> To many contemporary theorists, united by the common goal of universalising whiteness, the construct has variously, though unanimously, been equated with civility, cultivation, piousness, asexuality in women and sexual restraint in men, as well as superiority, morality and enterprising spirit.<sup>471</sup> Though not exhaustive, the list demonstrates the propensity to define whiteness in metaphorical terms. While enumerating the qualities attendant to whiteness, the list does not indicate how they would have been externalised in the ordinary. In other words, it does not identify the social and cultural constructs that became associated with whiteness and, arguably, nonwhiteness; how whiteness became effected through an espousal of qualities deemed desirable, and an outward rejection, or projection onto others, of those considered pernicious.

Within the discourse of the South such lofty qualities as cultivation or civility are encapsulated in the figure of the aristocratic planter, just and chivalrous to his equals, but equally capable of benevolence and kindness to those deemed less worthy, or ‘darkies’. While the ‘unworthy’ may be the recipients of the aristocratic benevolence, they cannot, by virtue of being unequal, inspire chivalry. Inseparable and integral to the construct of the aristocratic planter – an epitome of southern whiteness – is his female counterpart, the southern belle.<sup>472</sup> The southern belle, cast in the mould of a medieval lady, acts as the receptacle of the qualities that inspire chivalry, namely: chastity, piousness, purity and

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<sup>470</sup> Lori Robinson offers the following comment on Hale’s argument in ‘Region and Race’: ‘The process of marking public spaces, denying African American the privileges of citizenship, and limiting black mobility resulted in a culture that made blackness highly visible. The collective white identity that was forged against that visibility could then become invisible, and through that invisibility could become normative and powerful’, in *A Companion to the Regional Literatures of America*, ed. Charles L. Crow (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 69. As I argue in Chapter One, marking spaces brings both whites and blacks into equal visibility. It could be suggested that the superior quality of ‘white’ spaces effects the visibility of white privilege associated with whiteness. In all subsequent quotations from essays in this collection, the collection will be referenced as *A Companion*. The volume is cited in the bibliography.

<sup>471</sup> The theorists in question include Babb, Frankenberg, Rothenberg, Berger, Aanerud *et al.*

<sup>472</sup> For an account of southern belles and cavaliers, see Watson’s *Normans and Saxons*, and Smith’s *American Body Politics*.

asexuality. If, like Richard Dyer, one adds suffering to the mixture, the southern belle materialises as a hybrid creation, a combination of the medieval lady presiding over a court of love, and the Virgin Mary. As reconstructions of such attributes, the benevolent planter and southern belle are transformed into actual embodiments of whiteness, unique to the region. De Certeau observes that ‘places are articulated by a thousand usages. They are thus transformed into “variations” – not verbal or musical, but spatial – of a question that is the mute motif of the interweavings of places and gestures.’<sup>473</sup> Southern whiteness becomes such a ‘mute motif’ grounded in ‘the interweavings’ of a place and gestures. The South as a distinct place facilitates the creation of its own fictions of whiteness that are then reconstructed through the discursive ‘gestures’ of the aristocratic planter and southern belle. This reciprocity inherent in the South-whiteness dialectic extends further. Just as the place creates its own fictions of whiteness, it spawns parallel discourses of nonwhiteness such as the fictions of ‘white trash’, ‘hillbillies’ or ‘rednecks’, all of which are representative of class differences. These, in turn, contribute to effecting the fictions of whiteness through their own distinct discursive ‘gestures’. Consequently, the ‘gestures’ of the aristocratic planter and southern belle serve as synecdoches, whereby both name ‘a part for the whole in which’ they are ‘included’.<sup>474</sup> Therefore, it is the presupposed attributes of whiteness that are articulated through the discursive ‘gestures’ of the aristocratic planter and southern belle, while whiteness remains unspoken. It is also through these discursive ‘gestures’ that these attributes are effected in the quotidian through, in Ross Chambers’s terms, unfavourable comparisons with their antitheses. If, as Vološinov observes, ‘Every utterance is *the product of the interaction between speakers* and the product of the broader context of the whole complex *social situation* in which the utterance emerges’, then the aristocratic planter and southern belle gain meaning in the process of interaction with those

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<sup>473</sup> Michel De Certeau, ‘Practices of Space’, trans. Richard Miller and Edward Schneider, in *On Signs*, ed. Marshall Blonsky (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), 131.

<sup>474</sup> De Certeau, ‘Practices of Space’, in *On Signs*, 136.

less fortunately positioned socially.<sup>475</sup> Since such interactions are enmeshed in the broader social context, they are therefore unique to a given place and time. David Landis Barnhill notes that ‘being in place’ involves an assumption ‘that there is at least the possibility of living *with* the land and its processes’.<sup>476</sup> Notwithstanding Barnhill’s ecologically-minded observation, in the context of the South it is clear that it was a particular relationship with the land, both in terms of possession thereof and affinity with, that facilitated the emergence of the constructs of the aristocratic planter and southern belle. Therefore, within the discourse of the South, the ownership of land becomes an inextricable part of the logos of southern whiteness. After all, as Theodore Allen points out, it was the combination of the clemency of the climate and the fertility of land that facilitated the emergence of cotton or tobacco monoculture that dominated the region and promoted a unique southern way of life. The latter inextricably binds the possession of land with the labour force conveniently, but not exclusively, furnished by the peculiar institution. Since, Landis Barnhill argues, ‘The particularities of history, geography, and culture shape our relationship to the land’, the constructs of the aristocratic planter and southern belle are both grounded in the hereditary possession of land.<sup>477</sup> Similarly, according to Murphy, ‘the very systematic entity called a culture is also inextricably ennatured’.<sup>478</sup> Moreover, Murphy continues, ‘Cultures are developed in place, not in the abstract; place shapes culture even as any culture alters the environment in which it is situated – particularly when the culture is transported from one kind of place to another.’<sup>479</sup> Place and culture are locked in a symbiotic relationship, whereby place is ‘cultured’ and culture is ‘ennatured’. As a space where culture and nature converge, place contributes to the emergence of unique constructs

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<sup>475</sup> Vološinov, *Freudianism*, 41.

<sup>476</sup> David Landis Barnhill, ‘Introduction’, in *At Home on the Earth: Becoming Native to Our Place: A Multicultural Anthology*, ed. David Landis Barnhill (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 5. In all subsequent quotations from essays in this collection, the collection will be referenced as *At Home*.

<sup>477</sup> Landis Barnhill, ‘Introduction’, *At Home*, 6.

<sup>478</sup> Murphy, *Further Afield*, 14.

<sup>479</sup> Murphy, *Farther Afield*, 14.

such as the aristocratic planter or southern belle. These epitomes of southern whiteness become endemic to the region and ‘ennatured’, defined by the possession of land and cultural practices associated with it. If the possession of land is deeply enmeshed in the discourse of southern whiteness, then, inadvertently, its lack will become a qualifying measure of the fiction of southern nonwhiteness. The latter – a cultural construct like whiteness – will also become ‘ennatured’. To Murphy, a culture is more likely to ‘alter the environment in which it is situated’ when this ‘culture is transplanted from one kind of place to another’.<sup>480</sup> The culture transplanted to the South, that eventually formed the upper echelons of society, was predominantly Anglo-Saxon, moderately Protestant, with strong Royalist leanings.<sup>481</sup> According to Frederick Turner, ‘The European mode of kinship is parental: we are defined by where and whom we come from’.<sup>482</sup> In the South, this European concept of kinship is strongly in evidence, whereby notions such as heredity, history, breeding and blood are laden with meaning, frequently harking back to the old continent, and are inextricable from the southern lexicon of whiteness. One of the protagonists of George Washington Cable’s *The Grandissimes: A Story of Creole Life*, Doctor Keene, pithily sums up the inter-relation between notions of blood, encompassing heritage, kinship as well as breeding, and region: ‘Blood is a great thing here, in certain odd ways.’<sup>483</sup> Not only do these notions constitute components of whiteness, they become pivotal to laying a claim to whiteness as well as the means of effecting it. They acquired a new significance during the Post-Reconstruction era when, as Elizabeth Hale points out, the abolition of slavery combined with harsh post-war realities, effectively re-inscribed the

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<sup>480</sup> Murphy, *Farther Afield*, 14.

<sup>481</sup> For accounts of founding the colony, see Allen’s *Invention of the White Race* 2 vols., Gray’s *Writing the South*, and Watson’s *Normans And Saxons*.

<sup>482</sup> Frederick Turner, ‘Cultivating the American Garden’, in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 48. In all subsequent quotations from essays in this collection, the collection will be referenced as *The Ecocriticism*. The volume is cited in the bibliography.

<sup>483</sup> George Washington Cable, *The Grandissimes: A Story of Creole Life*, intr. Michael Kreyling, *Penguin Classics* (London: Penguin, 1988), 15.

relationship between land and its inhabitants as well as the region and the newly reunited country. Hand in hand with this newly emerged context went a re-imagination of southern whiteness, the trajectory of which can be compared to De Certeau's theory of the concept of the city. Among the factors contributing to the creation of the concept of the city, De Certeau enumerates 'the creation of a *clean space* [...]; the substitution of a non-time for the indiscernible, stubborn resistance of tradition [...]; and finally the creation of a universal and impersonal subject (this is the city itself)'.<sup>484</sup> A clearly demarcated space and a 'resistance of tradition' contribute to the emergence of the city as a subject that is both impersonal and universal. Like De Certeau's city, the Old South, imbued with a continuity of tradition and frequently imagined as a prelapsarian idyll, becomes both impersonal and universal – a perfect place in which the seeds of postbellum southern whiteness can germinate.<sup>485</sup> Grounded in the fertile soil of the Old South – the cradle of gentility – such conceptions of whiteness acquire both the impersonality of an ideal and timelessness. Conceived in this way, southern whiteness becomes 'a site of transformations and appropriations' which, nonetheless, consist in looking back to the past.<sup>486</sup> This atavistic tendency of southern whiteness, combining heredity, history, breeding and blood, all of which are presupposed and prefigured in the constructs of the aristocratic planter and southern belle, is threefold. Firstly, it reaches back to England as the place from which the culture was transplanted; secondly, the transplanted sentiments of gentility are reinterpreted from the perspective of the Old South; and thirdly, they establish a regional model of whiteness. Such re-imaginings of whiteness, while reinforcing its status as a

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<sup>484</sup> De Certeau, 'Practices of Space', in *On Signs*, 127.

<sup>485</sup> For discussions of the concept of the idyllic Old South, see Saxton, Roediger and Hale.

<sup>486</sup> De Certeau, 'Practices of Space', in *On Signs*, 127. Allen Tate sees looking back to the past as a characteristically southern propensity: 'With the war of 1914-1918, the South re-entered the world – but gave a backward glance as it stepped over the border: that backward glance gave us the southern renaissance, a literature conscious of the past in the present,' in 'The New Provincialism', *Collected Essays* (Denver: Alan Swallow, 1959), 292. The remark appears particularly pertinent to the literature that emerged in the aftermath of the Civil War which is equally characterised by viewing the present from the vantage point of the past.

simulacrum, are inseparable from place. Thereby place, denoting a particular geographical locale and endowed with atemporality of tradition, becomes crucial to reconstructions of whiteness.

The ideas of place, both imagined and real, and the past as a receptacle of continuity and tradition, are both crucial to reconstructions of southern whiteness and in establishing its distinctiveness. Regionalism, the genre that Allen Tate sees as ‘limited in space but not in time’, facilitated the happy union of the imagined past with the present, while consigning it to a specific locale.<sup>487</sup> Initially termed local colour writing and later re-defined as regional writing, it contributed to reconstructions of southern whiteness, while promoting its distinctiveness and traditionalism through a combination of ‘a fairly realistic concern for fidelity to physical setting’ with a ‘romantic emphasis’ on ‘local legend and the quaint eccentricities of regional manners and mores’.<sup>488</sup> Stephanie Foote characterises regional writing as ‘a genre that is dedicated to elaborating the meaning of places and of the people who inhabited them’. As such, Foote continues, it is ‘most efficient at discussing and mediating the place of social and cultural difference itself’.<sup>489</sup> Regional fiction became the perfect medium through which the values of antebellum southern whiteness could be disseminated, particularly so considering its rising popularity in the post Civil War era. Lori Robinson observes that ‘local color literature achieved national prominence, and by the turn of the century, popular plantation romances signalled the cultural reinvestment in a mythic South’.<sup>490</sup> Donna Campbell sees this reinvestment in the mythic South and its popularity as corollaries of the Civil War because ‘the conflict heightened awareness of

<sup>487</sup> Tate, ‘The New Provincialism’, in *Collected Essays*, 286.

<sup>488</sup> Donna Campbell notes in ‘Realism and Regionalism’ that ‘in the nineteenth century’ the terms ‘regional or local color fiction’ were used interchangeably, with “local color” being predominant before “regionalism” was redefined by Judith Fetterley and Marjorie Pryse in the twentieth century as a more serious, more sympathetic, and less stereotypical way of writing about region’, in *A Companion*, 93; and Lucinda Hardwick MacKethan, *The Dream of Arcady: Place and Time in Southern Literature* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 36-37.

<sup>489</sup> Stephanie Foote, ‘The Cultural Work of American Regionalism’, in *A Companion*, 27.

<sup>490</sup> Robinson, ‘Region and Race’, in *A Companion*, 61.

sectional differences’ and ‘had made the country conscious of itself as a land full of disparate regions’.<sup>491</sup> In other words, regional fiction promoted difference and diversity as coalescing components of national unity. Robinson sums this up when she observes that ‘regional writing is about borders, about the spatial locations that make people – even people who claim the same nationality – different from one another’.<sup>492</sup> Place, therefore, materialises as a crucial factor in shaping regional awareness and promoting regional whiteness as unique and different from the national norm. Regional writing contributes to the ‘de-universalisation’ of whiteness, for it is ‘associated with [promoting] the interests of persons who, for a variety of reasons, were themselves considered minor or marginal’.<sup>493</sup> Promoting the interests of the region notwithstanding, this is not to say that regional writing promulgated an image of region as homogenous. On the contrary, the employment of dialect allowed regional writers ‘to represent differences in class as well as differences in region’.<sup>494</sup> In the South, while evocative of class difference, vernacular speech also furnished a means of representing southern whiteness. Others included a return to the Old South as, in De Certeau’s terms, the impersonal and universal subject and were ‘based on the memories, real and imagined, of times before the war and the romantic idea of the “Lost Cause”’.<sup>495</sup> Frequently such re-imaginings were combined with ‘addressing current issues in a region destabilized by impoverishment, industrialization, reintegration with the nation and conflicts over race’.<sup>496</sup> In such nostalgic reminiscences, realism which, according to Howells, should be concerned with depicting ‘nothing more and nothing less than truthful treatment of material’ was frequently transformed into quasi-realism that

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<sup>491</sup> Campbell, ‘Realism and Regionalism’, in *A Companion*, 101.

<sup>492</sup> Robinson, ‘Region and Race’, in *A Companion*, 61.

<sup>493</sup> Foote, ‘The Cultural Work’, in *A Companion*, 27.

<sup>494</sup> Campbell, ‘Realism and Regionalism’, in *A Companion*, 97.

<sup>495</sup> Campbell, ‘Realism and Regionalism’, in *A Companion*, 105.

<sup>496</sup> Campbell, ‘Realism and Regionalism’, in *A Companion*, 105.



consisted in not only looking back to the Old South, but also painting it in roseate hues.<sup>497</sup> The popularity of such retrospections among the southern and northern audiences alike allowed southern writers to reconstruct ‘the Old South as America’s golden age [...], produced the grand dream of a southern Arcady and allowed it more attention and respect than it had ever known in antebellum times’.<sup>498</sup> The role of the Old South is again synecdochal, whereby it stands for the notions of gentility, heritage, blood – in short – southern whiteness. The latter is then established, to borrow from De Certeau, ‘as a relationship between the *site* from which it issues (an origin) and the *non-site* it creates (a way of passage)’, and this passage becomes the *modus operandi* of whiteness which, while evoking the mythic South as the site of origin, becomes a site of re-imagining. Only then, its ‘discursive progress’ can be ‘verbalized’ and ‘dreamed’.<sup>499</sup>

Virginia-born Thomas Nelson Page belongs to those regional writers who, by juxtaposing realism with nostalgic reminiscences, ‘gave the plantation legend its clearest voice’ and contributed to the transformation of ‘shaky actuality into enduring myth’.<sup>500</sup> According to Page, the Old South ‘combined elements of the three great civilizations, which since the dawn of history have enlightened the world. It partook of the philosophic tone of the Grecian, of the dominant spirit of the Roman, and of the guardfulness of individual rights

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<sup>497</sup> William Dean Howells, ‘Editor’s Study’, *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* (1889):966. Curiously, according to Richard Grey, the tendency to romanticise the region also characterises the pre Civil War fiction produced in the region and stems from the need to ‘defend the indefensible in the shape of the peculiar institution’ and ‘growing impotence’ in the face of ‘the economic and political growth of North and West’. As a consequence, Grey notes, ‘books of the time veer between conflicting models of the good society with their authors evidently never quite sure if they are writing elegy or prophecy’, in *Southern Aberrations*, 59-60.

<sup>498</sup> MacKethan, *The Dream of Arcady*, 8.

<sup>499</sup> De Certeau, ‘Practices of Space’, in *On Signs*, 138. De Certeau discusses walking in the city as utterance. The meaning of walking is constructed in ‘passing’, originating at a certain point of origin without requiring a clearly delineated destination.

<sup>500</sup> Sarah E. Gardner, ‘The Plantation School: Dissenters and Countermyths’, in *A Companion*, 267; and MacKethan, *The Dream of Arcady*, 17.

of the Saxon civilization.<sup>501</sup> Not only did Page perceive this cultural splendour as steeped in ‘a softness and beauty’, but also as ‘the joint product of Chivalry and Christianity’.<sup>502</sup> In this felicitous South antiquity sat comfortably alongside the Saxon civilization, while the adherence to the codes of chivalry and Christianity ensured a lasting tranquillity for the region. Cobbled from a variety of traditions, the South served as an impersonal subject in which the cultures of antiquity, Christianity and medieval chivalry united. Not only did such felicitous convergence of traditions, augmented by the possession of land, lead to the emergence of the myth of southern whiteness, it also furnished it with continuity and resilience. Exemplary of the convergence of these traditions is Page’s *Gordon Keith*. The novel, published in 1903, is a *bildungsroman* that follows the changing fortunes of the eponymous Keith. Gordon, the scion of the Keith family, witnesses his family’s fortune and plantation dwindle and perish in the aftermath of the Civil War, vows to recover his ancestral seat, patiently but tenaciously struggles to achieve his goal, and finally returns victorious to the South. Gordon’s wanderings take him away from the South, to New York and Appalachia, before he is finally restored to his rightful place. Through the act of naming Page establishes a connection between the Keiths’ claim to whiteness, heritage, and place. Since both Gordon and Keith are of Scottish origin, as cognomen they imbue the Keiths’ whiteness with a particular historicity and tradition thus emphasising its uniqueness.<sup>503</sup> The uniqueness of their Scottish heritage is reinforced by yet another name – Elphinstone – the Keiths’ ancestral plantation. While the word ‘stone’ carries connotations of permanence and immutability, ‘Elphin’ links this permanence to both

<sup>501</sup> Thomas Nelson Page, *The Old South: Essays Social and Political* (1892) (New York: Cosimo, 2008), 5.

<sup>502</sup> Page, *The Old South*, 5. Also cited by Gardner in ‘The Plantation School’, in *A Companion*, 267.

<sup>503</sup> *Brewer’s Dictionary of Names*, ed. Adrian Room (Oxford: Helicon, 1997), gives the following definitions of Gordon and Keith: Gordon – ‘The name comes from the Scottish surname, which is itself from the village of Gordon near Kelso, not far from the English border. Its own name is said to mean “spacious fort”’, 213. ‘The name’ Keith ‘derives from a Scottish surname, itself from the Celtic name of a place in East Lothian meaning “wood”’, 281. Curiously, in her ‘Introduction’ to Sir Walter Scott’s *Waverley; or, ‘Tis Sixty Years Since* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), Claire Lamont observes that Scott spent his childhood ‘partly in Edinburgh and partly in the Borders near Kelso’, vii. In naming his protagonist Gordon, Page introduces a subtle allusion to Scott.

Scottish royalty and folklore.<sup>504</sup> Elphinstone both inscribes and externalises the interconnectedness of southern whiteness, history and tradition, which Page accentuates by the employment of a technique which Robinson considers characteristic of ‘local color fiction’ – that of presenting the narrative ‘through an outsider’s perceptions of a different place and culture’. Consequently, Robinson continues, ‘these written representations are thus shaped through metaphors of sight: those who approach the new culture write from the experience of “seeing,” “observing,” “looking at,” or “objectifying”’.<sup>505</sup> Accordingly, Elphinstone is first revealed as it might have appeared to ‘A stranger passing through the country prior to the war’.<sup>506</sup> This brief preamble endows the description with objectivity, while both distancing the past from the present and introducing a sense of continuity already enshrined in its name. What the stranger would have seen first were ‘long stretches of rolling fields well tilled’, then ‘a grove on a high hill, where the mansion rested in proud

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<sup>504</sup> According to James E. Fraser, Elphin was the king of Pictland from 775-80, in *From Caledonia to Pictland: Scotland to 795* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 273. Incidentally, the name appears in the title of the Scottish ballad ‘The Elfin Knight’. In the version of the ballad published in *A Scottish Ballad Book*, ed. David Buchan (London: Routledge, 1973), the name is spelt ‘Elfin’, 137. However, in what appears to be a modern English version of the ballad published in *The Faber Book of Ballads*, ed. Matthew Hodgart (London: Faber & Faber, 1965), ‘the elfin knight’ is transformed into ‘the elphin knight’: ‘My maidenhead I’ll then keep still,/Let the elphin knight do what he will,’ 26-28. The latter example suggests that the two variations of the word could have been used interchangeably or, at the very least, that the spelling of ‘elfin’ changed over time to ‘elphin’. What is of importance is that both variations evoke supernatural, magical connotations: ‘elfin’ orthographically, and ‘elphin’ phonetically. While it is possible that the ballad might have provided a source of inspiration for Page, it is equally possible that the plantation is named after Elphin the King, or William Elphinstone, Bishop of Aberdeen and distinguished statesman and lawyer who founded University of Aberdeen in 1495 and expanded it by the foundation of King’s College in 1505, in Leslie J. Macfarlane, *William Elphinstone and The Kingdom of Scotland 1431-1514: The Struggle for Order*, (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1995). An equally plausible candidate is John Elphinstone, 2<sup>nd</sup> Baron Balmerino who was ‘the chosen President of the Scottish Parliament in 1641’, in *The History Today Companion to British History*, ed. Juliet Gardiner and Neil Wenborn (London: Collins & Brown, 1995). The most likely candidate is, however, George Keith Elphinstone who was ‘1st and last Viscount Keith (UK), so created 1 June 1814’ and ‘Baron Keith of Stonehaven Marischal’, *Burke’s Peerage*, 2002 - 2012 Burke’s Peerage (UK) Limited, 18 September 2012 <http://www.burkespeerage.com/Search/FullRecord.aspx?ID=4322>. Alexander Allardyce notes of the Keith Elphinstone family that it was ‘of ancient lineage, and connected with the noblest houses in Scotland [...]’. The barons of Elphinstone had, however, always lived respected and honoured on their property; and the social esteem in which they were held is testified by the alliances which they formed,’ in *Memoir of the Honourable George Keith Elphinstone Viscount Keith, Admiral of the Red* (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1882), 2. His name provides a direct connection between ‘Keith’ and ‘Elphinstone’ and links both to Scottish aristocracy. However, regardless of which of these sources Page may have drawn upon, the significance of Elphinstone as a place name lies in its evocation of mythical, folkloric and royalist ties with Scotland, which emphasises the nobility and respectability of its inhabitants.

<sup>505</sup> Robinson, ‘Region and Race’, in *A Companion*, 64.

<sup>506</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 4.

seclusion amid its immemorial oaks and elms, with what appeared to be a small hamlet lying about its feet'.<sup>507</sup> This feudal setting establishes the plantation as a pinnacle of greatness. Surrounded by fertile and verdant fields, it materialises as an ennobled emblem of civilization. Its setting establishes it as a part of nature, whereby dwelling there implies 'living with the land and its processes'.<sup>508</sup> However, the location also sets it apart from the hamlet 'lying about', thus creating a natural gap between their respective inhabitants.<sup>509</sup>

According to Julius Evola, ascending a mountain has been historically the privilege of gods and heroes; while De Certeau observes that altitude affords 'The exaltation of a scopic or a gnostic drive,' whereby 'Just to be this seeing point creates the fiction of knowledge.'<sup>510</sup> This fiction of knowledge is therefore suggestive of divinity – a quality which instantly separates the owners of Elphinstone from the denizens of the hamlet below. Indeed, as René Daumal suggests, the gods may partake of the knowledge of their inferiors, which such panoptic setting affords, but the inferiors are denied this privilege.<sup>511</sup> The plantation

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<sup>507</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 4.

<sup>508</sup> Barnhill, 'Introduction', in *At Home*, 5.

<sup>509</sup> MacKethan observes of the plantation house that 'It was intended to be a symbol of the quality of the man who lived in it, testifying to his virtue, his isolation from the common, and his kinship with the land he had conquered', in *The Dream of Arcady*, 44. In other words, the edifice symbolises the genteel nobility, and thus whiteness, of those dwelling within its walls. It is noteworthy that the technique Page employs in his introduction and depiction of the aristocratic place echoes that of Scott. In *Waverley*, when Edward Waverley travels to pay a visit to Cosmo Comyne Bradwardine of Bradwardine in Scotland, he first passes through the hamlet of Tully-Veolan, suitably inferior to the grandeur of the mansion, towards which leads an avenue that is 'straight, and of moderate height, running between a double row of very ancient horse-chestnuts, planted alternately with sycamores, which rose to such huge height, and flourished so luxuriantly, that their boughs completely over-arched the broad road beneath'. From there, 'half-hidden by the trees of the avenue, the high steep roofs and narrow gables of the mansion, with ascending lines cut into steps, and corners decorated with small turrets', are visible. To Waverley, 'The solitude and repose of the whole scene seemed almost monastic', in *Waverley*, 34-35. The place is therefore introduced through the metaphor of sight: Waverley is a stranger, beholding the scene before him for the first time. Although the technique, as Robinson argues, is characteristic of regionalism, its roots can be traced to Scott. Considering the popularity of Scott in the nineteenth century South, the adoption of this technique by Page, and to a lesser extent Glasgow and Chesnutt, is not incidental. In Page's novels it constitutes a deliberate effort to emulate Scott's technique, thereby reinforcing the connection with Scotland and enunciating the nobility of his protagonists; while Glasgow and Chesnutt's employment of the technique subverts the notion of place as a monument of gentility as, frequently, the grandeur of the places thus rendered is belied by their inhabitants who have little, or nothing, in common with hereditary gentility.

<sup>510</sup> Evola, *Meditations*, 12; and De Certeau, 'Practices of Space', 123.

<sup>511</sup> Daumal, *Meditations*, xii.

house, therefore, becomes imbued with significance which, though deriving from its physical setting, transcends its ontological presence. In Henri Lefebvre's terms, the plantation house functions as a representational space – 'space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols'.<sup>512</sup> Elphinstone acts as such a representational space, whereby its possession becomes the first component in the fiction of the Keiths' whiteness. Consequently, Gordon's whiteness, as well as his father's, is inextricably bound up with the possession of Elphinstone. Within the walls of Elphinstone, as befitting a cradle of knowledge, the visitor would have met with gracious hospitality, 'he would have found culture with philosophy and wealth with content, and he would have come away charmed with the graciousness of his entertainment'.<sup>513</sup> Indeed, if the traveller happened to reside outside the South, 'he would have departed with a feeling of mystification'.<sup>514</sup> Introduced from the outsider's perspective, and through the metonymy of plantation, are both the values of southern whiteness among which Page casts: hospitality, graciousness of manners, knowledge, philosophy and culture – in short all attributes associated with gentility – and its commensurability with the region. Gordon's world was the plantation and 'The woods that rimmed it in were his horizon, as they had been that of the Keiths' for generations', over which the spirits of his saintly mother and many illustrious ancestors who found glory on the battlefields of the Revolution and the Mexican War kept watch.<sup>515</sup> Gordon's heritage predestines him for gentility. His father, the epitome of the aristocratic and benevolent planter, governed the plantation 'without ever raising his voice'.<sup>516</sup> Little wonder perhaps, since 'his word had a convincing quality of a law of nature'.<sup>517</sup> Interestingly, the Keiths' gentility, and thus their whiteness, is not only a matter of social

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<sup>512</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 2010), 39.

<sup>513</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 5.

<sup>514</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 5.

<sup>515</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 5-6.

<sup>516</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 5.

<sup>517</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 5.

status, but it also may be counted among natural phenomena – it is endemic to the place. As Lefebvre notes, ‘only activity developed over (historical) time engenders (produces) a space, and can only attain practical “reality” or concrete existence within that space’.<sup>518</sup> Gentility and its attendant attributes such as hospitality, graciousness of manners, and knowledge, can only signify as unique components of whiteness in the South in general and, as far as the Keiths are concerned, at Elphinstone. Indeed, ‘The history of two hundred years bound the Keiths to Elphinstone’ which ‘They had carved from the forest’ and ‘held against the Indian’.<sup>519</sup> The Keiths transformed the place as much as it transformed them, so much so that their heritage, ‘all the sanctities of life – were bound up with it’.<sup>520</sup> It is therefore fitting that for Gordon, as for Faulkner in *Requiem for a Nun*, ‘The past is never dead. It’s not even past.’<sup>521</sup> Anchored in the place, their gentility is shaped through history, which ensures its continuity by providing a link between the present and the past.<sup>522</sup> Unfortunately, in the aftermath of the Civil War when General Keith is forced by pecuniary circumstances to sell the plantation to Mr Wickersham – a capitalist from the North – the link between the past and present is severed, and with it the General’s claim to whiteness. Although he remains on the plantation, he becomes, in Gordon’s words, ‘nothing but an overseer’.<sup>523</sup> The General’s whiteness is bound up with his historically constructed function – that of the aristocratic planter residing at Elphinstone. With Elphinstone’s passing from their hands, all the other hereditarily cultivated attributes of whiteness such as hospitality, graciousness of manners and knowledge, can only facilitate the Keiths’ passing for gentlemen. Their passing for

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<sup>518</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production*, 115.

<sup>519</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 28.

<sup>520</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 28.

<sup>521</sup> Faulkner, *Requiem*, 85.

<sup>522</sup> Jessica Adams notes the notion of continuity between history and the present which is encoded in the construct of the plantation house: ‘Plantation houses satisfy some desire for connection with history; as these sites contextualize the present within a history that is tangible, they convey a sense of collective identity, of a heritage that Americans share,’ in ‘Local Color: The Southern Plantation in Popular Culture’, *Cultural Critique* 42 (1999):164.

<sup>523</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 28.

gentlemen notwithstanding, the individual attributes of their gentility continue to be effected through comparisons with others, evoking the North-South dichotomy as well as ‘shades of whiteness’. When Wickersham entertains at Elphinstone, it is the Keiths’ old servant, Richard who, when asked by the host his opinion of the gentlemen present, replies:

‘What gent’mens?’  
 ‘Why, our guests.’ He [Wickersham] used the possessive that the General used.  
 ‘Does you call dem “gent’mens”?’ demanded the old servant, fixing his eyes on him.  
 ‘Well, no; I don’t think I do – all of them.’  
 ‘Nor, suh; dee ain’t gent’mens; dee’s scalawags!’ said Richard, with contempt. ‘I been livin’ heah ‘bout sixty years, I reckon, an’ I never seen nobody like dem eat at de table an’ sleep in de beds in dis house befo’.’<sup>524</sup>

Considering the length and nature of Richard’s employment, it can be safely assumed that he is a former slave, and one of only two black characters in the novel. Significantly, Richard’s skin colour is never mentioned which divorces the Keiths’ whiteness from the binarity of blackness in terms of skin colour; it is the reverence of a faithful servant for his one-time masters that reifies their gentility, and thus their whiteness. Richard’s praise of the Keiths is doubly significant. Firstly, it reaffirms that being called a gentleman is the highest commendation in the South; and secondly, it reifies the aristocratic status of the Keiths by invoking the idea of the benevolent planter linking them to the Old South. Indeed, the Keiths’ gentility is effected by Richard through an unfavourable comparison with the uncouthness of ‘scalawags’ on par with whom he places their northern host.

Throughout the novel, the idea of ‘shades of whiteness’ is invoked to effect Gordon’s or his father’s status as gentlemen. When Gordon displays a propensity for scholarly education and his father cannot afford to send him to college, an ‘old cattle-dealer’, Squire

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<sup>524</sup>Page, *Gordon Keith*, 33.

Rawson, unexpectedly comes to the rescue.<sup>525</sup> Although the Squire's 'education didn't cost twenty-five dollars', he is astute enough to 'admit blood counts for somethin'', and he is 'half minded to adventure some on your [Gordon's] blood'.<sup>526</sup> Clearly, the Squire's generosity is prompted by Gordon's father's once superior standing in the community, while his vernacular speech establishes his status as a 'shade darker'. Discussing dialect writing in the nineteenth century, Gavin Jones observes that it upheld 'an elitist agenda by juxtaposing the "proper language" of the narrator with the "improper language" of the character'.<sup>527</sup> The Squire's reverence for the Keiths' blood and gentility is effected through his speech which simultaneously emphasises his lower social standing; the Squire's speech reifies Gordon's claim to whiteness. The fact that the Squire 'doesn't care anything about security or interest' and 'doesn't want any bond' is suggestive of another quality of whiteness that he believes the Keiths to possess: that of honour.<sup>528</sup> What is more, such disinterested generosity, coming from an exponent of a lower social stratum, evokes the notion of southern generosity which, as Ritchie Devon Watson demonstrates, was frequently placed in opposition to northern avarice. Following a period of sedulous study and graduation from college, Gordon takes up the position of a teacher in Ridge College. Here again, environment provides a natural contrast between Gordon's gentility and the lack thereof in others. A part of Gordon's aristocratic legacy is his acute awareness of the beauty of nature, whereby mountains are a source of inspiration to him. Upon climbing a mountain,

his eyes rested on the level of the horizon far below him. Down there lay all he had ever known and loved. All was changed; his home belonged to an alien. [...] On the other side, the distant mountains lay a mighty rampart across the sky. He wondered if the Alps could be higher or more beautiful. A line he had been

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<sup>525</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 54.

<sup>526</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 55; and Page, *Gordon Keith*, 54.

<sup>527</sup> Gavin Jones, *Strange Talk Strange Talk: The Politics of Dialect Literature in Gilded Age America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 39.

<sup>528</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 54; and Page, *Gordon Keith*, 55.



explaining the day before to his scholars recurred to him: “Beyond those mountains lies Italy”.<sup>529</sup>

To Gordon, climbing the mountain becomes a gnostic, consciousness-raising experience. The awareness of the mountainous grandeur is retrospectively nostalgic, forcing him to acknowledge the loss of his home – the kernel of his gentility and heritage. Incidentally, the allusion to Alps and Italy links Gordon, and the civilization he represents, to antiquity – the cradle of Western civilization. Consequently, Gordon represents the continuity of both civilizations. However, since Gordon is no longer the heir to Elphinstone, his gentility can only be incomplete. This incompleteness notwithstanding, it is firmly rooted in the memory of the plantation, so much so that the latter becomes a haunting presence. As De Certeau observes, ‘Every site is haunted by countless ghosts that lurk there in silence, to be “evoked” or not.’<sup>530</sup> Elphinstone becomes such a ghostly presence, inseparable from Gordon’s consciousness, whereby its memory concurrently validates his tenuous claim to gentility and negates it by virtue of being a recollection of what is lost, thus re-inscribing his whiteness as a fiction of passing. Crucially, it is the mountains that invoke the poignant memory and offer a healing vision of a way forward. It strikes Gordon that ‘Others had crossed the mountains to find the Italy of their ambition.’<sup>531</sup> The force of this sudden revelation propels Gordon to stand upright, with ‘his face lifted to the sky, his nerves tense, his pulses beating and his breath coming quickly’.<sup>532</sup> At this cathartic moment, with his gaze lifted heavenwards, Gordon partakes of a divine revelation, one that is possible because of his heritage. It is at this moment that he vows that ‘He would conquer and achieve honors and fame, and win back his old home, and build up again his fortune, and

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<sup>529</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 93. The line in question seems to be a paraphrase of Emily Dickinson’s Poem No. 80, composed in 1859 and published in 1891, where it reads: ‘Italy stands the other side!’, in *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), 42.

<sup>530</sup> De Certeau, ‘Practices of Space’, in *On Signs*, 143.

<sup>531</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 93.

<sup>532</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 93.

do honor to his name.’<sup>533</sup> Indeed, winning honour, name, fame and fortune are ideals worthy of a hero, and the fact that his home is mentioned amongst his future exploits implies that they can be lived in one place only – a sentiment voiced by one of the protagonists, Miss Brooke: ‘One week in New York is warranted to break any gentleman of good manners.’<sup>534</sup> Indeed, heroic pursuits and manners can only be cultivated in certain places and New York, connoting ‘amorality, greed, and selfishness’ of the North, is not one of them.<sup>535</sup> Whilst to Gordon, the mountains are a site of inspiration and ambition, both of which are defined by, and in relation to, Elphinstone – the cradle of his heritage – they exert no such influence upon his scholars. The line that Gordon recollects reading to his students, ‘Beyond the Alps lies Italy,’ sent his lips aquiver ‘with feeling’, whereas in his young listeners it was ‘met only [with] listless eyes and dull faces’.<sup>536</sup> Partaking of a less lofty heritage, his scholars are incapable of comprehending either the significance of the line or the splendour of the surrounding mountains. Representing a darker ‘shade of whiteness’, they cannot aspire to the genteel sensibility that constitutes Gordon’s whiteness, yet, it is their close proximity to nature that defines their status as non-gentlemen. Unlike Gordon’s upbringing on the plantation, the Dennison boys, who are among Gordon’s listless scholars, live in ‘a “cove,” an opening in the angle between the mountains, where was a piece of partly level ground’.<sup>537</sup> Their mother, Mrs Dennison, is ‘a small, angular woman with sharp eyes, a thin nose, and thin lips, very stiff and suspicious’, someone who ‘would have gladly set the dogs on him [Gordon] instead of calling them off as she did when he strode up’.<sup>538</sup> A far cry from the idealised southern belle, such a mother can only produce ‘listless’ offspring. Living at the foot of the mountain, they possess

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<sup>533</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 93.

<sup>534</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 171.

<sup>535</sup> MacKethan, *The Dream of Arcady*, 47.

<sup>536</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 80.

<sup>537</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 71.

<sup>538</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 71.

neither the means nor the inclination to aspire to greatness as Gordon does. The gulf separating the sensibilities of these inhabitants of the South is seemingly unbridgeable, while the superiority of Gordon's gentility and breeding is contrasted with Mrs Dennison's lack of hospitality. Not only does the stereotyping of Mrs Dennison introduce class difference into the discourse of southern whiteness, it also exemplifies the effecting of whiteness in the everyday, whereby Gordon's gentility is juxtaposed with Mrs Dennison's silent hostility and lack of manners. Similarly, Squire Rawson, Gordon's benefactor and staunch supporter throughout his career, despite accumulating considerable fortune following, in his words, 'years of hard work on the mountain-side, sweatin' o' days, and layin' out in the cold at nights, lookin' up at the stars and wonderin' how I was to git along – studuin' of folks jest as I studied cattle', does not partake or even aspire to gentility.<sup>539</sup> Unlike Gordon's, his relationship with the land is not that of an aesthete capable of understanding its symbolic significance – a fact again emphasised by his vernacular speech – but that of a simple farmer. He is the 'salt' of the earth to Gordon's 'cream'; Gordon is 'a paler shade of white'. To the Squire, a man of simple sensibility, 'land's land', and its significance is primarily utilitarian.<sup>540</sup> Although the Squire's pecuniary circumstances place him above Gordon who works as a teacher, his lack of aristocratic heritage invalidates his claim to gentility, at least in the region.

Gordon's love of the place and his attachment to it are peculiarly southern traits which can only be observed through a stranger's eyes. The stranger is Alice Yorke, a visitor to the region from New York, who becomes the recipient of Gordon's love and adulation. Although not entirely immune to the beauty of the place, Alice seems incapable of forming a spiritual bond with it: 'I did not know that any one [sic] could have so much feeling for a

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<sup>539</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 215.

<sup>540</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 307.

plantation'.<sup>541</sup> Alice's northern sensibility occludes her understanding of the bond between Gordon and Elphinstone – the ties that transcend the mere ownership of land to encompass tradition and heritage, both of which are constitutive elements of Gordon's gentility. Considering Alice's regionally predestined inability to understand this bond, it is perhaps unsurprising that Gordon 'gave her a vague feeling that he was wanting in that quality of sound judgement which she recognized in some of her other [northern] admirers'.<sup>542</sup> Gordon's shortcoming is his lack of business acumen, which Alice ascribes to his culture: Gordon 'was too romantic'.<sup>543</sup> Through regional stereotyping, southern chivalrous gentility and romanticism are juxtaposed with northern industry and pragmatism, while, concurrently, remaining endemic to their respective regions. This gentlemanly disdain for matters pecuniary is expressed by Gordon's father early on in the novel when he informs Gordon that 'there are some things that gentlemen never discuss at table. Money is one of them'.<sup>544</sup> This simple scholium from father to son confirms the existence of an unwritten code of practice obtaining among gentlemen which consigns money to the realm of the unmentionable.<sup>545</sup> The disdain for matters pecuniary and the accumulation of capital in particular are expressed succinctly by Gordon's father further in the narrative. To General Keith, 'riches considered as something to possess or to display is one of the most despicable and debasing of all the aims that men can have'.<sup>546</sup> Needless to say that Gordon's acquaintance with Alice changed somewhat his perspective on riches so that 'wealth appeared to him just then a very desirable acquisition'.<sup>547</sup> Gordon's ideals, it appears, have expanded since meeting Alice. Incidentally, during their second meeting

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<sup>541</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 102.

<sup>542</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 104.

<sup>543</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 105.

<sup>544</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 35.

<sup>545</sup> MacKethan sees General Keith as 'a symbol of the permanence of certain values inherent in the Old South', in *The Dream of Arcady*, 50. Since he is no longer a landed gentleman but an overseer, his adherence to the genteel values of the Old South can only result in passing.

<sup>546</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 106.

<sup>547</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 106.

Gordon finds Alice lying unconscious on a peak. She has fallen from her horse and Gordon, in a tide of chivalric spirit, carries her down the mountain. The act itself appears proleptic as it foreshadows Gordon's subsequent quest for wealth and his altered sensibility occasioned by the encounter with a lady from the North. Here, the descent from the mountain is symbolic of the change in Gordon's sensibility which renders his heroism anti-heroic, for it prefigures his partial abandonment of his hereditary ideals. Gordon's quest for wealth, begun with his descent down the mountain, takes him away from the region to Appalachia and New York, where he finally accomplishes his goal of becoming rich. He recovers Elphinstone, but continues to reside in the city that made him prosperous until he realises that 'he was sailing under false colors' – that he was passing.<sup>548</sup> The accumulated wealth cannot elevate him to the metaphorical peaks where he once sought his ideals; it is not reconcilable with his heritage. In his pursuit of wealth, 'He had almost lost sight of the life that lay outside of the dust and din of that arena [...] that life held other rewards than riches.'<sup>549</sup> Indeed, these rewards can only be found in 'the calm and tranquil region' where

his father walked with him again, calm, serene, and elevated, his thoughts high above all commercial matters, ranging the fields of lofty speculation with statesmen, philosophers, and poets, holding up to his gaze again lofty ideals; practicing, without a thought of reward, the very gospel of universal gentleness and kindness.  
There his mother, too, moved in spirit once more beside him with her angelic smile, breathing the purity of heaven.<sup>550</sup>

New York has altered him and only in Elphinstone – the cradle of gentlemanly values – can Gordon recover his gentility and thus his whiteness. Elphinstone, therefore, serves as a metonymy, whereby it 'enlarges one element of space in order to make it play the role of a "more"'.<sup>551</sup> The 'more' encompasses gentility, learning, heritage, gentleness, selflessness,

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<sup>548</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 515.

<sup>549</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 515.

<sup>550</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 515-16.

<sup>551</sup> De Certeau, 'Practices of Space', in *On Signs*, 137.

all of which apotheosise southern whiteness and ground it in the region. All of these attributes represent disparate totalities of whiteness which disrupt the totality of the concept itself. Ironically, though Gordon returns to Elphinstone, it is on different terms: he does not inherit the plantation, but purchases it with the capital he has accumulated over the years – an act which irrevocably marks his gentility as different from that of his father. The historic chain of inheritance has been broken, and he can therefore never return to the innocence which his wistful imagination conjures up. The impossibility of such a return to the state of purity uncontaminated by capital is again reflected in the environment. On his return to the region, Gordon sees the moon ‘slowly sinking toward the western mountaintops’, but he remains a passive observer.<sup>552</sup> The scene is reminiscent of ‘*ragnarokkr*, namely the destined twilight of the divine’.<sup>553</sup> Not only does this act of passive observation mark the end of Gordon’s quest begun with his descent down the mountain, but it also foreshadows his passing for a gentleman, whereby the twilight of the ‘divine’ signifies the irrecoverableness of the lost whiteness. For Gordon, Elphinstone can only remain a passing place. Though Gordon’s desire for this mythical return can never be fulfilled, and with it his desire for gentility, the very name of Elphinstone is evocative of the endurance of the values to which Gordon aspires. De Certeau observes of proper names that their power lies in their capacity to ‘open up meanings and directions’ which ‘link gestures and steps’.<sup>554</sup> Proper names ‘make the place they clothe with a word habitable and believable: they recall or evoke the phantoms (dead and supposedly gone) that still stir, lurking in gestures and walking bodies’.<sup>555</sup> As a proper name, Elphinstone ‘opens up meanings’ of whiteness to which Gordon subscribes, and which encapsulate gentility, heritage, as well as tradition and knowledge. In propagating this particular fiction,

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<sup>552</sup> Page, *Gordon Keith*, 545.

<sup>553</sup> Evola, *Meditations*, 15.

<sup>554</sup> De Certeau, ‘Practices of Space’, in *On Signs*, 140.

<sup>555</sup> De Certeau, ‘Practices of Space’, in *On Signs*, 141.

Elphinstone's power is twofold: it evokes the permanence and continuity of such a fiction thus binding both to the locale and the quotidian; while by furnishing this fiction with believability, it places it within the realm of the abstract and cements its status as a fiction. Since facts are subject to verifiable, empirical knowledge, and fictions only need to be believable, Gordon's fiction of whiteness requires him to return to Elphinstone where the ghosts of his ancestors still reside; it is Elphinstone which makes this fiction believable.

This relationship between a proper name and a fiction of whiteness is also evident in Page's *Red Rock: A Chronicle of Reconstruction*.<sup>556</sup> The novel, published in 1898, traces the tempestuous fortunes of two patrician families: the Grays and the Carys. The narrative begins on the cusp of secession, follows the heroes on to the battlefields of the Civil War, and continues into Reconstruction – 'the era [which] represented the worst abuses heaped upon a righteous civilization'.<sup>557</sup> In a 'Preface' to the novel, Page establishes a connection between place and myth. The Red Rock plantation is situated '*in the South, somewhere in that vague region partly in one of the old Southern States and partly in the yet vaguer land of Memory*'.<sup>558</sup> Such a precarious setting, suspended between the *hic et nunc* and memory, inscribes Red Rock with timelessness. Similarly to Elphinstone, Red Rock carries connotations of permanence and indelibility. The plantation, owned by the Grays, takes its name 'from the great red stain, as big as a blanket, which appeared on the huge boulder [sic] in the grove, beside family grave-yard'.<sup>559</sup> The blood on the stone belonged to

the Indian chief who had slain the wife of the first Jacquelin Gray who came to this part of the world: the Jacquelin who had built the first house at Red Rock, around the fireplace of which the present mansion was erected, and whose portrait, with its

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<sup>556</sup> Thomas Nelson Page, *Red Rock: A Chronicle of Reconstruction* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1904).

<sup>557</sup> Gardner, 'The Plantation School', in *A Companion*, 269.

<sup>558</sup> Page, 'Preface', *Red Rock*, vii.

<sup>559</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 1.

piercing eyes and fierce look, hung in a black frame over the mantel, and used to come down as a warning when any peril impeded above the house.<sup>560</sup>

The roots the first Jacquelin planted in this place reach across the Atlantic to England where ‘he was a scholar and had been a soldier under Cromwell and lost all his property’.<sup>561</sup> The same Jacquelin later ‘fell in love with a lady whose father was on the King’s side, and married her [...] and came over here’.<sup>562</sup> The rock from which the plantation derives its name is imbued with historical meaning which links the Grays both to the Stuart England and Scotland and, as the hint of the loss of property implies, its more affluent class. In the descendants of Jacquelin, the puritan sympathies coexist happily with royalist ones to create a unique brand of aristocratic gentility. This gentility, transplanted to the South, is cemented by the conquest of the Indian chief and, rather tellingly, sealed in blood. The blood stain, still visible upon the stone, literalises the metaphor of blood as heritage. Even the deeds to the house are stamped red by the feet of Jacquelin’s descendant, Rupert Gray, who ‘while playing in the hall’, dabbed them in red paint thus marking the floor and the papers that the wind happened to scatter on it.<sup>563</sup> Rupert’s mother, Mrs Gray, in a gesture reminiscent of Mary Queen of Scots, ‘would never allow the prints to be scoured out, and so they have remained’.<sup>564</sup> In refusing to have the prints

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<sup>560</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 1.

<sup>561</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 27.

<sup>562</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 27.

<sup>563</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 29.

<sup>564</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 29. In the ‘Introduction’ to *The Fair Maid of Perth or St. Valentine’s Day* (New York: John B. Alden, 1885), Sir Walter Scott includes an account of the murder of David Rizzio – Queen Mary’s favourite. Discussing the authenticity of the blood stains which are still to be found on the floor in Queen Mary’s apartments in Holyrood Palace, and which are reputed to be Rizzio’s, Chrystal Croftangry offers the following explanation to his cousin, Mrs Baliol: ‘The constant tradition of the Palace, says, that Mary discharged any measures to be taken to remove the marks of slaughter, which she had resolved should remain as a memorial to quicken and confirm her purposed vengeance,’ xii-xiii. In imitating the behaviour of Mary Queen of Scots, Mrs Gray perpetuates the continuity between the Grays, Scotland and royalty. A similar legend of blood stains that enhances the teller’s claim to nobility can be found in Scott’s *Waverley*, where Mrs Rachael Waverley regales her nephew, Edward Waverley, with a tale of his ancestor’s heroic deeds. Following the battle of Worcester, Lady Alice, endangering her life, ‘offers a day’s refuge’ to King Charles II. When Cromwell’s soldiers approach ‘to search the mansion’, she orders her son to gather the servants and ‘to make good with their lives an hour’s diversion, that the king might have that space to escape’. During the diversion, the son is mortally wounded, brought to the house and, according to Mrs Racheal, one ‘may trace



removed, Mrs Gray actively perpetuates the Gray tradition and reinforces their hereditary hold on the place wherein lies their claim to gentility. Indeed, blood as heritage, immortalised in stone, is an inextricable component of the Grays' gentility, while its visible marks reinforce their claim to whiteness and invoke its continuity. Interestingly, both women and black servants share equally in the perpetuation of the Grays' fiction of whiteness. First, it was Mammy Celia who instilled in Jacquelin Gray, a descendant of the first Jacquelin and heir to Red Rock, a reverence for his formidable ancestor by telling him that if he misbehaved 'the "Indian Killer" would see him and come after him'.<sup>565</sup> Jacquelin's first instruction in gentlemanly decorum was taught by Mammy Celia who inspired in him a respect for the past. Similarly, when the plantation is unjustly repossessed by Hiram Still, a former overseer, it is one of the Grays' former slaves, Doan, who, as the only witness to Rupert's exploits, is able to verify the authenticity of the bond and becomes instrumental in effecting the Grays' claim to Red Rock and, consequently, to the whiteness that the place symbolises.

Told and retold, the Grays' whiteness becomes endemic to the place, part of the local folklore, perpetuated in the stories 'believed by the old negroes (and perhaps, by some of the whites, too, a little)'.<sup>566</sup> Thanks to such stories, Red Rock, in the eyes of the locals as well as the Grays, signifies as De Certeau's 'more' and becomes synonymous with hereditary gentility, courage, justice and benevolence – the seat of the southern 'truth' of whiteness. As Lefebvre observes, 'There is doubtless no such thing as a myth or symbol

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the drops of his blood from the great hall-door, along the little gallery, and up to the saloon, where they laid him down to die at his mother's feet', in *Waverley*, 16. In these two examples, blood symbolises the continuity of tradition and furnishes it with a historicity and materiality of a tangible proof. What is more, it implies that such continuity may be obtained and maintained through a connection to royalty. Although Page's allusion to Mary Queen of Scots is rather subtle, the conjunction of Red Rock, tradition, and blood serves to enunciate the aristocratic heritage of the Grays and reinforce the ties with Scottish nobility.

<sup>565</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 2.

<sup>566</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 1.

unassociated with a mythical or symbolic space which is *also* determined by practice.<sup>567</sup>

Grounded in Red Rock, such stories acquire mythical dimension in the act of telling, and through evocations of the Grays' ancestry and courage, they construct the Grays' whiteness, rooting it firmly in place; while the allusion to the Indian blood endows it with a continuity that predates the establishment of the colony. It is therefore quite fitting, if hardly surprising, that this cradle of gentility, like Elphinstone in *Gordon Keith*, is 'a little world in itself – a sort of feudal domain: the great house on its lofty hill, surrounded by gardens; the broad fields stretching away in every direction, with waving grain or green pastures dotted with sheep and cattle, and all shut in and bounded by the distant woods'.<sup>568</sup>

Like that of the Keiths, the status of the owners of Red Rock is mirrored in the elevated setting of the place, separating them from the other inhabitants of '*the Red Rock section*'.<sup>569</sup> To Mr Welch, an entrepreneur from the North, the natural splendour of the place provides 'evidences that the Garden of Eden was situated not far from that spot, and certainly within the limits of the State'.<sup>570</sup> Similarly to Gordon Keith, the Grays' gentility is effected through evocations of natural environment and verbalised by a northerner. By extending the pastoral of the place to the whole region, Mr Welch voices the difference between the idyllic South and North; while the allusion to Eden firmly mythologizes Red Rock and grounds it in Christian tradition. Unsurprisingly then, the path to this place leads 'by the highway of Sincerity and Truth'.<sup>571</sup> Quixotic as the remark appears, it nonetheless reifies the notion that truth can only be found and cultivated in one place – Red Rock.

Indeed, both sincerity and truth imply a purity of purpose and knowledge, notions which the elevated location emphasises. To Dr Cary, the owner of Birdwood who is related to the Grays by blood since his sister married Mr Gray, honour constitutes one component of the

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<sup>567</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production*, 118.

<sup>568</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 29.

<sup>569</sup> Page, 'Preface', *Red Rock*, vii.

<sup>570</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 29.

<sup>571</sup> Page, 'Preface', *Red Rock*, x.

truth. In his impassioned speech against secession, Dr Cary proclaims that ‘War is the most terrible of all disasters, except Dishonor.’<sup>572</sup> Despite his anti-war sentiment, when the conflict erupts, the Doctor joins the Confederate army because his honour demands it. This heightened sense of honour conquers commonsensical pragmatism and, in *Red Rock*, becomes an element of southern whiteness. Honour also demands that one be kind to one’s servants. On the eve of his departure for war, General Gray leaves Still in charge of the plantation ‘as long as he treated the negroes well’.<sup>573</sup> As befitting a conscripted benevolent planter, the General’s sense of honour encodes a moral obligation towards those in his care so that the tradition of planter benevolence can be carried on *in absentia*. Since running the plantation would involve dealing with financial matters, it is left in the hands of the overseer whom the General believes to be ‘the best business man’.<sup>574</sup> His orders to his son, Jacquelin – a gentleman in the making and the heir apparent to the plantation – are to care for his mother and younger brother, Rupert. Above all, however, Jacquelin must ‘keep the old place. Make any sacrifice to do that. Landholding is one of the safeguards of the gentry’.<sup>575</sup> While landholding may be the safeguard of the gentry, it excludes ‘participating in that life at its most elemental level’.<sup>576</sup> Consequently, Jacquelin, in whose name the perpetuation of tradition is evoked, is not made privy to the financial circumstances of the family, which will have disastrous consequences. Instead, he receives an invaluable lesson that his gentility, and therefore his whiteness, is inextricably bound up with the possession of land, both as heritage and its quotidian manifestation. What is more, as his brother’s guardian, Jacquelin must ‘see that he gets an education. It is the one patrimony that no accident – not even war – can take away’.<sup>577</sup> In the General’s estimation, education, honour

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<sup>572</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 12.

<sup>573</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 48.

<sup>574</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 47.

<sup>575</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 47.

<sup>576</sup> MacKethan, *The Dream of Arcady*, 51.

<sup>577</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 48.

and the possession of land may be enumerated among the attributes of southern whiteness. Although his father's dictum remains etched deeply in Jacquelin's memory, once the plantation eventually passes to Still, without Red Rock and land where his genteel benevolence could be effected in the everyday, Jacquelin's whiteness, as that of Gordon Keith, will be incomplete. When Jacquelin returns to the region after an absence of several years, he is still 'Marse Jack' to Waverley, an old servant, to whom Jacquelin materialises as his 'ole marster – er de Injun-Killer'.<sup>578</sup> Bearing the name of one of Scott's protagonists, Waverley supplies a direct link with Scotland.<sup>579</sup> It is therefore quite fitting that Jacquelin's resemblance both to his father and his famous ancestor is verbalised by Waverley whose name internalizes the continuity of tradition just as Jacquelin externalises blood heritage. In calling Jacquelin 'Marse Jack' and observing his uncanny similarity to his forefathers, Waverley effects Jacquelin's hereditary claim to whiteness. This is the only place where Jacquelin can signify as 'Marse Jack', and where the appellation carries historical and hereditary connotations. As a proper name, the title evokes the continuity of the past and present converged in Jacquelin. Since Jacquelin is no longer a plantation owner and master of slaves, the title becomes an empty signifier. Ironically, it is Waverley, a former slave, who evokes Jacquelin's whiteness and effects his passing for 'Marse Jack'. Passing he may be, however, considering Jacquelin's heritage and the blood that runs in his veins, it is unsurprising that he vows to recover Red Rock. Assuming the authority of his ancestors, he announces to Still: 'you will not be in this place always. We are coming back here, the living and the dead'.<sup>580</sup> Like Gordon Keith's, Jacquelin's gentility can only be resurrected through the recovery of Red Rock, his ancestral home, and the place where the ghosts of

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<sup>578</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 252.

<sup>579</sup> Lamont considers the novel, published in 1814, 'the first political novel', in 'Introduction', *Waverley*, xv. According to Lamont, 'The defeat of Jacobitism [with which the novel deals] had been seen as a victory for rationalism and enlightenment', x. Coincidentally, the defeat of the South was justified on similar grounds. Through *Waverley*, Page demonstrates that though the South suffered a military defeat, its spirit and tradition remained undaunted.

<sup>580</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 262.

his ancestors serve as constant reminders of his heritage and whiteness. Jacquelin's whiteness is as much the discourse of the living as it is of the dead. As such, its nature is atavistic since it consists in looking back to the past for reification. In *Red Rock*, as in *Elphinstone*, 'The past can never be past', since it is constantly resurrected to support Jacquelin's gentility and, thus, whiteness.<sup>581</sup> Dr Cary shares Jacquelin's reverence for place and land as receptacles of tradition. In the wake of adversity and devastation in the aftermath of the War, he reminds his wife and daughter: 'we have – the land. It is as much as our forefathers began with'.<sup>582</sup> This land, framed in by 'the far-off mountains [that] rose blue and tender', is a site of inspiration which is predicated upon a link to the past. The possession of land enables Dr Cary to transform himself from benevolent planter into benevolent employer, thus retaining an element of his former gentility. Since his transition depends on borrowed money, his genteel benevolence is tarnished by matters pecuniary, which strips it of the presupposed innocence enshrined in hereditary wealth. Consequently, the possession of land, as a remnant of his forefathers' legacy, facilitates Dr Cary's passing for a gentleman.

The respect for land instilled in Jacquelin by his father, and exemplified by Dr Cary, is inescapably bound up with their gentility, which establishes a difference between them and those representing a darker shade of whiteness or, indeed, nonwhiteness. Still, the former overseer, vehemently declares: 'I know good land, and when you've got land you've got it, and everybody knows you've got it'.<sup>583</sup> Although Still acknowledges that the possession of land signifies as 'more' – it denotes prestige in this place – he does not recognize the fact that it is a hereditary possession of land on which such prestige, and thus gentility, rest. Unlike Still, Dr Cary is fully aware of this symbolic value of land, however even such

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<sup>581</sup> Faulkner, *Requiem*, 85.

<sup>582</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 59.

<sup>583</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 228.

awareness cannot withstand dire necessity and he is forced to sell part of his property to pay off his debts. To accomplish this, he travels, accompanied by General Legaie, to the city to meet Mr Ledger, a banker. Mr Ledger, true to his name, is unmoved by the Doctor's laudatory evaluation of his land from which 'not an acre has ever been sold from the original grant', a fact which in the Doctor's estimation 'manifestly added to the value of the terms offered'.<sup>584</sup> While to the Doctor, the connection to the royal grant aggrandizes the place, it fails to impress Mr Ledger. Like Still, Mr Ledger possesses no reverence for heredity so esteemed by gentlemen. Incomparably rich in sentiment, Dr Cary and General Legaie lack Mr Ledger's northern business acumen, so much so that, according to Mr Ledger, 'They are about as able to cope with the present as two babies.'<sup>585</sup> Mr Ledger fails to discern the motivation behind the Doctor and General Legaie's resistance to the demands of the zeitgeist, namely the loyalty to tradition which characterises their whiteness and sets them apart from Mr Ledger.<sup>586</sup> Unwittingly, through the parallel with babies, Mr Ledger emphasises the innocence of the two gentlemen and the values they espouse. Here, southern whiteness is constructed at an intersection between gentility, benevolence, disdain for matters pecuniary and the lack of these attributes in usually, but not exclusively, northern others. Elsewhere in the novel, when Mr Welch, accompanied by his daughter, Ruth, returns to the region with a view to settling there, they are accidentally, or serendipitously, directed to Dr Cary's. The latter has by now lost his plantation and resides in a little cottage. However, even amidst such impoverished surroundings, the Doctor's nobility of breeding shines brightly. Ruth is enthralled by the bow he makes to

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<sup>584</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 221.

<sup>585</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 222.

<sup>586</sup> MacKethan observes of Dr Cary and General Legaie that 'They are allowed to survive the war in order to show the great disparity between the Old and New South and to emphasise how much has been lost,' in *The Dream of Arcady*, 49. Notwithstanding the pertinence of her observation, the fact that their gentility is depicted as anachronistic is suggestive of the impossibility of reconstructing antebellum ideals in the postbellum realities, which, if attempted, can only result in passing since it brings into sharp relief the temporal divide between the past and the present.

her ‘with an old-fashioned graciousness’ which ‘sets her to blushing’.<sup>587</sup> Nonetheless, amidst all the blushing, Ruth remarks to herself: ‘What a beautiful nose he has, finer even than my father’s.’<sup>588</sup> In remarking upon the beauty of the Doctor’s nose, Ruth evokes his patrician heritage, while the direct comparison with her father, a northerner, juxtaposes the two regions; such gentlemanly manners are endemic to the South, but alien to the North. Ruth’s admiration extends to the Doctor’s daughter, Blair, whose ‘figure was so slim’ and her ‘face so refined’ that they compensated amply for the plainness of her dress adorned only with ‘a brass button’.<sup>589</sup> What astonished Ruth even more was that Blair’s ‘manners were as composed and gracious as if she had been a lady and in society for years’, which is precisely what Blair had been raised to be.<sup>590</sup> Ruth’s admiration effects both Dr Cary and Blair’s whiteness by not only naming the distinct qualities such as gallantry and graciousness of deportment that constitute it, but also evoking the two constructs that are the repositories of such qualities: southern gentleman and lady.

Although Ruth observes the brass button adorning Blair’s dress, its significance is lost upon her: it is a Confederate uniform button and as such imbued with dual significance. On the one hand, it is a symbol of the Lost Cause acting as a link to the mythical South as the source of the gentility that Ruth admires so; while on the other, the button highlights the Doctor and Blair’s passing for gentility in the present, branding it as a ‘lost cause’. However, to a northerner like Ruth, such intricacies of history and tradition are beyond comprehension, as are they to her mother, Mrs Welch. Mrs Welch, as befitting one hailing from the North, was an industrious woman who ‘had no time to spend in the sort of hospitality practiced by her neighbors’, whereby ‘The idea of going over to a neighbor’s to

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<sup>587</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 283.

<sup>588</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 283.

<sup>589</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 282.

<sup>590</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 282.

“spend the day” [...], or of having them come and “spend the day” with her as they did with others, was intolerable’.<sup>591</sup> Mrs Welch’s condemnation of southern hospitality transforms it into a virtue and a component of southern whiteness, whereby the latter is effected through a juxtaposition of regional sensibilities. Similarly, southern hospitality and genteel manners prevent Dr Cary from asking Mr Welch whether he was a carpetbagger, a term he finds offensive since it combines opportunistic materialism with northern occupation.<sup>592</sup> No wonder, therefore, that the Doctor ‘would not insult’ Mr Welch under his roof by evoking the appellation.<sup>593</sup> Mr Welch, clearly of less refined stock, does not share the Doctor’s qualms about uttering the word. To Dr Cary, though hailing from the North, as a gentleman Mr Welch will be welcome; whereas being a carpetbagger constitutes an unforgivable offence – it is a sin that cannot be expiated. Dr Cary’s suspicion of Mr Welch’s carpetbagging notwithstanding, his conduct towards Mr Welch cannot be faulted: it is that of a gentleman – the epitome of southern whiteness. In *Red Rock*, as in *Gordon Keith*, the meanings of southern whiteness are manifold. Nonetheless, whether it be gentility, hospitality, graciousness of manners or benevolence, all are inextricably bound up with the place; in equal measure products of ‘the red earth’ that propelled into existence the two

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<sup>591</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 331-32.

<sup>592</sup> Page offers a stereotypical rendering of the carpetbagger in the character of Jonadab Leech who ‘arrived one afternoon with only a carpet-bag’, in *Red Rock*, 100. Leech, who combines northern avarice with duplicity, has relocated to the South to ‘bleed’ the country dry. Quite appositely, Steve Allen – Jacquelin’s cousin – considers Leech ‘the vampire, sucking the life-blood of the people’, in *Red Rock*, 564. Considering Leech’s intentions, it is unsurprising that he ‘turns nigger.’ When, following the arrest of the local gentlemen, Steve Allen kidnaps Leech and holds him in a secret location in order to exchange him for the prisoners, Leech, fearing being handed over to the Klan, climbs up the chimney. When Steve Allen pulls him down, Leech has literally and metaphorically, through his lack of courage, ‘turned nigger’. Seeing him, Steve Allen observes: ‘You wouldn’t know yourself from a nigger’, in *Red Rock*, 518. Not only does the word ‘nigger’ indicate a lack of gentlemanly values, but also becomes synonymous with cowardice. To Fanon, being a ‘nigger’ implies ‘walking backward, [and] shaking at the slightest sign of irritation on the part of a petty officer’, in *Black Skin*, 34. The term then transcends racial manifestation of colour and becomes indicative of decorum. In the case of Leech, it serves to mark his distance from the values of southern whiteness stemming, possibly, from his carpetbagger legacy. Another characterization of a carpetbagger is given by Al Turley, a local farmer, who escorts the newly-arrived Mrs Welch to Red Rock: ‘some says it’s the Yankee carpet-baggers steals all the money’, in *Red Rock*, 326. The Doctor finds the term offensive because it is synonymous with theft and exploitation, and therefore sin – metaphorical blackness.

<sup>593</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 287.



constructs in which these qualities are apotheosised in the quotidian: the benevolent planter and southern belle.<sup>594</sup>

By contrast, Page's lauded benevolent planter and his accomplice, the southern belle, are all but absent from Ellen Glasgow's *The Deliverance: A Romance of the Virginia Tobacco Fields*.<sup>595</sup> Glasgow's tale, published in 1904, is set in postbellum Virginia where the vagaries of war have irrevocably altered the fortunes of the Blake family. Unlike Page's tale, Glasgow's resists 'the elegiac impulse'; hers is 'A valediction to the Old South, forbidding mourning.'<sup>596</sup> However, following in Page's footsteps, Glasgow opts for introducing the place through a stranger's eyes. The stranger in question is Mr Carraway, a lawyer, summoned by his client, Mr Fletcher, to Blake Hall on a matter of business. Not only does Mr Carraway have the pleasure of observing the surrounding countryside, but he also benefits from Sol Peterkin's commentary. Peterkin, a local tobacco farmer, with a 'wiry, sun burned neck' from whose mouth 'a thin stream of tobacco juice' trickled, fits the stereotypical description of a 'redneck'.<sup>597</sup> The narrator's account of Peterkin sets the tone for the ensuing narrative and indicates its distance from the refinements of the mythical South. It is from Peterkin that Carraway learns that 'tobaccy's king down here, an' no mistake', and that the Blakes' fortune depended on its cultivation.<sup>598</sup> With pride and fondness Peterkin reminisces of the grandeur of the family's estate: 'you might stand at the big gate an' look in any direction you pleased till yo' eyes bulged fit to bu'st, but you couldn't look past the Blake land for all yo' tryin'.'<sup>599</sup> Indeed, the fields they are passing

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<sup>594</sup> McPherson, *Reconstructing Dixie*, 51.

<sup>595</sup> Ellen Glasgow, *The Deliverance: A Romance of the Virginia Tobacco Fields* (New York: Doubleday Page & Co., 1904).

<sup>596</sup> Grey, *Southern Aberrations*, 72. Grey's paraphrase of John Donne's 'A Valediction Forbidding Mourning' is particularly apposite to the rendering of the difference between Page and Glasgow's differing approaches to the theme of the Old South.

<sup>597</sup> Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 4.

<sup>598</sup> Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 6.

<sup>599</sup> Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 6.

were ‘set out in Blake tobaccy time an’ agin’.<sup>600</sup> Neil Evernden observes that ‘There is no such thing as an individual, only an individual-in-context, individual as a component of place, defined by place.’<sup>601</sup> Consequently, the story of the Blakes’ gentility is defined by, and revolves around, the possession of this vast plantation and the cultivation of tobacco. The fact that Peterkin consigns his narrative to the past foreshadows the Blakes’ fall. Although deprived of his inheritance by the cunning of his father’s former overseer, Fletcher, Christopher Blake labours in the fields with other common labourers, to Carraway he appears ‘moulded physically perhaps in a finer shape than they’.<sup>602</sup> Notwithstanding Christopher’s fine stature, Carraway, rather tellingly, sees Christopher as ‘the product of the soil on which he stood’.<sup>603</sup> Inadvertently, Carraway contrasts his newly acquired knowledge of Christopher’s heritage with the actual, attempting to discover traces of his family’s gentility beneath the labourer’s exterior. To Peterkin, however, despite his diminished status, Christopher is ‘a Blake, skin an’ bone, anyhow, an’ you ain’t goin’ to git this here county to go agin him’.<sup>604</sup> The respect accorded Christopher is largely, but not solely, based on his family’s former standing in the community; it is also grounded in blood. Indeed, as Peterkin wisely remarks, ‘blood will tell, even at the dregs’.<sup>605</sup> Blood symbolises superiority of Christopher’s lineage which is externalised in his appearance. Not only, Peterkin observes, is Christopher ‘the very spit of his pa, that’s so’, but ‘he’s got the old gentleman’s dry throat along with it’.<sup>606</sup> In a world irrevocably altered, where ‘De overseer is in de gret house, and gent’man’s in de blacksmiff shop’, Peterkin’s narrative provides a continuity between the past and the present, and Christopher is the embodiment

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<sup>600</sup> Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 6.

<sup>601</sup> Neil Evernden, ‘Beyond Ecology: Self, Place, And the Pathetic Fallacy’, in *The Ecocriticism*, 103.

<sup>602</sup> Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 12.

<sup>603</sup> Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 12.

<sup>604</sup> Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 8.

<sup>605</sup> Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 12.

<sup>606</sup> Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 12.

of this connection.<sup>607</sup> In Peterkin's estimation, Christopher's lineage places him above the other denizens of the region; whereas to Carraway, whose assessment does not partake of the same historicity as Peterkin's, Christopher is only 'an illiterate day-laborer', albeit of a finer stature.<sup>608</sup> As Frederick McDowell observes, 'Defeat in war left essentially unchanged the Southerner's attitudes, including an instinctive reverence for his social superiors.'<sup>609</sup> It is Peterkin's 'instinctive reverence' for Christopher that effects his claim to gentility, and consequently whiteness. Told and retold by Peterkin, the fiction of Christopher's whiteness becomes endemic to the place; its discourse is locked in a mutually reciprocal relationship with the place, whereby its construction depends on the place, while its fiction adds to the uniqueness of the place. In telling the story, Peterkin actively produces the fiction of Christopher's whiteness, the fiction which is simultaneously undermined by Carraway's comment. This uncharitable remark notwithstanding, in a conversation with Fletcher, Carraway voices the connection between property, heritage, continuity and place, observing that:

The property idea is very strong in these rural counties, you see [...] They feel that every year adds a value to the hereditary possession of land, and that when an estate has borne a single name for a century there has been a veritable impress placed upon it.<sup>610</sup>

Effectively, Carraway expresses an indispensable component of southern whiteness, namely the hereditary possession of land. Since the Blakes had occupied Blake Hall for two hundred years, the relatively short period of Fletcher's tenancy cannot erase the impress left by its previous occupants, the impress which has been transformed into local lore. Indeed, Fletcher's uncouthness and lack of noble lineage, which Carraway observes,

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<sup>607</sup>Page, *Red Rock*, 253.

<sup>608</sup>Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 7.

<sup>609</sup>Frederick P.W. McDowell, *Ellen Glasgow And The Ironic Art of Fiction* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1963), 92.

<sup>610</sup>Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 25.

serve to effect the gentility of the previous occupants of the house. Having summoned Carraway to discuss his will, Fletcher intends to bequeath everything to his grandson, William, who will one day ‘make his mark among the gentility’; while his granddaughter, Maria, will ‘receive a share of the money’ which will ‘make her child-bearing easier’ and, as far as Fletcher is concerned, ‘that’s the only thing a woman’s fit for’.<sup>611</sup> Indeed, Fletcher, would ‘as soon keep a cow that wouldn’t calve’, than ‘a childless woman’.<sup>612</sup> Fletcher’s lack of chivalry and undisguised disdain for women emphasise his plebeian status which even his possession of Blake Hall cannot expunge. Though he resides in the region, as an exponent of the lower class, Fletcher does not worship at the altar of femininity; the cult of femininity and its attendant chivalry are anathema to Fletcher. To him, woman’s purpose is purely utilitarian, a sentiment which ‘Carraway as a man of “old-fashioned ideal” finds deeply offensive’.<sup>613</sup> This brief exchange, while emphasising Fletcher’s lack of genteel breeding, effects Carraway’s claim to gentility by highlighting his subscription to the ‘old-fashioned ideal’. The very setting of the exchange, Blake Hall – ‘a manifestation in brick and mortar of the hereditary greatness of the Blakes’ – makes it doubly offensive.<sup>614</sup> Set against the backdrop of this hereditary grandeur, adorned with ‘the clean white Doric columns’ harking back to antiquity, Fletcher’s lack of gentlemanly manners renders him ‘out of place’, while evoking the ghosts of the Blakes’ past.<sup>615</sup> Maria Fletcher, who eventually inherits the residence and returns it to its rightful owners, feels acutely her inadequacy to occupy this place. Having been educated to become a lady, Maria observes of returning to Blake Hall: ‘When I come back here I seem to lose all that I have learned, and to grow vulgar, like Jinnie Spade, at the store.’<sup>616</sup> Blake Hall seems to

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<sup>611</sup> Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 37.

<sup>612</sup> Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 37.

<sup>613</sup> Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 37.

<sup>614</sup> Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 15.

<sup>615</sup> Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 15.

<sup>616</sup> Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 133.

‘unmake’ Maria’s tenuous claim to gentility which her education and grandfather’s wealth have furnished. Maria, confronted with the heritage of the Blakes which the Hall represents, realises that, despite her ‘acquired’ gentility, in this particular place, she only passes for a lady. To Maria, ‘its [Blake Hall’s] very age is a reproach to us, for it shows off our newness – our lack of any past that we may call our own’.<sup>617</sup> Though formulated more sophisticatedly, Maria’s sentiment echoes that of Peterkin, whereby both see the notions of the past and heredity as crucial to one’s status. Maria’s statement seems the more poignant as it emphasises her precarious status as passing for a lady by rendering acute her awareness of her lack of an acceptable past – her lack of a genteel legacy. Maria’s acknowledgement of ‘being out of place’ highlights the nature of her whiteness as a fiction based on wealth and education, but not endowed with heredity. Christopher’s claim to whiteness, by contrast, rests on heredity and historicity. Christopher, together with his frail mother whose southern belle fame still reverberates in a nostalgic echo across the region, two sisters, Cynthia and Lila, his uncle and several of their former slaves occupy the overseer’s house. This is the place where Mrs Blake has been living in darkness, literally and metaphorically, for the past twenty years. The stroke she suffered before Fletcher took over Blake Hall has left her blind and paralysed. In this state she continues, unaware of the family’s altered circumstances; for Mrs Blake dwells in a world in which ‘the Confederacy had never fallen’, where ‘the three hundred slaves’ are constantly present in her visions ‘tilling her familiar fields’.<sup>618</sup> She lives in a world in which it is customary for a gentleman, as she admonishes her son, to discuss matters of business in the library ‘over a bottle of burgundy’ as was his ‘grandfather’s custom’ before Christopher.<sup>619</sup> Indeed, Mrs Blake’s condition literalizes the principles of southern whiteness ‘where ancestry, gentility, and the

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<sup>617</sup> Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 407.

<sup>618</sup> Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 74.

<sup>619</sup> Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 72-73.

backward view counted most'.<sup>620</sup> Ironically, her instruction in gentlemanly conduct, grounded in tradition, undermines the facade of gentility which her family has painstakingly maintained. What is more, Mrs Blake's scholium effectively forces Christopher to pass for a gentleman, since he feels obliged to postpone his discussion with Carraway until they can remove to the library. The failure of the endeavour is already predetermined by the simple fact that their lodgings do not boast a library, and with it Christopher's passing is foiled. Thanks to the efforts of her family, who have woven 'the intricate tissue of lies [...] around her chair', Mrs Blake can pass for an aristocratic matron – the epitome of Christian charity who graciously gives audiences to her inferior neighbours such as Jim Weatherby.<sup>621</sup> Before Jim can present himself before her illustrious personage, Mrs Blake instructs Cynthia 'to make him wipe his feet before he comes in'.<sup>622</sup> Only when reassured of the cleanliness of her visitor, does Mrs Blake nostalgically remark: 'I remember his father always was [clean] – unusually so for a common labourer.'<sup>623</sup> Such remarks, while belied by her surroundings, both emphasise her passing for a lady and provide a means for Mrs Blake to effect her own whiteness and superiority. In enquiring as to Jim's cleanliness, Mrs Blake leaves implicit the notion of her own cleanliness, which constitutes *fait accompli*. To paraphrase Dyer, the cleanliness of a former belle is the norm, whereas the cleanliness of a common labourer is a surprise. If cleanliness is counted, as Dyer does, among the attributes of whiteness, then Mrs Blake certainly aspires to it, at least in her own estimation. Interestingly, Mrs Blake's remark about Jim's father's cleanliness sets the Weatherbys apart from other labourers and reaffirms the existence of 'shades of whiteness', inadvertently validating their tenuous claim to whiteness. This claim is later legitimated by Jim's marriage to Mrs Blake's daughter, Lila. However, mindful of Lila's

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<sup>620</sup> McDowell, *Ellen Glasgow*, 93.

<sup>621</sup> Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 74.

<sup>622</sup> Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 269.

<sup>623</sup> Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 269.

heritage, the Weatherbys treat her as the belle that she never was, so much so that Sarah, Jim's mother, 'would rather work her fingers to the bone than have that gal take a single dish cloth in her hand'.<sup>624</sup> Paradoxically, in this place, where the past haunts the present, the Blakes cannot eschew passing for gentility. On the one hand, the fiction of the Blakes' whiteness is propagated by their formerly poor, but now financially equal, neighbours for whom the very connection with the Blakes stands for an elevation in status. On the other hand, however, the family writes their own fiction of whiteness, equally populated by the ghosts of their past. Cynthia spends her nights plotting 'all sorts of pleasant lies' that she can 'tell [her mother] about the house and the garden, and the way the war ended, and the Presidents of the Confederacy' whose names 'she made up'.<sup>625</sup> Since the Blakes' whiteness is bound up with the Old South, it is imperative that the place be reinvented in order for Cynthia's narrative to be believable. In re-inscribing their whiteness, Cynthia re-inscribes the history of the region. Cynthia's reconstruction of their whiteness, grounded in a resurrected and rewritten story of the Confederacy, inadvertently cements the signification of the construct as a simulacrum. Not only did a precedent for it never exist, its story was conjured up alongside the reinvented history of the region, which exacerbates its imaginary character.

Although to their neighbours the Blakes' whiteness is grounded in their genteel heritage, Christopher perceives the untenability of such fiction. When Maria offers to restore Blake Hall to him, he bluntly answers: 'It is too late. [...] You can't put a field-hand in a fine house and make him a gentleman.'<sup>626</sup> While Christopher's retort evokes Maria's conviction of being out of place in Blake Hall occasioned by her lack of genteel legacy, it also problematizes it by highlighting the futility of claims to whiteness based on lineage and

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<sup>624</sup> Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 487.

<sup>625</sup> Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 486.

<sup>626</sup> Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 419.

heritage alone. Without his ancestral home and the adjunct acres, hereditary whiteness becomes an empty signifier. Having tasted ‘the abject bitterness and despair of those years’ when he ‘tried to sink to the level of the brutes – tried to forget that [he] was any better than the oxen he drove’, Christopher places himself beyond the pale of whiteness.<sup>627</sup> As he vehemently declares: ‘No, there’s no pulling me up again; such things aren’t lived over, and I’m done for good.’<sup>628</sup> Christopher’s anguished outburst is redolent of Social Darwinism, whereby once his enforced metamorphosis into a field labourer has been accomplished, its reversal is impossible; he will never be able to rise above his station in life.<sup>629</sup> A similar social determinism may be detected in Maria. Whenever in Christopher’s presence, Maria feels ‘the appeal of the rustic tradition, the rustic temperament; of all the multiplied inheritances of the centuries, which her education had not utterly extinguished’.<sup>630</sup> What Christopher resents but accepts, Maria finds appealing because of her lowly descent which no amount of education can elevate. Just as Maria’s lowly legacy invalidates the accomplishments which her grandfather’s wealth helped to acquire, Christopher’s status as a field labourer belies his hereditary claim to whiteness. Implicit in his status is a different relationship with the land. In other words, the land giveth and the land taketh away.<sup>631</sup> While Christopher’s words bring into sharp relief the disparate totalities of whiteness – hereditary possession of land and lineage – they also reify the existence of a class among whom he counts himself, and to whom claims to whiteness are

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<sup>627</sup> Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 421.

<sup>628</sup> Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 421.

<sup>629</sup> McDowell observes in *Ellen Glasgow* that Glasgow was dominated, like many of her contemporaries, ‘by a realism which had assimilated Darwinian concepts’, 20. Nonetheless, he also stresses that ‘Her application of Darwin to the social scene’ was ‘less rigid than’ Zola’s. Consequently, ‘like many of the other American realists contemporary with her, she accepted only a modified determinism’, 22. Similarly, R.H.W. Dillard observes of Glasgow that ‘Given her close attention to Darwin’s thought, it is only natural that her characters were in many ways powerless in the face of larger forces that define and manipulate them’, in ‘On Ellen Glasgow’s *The Battle-Ground*’, in *The Classics of Civil War Fiction*, ed. David Madden and Peggy Bach (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1991), 67.

<sup>630</sup> Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 172.

<sup>631</sup> Colin Dayan, discussing the power of the law to make and unmake persons, observes: ‘The law giveth and the law taketh away,’ in *The Law Is a White Dog: How Legal Rituals Make and Unmake Persons* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 42. Here, I substitute the land for the law.



denied. While his forefathers supervised the cultivation of tobacco, Christopher literalises the metaphor of ‘living with the land and its processes’, so much so that ‘The smell and the stain of it [tobacco] are well soaked in’, and he bitterly wonders whether ‘all the water in the river of Jordan could wash away the blood of the tobacco worm’.<sup>632</sup> The blood of the tobacco worm is thus transmuted into the stain of the original sin which even the waters of Jordan cannot cleanse, and this is what will always preclude his rebirth in whiteness. Even if he is restored to Blake Hall, for Christopher it can only be a passing place, just as it has been for Maria.

While to Page and Glasgow whiteness as passing materialises as a corollary of the harsh, Post-Reconstruction realities which severed or transformed the link between heritage and land, Charles Waddell Chesnutt’s *The House behind the Cedars* undermines the validity of such claims.<sup>633</sup> Through its evocations of the notions of blood and heredity, the novel, published in 1900, constitutes a powerful indictment of the very concepts it exploits. In introducing the pastoral setting of Patesville, Chesnutt utilises the familiar technique of viewing it through a stranger’s eyes. The stranger is John Warwick whose attire, comprising ‘a suit of linen duck [...] a panama straw hat, and patent leather shoes’ combined with his tall stature and ‘straight, black, lustrous hair and very clean-cut, high-bred features’, convinces the hotel clerk of his status as a gentleman.<sup>634</sup> Considering his apparel, the clerk draws the only possible conclusion – that this must be ‘One of the South Ca’lina big bugs’, whose fortune derives from ‘cotton, or turpentine’.<sup>635</sup> The clerk establishes John’s status as a gentleman, and his claim to whiteness, through an association

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<sup>632</sup> Glasgow, *The Deliverance*, 182.

<sup>633</sup> Charles W. Chesnutt, *The House Behind The Cedars*, ed. Nancy Bentley and Sandra Gunning (Boston: Bedford, 2002). MacKethan observes that in Chesnutt’s fiction ‘the standardized features of the plantation are twisted into grotesque contradictions of the true ideal’, in *The Dream of Arcady*, 17. I argue that Chesnutt undermines the notion of the truth of such an ideal by revealing it as inherently unstable and untenable.

<sup>634</sup> Chesnutt, *The House*, 1.

<sup>635</sup> Chesnutt, *The House*, 1.

with the region and its resources, cultivated or natural. Though the stock image of the plantation house is absent from Patesville, it is still a place where certain hierarchies obtain, according to which its patrician citizens reside on the elevated peak of the Hill – ‘the aristocratic portion of the town’.<sup>636</sup> Similarly to Page, Chesnutt employs natural terrain to signify as a preordained boundary separating aristocracy from plebeians. It is also a place where certain customs are cultivated which, as John reminisces, ‘once made, like our sins, they grip us in bands of steel; we become the creatures of our creations’.<sup>637</sup> John’s words both indicate the existence of a code according to which gentility and its antithesis are constructed in Patesville and emphasise the artificiality of such creations. According to this code, as John learns when still a boy, he ‘need not be black, away from Patesville’.<sup>638</sup> Ironically, this lesson in the relativity of his blackness is given by Judge Straight, one of the most illustrious denizens of the town, in a moment of an almost unguarded liberalism – almost being the operative word. While the Judge indulges John’s wish to become a lawyer and offers him the position of an office boy, he stipulates: ‘To the rest of the town you will be my servant, and still a negro.’<sup>639</sup> The Judge’s beneficence is therefore mitigated by the adherence to ‘certain customs’ which demand that John, to borrow from du Bois, be kept ‘in his place’. Although the Judge voices no objection to John’s reading his books when ‘no one is about’ and being ‘white’ in his ‘own private opinion’, this covenant is to be kept secret: ‘But mum’s the word.’<sup>640</sup> While the Judge’s words clearly separate whiteness from white as skin colour, his actions establish conformity to Patesville customs as a means of maintaining his genteel status. In order to perform the role of a benefactor, which in this instance replaces that of the benevolent planter, and to retain his privileged position as a gentleman, his relationship with John can only be that of master and servant; while John’s

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<sup>636</sup> Chesnutt, *The House*, 13.

<sup>637</sup> Chesnutt, *The House*, 23.

<sup>638</sup> Chesnutt, *The House*, 116.

<sup>639</sup> Chesnutt, *The House*, 117.

<sup>640</sup> Chesnutt, *The House*, 117.

servile status becomes the matter of not hue, but blood and heritage. The Judge's claim to benevolence, and thus whiteness, rests on his re-enactment of the role of the beneficent master which can only be performed in the presence of an inferior servant. In other words, John's aspiration to become a lawyer precipitates the Judge's benevolence which, in this instance, is analogous to whiteness. To paraphrase Adorno and Horkheimer, John reproduces the Judge's gentility so that the Judge 'is no longer able to escape his social role'.<sup>641</sup> Since the Judge is fully aware of the duplicity of his actions, whence the need for secrecy, his whiteness can signify as nothing other than passing, whereby John's aspirations depend on the Judge's averting his gaze. The fact that the charade is to be maintained before 'the rest of the town' reaffirms the existence of rigid customs that, paradoxically, by the very virtue of policing the boundaries of gentility transform it into passing. Unbeknownst to the Judge, his questionable beneficence nonetheless sets John on the path to gentility, culminating in the metamorphosis of John Walden into John Warwick. John – now a respectable gentleman, a lawyer and owner of his own plantation – returns to Patesville to assist the transformation of his sister, Rowena, into a lady. A year later Rowena Warwick – ironically named after the archetype of southern whiteness, the noble Saxon heroine of Scott's *Ivanhoe* – makes her debut in the Clarence society at a jousting tournament. Unlike Page's veiled allusions to Scott, Chesnutt's narrator observes acerbically that both the idea of tournaments and 'Scott's novels of chivalry appealed

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<sup>641</sup> Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, 'The Logic of Domination', trans. John Cumming, in *The Green Studies Reader: From Romanticism to Ecocriticism*, ed. Laurence Coupe (London: Routledge, 2000), 79. Adorno and Horkheimer evoke Odysseus and his crew's encounter with the sirens during which Odysseus commands his men to put wax in their ears and tie him to the mast so that they can resist the sirens' song. In following his orders, his men 'reproduce the oppressor's life together with their own, and the oppressor is no longer able to escape his social role. The bonds with which he has irremediably tied himself to practice, also keep the Sirens away from practice: their temptation is neutralized'. The relationship between Odysseus and his crew mirrors the Hegelian master/slave dialectic which is both reified and undermined by the act of binding. Odysseus is bound to the mast on his own orders, just as his crewmen plug their ears on his command. Their obedience, while confirming Odysseus's superior position, transforms Odysseus into a bondsman, at the mercy of his crew, simply because his orders preclude them from hearing his pleas. Consequently, the oppressor becomes the oppressed who is literally and metaphorically immobilised in his own social role as a result of his own actions.

forcefully to the feudal heart'.<sup>642</sup> This spectacle of medieval chivalry perpetuates the myth of the nobility of the southern civilization, the myth which is simultaneously belied by the presence of 'the poorer white and colored folks [who] found seats outside, upon what would now be known as the "bleachers"''.<sup>643</sup> Paradoxically, the 'bleachers' sublate the validity of the myth of a homogenous southern nobility, and consequently whiteness, while suggesting that watching the spectacle will provide the means of ennoblement. What is more, the existence of the 'bleachers' reinforces the fiction of whiteness of those who are deemed 'The best people' and as such entitled to take their place in 'the grand stand'.<sup>644</sup> Needless to say that both John and Rowena find themselves among those seated in the grand stand where John, in response to a remark from one of the ladies, pronounces the spectacle 'the renaissance of chivalry' which 'like any other renaissance [...] must adapt itself to new times and circumstances'.<sup>645</sup> John's words imply that the unfolding events are already a simulacrum, an idealised copy, as are the values that the spectacle promulgates. In the here and now, when 'knights are not weighted down with heavy armor', when 'a wooden substitute is used 'For an iron-headed lance', such re-enactments yield palimpsests passing for 'southern knights'.<sup>646</sup> Clarence, just like the less poetically and nostalgically named Patesville, materialises as a passing place, a fact emphasised by John and Rowena's passing for white. If, according to Peter Schmidt, 'Scott is an indispensable novelist for studying narratives of how conquered colonies or border states reclaim nationhood', then

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<sup>642</sup> Chesnutt, *The House*, 30. M. Giulia Fabi observes that the names of Chesnutt's male protagonists connect them 'with the historical figures of Warwick the Kingmaker and George Duke of Clarence', in *Passing and the Rise of the African American Novel* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 79. Through their evocations of these historical figures, which though tenuous are plausible, another dimension is added to John Warwick and George Tryon. Both the Kingmaker and Clarence, his son-in-law, were guilty of treason against Edward IV. David Baldwin offers a detailed account of the turbulent relations between Edward IV, his brother George Duke of Clarence and Warwick the Kingmaker (Richard Neville Earl of Salisbury) in *Richard III* (Stroud: Amberley, 2012). While the Kingmaker died an honourable death on the battlefield, Clarence was tried and executed. Betrayal constitutes the historical legacy of both John Warwick and George Tryon and underpins their conduct: Warwick betrays his heritage by electing to pass for white, and Tryon betrays Rowena.

<sup>643</sup> Chesnutt, *The House*, 30.

<sup>644</sup> Chesnutt, *The House*, 30.

<sup>645</sup> Chesnutt, *The House*, 31.

<sup>646</sup> Chesnutt, *The House*, 31.

John and Rowena's presence at the tournament acquires a new meaning, since in their veins flows united the blood of two discrete 'races'.<sup>647</sup> Whereas in *Ivanhoe*, as Schmidt observes, 'the two hostile "races"' of Saxons and Normans were 'separated by blood as well as by culture', in Chesnutt both blood and culture converge in John and Rowena.<sup>648</sup> Their presence at the tournament marks an attempt to reclaim their heritage, their claim to southern whiteness which, according to the English law, constitutes their undisputed patrimony. It is the reinvented law of the colony that cements their whiteness as passing.<sup>649</sup>

Predictably, at the tournament Rowena meets her 'knight in shining armour' in the person of George Tryon. His inherited 'two estates', 'Lots of land, and plenty of money', combined with his faultless manners, make Tryon an undisputed gentleman – the epitome of southern whiteness.<sup>650</sup> Ironically, the inherited property does not sit comfortably with his name which implies both aspiration and usurpation; the cognomen casts a shadow over his hereditary gentility. Following a brief courtship, Tryon proposes to Rowena and is accepted. However, Rowena, conscious of her heritage, becomes beset by pangs of conscience and feels obliged to confess her secret to Tryon, yet fears his reaction. Upon her request, John sounds Tryon on his views on heritage and confesses to him their lack of aristocratic background. Not only do they 'have no connections of which you could boast and no relatives to whom [they] would be glad to introduce' Tryon, they 'are [also] new

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<sup>647</sup> Peter Schmidt, 'Walter Scott, Postcolonial Theory, and New South Literature', *Mississippi Quarterly* 56 (2003): 545.

<sup>648</sup> Schmidt, 'Walter Scott', 547.

<sup>649</sup> Allen notes: 'In 1662, the Virginia Assembly discarded English common law of descent through the father, and instituted the principle of *patris sequitur ventrem*, whereunder the child was declared "bond or free according to the condition of the mother."' That law was specifically aimed at giving the plantation bourgeoisie a predefined supply of self-perpetuating unpaid labor,' in *The Invention*, 2.134. Smith observes of these early statutes that they 'sited female bodies as the theoretical and functional dividing points of slave and free status, and, by extension, effected the division of the races based on 'the condition of the mother', in *Body Politics*, 10.

<sup>650</sup> Chesnutt, *The House*, 90.

people'.<sup>651</sup> John's circumspect honesty is met with an impassioned denunciation of there being any 'advantage in belonging to an old' family.<sup>652</sup> Despite her lack of heritage, Tryon is ready to embrace Rowena, particularly since to him she 'carries the stamp of her descent upon her face and in her heart'.<sup>653</sup> To demonstrate his apparent disregard for heritage, Tryon confesses a secret of his own: 'My maternal great-great-grandfather, a hundred and fifty years ago, was hanged, drawn, and quartered for stealing cattle across the Scottish border. How is that for a pedigree? Behold in me the lineal descendant of a felon!'<sup>654</sup> Whereas in Scotland, as Dayan observes, 'treason or felony' would have meant 'forfeiture of property to the king' and 'corruption of blood, which blocked the descent of property', in the South the Scottish heritage, reinvented, secures Tryon's respectability and with it, his whiteness. Tryon's confession, however, transforms his whiteness into passing, and the region's role as a passing place is thus reinforced. If 'One week in New York' can divest a gentleman of his manners, so three generations of residence in the South can turn a felon into a gentleman. While both transmutations ground the ideal of gentleman – the preordained embodiment of southern whiteness – in the South, the latter destabilises the possibility of the stability and purity of such an ideal. Indeed, Tryon's 'corrupted blood' is soon put to the test. Before the nuptials take place, Rowena and Tryon, unbeknownst to each other, travel to Patesville: Tryon on business and Rowena to nurse her sick mother. Ironically, their respective visits there literally turn Patesville into a passing place. In Patesville, the customs on which southern gentility, and thus whiteness, rest are reaffirmed: here, by his own admission Tryon – 'the lineal descendant of a felon' is hailed by Judge Straight as a representative 'of the old blood' – a statement which inadvertently highlights

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<sup>651</sup> Chesnutt, *The House*, 56.

<sup>652</sup> Chesnutt, *The House*, 56.

<sup>653</sup> Chesnutt, *The House*, 56.

<sup>654</sup> Chesnutt, *The House*, 56-57.

Tryon's passing for a gentleman.<sup>655</sup> The Judge's effusiveness is quite understandable considering that Patesville is a place where 'the ties of blood' are 'cherished as items of value, and never forgotten', and where a gentleman must be 'treated with genuine southern hospitality'.<sup>656</sup> In Patesville, blood and heritage materialize as uniquely southern commodities, to be traded cautiously: blood establishes, however tenuously, one's status as a gentleman, while heritage can only be accorded to a gentleman. Both act as 'rituals of banishment' which aid 'the placement of the stigmatized outside the body politic'.<sup>657</sup> That both are accorded to Tryon only serves to reify the dubiousness of his claim to whiteness. When Tryon finally learns the truth of Rowena's descent, he sends a letter to her brother, breaking off the engagement. Rather tellingly for somebody of 'corrupted blood' and a name that implies opportunism and lack of perseverance, Tryon confesses in the epistle that he 'would have doubtless been happier had [he] gone through life without finding it [Rowena's secret] out'.<sup>658</sup> Ironically, possessing the knowledge he must break off the engagement as it might jeopardise his passing for a gentleman by tainting the 'corrupted' purity of his ancestral whiteness. Although Tryon cannot think of John 'as other than a white man', he 'cannot marry' his sister.<sup>659</sup> Clearly, to Tryon being white and whiteness are not synonymous. Indeed, his 'repugnance', he admits, 'was not to the woman [...] but merely to the thought of her as a wife'.<sup>660</sup> What makes his marriage to Rowena impossible is her heritage because of which he cannot accept her as his equal and, considering his own lineage, his conduct appears doubly ironic. While Tryon's passing for a gentleman undermines the purity of the presupposed ideal of southern whiteness by tainting it with 'corrupted blood', Rowena's passing for a lady, despite her outward gentility, results in her

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<sup>655</sup> Chesnutt, *The House*, 57; and Chesnutt, *The House*, 73.

<sup>656</sup> Chesnutt, *The House*, 90-91.

<sup>657</sup> Dayan, *The Law*, 16.

<sup>658</sup> Chesnutt, *The House*, 103.

<sup>659</sup> Chesnutt, *The House*, 103-04.

<sup>660</sup> Chesnutt, *The House*, 128.

‘civil death’ executed through Tryon’s ‘ritual of banishment’, to be soon followed by her actual death.<sup>661</sup> Here, both Rowena and Tryon’s whitenesses are shaped by place that imposes its own ‘rhetoric of banishment’, and though Tryon recognizes this as a blend of ‘Reason, common-sense, the instinctive ready-made judgements of his training and environment’, he is powerless to liberate himself from under its spell.<sup>662</sup> When he eventually defies custom and tradition and decides to marry Rowena, filled with love fuelled by a newly-found conviction that ‘Custom was tyranny’, he arrives too late and Rowena is dead.<sup>663</sup> Rowena’s death reveals the proliferation of the metaphor of passing. While alive, she passed for the ideal, in passing she becomes the ideal, divested of flesh and blood, perpetually virginal and asexual. What is more, her unattainability as the ideal will ensure the continuity of Tryon’s passing for a gentleman. Killed by Tryon’s pretence to whiteness, not only is Rowena’s passing essential to the preservation of his already tainted gentility, but it also literalizes the metaphor of whiteness as death – whiteness as passing *ad infinitum*. Ironically, on his way to Patesville, Tryon meets a woman whose claim to whiteness, according to the southern custom, would be greater than Rowena’s. He observes that ‘she was white enough, with the sallowness of the sandhill poor white [...] and held in her hand a bottle, the contents of which had never paid any revenue tax’.<sup>664</sup> Through the recourse to stereotype, Tryon acknowledges the paradox on which whiteness rests: the woman was ‘white enough’, but ‘she was not fair, and she was not Rena’.<sup>665</sup> Through this unfavourable comparison Tryon effects Rowena’s whiteness. However, the comparison does not erase the ambiguity of the construct. On the contrary, its ambiguity is emphasised by the employment of the term ‘fair’ which carries connotations of beauty and

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<sup>661</sup> Dayan, in ‘Preface’, in *The Law*, employs the phrase ‘civil death’ to denote a legally imposed condition on ‘slaves, animals, criminals, and detainees who are disabled by law’, xii.

<sup>662</sup> Chesnutt, *The House*, 130.

<sup>663</sup> Chesnutt, *The House*, 197.

<sup>664</sup> Chesnutt, *The House*, 189.

<sup>665</sup> Chesnutt, *The House*, 189.



gentleness as well as lightness of complexion. While the woman does not possess any of these attributes, she certainly espouses the notion of southern hospitality as she ‘tenders’ Tryon ‘the bottle with tipsy cordiality’.<sup>666</sup> Nonetheless, in the region where such stringent customs obtain, both women are placed beyond the pale of whiteness: the sandhillier woman because of the shiftlessness that her appearance bespeaks, which testifies to her lowly descent, and for which even her attempt at hospitality cannot atone; and Rowena because of her descent, regardless of her fairness and gentility.

To Page, Glasgow and Chesnutt place becomes instrumental in both reconstructions of and effecting whiteness. The plantation houses evoked by Page and Glasgow, constitute the locus of origin, the emblem of and monument to one’s heritage which is inextricably bound up with blood, both as an essence of life and a means of perpetuation of aristocratic tradition. Such monumental spaces, according to Lefebvre, offer ‘each member of a society an image of that membership, an image of his or her social visage’.<sup>667</sup> As monumental spaces, plantation houses render visible one’s claim to whiteness, while simultaneously reinforcing ‘gradations of whiteness’ dependent on how far one is removed from the monument. Uprooted from their ancestral seats, the whiteness of Page and Glasgow’s heroes is transformed into passing, partly effected through historic ties to such places, and partly by the nostalgic reminiscences of their formerly inferior neighbours. As monuments of hereditary tradition, once lost, plantation houses begin to signify as passing places. Even if they are eventually restored to their rightful heirs, the exigencies of Post-Reconstruction have irrevocably altered their owners so that their return to the seats of forefathers is not synonymous with a recovery of gentility; the restoration to the plantation cannot resurrect the presupposed purity of the antebellum values, which renders it a passing place. In

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<sup>666</sup> Chesnutt, *The House*, 190.

<sup>667</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production*, 220.

Chesnutt's *The House behind the Cedars*, however, the plantation can only signify as a passing place, a veneer that conceals the hereditarily 'corrupted blood' of George Tryon; it houses the spectre of whiteness, a phantom, which explains its shadowy, rather than monumental, presence in the novel. Through the character of Tryon, Chesnutt undermines not only the purity, but also attainability of whiteness, effectively highlighting its ambiguity.

A similar ambiguity is discernible in Alice Dunbar-Nelson's 'In Our Neighborhood'.<sup>668</sup> For Dunbar-Nelson who, like Chesnutt, purposefully blurs the distinctions between black and white, the discourse of whiteness is bound up with aspiration and place. In the story, not a plantation house, but the Avenue serves as a site of aspiration. The Avenue, just like the Hill in *The House behind the Cedars*, functions as, in Pierre Macherey's terms, a 'half-presence' which enacts the 'true absence' of the genteel values, encoded in its name, in the neighbourhood.<sup>669</sup> The Avenue may constitute a site of inspiration and incite aspiration, but in this particular neighbourhood such aspirations are, by virtue of the location, downgraded to second rate palimpsests and culminate in passing. Whereas in 'In Our Neighborhood' the Avenue provides a site that both inspires and foils its denizens' aspirations to gentility, in 'Tony's Wife' Dunbar-Nelson limns a neighbourhood that acts as a passing place.<sup>670</sup> This locality constitutes 'the sort of neighbourhood where millionaires live before their fortunes are made and fashionable, high-priced private

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<sup>668</sup> Alice Moore Dunbar-Nelson, 'In Our Neighborhood' (1895), in *Violets and Other Tales* (Charleston: Bibliobazaar, 2008). In all subsequent quotations from this story, or other stories from this collection, the collection will be referenced as *The Violets*.

<sup>669</sup> Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (London: Routledge, 1978), 82. Macherey notes that 'meaning is in the relation between the implicit and the explicit', 87. Explicit, in this instance, is the nonwhiteness of the neighbourhood measured against the presupposed, but kept implicit, standards represented by the Avenue.

<sup>670</sup> Alice Dunbar-Nelson, 'Tony's Wife', in *Laughing to Stop Myself Crying* (London: X Press, 2000). In her 'Introduction', Yvette Richards praises the collection as 'a compilation of the best [stories] from *Violets and Other Tales* and *The Goodness of St. Roque*'. In all subsequent quotations from this story, or other stories from this compilation, the compilation will be referenced as *Laughing*. The stories from this compilation are referenced individually in the bibliography.

schools flourish, where the small cottages are occupied by aspiring schoolteachers and choir singers'.<sup>671</sup> In short, it is a passing place in a dual sense. Firstly, it materialises as a purgatory through which those with aspirations pass and, possibly, emerge 'improved' enough to attain a semblance of whiteness, at least in their own estimation; secondly, the institutions, while titillating with the possibility of attaining whiteness through a blend of education and morality, do not boast aristocratic heritage as a curricular item. Without this constituent part of whiteness proper, all efforts at improvement inadvertently yield pseudo-gentility. Here, as in 'In Our Neighborhood', another place, 'the old-time French quarter' materialises as a 'half-presence', a source of aspirations to whiteness and, as such, its meaning, as that of the Avenue or the Hill or Page and Glasgow's plantations, goes beyond the literal, soaring to the lofty heights of genteel notions and aristocratic legacy.<sup>672</sup> In this locality, situated beyond the pale of whiteness, attempts at gentility culminate in passing, which not only reifies the existence of 'shades of whiteness', but also questions the possibility of the attainment of whiteness proper.

The notion of place appears crucial to the writing of fictions of whiteness. Grounded in a different place, each fiction serves to dispel the notion of whiteness as universal. To these authors, whiteness is not only a fiction, but also one with synecdochical properties.

Glasgow once remarked of the turn-of-the-century literature that 'things were [...] seldom known by their right names,' and this sentiment appears particularly pertinent to the fiction of whiteness.<sup>673</sup> In the South, as a direct corollary of the locality, whiteness becomes negotiated through the disparate fictions of the gentleman planter and angelic southern lady. These fictions, undergirded by indomitable notions of blood, tradition and heritage,

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<sup>671</sup> Dunbar-Nelson, 'Tony's Wife', in *Laughing*, 26-27

<sup>672</sup> Dunbar-Nelson, 'Tony's Wife', in *Laughing*, 26.

<sup>673</sup> Ellen Glasgow, *A Certain Measure: An Interpretation of Prose Fiction* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1943), 121.

consigned to the monumental space of the plantation constitute inextricable components of the southern narrative of whiteness. These disparate fictions of whiteness, endemic to the South, have grown in significance commensurable with the cultivation of cotton or tobacco which sustains them. Each tale of whiteness is contingent upon the staples of the plantation house, heritage and blood, and in the absence of one of these components, southern gentility, and thus whiteness, can only signify as passing. None of Page, Glasgow and Chesnutt's protagonists can boast of possessing a plantation, aristocratic descent, and purity of blood concurrently, perhaps with the exception of the senile Mrs Blake. For them, the South in general, and the distinct localities in particular, become passing places where the disparate fictions of whiteness can never be united in a totality. In Dunbar-Nelson's stories, the absence of the plantation house is palpable, for it emphasises the lack of claims to whiteness of her protagonists, which is established through references to other places where genteel values are cultivated. In doing this, Dunbar-Nelson renders her protagonists as hopelessly passing – a status that is exacerbated by the futility of their desires for redemptive whiteness. Although such aspirations inevitably turn into passing, they nonetheless reify the existence of places deemed receptacles of whiteness which in turn inspire individual acts of passing.

## Chapter four: A touch of the tar brush – or the ambivalence of whiteness

But, when one has taken it into one's head to try to express existence, one runs the risk of finding only the nonexistent.<sup>674</sup>

The contradiction between the man and his ideal of himself was embodied before her under a clerical waistcoat.<sup>675</sup>

In the particular places evoked in Page, Glasgow and Chesnutt's fiction, or their spectral traces in Dunbar-Nelson's, southern whiteness becomes synonymous with hereditary gentility. The southern gentleman planter and the southern lady, ensconced on inherited land, with appropriately aristocratic blood coursing in their veins, signify as the living embodiments of the endurance of the genteel tradition. Since, as Jacques Derrida observes, 'One never inherits without coming to terms with [...] some specter', the inheritance of the southern gentleman and lady is dependent upon convoking and ontologizing the genteel ideals of the Old South.<sup>676</sup> This spectral legacy marks southern whiteness as atavistic, furnishing its discourse with a continuity which itself is nothing more than fiction since, as Michel Foucault notes, 'History becomes "effective" to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being'.<sup>677</sup> As reconstructions grounded in the mythical Old South, the southern gentleman and lady encode the haunting irreconcilability of the past and present. Since 'there is no Dasein without the uncanniness, without the strange familiarity [...] of some specter', each reproduction of the antebellum ideal from the

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<sup>674</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 137.

<sup>675</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 134.

<sup>676</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of National Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, 'Editor's Introduction' by Bernard Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 2006), 24.

<sup>677</sup> Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), 154.

vantage point of the present becomes a site of spectral haunting.<sup>678</sup> Reconstructed in response to historic antecedents, the gentleman planter and lady convey their absence.<sup>679</sup> Stamped with a historicity, the southern gentleman and lady encode ‘the grim performativeness of all orders which are called in’, which makes them ‘Other, which is to say “with” or haunted’.<sup>680</sup> The historic other, like a revenant, comes to be reanimated in the bodies of the southern planter and lady. Not only does such reanimation imply a re-discovery of this other, elevating it to the status of an ideal or truth, it also marks its disjunction. Indeed, each resurrection of the ideal of whiteness leads ‘its own funeral procession’ and raises ‘itself in the course of this march’, thus ‘becoming its own revenant’.<sup>681</sup> Since resurrection implies death and rebirth, southern whiteness evokes its own passing and spectrality as ‘it recalls the repetition of the same, of the same thing as a ghost’.<sup>682</sup> Haunted by the spectre of the ideal, southern whiteness becomes a locus of approximations whereby the southern gentleman and lady, as repositories of antebellum gentility, perpetuate alterity predicated upon the impossibility of uniting the three factors indispensable to gentility – hereditary land ownership, blood and tradition; and predetermined by the discontinuity from the site of origin – the Old South.

Evoking the ideal – ‘the very thing that will never present itself in the form of full presence’ – the gentleman planter and lady open the ‘gap between an infinite promise’ and its reconstruction, and become ‘necessarily inadequate forms of what has to be measured against this promise’.<sup>683</sup> What they represent are permutations of the truth, or gentility, that

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<sup>678</sup> Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 125.

<sup>679</sup> Avital Ronell sees the telephone as a metaphor for absence which ‘presupposes the existence of another telephone’, in *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 3.

<sup>680</sup> Ronell, *The Telephone Book*, 29; and Ronell, *The Telephone Book*, 70.

<sup>681</sup> Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 43.

<sup>682</sup> Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 45.

<sup>683</sup> Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 81.

come into being at the moment of re-enactment which itself marks the fissure between the site of origin and the copy. Such invocation of truth, engendered by ‘the respect for ancient continuities’, renders each act of mimetic reproduction a ‘systematic dissociation’.<sup>684</sup> This ‘systematic dissociation’ inadvertently brands the southern gentleman and lady with ‘a touch of the tar brush’. Whilst the etymology of the phrase suggests a visible imperfection – ‘A strain of Negro blood in one’s ancestry indicated by dark skin’ – Fanon, crucially, equates the symbology of such darkness with ‘evil, sin, wretchedness, [and] death’.<sup>685</sup> Consequently, the touch of the tar brush foregrounds innate imperfection – metaphorical blackness – engendered by ‘systematic dissociation’ from the ideal of antebellum gentility which the gentleman planter and lady project. The desire to conceal the imperfection of reproductions that is fuelled by the hysteric striving for the perfection of antebellum whiteness is apparent in Thomas Nelson Page’s *Red Rock*, where revivifications of gentility are tainted by the lack of its prerequisites – land and plantation; or Ellen Glasgow’s *The Battle-Ground*, where noble lineage is besmirched by less than genteel yearnings.<sup>686</sup> The touch of the tar brush becomes an inescapable reality engendered in the replication of the ideal which, through a relentless process of substitutions, is transformed into abortive fictions of verisimilitude – the southern gentleman and lady – who fall short of not only the antebellum, but also divine ideals of whiteness.

For Richard Dyer, Christ and the Virgin Mary provide the antecedents of whiteness, whereby Christ embodies the attributes of its male incarnation such as suffering engendered by ‘spiritual and physical striving’ and the asceticism of self-denial; while the

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<sup>684</sup> Foucault, *Language*, 164.

<sup>685</sup> *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, ed. Ivor H. Evans, 14<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: Cassell Publishers, 1989), 1082; and Fanon, *Black Skin*, 191.

<sup>686</sup> Ellen Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1902).

Virgin Mary acts as a paradigm of female virtues: docility, passivity and purity.<sup>687</sup> In colonial Maryland, as Smith notes, the notion of female purity acquired a particular significance, so much so that ‘by the 1660s, the colonies had already embarked upon a tradition of civil distinctions founded on the imagination of “loathsome copulations,” identifying white females as the only potential avenue of corruption’.<sup>688</sup> Interestingly, the threat of ‘loathsome copulations’ results in a division of white femininity since only white women who were indentured servants were believed capable of engaging in such acts.<sup>689</sup> It is, therefore, hardly surprising that ‘white female purity was largely a class-based phenomenon’, which narrows the ‘potential avenue of corruption’ that is the female body to the lower stratum of society.<sup>690</sup> Implicit in this distinction is the idea of the purity of the genteel woman – the epitome of whiteness. Although this does not remove the threat of ‘pollution’, it suggests that the antithesis – the corrupted woman – was conjured up before the ideal to delineate the parameters of genteel womanhood, endowing it with passivity and transforming it into an ideal in need of protection. Only then can the genteel woman acquire ‘the bright look of innocence’ and ‘magical, heavenly light’; only then can she be protected from the touch of the tar brush.<sup>691</sup> Not only is purity the *sine qua non* of female gentility, but it is also indispensable to projections of male whiteness which develops along the axes of sexual restraint and struggle.<sup>692</sup> If ‘to blacken one’s reputation’ is to consign them to ‘Blackness, darkness, shadow’, then it is from such spectre of pollution that the

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<sup>687</sup> Dyer, *White*, 17.

<sup>688</sup> Smith, *American Body Politics*, 11.

<sup>689</sup> Smith, *American Body Politics*, 11.

<sup>690</sup> Smith, *American Body Politics*, 129. Martha Hodes notes that in the antebellum South, ‘communities were likely to consider poorer white women to be the depraved agents of illicit liaisons, including liaisons with black men. Thus could white ideology about lower-class female sexuality overshadow ideas about the dangers of black male sexuality’, cited in Smith, *American Body Politics*, 129. Hodes demonstrates that illicit sexuality and skin colour need not walk hand in hand.

<sup>691</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin*, 189.

<sup>692</sup> Whilst Babb sees sexual restraint as a characteristic of whiteness, Dyer perceives struggle as an attribute of male whiteness.



southern lady must be shielded.<sup>693</sup> It is, therefore, metaphorical blackness that is indispensable to reconstructions of both male and female ideals of gentility. The preservation of the purity on which the southern female gentility rests creates a paradox: for the ideal to remain immaculate, it needs to be, in Dyer's terms, disembodied. This formulation suggests that the dissonance between the ideal and the ordinary is inescapable from reconstructions of whiteness. Anson Rabinbach and Jessica Benjamin, discussing depictions of women in fascist literature, assert that 'the fascist man is a motherless child, a man who must exclude women'.<sup>694</sup> In his reconstruction of whiteness, the southern planter replaces repudiation with the valorisation and elevation of the purity of the genteel lady. Like 'the fascist man', the southern gentleman is a 'motherless man' because to admit otherwise would amount to besmirching the ideal with the stigma of sin. For the southern gentleman, the preordained ideal of the genteel lady 'connects where there has been little or no relation', establishing an illusory link between the imagined and the actual.<sup>695</sup> Consequently, the fiction of the southern gentleman is contingent upon the projection of the ideal of the genteel lady in the ordinary – on the negotiation of the dissonance between the disembodied ideal and corporeal reanimation. The creative role the southern gentleman assumes in the reconstructions of the southern lady is apparent in Page's *Red Rock*, Glasgow's *The Miller of Old Church* and Charles Waddell Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* where, despite his valiant efforts, the interstice between the female ideal and reconstruction is never bridged.<sup>696</sup> In failing to erase the touch of the tar brush from the southern lady, the gentleman initiates her passing for the genteel ideal. Since this 'house of Being' that the southern lady inhabits and the gentleman reconstructs is haunted by the

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<sup>693</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 189.

<sup>694</sup> Anson Rabinbach and Jessica Benjamin, 'Foreword' to Klaus Theweleit's *Male Fantasies: Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror*, vol. 2, trans. Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), xxii.

<sup>695</sup> Ronell, *The Telephone Book*, 8.

<sup>696</sup> Ellen Glasgow, *The Miller of Old Church* (Doubleday, Page & Company, 1911); and Charles Waddell Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition*, ed. Nancy Bentley and Sandra Gunning (Boston: Bedford, 2002).

shadowy presence of the ideal, the ambivalence of whiteness as gentility is already predetermined by the unattainability of its ideals through the perpetuation of which it is effected.<sup>697</sup> In evoking a haunting a priori, each reconstruction establishes a ‘disjunctive rapport’ between itself and the genteel ideal through which it is transformed into synecdoche, capable only of offering a partial replication of the presupposed whole.<sup>698</sup> While this spectral a priori makes such partial replications ‘possible and intelligible’, it is never ‘reducible to them’.<sup>699</sup> As synecdoches, the significations of the gentleman planter and lady exceed their embodiments, revealing a haunting incompleteness which not only points to the presupposed wholeness of the antebellum ideal, but also obviates its full reanimation. Consequently, southern whiteness remains caught up in the ambivalent space between the tantalising wholeness of the ideal and its partial reconstruction.

This ambivalence is crucial to the construction of southern male whiteness as it inaugurates the struggle inherent in the protection of the female ideal from the touch of the tar brush. This is precisely why it is ‘crucial first that women *always* be present and second that they be depicted as present at the bidding of others’.<sup>700</sup> While the presence of the genteel lady materialises as indispensable to assertions of southern male whiteness insofar as it is circumscribed by docility, it also, inadvertently, evokes the ‘absent presence’ of the ideal to which it alludes in its mimetic representation.<sup>701</sup> This allusion to the ‘absent presence’ of the ideal not only ‘spectralizes’ its reconstruction, but also reifies its ambivalence.<sup>702</sup> The

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<sup>697</sup> Ronell, *The Telephone Book*, 62. Similarly, Derrida suggests that ‘being-with spectres would also be, not only but also, a *politics* of memory, of inheritance, and of generations’, in ‘Exordium’, in *Spectres of Marx*, xviii.

<sup>698</sup> Ronell considers the telephone a medium that establishes ‘a disjunctive rapport’ between the call and the called so that they ‘never entirely coincide with what they are made to communicate with; they operate as the synecdoches of what they are’, in *The Telephone Book*, 6.

<sup>699</sup> Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 25.

<sup>700</sup> Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 28.

<sup>701</sup> Derrida notes that the supplement holds ‘the power of *procuring* an absent presence through its image’, in *Of Grammatology*, 155.

<sup>702</sup> Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 63.

‘absent presence’ of the ideal, however, inaugurates the elevation of the southern lady to the status of the ideal since only then can southern male whiteness come into signification. Implicit in this sanctifying process is death through which the ideal of femininity encoded in the construct of the genteel lady attains an ethereal ‘dis-embodiedness’, not only from itself, but also from its antithesis.<sup>703</sup> Since ‘Independent femininity [...] is the opposite of culture’, only disembodied, docile femininity can be embraced to the bosom of culture, the concept of which encompasses ‘nobility, morality, intellect, heart, feeling, reason and soul’ – in short all attributes associated with southern gentility and whiteness.<sup>704</sup> This rigid construction of southern femininity emphasises the privileging of the ideal over the actual, since only in its ideal form can it augment the construction of male whiteness.

Unsurprisingly, the male protagonists of Page’s *Red Rock* and Glasgow’s *The Miller of Old Church* are engaged in active re-imagining of the female ideal. Essential as such reinterpretation is to the construction of male whiteness, it is also counterproductive as it results in revealing the disjunction between the ideal and reconstruction, which marks the latter as an abortive, touched with the tar brush, copy. While ““respect,” “reverence,” “courage,” “discipline,” “distance,” “obedience,” “integrity,” and above all, “loyalty”” constitute the attributes that characterise the cultured man; loyalty ““is the backbone of honor” – and neither backbone nor honor is the business of women’.<sup>705</sup> The genteel lady finds herself in a curious predicament, whereby the presupposed qualities of docility and dependence encoded in the ideal preclude her from the possession of honour. Possessed of honour, the southern gentleman can defend the purity, and restore honour to the southern lady. Since this chivalric endeavour is predicated upon the haunting disparity between the

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<sup>703</sup> Theweleit observes that ‘the act of killing allows him [the fascist male] to escape the unreality of his feelings’, *Male Fantasies*, 42. I equate Theweleit’s notion of killing as anti-cathartic to the process of idealisation of the southern lady which can be seen as a form of killing since it sacrifices corporeality on the altar of the ideal.

<sup>704</sup> Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 45.

<sup>705</sup> Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 47-48.

preconceived ideal and its quotidian representation, it cements the fate of southern whiteness as passing for gentility.

The indispensability of the female ideal to reconstructions of gentility is evident in Thomas Nelson Page's *Red Rock*. Page's tale limns the fortunes of two patrician families, the Grays and the Carys, sketched against the backdrop of the turbulent aftermath of the Civil War – the era that Page saw as 'destruction under the euphemism of reconstruction'.<sup>706</sup> In this period, when the South 'was crucified' and 'wrapped in the cerements of the grave', Page evokes the indomitable spirit of southern ideals which, planted in the antebellum South, mature amidst the chaos of Reconstruction.<sup>707</sup> It soon becomes apparent that in *Red Rock* behind every gentleman stands a southern lady.<sup>708</sup> As befits a gentleman in the making and heir to the Red Rock plantation, Jacquelin's behaviour, since childhood, has been shaped by Blair Cary – his blue-blooded cousin and heiress to the neighbouring Birdwood plantation.<sup>709</sup> Born to the felicity of the antebellum South, suitably edulcorated by their aristocratic heritage, Jacquelin and Blair grow up carefree. However, the innocence of their childhood games betrays a division of roles with Jacquelin – Blair's senior by a handful of years – assuming the position of a judicious mentor. When Jacquelin jumps from the roof

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<sup>706</sup> Page, *The Old South*, 4.

<sup>707</sup> Page, *The Old South*, 4.

<sup>708</sup> Toni Morrison sees the function of 'the Africanist character' in American literature 'as surrogate and enabler', in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (London: Pan Books, 1993), 51. I propose that, similarly, in reconstructions of male whiteness the female characters perform the function of 'enablers' and 'disablers'.

<sup>709</sup> *A Dictionary of First Names*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., ed. Patrick Hanks, Kate Hardcastle, and Flavia Hodges (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), defines Blair as: 'Transferred use of the Scottish surname, in origin a local name from any of various places named with Gaelic *blàr* "plain field." Outside Scotland, where it is a male name, it is found chiefly in North America, where it is also popular for girls.' Considering its etymology, Blair's name provides another possible link with Sir Walter Scott's *The Fair Maid of Perth*, in which one of the protagonists, Father Clement Blair – an advocate of reform in the Catholic Church – is forced to flee from Perth to avoid persecution. Blair, therefore, connotes non-conformity. Full publication details are given in the bibliography. Jacquelin appears to be a variety of Jacqueline which derives from 'the French male name *Jacques*, itself corresponding to English James and Jacob'. The name Jacob is Hebrew in origin and denotes 'may God protect', in *Brewer's Dictionary of First Names*, 265-66. The link to Jacob renders Jacquelin both the protector of Blair and, later, the Grays' gentility, reaffirming the divinely-sanctioned nature of the Grays' whiteness.

of a barn and Blair, unheeding of his command not to jump, follows suit, the incident marks a turning point in their relationship. Jacquelin vows to ‘guard her’ and this vow has ‘sweetened to him the bitterness of having to confess to his father’, so much so that when he confesses to his father, despite being ‘mightily afraid’, he behaves ‘like a man’, recounting ‘the whole story alone without the least reference to Blair’s part in it, taking the entire blame on himself’. <sup>710</sup> Blair’s misdemeanour kindles Jacquelin’s chivalric spirit, which results in his vow to protect her and safeguard her honour as a budding lady for whom jumping off barn roofs exceeds the acceptable decorum. In assuming responsibility not only does Jacquelin protect Blair, but also guards the ideal of femininity she represents. Ironically, the honourableness of his deed is undermined by a lie, marking Jacquelin’s departure from the gentlemanly ideal to which he is hereditarily preconditioned. While Blair’s unbiddability marks her departure from the ideal, it also both awakens and frustrates Jacquelin’s genteel aspirations: it reveals the irreconcilability between loyalty to his father and chivalry, transforming Jacquelin’s valiant efforts into no more than passing for a gentleman. Consequently, both Blair and Jacquelin, as distinct embodiments of southern ideals of whiteness, materialise as flawed: Blair because of her disobedience and Jacquelin because of the falsehood he tells. Inspired by the defence of the imperfect ideal, Jacquelin’s gentility is tainted by the touch of the tar brush.

Jacquelin’s gentility is therefore inspired by the fissure between the ideal of southern femininity and Blair’s revivification of it. On his return from the war Jacquelin finds Blair ‘sprung up to a slender young lady of “quite seventeen,” whose demureness and newborn dignity were the more bewitching, because they were belied by her laughing glances’. <sup>711</sup> Although Blair’s demureness and her ‘laughing glances’ appear irreconcilable, to Jacquelin

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<sup>710</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 10.

<sup>711</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 82.

‘she was no longer mortal: he had robed her in radiance and lifted her among the stars’.<sup>712</sup>

The elevation of Blair among the celestial bodies marks a continued effort of ‘pedestallisation’ on Jacquelin’s part, which is belied by the description of Blair as a carefree teenager. No longer a mere mortal, Blair becomes both disembodied and desexualised, evoking Theweleit’s concept of the ‘white wife’ who ‘produces order in domestic space and functions as a barrier to ward off sexual danger; she is a subordinate and devivified buttress to the “unity” of the solider male’.<sup>713</sup> As a ‘white wife’ beyond the spectre of contamination, Blair can aspire to the purity of the ideal and become worthy of protection. Only in this devivified state can Blair function as the ‘subordinate buttress to the “unity”’ of Jacquelin’s conception of himself as a gentleman. Through Blair’s devivification, Jacquelin invokes the ghost of the ideal indispensable to the evocation of her purity, and thus whiteness; and in doing so, he delineates his own perception of whiteness as inextricably bound up with that of the genteel lady. Since ‘the whole that is the man’s body is never sufficient unto itself’ and ‘requires larger external totalities’, the construction of the ideal of the southern lady acts as such a totality.<sup>714</sup> As a totality constructed by the southern gentleman, the southern lady becomes a synecdoche whose presence, while pointing to the spectre of the ideal, reveals the incompleteness of its reconstruction. Though irreconcilable, the defence of the ideal is substituted for the protection of its quotidian embodiment – the genteel lady – and becomes a ubiquitous trait among southern gentlemen, to whom ‘The honor of the female sex’ ranks higher ‘than money or life’.<sup>715</sup> When Jonadab Leech, a former carpetbagger elevated to the rank of provost, initiates a search of confederate homes to confiscate arms, his conduct is perceived as offensive to ladies. As a result of Leech’s transgression, Steve Allen –

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<sup>712</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 82.

<sup>713</sup> Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 223. Devivification both renders the ‘white wife’ subordinate to the soldier male and central to the projection of the wholeness of his body-ego.

<sup>714</sup> Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 103.

<sup>715</sup> Clarkson, ‘The Basis’, 13.

Jacquelin's older cousin who also grew up on the plantation – leads a deputation to Captain Middleton who commands the northern regiment stationed there.<sup>716</sup> During the interview, Steve asseverates: 'before we will allow our women to be insulted, we will kill every man of you'.<sup>717</sup> Steve's impassioned declaration is grounded in the loyalty to the passivity enshrined in the ideal that the southern lady represents. Since his gentility is predicated upon this ideal, failure to defend it would undermine his projection of whiteness. While such grounding of the male ideal in its female counterpart emphasises its instability, it also implies homogeneity by furnishing it with an overarching quest for protection of the southern female ideal. After all, Steve leads a delegation of like-minded men who, united in the defence of the ideal, epitomise culture and education. However, the signification of male whiteness can only come to pass if it is inaugurated by a 'woman of culture' who 'satisfactorily fulfils her functions of representation'.<sup>718</sup> In other words, it can only be inspired by a genteel lady who approximates the ideal of female whiteness, whereby she acquires a metonymic dimension which allows her to signify as De Certeau's 'more': purity, chastity, docility and male gentility. While the presence of the genteel lady evokes the ideal of female whiteness, it also points to a lack encoded in the ambivalent space where meaning transcends the sign or the imitator. As a figure whose reconstruction consists in constant reimagining of the reconstructions of female gentility to fit the mould of the ideal, the whiteness of the southern gentleman is caught up between two totalities: the ideal and its actual embodiment – the genteel lady. Contingent upon the fiction of the genteel lady as the embodiment of the female ideal, southern male whiteness is undermined by the irreconcilability of the two, which transforms it into a fiction of passing for a gentleman. Ironically, it is through a genteel lady – Jacquelin's spinster Aunt

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<sup>716</sup> General Middleton is one of the heroes of the tale with which Fergus Mac-Ivor – one of the protagonists of *Waverley* – regales Waverley. Despite his demotion and relocation to the South, Page's Middleton is possessed of loyalty and honour which distinguish him among his compatriots.

<sup>717</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 128.

<sup>718</sup> Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 59.

Thomasia – that the ambivalence of the southern gentleman as the epitome of southern whiteness grounded in perceptions of southern femininity is voiced. When Blair complains to her about Steve’s blaming ‘all his shortcomings’ on ‘the example set him by a woman’, Aunt Thomasia stoically replies: ‘They all do it, my dear, from Adam down.’<sup>719</sup> Elsewhere, Aunt Thomasia makes an equally astute assertion: ‘Men like to fancy themselves broader and more judicial than women.’<sup>720</sup> While hinting at the continuity of the fiction of the female ideal by weaving it into the tapestry of the Christian tradition, Aunt Thomasia pronounces it a particularly male invention. Not only does her awareness of this woven fiction emphasise its instability and irreconcilability with the ordinary, it also underscores the undecidability of the construct of southern male whiteness. Interestingly, her words reaffirm the haunting ‘absent presence’ of the female ideal in the constructions of male whiteness, which is evoked through language, encoded in the comparative forms of the adjectives ‘broad’ and ‘judicial’ – incidentally in the case of the latter formed through the quantifier ‘more’. The inclusion of women among the ‘broad’ and ‘judicial’ seals their status as ‘cultured women’ and, consequently, a fitting site for cultivating southern male gentility. However, by noting the disparity between the southern female ideal and its actual embodiment, not only does Aunt Thomasia’s remark confirm their status as distinct, but also irreconcilable totalities.

Ironically, for a person who is aware of the irreconcilability of the ideal and reconstruction, Aunt Thomasia’s life exemplifies the struggle inescapable from such awareness. Her choice to remain a spinster and resistance to General Legaie’s interminable addresses stem from her loyalty – the trait characteristic of male whiteness – and feminine docility. Having given her heart to a gentleman ‘who had loved her’, but who ‘had not been strong

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<sup>719</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 144-45.

<sup>720</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 85.



enough to resist, even for her sake, the temptation of two besetting sins – drink and gambling’, Aunt Thomasia ‘had obeyed her father and given him up’.<sup>721</sup> Not only do the gentleman’s vices symbolise metaphoric blackness, but they also undermine his gentility, and thus whiteness. Besmirched by sin, he lacks yet another quality associated with whiteness – that of the sacrifice of self-denial. His susceptibility to temptation marks a lack of reverence for the ideal that Aunt Thomasia represents, invalidating his status as a ‘cultured man’. His failure to be converted from this path of iniquity suggests that, irrespective of his claim to gentility, his whiteness is irredeemably touched by the tar brush. In obeying her father, Aunt Thomasia fulfils her filial duty and acts according to the standard of ideal femininity – that of a woman doing others’ bidding. While such unconditional obedience secures her claim to whiteness, it concurrently problematises it by preventing Aunt Thomasia from fulfilling one of the duties which Dyer links to the concept of ideal female whiteness, namely motherhood. The purity of her intentions notwithstanding, Aunt Thomasia’s whiteness remains incomplete: while the distinct qualities she possesses constitute discrete signifiers of whiteness, they never converge into a totality. Instead, her incarnation of genteel lady remains synecdochical which, while pointing to the ‘more’, betrays a lack. Aunt Thomasia’s disclosure to Steve Allen – coincidentally her ill-fated suitor’s son – is intended to prevent him from following in his father’s footsteps. However, its success is only partial: ‘I will not say I will never drink again; but I will promise you not to gamble again, and I will not drink to excess any more.’<sup>722</sup> Unlike his father, Steve is not immune to the appeal of the genteel lady; however he consciously retains his father’s legacy of metaphorical blackness. Although Aunt Thomasia’s tale initiates Steve’s struggle for whiteness, his failure is predetermined by his reluctant promise. Consequently, Steve’s whiteness can only signify as ‘black whiteness’ –

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<sup>721</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 158.

<sup>722</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 158.

marked by the touch of the tar brush. The ambivalence of Steve's whiteness materialises as twofold: it is predicated upon the incompleteness of the ideal that inspires it and undermined by his conciliatory promise.

Imperfect though Aunt Thomasia's whiteness may be, according to Steve, 'there aren't any of 'em [ladies] like you nowadays. The mould's broken'.<sup>723</sup> Steve's veneration of the ideal that Aunt Thomasia represents inadvertently evokes its death and pronounces it beyond the attainment of other aspiring ladies, such as Blair, thus consigning the latter's whiteness to that of passing for a lady. His assertion finds reflection in Blair's account of visiting Aunt Thomasia. Each visit to the lady, Blair declares, 'was like reading one of Scott's novels; that she got back to a land of chivalry'.<sup>724</sup> Blair endows Aunt Thomasia's gentility with a mythical status which, while it may inspire emulation, cannot be resurrected and reconciled with the post-war realities. While Aunt Thomasia's saintliness seems out of place because it harks back to a bygone ideal, Blair is equally misplaced because she departs from it. To help her father to meet tax payments on Birdwood, Blair betrays a truly enterprising spirit and sets about making and selling preserves. Crucially, she is aided in her enterprise by Andy Stamper and his wife whose parents Aunt Thomasia describes as 'one of our poor neighbors'.<sup>725</sup> Their cooperation, to the displeasure of Mammy Krenda, marks Blair's departure from the ideal of southern belle. Although the selflessness of her intentions bespeaks her whiteness as encoded in the impossible ideal of the Virgin Mary, it is simultaneously besmirched by performing manual labour which is incommensurate with the construct of the southern belle. Ironically, it is Mammy Krenda who insists on Blair's maintaining a facade of gentility. When Captain Middleton finds Blair cooking, Mammy

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<sup>723</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 157.

<sup>724</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 346.

<sup>725</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 305.

Krenda ingenuously exclaims: 'I don' know what she air doin' in heah.'<sup>726</sup> Her efforts are wasted when Blair admits to Middleton: 'I do nearly all the cooking since our cook went off, but she thinks it's beneath my dignity to be caught at it.'<sup>727</sup> Mammy Krenda's attempt at facilitating Blair's passing for a lady is frustrated by Blair's confession. Blair's admission both renders superfluous the indispensability of blackness as a manifestation of skin colour to constructions of whiteness and reifies the undecidability of the southern belle as the incarnation of the ideal of southern whiteness.<sup>728</sup> Blair, therefore, embodies the irreconcilability of the ideal with its quotidian representation. Effectively, Blair's departure from the ideal and transformation into a working-class woman enables her father to pass for a gentleman. The instability inherent in Blair's positioning renders her an 'enabler' of the ideal of the southern gentleman. It is, similarly, the enterprise of Blair's mother and Aunt Thomasia which, though marking their departure from the ideal, maintains the facade of gentility of Dr Cary and General Legaie. Not only are these gentlemen's shirts 'made from an under-garment of one of the ladies', but they also possess transforming powers.<sup>729</sup> The General declares that 'he had felt on putting it [the shirt] on that morning, as a knight of old might have felt when he donned his armor prepared by virgin hands'.<sup>730</sup> Literally, the ladies' labours effect the General's gentility by negotiating the fissure between the past and the present. In doing so, they, to paraphrase Derrida, vacillate between transgressing and respecting the ideal of whiteness.<sup>731</sup> The gentility they resurrect materialises as a product of this vacillation between the transgression of, and respect for, the antebellum ideal and, as such, encodes difference

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<sup>726</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 184.

<sup>727</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 184.

<sup>728</sup> Fanon notes that black 'symbolizes evil, [and] sin', in *Black Skin*, 191. It could be suggested that Mammy Krenda's lie is a 'natural' corollary of her skin colour, whereas Blair's truthfulness reaffirms the purity encoded in whiteness. However, such a supposition is undermined by Blair's well-intentioned, but nonetheless duplicitous conduct towards her father from whom she conceals her preserve-making enterprise.

<sup>729</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 83.

<sup>730</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 83.

<sup>731</sup> In Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, the sentence reads: 'The supplement transgresses and at the same time respects the interdict', 155.

predicated upon the impossibility of the resurrection of antebellum whiteness. The genesis of the shirt reveals the untenability of the devivified ideal of southern lady, consigned to occupy a purely representational space. In the ordinary, the representational space transmutes into a constitutive space, and the genteel lady, comfortably or not, straddles both, thus emphasising the irreconcilability between the ideal and its reconstructions. However, it is precisely because of the fissure between the ideal and its actual representation that, in Steve Allen's words, one can 'don his gray jacket [and] play gentleman once more'.<sup>732</sup> Steve's playing gentleman 'once more' implies a haunted performance that points to a priori: a revenant which, while promising continuity, marks such re-playing as different and finite. Through establishing a 'disjunctive rapport' between the antecedent and reproduction, the southern lady transforms playing gentleman into passing for a gentleman and furnishes it with a duality: not only being a repetitive replication, but also one contingent upon the instability of the female ideal.

In Page's *Red Rock* the ambivalence of the southern ideals of male and female whiteness emerges as a grudgingly reluctant admission, justified by the Reconstruction vicissitudes. Ellen Glasgow's *The Battle-Ground*, by contrast, offers no such justification and, instead, holds up the very notion of the ideal to close scrutiny. Published in 1902, the narrative begins in 'Virginia – the school for gentlemen', before the outbreak of the Civil War, follows the fortunes of its protagonists through the conflict and ends on the cusp of Reconstruction.<sup>733</sup> Spanning a considerable length of time, the novel 'contrasts the leisured existence of the pre-war South with its mettle in battle'.<sup>734</sup> Glasgow's narrative centres on two aristocratic families: the Lightfoots residing at Chericoke and the Amblers

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<sup>732</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, 93.

<sup>733</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 61. In her autobiography, Glasgow gives 1850 as the beginning of the narrative, in *The Woman*, 286.

<sup>734</sup> McDowell, *Ellen Glasgow*, 62.

inhabiting the neighbouring Uplands.<sup>735</sup> While the name Uplands appears evocative of noble spirit and gentility, Chericoke derives its fame from the portrait of ‘Great-great-aunt Emmeline’ who ‘was the beauty and belle of two continents’.<sup>736</sup> The thought of this illustrious ancestor immortalised in the portrait hanging in the parlour sustains Dan Montjoy – the Major and Mrs Lightfoot’s grandson – during his two-hundred mile walk to Chericoke following the death of his mother and the Lightfoots’ estranged daughter. Told and retold by his mother, the legend of Aunt Emmeline becomes synonymous with Dan’s patrician heritage. Not only is Aunt Emmeline ‘the abiding presence of the place’ in Dan’s boyhood, but also, unsurprisingly, the portrait is salvaged from Chericoke after it had been fired by Union soldiers and ‘the radiant image’ of her welcomes Dan home upon his return from the war.<sup>737</sup> Since women are ‘veritable icons of the Old Order’, the portrait, set amidst humble surroundings, represents a silent but salient reminder of their antebellum gentility; it is the revenant *par excellence* since it figures a dead woman who is also emblematic of the spirit of whiteness, the reincarnation of which it prefigures.<sup>738</sup> Indeed, the portrait possesses a dual signification: it constitutes a physical representation of Dan’s antecedent, thus providing a haunting but tangible link to the past; and, by virtue of being a copy, it brings into sharp relief the unbridgeable gap between the ideal and its reconstruction. As such, it exacerbates the ‘absent presence’ of the ideal, both literally since Aunt Emmeline has long departed from the place; and metaphorically since her departure marks the unattainability of the ideal.

<sup>735</sup> Gray notes that the family names ‘recollect the attributes of different kinds of horses’ to convey ‘breeding’, in *Southern Aberrations*, 69.

<sup>736</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 30.

<sup>737</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 31; and Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 504.

<sup>738</sup> R.H.W. Dillard, ‘On Ellen Glasgow’s *The Battle-Ground*’, in *Classics of Civil War Fictions*, ed. David Madden and Peggy Bach (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1991), 74.

The still perfection of this ideal sets off the imperfections of the genteel ladies who dwell in its shadow; their incarnations of the ideal are spectralized by the ghost of Aunt Emmeline. Aunt Lydia, the Ambler's relation living with them at Uplands, feels acutely the need to maintain the veneer of a genteel lady. Aunt Lydia who 'had read Scott, and enshrined in her pious heart the bold Rob Roy', like Page's Aunt Thomasia, establishes a link to the past that reaches beyond the Old South to the Scotland of heroic exploits.<sup>739</sup> Unsurprisingly, not only is Aunt Lydia's life permeated with, but also consists in upholding the rigidity of tradition. According to her creed, 'the proper place for a spinster is her father's house', a dictum she is wont to deliver with 'her conventional primness, and send, despite herself a mild imagination in pursuit of the follies from which she so earnestly prayed to be delivered'.<sup>740</sup> While Aunt Lydia's outward primness may be a manifestation of a spinsterly variety of southern whiteness, it is adulterated by the mixture of awe and fascination in which she holds Mrs Ambler's grandmother who was 'the most finished dancer of her day'.<sup>741</sup> Despite deeming dancing 'the devil's own device', her 'timid pride' in recollecting this bold but sinful personage betrays Aunt Lydia's desire for metaphorical blackness – for that which is forbidden by the dictates of spinsterly gentility.<sup>742</sup> Since desire alienates the desiring subject from itself by evoking the chasm between the desired and the actual, Aunt Lydia's 'immodest' yearnings reify the instability of the ideal that she projects and point to the futility of her aspirations to whiteness; as long as 'the blood of the most finished dancer circulated beneath the old lady's gown and religious life', Aunt Lydia's incarnation of the genteel lady will remain touched with the tar brush.<sup>743</sup> Futile it may be, however Aunt Lydia's adherence to the ideal of spinsterly whiteness becomes a site of constant struggle in which desire is mediated by the necessity

<sup>739</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 52.

<sup>740</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 51.

<sup>741</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 51.

<sup>742</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 51.

<sup>743</sup> Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, 37; and Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 51.

to maintain the preordained decorum. Although Julia Ambler has ordered a new bonnet for her, in matters of attire, according to Aunt Lydia, ‘A plain black poke’ only befits her status as a spinster.<sup>744</sup> To reconcile the temptation presented by the bonnet, Aunt Lydia seeks guidance in the Scriptures, in ‘Saint Paul on Woman’.<sup>745</sup> Having consulted the biblical authority,

When she came down a few hours later, her face wore an angelic meekness. “I have been thinking of that poor Mrs. Brown who was here last week,” she said softly, “and I remember her telling me that she had no bonnet to wear to church. What a loss it must be for her not to attend divine service.”<sup>746</sup>

Hearing Aunt Lydia’s remark, Mrs Ambler rejoins: ‘Why, Aunt Lydia, it would be really a charity to give her your old one!’<sup>747</sup> Her conscience assuaged, Aunt Lydia consents that indeed ‘It would be a charity’.<sup>748</sup> Although for Aunt Lydia the ideal of female whiteness is to be sought in the Bible, she actively re-interprets it whereby otherwise ‘unseemly’ vanity is transformed into Christian charity. Such a re-interpretation of the ideal can only result in her passing for a selflessly charitable lady, instrumental to which, albeit unawares, is Mrs Brown as a representative of a darker ‘shade of whiteness’. What is more, since Mrs Ambler solicitously advises Aunt Lydia to keep the bonnet, she is equally implicated in Aunt Lydia’s maintaining a facade of female whiteness. Indeed, the preservation of this facade does not come without sacrifice. When offered apple toddy at Christmas, Aunt Lydia declines though ‘She was fond of apple toddy, but she regarded the taste as an indelicate one, and would as soon have admitted, before gentlemen, a liking for

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<sup>744</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 52. Like Aunt Lydia, Page’s Aunt Thomasia deems bonnets outward markers of genteel deportment since ‘nothing characterizes a woman more than her bonnet’, in *Red Rock*, 304.

<sup>745</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 53.

<sup>746</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 53.

<sup>747</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 53.

<sup>748</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 53.

cabbage.<sup>749</sup> Not only is Aunt Lydia's performance of the genteel lady circumscribed by an aesthetic concern indicating the existence of an etiquette that a lady should observe, but it is also, importantly, predicated upon the presence of gentlemen. Evidently, something as earthly as apple toddy may degrade the ideal of female whiteness in the eyes of the gentlemen, therefore, as a preventative measure, Aunt Lydia devivifies herself to protect the sanctity of the ideal. Since her refusal of the offending potation is belied by a tacit admission to a fondness for it, Aunt Lydia, inadvertently, reveals a crack in the facade of the genteel lady she so painstakingly maintains. Consequently, the example of gentility that Aunt Lydia sets is metonymic in that it is partial, haunted by the perfection of the ideal but irreducible to it; it exceeds her incarnation of gentility and renders it lacking. This duplicity notwithstanding, her unceasing preoccupation with the protection of the ideal of female whiteness is extended to Betty whom she implores not to sample the toddy because 'it will give' her 'a vulgar colour'.<sup>750</sup> Flushed cheeks, it appears, are unacceptable in a genteel lady. In denying her desire for apple toddy, Aunt Lydia's virtue is left untainted by the treacherous flush of a cheek, and her passing for a genteel lady, though haunted by 'unseemly' desires, is assured. Betty, by contrast, is beset by no such scruples simply because hers has been a life of non-conformity interspersed by unsuccessful attempts at passing for a lady. Even Betty's looks conspire against her embodying the ideal of southern female gentility. Betty's red hair both marks her divergence from the ideal of southern femininity and becomes an outward manifestation of metaphorical blackness. In an attempt to effect Betty's conformity to the southern ideal of female whiteness, her sister, Virginia, bringing a pitcher of buttermilk for Betty's face, remarks: 'It isn't usual for a young lady to have freckles, Aunt Lydia says, [...] and you must rub this on and not wash it off till morning – and, after you've rubbed it well in, you must get down on your knees and

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<sup>749</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 95.

<sup>750</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 95.



ask God to mend your temper.’<sup>751</sup> In her effort to bring Betty closer to the ideal of female whiteness, Virginia, inadvertently, emphasises yet another flaw separating Betty from it – her temper. Virginia’s good intentions are frustrated by Betty who ‘laved her face in buttermilk’, but refused to pray reasoning: ‘I don’t reckon there’s any use about the other, [...]. I believe the Lord’s jest leavin’ me in sin as a warnin’ to you and Petunia’.<sup>752</sup> Betty’s efforts to embrace the ideal are belied by her vernacular speech, which, in terms of whiteness, marks her as a shade darker than Virginia. Moreover, her remark destabilises the notion of truth inherent in hereditarily predetermined ideals. Curiously, Betty sees herself as an embodiment of sin – metaphorical blackness – and thus a warning to Virginia and her Negro slave, Petunia. In Betty’s eyes, Petunia appears more virtuous than she and, therefore, like Virginia, possesses a stronger claim to whiteness, whilst Betty believes herself touched with the tar brush. Unlike Virginia, ‘a pretty, prim little girl’ who ‘carried her prayer book in her hands when she drove to church’, Betty materialises as an antithesis to the ideal of perfection that her sister embodies, and which is emphasised by her name connoting not only chastity, but also gentility through its evocation of the state hailed as its cradle.<sup>753</sup> Virginia’s meek conformity devivifies her and her path to sanctity culminates in her death in childbirth when she attains the ultimate devivification and takes her place alongside Aunt Emmeline. Ironically, Betty’s conviction of her imperfection inaugurates her quest for betterment which endows her with the characteristic associated with the male ideal of whiteness, namely struggle. Since desperate struggle calls for desperate measures, Betty resolves to dye her hair because, as she explains to her mother, ‘It is the only thing left to do, [...]. It isn’t ladylike, I know, but red hair isn’t ladylike either’.<sup>754</sup>

Notwithstanding her mother’s objection and Betty’s abandonment of the scheme, her

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<sup>751</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 24.

<sup>752</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 24.

<sup>753</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 70.

<sup>754</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 78.

resolution reveals the impossibility of the attainment of the ideal. While Betty's hair colour prevents her from externalising perfection like Virginia's, the act of dying it could only result in her attempting to pass for a lady.

What makes Betty's predicament doubly poignant is her recognition of it: 'She had been really a double self from her babyhood up'.<sup>755</sup> Betty recognises the paradox inherent in the concept of female whiteness which, while consisting in replicating the ideal, can only result in a split-self – a corollary of the irreconcilability of the ideal and the quotidian; whether crowned with success or marred by failure, Betty's struggle towards the attainment can only be a struggle for approximation. Despite 'the kindness brimming over from her eyes' and having inherited 'her father's head and her mother's heart', Betty materialises as a hybrid, possessing a heady mixture of male and female attributes of whiteness.<sup>756</sup> In a place where, according to her mother, 'Women do not need as much sense as men', Betty's father's intellectual legacy exacerbates the chasm separating Betty from the ideal of the genteel lady.<sup>757</sup> Unlike Betty, her mother, who 'was rare and elegant like a piece of fine point lace', whose 'hands had never known no harder work than the delicate hemstitching' and 'mind had never wandered over the nearer hills', materialises as the embodiment of the ideal in the ordinary.<sup>758</sup> To her husband's remark that she 'might have been President, had [she] been a man', Mrs. Ambler replies: 'I am quite content with the mission of my sex, sir, [...]. I'm sure I'd much rather make shirt fronts for you than wear them myself'.<sup>759</sup> In her devoid of aspiration wifely docility, Mrs Ambler constitutes, in Smith's terms, 'the spiritual essence of the white household – the woman as domestic

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<sup>755</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 119.

<sup>756</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 82.

<sup>757</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 49.

<sup>758</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 69.

<sup>759</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 48.

space'.<sup>760</sup> As a site of inspiration she attains the passivity of the ideal, while actively perpetuating the construct of 'a bland and generous gentleman' that is Mr Ambler.<sup>761</sup> Content to dwell in the shadow of her husband, Mrs Ambler's humility and modesty secure her claim to female whiteness and enhance her husband's gentility. This exemplary union, caught up in emulating a code of behaviour, reaffirms the existence of truth that deems such emulations genteel. While Mrs Ambler and Virginia possess the 'sanctified qualities' of the 'ideal woman', namely 'Moral passivity, emotional reticence,' and 'a cheerful recognition of masculine superiority', all of which constitute 'the code of beautiful behaviour'; Betty lacks 'the moral passivity' and 'emotional reticence'.<sup>762</sup> Embodying some, but not all of the attributes of 'beautiful behaviour', Betty's whiteness, despite Aunt Lydia's ministrations, remains incomplete – haunted by the projected perfection of her mother and sister. As behoves a lady familiar with 'the code of beautiful behaviour', Mrs Ambler, following her husband's death in combat, sacrifices herself for the Cause. Accordingly, 'grave and pallid as a ghost, [she] would eat nothing that, by any chance, could be made to reach the army'.<sup>763</sup> Mrs. Ambler's ghostly pallor acts as an outward manifestation of the ideal of whiteness that she seemingly embodies. However, her refusal to sacrifice the family jewels to the Cause mitigates the selflessness of her conduct and transforms her whiteness into passing. Despite 'the unearthly light upon her face' which marks her aspiration to divine whiteness, Mrs Ambler appears touched with the tar brush – an intrinsically imperfect representation of the ideal.<sup>764</sup>

Similarly, Mrs Lightfoot, the wife of the irascible Major Lightfoot and Dan's grandmother, engenders the irreconcilability between the ideal and the actual, though her incarnation

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<sup>760</sup> Smith, *American Body Politics*, 116.

<sup>761</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 45.

<sup>762</sup> McDowell, *Ellen Glasgow*, 116.

<sup>763</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 451.

<sup>764</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 431.

lacks the meekness and passivity of Mrs Ambler. Capable of ‘weeping over “Thaddeus of Warsaw”’, Mrs Lightfoot displays an unmitigated disdain for ‘untitled hero[s]’ and literature about ‘Sukey Sues, with pug noses, who eloped with their Bill Bates, from the nearest butcher shop’.<sup>765</sup> Indeed, upon reading ‘one of Mr. Dickens’s stories [...] about a chimney sweep – a common chimney sweep from a workhouse’, the lady felt as if she ‘had been keeping low society’.<sup>766</sup> Despite her questionable sentimentality, Mrs Lightfoot’s sympathies, undisputedly, lie with the upper classes. When she learns that Rainy Day Jones, one of their less refined neighbours, sent his son to the university her grandson attends, Mrs Lightfoot vehemently declares: ‘I don’t care to have my grandson upon terms of equality with any of that rascal Jones’s blood. Why, the man whips his servants.’<sup>767</sup> In order to prevent her grandson’s contamination, she would rather send him to Oxford as ‘It matters very little where he [Dan] is so long as he is a gentleman.’<sup>768</sup> Mrs Lightfoot’s sacrifice is predicated upon the desire to protect her grandson’s gentility, and thus whiteness, from the spectre of lower-class contamination. In her tirade against Jones she names one of the traits characterising the southern gentleman and, consequently, the Lightfoots, namely benevolence towards their subordinates. Mrs Lightfoot’s critique, like her praise, displays a class-conscious selectiveness. When her husband gambles and loses her carriage and horses, she accepts the news with surprising equanimity. The only reprimand she offers to the errant spouse, as their faithful servant – Big Abel – recollects, is: ‘Well, Marse Lightfoot, I’m glad you kep’ Abel – en we’ll use de ole coach agin’.<sup>769</sup> In refraining from criticism, Mrs Lightfoot protects the ideal of the southern gentleman of which Mr Lightfoot, as its embodiment, falls short. The awareness of her husband’s transgression and its disavowal transforms Mrs Lightfoot into the ‘enabler’ of her

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<sup>765</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 199.

<sup>766</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 199.

<sup>767</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 75.

<sup>768</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 75-76.

<sup>769</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 44.

husband's passing for a gentleman. While Mrs Lightfoot's conduct stems from 'wifely duty' to honour her husband, thus reaffirming her claim to whiteness, it evokes the 'absent presence' of the ideal of gentleman, capable of resistance to temptation. What is more, Mr Lightfoot's misdemeanour tarnishes Mrs Lightfoot's embodiment of the standard of southern femininity that hails her as 'the great moral agent', for she proves incapable of elevating her spouse 'above the brute creation'.<sup>770</sup> Having escaped lightly, Big Abel recalls, the unrepentant Mr Lightfoot declares her 'en angel'.<sup>771</sup> Since this divinity is bestowed upon Mrs Lightfoot following the concealment of her husband's transgression, it is, like her husband's gentility, tainted by metaphorical blackness. However, Mrs Lightfoot's tolerance does not extend to Dan who, following a duel, has been expelled from university. Even the fact that the duel was fought to defend female honour fails to mollify her anger. On the contrary, she sententiously declares that 'the honour of a barkeeper's daughter' is not 'the concern of any gentleman'.<sup>772</sup> In delimiting the concerns of a gentleman to ladies of the upper class, Mrs Lightfoot questions the gentility of her grandson; while in recollecting the preordained promiscuity of the lower-class woman, Mrs Lightfoot reaffirms the legitimacy of her claim to whiteness. Paradoxically, Dan's attempt to follow a gentlemanly code of behaviour jeopardizes his Lightfoot inheritance, the dictates of which demanded, according to the Major, that they 'fought like men and made love like gentlemen'.<sup>773</sup> Loving like a gentleman implies attachment to a lady of equal social standing and duelling for such a worthy keeper of a gentleman's affections is, indeed, an honourable matter. Only then can a gentleman preserve his sense of honour and his claim to whiteness. What makes Dan's transgression doubly grievous is its implicit undermining of the notion of a Virginia gentleman. After all, it is a dubious conduct of

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<sup>770</sup> Clarkson, 'The Basis', 13. According to Clarkson, it is the prerogative of the southern woman 'to guide us [southern men], and lead us to heaven', 'The Basis', 14.

<sup>771</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 44.

<sup>772</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 206.

<sup>773</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 132.

another gentleman, who ‘insulted the girl in his [Dan’s] presence’, that precipitates the duel.<sup>774</sup> However, the Major sees his grandson’s transgression as the result of the Montjoys’ ‘dirty blood’ which renders it impossible ‘that Jack Montjoy’s son could be a gentleman’.<sup>775</sup> Dan’s father’s legacy bars his ascent to the Lightfoot standard of whiteness. Although his father’s blood is responsible for Dan’s fall from whiteness, the Major unwittingly implicates his daughter, who displayed ‘a dangerous taste, [...] the taste for trash’, in Dan’s disgrace.<sup>776</sup> Implicit in the Major’s assertion are Dan’s father’s ‘trashiness’ and his daughter’s attraction, despite her aristocratic descent, to metaphorical blackness. Dan’s legacy is, therefore, doubly tarnished since he internalises the ‘preoriginary and properly spectral anteriority’ of two others – his father’s trashiness and his mother’s predilection for it.<sup>777</sup> Not only do the Major’s words indicate the fissure between the female ideal of whiteness and its representation, but they also undermine the notion of hereditary whiteness.

Ironically, although Dan’s gentility is haunted by the spectre of his father’s polluted blood, it is the transgression he commits in trying to emulate the gentlemanly code of behaviour that marks the end of his passing for a gentleman. Dan’s unwitting departure from the ideal coincides with a change in his circumstances, whereby the splendour of Chericoke is replaced by lodgings in an inn run by the Hickses – the local representatives of ‘white trash’. Initially, he finds Mrs Hicks’s presence deeply offensive. Looking ‘at her faded wrapper and twisted curl papers, he flinched and turned away as if her ugliness afflicted his eyes’.<sup>778</sup> Mrs Hicks, as a living antithesis of the genteel lady, repulses Dan to whom her bedraggled appearance constitutes *corpus delicti* of the touch of the tar brush. However,

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<sup>774</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 206.

<sup>775</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 212.

<sup>776</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 198.

<sup>777</sup> Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 24.

<sup>778</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 234-35.

when he is, albeit unwillingly, subjected to Mrs Hicks's life story, of which a part relates to his mother's elopement with Jack Montjoy, he observes 'that a new meaning passed into her face – something that made her look like Betty and his mother – that made all good women who had loved him look alike'.<sup>779</sup> Having overcome his initial revulsion, Dan 'saw only the dignity with which suffering had endowed this plain and simple woman'.<sup>780</sup> Mrs Hicks's suffering, despite her apparel, facilitates her ascent to whiteness, whereby she transcends class boundaries to take her place among genteel ladies. Though Dan's comparison elevates Mrs Hicks, however temporarily, to whiteness, such elevation touches the other two women with the tar brush; it implies a connection between the ideal and the antithesis and reifies the ambivalence of southern female whiteness as a prerogative of the upper class. Dan's realisation of the ambivalence of preordained ideals reflects that of Betty whose conception of the male ideal of whiteness is tempered by her awareness of the impossibility of its reconciliation with the ordinary. Her ideal is 'a man with a faith to fight for – to live for – to make him noble. He may be a beggar by the roadside, but he will be a beggar with dreams'.<sup>781</sup> Betty dispenses with the conventional criterion of whiteness encoded in hereditary gentility and, instead, she valorises striving as the only path leading to the nobility of spirit and whiteness proper. Since inseparable from striving is the notion of imperfection, Betty inadvertently places the ideal beyond attainment and, in doing so, she exorcises its ghost; in investing striving with ideality and future, Betty severs the link with antebellum antecedents and renders the replication of these ideals superfluous. When Dan returns from the war, an invalid, to find Chericoke reduced to ashes and its grandeur a distant memory, it is Betty who inspires his truly heroic declaration: 'There's some fight left in me – I am not utterly beaten so long as I have you on my side.'<sup>782</sup> Only when he is

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<sup>779</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 241.

<sup>780</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 241.

<sup>781</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 169-70.

<sup>782</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 511-12.

stripped of the trappings of gentility is Dan's nobility manifest. Though he now approximates Betty's ideal of male whiteness, he is irrevocably separated from the concept of southern whiteness as enshrined in the construct of the gentleman planter to which he once aspired. Indeed, the only escape from the touch of the tar brush that guarantees the attainment of the ideal whiteness, as the portrait of Aunt Emmeline suggests, is through death which divorces the ideal from its corporeal reanimation.

Similarly to *The Battle-Ground*, in *The Miller of Old Church* the touch of the tar brush is not a corollary of the Reconstruction exigencies, but rather an inevitability stemming from the constructed nature of the ideal. Whereas in Page's *Red Rock*, the female ideal of whiteness is constructed by men and, though ambivalent, fuels the reconstruction of the male ideal of whiteness; in *The Miller*, women are actively involved in both the propagation and destabilisation of the female ideal of whiteness and thereby its male counterpart. The novel, published in 1911, 'is set in Southside Virginia from 1898 until 1902'.<sup>783</sup> Peopled with quaint characters, replete with bucolic wisdom, it tells a tale of struggle where the notion of being touched with the tar brush is as inevitable as it is divorced from skin colour. Both Old Church and the neighbouring plantation, Jordan's Journey, are places where ideals of female and male whiteness are esteemed and cultivated, irrespective of class. One of the protagonists, the eponymous miller – Abel Revercomb – observes the struggle inherent in the pursuit of ideals: 'The world he moved in was peopled by a race of beings that acted under ideal laws and measured up to an impossible standard'.<sup>784</sup> What makes Abel's remark so poignant is not only his awareness of the existence of a truth, but his conviction of its unattainability which, inevitably, marks all reproductions as haunted approximations. Notwithstanding the acuteness of his

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<sup>783</sup> McDowell, *Ellen Glasgow*, 96.

<sup>784</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 164.



observation, Abel's life has been that of struggle which, were it not for his humble origin, would furnish a claim to whiteness. While 'Abel's ancestors had got out of the habit of trying' to measure up to the 'impossible standard', so much so that his father died 'in the odour of shiftlessness', Abel overcomes his legacy and prospers.<sup>785</sup> The sole reason for Abel's striving is Molly Merryweather, the granddaughter of the overseer at Jordan's Journey and illegitimate offspring of its late owner – Jonathan Gay. Molly's illegitimacy constitutes a *bar sinister* invalidating her claim to whiteness as hereditary gentility. However, this does not prevent Abel from setting her up as an ideal and dreaming of 'a happiness that was suited to the ideal figure rather than to the living woman'.<sup>786</sup> In Abel's case, such 'pedestallisation' goes hand in hand with aspiration. Little wonder, then, that he idolises Molly despite his conviction of the impossibility of ideals since, as Mrs Bottom – the proprietress of Bottom's Ordinary – astutely observes: 'when it's b'iled down to the p'int, it ain't her, but his own wishes he's chasin''.<sup>787</sup> The pedestallised Molly becomes a receptacle of Abel's ambition of social elevation. So important is the preservation of the ideal to Abel that while Molly expresses her doubt of ever being 'little or innocent', Abel obstinately assures her: 'I don't believe you know yourself as you are, Molly'.<sup>788</sup> For Abel, privileging the imagined ideal of Molly over its actual representation is essential to his budding aspiration to whiteness. Ironically, it is Molly who, noting his Sunday apparel complete with a 'starched collar' and complemented by 'hair [that] was brushed flat on his head', observes that 'He had never looked worse, nor had he ever felt quite so confident of the correctness of his appearance.'<sup>789</sup> Molly's uncharitable remark evokes the ghost of the ideal of male whiteness which renders Abel's reconstruction a poor imitation. In emphasising the futility of Abel's aspirations, Molly indicates the existence of boundaries

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<sup>785</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 48.

<sup>786</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 164.

<sup>787</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 110.

<sup>788</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 207; and Glasgow, *The Miller*, 138.

<sup>789</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 136-37.

that cannot be crossed. While Abel's attempts at passing for a gentleman produce slippage, Molly's avowed non-conformity reveals the existence of ideals to which she is expected to subscribe:

The rector thinks that I'll marry him and turn pious and take to Dorcas societies, and Jim Halloween thinks I'll marry him and grow thrifty and take to turkey raising – and you [Abel] believe in the bottom of your heart that in the end I'll fall into your arms and find happiness with your mother. But you're all wrong – all – all – and I shan't do any of the things you expect of me.<sup>790</sup>

Although none of these stereotypes materialise as acmes of female whiteness, they nonetheless form ideals of femininity commensurate with the stations of the suitors. As such, they constitute varieties of female whiteness, the essence of which lies in conformity, offering Molly an opportunity to become 'the spiritual essence of the house'. In choosing independence over conformity, Molly rejects such meagre offerings of respectability that would furnish her with a claim to whiteness, albeit of a 'darker' kind. When on her twenty-first birthday it is revealed that her father, Jonathan Gay, bequeathed her a considerable legacy on the condition that she come and live at Jordan's Journey with his sister-in-law – Miss Angela, her sister – Miss Kesiah, and his recently arrived nephew and namesake – Jonathan Gay; Molly is overnight transformed into an almost genteel lady whose claim to whiteness is materially supported. Ironically, by accepting her father's legacy, Molly embraces another form of conformity – the ideal of the genteel lady. However, this particular ideal will remain unattainable to Molly by virtue of, as Miss Angela puts it, 'the strain of Merryweather blood, of the fact of her being born in such unfortunate circumstances', which manifests 'itself in a kind of social defiance that would always keep her from being just – oh, well, you know – '.<sup>791</sup> Paradoxically, Molly's heritage concurrently facilitates and negates her claim to the ideal of female whiteness. The rise in

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<sup>790</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 64.

<sup>791</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 326.

Molly's circumstances reaffirms the undecidability of the ideal of female whiteness by cementing her incarnation of the southern lady as a synecdoche that always points to a negative 'more' – illegitimacy and 'diluted' aristocratic blood.

Molly's precarious positioning allows her to unmask the impossibility of the female ideal of whiteness and the futility and duplicity of the male ideal grounded in the projections of perfect femininity. When the Reverend Orlando Mullen, one of Molly's unfortunate suitors, delivers a fiery sermon upon the virtues of the ideal woman, 'Molly's lips trembled into a smile', and considering the self-aggrandising pompousness of the sermon, her merriment is justified.<sup>792</sup> According to the Reverend, 'What the womanly woman desired was to remain an Incentive, an Ideal, an Inspiration', sacrificing herself for the advancement of her husband and sons.<sup>793</sup> Indeed, 'self-sacrifice was the breath of the nostrils of the womanly woman' and it was for this 'that men loved her and made an Ideal of her'.<sup>794</sup> Only through following the self-sacrificial example of the Virgin Mary can the 'womanly woman' aspire to whiteness. The only respite from the rigours of 'idealhood' is to be found in 'ministering to the sick and the afflicted'.<sup>795</sup> In this saintly life of duty, the 'womanly woman' should not concern herself with whether she 'was ugly or beautiful', but instead should find comfort in the fact that 'no God-fearing man would rank loveliness of face or form above the capacity for self-sacrifice and the unfailing attendance upon the sick and the afflicted'.<sup>796</sup> While self-sacrifice and compassion characterise the 'womanly woman' and secure her claim to whiteness, the recognition of these qualities delineates an ideal man. Curiously, it is the Reverend's disparagement of beauty that betrays his passing for an ideal man, of which Molly wryly observes:

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<sup>792</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 132.

<sup>793</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 130.

<sup>794</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 130.

<sup>795</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 131.

<sup>796</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 132.

It was all very well for the rector to say that beauty was of less importance than visiting the sick, but the fact remained that Judy Hatch visited the sick more zealously than she – and yet he was very far, indeed, from falling in love with Judy Hatch! The contradiction between the man and his ideal of himself was embodied before her under a clerical waistcoat.<sup>797</sup>

Having thus attempted ‘to express existence’ of the ideal, the Reverend reveals ‘only the nonexistent’.<sup>798</sup> His zealous delineation of the female ideal reveals not only the duplicity of the male ideal thus inspired, but also the fissure between the ideal and praxis. Judy Hatch’s piousness and self-sacrifice, both markers of the ideal of female whiteness, go unnoticed because she is not comely and does not espouse the characteristic so disparaged by the rector; while Molly is vaunted despite her non-conformity. The Reverend’s actions undermine the veracity of his sermon, while emphasising, unwittingly, the ambivalence of the female ideal of whiteness. Consequently, the disparity between the Reverend’s idea of himself and the actuality transforms this saintly man into a ‘no-God-fearing man’, revealing him to be the antithesis of his sermon. Contrary to his teaching, the female embodiment of the ideal must first and foremost be pleasing to the eye.

Similarly to the Reverend, Jonathan Gay imagines ‘His ideal woman’ to be ‘submissive and clinging’.<sup>799</sup> Indeed, he has always considered meekness ‘the becoming mental and facial expression for the sex’.<sup>800</sup> Since meekness connotes defencelessness, it is capable of inspiring chivalry and thus contributes to Jonathan’s projection of gentility. Contrary to his imaginings, it is not Blossom’s meekness that moves him when he meets her, but her beauty, or more precisely, her embodiment of a particular type of female beauty: ‘She was of an almost pure Saxon type – tall, broad-shouldered, deep-bosomed, with a skin the

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<sup>797</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 134.

<sup>798</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 137.

<sup>799</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 38.

<sup>800</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 38.

colour of new milk, and soft ashen hair'.<sup>801</sup> It is Blossom's approximation of the standard of Saxon beauty, and not her meekness, that marks her claim to whiteness which is belied by her social standing. Being the miller's niece, Blossom is more than a 'shade darker' than Jonathan, a fact emphasised by her speech, of which Jonathan observes that it is 'simple [and] direct'.<sup>802</sup> However, in Jonathan – a veritable votary of beauty – the perception of this Saxon ideal evokes a sense of hereditary pride whereby the reverence for beauty is 'in the bone and it is obliged to come out in the blood'; as did his predecessors, Jonathan 'will go on ogling the sex'.<sup>803</sup> His susceptibility to female beauty is a result of his 'originary indebtness', betraying the 'intervention of an Other'.<sup>804</sup> Haunted by the 'spectral anteriority' of his ancestors, Jonathan's weakness forms a constitutive part of his genteel heritage which, along with the inherited acres and plantation, endows his whiteness with continuity. Ironically, Jonathan's response to his 'originary indebtness' also brands him as different from the origin. Driven by his passion and having reassured himself that she looks 'every inch a lady', Jonathan marries Blossom.<sup>805</sup> Unfortunately, there is a difference between looking and being, as Jonathan discovers, and when Blossom becomes clinging, his ardour is tempered by 'a serious annoyance'.<sup>806</sup> This change of heart stems from a re-imagining of the female ideal, whereby Jonathan supersedes the once vaunted meekness and clinging with 'a perpetual virgin in perpetual flight'.<sup>807</sup> Jonathan's reformulation is indebted to the ghost of courtly love which dictates that the female ideal 'be like a mother: remote, superior, [and] unattainable'.<sup>808</sup> Enmeshed in the net of Western logic, the sentiment becomes 'a true counter-religion to Christianity', acquiring a universality that

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<sup>801</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 21.

<sup>802</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 23.

<sup>803</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 21.

<sup>804</sup> Ronell, *The Telephone Book*, 51.

<sup>805</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 151.

<sup>806</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 294.

<sup>807</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 329.

<sup>808</sup> Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, 1<sup>st</sup> Dalkey Archive Ed. (Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press, 2003), 52.

transcends the borders of Old Church.<sup>809</sup> While the knights of old may have mellowed into vapid aristocrats, the strength of the logic has not diminished. Placing the female ideal beyond attainment fuels male striving and self-denial and, consequently, becomes indispensable to male aspirations to whiteness. For Jonathan, the only way to revive his struggle is to render perfection imperfect; to perform a ghostly transference that renders the sensuous non-sensuous.<sup>810</sup> Only by divorcing it from the actual can he protect the notion of the female ideal and preserve his claim to whiteness. Imperfection, then, becomes the *modus operandi* of whiteness, as it both feeds the perpetuation of its ideal and exacerbates its ambivalence; while the essence of the ideal consists in its unattainability which, while fuelling desire, negates the possibility of its fulfilment. Irrespective of Blossom's approximation of the ideal and a claim to gentility which their union guarantees her, she can no longer aspire to the ideal purity enshrined in the figure of the Virgin Mary. While Jonathan's inconstancy is symptomatic of the instability of the ideal, it also undermines his status as a chivalrous gentleman. Jonathan's ideal of himself, like the Reverend's, does not correspond with praxis. The imperfection of his conduct mirrors the imperfection that inspired it, thus accentuating the ambivalence of whiteness as an ideal that cannot be replicated. Jonathan's awareness of the unattainability of ideals adds yet another ghost to his already haunted passing for a gentleman.

Nowhere is the ambivalence of the ideal of female whiteness more pronounced than in the characters of Miss Angela and Miss Kesiah, whose claims to whiteness are seemingly sealed by their patrician descent. However, the treatment accorded to both ladies belies the very notion of hereditary whiteness. Miss Angela, a former belle and 'a still pretty woman

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<sup>809</sup> Fiedler, *Love and Death*, 52.

<sup>810</sup> Derrida asserts that 'The commodity is a "thing" without phenomenon' that acquires corporeality through the appropriation of the use-value and transcends it. This transcendence 'renders the non-sensuous sensuous', in that it grants a visibility to the phantom of commodity that haunts the use-value, in *Spectres of Marx*, 189.

of fifty years', materialises as a worthy contender to replicate the ideal of female whiteness in the quotidian.<sup>811</sup> Indeed, the Reverend believes it impossible 'for any woman to approach more closely the perfect example of her sex'.<sup>812</sup> As for the existence of Miss Kesiah, Mr Chamberlayne, a lawyer and family friend, asserts that it is 'an outrage on the part of Providence that a woman should have been created quite so ugly'.<sup>813</sup> Miss Kesiah's patrician heritage avails her naught because it is not augmented by the quality that all God-fearing men should spurn – physical beauty. Not only does her plainness fail to inspire, but it also affronts 'openly a man's ideal of what the sex should be'.<sup>814</sup> Miss Kesiah externalises the ambivalence between the notion of the female ideal of gentility and its representation, whereby, irrespective of her rank, she is transformed into its antithesis. The life of self-sacrifice that she leads at her sister's side, which should mark her as a 'womanly woman', instead of filling the gap separating her from the ideal exacerbates it as her saintliness does not derive 'from inclination, but from the force of necessity against which rebellion has been in vain'.<sup>815</sup> Try as she might to aspire to the ideal, Miss Kesiah's efforts are touched by the tar brush. Whereas Miss Kesiah's 'false front only extinguished sentiment' and failed to inspire chivalry, her sister materialises as the 'womanly woman' *par excellence*.<sup>816</sup> 'Clinging and small and delicate', Miss Angela embodies the holy trinity of Reverend Mullen's sermon: Incentive, Ideal and Inspiration.<sup>817</sup> Miss Angela's awareness of being vaunted as the ideal of female gentility combined with her superficial docility enable her to dominate 'not by force, but by sentiment', to surrender 'all rights in order to grasp more effectively at all privileges' so that she rules with a 'remorseless

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<sup>811</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 70.

<sup>812</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 193.

<sup>813</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 97.

<sup>814</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 98.

<sup>815</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 73.

<sup>816</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 80.

<sup>817</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 72.

tyranny of weakness'.<sup>818</sup> By projecting the passivity of the ideal, Miss Angela imposes indirectly her 'desires and standards upon the society'.<sup>819</sup> Being 'far from angelic in her disregard for Christian charity', Miss Angela internalises the ambivalence of the ideal of female whiteness: her submissiveness and docility carry no traces of self-sacrifice, and her purity is an assiduously cultivated fiction.<sup>820</sup> To Jonathan's enquiry about Molly's status and financial security, Miss Angela replies: 'I am a woman and should know nothing of such matters.'<sup>821</sup> Through her feigned innocence, she purports the purity of the genteel lady by dissociating herself from any knowledge of Molly's illegitimacy. The fact that she knew about the late Jonathan's love for Molly's mother but 'thought he had forgotten it' and remained true to his 'spirit worship' for her reveals Miss Angela's innocence as passing.<sup>822</sup> Her lack of humility, quite unfitting for a 'womanly woman', bespeaks a conviction of herself as the embodiment of the ideal. What distresses her is not Jonathan's indiscretion which precipitated his death, but the fact that he strayed in his devotion to her by 'thinking of that woman [Molly's mother]' when he lay dying.<sup>823</sup> Jonathan's lapse is expunged by his death which, in Miss Angela's eyes, removes the possibility of contamination and restores him to gentlemanly whiteness. Little wonder that, as Miss Kesiah observes, Jonathan 'means much more to her dead than he did living'.<sup>824</sup> Ironically, in his attempt not to distress Miss Angela, Jonathan forsakes Molly's mother, which marks his conduct as ungentlemanly. Since the same concern for Miss Angela's health prevents her son from revealing his union with Blossom, she is also responsible for his ungentlemanly conduct. Paradoxically, by pronouncing Jonathan 'free from those dreadful weaknesses of other

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<sup>818</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 72; and Glasgow, *The Miller*, 426.

<sup>819</sup> McDowell, *Ellen Glasgow*, 64. This comment, describing Mrs Lightfoot of *The Battle*, is equally pertinent here.

<sup>820</sup> McDowell, *Ellen Glasgow*, 99.

<sup>821</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 77.

<sup>822</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 195.

<sup>823</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 194.

<sup>824</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 192.



men', Miss Angela facilitates Jonathan's passing for a gentleman, since he has already demonstrated his 'originary indebtedness' to his uncle and, like his predecessor, succumbed to the hereditary weakness of worshipping at the altar of beauty.<sup>825</sup>

Outwardly, Miss Angela condemns such worshipping as weakness; inwardly, she considers it essential to the perpetuation of the ideal of the genteel lady. Consequently, 'she herself preferred adorers to lovers'.<sup>826</sup> Since adoration implies a lack of corporeality, it invests its object with a divinity which places it beyond 'the spectre of pollution'. If promiscuity is a marker of lower class femininity, then Miss Angela's preference of adoration over love reifies her status as a genteel lady, and thus her whiteness. Moreover, inherent in the notion of adoration is repression. Theweleit suggests that 'The focus of repression in the soldier male is the "desire to desire"', the eradication of 'everything that constitutes enjoyment and pleasure'.<sup>827</sup> Miss Angela subverts Theweleit's notion of the annihilation of 'desire to desire' and demonstrates that the preservation of the female ideal of whiteness requires that she fuel desire, but defer its fulfilment at the bodily level. Once the ideal acquires corporeality, it ceases to be an ideal. Miss Angela's preference of adoration over love betrays her awareness of the impossibility of the reconciliation of the ideal with its quotidian representation. Such an admission touches not only her gentility, but also that of those who consider her a perfect embodiment of the ideal, with the tar brush. Ironically, when it comes to the necessity of maintaining the unattainability of the ideal as the only means to ensure its propagation, Miss Angela and her son are unanimous. Adoration, just like 'the perpetual virgin in perpetual flight', while evading consumption, leads to a devivification and separation from bodily functions, thus implying purity. Ironically, in performing the split of the ideal from the body, Miss Angela, unwittingly, condemns her

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<sup>825</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 195.

<sup>826</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 327.

<sup>827</sup> Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 7.

incarnation of female whiteness as deficient. So deadly is the power of the adored ideal that Miss Angela ‘has drained her sister’ so that ‘there isn’t an ounce of red blood left in her veins’.<sup>828</sup> The devivified Miss Angela metaphorically sucks the living force out of others, which, literally, makes her responsible for three deaths: her brother-in-law, Jonathan, Molly’s mother, and her son Jonathan, all fall victim to Miss Angela’s projection of the ideal of whiteness. In her dogged determination to protect the purity of her family’s gentility from lower-class pollution, Miss Angela prevents the marriage between the elder Jonathan Gay and Molly’s mother, Janet. Forsaken by her lover, Janet succumbs to madness and dies. It is not long after Janet’s death that her former suitor is found shot, his unexplained fate supplying an inexhaustible fount of local speculation. Finally, motivated by his concern for Miss Angela’s health, Jonathan resolves to keep his marriage to Blossom a secret, and persuades his wife to do likewise. The secrecy surrounding their union rouses the suspicions of Blossom’s father, Abner Revercomb. Convinced of what he imagines to be Blossom’s disgrace, Abner decides to avenge his daughter’s honour and shoots Jonathan. As he lies dying, Jonathan refuses to disclose the name of his assassin, for he sees his death as a punishment for his misconduct towards Blossom. In claiming that it was ‘an accident’, Jonathan acts honourably and selflessly, partially redeeming his whiteness with a lie.<sup>829</sup> Miss Angela, despite the saintliness encoded in her name, apotheosises the symbolism that Fanon associates with blackness – evil, sin, and ultimately death; or Smith’s ‘white witch’ who epitomises the duality of ‘Life-in-Death’, and as such is always already touched with the tar brush.<sup>830</sup> Miss Angela embodies the vampiric aspect

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<sup>828</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 175.

<sup>829</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 423.

<sup>830</sup> Smith, *American Body Politics*, 309. According to Smith the ‘white witch’ and the black Madonna derive from the Egyptian goddess Isis who resurrects ‘her brother/husband Osiris’, conflating life and death, *American Body Politics*, 308. In the ‘Western appropriation of color symbolism’, Smith continues, the dark goddess is separated from the light, *American Body Politics*, 309. The ‘white witch’, as a guardian of decorum, ‘becomes a key figure in a tradition that examines the ambivalent attachment of the black male striver to the “dazzling opportunities” of the white world’, *American Body Politics*, 310.

of whiteness which, parasitically relies on others to be effected. However, in doing so, Miss Angela as the ‘white witch’ acts in ‘defense of the status quo’ and polices the boundaries of gentility and, thus, whiteness.<sup>831</sup> Without Miss Angela’s ‘soft yet indomitable influence’, Molly observes, Jonathan, like his uncle before him, ‘would never have lied in the beginning, would never have covered his faithlessness with the hypocrisy of duty’.<sup>832</sup> It is, therefore, the need to protect the ideal engendered in its irresistible power that underlies their dishonourable conduct; in their zeal to protect the ideal, their gentility suffers the touch of the tar brush. The veneration of the female ideal of whiteness literally destroys the aspiring subject and reinforces its ambivalent positioning which, paradoxically, evokes passing as a means of maintaining a facade of male gentility indispensable to the preservation of its female counterpart.

Like Glasgow, Charles Waddell Chesnutt’s *The Marrow of Tradition* destabilises the notion of whiteness as an attainable totality. Whilst Glasgow explores the discrete totalities such as asexuality, chastity, self-sacrifice and beauty that characterise the female ideal, and chivalry, honour and self-discipline that mark its male incarnation, she limits her interrogation to the representatives of the white caste. Such a delineation undermines the correlation between whiteness and hue as her protagonists, despite their lack of visible tint, are always touched with the tar brush; thus questioning the notion of whiteness as the prerogative of the upper class by demonstrating that its distinct attributes are class-transcendent. *The Marrow of Tradition* takes the notion of transcendence a step further, across the colour line. Published in 1901, it presents ‘the fictionalized retelling of an infamous race riot that broke out in Wilmington, North Carolina’ in 1898’.<sup>833</sup> Although

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<sup>831</sup> Smith, *American Body Politics*, 309.

<sup>832</sup> Glasgow, *The Miller*, 426.

<sup>833</sup> Nancy Bentley and Sandra Gunning, ‘Introduction: Cultural and Historical Background’, in *The Marrow*, 4.

Chesnutt substitutes Wilmington for Wellington, by preserving its North Carolinian location, he endows his account with a historic validity.<sup>834</sup> Accordingly, the story delineates the events precipitating the riot: the formation of a secret coalition among the city's male elite and its efforts to 'blacken' its prosperous black citizens. It culminates whilst the riot is still raging around its now either dead, or horrified, perpetrators. Stephen P. Knadler suggests that Chesnutt's reason for revealing the moral degradation of the white citizens of Wellington, with very few exceptions, 'was to deprive them [white readers] of the privilege of whiteness'; while Wilson proposes that it stemmed from the need 'to present images of whiteness to his white audience, images that would denaturalize the privilege of that whiteness'.<sup>835</sup> Be that as it may, in divorcing the image of whiteness from the upper class, Chesnutt successfully subverts the Western conception of blackness that 'Sin is Negro as virtue is white.'<sup>836</sup> In allowing whiteness to transcend the colour line, Chesnutt liberates it from the strictures of its ontic manifestation – the binarity of black and white.<sup>837</sup> In *The Marrow*, Knadler notes, Chesnutt emphasises that 'whiteness had been inflected in terms of gentlemanliness'.<sup>838</sup> Chesnutt's scrutiny of the paradigms of whiteness – the southern gentleman and lady whose gentility rests on the pillars of honour, chivalry and aristocratic heritage – reveals them to be empty signifiers. Its protagonists – Major Carteret, Olivia Carteret, Clara Pemberton, Polly Ochiltree and Tom Delamere – despite boasting a hereditary claim to whiteness fall abominably short of the ideal; whereas others like Lee Ellis, Dr Miller and Janet Miller are possessed of honour and self-sacrifice, however their heritage precludes them from ascent to whiteness. Though Major Carteret

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<sup>834</sup> Matthew Wilson observes that Chesnutt presents his white readers with 'a counterhistory', in *Whiteness in the Novels of Charles W. Chesnutt* (Jackson: The University Press of Mississippi, 2004), 99.

<sup>835</sup> Stephen P. Knadler, 'Untragic Mulatto: Charles Chesnutt and the Discourse of 'Whiteness'', in *American Literary History* 8.3 (1996): 429; Wilson, 'Introduction', in *Whiteness*, xiv-xv.

<sup>836</sup> Fanon, *Black Skin*, 139.

<sup>837</sup> Knadler observes that Chesnutt 'asks them [his readers] to see race itself as a matter of positionality', in 'Untragic Mulatto', 435. I suggest that Chesnutt also sees whiteness as a question of positionality.

<sup>838</sup> Knadler, 'Untragic Mulatto', 435.

hails from ‘one of the oldest and proudest [families] in the state’, his family is left ‘hopelessly impoverished by the war’ that ‘swallowed’ his ‘ancestral home’.<sup>839</sup> This reversal in the family fortunes undermines Carteret’s claim to hereditary gentility. He owes the improvement of his circumstances to his marriage to Olivia Merrell, with whose ‘money he had founded the Morning Chronicle, [...] the most influential paper in the State’.<sup>840</sup> His tenuous claim to whiteness, augmented by ‘The fine old house in which they lived’, is restored through marriage, and not inherited as tradition dictates.<sup>841</sup> A narrow-minded bigot, Carteret is possessed of a remarkably flexible conscience which, if required, he can trick ‘into acquiescence’.<sup>842</sup> The existence of ‘that docile organ’ predestines him for passing, for it implies moral lassitude contradictory to the gentlemanly code of behaviour.<sup>843</sup> Thanks to the biddability of his conscience, Carteret’s convictions appear rather contradictory. He may believe ‘in the divine right of white men and gentlemen’, however his response to Dr Burns belies the truthfulness of his conviction.<sup>844</sup> When Dr Burns, a specialist from the North, asserts: ‘I am a gentleman, sir, before I am a white man,’ Carteret avers: ‘The terms should be synonymous.’<sup>845</sup> Whereas Dr Burns separates gentility from the white hue, Carteret, in conflating the terms, turns white into the prerogative of a gentleman. Not only does Carteret’s rejoinder mark regional difference, but it also belies his previous assertion of the ‘divine right’ being the privilege of white men and gentlemen alike. What Carteret believes in are the divinely sanctioned ‘shades of whiteness’, whereby whiteness proper is only accessible to a gentleman. This conviction of gentlemanly superiority is emphasised in his dealings with General Belmont and Captain McBane. Together, the men form a triumvirate, the aim of which is to restore the

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<sup>839</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 44.

<sup>840</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 44.

<sup>841</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 44.

<sup>842</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 64.

<sup>843</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 64.

<sup>844</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 64.

<sup>845</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 89.

antebellum order.<sup>846</sup> When Captain McBane and General Belmont present themselves in his office, Carteret greets the Captain ‘with an unconscious but quite perceptible diminution of the warmth with which he had welcomed the other’.<sup>847</sup> The coolness of his manner is occasioned by McBane’s heritage. As ‘the descendant of the indentured bondservant and the socially unfit’, McBane is a social upstart whom, regardless of the fortune he has amassed from ‘a contract with the State for convict labor’, Carteret deems unworthy of the cordiality accorded to Belmont who is ‘Aristocratic by birth and instinct’.<sup>848</sup> McBane’s wealth, though it marks one of the criteria of gentility, cannot buy him membership in the gentlemen’s Clarendon Club, for he lacks the other essential attributes – ‘birth’ and ‘breeding’.<sup>849</sup> McBane’s gentility is acquired and, therefore, for Carteret, McBane and gentleman are mutually exclusive terms. Although he finds it distasteful ‘to rub elbows with an illiterate and vulgar man of no ancestry’, he concedes that McBane’s ‘wealth and energy’ make him useful to their cause.<sup>850</sup> Since gentility, and thus ideal whiteness, is a composite of totalities, McBane’s dubiously acquired fortune both furnishes and invalidates his claim to whiteness by emphasising his lack of education and suitable ancestry. Regardless of his wealth, McBane falls abominably short of the ideal of whiteness, and therefore his gentility can only signify as passing; wealth, if not haunted by aristocratic ancestry and supported by education, cannot guarantee ascent to whiteness proper. This alliance of expedience augments Carteret’s gentility, for, to him, McBane represents the metaphorical blackness which Theweleit associates with ‘the masses’, ‘floods’ and ‘filth’.<sup>851</sup> As an exponent of ‘the masses’, McBane becomes the site of unfavourable comparison and, only through a dissociation from his plebeianism, can

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<sup>846</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 64.

<sup>847</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 63.

<sup>848</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 98; and Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 65; and Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 64.

<sup>849</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 140.

<sup>850</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 98.

<sup>851</sup> Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 4.

Carteret retain his gentility. However, Carteret's whiteness is belied by his awareness of the disparity between his incarnation of the ideal and old Mr Delamere's whom he considers the 'ideal gentleman of the ideal past'.<sup>852</sup> This tacit admission marks his whiteness as 'a matter of positionality', whereby compared with McBane he is a gentleman, whilst a comparison with Mr Delamere reveals his passing for one.<sup>853</sup> Moreover, the conjunction of 'the ideal gentleman' with 'the ideal past' transforms Carteret and his contemporaries' gentility into imperfect reproductions.

Ironically, it is McBane who verbalises Carteret's tacit convictions and reveals his passing. During a discussion upon who from among the black citizens is to be expelled from the city, Carteret declares his wish 'to be strictly impartial in this matter, and to take no step which cannot be entirely justified by the wise regard for public welfare'.<sup>854</sup> Hearing the lofty speech McBane replies: 'What's the use of this hypocrisy, gentlemen? [...] Every last one of us has an axe to grind! The Major may as well put an edge on his'.<sup>855</sup> Inwardly, Carteret is dismayed to hear McBane speak so of their undertaking because it robs 'the enterprise of all its poetry and put[s] a solemn act of revolution upon the plane of a mere vulgar theft of power'.<sup>856</sup> Although McBane's blunt remark debunks Carteret's gentility by pointing out the hypocrisy of his purpose, it is Carteret's own comment that removes the cloak of honour from the otherwise ignoble enterprise. If, as Theweleit observes, the dissociation from the vulgarity of the mob equals an escape from 'the darkness within', then Carteret fails irrecoverably; and his failure enunciates the ambivalence of the ideal of

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<sup>852</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 175.

<sup>853</sup> Knadler remarks that in *The Marrow* Chesnutt asks his 'white readers [...] to see race itself as a matter of positionality', in 'Untragic Mulatto', 435. Chesnutt's portrayal of Carteret demonstrates that whiteness is equally a 'matter of positionality'.

<sup>854</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 199.

<sup>855</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 199.

<sup>856</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 199.

whiteness.<sup>857</sup> Effectively, McBane – the antithesis of the ideal of gentility – instead of effecting Carteret’s whiteness, is instrumental in foiling his passing for a gentleman. This exchange constitutes a prelude to Carteret’s inevitable fall from whiteness that, rather tellingly, coincides with the riot that he has helped to mastermind to protect the ideal of gentility. During the riot, his only son contracts the croup and, as a consequence of the fighting, there are no white doctors available to treat him. Carteret is forced to seek the help of a coloured doctor – Dr Miller. He hopes that Miller, as ‘a man of some education’ and ‘fine feeling, – for a negro’, will not refuse a ‘professional call’, despite being once refused admittance to Carteret’s house.<sup>858</sup> As it happens, Miller refuses because his own son has been killed in the riot, for which he holds Carteret responsible. As Carteret leaves, he is filled with an ‘involuntary admiration’ for Miller and concedes that ‘In Dr. Miller’s place he would have done the same thing.’<sup>859</sup> The recognition of Miller’s refinement and honourableness, albeit belated, confers upon him a claim to whiteness otherwise denied him by virtue of his descent. The encounter reveals to Carteret the futility of his pursuit of the ideal of whiteness by displacing it onto Miller – its socially and culturally constructed antithesis. Ultimately, it is Carteret who is touched with the tar brush and Miller who is ‘whitened’.

Carteret’s only redeeming quality that betrays a smattering of gentlemanly honour is his realisation that, to paraphrase Fanon, white does not equal a gentleman any more than black equals a sinner. In the case of Tom Delamere, however, honourableness is not inherited along with ‘birth’ and ‘breeding’. While Tom’s gentility is hereditarily preordained as befits the last scion of the patrician Delameres, his countenance

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<sup>857</sup> Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 20.

<sup>858</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 239.

<sup>859</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 241.



‘negativated [sic] the idea of manliness’.<sup>860</sup> Not only does Tom’s unmanliness bespeak metaphorical blackness which is made manifest through his conduct, but it also emphasises the untenability of hereditary gentility. A drinker, gambler and eventually murderer, Tom, more than any other character in the novel is aware of the power of passing on which his gentility is precariously balanced: ‘He had reached that degree of moral deterioration where, while principles were of little moment, the externals of social intercourse possessed an exaggerated importance.’<sup>861</sup> Whilst Tom is aware that his iniquities turn his gentility into a travesty, he is even more conscious of the necessity of maintaining a facade of gentility. His penchant for projection, rather than gentility, constitutes Tom’s heritage. Not only can Tom, literally, ‘turn nigger’ and imitate Sandy, his grandfather’s servant, to such perfection that he wins the cakewalk ‘much to the surprise of his sable companions, who were about equally swayed by admiration and jealousy’; but also, metaphorically, when he uses this device to implicate Sandy in the murder of his aunt Polly Ochiltree, which he commits.<sup>862</sup> Tom’s ability to pass freely across the colour line is a reflection of his innate blackness. Whereas Carteret’s passing is a corollary of the unattainability of the ideal, Tom’s is necessary to project the ideal of gentility since his social position demands it. Although Sandy becomes an unwitting tool for Tom’s passing the colour line, he deliberately foils his passing for a gentleman. When Tom turns to him to borrow money to settle the most pressing debts, Sandy reluctantly agrees ‘fer de sake er de fam’ly honuh’.<sup>863</sup> However, when Tom, in a surge of feigned gratitude, calls him ‘a good darky’, Sandy is

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<sup>860</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 53.

<sup>861</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 143.

<sup>862</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 119. In ‘Segregation as Culture: Etiquette, Spectacle, and Fiction’, Nancy Bentley and Sandra Gunning explain the origin of the cakewalk: ‘In its early plantation origins, the stylized dancing and strutting that came to be called the cakewalk was a vital part of the community life of enslaved Africans. The celebratory dancing probably drew upon rites that originated in African homelands, but descendants introduced innovations that included moves – exaggerated or grotesque stepping – enacting a disguised mockery of white owners. [...] Even with its coded criticism, however, the cakewalk was seized upon by white performers in blackface and turned into the centerpiece of countless racist minstrel shows during this period [the latter part of the nineteenth century]’, in *The Marrow*, 426.

<sup>863</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 144.

appalled at his lack of genteel manners: ‘in all de yeahs I has wo’ked fer yo’ gran’daddy, he has never called me, a “darky” ter my face, suh. Co’sse I knows dere’s w’ite folks an’ black folks, – but dere’s manners, dere’s manners, an’ gent’men oughter be de ones ter use ‘em’.<sup>864</sup> In correcting Tom’s slippage, Sandy accentuates the difference between Tom’s grandfather and Tom, whereby their kinship notwithstanding, Tom materialises as no gentleman. Instead, the hereditary gentility, like Tom, skipped the colour line and passed to Sandy, endowing him with a sense of ancestral honour and pride.

Like Sandy, Lee Ellis is another witness to Tom’s passing for a gentleman. Ellis materialises as an inversion of Tom: where Tom’s claim to whiteness is belied by his ungentlemanly conduct, Ellis’s conduct is beyond reproach, but his attainment of whiteness proper is blighted by his Quaker heritage. Despite not hailing from ‘their caste’, Ellis is received ‘cordially’ by ‘The “best people”’ of Wellington, including the Carterets.<sup>865</sup> Interestingly, the use of inverted commas belies the epithet and bespeaks a darkness beneath the finest paragons of Wellington’s gentility. Even his membership at the exclusive Clarendon Club cannot eradicate the fact that he is Carteret’s employee and a Quaker, whose ‘father never owned any slaves’.<sup>866</sup> Paradoxically, Tom and Ellis can only pass for gentlemen: Tom’s passing is precipitated by his metaphoric blackness, while Ellis’s is predetermined by his lack of suitable ancestry. Indeed, Wellington is a place where passing becomes synonymous with gentility and even its ladies are not spared the touch of the tar brush. Carteret’s half-sister, Clara Pemberton’s claim to gentility is partial because her mother ‘married Daniel Pemberton, who was not of so good a family’ as the Carterets.<sup>867</sup> Despite possessing a ‘fair countenance’ that bespeaks ‘a pure heart and a high

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<sup>864</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 145.

<sup>865</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 105.

<sup>866</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 61.

<sup>867</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 54.

spirit', her incarnation of the ideal is intrinsically tainted.<sup>868</sup> While Clara's claim to whiteness, like Ellis's, is blighted by her parentage, Miss Polly Ochiltree's is belied by her actions. Once the facade of the genteel lady that Miss Polly – Olivia Carteret's aunt – maintains is stripped away, it reveals a thief. When Olivia's father lies on his death-bed, Miss Polly overhears his conversation with Julia – Olivia's half-sister, Janet Miller's mother – whom he informs of the whereabouts of his will in which he leaves her a considerable bequest. Hidden in the same spot is also their marriage certificate confirming Janet Miller's legitimacy. Miss Polly intercepts the documents and, when she finds Julia searching for them, brands her a thief and, showing 'no mercy', banishes her from the house.<sup>869</sup> A far cry from the Marian ideal of compassion, Miss Polly's hereditary claim to whiteness is, ironically, negated by the need to protect and project the image of the ideal in the quotidian. In branding Julia a thief, Miss Polly externalises the darkness within herself. The theft may be precipitated by the concern to protect her niece, Olivia's, gentility, it nonetheless reveals a rupture between the ideal and Miss Polly's reconstruction, which results in a thief masquerading for a lady. Olivia, a proud woman, fiercely guards her claim to whiteness by refusing to acknowledge her half-sister, Janet Miller, who is her mirror image. At first, Olivia's passing is initiated by Miss Polly; however, after the latter's death, when she discovers the documents confirming her father's marriage, Olivia chooses to throw 'the offending document into the fire'.<sup>870</sup> Since she 'could not have endured' the scandal such a disclosure would have brought upon her, by destroying the document Olivia attempts to protect the ideal of her gentility, and consciously elects to pass.<sup>871</sup> Her dishonourable deed simultaneously ensures the posthumous passing of her father by removing the spectre of pollution from his gentility and negates it by concealing his

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<sup>868</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 53.

<sup>869</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 129.

<sup>870</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 202.

<sup>871</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 208.

honourable conduct towards Janet's mother. Indeed, Olivia's actions confirm her lack of purity which forms a fundamental pillar of female gentility. When her child lies dying, despite her husband's explanation of Dr Miller's honourable right to refuse the call, Olivia rushes to the Millers' house. There, she confronts her sister and acknowledges the bond between them. Olivia resolves to 'shrink at no sacrifice' to save her son, and the sacrifice in question involves offering Janet a claim to her father's name 'and to half his estate', and thus a right to hereditary whiteness.<sup>872</sup> Although Janet rejects 'this tardy recognition' because 'it is tainted with fraud and crime and blood', she consents to her husband's treating the child.<sup>873</sup> Janet acts honourably on two counts: firstly, in spurning the tainted whiteness Olivia offers, and, secondly, in being capable of compassion to those who have wronged her. While Olivia's sacrifice consists in acknowledging the kinship with Janet, Janet's sacrifice lies in her forgiveness and repudiation of the whiteness she had desired. Although Olivia's disclosure marks the end of her passing for a genteel lady, and thus brings her closer to the notion of sacrifice enshrined in the ideal, her sacrifice is necessitated by the need to save her son, and thus it is not selfless. As such, it lacks the purity of Janet's motivation that stems from the rejection of the privilege her connection with Olivia would bring. Janet's sacrifice reinforces her claim to the ideal of female whiteness and inveighs against the construction of gentility as a conjunction of 'birth' and 'breeding'. Consequently, their confrontation results in the transference of a claim to whiteness from Olivia to Janet, which negates the notion that whiteness is skin-deep. Although Knadler sees Janet as 'not a victim but the redeemer of white society', her ultimate repudiation of the kinship with Olivia condemns rather than redeems the genteel white society.<sup>874</sup> For Janet, whiteness can only be black, tainted with the touch of the tar brush and therein lies its ambivalence, whereby the very unattainability of the venerated

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<sup>872</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 245.

<sup>873</sup> Chesnutt, *The Marrow*, 246.

<sup>874</sup> Knadler, 'Untragic Mulatto', 441.

ideal places it beyond redemption and fixes its embodiments within the realm of passing. Since Olivia exemplifies the rupture between the ideal and its reconstruction, accepting her offer would amount to passing.

Through the construction of his characters, Chesnutt invalidates the notion of hereditary whiteness as a conjunction of nobility of descent and spirit. For Dunbar-Nelson, as for Chesnutt, whilst the ideal of whiteness remains unattainable, its attributes are capable of transcending the colour line. 'The Stones of the Village' follows Victor Grabért's rise from obscurity to prominence. From his childhood spent in a neighbourhood beyond the pale of whiteness, Victor emerges with a stigma of 'White nigger', with which he is unanimously branded by 'white and black and yellow' boys.<sup>875</sup> Inherent in the appellation is the seemingly irreconcilable dichotomy of black and white; a combination of virtue and sin. Whilst Victor's appearance aids his ascendancy, his passing acquires a duality. On one level, it begins with crossing the proverbial colour line, attending white college, marrying into an aristocratic family and becoming a judge; on another level, it is inaugurated by his realisation that 'he hated the traditions his wife represented'.<sup>876</sup> His hate is precipitated by his realisation that in following the dream of gentility he has 'turned nigger', since his actions have always been mitigated not by 'his convictions', but were the results of 'prudence and fear and cowardice'.<sup>877</sup> The discovery that cowardice and lack of honour, and not his origin, invalidate his claim to whiteness cements his passing for a gentleman. Only when he acknowledges that his conduct 'blackens' him, does he realise that whiteness can transcend colour. This revelation tarnishes his triumph in court over a black lawyer and fills him with self-loathing, for in Pavageau he recognises 'the abler man'.<sup>878</sup>

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<sup>875</sup> Alice Dunbar-Nelson, 'The Stones of the Village', in *Laughing*, 76-77.

<sup>876</sup> Dunbar-Nelson, 'The Stones', 97.

<sup>877</sup> Dunbar-Nelson, 'The Stones', 112.

<sup>878</sup> Dunbar-Nelson, 'The Stones', in *Laughing*, 104.

Pavageau internalises the courage and honour which Victor has compromised in his pursuit of the genteel ideal. Similarly to Chesnutt, Dunbar-Nelson exposes the pursuit of the ideal of whiteness as a means of revealing its unattainability. In 'Little Miss Sophie', honour and courage, while constitutive of the ideal of whiteness, are a matter of heredity, though not necessarily synonymous with gentility. Here, the ideal of whiteness is symbolised by the possession of a Roman ring – itself a sign of the continuity of tradition. The ring was once given to Miss Sophie by Louis Neale, who has since found a different object of adoration and married. Sophie, who 'had not always been poor', now lives in abject poverty, eking out a meagre existence as a seamstress, and the ring has been pawned.<sup>879</sup> When Sophie learns that Neale stands to lose his inheritance and face ruin unless he produces the ring, she vows to redeem it. Although this means tripling her workload, 'telling him [Neale] that he might redeem it was an impossibility' that would have meant 'That good, straight-backed, stiff-necked Creole blood' rising and choking her.<sup>880</sup> Since the ring was bestowed upon her 'as a present', honour demands that 'As a present should it be returned'.<sup>881</sup> For Sophie, contrary to Neale, honour and self-sacrifice are inseparable, and this conjunction marks her claim to whiteness. Through her sacrifice, Sophie redeems the ring and dies clasping it in her hand. Despite her relatively lowly station, she, not Neale, is the worthy keeper of the ring. Her death, foreshadowed by comparisons with the Virgin Mary, marks her attainment of the biblical ideal of whiteness.

To Dunbar-Nelson, as to Page, Glasgow and Chesnutt, the concept of the ideal whiteness is underpinned by a conviction of truth which, ineluctably, cannot be reconciled with its embodiments. If enshrined in the concept of über whiteness is a coalescence of whiteness denoting spiritual nobility and hereditary whiteness encompassing blood, tradition, and the

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<sup>879</sup> Dunbar-Nelson, 'Little Miss Sophie', in *Laughing*, 141.

<sup>880</sup> Dunbar-Nelson, 'Little Miss Sophie', in *Laughing*, 141.

<sup>881</sup> Dunbar-Nelson, 'Little Miss Sophie', in *Laughing*, 141.

possession of land, then the southern gentleman and lady, as preordained epitomes of the ideal, encode the impossibility of the reconciliation of the two whitenesses in the quotidian. Through their respective struggles to protect the ideal, both the southern gentleman and lady reveal the rupture existing between the ideal and its reconstructions. Consequently, 'the respect for ancient continuities' that fosters the reanimations of the ideal 'becomes systematic dissociation' which not only frustrates the coalescence of the disparate totalities of whiteness into a whole, but also exposes their permeability.<sup>882</sup> For Theweleit, however, 'the whole is not the true', but 'a force that suppresses the existence of anything halved or segmented'.<sup>883</sup> The ideal of whiteness is, therefore, an illusion, always already mediated by its disparate attributes, the existence of which both fosters and foils the attainment of whiteness proper. Thereby, the struggle for whiteness is rendered a struggle for approximation that can only yield passing subjects, born out of the fissure that is itself the essence of approximation.

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<sup>882</sup> Foucault, *Language*, 164.

<sup>883</sup> Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 422.

## Chapter five: Monster mash – or a paler shade of white

To him, man was a being with myriad lives and myriad sensations, a complex multiform creature that bore within itself strange legacies of thought and passion, and whose very flesh was tainted with the monstrous maladies of the dead.<sup>884</sup>

Dey's so many things a body knows is lies, dat dey ain' no use gwine roun' findin' fault wid tales dat mought des ez well be so ez not.<sup>885</sup>

The southern whiteness conjured up by Page, Glasgow, Chesnutt and Dunbar-Nelson is predicated upon the notion of the 'true', or ideal whiteness, and equated with hereditary gentility. Its essence consists in replicating the perfection and wholeness of the antebellum ideal that flourished in the imagined Old South. However, this wholeness is merely an illusion which conceals the fragmented nature of southern whiteness and renders its embodiments, the southern gentleman and lady, perpetually lacking. Indeed, whiteness and wholeness are mutually exclusive terms. For Dyer, the rhetoric of Christianity, whilst germane to the conception of whiteness, promulgates a split between the spiritual and the corporeal, treating the latter as inferior or monstrous. Dyer considers this split crucial to the genesis of whiteness since, by placing its female and male attributes such as passivity, purity, expectancy, or striving and the denial of self-gratification, beyond attainment, it frustrates the possibility of their incarnation in the ordinary.<sup>886</sup> This split condemns the earthly embodiments of whiteness as monstrous mutations, for it prefigures rebellion against the loftier ideals of whiteness enshrined in the figures of the Virgin Mary and Christ. When translated into the postbellum southern parlance, this split is further

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<sup>884</sup> Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), 159.

<sup>885</sup> Charles Waddell Chesnutt, 'The Conjuror's Revenge', in *The Conjure Woman and Other Conjure Tales*, ed. Richard H. Brodhead (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1993). In all subsequent quotations from this story, or other stories from this collection, the collection will be referenced as *The Conjure*. The volume is cited in the bibliography.

<sup>886</sup> Dyer, *White*, 16-17.



problematised because these antecedents of whiteness are endowed with worldly goods that do not sit comfortably alongside notions of asceticism: the hereditary possession of land which is inextricably bound up with its concomitant adjuncts – tradition and blood. As a heady mix of distinctive attributes, both divine and genteel, southern whiteness becomes doubly split and intrinsically heterogeneous. The southern gentleman and lady become loci of conflict through whom the unattainability of the ideal is manifested in the quotidian, rendering their reconstructions of southern whiteness more or less successful, but never complete, approximations of the ideal. This incompleteness has already been glimpsed in Page's *Gordon Keith* or Glasgow's *The Deliverance*, the protagonists of which fail to combine genteel lineage with the possession of land; or material wealth with aristocratic pedigree; or augment genteel breeding with angelic goodness. It would appear that heredity, though a prerequisite of southern whiteness, obstructs its reconstruction. According to Jacques Lacan, the 'discourse of the other' is 'the discourse of the circuit' in which one is integrated as one 'of its links'.<sup>887</sup> Lacan exemplifies this point with the discourse of the father, which the subject is 'absolutely condemned to reproduce'.<sup>888</sup> Since 'one can't stop the chain of discourse', it becomes the subject's 'duty to transmit' the discourse of the father 'in its aberrant form'.<sup>889</sup> Enshrined in the concept of heritage is therefore an aberration which marks the successor as inherently other than the predecessor. Indeed, for the southern gentleman and lady 'The time is [always] out of joint.'<sup>890</sup> Such originary incompleteness constitutes what Chris Baldick terms 'the transcendent Truth of history' which, within the rhetoric of southern whiteness, transforms its emulators into

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<sup>887</sup> Jacques Lacan, 'The Circuit', in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book II: The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Sylvana Tomaselli (New York: Norton, 1988), 89.

<sup>888</sup> Lacan, 'The Circuit', in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, 89.

<sup>889</sup> Lacan, 'The Circuit', in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, 89.

<sup>890</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Oxford Shakespeare: Hamlet*, ed. G. R. Hibbard, *The World's Classics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 1.5.196.

‘hideous progeny’, inherently different from the ideal bequeathed to them.<sup>891</sup> In Page’s *Gordon Keith*, Gordon’s espousal of his father’s genteel legacy is tainted by capitalist ambition; while in Glasgow’s *The Deliverance*, Christopher’s striking resemblance to his father is juxtaposed with his much diminished circumstances, which exacerbates the loss of his genteel legacy. If, as Kierkegaard suggests, ‘what is repeated has been [...]’, but precisely the fact that it has been gives to repetition the character of novelty’, then mutation is inescapable from repetition.<sup>892</sup> Since, Lacan observes, repetition is tainted by sin and only through it ‘man finds his way’, transgression lies at the heart of southern whiteness, and the gentleman and lady embody its inevitability.<sup>893</sup> Through the revivification of antebellum ideals, southern whiteness reaches an aporia: the path to the attainment of southern whiteness is through repetition, the imperfection of which is predetermined by virtue of being a repetition.

This repetitious nature of southern whiteness, circumscribed by the rigidity of the male and female ideals, lends itself to *misconstruction*. Although Elizabeth Young traces the etymology of the term monster to ‘the Latin *monstrare*, to show or display’, thereby emphasising the visual aspect of its discourse, she also sees ‘amalgamation, reanimation, and revolt against a creator’ as characteristics of the monster.<sup>894</sup> As a composite of disparate totalities not only does southern whiteness encode amalgamation, but also, and crucially, reanimation and difference which are inextricable from emulation and heredity. Similarly, Baldick notes the visible aspect of monstrosity, observing that ‘the traditional

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<sup>891</sup> Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein’s Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-century Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 101; and Mary Shelley, ‘Author’s Introduction to the Standard Novels Edition’ (1831), in *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus* (1818), ed. Marilyn Butler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 197.

<sup>892</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Repetition: An Essay in Experimental Psychology*, trans. and introd. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1941), 34.

<sup>893</sup> Lacan, ‘The Circuit’, in *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan*, 87.

<sup>894</sup> Elizabeth Young, *Black Frankenstein: The Making of an American Metaphor* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 160; and Young, *Black Frankenstein*, 14.

idea of the monstrous was strongly associated with visual display, and monsters were understood primarily as exhibitions of moral vices'.<sup>895</sup> Baldick's emphasis on moral iniquity becomes particularly pertinent to reconstructions of southern whiteness. Tracing the genesis of monstrosity, Baldick observes that 'the vices of ingratitude, rebellion, and disobedience, particularly towards parents, [...] most commonly attract the appellation "monstrous": to be a monster is to break the natural bonds of obligation towards friends and especially blood-relations'.<sup>896</sup> To be a monster is to transgress the boundaries of filial obedience, and if there is a vice of which southern whiteness is guilty, albeit inadvertently, it is filial rebellion. If, according to Bill Brown, the essence of monstrosity is 'the result of like not proceeding from like', then the southern gentleman and lady's filial rebellion and, consequently, monstrosity, are predicated upon the failure to conflate the antebellum and biblical ideals of whiteness and predetermined by the discontinuity enshrined in the very notion of heredity.<sup>897</sup> While the gentleman planter and lady 'like the monster literally embod[y] the process of reanimation', each reconstruction conveys both continuity and difference, whereby the two figures signify as synecdoches – partial significations – always pointing to the more encapsulated in the presupposed wholeness of the ideal. Since 'The body that has sin written upon it is of course a monstrous body', the bodies of the gentleman planter and lady become ontic manifestations of the sin of filial disobedience, whose awareness of intrinsic imperfection 'suggests that [their] monstrosity is precisely an internal not an external feature'.<sup>898</sup> While reaffirming the existence of the ideal and carrying its traces, the southern gentleman and lady monumentalise its absence. As ontic embodiments of antebellum antecedents, they constitute 'the objectivized phantasma of the

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<sup>895</sup> Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow*, 45.

<sup>896</sup> Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow*, 13.

<sup>897</sup> Bill Brown, *The Material Unconscious: American Amusement, Stephen Crane, and the Economics of Play* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 200.

<sup>898</sup> Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 70; and Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 74.

restitutability' of the body of the ideal.<sup>899</sup> Such reconstitutions, while fuelling emulation, emphasise the atotality of each mimetic reconstruction and reveal absence as crucial to the process of monster-making.<sup>900</sup> Similarly to Lacan's circuit that points to the irreducible interstice between the progenitor and progeny, reconstitution, like reconstruction, 'signals both its allegiance to a model and its uncontested autonomy'.<sup>901</sup> Such a formulation renders not only reconstitution, but also mimetic reproduction, monstrous by marking each act as autonomous and disjoined from the model. Disjunction, in turn, is symptomatic of 'indetermination' and 'ontological instability', both of which are characteristic of monsters.<sup>902</sup> Indeed, the exponents of southern aristocracy emerging from the pages of Page, Glasgow, and Chesnutt's novels stubbornly struggle to revive the antebellum ideal, albeit with limited success. With one foot metaphorically firmly on the plantations of the mythical Old South, and the other precariously balanced on the less hospitable soil of the Post-Reconstruction South, these gentlemen and ladies not only partake of 'ontological instability', but also cultivate it through their insistence on the revivification of the antebellum model of gentility. This relentless process of revivifications transforms the southern gentleman and lady into fictions of verisimilitude. Although the appellations of southern gentleman and lady allude to 'an integral and sacred whole' similar to the one associated with 'the King's body', their abortive reconstructions of gentility undermine the notion of organic wholeness and, as Lacan predicts, break out of the circuit of inheritance.<sup>903</sup> Such transgressive transformations, while monstrous because

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<sup>899</sup> Ronell, *The Telephone Book*, 194.

<sup>900</sup> In this atotality they are redolent of Ronell's telephone which, in its singularity, presupposes the existence of a pair.

<sup>901</sup> Marie-Helene Huet, 'Monstrosity and Representation', in *Representations* 4 (1983):74.

<sup>902</sup> Allen S. Weiss, 'Ten Theses on Monsters and Monstrosity', *TDR* (1988-) 48.1 (2004):124.

<sup>903</sup> Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow*, 14. The doctrine of the '*duplex corpus Christi*' or 'the "Lord's Two Bodies"', in which 'the bodies natural and mystic, personal and corporate, individual and collective of Christ' merge, constitutes 'the precise precedent of the "King's two Bodies"', in Ernst H. Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Theology* (1957) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 199. Its shift to the secular domain contributed to the emergence of 'the English "physiologic" concept of the King's Two Bodies', whereby two bodies become united in a sovereign's body: 'his immaterial and immortal body

they eliminate the possibility of like proceeding from like, are crucial to reconstructions of southern whiteness.

Exemplary of the impossibility of like proceeding from like is Henry Glave, the hero of Thomas Nelson Page's *John Marvel Assistant*.<sup>904</sup> The novel, published in 1910, bears a resemblance to *Gordon Keith* insofar as it is a *bildungsroman*. However, compared to Gordon's prudish morality, Henry's retrospective narrative marks him as a prodigal, for it benefits from hindsight wisdom that betrays his awareness of not only the ideal of gentility, but also his departure from it. Henry's tale reveals that the gentility he replicates is flawed on two counts: his failure to reproduce like for like and the imperfection of the construction when the 'likeness' to the model is preserved. In Henry's case, Lacan's circuit extends to encompass not only the father, but the rhetoric of gentility, the interpretability of which leads to distortion. Although Page does not disclose the actual setting of the novel, Henry's brief family history leaves no doubt as to from which region his ancestors hail. Accordingly, Henry's 'family was an old and distinguished one' and its genealogy 'could be traced back about two hundred years'.<sup>905</sup> Several of his 'ancestors had accomplished enough to be known in the history of the State', and his father 'fought through the war, rising to be a major and surrendering at Appomattox'.<sup>906</sup> Whilst the family 'had formerly been well off' and 'prior to the Revolutionary War owned large estates', that time of

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politic' denoting 'the King's sempiternity' and 'his material and mortal body natural' designating his 'temporariness'. Though this unification gives the illusion of wholeness, it also encodes a split which makes possible the annihilation of the body natural, as in the case of Charles I, and the transference of sempiternity to another body, the Parliament, in Kantorowicz, *The King's*, 20-21. Thus, upon the demise of the king's natural body, 'the perpetuity of the Dynasty, the corporate character of the Crown, and the immortality of the royal Dignity' could be preserved, uninterrupted, in the body natural of his successor, in Kantorowicz, *The King's*, 316. A similar physiologic operates in the bodies of the southern gentleman and lady. The wholeness of southern whiteness that they represent is contingent upon the unification of the timelessness of the antebellum ideal of gentility and temporariness of their physical bodies. Like the king's body, therefore, it is underwritten by a rift which facilitates the revivification of the mystical ideal, simultaneously promulgating and undermining the sense of continuity.

<sup>904</sup> Thomas Nelson Page, *John Marvel Assistant* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910).

<sup>905</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 1.

<sup>906</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 1; and Page, *John Marvel*, 3.

greatness now only exists in the realm of fond reminiscence.<sup>907</sup> Despite Henry's father's 'slender patrimony' being 'swept away by the war', he nonetheless manages 'by much stinting to send' him to college.<sup>908</sup> However, the impoverished circumstances of his family do not diminish Henry's pride in his descent, leaving him 'quite satisfied at college to rest on their [ancestors'] achievements' and feeling 'no need to add to its distinction by any labors' of his own.<sup>909</sup> Henry's assertion is tinged with a hubristic presumption, whereby his gentility is secured by virtue of his descent from such illustrious personages. While his heredity furnishes Henry's claim to whiteness, it simultaneously, in his estimation, exempts him from striving, thus facilitating a departure from the model practiced by his ancestors and the spiritual ideal of male whiteness. Henry's heritage, then, becomes instrumental to the unravelling of his gentility. His belief in the hereditary virtues of gentility contradicts his father's conviction according to which 'A king can make a nobleman [...]; but it takes Jehovah to make a gentleman'.<sup>910</sup> His father's maxim privileges the nobility of spirit and points to the divinely-ordained origin of gentility. To his son, such principles, though deserving admiration, mark his father's 'inadequacy to the new state of things', and lead Henry to consider himself his sire's superior 'in all practical affairs'.<sup>911</sup> This tacit conviction of superiority marks Henry's filial disobedience to the model of gentility espoused by his father and makes him guilty of the sin of ingratitude towards those of his own blood. Effectively, both Henry and his father's incarnations of whiteness are flawed: the father's because it disposes with the hereditary aspect of gentility, and Henry's because it relies solely on heredity, disregarding its spiritual facet.

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<sup>907</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 2.

<sup>908</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 4.

<sup>909</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 2.

<sup>910</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 3.

<sup>911</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 4.

Henry's college years deepen the gulf separating him from the whiteness of his ancestors. Whereas the father harbours 'a high idea of classical learning', the son prides himself on being 'a good poker-player'.<sup>912</sup> By his own admission, Henry 'loved pleasure too much to apply' himself 'to work, and was too self-indulgent to deny' himself 'anything'.<sup>913</sup> Gone are the ideals of striving and self-discipline of which Jehovah might approve, and what remains in their place is a hubristic conceit that solely by virtue of being a gentleman, Henry will 'bear off the more shining honors of the orator and society-medalist'.<sup>914</sup> In the end, Henry's hopes are dashed and, although he finally receives his lawyer's diploma after 'many tribulations', he loses 'all the prestige and pleasure of receiving it along with' his 'class'.<sup>915</sup> Henry's semi-success forces him to acknowledge his arrogance and admit that he did not succeed precisely because he 'was so certain of winning'.<sup>916</sup> While such combination of conceited pride and self-assurance leads him to despise 'the plodding ways of cold-blooded creatures like Peck even more' than 'the dullness of John Marvel', it also leaves him blind to the attributes of whiteness that others possess, including the eponymous John Marvel. What is more, Henry's admission reveals the permeability of boundaries separating southern whiteness from monstrosity. Whilst Henry's departure from the model of gentility espoused by his forefathers and father transforms him into 'a monstrous arrangement of skin, flesh, social mores, pleasures, dangers, and wounds'; it is also through the perpetuation of such 'social mores' that Henry can maintain a facade of gentility.<sup>917</sup> Although, David Punter observes, 'the law forms a frame or grid through which all bodies must pass', it 'cannot permit the exceptional body'.<sup>918</sup> Since, according to

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<sup>912</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 4; Page, *John Marvel*, 16.

<sup>913</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 26.

<sup>914</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 26.

<sup>915</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 38; and Page, *John Marvel*, 39.

<sup>916</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 42.

<sup>917</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 141.

<sup>918</sup> David Punter, *Gothic Pathologies: The Text, the Body and the Law* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), 45.

the law, ‘there cannot be monsters’, monstrosity ‘is socially and literally constructed’.<sup>919</sup> Southern whiteness, like monstrosity, signifies as a fantasy which Slavoj Žižek terms ‘a “primordial lie”, a screen masking the fundamental *impossibility*’.<sup>920</sup> This impossibility, Žižek writes, forms an inextricable part of ideology which can only be sustained through ‘the reference to such a trans-ideological kernel’.<sup>921</sup> Transgression, therefore, presupposes the fantasy of southern whiteness and transmutes it into a rhetoric spawning monstrous subjects. Essential to this process, Žižek notes, is ‘the paradoxical role of unwritten rules’, or ‘social mores’, which are simultaneously ‘*transgressive*’ because they violate ‘the explicit public Law’, and ‘*coercive*’ in that they ‘restrain the field of choice by prohibiting the possibilities allowed for’ or ‘guaranteed’ by ‘the public Law’.<sup>922</sup> It is precisely such ‘unwritten rules’ that enable Henry to reconstruct his flawed gentility by placing others beyond the boundaries of what is deemed respectable or acceptable. Although Henry realises eventually that the perfection of gentility consisting in an amalgamation of the divine and genteel models is merely a fantasy, initially he asserts his whiteness through turning others into monsters. Henry’s first recollection of John Marvel is far from charitable and not devoid of class stereotyping. Marvel, whom Henry describes as ‘round-faced, round-bodied, bow-legged’ and a ‘moon-faced, slow-witted Saxon’, arrives at the institution to study ‘for the ministry’.<sup>923</sup> Although the adjective ‘shiftless’ is missing from the description, the readiness with which ‘a rusty man with a frowzy beard, and a lank, stooping woman’ are universally accepted to be his parents suggests that ‘slow-witted Saxon’ is Henry’s euphemism for plebeian. Soon, however, Marvel, whom Henry helped with Latin, ‘had come to understand the language better than’ he.<sup>924</sup> Unpleasant as the

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<sup>919</sup> Punter, *Gothic Pathologies*, 45; and Young, *Black Frankenstein*, 22.

<sup>920</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *The Plague of Fantasies* (London: Verso, 1998), 20.

<sup>921</sup> Žižek, *The Plague*, 21.

<sup>922</sup> Žižek, *The Plague*, 28-29.

<sup>923</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 11; and Page, *John Marvel*, 12.

<sup>924</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 26.



admission is, at this point Henry does not realise that what he took for Marvel's 'plodding' is a symptom of the strength of Marvel's character and striving – qualities which Henry lacks. In this reversal of roles, where complacency and striving transcend their socially-preordained boundaries revealing in the process the permeability of whiteness, the student literally masters the master. The dyad that Henry and Marvel create divorces the concept of monstrosity from visual imperfection. Whereas beneath Marvel's 'awkward exterior lay a mine of true gold', Henry's blemish-free physiognomy conceals an inner imperfection that turns him into 'an idle dog'.<sup>925</sup>

Equally illustrative of Henry's shortcomings is his acquaintance with Leo Wolffert.

Wolffert is a student with whom Henry is assigned to share quarters upon his arrival in college. Henry's first impression of Wolffert, unlike that of Marvel, is favourable. Wolffert appears to him 'an affable, gentlemanly fellow, and very nice looking,' with a 'broad brow,' 'curling brown hair,' 'dark eyes; [and] a nose the least bit too large and inclining to be aquiline'.<sup>926</sup> Only when he learns that Wolffert is a Jew, does 'the ridge of his well-carved nose' begin to signify as a monstrous flaw.<sup>927</sup> In Henry's estimation, Wolffert's descent erases his claim to gentility which, combined with his father's rise 'from poverty to the position of chief merchant and capitalist' as well as 'elected mayor', makes him an unsuitable roommate for a gentleman of deep convictions of the virtue of heredity.<sup>928</sup> Following Wolffert's disclosure, Henry promptly vacates the lodging in his absence, justifying his action with a lie that he had met 'an old friend who was very desirous' of sharing his quarters with Henry.<sup>929</sup> The lack of courage that Henry's action betrays places him in direct opposition to his forefathers and father's standard of gentility against which

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<sup>925</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 138; and Page, *John Marvel*, 4.

<sup>926</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 5.

<sup>927</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 5.

<sup>928</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 7.

<sup>929</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 6.

he unwittingly rebels. The harder Henry tries to preserve his gentility, the further he departs from the ancestral archetype. Henry's predicament is emphasised through juxtapositions of his idleness with Wolffert's 'acquirements and ability' which have no equals.<sup>930</sup> Unlike Henry, Wolffert is capable of striving and self-denial. His father, hoping that his son would desist from his chosen path and become a capitalist, 'cut him down to the lowest figure on which he could live'.<sup>931</sup> Ironically, Wolffert's disobedience to his father's wishes earns him a claim to the whiteness that Henry's father extols. Once Henry realises that Wolffert is a man of a disinterested purity of purpose who sees 'beneath the stony surface of the commonplace the ideals and principles that were to reconstruct and resurrect the world', he feels 'ashamed' of his 'poltroonery in leaving him'.<sup>932</sup> Henry's admission of shame at his conduct marks a dawning awareness of his own imperfection. If, as Page writes, 'courage, [and] fidelity' as well as 'honesty, and truth' distinguish a southern gentleman, then Henry falls abominably short of this paradigm.<sup>933</sup> Since, according to Avital Ronell, 'the monster envisions himself in the light of a pair, and thus arrives at a self-designation suggestive of its being a phantom', Henry's acquaintance with the two men offers him a glimpse of his own inadequacy and the untenability of claims to whiteness based on heredity.<sup>934</sup> In internalising the qualities that Henry lacks, Marvel and Wolffert represent the spiritual facet of the model of southern whiteness. Compared to them, Henry is not only a paler shade of white, but also monstrous within.

Although the paths of the three men will cross again, following their graduation they separate and soon correspondence ceases. Full of grandiose schemes, Henry sets up as a lawyer in a neighbouring city. Before he leaves home, his father advises him to 'Be careful

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<sup>930</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 5.

<sup>931</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 9.

<sup>932</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 7; and Page, *John Marvel*, 17.

<sup>933</sup> Page, *The Old South*, 43.

<sup>934</sup> Ronell, *The Telephone Book*, 194.

with other people's money and keep out of debt'.<sup>935</sup> Betraying a monstrous ingratitude, Henry wastes this valuable piece of paternal wisdom. After a promising beginning, Henry's arrogance and misplaced pride lead him to decline cases which he considers 'too small to satisfy him' or 'below' his 'abilities'.<sup>936</sup> It is not long before he is 'welcomed in the poker-game of "the best fellows" in town' and has little time to do anything else 'than enjoy' his 'social success'.<sup>937</sup> Like during his college days, self-discipline is replaced with idleness and, in due course, Henry begins 'to speculate – just a little at first; but more largely after awhile'.<sup>938</sup> However, in the choice of his new profession, Henry stands in breach of southern tradition. Unlike the law which was 'the most desirable' profession for 'every young Southerner of good social connection who was too poor to live without work, or too ambitious to be contented with his plantation', speculating is not deemed worthy of a respectable and self-respecting southerner.<sup>939</sup> Henry, then, transgresses the southern standard of whiteness and though his newly earned wealth enables him to keep 'a pair of horses' and engage in 'other gay pleasures', this display of wealth transforms his gentility into passing for a gentleman.<sup>940</sup> Henry's ambition 'to go to Congress' and his wealth are brought to an abrupt end when, through an unfortunate accident, a scheme in which he has invested all collapses, leaving him bankrupt.<sup>941</sup> Penniless, Henry relocates to another city to start afresh. Upon arrival, he puts up at a respectable boarding house, Mrs Kale's, and dutifully sets up his practice. Initially, the 'unwritten rules' of gentility prevent him from developing the selflessness enshrined in the paradigm of Christ. Although he offers to carry parcels for two elderly ladies who also reside at Mrs Kale's establishment, he feels 'at heart rather ashamed to be lugging two large bundles for two shabby-looking old

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<sup>935</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 44.

<sup>936</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 45.

<sup>937</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 45-46.

<sup>938</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 45.

<sup>939</sup> Page, *The Old South*, 46.

<sup>940</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 49.

<sup>941</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 49.

women'.<sup>942</sup> Henry's remark opens a gap between his circumstances and his conception of gentility. Both menial labour and accompanying ladies less than finely attired are damaging to one's gentility: the former because it is incommensurate with it, and the latter because it carries the threat of lower-class contamination. His feelings of shame betray his awareness of the ontological instability of his position and highlight the acuteness of his need to preserve a semblance of whiteness. For Henry, the concept of whiteness merges with passing for gentility, transforming him into a gentleman *manqué*. Although Henry admits that he had 'no association in the town except the poor' and 'had come to know some of them well', he qualifies the admission by adding 'as well as a man in a good coat can know men in a workman's blouse'.<sup>943</sup> Considering his pecuniary circumstances, Henry's insistence on class distinction is both misplaced and emphasises the chasm separating him from the standard of southern gentleman. Indeed, while the law may be a suitable profession for a gentleman insofar as it acts as 'the surest stepping-stone to political preferment', in Henry's case such a lofty ambition is replaced with a rather more prosaic and utilitarian aim of earning a living.<sup>944</sup> The necessity of having to earn his own keep marks Henry's departure from the model of hereditary gentility. His projection of whiteness betrays both 'lack, [and] excess', both of which characterise the monster: it exceeds the actual while pointing to a monstrous lack of the divine and earthly prerequisites of whiteness.<sup>945</sup> Only when 'having pawned everything pawnable' he possessed to augment his scant earnings, does Henry perceive the paradox inherent in gentility.<sup>946</sup> Reduced to near penury, he contemplates reverting to his old habit of gambling because 'Gambling was gentlemanly – at least, gentlemen gambled.'<sup>947</sup> Although he resists

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<sup>942</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 95.

<sup>943</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 312; and Page, *John Marvel*, 354.

<sup>944</sup> Page, *The Old South*, 46.

<sup>945</sup> Weiss, 'Ten Theses', 125.

<sup>946</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 203.

<sup>947</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 203.

the temptation, the resistance does not stem from a nobility of spirit which his father admires, but rather from the conviction that ‘as soon as a man played for his living, he crossed the line and ceased to be a gentleman’.<sup>948</sup> Henry’s words reveal the ‘social mores’ according to which gentility is constructed to be not only inadequate, but also self-negating. Though incongruent with the self-denial of the Christ model or the honesty of Page’s paradigm of southern gentleman, gambling is ranked among gentlemanly pursuits. The gentlemanly code of practice therefore precludes the attainment of gentility, rendering its practitioners monstrous. This paradox inherent in gentility is made manifest to Henry when in the gambling house. Upon overhearing a conversation between a young man and his companions at the card table, Henry is informed that the gentleman is ‘one of the real upper class’, and his ‘soul revolted at the thought of this man standing as the type of our upper class’.<sup>949</sup> The gentleman in question is John Carter, the son of a wealthy entrepreneur and ‘the *bon parti*, the coveted of aspiring mothers’.<sup>950</sup> Henry’s indignation is aroused less by Carter’s gambling than by his face ‘with marks of dissipation’, in which he sees a reflection of his former self.<sup>951</sup> The clarity of this vision carries with it a realisation of how far he had strayed from the whiteness espoused by his father. For the first time, Henry becomes fully conscious of his monstrosity, particularly as he entered the establishment with the intention to gamble. Following this failed attempt to bolster his finances, Henry is forced to abandon his lodging at Mrs Kale’s and moves ‘to the poorest part of the city’.<sup>952</sup> Although he admits that living at Mrs Kale’s he ‘had been playing the gentleman’, he conceals the true reason for his removal from Mrs Kale for fear of ‘com[ing] down in her esteem’.<sup>953</sup> In his unwillingness to abandon the pretence of gentility, Henry evokes

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<sup>948</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 204.

<sup>949</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 207.

<sup>950</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 310.

<sup>951</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 206.

<sup>952</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 215.

<sup>953</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 215.

Derrida's concept of the example. Derrida observes of the example that it is 'first of all for others, and beyond the self', therefore 'whoever gives the example is not equal to the example he gives, even if he does everything to follow it in advance'.<sup>954</sup> Henry's dishonesty, stemming from the need to protect the image of gentility, renders him unequal to the task of representing the standard which exceeds the quotidian embodiment, reaching beyond to the presupposed wholeness of the ideal.

Henry's pretension to whiteness is all the more monstrous because it is underlain by the awareness of his imperfection, the result of which 'had been [his] slipping down, down' and finding himself 'near the bottom'.<sup>955</sup> The acceptance of the blame for finding himself in such a predicament leads Henry to re-evaluate the standard of whiteness. Wandering the streets of the city, Henry observes that the vulgarity of display of material wealth is a testament to the owners of such edifices 'hav[ing] no traditions and no ideals'.<sup>956</sup> If the monster, as Baldick observes, 'is one who has so far transgressed the bounds of human nature as to become a moral advertisement', then, in their excessiveness, such gaudy demonstrations of wealth are monstrous distortions of gentility. The grandeur of the display appears to Henry both transgressive and 'only a counterfeit, a poor imitation of what they [bourgeoisie] imagine to be the manners of the upper class abroad whose indifferent manners they ape'.<sup>957</sup> This observation enables Henry to redefine his whiteness as a matter of refinement grounded in tradition which is, however, lacking the pecuniary resources that would furnish a gentlemanly lifestyle. Though Henry's reformulation of gentility begins to resemble that of his father's, it also reveals the latter's model to be divergent from the archetype of southern whiteness. Since transgression presupposes and

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<sup>954</sup> Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, 41.

<sup>955</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 217.

<sup>956</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 199.

<sup>957</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 199.

sustains every fantasy, Henry's mutated gentility supports the ideal of southern whiteness in its pure form. Southern whiteness, therefore, carries its own antagonism, whereby its reconstructions can only be synecdochical in order to sustain the idea of perfection. To this extent, southern whiteness shares in 'the fundamental paradox of the Lacanian *objet petit a* which emerges as being-lost'.<sup>958</sup> Henry only appreciates the loftier ideals of whiteness once he has departed from them. The fantasy of gentility produces monstrous subjects and only from his position of gentleman *manqué* is Henry able to perceive 'the spark of sentiment' that manifests itself in 'a bit of a plant in a little pot' which symbolises 'struggling and striving'.<sup>959</sup> This is precisely why, once he stops 'playing the gentleman' and moves to the poorest quarter of the city, he is charmed by 'a little house' with 'a rose-bush carefully trained over the door'.<sup>960</sup> Supplying a link to land, the plant appears symbolic of the virtue of hereditary gentility and the finer sentiment of tradition to which Henry, despite his blunders, is instinctively drawn. It is in this part of the city where his path crosses with Marvel and Wolffert, both of whom have renounced worldly glory and devoted their lives to the service of the poor: Marvel preaching and helping by any means possible and Wolffert championing for the recognition of their rights. While Marvel is the 'simple follower of Christ' who is 'threadbare like' the poor whom he serves, Wolffert dies 'a Christian death', trampled by a striking mob, 'in the act of supplicating for those who slew him'.<sup>961</sup> Although both Marvel and Wolffert embody the Christ-like nobility of spirit, they are barred from the attainment of whiteness proper by virtue of their descent. Regardless, their conduct leads Henry to admit 'how much nobler [than him] both had always been'.<sup>962</sup> This recognition of Marvel and Wolffert's nobility, though redeeming and cathartic in itself, emphasises Henry's monstrous shortcomings: Marvel and Wolffert are

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<sup>958</sup> Žižek, *The Plague*, 13.

<sup>959</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 200.

<sup>960</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 215.

<sup>961</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 443; and Page, *John Marvel*, 552.

<sup>962</sup> Page, *John Marvel*, 553.

marvels because in meeting the Christian standard of whiteness, they surpass Henry's incarnation which, ironically, turns Henry into a marvel because he departs from the model despite his hereditarily-predetermined claim. With this admission Henry seals his status as a monstrous aberration and accepts the unattainability of whiteness as an organic whole. Page's construction of the three characters, though characterised by a naturalistic tendency to stereotype, inadvertently reveals the malleability of the monstrous. Compared to *Gordon Keith* and *Red Rock*, the novel itself is a marvel, or indeed a monster, in its candid admission that, irrespective of the Post-Reconstruction contingencies, only partial reconstructions and approximations are both possible and indispensable to the perpetuation of the ideal.

This futile struggle to remain true to the ideal of southern whiteness becomes evident in Ellen Glasgow's *The Voice of the People*.<sup>963</sup> Published in 1900, the novel is set in Kingsborough, Virginia, modelled after Williamsburg, 'and Richmond from 1870 to 1898'.<sup>964</sup> Peopled with anachronistic characters who exemplify the hierarchical structure of the Kingsborough milieu, *The Voice* portrays 'a society in transition'.<sup>965</sup> The upheavals of the Civil War and Reconstruction notwithstanding, Kingsborough 'clung to her amiable habits'.<sup>966</sup> Having once been 'a chartered city' and now boasting 'only a charter', and despite the valiant efforts of its denizens to preserve the former grandeur, Kingsborough itself becomes emblematic of filial rebellion that disturbed the wholeness of the body politic: first through participation 'in the cause of American independence' and then secession from the Union.<sup>967</sup> Though its inhabitants, like those of the state, present 'a countenance that was unerringly Anglo-Saxon', it is also a countenance that has been

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<sup>963</sup> Ellen Glasgow, *The Voice of the People* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1900).

<sup>964</sup> McDowell, *Ellen Glasgow*, 54.

<sup>965</sup> McDowell, *Ellen Glasgow*, 53.

<sup>966</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 13.

<sup>967</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 197; and Glasgow, *The Voice*, 13.



‘modified by the conditions of centuries of changes’.<sup>968</sup> Given the altered nature of not only the place, but also its residents, any attempts at a resurrection or propagation of genteel ideals are doomed to failure; not only gentility, but also rebellion runs in the veins of Kingsborough’s finest. However, since there is no harm in trying, and striving is counted among the attributes of whiteness, the protagonists of *The Voice* replicate the ways of their antecedents and, in doing so, demonstrate the monstrous incompleteness of their reconstructions. When it comes to the monster mash of Kingsborough denizens, the inherent imperfection of their whiteness is literally inscribed on their bodies. Although the blemishes which Glasgow’s protagonists sport hardly merit the appellation monstrous *per se*, they constitute a constant reminder of the tenuousness of their projections of gentility that threaten to unravel at any moment. Accordingly, Judge Bassett, the exponent of the uppermost echelon of Kingsborough society, represents ‘a boldly limned composite likeness of his race’, an impression which is amplified by his name that conveys both an aristocratic and pure-bred pedigree.<sup>969</sup> This image is belied by ‘the white paint [that] was fast peeling away’ from the shutters of his study, testifying to his altered circumstances and contrasting sharply with the ‘rows of bygone Bassetts’ who ‘looked down on their departed possessions – stately and severe in the artificial severity of periwigs and starched ruffles’.<sup>970</sup> The Judge may be ‘a Bassett of Virginia’, but what remains from the composite legacy of his antecedents has been reduced to a name and a former slave, now servant, Caesar.<sup>971</sup> The bewigged Bassetts are the other in the dyad of the Judge’s gentility and their still presence serves to emphasise the atotality and spectrality of his whiteness. Despite ‘his classic head’ jarring with his ‘ill-fitting boots’, the Judge projects an air of gentility bestowing, in the fashion of a feudal lord, ‘an absent-minded, habitual friendliness’ and

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<sup>968</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 299.

<sup>969</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 9. Here, similarly to *The Battle Ground*, Glasgow invokes a breed of dog, Basset Hound, to communicate the idea of breeding.

<sup>970</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 8.

<sup>971</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 4.

‘rich, beneficent smile’ upon his inferiors.<sup>972</sup> The mismatched compositeness of the Judge’s appearance, itself evocative of the monster, constitutes a visible proof of his departure from ancestral gentility that marks him as a man in transition. The Judge’s acceptance of Nicholas Burr, a boy whose family is commonly regarded as ‘white trash’, into the school he runs for the progeny of local gentry may be read both as an instance of benevolent kindness and as a disregard for class-consciousness. However, his offer to help the boy is tinged with regret which, albeit brief, suggests that he feels guilty of a breach of genteel decorum. Although he stands firmly and resists the insistence and scheming of Mrs Webb – a former belle whom circumstances transformed into a sour lady – to have Nicholas removed from the school, the victory he gains ‘would have felt pleasanter had it been defeat. It was as if he had taken some secret advantage of a woman – of a widow’.<sup>973</sup> This glimmer of progressiveness places the Judge in direct opposition to Mrs Webb who evokes the power of tradition that makes ‘those who go counter to her wishes feel they have violated the loyalties which ought to command their deepest reverence’.<sup>974</sup> In opposing Mrs Dudley Webb – ‘a symbol of the aristocratic South in eclipse’ – the Judge inadvertently rebels against not only the model of southern gentility, but also the dictates of chivalry on which it is founded, tainting his reconstruction of whiteness with the monstrous vice of filial rebellion. Mrs Webb – formerly Miss Dudley – married a northerner who ‘was a jovial young buck, who lived in his cards and cups and loathed a quarrel as he loved a fight’.<sup>975</sup> With the outbreak of the war and ‘caring little for either

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<sup>972</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 4; and Glasgow, *The Voice*, 5.

<sup>973</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 120.

<sup>974</sup> McDowell, *Ellen Glasgow*, 57.

<sup>975</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 112. The name Dudley furnishes a direct link to English aristocracy. Its most famous bearers were Lord Guildford Dudley executed in 1554 for an attempt to usurp the crown from Mary Tudor in 1553 and Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and the favourite courtier of Elizabeth I, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, vol. 17 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 69 and 92-112. Hence, in order to preserve the aristocratic connection Mrs Webb’s father only consents to the marriage on the condition that she ‘should drop the name of Jane and be known as Dudley in her husband’s household’, in Glasgow, *The Voice*, 112.

cause', Julius Webb fought for Virginia and died in her service.<sup>976</sup> While the gentleman's frivolity and flexibility of conscience are hardly compatible with striving and denial of self-gratification, his death in combat expunges such flaws and elevates him to martyrdom, at least in his wife's eyes. On her husband's death, Mrs Dudley Webb donned her weeds and has worn them proudly since. The only adornment of this sombre attire is 'a button that had been cut from a gray coat' which she pins 'At her throat'.<sup>977</sup> The perpetual mourning in which she immures herself and the single relic of the past accrue to a monumentalisation of a lack: they point to a site of origin and emphasise her departure from it. Consequently, Mrs Webb externalises the incompleteness of her whiteness, an abortive assemblage of 'skin,' 'flesh,' 'social mores,' and garment, whose projection of gentility requires an excess of decorum to conceal lack.<sup>978</sup> Forced to support herself by renting 'her spare rooms to student borders', Mrs Webb's gentility is as patched up as the sleeves of 'her black gown' which 'she sat up far into the night to darn'.<sup>979</sup> Since 'all great things', Nietzsche observes, 'in order to inscribe themselves into men's hearts with eternal demands [...] must first wander the earth as monstrous and fear-inducing caricatures', Mrs Webb's sutured whiteness is revered because it is imperfect.<sup>980</sup> It is her struggle to maintain a semblance of gentility, itself a characteristic of male whiteness, that makes General Battle 'feel positively unworthy to sit in her presence', for her manner evokes his 'past indiscretions'.<sup>981</sup> Mrs Webb's projected saintliness, similarly to Miss Angela's in *The Miller*, reduces others' gentility to second-rate imitation, which prompts Sally Bassett, Judge Bassett's daughter-in-law, to observe of her husband: 'Tom, like all men, believed

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<sup>976</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 112.

<sup>977</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 114.

<sup>978</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 141.

<sup>979</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 113.

<sup>980</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Preface', in *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, intr. Robert C. Holub, trans. and ed. Marion Faber, *Oxford World's Classics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3.

<sup>981</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 115.

Mrs Webb to be a martyr until I convinced him that she martyred others.’<sup>982</sup> Despite her projection of gentility, a veritable candidate for Marian saintliness Mrs Webb is not. Even the sight of Nicholas Burr running to school without a coat in winter failed to stir her compassion, and her ‘placid eyes would not darken’.<sup>983</sup> While such indifference to the plight of her social inferiors may be imputed to the harshness of her reduced circumstances, the awareness of which makes the need to dissociate herself and her son from the stigma of poverty all the more acute; it nonetheless suggests that Mrs Webb’s embodiment of the biblical ideal is far from flawless. Indeed, when it comes to defending her son’s gentility and tradition Mrs Webb demonstrates a determined single-mindedness. Her son, Dudley, she declares, ‘is a gentleman, and will not submit to association with his inferiors. His grandfather would not have done so before him’.<sup>984</sup> That her son’s gentility is nominal only and based on the charity of her more affluent acquaintances transforms it into a signifier with merely one signified – blood legacy – and reveals its monstrous incompleteness. The comparison with his grandfather, while including her son in the circuit of heredity, concurrently highlights his difference from his antecedent. Compared with his illustrious grandfather, Dudley Webb is reduced to a ‘hideous progeny’.

One of Dudley Webb’s benefactors is General Battle who, along with the Judge, constitutes a pillar of Kingsborough gentility. Though his name is evocative of striving, the only battles the General fights these days are with his former slaves, now servants, and obesity. A widower, the General is ‘a stout gentleman with a red face’ whose ‘expansive shirt front’ sports a ‘collar [that] had wilted away’.<sup>985</sup> The shabby splendour of the General’s apparel is mirrored in his equipage that comprises a vehicle ‘of an old-fashioned

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<sup>982</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 350.

<sup>983</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 121.

<sup>984</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 117.

<sup>985</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 18; and Glasgow, *The Voice*, 19.

make, bare of varnish, with rickety, mud-splashed wheels and rusty springs'.<sup>986</sup> While the shabbiness of the General's appearance bears traces of bygone finery, his stoutness bespeaks a more sinister flaw in his projection of whiteness. Indeed, by his own admission, his 'great-grandfather Battle raised himself'.<sup>987</sup> Since 'excess' and 'multiplication' characterise the monster, the General's 'jovial-faced' and 'wide-girthed' gentility are symbolic of his inflated claim to hereditary whiteness.<sup>988</sup> Neither is his sister free from the malady. Miss Chris, predictably a belle in her youth, 'as she passed middle age the family failing seized upon her, and she grew huge and unwieldy, the disproportion of her enormous figure to her small feet giving her an awkward, waddling walk'.<sup>989</sup> Resembling a mammy, rather than a lady, Miss Chris's stoutness, like her brother's, reveals her plebeian origin and turns her gentility into a monstrous usurpation. Even her devotion to the service of her brother and his family, though truly Marian in its self-effacement, is prone to excess. When, alarmed by the mysterious disappearance of chickens, Miss Chris intervenes in the kitchen, she is unceremoniously rebuked by Aunt Verbeny who declares that 'Hit don't becomst de quality ter fluster demse'ves over de gwines on uv er low-lifted fowl'.<sup>990</sup> In her zeal to protect the livelihood of her brother, Miss Chris transgresses the boundaries of gentility, betraying her parvenu roots. Since 'It is the propensity of the monster to deconstruct at any time, to always be in the process of decomposition', Miss Chris's slippage is doubly significant because it reveals the imperfection of her aspiration to gentility.<sup>991</sup> Not only does the excessiveness of her and her brother's bodies reflect the untenability of their claim to whiteness, but also transforms them, literally and metaphorically, into monstrous travesties. Since repetition is 'recollected forwards', always

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<sup>986</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 18.

<sup>987</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 119.

<sup>988</sup> Weiss, 'Ten Theses', 125; and Glasgow, *The Voice*, 4.

<sup>989</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 55.

<sup>990</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 55.

<sup>991</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 37.

to come, the General and Miss Chris's projection of whiteness both replicates the plebeianism of their ancestors and anticipates the flawed gentility of General Battle's offspring.<sup>992</sup> Though the General's progeny is seemingly free from the vice of excess, they are by no means flawless. Indeed, the indelible stain of the parvenu not only taints, but is also amplified in the next generation. The Judge's son, Bernard, is 'a bright-faced, snub-nosed boy' whose 'girlish mouth' bespeaks a lack of honour and cowardice.<sup>993</sup> Bernard partakes of the insidious monstrosity of Jekyll or Dorian Gray, 'because [his] exterior hides a corrupt self'.<sup>994</sup> Unsurprisingly, he grows up to be the seducer of a local grocer's daughter who, in trying to preserve 'the whiteness of his own skin', spreads a rumour laying the blame at Nicholas's door.<sup>995</sup> The seduction is merely a prelude to his later misconduct which culminates in charges of felony and self-imposed exile from the state to avoid prosecution. Since 'It is simply impossible that a person would not have his parents' and forefathers' qualities and preferences in his body', Bernard's misdeeds betray a legacy of 'corrupted blood' cloaked in the mask of gentility.<sup>996</sup> In Bernard's case, Lacan's circuit works in reverse and his predecessors become implicated in his transgressions insofar as his misdeeds are an amplification of hereditary flaws.

Indeed, the Battles' gentility, in a monster-like fashion, undergoes mutation in each generation, so much so that Eugenia, the General's daughter, fears 'getting fat like [her] forefathers'.<sup>997</sup> Ironically, Eugenia, whose name not only alludes to eugenics and notions of purity of species, but also denotes noble descent, literally embodies a divergence from

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<sup>992</sup> Kierkegaard, *Repetition*, 4.

<sup>993</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 68.

<sup>994</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 74.

<sup>995</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 260.

<sup>996</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good*, 161.

<sup>997</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 225.

the model of southern gentility.<sup>998</sup> ‘A plain, dark, little girl, with an unearthly pallor of complexion’, Eugenia departs from the ideal of southern femininity.<sup>999</sup> According to Uncle Ish, a family servant, ‘it ‘ud mek Ole Miss tu’n in her grave to hear tell ‘bout her gwines on. De quality en de po’ folks is all de same ter her’.<sup>1000</sup> Clearly, in Uncle Ish’s conception of the ideal of the southern lady there is no room for class liberality; just like her aunt, Miss Chris, Eugenia does not know her place. Eugenia’s other ‘gwines on’, to which her mother might take exception, include ‘talking like a darkey’, a failed attempt to wear breeches which she was ‘made to get out of’ by Miss Chris, and an aversion to hemming ‘cup-towels’.<sup>1001</sup> Since skin is ‘the place where inside threatens to become outside, [...] the place of suture that only barely conceals the mess of identity and subjectivity underneath’, the paler shade of white of Eugenia’s complexion highlights her non-conformity and the unattainability of the ideal of which even Mrs Webb with her heightened class-consciousness falls short.<sup>1002</sup> When Eugenia reaches womanhood, the paleness of her skin is complemented by a forehead that is ‘too high’, a chin that is ‘too long’, and a nose that ‘isn’t all that a nose should be.’<sup>1003</sup> This irregularity of features, bordering on excessive, is symbolic of ‘the assemblage of ill-fitting fragments’ that constitute her gentility and never coalesce into a harmonious whole.<sup>1004</sup> Accordingly, Eugenia combines ‘a rooted aversion to duty’ with selfless charity and would, in her father’s words, ‘damn herself to do a kindness’.<sup>1005</sup> Since ‘The essence of aristocracy is hereditary; it is not a product of learned manners,’ Eugenia’s manifest non-conformity, not only of appearance but also sensibility, stems from the acquired status of her gentility that negates the possibility of repetition of

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<sup>998</sup> Eugenia is a feminine version of Eugene which derives from ‘the Greek name *Eugenios* (from *eugen*□s “well-born, noble”)', in Hanks, Hardcastle, Hodges, eds., *A Dictionary*, 94.

<sup>999</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 48.

<sup>1000</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 30.

<sup>1001</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 62; and Glasgow, *The Voice*, 100; and Glasgow, *The Voice*, 70.

<sup>1002</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 159.

<sup>1003</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 223.

<sup>1004</sup> Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow*, 146.

<sup>1005</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 223; and Glasgow, *The Voice*, 174.

the imagined perfection which inspired grandfather Battle to raise himself.<sup>1006</sup> Like her father and aunt's gentility, her incarnation of whiteness is a distortion made visible through the imperfection of her countenance. However, it is the awareness of her own unconventionality that draws Eugenia to Nicholas Burr. Echoing Betty in *The Battle*, Eugenia recasts the masculine ideal and professes that she would 'rather a man would be clever than handsome'.<sup>1007</sup> Unlike beauty, intellect is something with which nature has endowed Nicholas generously. In the Bassetts and the Webbs' incarnation of whiteness, supported by the belief of 'fellow citizens' in the unshakable value of 'hereditary virtues', striving and denial of self-gratification have been replaced by a complacency which does not even spare General Battle and his son, despite their lack of illustrious lineage.<sup>1008</sup> By contrast, in Nicholas, who acts as an inverted image of the dissipated pseudo-aristocracy of Kingsborough, such qualities of whiteness as striving and self-denial are amplified and augmented by an unwavering sense of honour. His ascent to whiteness proper, however, is barred by a lack of genteel lineage. The son of Amos Burr, 'a disorderly and procrastinating' peanut farmer, Nicholas hails from a humble stock.<sup>1009</sup> The traces of his father's legacy are carved in Nicholas's physiognomy and create a visible discord with the more noble traits of his character. Beneath Nicholas's 'red head', 'freckles' and 'ugly little face' lies ambition which, in response to the Judge's suggestion that he will become 'a farmer like his father before him', prompts him to declare boldly that 'There ain't nothin' in peanut-raisin' and that he would 'rather be a judge'.<sup>1010</sup> Nicholas's filial rebellion marks his first step on the path to whiteness, and with it comes the awareness of the inadequacy of his aspiration. It is not until Nicholas joins the Judge's school, however, that he feels

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<sup>1006</sup> Linda Brigham, 'Aristocratic Monstrosity and Sublime Femininity in De Montfort', in *Studies in English Literature, 1500 – 1900* 43.3 (2003): 702.

<sup>1007</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 131.

<sup>1008</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 165.

<sup>1009</sup> McDowell, *Ellen Glasgow*, 56.

<sup>1010</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 5; and Glasgow, *The Voice*, 7.



‘ashamed of his ugliness, of his coarse clothes, of his briar-scratched legs, of his freckles, and of the unalterable colour of his hair’.<sup>1011</sup> For the first time Nicholas becomes conscious of the irreconcilability of his heritage and aspiration that renders him ‘common’ in Dudley Webb’s words, and ‘uncommon’ in the Judge’s estimation.<sup>1012</sup> Nicholas, literally, embodies class difference which, while emphasising his singularity, marks him as a doubly monstrous mutation, for it displaces him and threatens the preordained wholeness of the genteel ideal. Although the whiteness of the Bassetts and the Webbs is flawed insofar as they depart from the ideal of gentility, it is supported by virtue of descent. Nicholas’s monstrosity is predetermined by a legacy of peanut farming which renders his aspiration a monstrously monstrous excess that threatens to undermine the ‘integral and sacred whole’ of the gentleman’s body.<sup>1013</sup> This is precisely why, the General, even once Nicholas has become a successful lawyer, insists on discussing nothing but crops with him: ‘the boy’s not a lawyer – only gentlemen belong to the bar, but there’s nobody too high or too low to be a farmer’.<sup>1014</sup> In the General’s case, striving has been replaced with an unwavering resolve to maintain the *status quo* which dictates that Nicholas be kept in his place. Arguably, to the General, whiteness and monstrosity are ‘a matter of positionality’, something Nicholas learns when still a boy.<sup>1015</sup> The first lesson is sententiously given by his stepmother, Marthy Burr, who declares of handsome men: ‘They’re pretty enough to look at when you’re feelin’ first-rate, but when you git the neuralgy they sort of turns yo’ stomach.’<sup>1016</sup> Since she suffers from chronic neuralgia, which becomes symptomatic of the flaw of her class, Marthy considers anything other a distortion. Ironically, the more time Nicholas spends in the Judge’s school, the more jaundiced his view of his family becomes:

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<sup>1011</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 46.

<sup>1012</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 46.

<sup>1013</sup> Baldick, *In Frankenstein’s Shadow*, 14.

<sup>1014</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 201.

<sup>1015</sup> Knadler, ‘Untragic Mulatto’, 435.

<sup>1016</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 86.

his stepmother seems ‘dried and brown like a hickory nut’, looking at his half-sister, Sairy Jane, leaves him wondering ‘why she didn’t have any eyelashes’, and his younger brother, Jubal, ‘was all gums’.<sup>1017</sup> Nicholas’s alienation from his family grows commensurately with his ambition of betterment, as does his feeling of misplacement. When Eugenia and he are courting, Nicholas asserts, not without a tinge of bitterness, that to the Battles he is ‘Good enough in [his] place, [...] good enough in the fields, at the plough, or in the barnyard’.<sup>1018</sup> Nicholas is conscious of his transgression, of the composite nature of his hereditarily-blighted subjectivity that is indelibly etched in his ‘square-jawed, large-featured face’, the ‘uncompromising ugliness’ of which is ‘the ugliness of individuality’.<sup>1019</sup> The coarse assemblage which is his face both holds him firmly within the circuit of inheritance of ‘the monstrous mass’ and, literally, renders him a monstrous mass.<sup>1020</sup> The ugliness of his countenance may mark his individuality, however, once he breaks out of his social sphere, it becomes a mark of monstrous transgression. Although what sets Nicholas apart from, in Tom Bassett’s estimation, ‘those blasted people of his’, and supports his claim to whiteness, are his ‘brains and education’, these intellectual achievements are always mitigated by the unattractiveness of his face that externalises the spectre of the ‘white trash’ monster who, though tamed, is ever ready to emerge.<sup>1021</sup> His striving notwithstanding, Nicholas is marked with ‘Essential monstrosity’ which

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<sup>1017</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 97.

<sup>1018</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 212.

<sup>1019</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 185; and Glasgow, *The Voice*, 303.

<sup>1020</sup> Baldick, *In Frankenstein’s Shadow*, 101.

<sup>1021</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 159. It is worth noting that for Chesnutt whiteness was analogous to education, the lack of which, and not the hue of the skin, prevented the moral and financial elevation of the black population. His journal entry for 7<sup>th</sup> June 1875, made whilst boarding with a black family and reporting a conversation with a black farmer bemoaning his lot, contains the following remark: ““Well, you certainly make something?” “Yes”. “Now, I’ll tell you. You say you are all renters, and get cheated out of your labor, why dont [sic] you send your children to school, and qualify them to look out for themselves, to own property, to figure and think about what they are doing, so that they may do better than you?””, Charles Waddell Chesnutt, *The Journals of Charles W. Chesnutt*, ed. Richard H. Brodhead (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 62.

constitutes ‘an integral feature of very specific bodies’ and which cannot be exorcised.<sup>1022</sup>

The undecidability of Nicholas’s position suddenly manifests itself to Eugenia with a staggering clarity. When she meets Nicholas’s father who attempts to engage her on a matter of business, she realises ‘for the first time the full horror of the fact’ that this ‘hairy, ominous, [and] uncouth’ man ‘was father to the man she loved’.<sup>1023</sup> Since her conception of Nicholas had been shaped by his association with the Judge, ‘she had conceived of his poverty and his people only in the heroic measures that related to his emancipation from them’.<sup>1024</sup> This belated discovery of the vulgar in Nicholas’s legacy demonstrates Eugenia’s ‘will to truth-reversal, to untruth at any price’.<sup>1025</sup> In order to dissociate herself from the taint of Nicholas’s family, Eugenia needs to concentrate on the surface in which she sees reflected the inferiority of Nicholas’s heritage. While his ugliness may be a symbol of his monstrous heritage, looking beneath the mere facade would reveal Nicholas’s nobility of spirit which, in turn, would violate the preordained integrity of hereditary gentility to which she aspires. Ironically, in an act of doubling, the distorted surface of Nicholas’s face mirrors Eugenia’s maimed claim to gentility. This determination to preserve untruth leads Eugenia to acknowledge that Nicholas’s ambition and striving will never be emancipated from the shadow of Amos Burr and are not sufficient to support his claim to gentility, whether it be endorsed by the Judge or not. For Eugenia, this indelible stain of his heritage transforms Nicholas’s whiteness into a monstrous travesty, so much so that ‘had she, in the beginning, seen him side by side with his father, she could not have loved him’.<sup>1026</sup> Writing in 1643, Sir Thomas Browne pronounces the mob ‘the multitude, the numerous piece of monstrosity, which taken asunder seeme men, and the reasonable creatures of God; but confused together, make but one great beast, & a

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<sup>1022</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 29.

<sup>1023</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 244.

<sup>1024</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 244.

<sup>1025</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good*, 53.

<sup>1026</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 244.

monstrosity more prodigious than Hydra'.<sup>1027</sup> Eugenia's altered conception of Nicholas reveals this plasticity of the monstrous, whereby 'taken asunder' from his father, Nicholas seems man, but combined with his father he forms an inextricable part of the hideous multitude. Convinced of Nicholas's innate monstrosity that no amount of striving can erase, Eugenia readily accepts her brother's slander about Nicholas's dalliance with Bessie Pollard, for which Nicholas cannot forgive her, and they part ways. Nicholas's resemblance to his father reifies Eugenia's deep-rooted belief that 'the ugly entails the idea of evil' – the evil presumption of lower-class aspiration.<sup>1028</sup> Recollecting his 'convulsed features, the furrow' that, in a Frankensteinian fashion, 'cleft the forehead like a seam', Eugenia glimpses in Nicholas 'the man in whom, for its brief instant, evil was triumphant'.<sup>1029</sup> Nicholas's ugliness, if confined to his social sphere, would neither be evil nor monstrous, however because of the undecidability of his position, Eugenia, in a twist reminiscent of Jekyll and Hyde, imagines she can glimpse the hideousness of his plebeianism in his features. At this moment, echoing Dorian Gray, Eugenia realises that Nicholas is 'a complex multiform creature that bore within itself strange legacies of thought and passion, and whose flesh was tainted with the monstrous maladies of the dead', and the still living.<sup>1030</sup> However, this revelation proves a double-edged sword, for it leads to the realisation of the permeability of heritage and initiates a scrutiny of her family. Looking at her relations, Eugenia suspects that beneath Miss Chris's candid 'countenance', Bernard's 'overwrought youthfulness', and 'the apoplectic credulity of the general's' lay 'latent possibilities – obscure tendencies, which were revealed to her now with microscopic exaggeration'.<sup>1031</sup> Although the members of her family do not appear as anomalous as Nicholas, the existence of 'latent possibilities' renders them incomplete –

<sup>1027</sup> Sir Thomas Browne, *The Major Works*, ed. C.A. Patrides (London: Penguin, 1977), 134.

<sup>1028</sup> Denise Gigante, 'Facing the Ugly: The Case of "Frankenstein"', in *ELH* 67.2 (200): 576

<sup>1029</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 255-56.

<sup>1030</sup> Wilde, *The Picture*, 159.

<sup>1031</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 253.

intrinsically monstrous. The fact that these ‘obscure tendencies’ do not mark them as evil suggests the presence of a value system, ‘a hypocritical moral code that recoils from its creations’, according to which monstrosity and whiteness are graded.<sup>1032</sup> This is why, Nicholas reflects, Eugenia ‘would not have turned from the brother of her blood had he been damned in Holy Writ’, as she did from him.<sup>1033</sup> In *The Voice*, similarly to *The Deliverance* and *The Miller*, Glasgow’s conception of this moral code echoes that of ‘the other American realists contemporary with her’, and appears a tempered version of Social Darwinism, according to which ‘an individual is in part capable of directing his activity, even if heredity and environment restrict him’.<sup>1034</sup> Heredity and environment are both responsible for Eugenia’s betrayal and Nicholas’s growing ambition, prompting him ‘to throw himself and his future into the service of his State’ and culminating in his elevation to the governor of Virginia.<sup>1035</sup> Unlike Eugenia who surrenders to the dictates of heredity and marries within her social sphere, Nicholas throws off the shackles of social determinism, cementing his transgressive distinctiveness. Like Victor Frankenstein, the monster craftsman *par excellence*, Nicholas’s ambition and pursuit of gentility become obsessions that ‘stand in direct competition with sexual love’ and separate him ‘from the sources of life in other people’.<sup>1036</sup> While marriage is ‘nonsense’ for which Nicholas has ‘no time’, he belatedly realises that ‘he wanted to be loved, if by a dog’.<sup>1037</sup> The seeming indifference of the master-craftsman for whom ‘solitude is voluntary’ contrasts sharply with the passionate outburst bemoaning his alienation and suggests that, despite his success, in Nicholas the monster-craftsman and monster merge into one.<sup>1038</sup> In uniting the ‘creature and creator’, and regardless of his elevated position, Nicholas cannot escape the

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<sup>1032</sup> Baldick, *In Frankenstein’s Shadow*, 152.

<sup>1033</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 260-61.

<sup>1034</sup> McDowell, *Ellen Glasgow*, 22.

<sup>1035</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 310.

<sup>1036</sup> Baldick, *In Frankenstein’s Shadow*, 65.

<sup>1037</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 319-20; and Glasgow, *The Voice*, 395.

<sup>1038</sup> Baldick, *In Frankenstein’s Shadow*, 52.

spectre of his heritage which, while propelling his striving, denies its absolute fulfilment.<sup>1039</sup> As a self-made man, made being the operative word, Nicholas has always been, and will remain, ‘an alien among his kind’; his gentility, unsupported by a suitable lineage can only signify as an abortive copy resulting from monstrous presumption.<sup>1040</sup> Having worked tirelessly to elevate himself, Nicholas dies from a shot fired by an exponent of the monstrous mass when trying to prevent a lynching in Kingsborough. Ironically, once he has been reclaimed by his former kind, Sally Bassett, Tom Bassett’s wife and Nicholas’s fellow pupil in the Judge’s school, remarks that ‘it is perhaps better that he died just now. He would have tried to lift us too high, and we should have fallen back’.<sup>1041</sup> With the annihilation of Nicholas’s corporeality, the possibility of transgression is removed. Spoken by a lady, albeit posthumously, the words elevate Nicholas to the status as an ideal; and, concomitantly, undermine the validity of the notion of hereditary gentility to which the Bassetts, the Webbs, and the Battles lay a claim. For the denizens of Kingsborough, though they may be in transition like the town itself, whiteness proper remains beyond attainment. What obtains are degrees of monstrosity that render Glasgow’s protagonists more or less abortive approximations of gentility, while remaining *raison d’être* of the rhetoric of southern whiteness.

Whiteness becomes equally elusive for the protagonists of Charles Waddell Chesnutt’s *The Colonel’s Dream*: a dream of what has been and cannot be revived and a utopian vision of what could be rendered out of place.<sup>1042</sup> The novel, which appeared in print in 1905, is Chesnutt’s last work ‘published in his lifetime’.<sup>1043</sup> Set in late nineteenth-century

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<sup>1039</sup> Nietzsche, *Beyond Good*, 117.

<sup>1040</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 394.

<sup>1041</sup> Glasgow, *The Voice*, 443.

<sup>1042</sup> Charles Waddell Chesnutt, *The Colonel’s Dream*, intr. SallyAnn H. Ferguson (New Milford: The Toby Press, 2004).

<sup>1043</sup> Wilson, *Whiteness*, 148.

Clarendon, North Carolina, *The Colonel's Dream* portrays the struggle of Colonel Henry French to regain a foothold in the circuit of inheritance and the impossibility of doing so. Descended from a line of planters, Henry distinguished himself on the battlefields of the Civil War, earning 'the honor of colonelcy'.<sup>1044</sup> After the conflict which 'work[ed] ruin to his fortunes' and 'The old family "mansion"' being 'sold upon foreclosure', Henry leaves Clarendon for New York where he enters 'his uncle's office as a clerk'.<sup>1045</sup> Thanks to his diligence and capability, he first becomes a partner and then, upon his uncle's death, succeeds him as the head of the company. Wilson notes that in creating Henry, Chesnutt crafts 'a hybrid: a southerner by birth' and 'a northerner by accomplishment, succeeding as an industrialist'.<sup>1046</sup> In Henry, the seemingly antagonistic values of northern industry and southern gentility unite to mark him as inherently transgressive. Having evaluated the company's market position, Henry and his partner decide to sell the business to 'the recently organized bagging trust', a move which will make the two men 'richer than they could have hoped to be after ten years of business stress and struggle'.<sup>1047</sup> When he is informed of the successful completion of the transaction, Henry, who has been awaiting the news as immovable as 'a wax figure' the illusion of which is strengthened by 'The pallor of his countenance', is overwhelmed and faints.<sup>1048</sup> Wilson sees his weakness as a sign of rationality in that he 'does not become addicted to the narcotic of the market', and sensitivity.<sup>1049</sup> In this instance, however, the waxy pallor of Henry's face marks an excess of appearance and becomes a symptom of his monetary success, whereby, as an epitome of northern capitalism, he is metaphorically and literally whitened. The vampiric whiteness of Henry's countenance symbolises the amalgamation of two conflicting whitenesses: the

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<sup>1044</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 19.

<sup>1045</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 19.

<sup>1046</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 160.

<sup>1047</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 8.

<sup>1048</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 9.

<sup>1049</sup> Wilson, *Whiteness*, 154.

northern equated with accumulation of capital and the southern vested in genteel heritage. Žižek observes that ugliness is ‘a *topological* category’, whereby ‘The ugly and out-of-place is *the excess of existence over representation*.’<sup>1050</sup> Transformed into a wax figure Henry externalises his own mutability. Since the ghostly excess of capitalism that Henry embodies cannot be represented, let alone reconciled with the southern notion of hereditary gentility, it is manifested in the paradoxical oversaturation of a lack of colour and culminates in the temporary suspension of signification that is his weakness. Henry’s weakness, therefore, is not only symptomatic of his mutated gentility, but also betokens both success and failure that will blight his future and marks him as a master craftsman and monster. Thanks to his business acumen and the lucrative deal, Henry intends to ‘take a long rest, and then travel for a year or two, and after that settle down and take life comfortably’.<sup>1051</sup> In other words, Henry’s capital will now furnish the life of a gentleman. Henry, spurred partly by the benefits of the salubrious southern climate to his son’s health and partly by ‘a twinge of something like remorse’ at not having ‘set foot within its borders’ for over twenty years, travels to Clarendon.<sup>1052</sup> Upon his arrival, Henry observes the changes that time has wrought there: ‘the once white weatherboarding and Venetian blinds’ adorning the house that ‘the colonel’s grandfather had built [...] as a town residence’ have been reduced to a ‘gray monotone’ by ‘the paintless years’.<sup>1053</sup> Despite its outward shabbiness, the house stands as a metonymy for ‘other things Southern’ that ‘live long and die hard’.<sup>1054</sup> This observation of the endurance of the southern tradition is tempered by an acceptance of change, which testifies to Henry’s altered sensibility, the result of the lessening of family ties occasioned by a long absence from the region. Henry’s

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<sup>1050</sup> Slavoj Žižek, ‘Love Thy Neighbor? No, Thanks!’, in *The Psychoanalysis of Race*, ed. Christopher Lane (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 165. This essay is a modified version of the chapter ‘Love Thy Neighbor? No, Thanks!’ published in *The Plague of Fantasies* the previous year.

<sup>1051</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel’s Dream*, 15.

<sup>1052</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel’s Dream*, 20.

<sup>1053</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel’s Dream*, 21.

<sup>1054</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel’s Dream*, 21.



progressiveness, while striking a discordant note with the fidelity to tradition championed in the region, prompts him to reflect that the old aristocratic system ‘carried the seeds of decay within itself and was doomed to perish’.<sup>1055</sup> Indeed, while ‘An aristocracy is quite enduring, for the aristocrat’, like capitalism, it rests on the exploitation of others and thus becomes irreconcilable with the ethereal attributes of whiteness; it carries within itself its own antagonism which precludes the attainment of whiteness proper, rendering all aspirants monstrous simulacra.<sup>1056</sup> Though Henry deems ‘himself a gentleman, and the descendant of a long line of gentlemen’, he does not subscribe to the creed that ‘blood alone entitled him to any social privileges’.<sup>1057</sup> Whilst ‘The consciousness of honorable ancestry might make one clean of life, [and] gentle of manner’, it is not enough to secure whiteness proper.<sup>1058</sup> Effectively, Henry simultaneously includes himself in the circuit of heredity and questions the validity of such designations. Not only does the observation cast doubt on his ancestors’ whiteness, but also emphasises Henry’s own ontological instability. To Henry, aristocratic heritage should ‘scarcely be boasted of’ if it is not supported by an excellence ‘born of personal effort’, and any pride worthy of cultivating is ‘that of achievement’.<sup>1059</sup> Such privileging of meritocracy over hereditarily-predetermined right to virtue, though congruent with the biblical conception of whiteness, places Henry in opposition to its southern archetype.

Henry’s tacit rebellion against the southern model of gentility is voiced by a former family slave, Peter French, whom he meets when visiting the family grave. Initially, the two men do not recognise each other, however, Peter, encouraged by the willing audience, launches into a tale of the French family history. He tends the plot ‘jes’ lak’ he ‘s’poses[s] Mars

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<sup>1055</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel’s Dream*, 32-33.

<sup>1056</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel’s Dream*, 33.

<sup>1057</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel’s Dream*, 36.

<sup>1058</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel’s Dream*, 36.

<sup>1059</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel’s Dream*, 36.

Henry'd 'a' had it done ef he'd 'a' lived hyuh in de ole home, stidder 'way off yandah in de Norf, whar he so busy makin' money dat he done fergot all 'bout his own folks'.<sup>1060</sup>

While moving to the North in search of fortune constitutes ingratitude towards the region, neglecting his family's past is by far the greater offence. Unwittingly chastised by Peter, Henry reflects upon his literal and metaphorical detachment from the site of origin. Indeed, 'the time when he had thought of Confederacy as his country' seems 'far away', while the only family heirloom, 'his grandfather's sword, had been for years stored away in a dark closet' instead of being 'displayed upon the drawing-room wall' as 'His father had kept it'.<sup>1061</sup> Although such disregard for family mementoes bespeaks Henry's departure from his forefathers' legacy, the realisation is precipitated by Peter who constitutes the only other familial connection linking Henry to his past. Unsurprisingly, the encounter with Peter 'touched a tender cord in the colonel's nature, already tuned to sympathy with the dead past of which Peter seemed the only survival'.<sup>1062</sup> This reawakened sympathy is underpinned by the guilt of neglect of the old values which Peter and the sword represent. Unlike Henry, Peter is capable of 'a touching loyalty to a family from which he could no longer expect anything in return'.<sup>1063</sup> Peter, in his selflessness, furnishes a device through which Henry re-enters the circuit of inheritance. Following the meeting, Peter is unlawfully arrested on charges of vagrancy, and the next day Henry happens to pass by the courthouse where the hearing is conducted. Peter is to be sentenced to two years of forced labour to redeem the fine levied on him for the alleged offence. Outraged, Henry intervenes, pays the fine, and 'walk[s] away with his purchase – a purchase which his father had made, upon terms not very different, fifty years before'.<sup>1064</sup> In performing this seemingly selfless gesture Henry both replicates the discourse of the father and departs from it: his father,

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<sup>1060</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 25.

<sup>1061</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 46.

<sup>1062</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 25.

<sup>1063</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 64.

<sup>1064</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 67.

who owned Peter, ‘had given him’ to Henry ‘as his own boy’, whereas Henry pays the fine out of charity.<sup>1065</sup> Although the outcome is similar since the judge sells Peter ‘for life’, Henry’s motivation for the transaction is different from his father’s who, Peter asserts, ‘wuz a monstus keerful man,’ and to whom Peter ‘wuz wuth five hundred dollahs’.<sup>1066</sup> Henry’s ‘purchase’ marks his departure from the model of gentility practiced by his father and highlights his nobility of spirit. Paradoxically, the acquisition also points to the inherent instability of the antebellum standard which, though driven by material concerns, advocates a dissociation from them. Henry’s abortive replication of his father’s whiteness renders it intrinsically untenable by revealing the innate disintegration of the wholeness of gentility prefigured in the construct of the gentleman planter. Baldick notes that ‘When political discord and rebellion appear’, ‘the “body politic” becomes ‘not just diseased, but misshapen, abortive, [and] monstrous’.<sup>1067</sup> In a doubling, Henry’s rebellion reveals the corruption of the organic wholeness of his father’s gentility, where the divine attributes of whiteness clash with its more earthly concerns, reducing the presupposed integrity of the gentleman’s body to ‘a chaos of dismembered and contending organs’.<sup>1068</sup>

Although Henry does not actively replicate the antebellum model of gentility and condemns Clarendon’s ‘quixotic devotion to lost causes and vanished ideals’, he also concedes that in ‘the old town the ideas of race and blood attained a new and larger perspective’.<sup>1069</sup> The conflicting nature of Henry’s sentiments reifies his transgressive positioning between the conservatism of the South and the progressiveness of the North. Accordingly, Henry’s belief in ‘the rights of man’ and the extension of ‘the doctrine to

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<sup>1065</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel’s Dream*, 25.

<sup>1066</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel’s Dream*, 66; and Chesnutt, *The Colonel’s Dream*, 27.

<sup>1067</sup> Baldick, *In Frankenstein’s Shadow*, 14.

<sup>1068</sup> Baldick, *In Frankenstein’s Shadow*, 14.

<sup>1069</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel’s Dream*, 84.

include all who bore the human form' are belied by the feeling that 'he was an equally pronounced aristocrat'.<sup>1070</sup> Wilson considers such contradictions symptomatic of 'a conceptual gridlock that results in the impossibility of compromise in either French or in the South'.<sup>1071</sup> In Henry's case, however, such inconsistencies are suggestive precisely of a tenuous compromise, or amalgamation, of these seemingly antagonistic sensibilities, which reinforces the undecidability of his gentility. An aristocratic democrat, subscribing to his own idea of humanism, Henry is indeed an anomaly, and this altered sensibility combined with the awareness of the impossibility of the revivification of the 'vanished ideals', renders his subsequent endeavours doubly monstrous. Upon his arrival in Clarendon, Henry renews an old acquaintance with the Treadwells – remnants of the aristocratic South – whose name carries not only connotations, but also the injunction of decorum. The growing intimacy between Henry and the Treadwell ladies, which culminates in his engagement to Laura, is responsible for his increasing attachment to Clarendon and romanticising of his youth spent there. Succumbing to the quixotism which he so condemns, Henry purchases his grandfather's town house from Nichols, 'a keen-eyed mulatto' who, like Henry, 'was a man of thrift and good sense'.<sup>1072</sup> An indulgence born out of nostalgia, the house and its subsequent renovation, rather than establish a link connecting Henry to his past serve to emphasise his discontinuity. Not only does Henry spare no expense to restore 'the interior as he remembered it in his childhood', but he also manages 'to recover several of the pieces' of furniture that 'had been sold and scattered'.<sup>1073</sup> What cannot be recovered Henry has 'reproduced from their description'.<sup>1074</sup> In restoring the house to its former glory, Henry attempts to piece together not only what would have constituted his inheritance, but also what represents the tangible effects of his

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<sup>1070</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 77.

<sup>1071</sup> Wilson, *Whiteness*, 162.

<sup>1072</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 77-78.

<sup>1073</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 89.

<sup>1074</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 89.

gentility. However, the gentility that Henry so meticulously recreates carries traces of mutation. While difference is inescapable from replication *qua* replication, in Henry's case, it is manifested by 'some modern additions' and 'a few choice books and pictures – for the colonel had not attempted to conform his own tastes and habits to those of his father'.<sup>1075</sup> In reproducing the whiteness of his ancestors, Henry preserves the individuality of his creation, cementing his transgressive status as a master craftsman and monster. Henry's attempts at restoration of his gentility are crowned with 'an old-time party, with old-time costumes – any period between 1830 and 1860 permissible', which he is persuaded to give by Graciella Treadwell.<sup>1076</sup> Complete with 'old-time entertainment', the ball is intended to mark a revival of the old traditions.<sup>1077</sup> However, instead, it reveals the unbridgeable gap separating Clarendon's self-designated finest from their antecedents. Aspiring young ladies need to be taught 'beforehand how to dance' a minuet, whilst 'making and altering men's garments' generates enough profit for Archie Christmas – 'the mulatto tailor' – to support himself 'for another twelve months'.<sup>1078</sup> The ball evokes what Žižek terms 'This split between the image' and 'the real', one of the results of which is the ugliness of 'representation without existence'.<sup>1079</sup> The temporarily-resurrected splendour of the costumes transforms the spectacle into a pretence to antebellum gentility, which betrays a monstrous lack of form and the requisites of whiteness that are its constituents in the ordinary. For the inhabitants of Clarendon, like for Henry, the life of plantation gentility is a distant memory. Those with 'any claims to gentility' have lost their estates to William Feters, a local entrepreneur who has risen from obscurity to prominence and now runs his plantation 'with convict labor'.<sup>1080</sup> Unsupported by the possession of land and its attendant

<sup>1075</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 90.

<sup>1076</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 92.

<sup>1077</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 92.

<sup>1078</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 92.

<sup>1079</sup> Žižek, 'Love Thy Neighbor', in *The Psychoanalysis*, 166.

<sup>1080</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 186; and Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 51.

fiscal advantages, such projections of gentility constitute ‘representation without existence’ and transform the participants’ efforts into empty signifiers. The ball, instead of validating claims to gentility, turns into a display of mutilated whiteness where excess and lack become interchangeable to create a monstrous distortion.<sup>1081</sup>

Despite Henry’s best intentions and grand designs for the improvement of Clarendon, the resounding success of the party is not to be repeated. In an effort to provide employment for the poorest of the town, Henry plans ‘to build a new and larger cotton mill’ that will ‘shake up this lethargic community’, teaching it the habits of ‘industry, efficiency and thrift’.<sup>1082</sup> To erect this new edifice Henry employs both black and white labourers, paying all ‘a dollar and a half a day’.<sup>1083</sup> His other projects include a library, or rather two libraries, since, as his fiancée points out, ‘the white people wouldn’t wish to handle the same books’ as the coloured population, together with support for the local schools, both for white and coloured citizens.<sup>1084</sup> While Henry’s efforts to create a new Clarendon are emblematic of striving and sacrifice *pro bono publico*, they also emphasise his departure from the Clarendon standard of gentility. Effectively, Henry becomes ‘placeless’ in that he views his life in New York and ‘the Clarendon of the present’ as ‘mere transitory embodiments’, while he ‘live[s] in the Clarendon yet to be, a Clarendon rescued from Fetters, purified, [and] rehabilitated’.<sup>1085</sup> Henry’s ambition results in ‘the blighting of the creator’, whilst his quest for perfection alienates him from the fellow citizens of Clarendon and turns him into a pariah, revealing in the process the ‘slave morality’ of those adhering

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<sup>1081</sup> Žižek proposes that what ‘makes “the phantom of the opera” so ugly’ is ‘the missing nose’, whereby ‘we have a lack that also functions as an excess’, in ‘Love Thy Neighbor’, in *The Psychoanalysis*, 166.

<sup>1082</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel’s Dream*, 100.

<sup>1083</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel’s Dream*, 146.

<sup>1084</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel’s Dream*, 153.

<sup>1085</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel’s Dream*, 112.

to outdated models of gentility.<sup>1086</sup> Through Henry, Chesnutt expresses the malleability of the monstrous and emphasises its instability as an unequivocal category. Owing to this fluidity of the monstrous, its capability of remaking itself, Henry's philanthropic qualities emblematic of spiritual whiteness are *misconstructed* into manifestations of evil that turn him into 'an enemy of his race'.<sup>1087</sup> His intervention to bring to justice the perpetrators of the unlawful lynching of Bud Johnson is futile because those who could help 'became increasingly difficult to find as it became known that he was seeking them'.<sup>1088</sup> His ostracism is complete when, following the accidental deaths of his son and Peter who rushed to his rescue, Henry buries them both in the family plot. Although the funeral service is attended by 'the more refined and cultured of the townspeople' who wanted to pay 'tribute of respect and appreciation for his [Peter's] heroic deed', Peter's coffin is exhumed and deposited on Henry's porch by those who 'dident tend yore nigger funarl'.<sup>1089</sup> While the orthography of the note indicates that it is composed by those beyond the pale of whiteness, the lack of response from the genteel part of the town 'who reprobated the action' in silence implicates them in this profane act by betraying a cowardly reluctance to confront the mob.<sup>1090</sup> With this final act of betrayal, Henry realises that 'The best people [...] are an abstraction', as indeed is the whiteness they project.<sup>1091</sup> Like the costumes donned for the ball, it remains a veneer which inadequately masks the caricatured ideal. That southern whiteness is an abstraction is responsible for its 'supra-temporal character' which lends itself to its reproducibility.<sup>1092</sup> Henry's dream fails

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<sup>1086</sup> Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow*, 65; and Nietzsche, *Beyond Good*, 156.

<sup>1087</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 258.

<sup>1088</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 265.

<sup>1089</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 257; and Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 268.

<sup>1090</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 268.

<sup>1091</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 269.

<sup>1092</sup> Kantorowicz observes that 'the most significant feature of all abstractions and personifications is their supra-temporal character, their continuity within time', in *The King's*, 79.

because, as his fiancée observes, it was built upon, and attempted to revive, another dream ‘of the old and happy past’ that cannot be resurrected and of which she was a part.<sup>1093</sup>

This dissonance between his reconstruction of reality and actuality has always been present and responsible for Henry’s striving. Since a sense of lack prefigures the formation of fantasy, the ideal of whiteness emerges at the ‘very moment of its alleged loss’.<sup>1094</sup> This is why upon his first visit to the Treadwells, Henry notices the softness and smoothness of the napkins, but remains oblivious to their having ‘been carefully darned in many places’.<sup>1095</sup> Similarly, although he is struck by the fragility of the family silver ‘worn very thin’, he considers it ‘charming’ and symbolic of ‘the simple dignity of the past’.<sup>1096</sup> Even Laura fails to break the illusion though, following Mrs Treadwell’s assurances of their material stability, she points to the ‘parlor carpet’ that ‘has been down for twenty-five years’ and tells him candidly that they ‘are not well off’.<sup>1097</sup> The ‘rentable property’, of which Mrs Treadwell boasts, constitutes ‘three ramshackle cabins’ which fetch ‘four dollars a month each’; while Laura’s primary occupation is ‘keep[ing] the house and wait[ing] on mother’ as well as teaching.<sup>1098</sup> Despite Laura’s frank admission to their passing for gentility, Henry does not desist from constructing their and Laura’s ideality, and remains unmindful of the contradictions inherent in that image. While her mother had received an education befitting ‘The daughter of a wealthy planter’, Laura, having ‘spent her youth in a transition period’, enjoyed no such privileges.<sup>1099</sup> Through no fault of her own, Laura’s gentility is a diluted version of the standard represented by her mother and derives from ‘duty well

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<sup>1093</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel’s Dream*, 270.

<sup>1094</sup> Žižek, *The Plague*, 13.

<sup>1095</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel’s Dream*, 45.

<sup>1096</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel’s Dream*, 45.

<sup>1097</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel’s Dream*, 50.

<sup>1098</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel’s Dream*, 51.

<sup>1099</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel’s Dream*, 47.



performed' that 'has no root in anything corruptible'.<sup>1100</sup> Laura's unswerving devotion to her family leads her 'to give the barber's daughter music lessons – for money', cementing her deviation from the standard of the southern lady.<sup>1101</sup> According to Henry, however, Laura's 'self-sacrifice and devotion to duty' mark her 'a queen among women' and 'the embodiment of all that is best' of his 'memories of the Old South'.<sup>1102</sup> In this noble, though when it comes to the southern model of whiteness, adulterated conception of the ideal, Henry reveals the incompleteness of Laura's gentility. His emphasis on the spiritual aspect of whiteness confirms its absence among the Clarendon's pseudo-elite whose gentility rests on deception. The Treadwells 'never speak about the money [Laura earns] at the house', and though Mrs Treadwell knows Laura teaches for recompense, she 'feigns' that she does 'it of mere kindness'; while their 'friends are not supposed to know it', and if they do 'they are kind and never speak of it'.<sup>1103</sup> What renders the Clarendon elite a monstrous aberration is the insistence on projection of gentility in which the honesty and truth associated with the antebellum ideal, so cherished by Henry and espoused by Laura, are irrevocably lost. Ironically, what transforms Henry into a monstrous outcast is his adherence to the loftier sentiments of the antebellum code of conduct.

Chesnutt's critique of whiteness not only places it beyond the pale of Clarendon gentry, but also, in the character of Malcolm Dudley, casts doubt over its existence. Dudley, whose name connotes aristocratic descent, managed the Mink Run plantation for his uncle Ralph Dudley before the outbreak of the Civil War, and became romantically involved with one of his slaves, Viney. When he falls on hard times during the war, he forsakes Viney and, to augment his fortune, proposes to a rich widow and is accepted. Viney visits the widow and,

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<sup>1100</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 47.

<sup>1101</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 171.

<sup>1102</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 175.

<sup>1103</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 171-72.

presumably, informs her of Malcolm's 'indiscretion', after which the lady promptly breaks off the engagement. In a fit of anger, Malcolm has the overseer whip Viney and the brutality of the act brings on a stroke. Dr Price, summoned to attend Viney, does not conceal his contempt for Malcolm: 'By God, Dudley, I wouldn't have thought this of you!'<sup>1104</sup> His dishonourable conduct and brutality towards Viney turn Malcolm into a caricature of a gentleman, a status that is sealed by his lack of moral courage. Although he apologises to Viney, assuring her that the overseer 'went further than' he 'intended', he does not accept the responsibility for his action.<sup>1105</sup> Before the whipping, and unbeknownst to Malcolm, Ralph returns to the plantation to bury fifty thousand dollars and Viney is the only witness to the whereabouts of the treasure. Ralph leaves a letter for Malcolm informing him that Viney will point the location to him. Ironically, as the result of the punishment Viney loses the ability to speak and is unable to direct Malcolm to the money. Eventually, Malcolm's obsession with finding the treasure leaves him mentally unstable and turns the plantation into a mining ground where 'No crack or cranny had been left unexplored' and 'The yard had been dug over many times' to no avail.<sup>1106</sup> Not only does Malcolm's mental instability bespeak his greed which overrides whatever morals he may have possessed, but it is also indelibly etched in his face which, though 'of a highbred and strongly marked type, emphasized by age, had the hawk-like contour, that is supposed to betoken extreme acquisitiveness'.<sup>1107</sup> Like Page and Glasgow, Chesnutt shares the obsession with outward expressions of inner monstrosity. Malcolm's gentility is as distorted as his 'hawk-like' profile, while the assemblage of conflicting values, of which his features are emblematic, indicates that even before the war whiteness was in short supply. On the one hand, such visible exaggerations are limiting because they mark the

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<sup>1104</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 163.

<sup>1105</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 163.

<sup>1106</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 166.

<sup>1107</sup> Chesnutt, *The Colonel's Dream*, 130.

bearers as monstrous; on the other, they are emblematic of the inherent instability of hereditary whiteness that also permeates Chesnutt's *The House* and *The Marrow*, contributing to its 'infinite interpretability' which itself constitutes a mark of 'the monster'.<sup>1108</sup> In visibly blighting its aspirants, such stigmas *demonstrate* that southern whiteness is subject to, and subjected to, incessant reinterpretations, but always beyond attainment. The quest for it proves as elusive as Malcolm's search for the hoard which Ralph had removed from the plantation, forgetting, in his haste, to destroy the note. While its virtues grow in the recollecting, as Henry discovers, its value remains within the realm of abstraction.

Chesnutt's debunking of the myth of antebellum gentility continues in 'The Goophered Grapevine' where it is revealed to be a monstrous misconception. The story forms a part of a collection titled *The Conjure Woman and Other Conjure Tales* that was published in 1899.<sup>1109</sup> However, several of Chesnutt's tales gathered in this volume had appeared in magazine publications between 1887 and 1893.<sup>1110</sup> The teller of the stories is Uncle Julius McAdoo, a former slave, while John and Annie supply his willing audience. John is a northern entrepreneur who, led by concerns for his wife's health, relocates to the South where, after the war, 'land could be bought for a mere song'.<sup>1111</sup> He acquires the former McAdoo plantation with the intention to grow grapes. Richard H. Brodhead observes that both John and Uncle Julius are 'stock characters' whose conventionality 'communicates the ironic message that dialect stories deal in stereotypes'.<sup>1112</sup> This surface conventionality enables Chesnutt to dispel another stereotype, that of the gentleman planter, and expose it

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<sup>1108</sup> Halberstam, *Skin Shows*, 31.

<sup>1109</sup> Richard H. Brodhead, 'Introduction', in *The Conjure*, 16.

<sup>1110</sup> The information is based on 'Chronology of Composition' established by Richard H. Brodhead, in *The Conjure*, 23-24.

<sup>1111</sup> Chesnutt, 'The Goophered', in *The Conjure*, 31.

<sup>1112</sup> Richard H. Brodhead, 'Introduction', in *The Conjure*, 6.

as a monstrous misconception. In ‘The Goophered Grapevine’, Uncle Julius’s former owner, ‘Ole Mars Dugal’ McAdoo’ is portrayed as an antithesis of the ideal of southern gentility.<sup>1113</sup> Beneath his veneer of benevolence lies avarice worthy of a carpetbagger: ‘it ha’ ter be a mighty rainy day when he couldn’ fine sump’n fer his niggers to do, en it ha’ ter be a mighty little hole he couldn’ crawl thoo, en ha’ ter be a monst’us cloudy night when a dollar git by him in de dahkness’.<sup>1114</sup> Uncle Julius’s deceptively innocuous misapplication of the adjective ‘monst’us’ allows Chesnutt to transform Mars Dugal’s seemingly positive thrift into excess. In this parody of the monstrous, the monster is craftily implicated by circumstantial evidence. When his prized ‘scuppernon’s’ grapes begin to disappear, Mars Dugal seeks the help of a local conjure woman, Aunt Peggy.<sup>1115</sup> Aunt Peggy prepares a ‘goopher’ which she buries ‘under de root uv a red oak tree’ and, for good measure, spreads the news among the slaves that ‘a nigger w’at eat dem grapes ‘ud be sho ter die inside’n twel’ mont’s’.<sup>1116</sup> Thenceforth the grapes are undisturbed, until a new addition to the plantation, Henry, avails himself of some. Learning of the curse, Henry is so worried about his fate that the overseer takes him to Aunt Peggy who concocts an antidote. As part of the remedy, every spring, Henry must anoint his head with ‘de sap whar it ooze out’n de cut een’s er de vimes’.<sup>1117</sup> Henry’s life begins to follow the cycle of the grapevine, whereby spring rejuvenation is succeeded by bouts of ‘rheumatiz’ in autumn.<sup>1118</sup> Not content with the profit from his vineyard, Mars Dugal waits until spring and sells Henry ‘fer fifteen huder’ dollars’.<sup>1119</sup> When he meets Henry’s new owner again it is autumn and Henry has reverted to being an old man. Seemingly perturbed, Mars Dugal

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<sup>1113</sup> Chesnutt, ‘The Goophered’, in *The Conjure*, 35.

<sup>1114</sup> Chesnutt, ‘The Goophered’, in *The Conjure*, 39-40.

<sup>1115</sup> Chesnutt, ‘The Goopherd’, in *The Conjure*, 35.

<sup>1116</sup> Chesnutt, ‘The Goopherd’, in *The Conjure*, 37.

<sup>1117</sup> Chesnutt, ‘The Goopherd’, in *The Conjure*, 38.

<sup>1118</sup> Chesnutt, ‘The Goopherd’, in *The Conjure*, 39.

<sup>1119</sup> Chesnutt, ‘The Goopherd’, in *The Conjure*, 40.

offers to buy Henry back ‘fer five hund’ed dollars’.<sup>1120</sup> Such transactions are repeated over several years until ‘Mars Dugal made ‘nuff money off’n Henry to buy anudder plantation’.<sup>1121</sup> In Mars Dugal, the love of truth, honesty and honour celebrated in the antebellum ideal of gentility are replaced with avarice and duplicity. Through Mars Dugal’s conduct, the construction of the southern gentleman is unravelled, while the dubious industriousness makes him doubly monstrous, for it is underlain by intentional deception. Similarly, in ‘Sis Becky’s Pickaninny’, the gentility of ‘Kunnel Pen’leton’ is undermined by a proclivity for gambling and moral cowardice that betoken an absence of honour.<sup>1122</sup> Having squandered his fortune on ‘hosses’ with which he ‘nebber hab no luck’, the Kunnel decides to purchase a winning horse from another gentleman. At ‘a thousan’ dollahs’, the price is too high for the Kunnel’s purse, who ‘owed ez much ez he could borry a’ready on de skyo’ity he could gib’.<sup>1123</sup> His gentility is therefore a mere husk, devoid of kernel. The note he offers to the owner of the horse is promptly declined, suggesting that this gentleman’s honour and word are no longer an acceptable currency. Eventually, an agreement is reached and Becky is to be traded for the horse. However, the man refuses to take Becky’s little son, despite the Kunnel’s willingness to add him gratis to the bargain. This feeble attempt at sacrifice is belied by the Kunnel’s awareness of the moral ugliness of his conduct and transforms him into a pseudo-gentleman. Devoid of courage and integrity, he lies to Becky telling her that her absence will only be temporary not because he is ‘a kin’-hea’ted man’, as Uncle Julius tells it, but because her departure is a proof of his vice and acknowledging it would be analogous to admitting to a lack of gentility.<sup>1124</sup> Whilst the blackening of the Kunnel’s character is metaphorical, in ‘Mars Jeems’s Nightmare’, the monstrous inside of distorted gentility spills onto the outside. In

<sup>1120</sup> Chesnutt, ‘The Goopherd’, in *The Conjure*, 40.

<sup>1121</sup> Chesnutt, ‘The Goopherd’, in *The Conjure*, 41.

<sup>1122</sup> Chesnutt, ‘Sis Becky’s Pickaninny’, in *The Conjure*, 85.

<sup>1123</sup> Chesnutt, ‘Sic Becky’s’, in *The Conjure*, 85.

<sup>1124</sup> Chesnutt, ‘Sic Becky’s’, in *The Conjure*, 86.

this tale, the notion of hereditary whiteness is turned into hereditary monstrosity. When out driving, John and his wife pass a gentleman whipping ‘a high-spirited’ horse that possessed ‘the marks of good temper and good breeding’.<sup>1125</sup> Judging by his behaviour, John finds the gentleman ‘deficient in both’.<sup>1126</sup> However, as it turns out, the gentleman, McLean, is descended from a long line of planters who ‘had a big plantation en a heap er niggers’.<sup>1127</sup> A far cry from the beneficent master, Mars Jeems, McLean’s grandfather, ‘wuz a ha’d man en monst’us stric wid his han’s’.<sup>1128</sup> Uncle Julius’s innocent statement is charged with irony that allows his words to be *misconstructed* to unveil the true nature of Mars Jeems’s monstrosity – overzealous management – without the necessity of explicitness. Mars Jeems eventually changes his ways after, in a reversal helped by a pinch of conjuring, he is transformed into a slave and delivered to his own plantation by Mars Dunkin as payment for a bet made while the two men ‘wuz playin’ kya’d s te’gedder’.<sup>1129</sup> Remaining faithful to the corrupted gentility that his grandfather externalises keeps McLean within the circuit of inheritance and, concurrently, undermines his claim to whiteness. Under the guise of the improbability of the conjure tale that makes such metamorphoses permissible, Chesnutt not only responds to ‘the cultural preference for the reminiscences of old black Uncles’, but, more importantly, ‘a preference for a *fiction* of racial history’.<sup>1130</sup> Through his seeming acquiescence to the perpetuation of the myth of antebellum whiteness, Chesnutt re-articulates the truth of its imagined perfection and unmask it as a monstrous lie.

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<sup>1125</sup> Chesnutt, ‘Mars Jeems’s Nightmare’, in *The Conjure*, 57.

<sup>1126</sup> Chesnutt, ‘Mars Jeems’s Nightmare’, in *The Conjure*, 57.

<sup>1127</sup> Chesnutt, ‘Mars Jeems’s Nightmare’, in *The Conjure*, 57.

<sup>1128</sup> Chesnutt, ‘Mars Jeems’s Nightmare’, in *The Conjure*, 57.

<sup>1129</sup> Chesnutt, ‘Mars Jeems’s Nightmare’, in *The Conjure*, 61.

<sup>1130</sup> Brodhead, ‘Introduction’, in *The Conjure*, 14.

Uncle Julius's stock conventionality enables him to voice this lie: 'Dey's so many things a body knows is lies dat dey ain' no use gwine roun' findin' fault wid tales'.<sup>1131</sup> However, through the simple wisdom of Uncle Julius's words Chesnutt moves beyond mere 'findin' fault' to express the indispensability of the lie to sustaining the re-interpretability of the fiction of whiteness that cements its status as a discourse of monstrous distortions. The insidious nature of this lie manifests itself belatedly to Victor Grabért, the hero of Alice Dunbar-Nelson's 'The Stones of the Village', who becomes aware of his own monstrosity only after reaching the pinnacle of gentility. A landed aristocrat through marriage and eventually a judge, Victor's reconstruction of himself as a gentleman is tarnished by a black lawyer, Pavageau. Although he wins a case against Pavageau, his victory is not grounded in merit, but rather the result of the prejudice of 'The judge, the jury, [and] the people' against the black lawyer.<sup>1132</sup> The congratulations bestowed upon Victor sicken him, for he is aware that, by virtue of ability, they belong to the black lawyer whom Victor secretly 'respected' and 'admired'.<sup>1133</sup> Pavageau's integrity forces Victor to acknowledge the lie that is his whiteness which consists not in the lack of aristocratic descent, but in the loss of honour and truthfulness. Despite Victor's outward hostility towards him, Pavageau never betrays the secret of Victor's assumed gentility. Consequently, the knowledge of Pavageau's moral superiority leaves Victor wallowing 'in a self-abasement at his position'.<sup>1134</sup> His courtroom victories over Pavageau both validate Victor's career and gentility and foster the growing awareness of his own inadequacy. Thanks to the outward trappings of gentility, Victor personifies the illusion of its attainability. However, the metaphorical blackness of his own creation precipitates an attack of hallucinations and, ultimately, his death. Ironically, the perpetuation of the lie marks self-sacrifice on Victor's

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<sup>1131</sup> Chesnutt, 'The Conjuror's Revenge', in *The Conjure*, 79.

<sup>1132</sup> Dunbar-Nelson, 'The Stones', in *Laughing*, 104.

<sup>1133</sup> Dunbar-Nelson, 'The Stones', in *Laughing*, 104.

<sup>1134</sup> Dunbar-Nelson, 'The Stones', in *Laughing*, 111.

part and points a way to redemption. Though he is tempted to reveal the truth of his past, he refrains from doing so as it would taint his wife and son's whiteness. In a contradictory fashion characteristic of whiteness, it is both an act of courage and cowardice. Whereas in 'The Stones of the Village' whiteness consists in honour and integrity, the loss of which results in the monstrous distortion that Victor becomes, in 'La Juanita', monstrosity and whiteness are 'a matter of positionality' or, indeed, nationality.<sup>1135</sup> In Mandeville, lying in the vicinity of New Orleans, whiteness is synonymous with Spanish and French descent and embodied in the figure of Juanita Alvarez who, being 'half-Spanish, [and] half-French' unites the two heritages.<sup>1136</sup> However, Juanita's hereditary perfection is marred by disobedience. Not only does she defy her Grandpère Colomes and insists on going to 'meet her Mercer', but also the ideal of Mandevillian whiteness for Mercer is 'Un Americain, pah!'<sup>1137</sup> Indeed, all of Mandeville 'sighed sadly and shook its head' at such an ostentatious betrayal of what they held sacred.<sup>1138</sup> Whereas Grandpère Colomes's family 'had held itself proudly aloof from "those Americain" from time immemorial', his granddaughter 'demean[s] herself by walking upon the pier with' one of them.<sup>1139</sup> Juanita, then, becomes tainted with monstrosity by association. Even when Mercer distinguishes himself through a display of extraordinary bravery during a regatta, leading all the boats to safety amidst a raging storm, Grandpère Colomes only grudgingly allows that 'some time dose Americain can mos' be like one Frenchman'.<sup>1140</sup> With these words, Grandpère Colomes seals Mercer's status as an almost, but not quite adequate, imitation of a Frenchman. Locating her narratives in New Orleans, where the conviction that 'a Louisianian – is a Louisianian' and not an 'Americain' or a southerner obtains, Dunbar-

<sup>1135</sup> Knadler, 'Untragic Mulatto', 435.

<sup>1136</sup> Alice Dunbar-Nelson, 'La Juanita', in *Laughing*, 215.

<sup>1137</sup> Dunbar-Nelson, 'La Juanita', in *Laughing*, 215; and Dunbar-Nelson, 'La Juanita', in *Laughing*, 216.

<sup>1138</sup> Dunbar-Nelson, 'La Juanita', in *Laughing*, 216.

<sup>1139</sup> Dunbar-Nelson, 'La Juanita', in *Laughing*, 217.

<sup>1140</sup> Dunbar-Nelson, 'La Juanita', in *Laughing*, 222.



Nelson emphasises the multiplicity and permeability of whiteness and monstrosity.<sup>1141</sup> No more can regional affiliation erase the loss of integrity that blights Victor's whiteness or filial disobedience that tarnishes Juanita's, than Mercer's courage can expunge the imperfection of his 'Americain' origin and lead to the attainment of the Luisianian whiteness.

For Dunbar-Nelson, Page, Glasgow and Chesnutt alike, the ability of whiteness to confound is truly monstrous. Unsurprisingly, their delineations of southern whiteness, intentionally or incidentally, reveal the multivalency of the monstrous. Whether limned as an inherent condition stemming from the composite and repetitious nature of the construct, the result of willing or unwitting departure from the ideal, or a lack of suitably aristocratic heritage, the whiteness of their *dramatis personae* is always already impaired. While the corporeality of the southern gentleman and lady may, like the monster's body, incarnate 'the political ideas of collectivity and reawakening', their 'behaviour signals political revolt' in that it contravenes, by virtue of repetition and irreconcilability, the antebellum and biblical injunctions.<sup>1142</sup> Endowed with this intrinsic flaw, the southern gentleman and lady resemble Sir Thomas Browne's 'Politicians', of whom he writes in 1650 that 'having been deceived by themselves, and continually deluded by others, they must needs be stuffed with errors, over-runne with these inferiour falsities'.<sup>1143</sup> Their efforts to remain within the circuit of inheritance are blighted, for they result in the perpetuation of 'inferiour falsities' that reveal the untenability of the notion of antebellum perfection. Like fantasy, the very notion of the ideal encodes its own antagonism that renders the pursuit of whiteness futile, transforming the aspirants into monstrous aberrations, while revealing the

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<sup>1141</sup> Cable, *The Grandissimes*, 222.

<sup>1142</sup> Young, *Black Frankenstein*, 23.

<sup>1143</sup> Browne, *The Completed*, 180-81. Following Patrides, I cite the publication date of the revised edition of *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* from which the quotation comes, in Browne, *The Completed*, 163.

preordained organic wholeness of whiteness to 'be the true monster'.<sup>1144</sup> What is perpetuated in the diegesis of southern whiteness are degrees of monstrosity grounded in the myth of flawless gentility. The struggle for whiteness is only capable of yielding maimed subjects, in whose bodies its illusion both unravels and permutes.

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<sup>1144</sup> Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow*, 138.

## 6. Concluding thoughts

We dont live among defeated grandfathers and freed slaves (or have I got it backward and was it your folks that are free and the niggers that lost?) and bullets in the dining room table and such, to be always reminding us never to forget. What is it? something you live and breathe in like air? a kind of vacuum filled with wraithlike and indomitable anger and pride and glory at and in happenings that occurred and ceased fifty years ago?<sup>1145</sup>

What plagues the aspiring gentlemen and ladies peopling the pages of Page, Glasgow, Chesnutt and Dunbar-Nelson's works is the awareness of the antebellum ideal of southern whiteness against which their reconstructions of it are pitted. By virtue of the incompleteness of their incarnations of southern whiteness, these gentlemen and ladies reify the existence of the ideal which, like every ideology, 'is always *elsewhere*,' and 'cannot be totally subdued, diminished or dispelled'.<sup>1146</sup> The archetype of whiteness may be compared to Žižek's interpretation of *jouissance* as 'the "place" of the subject' in relation to which 'the subject is always-already displaced, [and] out-of-joint'.<sup>1147</sup> Žižek's *jouissance* deconstructs the subject, however, the illusion of completeness that it furnishes is indispensable to the functioning of ideology, and the rhetoric of whiteness is no exception.<sup>1148</sup> The possibility of the attainment of *jouissance*, or ideal whiteness in this instance, creates an irreconcilable tension that juxtaposes 'the symbolic frame' of the archetype with its reconstructions and condemns them as lacking.<sup>1149</sup> This conundrum is manifest in Melville's *Moby-Dick* where, musing upon 'the mystic sign' of whiteness, he concludes 'that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of

<sup>1145</sup> William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1960), 361.

<sup>1146</sup> Macherey, *A Theory*, 64.

<sup>1147</sup> Žižek, *The Plague*, 49.

<sup>1148</sup> Žižek, *The Plague*, 50.

<sup>1149</sup> Žižek, *The Plague*, 50.

the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky way'.<sup>1150</sup> For Melville, the mysticism of whiteness presupposes failure without which the promise of its ideal could not manifest itself; and without which its pursuit could not be initiated. The quest to fathom the meaning of 'the mystic sign' confounds the subject, just as it perplexed Ahab. Babb sees Ahab's obsession with the whale as 'akin to a civilization that for its own ends seeks to impose a variety of significations on racial whiteness'.<sup>1151</sup> For Harold Aspiz, 'Ahab's pursuit of Moby Dick is a self-deluded struggle against brute force, animal drives, the sexual and self-preservative instincts – in fact, *against raw life itself*'.<sup>1152</sup> Walter Allen interprets *Moby-Dick* as Melville's dramatization of 'his sense of evil that stems from man's overweening pride, his refusal to recognize limits'; while Fiedler reads Ahab with 'his alienation, his sultanism, his pride, blasphemy, and diabolism' as not only 'more monstrous than the beast he hunts', but also as an allegory of man.<sup>1153</sup> The fluidity with which the tale lends itself to reinterpretation has its roots in Melville's indebtedness to the practice of puritan typology and, particularly, 'its power to create identifications across time and so permit individual Puritans to identify with key events in God's providential history'.<sup>1154</sup> And, as Fiedler observes, Melville proves himself incapable of 'clos[ing] his ears to the Old Testament challenge'.<sup>1155</sup> At the heart of the challenge, according to Erich Auerbach, lies 'The Bible's claim to truth', mitigated by the darkness and incompleteness of the knowledge that 'God is a hidden God'.<sup>1156</sup> The tension this dogma creates between truth and obscurity, or obscurity as truth, lends itself, Auerbach writes, to constant reinterpretability which

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<sup>1150</sup> Melville, *Moby-Dick*, 169.

<sup>1151</sup> Babb, *Whiteness*, 99.

<sup>1152</sup> Harold Aspiz, 'Phrenologizing the Whale', in *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 23.1 (1968): 27.

<sup>1153</sup> Walter Allen, *Tradition and Dream: A Critical Survey of British and American Fiction from the 1920s to the Present Day* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), 16; and Fiedler, *Love and Death*, 385.

<sup>1154</sup> Madsen, *American*, 13.

<sup>1155</sup> Fiedler, *Love and Death*, 385.

<sup>1156</sup> Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 14; and Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 15.

contributes to the emergence of the Puritan sensibility of regarding the world ‘not as an ultimate reality but as a system of signs to be deciphered’.<sup>1157</sup> As a consequence of this world perception, ‘allegory and symbolism are ingrained in the American sensibility’, and this fusion of ‘allegory and symbolism’ permeates *Moby-Dick*.<sup>1158</sup> In the kaleidoscopic sequence of allegories that unfold in the novel, the connection between the symbol and its meaning is kept obscure, lurking in the text but never made explicit. Such obscurantism invests the interpretative process itself with an allegorical significance redolent of Adam’s transgression, whereby it is transformed into the symbol of the temptation of knowledge, of comprehending the one, unalienable truth which constitutes God’s prerogative and cannot be fathomed. Although the kind of typology practiced by Melville is associated with the North, the region which, unlike the South, was peopled by ‘religious zealots and revolutionists’, the postbellum South cultivated its own brand of symbolism vested in the concepts of the Old South and its genteel ways, which served as ‘a device for mediating and structuring experience’.<sup>1159</sup> In this mythical land of plenty, the southern gentleman and lady ruled benevolently over their inferiors providing standards for emulation in the postbellum era, which proved to be rather malleable in their rigidity. The whiteness that Page, Glasgow, Chesnutt and Dunbar-Nelson’s protagonists reconstruct is as multivalent and elusive as Melville’s, and equally dependent on symbols. However, what distinguishes the symbolism of southern whiteness from Melville’s is its blend of secularism and finiteness. The southern symbolism practiced by these authors operates through discreet associations grounded in hypersensitivity to class and race, rather than the hermeneutic overdetermination characteristic of Melville. Though the link between the symbol and its meaning may only be read by a select few, it invariably conjures up the glory of the antebellum archetype of whiteness. Ironically, the symbols through which it is evoked are

<sup>1157</sup> Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 15; and Fiedler, *Love and Death*, 29.

<sup>1158</sup> Allen, *Tradition and Dream*, 18.

<sup>1159</sup> Page, *The Old South*, 6; and Gray, *Southern Aberrations*, 6.

both reificatory and deny legitimacy to reconstructions of whiteness. The iconic image of the plantation house which, though an enduring monument to tradition, is also symbolic of the impossibility of its resurrection. Inhabited equally by the dead and the living, the plantation house is both indispensable to projections of whiteness and a reminder of their imperfection. Though perhaps admitted reluctantly, this power of the plantation house to unmake whiteness, while remaining a continuing emblem of gentility, is evident in Page's *Red Rock* and *Gordon Keith*, or Glasgow's *The Deliverance* and *The Voice*. The 'paintless house with its rotting portico' greets Colonel French upon his return to Clarendon in Chesnutt's *The Colonel's Dream*, and haunts Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, bearing witness to the Compsons' decline.<sup>1160</sup> Another such symbol is the confederate button with which Blair in *Red Rock* adorns her blouse, and the significance of which is lost upon Ruth who represents northern sensibility. In *The Voice*, Glasgow takes 'a deeply traditional figure for Southern commemoration and memory (the Confederate widow)', and turns it into 'a critique of the elegiac impulse'.<sup>1161</sup> In Mrs Dudley Webb's grim persistence in wearing black ornamented with the immortal confederate button, the fidelity to the southern tradition is transformed into the folly of allowing the past an injudicious influence upon the present. In *The Sound*, Faulkner undertakes a more overt critique of such nostalgic impulses when he has the disillusioned Jason Compson present his son, Quentin, with his grandfather's watch, declaring that it will enable him 'to gain the reducto absurdum of all human experience which can fit your individual needs no better than it fitted his or his father's'.<sup>1162</sup> Time transforms such symbols of inheritance into empty signifiers which, in their materiality, are invested with a trace of the ideal, but are never reducible to it. In suggesting that 'the sweep of time negates the value of any action', Faulkner both emphasises the futility of recreating the past and renders it a chronic

<sup>1160</sup> William Faulkner, *The Sound and the Fury*, intr. Nicholas Shakespeare (London: Everyman, 2000), 257.

<sup>1161</sup> Gray, *Southern Aberrations*, 72.

<sup>1162</sup> Faulkner, *The Sound*, 64.

southern malady.<sup>1163</sup> Curiously, when it comes to the reconstruction of tradition both Page and Glasgow perform a reversal of gender roles. It is women who, adorned with military relics, continue the battlefield heroism albeit in a less militant form; while men are emasculated. General Legaie and Dr Cary in *Red Rock* parade in shirts made by ladies from their undergarments. Through these new garments, a continuity with the antebellum tradition is re-established and the men perform gentility almost but not quite in drag. The heroes of the drama are not the male performers, but the female orchestrators.

When it comes to reconstructions of whiteness, this interdependence between male and female characters seems a particularly southern trend. Fiedler observes of the American hero that he is a lonely man, a Natty Bumppo type who, accompanied by a suitably inferior Chingachgook with whom he enjoys a unique bond, is always in search of 'the virgin heart of the American wilderness'; while Lewis sees him as an American Adam who is 'emancipated from history, happily bereft of ancestry, untouched and undefiled by the usual inheritances of family and race'.<sup>1164</sup> Similarly, Allen sees the 'classic American' hero as a man 'who had opted out of society in anything but the simplest form', a man who, like Huck Finn, 'got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest' to seek 'the orgasmic future' in which Fitzgerald's *Gatsby* believed.<sup>1165</sup> In 'seeking the promised land' that forms 'an essential part of the American Dream', each of these heroes replicates the flight from the corruption of the Old World to the pristine innocence of the new one that once spurred the puritan settlers.<sup>1166</sup> No such flight from society or Old-World corruption characterises Page, Glasgow and Chesnutt's heroes who are never free of tradition, history or women.

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<sup>1163</sup> MacKethan, *The Dream of Arcady*, 158.

<sup>1164</sup> Fiedler, *Love and Death*, 192; and R.W.B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959), 5.

<sup>1165</sup> Allen, *Tradition and Dream*, 16; and Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 328; and F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1950), 171.

<sup>1166</sup> Allen, *Tradition and Dream*, 17; and Fiedler, *Love and Death*, 143.

They are firmly embedded in the patria of plantation and region to which they are bound by the ties of history and heritage. Unlike Natty Bumppo or Huck, they are dependent on ladies who elevate them spiritually and inspire heroic deeds. This dependence is indebted to the traditions of courtly love and 'The ethics of feudalism' according to which 'the perfect knight' apotheosised the ideals of 'courage, honor, loyalty, mutual respect, refined manners, [and] service to women'.<sup>1167</sup> This ideal of chivalry, 'because it is so removed from reality', could be adapted 'to any and every situation' provided 'there were ruling classes', and the South, priding itself upon the cultivation of 'a system as nearly a copy of that in England [...], as the conditions of the new land admitted', adopted it with alacrity.<sup>1168</sup> This worship is evident in Jacquelin's chaste admiration for Blair in *Red Rock*, and George Tryon's initial courtship of Rowena in Chesnutt's *The House* which, ironically, begins at a re-enactment of a medieval joust when he chooses her as 'the Queen of Love and Beauty'.<sup>1169</sup> Its caricatured version is present in Glasgow's portrayal of Miss Angela in *The Miller* where the 'exaggerated worship of the lady unman[s]' the two generations of Jonathan Gays and leads to their demise, while the lady serenely continues to inspire devotion.<sup>1170</sup> Miss Angela, whose failing health never succeeds in failing her, anticipates the irascible and hypochondriac Mrs Compson of Faulkner's *The Sound* who, in upholding the tradition of female frailty, 'kept herself sick all the time'.<sup>1171</sup> This veiled critique of the cult of womanhood reaches its climax in *The Sound* where Jason Compson declares that 'men invented virginity not women'.<sup>1172</sup> The ability to venerate femininity becomes a mark of a gentleman along with courage, loyalty, and honour. Unsurprisingly, all Page's gentlemen, including the reformed wastrel Henry Glave, are abundantly endowed with

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<sup>1167</sup> Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 137.

<sup>1168</sup> Auerbach, *Mimesis*, 137; and Page, *The Old South*, 110.

<sup>1169</sup> Chesnutt, *The House*, 36.

<sup>1170</sup> Fiedler, *Love and Death*, 49.

<sup>1171</sup> Faulkner, *The Sound*, 224.

<sup>1172</sup> Faulkner, *The Sound*, 66.



these qualities; while in Chesnutt's George Tryon, Major Carteret, and Tom Delamere, as well as Glasgow's two Jonathan Gays, these values only resonate with a faint echo that, on occasion, might produce an uneasy pang of conscience.

Unlike the 'classic American' hero who is unencumbered by tradition, the southern one is not only unmanned by the lady, but also burdened with history and tradition. The southern hero never loses awareness of his historical heritage, which testifies to his allegiance to 'a deeply ambivalent model of aristocracy, derived from England'.<sup>1173</sup> It is this model of aristocracy that inspires Sutpen's plan in *Absalom, Absalom!*, to accomplish which he requires 'money, a house, a plantation, slaves, a family – incidentally of course, a wife'.<sup>1174</sup> However, although he acquires all, he can only pass for a gentleman because he is 'underbred'.<sup>1175</sup> Land and wealth, if not sanctified by appropriate heritage, cannot furnish a claim to whiteness. The hereditary aspect of southern whiteness that Sutpen lacks is apotheosised in the landed aristocrat and, in order to effect it, he is placed in opposition to a representative of a darker shade of whiteness – the 'bluff country squire'.<sup>1176</sup> This pairing of the 'gracious feudal aristocrat' and his less cultivated counterpart comes closest to resembling the inter-male relationships existing between Huck and Jim, or Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook. Accordingly, Gordon Keith and General Keith's gentility is juxtaposed with Squire Rawson's blunt pragmatism; while in *Red Rock*, Andy Stamper, a white farmer, acts as a catalyst that provokes the assumption that the qualities of courage, loyalty and honour, which he as a southerner espouses, are amplified in his aristocratic neighbours – Dr Cary and Jacquelin Gray. Glasgow also recreates this relationship in *The Battle-Ground* by contrasting the 'upright, [and] clear-sighted' Governor Ambler with the

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<sup>1173</sup> Gray, *Southern Aberrations*, 12.

<sup>1174</sup> Faulkner, *Absalom*, 263.

<sup>1175</sup> Faulkner, *Absalom*, 46.

<sup>1176</sup> Gray, *Southern Aberrations*, 12.

‘Irascible, [and] stubborn’ Major Lightfoot.<sup>1177</sup> This union permits Page and Glasgow to enunciate the plight of the postbellum aristocrat as a man out of step with his time, an Adam whose memory of paradise keeps him anchored in place, though he realises that re-entry is impossible. Gordon Keith, despite his sojourns in New York and Appalachia, always remains an outsider, even after his return to the South; Jacquelin, swindled out of his birthright, becomes alienated from his ancestors; while Colonel French experiences metaphorical and physical isolation only when he returns to his hometown. In order to portray this sense of individual isolation which is ‘central to the American experience’ and ‘the American novel’, Page, Glasgow and Chesnutt ‘conjure up a vanished world of aristocratic ease’ and have their protagonists struggle to recreate its evanescent splendour.<sup>1178</sup> What alienates Gordon Keith, Colonel French or Dr Cary is the insistence upon the revivification of antebellum whiteness in the ‘spoilt’ territory of the post-Reconstruction South. It is a southern version of the search for what Allen terms ‘something more’ characteristic of American fiction.<sup>1179</sup> However, what distinguishes the southern hero from the American one is that for him the ‘something more’ is not a desire for an innocent, unencumbered future that impels Huck and his ilk to depart for the wilderness; rather it consists in a futile restoration of an imagined past which results in maimed whiteness. For the southern hero, the dream is no less elusive because it had already been lived, the awareness of which returns with mocking clarity to plague him and his gentility. The alienation of these characters is therefore twofold, for in replicating the antebellum paradigms of whiteness they become isolated in the present; while by virtue of the incompleteness of such reconstructions they are also alienated from the ideals of whiteness. Faulkner formulates this sense of alienation as a matter of heritage in *Absalom* where Quentin Compson, though ‘still too young to deserve yet to be a ghost’, is

<sup>1177</sup> Gray, *Southern Aberrations*, 69.

<sup>1178</sup> Allen, *Tradition and Dream*, 18; and Gray, *Southern Aberrations*, 27.

<sup>1179</sup> Allen, *Tradition and Dream*, 20.

nonetheless already a spectre by virtue of being born ‘in the deep South’ which ‘was peopled with garrulous outraged baffled ghosts’.<sup>1180</sup> Faulkner verbalises what Glasgow and Page tacitly imply, that the preservation of tradition is both an inextricable part of the southern sensibility and impossible. Even in Page’s sentimentalised account of the continuity of antebellum gentility that pits ‘the tragic plight of the fallen aristocrats’ against the iniquity of the former overseers or rapacity of carpetbaggers, reconstructions of whiteness are inevitably reduced to ghostly palimpsests.<sup>1181</sup> Although Glasgow anticipates Faulkner in that she dispenses with ‘the “evasive realism” responsible for contrasts of this kind’ and ‘the consequent illusion of Southern innocence’, she cannot liberate herself from the allure of aristocratic breeding.<sup>1182</sup> What emerges therefore is a curious mixture of admiration and irony exemplified in the portrayal of Mrs Lightfoot in *The Battle-Ground* who, through the tears shed over ‘Thaddeus of Warsaw’, is included in the universal body aristocratic.<sup>1183</sup> Glasgow’s compulsion to critique such outdated sentiments is always mediated by the need to guard them. Although Nicholas Burr in *The Voice* is permitted to rise from the obscurity of peanut farming to the governorship of Virginia, he is annihilated at the pinnacle of his career. In the end, ‘Status and power’ as well as ‘the hand of the lady’ and thus ‘all the rewards of the romantic plot are given to the gentleman [Dudley Webb], while the plain man is sidelined’.<sup>1184</sup> In a sense, Nicholas is a blueprint for Faulkner’s Sutpen or Fitzgerald’s Gatsby, whose acquired gentility dissolves in the end to oust the parvenu from the ranks of aristocracy or ‘old money’. The same protective impulse guides Page in *John Marvel*, perhaps his most realistically painted plight of the southern aristocrat. Although Henry Glave’s whiteness is undermined from within through his disregard for *noblesse oblige*, he perceives the error of his ways, reforms and prospers;

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<sup>1180</sup> Faulkner, *Absalom*, 9.

<sup>1181</sup> Gray, *Southern Aberrations*, 71.

<sup>1182</sup> Gray, *Southern Aberrations*, 71.

<sup>1183</sup> Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground*, 199.

<sup>1184</sup> Gray, *Southern Aberrations*, 54.

while Wolffert's populist notions lead to a tragic end like Burr's. Marvel alone escapes critique because he remains in his place among his working-class parishioners and, thus maintaining the *status quo*, presents no threat.

This tendency to see the southern aristocrat triumphant evident in Page and Glasgow's works derives from, Macherey suggests, their 'social position'.<sup>1185</sup> Hailing from Virginian aristocratic stock, both writers find it hard to bury the myth of antebellum innocence and gentility.<sup>1186</sup> Indeed, Glasgow confesses that she 'had been born with an intimate feeling for the spirit of the past, and the lingering poetry of time and place'; and growing up 'in the South there was not only adolescence to outgrow, there was an insidious sentimental tradition to live down'.<sup>1187</sup> The individual social positions of these writers bear upon the objectivity of their critique of southern aristocracy, adulterating it with a modified version of Social Darwinism. The aristocrats in *The Voice*, *The Deliverance*, and *John Marvel*, are certainly not the fittest, yet they survive; while self-made men like Burr, or reformers like Wolffert, perish. In *The Voice*, Dudley Webb succeeds as governor, in *The Deliverance* Christopher is miraculously restored to his ancestral home, and even Henry Glave in *John Marvel*, after a period of repentance and struggle, marries a lady and heiress. The extent to which the individual reluctance to de-sentimentalise the story of southern aristocracy is influenced by public demand can never be accurately divined. As Gray observes, the turn-

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<sup>1185</sup> Macherey, *A Theory*, 113.

<sup>1186</sup> Both Glasgow and Page were Virginians whose families enjoyed a considerable affluence. On her mother's side Glasgow was descended from 'the early English settlers of Virginia' and from her mother she inherited 'ancestral pride, the burden of the past and tradition', while her father was 'a successful business man' of Calvinist persuasion, in Gray, *Southern Aberrations*, 36-37. Although Glasgow's parents 'tried to restore the old place at Green Forest' after the Civil War, 'the family fortunes were irretrievably ruined' as a result of the conflict and they relocated to Richmond, in *The Woman*, 299. Lucinda H. MacKethan notes that Page also 'inherited an aristocratic past from prominent Virginia ancestors whose relics were enshrined at Oakwood, the tidewater plantation' where he was born and spent the Civil War years, 'Plantation Fiction, 1865-1900', in *The History of Southern Literature*, ed. Louis D. Rubin, Jr, Blyden Jackson, Rayburn S. Moore, Lewis P. Simpson, Thomas Daniel Young (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 212. In all subsequent quotations from this collection, it will be referenced as *The History*.

<sup>1187</sup> Glasgow, *The Woman*, 104.

of-the-century America ‘want[ed] to hear the story of the South, particularly the Old South’: southerners motivated by the ‘affection for what seemed to be irrevocably dead and buried, and northerners ‘in order to find out about the people they had defeated’.<sup>1188</sup> In order to accommodate affection for the genteel values and respond to a popular demand for the image of antebellum pastoral, both Glasgow and Page vacillate between realism and sentimentalism in their versions of the myth which permit only a veiled critique. A similarly tempered critique is evident in Chesnutt’s work, although it is safe to assume that the affection for aristocratic values was not his primary concern. The son of ‘free Negroes from North Carolina’ who was by his own admission ‘as white as any’ white man, Chesnutt’s heritage marked him as an antithesis of the values which Page and Glasgow espoused.<sup>1189</sup> Indeed, his motives for taking up the pen that he records in his journal are rather complex; the lofty notion of ‘the elevation of the whites’ contrasts sharply with the candid admission of ‘I want fame; I want money; I want to raise my children in a different rank of life from that I sprang from’.<sup>1190</sup> Unsurprisingly, like Chesnutt, many of his protagonists set out to live the American Dream, earning the privilege with hard work and diligence. Dr Miller in *The Marrow* is a gentleman in all but name, while John Walden in *The House* is worthier of the appellation than George Tryon. Compared with Janet Miller and Rowena Walden’s flawlessness of character, the preordained ladies like Polly Ochiltree or Olivia Carteret seem like ogres. Through the success and social mobility of these men, which in the case of Walden is accomplished by passing the colour line, Chesnutt demonstrates that whiteness need not be circumscribed by outdated notions of heredity. His critique of the rhetoric of hereditary whiteness in *The Marrow*, *The House* and *The Colonel’s Dream* is conveyed from the perspective of a genteel mind, even if this

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<sup>1188</sup> Gray, *Southern Aberrations*, 61.

<sup>1189</sup> Dickson D. Bruce, Jr., *Black American Writing from the Nadir: The Evolution of a Literary Tradition 1877-1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 165; and Chesnutt, *The Journals*, 78.

<sup>1190</sup> Chesnutt, *The Journals*, 139; and Chesnutt, *The Journals*, 154.

gentility is acquired through education. Dickson D. Bruce Jr observes that ‘Genteel writing was a major element in black literature of the Post-Reconstruction period’, for it supported the ‘assimilationist purposes by proving that blacks were as capable as whites of expressing fine thoughts and feelings’.<sup>1191</sup> Therein lies Chesnutt’s dual didactic message, in demonstrating the imperfect gentility of the whites and proving that whiteness can transcend the colour line. In order to render such a revolutionary idea more palatable to his contemporaneous audience, Chesnutt’s realism at times suffers from maudlin sentimentality, particularly in his portrayal of the virtuous Rowena of which Page would be proud. Only when he speaks through Uncle Julius does Chesnutt abandon sentimentalism and, through a curious combination of folk tale and realism, undermines the myth of antebellum whiteness.

Unlike Chesnutt, though sharing a similar heritage, Dunbar-Nelson is able to move ‘away from the kinds of characterizations that dominated sentimental writing by focusing mainly on lower-class characters or on folk-customs’.<sup>1192</sup> Placing her characters beyond the pale of whiteness enables her to critique not only the arbitrariness of its rhetoric that maims those who dare to aspire, like Victor Grabért, but also to explore the duality inherent in the concept of Creole.<sup>1193</sup> Fabi notes that the tendency to ‘deploy racially indeterminate characters’ prevalent among African-American writers of the period stemmed from ‘the need of reaching and influencing a wider, mixed audience’.<sup>1194</sup> However, Dunbar-Nelson’s preoccupation with the ambiguity of Creole serves a dual purpose in that it constitutes an indictment of blood classifications and cements her regional affiliation with Louisiana. Her

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<sup>1191</sup> Bruce, *Black American*, 26.

<sup>1192</sup> Bruce, *Black American*, 132; Thomas Richardson notes that Dunbar-Nelson was ‘a descendant of the proud colony of free Negroes in New Orleans which numbered no less than eighteen thousand at the beginning of the Civil War’, in ‘Local Color in Louisiana’, in *The History*, 205.

<sup>1193</sup> Jones notes that ‘During the post-Civil War years’, the term Creole, ‘instead of signifying only a line of pure Latin descent, [...] had somehow come to signify a person of mixed blood’, in *Strange Talk*, 116.

<sup>1194</sup> Fabi, *Passing*, 66.

concern with the blood designations mirrors that of another fellow Louisianian, George Washington Cable, whose *The Grandissimes* tells a story of two Honoré Grandissimes who, despite sharing a father and a name, embody the disparate meanings of Creole: a person of pure Latin descent and a person with a drop of black blood. The burden of blood that haunts her stories is not unique to Dunbar-Nelson. Nor can Page, Glasgow, Chesnutt, and Faulkner, put its unquiet spirit to rest, for it is intertwined with the past and heritage, for in the South ‘blood is blood and you can’t get around it’.<sup>1195</sup> Fiedler observes of American fiction that it ‘is most deeply influenced by the gothic, is almost essentially a gothic one’; and the assertion is particularly pertinent to southern fiction.<sup>1196</sup> The gothic, according to Fiedler, is characterised by an awareness of ‘the pastness of the past’, and an attempt ‘to give some sense of it: the sense of something lapsed or outlived or irremediably changed’.<sup>1197</sup> What these southern writers share is not only an awareness of the ‘pastness of the past’, but also its continuing influence upon the present that mars indiscriminately both reconstructions of and aspirations to southern whiteness. Their protagonists choose to ‘live among defeated grandfathers [...] and bullets in the dining room table and such’ to remind them ‘never to forget’.<sup>1198</sup> Surrounded by monuments of the past, whether inherited or acquired, their heroes and heroines are both compelled and fail to replicate the gentility of the antebellum antecedents. Theirs is a Faustian bargain sealed in blood which condemns the preordained aristocrat and the upstart alike, and transforms each reconstruction of whiteness into a site of mutation, while whiteness proper remains a promise beyond attainment.

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<sup>1195</sup> Faulkner, *The Sound*, 209.

<sup>1196</sup> Fiedler, *Love and Death*, 142.

<sup>1197</sup> Fiedler, *Love and Death*, 137.

<sup>1198</sup> Faulkner, *Absalom*, 361.

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## **Appendix**

### **‘A Whiter Shade of Pale, or the Monster Within’**

## A WHITER SHADE OF PALE, OR THE MONSTER WITHIN

*Izabela Hopkins*

### **Abstract**

This article situates its discussion in the Post-Reconstruction American South and explores the concept of the monstrous in relation to literary reconstructions of whiteness. Following Richard Dyer's equation of Christ and the Virgin Mary with perfect whiteness, this article argues that the essence of whiteness consists in replicating these biblical antecedents in the ordinary. In the South, these ideals of whiteness become conflated with notions of antebellum gentility and are internalised in the figures of the gentleman planter and southern belle. As epitomes of whiteness, these two constructs are caught up in a process of mimetic reproductions of the biblical and genteel ideals grounded in the mythical Old South. This article regards whiteness as an amalgamation of distinct totalities which resist unification into a whole. It also recognises that the desire to replicate the divine and genteel models of whiteness is fuelled by the awareness of imperfection, the monster within, which needs to be exorcised. Consequently, each reconstruction of the preconceived perfection of the biblical and antebellum models is transformed into a site of rupture and mimetic transgression. Although whiteness, like a monstrous revenant, is reanimated in the figures of the gentleman planter and southern belle, each mimetic reproduction is haunted by the flawlessness of the antebellum paradigm and tainted by its own imperfection — its intrinsic monstrosity. This discussion engages with Ellen Glasgow's *The Miller of Old Church* and Thomas Nelson Page's *Red Rock*. Immersed in the tradition of the South, both writers portray whiteness as haunted by the spectre of the ideal model, the 'absent presence' of which renders reproductions of whiteness monstrous approximations.

**Key Words:** whiteness, monstrosity, Ellen Glasgow, Thomas Nelson Page

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Unlikely as it may appear, Mary Shelley's 'hideous progeny' and whiteness are not dissimilar in that both have been linked to imperialism, race, dominance, class, and arrogance, if one recalls the monster craftsman himself.<sup>1</sup> More importantly, however, just as the ideas of monstrosity that Frankenstein's creature evokes transcend the actuality of the monster, the meanings of whiteness exceed the mere visibility of colour. Grace Elizabeth Hale traces the genesis of whiteness to the abolition of slavery in 1863, which irrevocably altered the unique 'power dynamic' that rested on the 'slave versus citizen' or 'dependent versus independent' dichotomy.<sup>2</sup> The notion of privilege and its concomitant power lay at the heart of whiteness, and the years of Reconstruction and Post-Reconstruction were marked by the struggle to regain both.<sup>3</sup> Since then, whiteness has been labelled as 'largely an invented construct blending culture, assumptions and attitudes' and 'a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed'.<sup>4</sup> Whiteness, therefore, becomes a matter of positionality whereby 'certain standards of belief and behavior' are given value and in turn translated into its markers.<sup>5</sup> Richard Dyer in *White*, his critique of whiteness, proposes that the rhetoric of Christianity provided models that were crucial to the conception of whiteness. Christianity, writes Dyer, 'maintains a conception of a split mind and body, regarding the latter as at the least inferior and often as evil', or monstrous.<sup>6</sup> This concept of a split between the mind and body is essential to the discourse on whiteness as it points to the disjunction between the symbolic ideal and its replication in the actual, creating the possibility for transgression. Although this division prefigures rebellion against the loftier ideals enshrined in the figures of

the Virgin Mary and Christ, the epitome of white femininity is associated with qualities such as ‘passivity, expectancy, [and] receptivity’ as well as ‘motherhood as the supreme fulfilment of one’s nature, all of this constituting a given purity and state of grace’.<sup>7</sup> For men, the model of whiteness ‘is of a divided nature and internal struggle between mind (God) and body (mind), and of suffering as the supreme expression of both spiritual and physical striving’ as well as ‘self-denial and self-control’.<sup>8</sup> These archetypes of whiteness ‘are what one should aspire to be like and yet also what one can never be’.<sup>9</sup>

In the nineteenth-century American South, Dyer’s antecedents of whiteness become endowed with worldly goods, such as the hereditary possession of land, and are transposed onto the southern gentleman planter and the southern belle.<sup>10</sup> Crucial to casting the two figures as embodiments of whiteness is, as Ritchie Devon Watson Jr observes, ‘the conviction that the region’s slaveholders had descended almost entirely from the English Cavalier aristocracy’, which furnished a direct connection to England and her nobility.<sup>11</sup> Southern whiteness then became synonymous with gentility which, predicated upon hereditary possession of land, tradition, and blood, was suitably enhanced with divine attributes. During the Post-Reconstruction era, the abolition of slavery combined with harsh post-war realities to reinscribe the meaning of southern gentility, anchoring it in the imagined idyll of the Old South, an ‘innocent plantation pastorate’.<sup>12</sup> Michel Foucault observes that history ‘becomes “effective” to the degree that it introduces discontinuity into our very being’, and so the resurrection of genteel models of the Old South makes postbellum whiteness not only atavistic, but also inherently different.<sup>13</sup> The southern gentleman and lady, ‘in attempting to ontologize remains, to make them present’, become ‘a site of transformations and appropriations’.<sup>14</sup> However, it is the illusory wholeness of the antebellum ideal, the promise of perfection which lies in the reconcilability of its earthly and biblical elements, that fuels the pursuit of whiteness and prevents its attainment.<sup>15</sup> It is, therefore, the awareness of innate and hereditarily predetermined imperfection that encourages reconstructions of whiteness and transforms its embodiments into monstrous reproductions.

Elizabeth Young traces the etymology of the term monster to ‘the Latin *monstrare*, to show or display’, thereby emphasising the visual aspect of its discourse.<sup>16</sup> However, Young also sees ‘amalgamation, reanimation, and revolt against a creator’ as characteristics of the monster.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Chris Baldick notes the visible aspect of monstrosity, observing that ‘the traditional idea of the monstrous was strongly associated with visual display, and monsters were understood primarily as exhibitions of moral vices’.<sup>18</sup> It is Baldick’s emphasis on moral iniquity that becomes particularly pertinent to reconstructions of southern whiteness. Tracing the genesis of monstrosity, Baldick observes:

It is the vices of ingratitude, rebellion, and disobedience, particularly towards parents, that most commonly attract the appellation ‘monstrous’: to be a monster is to break the natural bonds of obligation towards friends and especially blood-relations.<sup>19</sup>

To be a monster is to transgress the boundaries of filial obedience, and if there is a vice of which southern whiteness is guilty, it is filial rebellion. Discussing mimesis, Jacques Derrida observes ‘that while referring each time to another text, to another determinate system,’ it ‘only refer[s] to *itself* as a determinate structure; a structure that is open and closed *at the same time*’.<sup>20</sup> Each act of mimetic reproduction of the antebellum ideal encodes its own negation which renders the faithfulness of such reproductions impossible and untenable. Hence, each reproduction, by virtue of being a reproduction, entails rebellion or disobedience against its antecedent. In the postbellum South, it is occasioned by the impossibility of the resurrection of the antebellum ideal in the Post-Reconstruction realities and failure to embody

the divine attributes of whiteness. This rebellion is therefore predicated upon the absence of any of the three factors indispensable to the projection of southern gentility, namely hereditary possession of land, blood, and tradition. It is also predetermined by the detachment from the site of origin, the idyllic Old South.

‘It is the propensity of the monster to deconstruct at any time, to always be in the process of decomposition’, and so the endeavours of the gentleman planter and the southern belle are significant because they reveal the hysteric and historic anxiety for attaining whiteness and emphasise the imperfection of the aspirants.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, in order to preserve the purity encoded in the concept of the genteel lady, the whiteness of the southern gentleman develops along the axes of sexual restraint and struggle.<sup>22</sup> Purity is central to the construction of female gentility, and it is also indispensable to projections of male whiteness. Thereby, it becomes crucial for the southern gentleman to assume an active role in the mimetic reproductions of the southern lady, and to negotiate the interstice between the ideal and its actual representation. Whilst such transformations are monstrous because they erase the possibility of hereditary perfection, they are essential to reconstructions of southern whiteness. An example of the indispensability of such metamorphoses is Thomas Nelson Page’s *Red Rock: A Chronicle of Reconstruction*.<sup>23</sup> The novel, published in 1898, traces the tempestuous fortunes of two patrician families, the Grays and the Carys. The narrative encompasses the events of secession, the American Civil War, and Reconstruction. Jacquelin Gray, the heir apparent to the Red Rock plantation, is wounded in the conflict and, when he returns home an invalid, his weakness becomes the outward manifestation of his imperfection that foreshadows his loss of whiteness. Through the evil machinations of the family’s former overseer, Hiram Still, who claims that Jacquelin’s father had defaulted on repayment of bonds, Jacquelin loses the plantation and with it a claim to whiteness. Without the plantation, Jacquelin’s gentility is an empty signifier and his weakness symbolises his filial disobedience, particularly as his father exhorted him to ‘keep the old place. Make any sacrifice to do that. Landholding is one of the safeguards of the gentry.’<sup>24</sup> Jacquelin’s reconstruction of gentility establishes a ‘disjunctive rapport’ between itself and the genteel ideal represented by his father through which it is transformed into a synecdoche, capable only of offering a partial replication of the presupposed whole.<sup>25</sup> If, according to Bill Brown, the essence of monstrosity is ‘the result of like not proceeding from like’, then without his ancestral plantation Jacquelin’s whiteness becomes a site of monstrous mutation, irreducibly different from the model bequeathed to him by his father.<sup>26</sup> Although the loss of his plantation is caused by circumstances beyond his control, it nonetheless prevents Jacquelin from obeying his father’s command. Jacquelin’s filial rebellion is a direct result of Post-Reconstruction vagaries and becomes an inextricable part of his gentility. His disability is a consequence of the South’s secession from the Union which tore the ‘body politic’ apart. Baldick observes that ‘when political discord and rebellion appear’, the wholeness of ‘the body politic’ collapses, and instead of ‘an integral and sacred whole’, it becomes metaphorically ‘not just diseased, but misshapen, abortive, [and] monstrous’.<sup>27</sup> Whilst his infirmity, resulting from the struggle to defend the interests of the South, transforms Jacquelin into a southern Prometheus-like hero, it also acts as a symbol of punishment for the sin of filial ingratitude against the country as an organic whole, tainting his heroism with monstrosity. Jacquelin’s plight serves as a metaphor for the mutilation of the South in the aftermath of the conflict, the era that Page wrote of as ‘destruction under the euphemism of reconstruction’.<sup>28</sup>

Although severed from his plantation, Jacquelin’s gentility becomes a locus of monstrous discontinuity, its remnants can be salvaged to project a ‘mutilated’ whiteness. Jacquelin’s reproduction of gentility is therefore synecdochical, always pointing to the wholeness enshrined in the antebellum ideal, while lacking its fundamental prerequisite – his plantation. Although the concept of the ideal makes such partial replications ‘possible and intelligible’, it

is never 'reducible to them'.<sup>29</sup> As a result, Jacquelin's projection of gentility, whilst pointing to the presupposed wholeness of the antebellum model, reveals a haunting incompleteness of his reconstruction. Despite that, Jacquelin's gentility is revived by negotiating the gap between the ideal of southern femininity and its actual manifestation. Following the years of separation forced upon them by the war, Jacquelin finds Blair Cary, his blue-blooded childhood playmate and cousin, 'sprung up to a slender young lady of "quite seventeen," whose demureness and newborn dignity were the more bewitching, because they were belied by her laughing glances'.<sup>30</sup> Although Blair's demureness and her 'laughing glances' appear irreconcilable, to Jacquelin 'she was no longer mortal: he had robed her in radiance and lifted her among the stars'.<sup>31</sup> The celestial elevation of Blair marks an effort of 'pedestallisation' on Jacquelin's part which turns her into his creation. Since 'artistic perfectionism' stands 'in direct competition with sexual love', Jacquelin desexualises Blair.<sup>32</sup> In performing a split evocative of Dyer's conception of Christianity, Jacquelin, in a monster-mongering fashion, revives the purity of the ideal by disembodiment Blair. No longer a mere mortal and elevated beyond contamination, Blair can aspire to the purity of the archetypal southern belle and become worthy of protection. As a totality constructed by Jacquelin, Blair becomes a synecdoche whose presence, whilst pointing to the spectre of the antecedent, reveals the monstrous incompleteness of the reconstruction. Since Jacquelin's efforts at constructing Blair's perfection are blighted by the description of her as a carefree teenager, his creation, in a monstrous reversal, 'masters the master'.<sup>33</sup>

Whilst the presence of a genteel lady evokes the ideal of female whiteness, it also points to a disjunction encoded in the ambivalent space where meaning transcends the sign or the imitator. Since the construction of southern male whiteness is dependent upon reinventing the model of female whiteness to conform to the ideal, it is caught up between two totalities: the concept and its embodiment. It is through Jacquelin's spinster Aunt Thomasia that the ambivalence of the southern gentleman as the epitome of southern whiteness grounded in perceptions of southern femininity is voiced. When Blair complains to Thomasia about Steve Allen, Jacquelin's cousin, blaming 'all his shortcomings' on 'the example set him by a woman', Thomasia replies: 'They all do it, my dear, from Adam down.'<sup>34</sup> Elsewhere, Thomasia makes an equally astute assertion that 'Men like to fancy themselves broader and more judicial than women.'<sup>35</sup> Not only does Thomasia hint at the continuity of the fiction of idealised femininity by placing it alongside Christian tradition, she also makes it a particularly male creation. Thomasia's awareness of the factitious creation of the southern belle emphasises the irreconcilability of the idealised woman with the actual and highlights the monstrous imperfection of such creations.

Despite her awareness of the irreconcilability of the model and its actual replication, Aunt Thomasia exemplifies the struggle for perfection. Her decision to remain a spinster and her resistance to General Legaie's interminable addresses demonstrate her obedience and docility. Having once given her heart to a gentleman 'who had loved her,' but who 'had not been strong enough to resist, even for her sake, the temptation of two besetting sins — drink and gambling', Thomasia 'had obeyed her father and given him up'.<sup>36</sup> These monstrous vices undermine the gentleman's gentility and therefore his whiteness. Marked by sin, he lacks another quality that Dyer associates with whiteness — that of struggle against temptation. His susceptibility to temptation and his failure to change his ways suggest that, irrespective of his claim to gentility, his whiteness is irredeemable. By obeying her father, Thomasia both fulfils her filial obligation and conforms to the standard of docile femininity. Although unconditional obedience seems to secure her claim to whiteness, it also problematises it by preventing Thomasia from fulfilling one of the duties which Dyer links to the concept of perfect female whiteness: motherhood. Despite the purity of her intentions, Thomasia's whiteness can never be complete because she cannot conform to the Marian paradigm of



female whiteness. Although certain characteristics she possesses constitute attributes of whiteness, they never converge into a totality. Instead, Thomasia's embodiment of the idealised form of womanhood remains partial and betrays a monstrous lack. Thomasia tells her story to Steve, the son of her former suitor, in the hope that it will prevent him from replicating his father's mistakes. However, Steve's reply suggests that her disclosure is only partly successful and reveals that he has already succumbed to his father's monstrous legacy: 'I will not say I will never drink again; but I will promise you not to gamble again, and I will not drink to excess any more.'<sup>37</sup> This act of filial 'obedience', while establishing a lineal continuity between father and son, marks Steve's whiteness as intrinsically monstrous. Whilst Thomasia's story initiates Steve's struggle for whiteness, his failure is predetermined by his reluctant promise. Consequently, the monstrosity of Steve's whiteness is both predicated upon the incompleteness of the ideal that inspires it and confirmed by his conciliatory promise.

Imperfect though Aunt Thomasia's whiteness may be, according to Steve, 'there aren't any of 'em [ladies] like you nowadays. The mould's broken.'<sup>38</sup> Steve's admiration for Thomasia also represents a symbolic end to the aspirations of young southern ladies, such as Blair. Blair's reconstruction is reduced to a monstrous copy of the ideal. Steve's assertion is reflected in Blair's account of visiting Thomasia. Each visit to the lady, Blair declares, 'was like reading one of Scott's novels; that she got back to a land of chivalry'.<sup>39</sup> Blair gives Thomasia's gentility a mythical status which, though admired, cannot be wholly emulated. Whilst Thomasia's gentility is anachronistic because it points to a bygone ideal of origin, Blair is equally misplaced because she departs from it. To help her father meet tax payments on their estate, Blair becomes an entrepreneur, making and selling preserves. Whilst the selflessness of her intentions reveals a whiteness worthy of the impossible example of the Virgin Mary, it is also tainted by performing manual labour, which is incommensurate with the standard of the southern belle. Blair and Thomasia exemplify the irreconcilability of the ideal woman with the actual representation of womanhood. Ironically, it is through Blair's transformation into a working-class woman that her father's flawed gentility is maintained.

In the harsh realities of the Post-Reconstruction era, belonging to the planter class would no longer guarantee a life of abundance. The enterprise of the southern lady, though marking her departure from the ideal, maintains the façade of male gentility. Not only are Dr Cary and General Legaie's shirts 'made from an under-garment of one of the ladies', but they also possess transforming powers. General Legaie declares that 'he had felt on putting it [the shirt] on that morning, as a knight of old might have felt when he donned his armor prepared by virgin hands'.<sup>40</sup> In his newly sutured shirt, the General 'like the monster literally embodies the process of reanimation'.<sup>41</sup> By negotiating the interstice between the past and present, the ladies' labours, in the manner of Frankenstein, resurrect the General's gentility. In doing so, they vacillate between transgressing and respecting the ideal of whiteness.<sup>42</sup> Consequently, the gentility they resurrect materialises as a monstrous product of this vacillation between the transgression and respect of the antebellum model and thus can only encode difference: difference as a corollary of 'like not proceeding from like' and difference predicated upon the impossibility of the resurrection of antebellum whiteness. Pieced together from the remnants of the former glory of the Old South which the garments represent, the General and Dr Cary's gentility literalises the metaphor of monstrous amalgamation which, caught up in the ambivalent space between the tantalising wholeness of the antebellum model and its partial reconstruction, threatens to unravel at any moment. The genesis of the shirts reveals the untenability of the 'devivified' ideal of the southern lady, consigned to occupy a purely representational space.<sup>43</sup> In practice, the representational space transmutes into a constitutive space, and the genteel lady occupies both, thus emphasising the irreconcilability of the ideal and its copy. However, it is precisely because of the difference between the model and its reincarnation that, in Steve Allen's words, one can 'don his gray jacket [and] play gentleman

once more'.<sup>44</sup> Like Jacquelin's infirmity, Steve 'play[ing] gentleman' is already abortive as it betrays the incompleteness of his gentility. Steve becomes involved in the 'hauntology' of reproduction, whereby each reincarnation constitutes 'repetition and first time, but also repetition and last time'.<sup>45</sup> Although southern whiteness, like a revenant, returns to be resurrected in Steve's body, his projection of gentility materialises as a mutation which, whilst evoking the presupposed wholeness of the antebellum ideal, brands each act of playing as a monstrous and finite revivification.

The gentleman and lady emerging from Page's *Red Rock* may be incomplete as reincarnations of southern whiteness, however such mutation is justified by the harsh exigencies of Reconstruction. For Ellen Glasgow in *The Miller of Old Church*, intrinsic monstrosity is not a consequence of life in the Reconstruction South, but rather an inevitability stemming from the constructed nature of the ideal of whiteness.<sup>46</sup> The novel, published in 1911, 'is set in Southside Virginia from 1898 until 1902'.<sup>47</sup> Populated with quaint characters and replete with bucolic wisdom, it tells a tale of struggle where the notion of indelible imperfection is inseparable from aspirations of whiteness. Both *Old Church* and the neighbouring plantation, *Jordan's Journey*, are places where notions of female whiteness and its male counterpart are esteemed and cultivated, irrespective of class. One of the protagonists, the eponymous miller Abel Revercomb, observes the struggle inherent in the pursuit of ideals: 'The world he moved in was peopled by a race of beings that acted under ideal laws and measured up to an impossible standard'.<sup>48</sup> What makes Abel's remark all the more pertinent is not only his awareness of the existence of an 'ideal', but also his conviction of its unattainability which marks all reproductions as monstrous approximations.

Abel's life has been a struggle for improvement and, were it not for his humble origin, he might have a claim to whiteness. 'Abel's ancestors had got out of the habit of trying' to measure up to the 'impossible standard' (his father died 'in the odour of shiftlessness') but Abel overcomes his legacy and prospers.<sup>49</sup> The sole reason for Abel's striving is Molly Merryweather, the granddaughter of the overseer at *Jordan's Journey* and illegitimate daughter of its late owner, Jonathan Gay. If the 'fallen woman' is a 'female version of monstrosity', then Molly, bearing the stigma of her mother's transgression, represents the monstrous progeny which invalidates her claim to whiteness as hereditary gentility.<sup>50</sup> Branded 'a flirt' by Abel's mother, Molly embodies the idea of the 'fallen woman'.<sup>51</sup> However, this does not prevent Abel from idealising Molly and dreaming of 'a happiness that was suited to the ideal figure rather than to the living woman'.<sup>52</sup> In Abel's case, such 'pedestallisation' is coupled with aspiration and is a product of his awareness of his own imperfection. It is therefore unsurprising that he idolises Molly, despite his belief in the impossibility of perfection, because, as Mrs. Bottom, the proprietress of *Bottom's Ordinary*, observes: 'when it's b'iled down to the p'int, it ain't her, but his own wishes he's chasin'.<sup>53</sup> The romanticised but socially blemished Molly becomes a reflection of Abel's transgressive ambition of social elevation. Abel's re-imagination of Molly's perfection is the projection of his desire for gentility from which his humble origin precludes him. Abel's embodiment of enterprising spirit and struggle, both identified by Dyer as attributes of male whiteness, points to a monstrous lack of aristocratic lineage that constitutes the norm of southern whiteness. Monsters are 'to be seen and not heard', so Abel's aspiration of social elevation and his subsequent political career are monstrous aberrations.<sup>54</sup>

As with Frankenstein's creature, Molly turns against her creator. Noting his Sunday apparel complete with a 'starched collar' and complemented by 'hair [that] was brushed flat on his head', Molly observes that 'he had never looked worse, nor had he ever felt quite so confident of the correctness of his appearance'.<sup>55</sup> Molly's uncharitable remark renders Abel's reconstruction of gentility a monstrous anomaly. The nuts and bolts of Boris Karloff's portrayal of Frankenstein's creature may be missing, but the overall effect is equally

unsettling.<sup>56</sup> Abel's ensemble manifests transgression in that it becomes emblematic of his misplaced ambition. By emphasising the futility of Abel's aspirations, Molly indicates the existence of boundaries which, when crossed, result in monstrosity. These tacitly erected boundaries, guarding the 'impossible standard', also render Molly's reconstruction of gentility a monstrous imitation. On Molly's twenty-first birthday, it is revealed that her father, Jonathan Gay, bequeathed her a considerable legacy on the condition that she lives at Jordan's Journey with his sister-in-law, Miss Angela, her sister, Miss Kesiah, and Jonathan's nephew and namesake, Jonathan Gay. Overnight, Molly is transformed into an almost genteel lady whose claim to whiteness is supported by her new material wealth. However, her father's legacy cannot erase the stigma of the 'fallen woman' to which Miss Angela refers as 'the strain of Merryweather blood'. Neither can it change 'the fact of her being born in such unfortunate circumstances', which results in 'a kind of social defiance that would always keep her from being just — oh, well, you know —'.<sup>57</sup> For Miss Angela, who in her own estimation embodies the norm of female whiteness, Molly's 'social defiance' is emblematic of her intrinsic monstrosity enshrined in the inferior Merryweather blood. However, Miss Angela's words reveal a paradox inherent in the idea of monstrosity. David Punter observes that 'the law forms a frame or grid through which all bodies must pass', but it 'cannot permit the exceptional body'.<sup>58</sup> Since, according to the law, 'there cannot be monsters', the 'unfortunate circumstances' to which Miss Angela refers emphasise the status of monstrosity as 'socially and literally constructed'.<sup>59</sup> By indicating the existence of social prescriptions and putatively accepted norms that render Molly's gentility a monstrous aberration, Miss Angela transforms herself into a monster-monger.

If, as Allen Weiss notes, 'ontological instability' characterises the monster, then Molly's class-transcending heritage concurrently facilitates and negates her claim to whiteness.<sup>60</sup> Her precarious position allows her to reveal the impossibility of the paradigm of female whiteness and the futility and duplicity of the male ideal grounded in the projections of perfect femininity. When the Reverend Orlando Mullen, one of Molly's unfortunate suitors, delivers a fiery sermon about the virtues of the perfect woman, 'Molly's lips trembled into a smile', and considering the self-aggrandising pompousness of the sermon, her merriment is justified.<sup>61</sup> According to the Reverend, 'What the womanly woman desired was to remain an Incentive, an Ideal, an Inspiration', sacrificing herself for the advancement of her husband and sons. Indeed, 'self-sacrifice was the breath of the nostrils of the womanly woman' and it was for this 'that men loved her and made an Ideal of her'.<sup>62</sup> Only through following the self-sacrificial example of the Virgin Mary can the 'womanly woman' aspire to whiteness. The only respite from the rigours of 'idealhood' is to be found in 'the privilege of ministering to the sick and the afflicted'.<sup>63</sup> In this saintly life of duty, the 'womanly woman', the Reverend thunders, should not concern herself with whether she 'was ugly or beautiful', but instead should find comfort in the fact that 'no God-fearing man would rank loveliness of face or form above the capacity for self-sacrifice and the unfailing attendance upon the sick and the afflicted'.<sup>64</sup> In this gesture of Christian charity, the Reverend separates physical unattractiveness from monstrosity. However, the Reverend's disparagement of beauty betrays his questionable morality and leads Molly to observe:

It was all very well for the rector to say that beauty was of less importance than visiting the sick, but the fact remained that Judy Hatch visited the sick more zealously than she — and yet he was very far, indeed, from falling in love with Judy Hatch! The contradiction between the man and his ideal of himself was embodied before her under a clerical waistcoat.<sup>65</sup>

His definition of female virtues reveals not only the duplicity of the male ideal, but also the fissure between the model and the reality. Judy Hatch's piousness and self-sacrifice, both indicators of ideal female whiteness, go unnoticed because she is not attractive and does not embody the characteristic so disparaged by the Reverend. Molly, however, is praised despite the stigma of her illegitimacy and flirtatiousness. The Reverend's actions undermine the veracity of his sermon, transforming him into a 'no-God-fearing man' and revealing him to be a monstrous antithesis of his own words.<sup>66</sup>

Like the Reverend, Jonathan Gay Jr's 'ideal woman' should be 'submissive and clinging'. Jonathan, the heir to Jordan's Journey and recently returned from England, considers submissiveness 'the becoming mental and facial expression for the [female] sex'.<sup>67</sup> Since meekness implies defencelessness, it is capable of inspiring acts of chivalry which Jonathan equates with hereditary gentility. However, when Jonathan meets Blossom, Abel Revercomb's niece, it is not her meekness that moves him, but her beauty. To Jonathan, Blossom is the embodiment 'of an almost pure Saxon type — tall, broad-shouldered, deep-bosomed, with a skin the colour of new milk, and soft ashen hair'.<sup>68</sup> Curiously, Jonathan's 'vague chivalric impulse' is animated not by Blossom's beauty, but by 'a little brown mole at the corner of her mouth' which marks the 'single imperfection of her otherwise flawless features'.<sup>69</sup> If monstrosity is constructed 'through lack, [or] excess', then Blossom's 'single imperfection' evokes a graver defect — the absence of aristocratic lineage. In a place where gentility epitomises whiteness, rustic origin is seen to be a monstrous flaw.<sup>70</sup> The significance of the mark is twofold in that it foreshadows Jonathan's dishonourable conduct and highlights Blossom's social imperfection. As the miller's niece, Blossom is Jonathan's social inferior, a fact emphasised by her speech of which Jonathan observes that it is 'simple [and] direct'.<sup>71</sup> In an act of doubling, Blossom's imperfection reflects Jonathan's intrinsic, and hereditary, monstrosity. Like his ancestors, Jonathan 'will go on ogling the sex' because it is 'in the blood'.<sup>72</sup> Although Jonathan's genteel heritage is sealed by his inheritance of the plantation which reinforces his claim to whiteness, his susceptibility to female beauty suggests a lack of the biblical attribute of whiteness — the struggle against temptation inherent in the figure of Christ. Jonathan's reconstruction of whiteness is therefore incomplete — it is a mutation of the preconceived archetype. Not only does Jonathan's response to his 'originary indebtedness' make him different from the locus of origin, but it also renders the ancestral model imperfect. Jonathan's faithfulness to his familial legacy leads him to reject the divine ideal of whiteness.<sup>73</sup>

Regardless of her imperfection and having reassured himself that she looks 'every inch a lady', Jonathan marries Blossom.<sup>74</sup> Unfortunately, there is a difference between looking and being, as Jonathan discovers, and when Blossom becomes clinging, his ardour is tempered by 'a serious annoyance'.<sup>75</sup> Jonathan's change of heart stems partly from a re-imagining of the female ideal, whereby the highly regarded submissiveness is superseded by 'a perpetual virgin in perpetual flight', and partly by Jonathan's realisation of the transgression he committed by marrying someone of a lower social class.<sup>76</sup> Since placing the female ideal beyond reach fuels striving which stands in 'direct competition with sexual love', the only way for Jonathan to rid himself of imperfection is to turn Blossom into a monster by performing a ghostly transference that renders the sensuous non-sensuous.<sup>77</sup> Imperfection then becomes crucial to whiteness as it both feeds the perpetuation of its ideal and exacerbates the ambivalence of its reconstructions. Irrespective of Blossom's approximation of perfect femininity and a claim to gentility which their union guarantees her, she can no longer aspire to the virginal purity enshrined in the figure of the Virgin Mary. Similarly, the imperfection of Jonathan's conduct mirrors the imperfection that inspired it, thus accentuating the ambivalence of whiteness as an ideal that cannot be replicated in the ordinary.

Nowhere is the ambivalence of the paradigm of female whiteness more pronounced than in the characters of Miss Angela and Miss Kesiah, whose claims to whiteness are seemingly sealed by their patrician descent. However, the treatment accorded to both ladies belies the very notion of hereditary whiteness and reveals its permeability. Miss Angela, a former belle and 'a still pretty woman at fifty', is considered a worthy contender to replicate the ideal of female whiteness in the actual. Indeed, the Reverend believes it impossible 'for any woman to approach more closely the perfect example of her sex'.<sup>78</sup> As far as Miss Kesiah is concerned, Mr. Chamberlayne, a lawyer and family friend, asserts that it is 'an outrage on the part of Providence that a woman should have been created quite so ugly'.<sup>79</sup> Miss Kesiah's noble heritage is of no significance because it is not complemented by physical beauty. Miss Kesiah externalises the ambiguity between the notion of female gentility and its physical representation, because, irrespective of her social rank, she is transformed into its monstrous antithesis. A monster, as Baldick notes, 'is one who has transgressed so far the bounds of nature as to become a moral advertisement', and so Miss Kesiah's plainness acts as a visual marker of her intrinsic monstrosity.<sup>80</sup> The life of self-sacrifice that she leads, which should characterise her as a 'womanly woman', only serves to amplify her monstrosity because her selflessness does not derive 'from inclination, but from the force of necessity against which rebellion has been in vain'.<sup>81</sup> As 'a tragic perversion of nature which romance and realism conspired to ignore', Miss Kesiah embodies the ambiguity of the ideal as an imagined construct which cannot be reconciled with its actual representation. In a doubling reminiscent of Jekyll and Hyde, her outward appearance serves as a visual representation of her sister's inherent imperfection.<sup>82</sup>

Whereas Miss Kesiah's 'false front only extinguished sentiment' and failed to inspire chivalry, her sister is venerated as the embodiment of 'womanly woman'.<sup>83</sup> 'Clinging and small and delicate', Miss Angela embodies the holy trinity of Reverend Mullen's sermon: 'Incentive, Ideal and Inspiration'.<sup>84</sup> Miss Angela's awareness of being vaunted as the apotheosis of female gentility combined with her superficial docility enable her to dominate 'not by force, but by sentiment', to surrender 'all rights in order to grasp more effectively at all privileges', so that she rules with a 'remorseless tyranny of weakness'.<sup>85</sup> Her beauty and passivity conceal her innate flaws and enable her to impose indirectly her 'desires and standards upon the society'.<sup>86</sup> Miss Angela, 'far from angelic in her disregard for Christian charity', internalises the ambiguity of the paradigm of female whiteness. Her submissiveness and docility carry no traces of self-sacrifice, but are adroitly exploited to perpetuate the perfection of the ideal of the genteel lady: she becomes her own creator. Blessed with an aristocratic legacy but lacking the Marian qualities of self-effacement and self-sacrifice, Miss Angela's whiteness is not only incomplete, but also results in the 'the blighting of the creator', who becomes sealed off 'from the sources of life in other people'.<sup>87</sup>

Miss Angela takes her powers of creation in pursuit of idealhood a step further in that she becomes, albeit indirectly, responsible for three deaths. First Molly's mother, Janet Merryweather, falls victim to Miss Angela's dogged determination to protect the purity of her family's gentility from lower-class pollution by preventing the elder Jonathan Gay from marrying Janet. Forsaken by her lover, Janet succumbs to madness and dies. It is not long after Janet's death that her former suitor is found shot, his unexplained fate supplying an inexhaustible fount of local speculation. Finally, motivated by his concern for Miss Angela's health, Jonathan resolves to keep his marriage to Blossom a secret, and persuades his wife to do likewise. The secrecy surrounding their union rouses the suspicions of Blossom's father, Abner Revercomb. Convinced of what he imagines to be Blossom's disgrace, Abner decides to avenge his daughter's honour and shoots Jonathan. Indeed, without Miss Angela's 'soft yet indomitable influence', Molly observes, Jonathan, like his uncle before him, 'would never have lied in the beginning, would never have covered his faithlessness with the hypocrisy of

duty'.<sup>88</sup> It is therefore the need to protect the ideal engendered in its irresistible power that underlies the dishonourable conduct of both men; in their zeal to guard the model, their gentility is irrevocably compromised. In protecting her own projection of whiteness, Miss Angela blights the gentility of those around her. Miss Angela's transgression is all the more grievous because she remains aware of the impossibility of amalgamating the divine and genteel attributes of whiteness. Her preoccupation with the purity enshrined in the concept of the southern lady leads her to confess that 'she herself preferred adorers to lovers'.<sup>89</sup> Since adoration implies a lack of corporeality, it invests its object with a divinity which places it beyond sexual contamination; once the ideal acquires corporeality, it ceases to be an ideal. In performing the split of the ideal from the body, Miss Angela, unwittingly, condemns her incarnation of female whiteness to be deficient. In doing so, she dissociates the notion of bodily deformity from the appellation of the monster. In Miss Angela's case, the comeliness of her physiognomy masks 'evil, sin, wretchedness, [and] death'; her body does not manifest, but contains moral corruption, albeit unsuccessfully, as it infects others.<sup>90</sup> Not only does Jonathan's filial obedience to Miss Angela result in his mutated gentility, but it also costs him his life. As he lies dying, Jonathan refuses to disclose the name of his assassin, for he sees his death as a punishment for his misconduct towards Blossom. In claiming that it was 'an accident', Jonathan acts selflessly and honourably, partially redeeming his whiteness with a lie.<sup>91</sup>

Whilst the pursuit of the ideal transforms the residents of Old Church and the neighbouring plantation into 'monstrous outcasts', it reveals the composite nature of whiteness to 'be the true monster'.<sup>92</sup> The whiteness emerging from Page and Glasgow's tales is not only a monstrous fiction, but also one which evades completion. If a coalescence of whiteness denoting spiritual nobility and hereditary whiteness encompassing blood, tradition, and the possession of land is enshrined in the concept of über whiteness, then the southern gentleman and lady, as preordained epitomes of the ideal, encode the impossibility of the reconciliation of the two whitenesses in the ordinary. Their respective struggles to revive and project the wholeness of the model render the southern gentleman and lady second-rate palimpsests who reveal the rupture existing between the ideal and its reconstructions. Consequently, 'the respect for ancient continuities' that fosters the southern gentleman and lady's reconstructions of the ideal 'becomes systematic dissociation' — a locus of filial rebellion — which not only frustrates the coalescence of the disparate totalities of whiteness into a whole, but also exposes their permeability.<sup>93</sup> Since 'ideal forms are impossible', the wholeness of the ideal of whiteness materialises as a monstrous illusion, always already mediated by its disparate totalities, the existence of which both fosters and foils the attainment of ideal whiteness.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, the struggle for whiteness becomes the struggle for approximation that can only yield 'maimed' subjects — monsters, born out of the fissure that is itself the essence of approximation.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Mary Shelley, 'Author's Introduction to the Standard Novels Edition' (1831), in *Frankenstein or the Modern Prometheus* (The 1818 Text), ed. by Marilyn Butler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), pp. 192-97 (p. 197). For various interpretations of the Frankenstein monster see Elizabeth Young's *Black Frankenstein: The Making of an American Metaphor* (New York: New York University Press, 2008) and Chris Baldick's *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-century Writing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Although the policies adopted towards African Americans varied across the South, restrictions on black franchise appeared throughout the 1880s, and in 1896, in *Plessy vs. Ferguson*, the Supreme Court 'gave federal

sanction to segregation as policy', in Hale, p. 48. Theodore W. Allen provides a detailed, historical account of the emergence of the notion of white privilege in *The Invention of the White Race*, 2 vols (London: Verso, 1995-97). Volume 2, in particular, focuses on the history and development of the concept in the United States and in the South. Each volume contains a subtitle: *Racial Oppression and Social Control* and *The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo-America* respectively.

<sup>4</sup> Valerie Melissa Babb, *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature and Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), p. 5; and Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Babb, p. 148.

<sup>6</sup> Dyer, *White* (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Dyer, p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> Dyer, p. 17.

<sup>9</sup> Dyer, p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> *The New Oxford Dictionary of English*, ed. by Judy Pearsall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), defines the term postbellum as: 'occurring or existing after a war, in particular the American Civil War,' p. 1448.

<sup>11</sup> Ritchie Devon Watson, Jr, *Normans and Saxons: Southern Race Mythology and the Intellectual History of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> Hale, p. 54. For discussions of the imagined Old South, see Hale, Alexander Saxton's 'Blackface Minstrelsy and Jacksonian Ideology', and David Roediger's *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. Full publication details are cited in bibliography.

<sup>13</sup> Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. by Donald F. Bouchard, trans. by Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Oxford: Blackwell, 1977), p.154.

<sup>14</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx: The State of National Debt, the Work of Mourning and the New International*, 'Editor's Introduction' by Bernard Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 9; and Michel De Certeau, 'Practices of Space', trans. by Richard Miller and Edward Schneider, in *On Signs*, ed. by Marshall Blonsky (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), pp. 122-45 (p. 127). To De Certeau, the concept of the city is constructed through such 'transformations and appropriations' that result in its meaning transcending urban reality.

<sup>15</sup> *The New Oxford Dictionary of English* provides the following definition of the term antebellum: 'occurring or existing before a particular war, especially the US Civil War: *the conventions of the antebellum South*,' p. 69.

<sup>16</sup> Young, p. 160.

<sup>17</sup> Young, p. 14.

<sup>18</sup> Baldick, p. 45.

<sup>19</sup> Baldick, p. 13.

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. by Barbara Johnson (London: Continuum, 2011), p.206.

<sup>21</sup> Judith Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 1995), p. 37.

<sup>22</sup> It is noteworthy that Babb sees sexual restraint as a characteristic of whiteness, while Dyer perceives struggle as an attribute of male whiteness.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Nelson Page, *Red Rock: A Chronicle of Reconstruction* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903).

<sup>24</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, p. 47.

<sup>25</sup> Avital Ronell considers the telephone a medium that establishes 'a disjunctive rapport' between the call and the called. The called is Martin Heidegger and the call comes from 'SA Storm Trooper Bureau'. In this case, 'both the telephone and Martin Heidegger never entirely coincide with what they are made to communicate with; they operate as the synecdoches of what they are', in *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), p. 6. The telephone condenses Heidegger to 'the called' and the Nazi Party to 'the call', whereby both are implicated in a larger power structure, but not equated with it. The telephone both connects and separates the called and the caller.

<sup>26</sup> Bill Brown, *The Material Unconscious: American Amusement, Stephen Crane, and the Economics of Play* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 200.

<sup>27</sup> Baldick, p. 14.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Nelson Page, *The Old South: Essays Social and Political* (1892; repr. New York: Cosimo, 2008), p. 4.

<sup>29</sup> Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, p. 25.

<sup>30</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, p. 82.

<sup>31</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, p. 82.

<sup>32</sup> Baldick, p. 65.

<sup>33</sup> Baldick, p. 64.

<sup>34</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, pp. 144-45.

<sup>35</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, p. 85.

<sup>36</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, p. 158.

<sup>37</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, p. 158.

<sup>38</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, p. 157.

<sup>39</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, p. 346.

<sup>40</sup> Page, *Red Rock*, p. 83.

<sup>41</sup> Young, p. 72.

<sup>42</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*. trans. by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p. 155. The sentence reads as follows: 'The supplement transgresses and at the same time respects the interdict.'

<sup>43</sup> I borrow the term 'devivified' from Klaus Theweleit who applies it to a discussion of a construction of femininity in fascist texts. According to Theweleit, the subjectivity of a fascist soldier is shaped through 'totality-machines', one of which is the family unit. Here, the woman needs to be elevated beyond the spectre of contamination in order to become a 'white wife' who 'produces order in domestic space and functions as a barrier to ward off sexual danger; she is a subordinate and devivified buttress to the "unity" of the soldier male', in *Male Fantasies: Male Bodies: Psychoanalysing the White Terror*, vol 2, trans. by Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989), p. 223.

<sup>44</sup> Page, p. 93.

<sup>45</sup> Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, p. 10.

<sup>46</sup> Ellen Glasgow, *The Miller of Old Church* (Doubleday, Page & Company, 1911).

<sup>47</sup> Frederick P.W. McDowell, *Ellen Glasgow and the Ironic Art of Fiction* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1963), p. 96.

<sup>48</sup> Glasgow, p. 164.

<sup>49</sup> Glasgow, p. 48.

<sup>50</sup> Young, p. 146.

<sup>51</sup> Glasgow, p. 59.

<sup>52</sup> Glasgow, p. 164.

<sup>53</sup> Glasgow, p. 110.

<sup>54</sup> Baldick, p. 45.

<sup>55</sup> Glasgow, pp. 136-37.

<sup>56</sup> Baldick proposes that Boris Karloff's 'rectangular face and bolt-adorned neck have fixed our idea of the monster into a universally-known image', p. 5.

<sup>57</sup> Glasgow, p. 326.

<sup>58</sup> David Punter, *Gothic Pathologies: The Text, the Body and the Law* (London: Macmillan, 1998), p. 45.

<sup>59</sup> Punter, p. 45; and Young, p. 22.

<sup>60</sup> Allen S. Weiss, 'Ten Theses on Monsters and Monstrosity', *TDR*, 48 (2004), 124-25 (p. 125).

<sup>61</sup> Glasgow, p. 132.

<sup>62</sup> Glasgow, p. 130.

<sup>63</sup> Glasgow, p. 131.

<sup>64</sup> Glasgow, p. 132.

<sup>65</sup> Glasgow, p. 134.

<sup>66</sup> Glasgow, p. 132.

<sup>67</sup> Glasgow, p. 38.

<sup>68</sup> Glasgow, p. 21.

<sup>69</sup> Glasgow, p. 21.

<sup>70</sup> Weiss, p. 125.

<sup>71</sup> Glasgow, p. 23.

<sup>72</sup> Glasgow, p. 21.

<sup>73</sup> Ronell, p. 51.

<sup>74</sup> Glasgow, p. 151.

<sup>75</sup> Glasgow, p. 294.

<sup>76</sup> Glasgow, p. 329.

<sup>77</sup> Discussing the relationship between the use-value and commodity, Derrida asserts that 'The commodity is a "thing" without phenomenon' that acquires corporeality through the appropriation of the use-value and transcends it. This transcendence 'renders the non-sensuous sensuous', in that it grants a visibility to the phantom of commodity that haunts the use-value, in Derrida, *Spectres of Marx*, p. 189. The relationship between the use-value and commodity mirrors that between the ideal and its quotidian manifestation. In order to preserve the ideality of the ideal, Jonathan must restore its spectral status, transferring the sensuous to the realm of the



non-sensuous. Interestingly, once Jonathan has disjoined the ideal from its bodily representation, Blossom is ‘de-spectralised’.

<sup>78</sup> Glasgow, p. 70; and Glasgow, p. 193

<sup>79</sup> Glasgow, p. 97.

<sup>80</sup> Baldick, p. 12.

<sup>81</sup> Glasgow, p. 73.

<sup>82</sup> Discussing Stevenson’s *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, Baldick suggests that ‘The creature who emerges from Jekyll’s study is a monster in the classical sense, demonstrating visibly the ugliness of the hidden’, p. 145. What is hidden is his creator’s ‘concealed pleasures’, p. 144. Hyde therefore is the sign of Jekyll’s intrinsic monstrosity.

<sup>83</sup> Glasgow, p. 80.

<sup>84</sup> Glasgow, p. 72.

<sup>85</sup> Glasgow, p. 72; and Glasgow, p. 426.

<sup>86</sup> McDowell, p. 64. Here, McDowell discusses one of the heroines of Ellen Glasgow’s *The Battle Ground*, Mrs. Lightfoot, however the comment appears equally pertinent to Miss Angela in whose character the passivity of the ideal is subverted, whereby it becomes a source of power ensuring that others do her bidding.

<sup>87</sup> Baldick, p. 65. In discussing Frankenstein and other monster makers, Baldick observes that those closest to them are neglected and frequently meet tragic ends.

<sup>88</sup> Glasgow, p. 426.

<sup>89</sup> Glasgow, p. 327.

<sup>90</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, trans. by Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 1967), p. 191

<sup>91</sup> Glasgow, p. 423.

<sup>92</sup> Baldick, p. 138.

<sup>93</sup> Foucault, p. 164.

<sup>94</sup> Dyer, p. 78.

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## Biography

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