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Repressions and revisions: the afterlife of slavery in Southern literature

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Dissertation

**REPRESSIONS AND REVISIONS:
THE AFTERLIFE OF SLAVERY IN SOUTHERN LITERATURE**

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ABSTRACT

Though many scholars have explored the memory of slavery in Southern literature, my project expands these readings through a hybrid critical methodology from the fields of trauma studies, African American studies, historiography, and psychoanalysis to articulate how texts about the antebellum past enable later Southern authors to imagine present and future race relations in the South. I analyze how the particularities of the myriad afterlives of slavery – particularly in the economic, social, and political subjugation and terrorization of African Americans – are expressed or repressed in literature about the antebellum past, and argue that these texts demonstrate the varying processes by which white supremacy is enacted in the Jim Crow era.

I argue in my first chapter that the plantation fictions of Thomas Nelson Page and Joel Chandler Harris commingle ideologies of antebellum paternalism and contemporary white supremacy to cast the future South as one founded on the reimagining of black subservience. My second chapter examines how black authors Paul Laurence Dunbar and Charles Chesnutt revise plantation romance, their techniques of masking and doubling enabling them to create an alternative collective memory that exposes the trauma of slavery and the fictive constructs of paternalism. Nonetheless, their lack of success

outside this accommodationist genre exposes the limitations of black voice. My third chapter considers the portrayal of race and racism in white Southern women's writings about the Civil War; Margaret Mitchell and Caroline Gordon explore the idea of modern white female freedom as contingent upon the continued subjugation of African Americans. I argue that Mitchell's and Gordon's novels displace the history of slavery – in fact, erase its very presence – as a kind of fantasy of white supremacy in the 1930s. In my fourth chapter, I analyze how William Faulkner's *The Unvanquished* fluctuates between anxiety about and aggrandizement of the antebellum past, thereby demonstrating the difficulties of modifying white Southern collective memory. The conclusion reads Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* through her protagonist's constitution of a storied self, one which enables her to recuperate the traumatic past of slavery.

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INTRODUCTION

“Backwards-Looking Ghosts”: Imagining The Plantation Past for the Jim Crow Present

In William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), one of his multiple narrators remarks that “there is a might-have-been which is more true than truth.”¹ The statement, hidden in a tortuous, multi-page monologue, aptly represents the novel’s project of shaping and imagining “truth” in which four separate narrators – all with varying regional, gendered, and generational subjectivities – attempt to piece together through their memories, experiences, and fantasies the history of Thomas Sutpen’s rise and fall. The power of story-telling in *Absalom, Absalom!* is so potent that two of its narrators, Quentin Compson and his Canadian roommate Shreve McCannon, imagine themselves out of their Harvard dorm room in 1910 and into the past: “now neither of them was there. They were both in Carolina and the time was forty-six years ago...both of them were Henry Sutpen and both of them were Bon, compounded each of both yet either neither...” (280). Even as Quentin and Shreve expunge themselves of their setting, temporality, and even identities, they believe they have gained something in return: insight. Quentin even tells himself that that this insight is attained not through lived experience but through their process of speculative narrative: “*If I had been there I could not have seen it this plain*” (155)

Southern writers have long been preoccupied with the “might-have-been”: possibilities that come to stand in for reality, legacies and myths that replace fact. The stories they tell stem not just from the “Southern rage to explain,” as scholar Fred Hobson

¹ William Faulkner, *Absalom, Absalom!* (1936), (New York: Vintage, 1990), 115.

puts it, but from their attempts to revise the history of the American South to befit present cultural needs.² *Absalom, Absalom!* thus serves as a case study of this dissertation's purpose: how writing about the Southern past – and thereby rewriting its past – negotiated certain anxieties and fears in the present. At the moment Faulkner was writing, such worries prominently involved conflicts over the potential or the impossibility for African Americans to achieve political, economic, and social freedom in the Jim Crow South. For even as voices compound and speculate in *Absalom, Absalom!*, there is a conspicuous absence of black voice and experience in the story. The black descendants of Sutpen's "design" such as his slave daughter Clytie and his illegitimate grandson Jim Bond are never given the opportunity to narrate their own experience. Instead, they are silenced, treated not as human but as "nigger": property, stereotype, shadowy nightmare.

Moreover, by intentionally privileging white experience in the novel via his white narrators and characters, Faulkner enacts the effacement of black experience in Southern society in the past and the present. The very difficulty of *Absalom's* narrators to contend with Sutpen's failed "design" stems from the uneasy truth around which they skirt: that Sutpen's son has killed his sister's fiancé Charles Bon because he is their unacknowledged brother – unacknowledged because of his black blood. In revealing this truth only as a delayed revelation in the last pages of the novel, Faulkner expands the trauma of an individual family to stand in for the trauma endured by the South, an entire region struggling to come to terms with its history. In the same way, this dissertation

² Fred Hobson, *Tell About the South: The Southern Rage to Explain* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983).

explores how various authors negotiate the trauma of slavery and its afterlife, what they choose to remember and – just as significantly – what they try to forget.

My approach is wide-ranging and multidisciplinary, informed by social and cultural history, literary criticism, and trauma theory, on the premise that various methodologies are necessary to unravel the interwoven collective beliefs, expressive modes, and psychological motives governing the literary repudiations and recreations of the Southern past. The texts examined are all set in the antebellum South but written during the Jim Crow era, a period of legal racial segregation in the region that spans from the end of Reconstruction in 1876 to the beginning of the civil rights movement in the 1960s. In particular, I focus on two specific historical moments: the period immediately following Reconstruction (the 1880s and 1890s) and the interwar period of the Great Depression (the late 1920s and 1930s). Though these two eras are separated by several decades, they share a bond. Laura Browder explains that they constitute “America's two great national dramas...in which the fate of the nation seemed so much in doubt.”³ Working through the trauma of slavery – a trauma believed to be “past” – enabled people to navigate and negotiate crises of identity formation in the Southern present and future.

Slavery – and the myriad psychological, sexual, and physical wounds it inflicted on its victims – may have officially ended with the federal emancipation of slaves in 1863, but the subsequent emergence of Jim Crow represented the afterlife of the “peculiar institution.” For Saidiya Hartman, the term “afterlife” indicates “the way in which slavery has established a measure of man and a ranking of life and worth that has yet to be

³ Laura Browder, *Rousing the Nation: Radical Culture in Depression America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1998), 1-2.

undone.” Closure or interment are impossible “not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory, but because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched years ago.”⁴ Slavery’s afterlife can readily be discerned in how the strictures of Jim Crow and today – poverty, high rates of incarceration, violence, and limited opportunities for educational, financial and social advancement – have afflicted African American communities in particular.

I envision slavery as the fundamental condition of trauma under which African Americans were forced to form their community and identities and by which white Americans interpreted African Americans. As such, the authors who wrote about slavery and its legacy had competing and even self-contradictory motivations. In order to reveal a fuller terrain of Southern ideological and political concerns, I juxtapose black, white, female, and male voices. Some writers, like Thomas Nelson Page and Joel Chandler Harris, sought to resuscitate plantation racial relations in the immediate post-Reconstruction era, while Paul Laurence Dunbar and Charles Chesnutt exposed such texts as dangerous fantasies. Still others like William Faulkner attempted to self-consciously explore and discredit the legitimacy of these myths, to limited effect. I am particularly interested in how the narrative strategies of these traumatic texts – their distortions, silences, repetitions, disjunctions – manifest the continued processing of anxiety and loss in the present. Despite their differing individual and social motivations, these fictions about the past are imbued with a special political and ideological force,

⁴ Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 6.

even urgency. Their authors were aware that they were articulating, even constructing, many of the fears and anxieties surrounding the history of slavery and the current state of race relations in their society.

While considerations of the Southern memorialization of slavery (or its lack of memorialization) by critics like David Blight and W. Fitzhugh Brundage have been influential to my project, more work needs to be done on how black and white traumatic recollections of slavery were used to work through Southern cultural anxieties about the possibilities of black freedom.⁵ This dissertation seeks to fill that gap, arguing that the popular literary construction of antebellum nostalgia for the paternalistic system of slavery was directly connected to contemporary means of policing black behaviors, such as convict leasing, disfranchisement, and lynching. Furthermore, I argue that the very formation of antebellum nostalgia and the “Lost Cause” was a kind of secondary trauma created by white Southerners that not only enabled them to commandeer the African American trauma of slavery but also exonerated white complicity in perpetuating slavery’s afterlife. The literary use and appropriation of black voice in these stories is a strategy to further limit black freedoms in the political and social realm of Jim Crow. All of these authors use their fiction as a means of tracing how white supremacy is created, even those writers who personally protested the injustice of such an ideology. These texts conclusively demonstrate and even enact the fraught and anxiety-riddled process by

⁵ David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); W. Fitz Brundage, *The Southern Past: A Clash of Race and Memory* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).

which the dominant narratives about the past and present of race relations – the perpetuation of white supremacy and the silencing of black experience – come to be.

An important influence upon my readings and analyses comes from trauma studies, a field that encompasses a wide range of disciplines such as history, neurology, and psychoanalysis. Led by Cathy Caruth, trauma emerged in the 1990s as a discourse of study concerned with the moral and cultural ramifications of events of atrocity. The term “trauma” originates from the Greek word for “wound,” and deals not merely with physical wounds but with psychic wounds as well. Its psychoanalytic definition applies to an event so catastrophic that its effects cannot be understood at the time of its occurrence. Instead, the trauma returns, unexpectedly, to haunt the survivor. Caruth notes that “the impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located, in its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time.”⁶ As traumatic revelation is grounded in belated recognition, it can be felt or expressed only long after the event has occurred. Linear time and chronology are distorted as the past continually disrupts the present, via flashbacks, nightmares, symptoms and repetitive behaviors associated with the event.

Trauma can afflict not only individuals but groups of people as well. Historian Dominick LaCapra’s analysis of social trauma (in particular, the Holocaust and its lasting effects on both its victims and perpetrators) can be applied to my work on the effects of

⁶ Cathy Caruth, “Introduction,” *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 9.

slavery on white and black identity formation.⁷ Even those who were not themselves survivors of trauma or even descendants of trauma survivors are shaped by it. As Ron Eyerman argues, “whether or not they directly experienced slavery or even had ancestors who did, blacks in the US were identified with and came to identify themselves through the memory and representation of slavery.”⁸ Slavery, in other words, was always part of the collective and imaginative social fabric of the African American identity, in how they saw themselves and how others regarded them.

There are two simultaneous examples of trauma at work in the texts I examine. One of course is the trauma of slavery and its afterlife, as seen in the continued denial of the humanity and rights of African Americans in the Jim Crow era. The other is the predominant post-Civil War narrative in which Southern whites were unwilling to confront their collective complicity and culpability in a system in which they benefited from the labor and lives of other human beings. The possible repression of culpability is thereby channeled into a secondary trauma perceived as the loss of the Civil War and the antebellum values which the Confederacy ostensibly sought to maintain: the “Lost Cause” ideology commemorated in texts from Joel Chandler Harris’s “Uncle Remus” short stories to Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind*. While LaCapra identifies two behavioral responses to trauma (mourning is a process of “working through” trauma, whereas melancholia is merely an “acting out” – a process that denies the potential for recuperation or overcoming their loss), mourning and melancholia cannot be separated

⁷ See Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000) and *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

⁸ Ron Eyerman, *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 14.

from each other in the genre of plantation literature. Instead, as their authors repress, revise, and reexamine the problem of slavery and its afterlife, these two responses become intertwined. As Caruth notes, the traumatized “carry an impossible history within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess.”⁹

Because of the delay in traumatic response, it is fitting that literature about trauma obsessively and repetitively probes the past in an attempt to process it. Many of the texts in this dissertation do not so much depict the traumatic event as evoke the psychically disorienting experience associated with it, such as in Faulkner’s purposefully chaotic and convoluted prose. By situating the reader in a place of confusion and anxiety, traumatic narratives can manifest the lived experience of trauma for their readership. My readings are particularly indebted to Deborah Horvitz and Anne Whitehead, whose scholarship offers useful examples of how to read fictional accounts of trauma as expressive of larger cultural issues.¹⁰ For instance, in *Literary Trauma*, Horvitz scrutinizes literary depictions of sexual violence against women as exposing and even at times combatting “entrenched patriarchal power” at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. She “deconstruct[s] the relationship between political power and sexual violence at both institutional and individual levels” in texts such as Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892) and Margaret Atwood’s *Alias Grace* (1996). Trauma cannot be affectively rendered through a conventional, linear sequence, but instead requires narrative

⁹ Caruth, “Introduction,” 5.

¹⁰ Deborah Horowitz, *Literary Trauma: Sadism, Memory and Sexual Violence in American Women’s Fiction* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000); Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

techniques like disjointed temporalities, fragmentation, and repetition to immerse the reader's psyche in the event.

A fundamental obstacle to narrating trauma is the immense challenge of making one's experience fully known. Kali Tal warns that survivors' stories, when not ignored, are often exploited for political purposes or mythologized into a containable narrative. She points out that the transformation of the Vietnam War into a cultural symbol (albeit one with a multiplicity of meanings from "genocidal war" to "noble cause") erases the actual suffering of its veterans during and after the war.¹¹ As a responsible alternative, LaCapra encourages "empathetic unsettlement": "a kind of virtual experience through which one puts oneself in the other's position while recognizing the difference of that position and hence not taking the other's place."¹² This attitude, devoid of appropriation or dismissal, is difficult to achieve but integral to being able to understand another's story.

It is important to consider not just the potential for external silencing but the use of silence within the traumatic text as a response to one's environment. Silence is most predominantly manifested in what David Blight deems the "politics of forgetting": the purposeful omission of unwelcome truths that would contradict official narratives.¹³ Silence as a willful refusal to speak can be a strategic form of empowerment for the marginalized. Other scholars have considered this notion in African American literature (see Kevin Quashie's analysis of "quiet" and Saidiya Hartman's reading of subversive

¹¹ Kali Tal, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 61.

¹² LaCapra, *Writing History*, 78-79.

¹³ David Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 316.

subjectivity). As Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman notes, “silence can be a powerful form of resistance when used...in defense against those whose domination is assisted and legitimized through language.”¹⁴ This kind of deliberate omission is a strategy founded in slavery and deployed post-emancipation in texts like Charles Chesnutt’s short story, “The Dumb Witness,” in which the mutilated ex-slave Viney refuses to give witness to her white (would-be) listeners. The redemptive possibility of silence suggests a new way of understanding traumatic narratives that transcends written words on the page.

Another issue pervading traumatic narratives is the failure of memory. Memory is neither objective nor static; instead, it is a highly contested site of speculation and revision. According to Maurice Halbwachs’ theory of collective memory, memory is not individual or unique but rather an aggregate of shared remembrances that gives a group its social identity. As such, forgetting is a crucial component of memory: “society tends to erase from its memory all that might separate individuals, or that might distance groups from each other.”¹⁵ Unsurprisingly, the collective memory of African Americans and white Southerners contrasted greatly with each other in the era of Jim Crow. Collective memories are passed from person to person and generation to generation, a notion that Marianne Hirsch defines as “postmemory”¹⁶: the way in which children or descendants of the survivors of trauma absorb narratives that preceded them, and their

¹⁴ Kevin Quashie, *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012); Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Aliyyah Abdur-Rahman, *Against the Closet: Black Political Longing and the Erotics of Race* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 33.

¹⁵ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, edited and translated by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 182.

¹⁶ Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

attempts to understand and recreate this trauma. In doing so, their own present circumstances become mired in the past: for instance, *Absalom, Absalom!*'s Quentin Compson envisions himself not as an autonomous individual but as a "commonwealth" or "barracks" full of "backwards-looking ghosts" (7).

Nostalgia – itself a "backwards-looking" stance – deliberately works to replace or displace traumatic memory. It is an intentionally artificial creation of a past that serves a social purpose: to make, as Peter Fritzsche suggests, "parochial misfortune socially meaningful." Advocates of the Lost Cause replace the trauma of the loss of the plantation system with a sentimental memorialization of that way of life – or rather, they invent a past that never actually existed – in order to create an ordered community with a shared ideology. Fritzsche writes that

while nostalgia takes the past as its mournful subject, it holds it at arm's length. The virtues of the past are cherished and their passage is lamented, but there is no doubt that they are no longer retrievable. In other words, nostalgia constitutes what it cannot possess and defines itself by its ability to approach its subject, a paradox that is the essence of nostalgia's melancholia.¹⁷

For Southerners, the potent power of the Lost Cause is to be found in the very fact that it is indeed lost, irrecoverable except through imagination. In *Gone with the Wind*, Southern Cavalier Ashley Wilkes tells Scarlett O'Hara that before the war, "life was beautiful. There was a glamor to it, a perfection and a completeness and a symmetry to it like

¹⁷ Peter Fritzsche, "Specters of History: On Nostalgia, Exile, and Modernity," *The American Historical Review* 106.5 (December 2001): 1595. While Fritzsche's study focuses on the autobiographies of the exiled elite after the French Revolution, his notion of the socially meaningful function of nostalgia easily applies to the white advocates of the Lost Cause ideology.

Grecian art.”¹⁸ Yet, as Jessica Adams writes, the root of the word “nostalgia” also derives from the “wounds of returning.” This term, she argues, “suggests something more complicated – that the past itself may return, inflicting new wounds and reopening old ones.”¹⁹ What Adams’ reading implies is that nostalgia is an unstable weapon that a writer may not entirely be able to control. Fittingly, the narratives examined often commingle with their artificial conceptions of the antebellum past moments that undermine, even contradict, those fantasies.

Counter to many trauma theorists like Kali Tal or Dori Laub, I do not suggest that there exists a kind of “truth” or authentic experience that can be written.²⁰ Instead, I want to insist on the idea that all narratives are purposefully crafted to appeal to, or to engender, a particular community. And while all authors are to an extent conscious of writing for an intended audience, many texts produced in the post-Reconstruction and interwar periods were intended to assuage the trauma and uncertainty stemming from the vast changes in the political and cultural landscape. They needed to produce a particular kind of cultural memory necessary for the nation to heal.

The first period that I explore is the immediate post-Reconstruction moment of the 1880s and 1890s in which the rise of plantation (or local color²¹) fiction emerged.

¹⁸ Margaret Mitchell, *Gone with the Wind* (New York: Macmillan, 1936), 529.

¹⁹ Jessica Adams, *Wounds of Returning: Race, Memory, and Property on the Postslavery Plantation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 5.

²⁰ Kali Tal, *Worlds of Hurt*; Dori Laub, “Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle,” *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 61-75.

²¹ While the two terms are often used interchangeably, I would stress that local color tales, unlike plantation literature, are not specifically Southern (or of any particular region, ethnicity, or culture). Texts like Bret Harte’s “The Outcasts of Poker Flat” (1868) which depicted the Wild West and Abraham Cahan’s stories about Jewish émigrés in New York City were all classified as “local color.” See Elizabeth Ammons and Valory Rohy’s *American Local Color Writing, 1880-1920* (New York: Penguin, 1998). For more on the

Plantation literature was usually narrated in dialect by fictional ex-slaves who commemorated white romance, white tragedy, and white chivalry and mourned the happy, carefree days of old. Harris's introduction to the first volume of *Uncle Remus* tales identifies Remus as a faithful slave who possesses "nothing but pleasant memories of the discipline of slavery" – which he proves by shooting a Yankee soldier about to kill his master. This story, Harris insists, "is almost literally true."²² Works such as these were widely disseminated and consumed by Southerners and Northerners alike, from such highbrow literary magazines as *Scribner's* and the *Atlantic* to the popular dramas performed on the New York stage.

Plantation literature is the perfect vehicle by which to study competing forms of cultural trauma and collective memory. As Rollin Osterweis and David Blight point out, plantation literature looked backwards and forwards; it celebrated the past and mourned the uncertain future in which the vanquished South sought valiantly to rebuild itself and its relationship with the North.²³ Such stories about the irrecoverable past functioned in the present as a form of consolation for Southerners, and became an integral part of the tradition known as the "Lost Cause": a collective social myth that romanticized the antebellum past as a place of agrarian gentility and honor. Page's opening lines to his novel *Red Rock* (1898) encapsulate the Lost Cause sensibility:

geographic peripheralization and subordination of the South in local color narratives, see Jennifer Greeson, *Our South: Geographic Fantasy and the Rise of National Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010), especially Chapter 10.

²² Harris, "Introduction," *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings* (New York: Appleton, 1881), xvii-xviii.

²³ For more on plantation fiction and the Lost Cause, see Rollin G. Osterweis, *The Myth of the Lost Cause (1865-1900)* (Hamden, CT: Archon, 1973); Gaines Foster's *Ghosts of the Confederacy: Defeat, the Lost Cause, and the Emergence of the New South, 1865-1913* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). For more on the effect of plantation fiction on the North, see Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South (1865-1900)* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

[T]he people of that section were the product of a system of which it is the fashion nowadays to have only words of condemnation. Every ass that passes by kicks at the dead lion. It was an oligarchy, they say, which ruled and lorded it over all but those favored ones who belonged to it. But has one ever known the members of a democracy to rule so justly? If they shone in prosperity, much more they shone in adversity; if they bore themselves haughtily in their day of triumph, they have borne defeat with splendid fortitude. Their old family seats, with everything else in the world, were lost to them – their dignity became grandeur. Their entire system crumbled and fell about them in ruins – they remained unmoved.²⁴

Southerners used the Lost Cause to defend their loss and refashion it into a kind of moral and spiritual victory. Their defeat was not the result of tactical failings, or lack of men, supplies and funding, but preordained by God. They explained that their superior spiritual and ideological qualities, such as those identified by Page in this passage, rendered them too good to win in a corrupt and secular world. (Note how Page suggests that this fallen, “splendid” oligarchy is preferable to the paradoxically unjust, unfit “democracy” that is Reconstruction.) Lloyd A. Hunter reveals how Southerners sacralized their defeat: “Lee and Davis emerged as Christ figures, the common soldier attained sainthood, and Southern women became Marys who guarded the tomb of the Confederacy and heralded its resurrection.”²⁵ Such historical revisionism enabled the South to offer hope and solace during an uncertain present and imagine for itself a victorious future (realized partially by Redemption). Of course, this myth only applied only certain Southerners – the wealthy, Anglo-Saxon slave-holder (the titles of Page’s short stories, “Meh Lady” and “Marse

²⁴ Page, *Red Rock: A Chronicle of Reconstruction* (New York: Scribner’s, 1898), vii-viii.

²⁵ Lloyd A. Hunter, “The Immortal Confederacy: Another Look at Lost Cause Religion,” *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War History*, Eds. Gary Gallagher and Alan T. Nolan (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 186.

Chan,” for instance, denote this preoccupation) – and ignored those of different classes or races.

Though now downplayed as a motivating factor in the war,²⁶ slavery was defended in Lost Cause plantation fantasies as part of the overall system of hierarchy and order. Antebellum apologists claimed that the system was beneficial for slaves themselves. Page remarked that slavery “Christianized the negro race in a little over two centuries, impressed upon it regard for order, and gave it the only civilization it has ever possessed since the dawn of history.”²⁷ It hardly needs saying that this myth did not reflect historical reality. Slaves themselves covertly resisted the dominant white narratives in an effort to wrest agency for themselves, as documented by historians such as Eugene Genovese, Stephanie Camp, and James Scott.²⁸ During the Civil War, demonstrations of the overt agency of slaves – running away, joining the Union Army, or sabotaging the plantation or the efforts of the Confederate Army – led to the disintegration of the plantation system even before Confederate surrender.²⁹ Nonetheless, white social memory completely drowned out black countermemory in dominant cultural registers. That Page’s “Marse Chan” (in which the ex-slave narrator enthusiastically endorses slavery as “good ole times”) allegedly brought noted abolitionists Thomas

²⁶ In an oft-quoted speech, Confederate Vice President Alexander Stephens characterized slavery as the “foundation” and “corner-stone” of the Confederacy.

²⁷ Page, “Social Life in Old Virginia,” *The Old South: Essays Social and Political* (New York: Scribner’s, 1892), 184.

²⁸ See Eugene Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World The Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974); Stephanie Camp, *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

²⁹ See James L. Roark, *Masters Without Slaves: Southern Planters in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (New York: Norton, 1977); Ira Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, Steven F. Miller, Joseph P. Reidy, Leslie S. Rowland, *Slaves No More: Three Essays on Emancipation and the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

Wentworth Higginson and Henry Ward Beecher to tears signals the cultural shift in ideologies after the Civil War and Reconstruction.³⁰

Reading fiction about harmonious race relations offered a respite from the difficulties of contemporary race relations for white readers not just in the South but in the North as well. Northern readers just as avidly consumed these plantation tales; as Edmund Wilson wrote, “having devastated the feudal South, the Northerner wanted to be told of its glamor, of its old-time courtesy and grace.”³¹ Countless readers, writers, and public figures, including President Theodore Roosevelt, praised Joel Chandler Harris’s works for returning his audience to a period of peaceable, harmonious race relations.³² By invoking a mythological past in which whites existed peaceably alongside – or rather, by asserting their authority over – blacks, Northerners could reassure themselves that Southern home rule after Reconstruction’s end in 1877 was in the best interests of Southerners and Northerners, blacks and whites. Page himself explained (perhaps disingenuously, when one considers his frequent depiction of greedy Northern scoundrels) that “he ha[d] never wittingly written a line which he did not hope might

³⁰ See James Christmann, “Dialect’s Double Murder: Thomas Nelson Page’s ‘In Ole Virginia,’” *American Literary Realism* 32.3 (Spring 2000): 235. See also Silber’s *Romance of Reunion* for quotations from Northern whites about the Southern white ability to understand and decipher blacks (140-141).

³¹ Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore: Studies in the Literature of the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 605. For more on the rise of Southern tourism, see Silber, who argues that the South became in the Northern imagination an exotic and salubrious “other,” a site opposed to the industrious, homogenized North.

³² See Julia Collier Harris (Harris’s daughter-in-law and editor of two volumes of Harris’s works), *Life and Letters*, 163-173. Roosevelt wrote that “where Mr. Harris seems to me to have done one of the greatest services is that he has written what exalts the South in the mind of every man who reads it, and yet what has not even a flavor of bitterness toward any other part of the union”; note that Roosevelt’s use of the term “every man” elides black experience (141).

bring about a better understanding between the North and South, and finally lead to a more perfect Union.”³³

This “perfect union” between the North and South was predicated on the aggrandizement of white experience and the erasure of black agency. At the end of Page’s passage memorializing the Lost Cause in *Red Rock*, he makes evident how the “grandeur” and resilience of Southerners enabled their victory, noting that despite their subjection “to the greatest humiliation of modern times: their slaves were put over them – they reconquered their section and preserved the civilization of the Anglo-Saxon.” Page interprets the return to Southern white supremacy – the period of home rule known as Redemption – as a “reconquer[ing],” a near-compensation for the loss of the Civil War. And in many ways, Redemption was truly a victory for the white South. The Compromise of 1877 led to the withdrawal of federal troops from the South and a return to a Democratic majority in state and local governments and the programs of the old South.

These outcomes implied Reconstruction was a failure and, by extension, black emancipation a mistake: a vision that would prevail throughout the Jim Crow era. W. E. B. Du Bois would write in his 1935 *Black Reconstruction*, a social and cultural counterhistory of the period, that

in order to paint the South as a martyr to inescapable fate, to make the North the magnanimous emancipator, and to ridicule the Negro as the

³³ Page, “Introduction to the Plantation Edition,” *The Novels, Stories, Sketches, and Poems of Thomas Nelson Page. Vol. I* (New York: Scribner’s, 1908), vii-xiii. Often this sectional rebuilding was facilitated in a none-too-subtle metaphor through the marriage of the Northerner and Southerner (see Silber). These marriages were based upon a conversion of Northern sympathy to the Southern cause; in *Red Rock*, a Southern belle marries her Yankee suitor only after he agrees to “dance to the tune of Dixie” (582).

impossible joke in the whole development, we have in fifty years, by libel, innuendo, and silence, so completely misstated and obliterated the history of the Negro in America and his relation to its work and government that today it is almost unknown.³⁴

The black community, finding themselves nearly as marginalized as during the era of slavery, attempted to protest these revisionist claims. Though the memory of slavery was humiliating and painful for many African Americans, many sought to preserve and recognize the past as a site of collective identity from which community could form. Slave narratives, already used as an anti-slavery tool in the antebellum era, now commemorated black agency and political involvement, as seen in Frederick Douglass's *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881, 1892) and Booker T. Washington's *Up From Slavery* (1901). African American authors Charles Chesnutt and Paul Laurence Dunbar wrote plantation fiction that countered and complicated the genre's tropes. Other writers would tout the contemporary accomplishments of the black middle class, a sub-genre Claudia Tate examines in *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire*. Yet these endeavors were relatively politically and socially futile, as the desire for sectional healing came at the expense of recognizing African American rights and humanity.

Writer and orator Henry Grady famously asserted that "the new South is simply the old South under new conditions."³⁵ Nowhere does this statement ring more true than in the continued economic, political, and social subjugation of African Americans.

Though emancipation and the "Reconstruction Amendments" granted enfranchisement

³⁴ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (1935) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 592.

³⁵ Henry Grady, *The New South: Writings and Speeches of Henry Grady*, ed. Mills Lane (Savannah, GA: The Beehive Press, 1971), 107-8. For more on Grady and the New South, see Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (New York: Knopf, 1970).

and social equalities to African American men, historians like Eric Foner and Joel Williamson have detailed the ways in which discriminatory practices and even violence – lynching, rioting, voter fraud, sharecropping, the convict lease – were used to circumvent racial equality.³⁶ As black independence in any form posed a great danger to white supremacy, white landowners and legislators sought to stymie those rare occasions of black economic freedom and success. They largely succeeded: by 1930, no more than seven percent of Southern black male workers held professional or managerial positions (most were clergy or teachers), while the vast majority of African Americans in the South were relegated to new forms of economic slavery such as sharecropping and farm tenancy.³⁷

Nonetheless, the economic subordination of African Americans was not enough to quell white fears of social equality; violence was often used as well. A lynching report released in 2015 by the Equal Justice Initiative found that 3,959 African Americans were lynched in the South between 1877 and 1950.³⁸ Lynchings, as Jacqueline Goldsby and Trudier Harris have pointed out, were social rituals intended to send a message about the dangers of transgressing racial hierarchy.³⁹ In his highly popular and inflammatory novel *The Leopard's Spots* (1902), Dixon extols the rise of the Ku Klux Klan and the use of

³⁶ Joel Williamson, *A Rage for Order: Black White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Eric Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper Collins, 1990).

³⁷ George Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South, 1913-1945* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967), 161.

³⁸ See Campbell Robertson, "History of Lynchings in the South Documents Nearly 4,000 Names" (*New York Times*, 10 February 2015). This number is much higher than that estimated by Stewart E. Tolnay and E. M. Beck in *A Festival of Violence: An Analysis of Southern Lynchings, 1882-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), long regarded as the most thorough scholarly accounts on lynching.

³⁹ See Jacqueline Goldsby, *A Spectacular Secret: Lynching in American Life and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Trudier Harris, *Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).

lynching as conjoined responses to the threat of “Negro Domination” to “civilization,” which he literalizes by depicting repeated violations of white women by lascivious black men. African American author Sutton E. Griggs, however, laments the victimization of African Americans in *The Hindered Hand* (1905), a direct literary response to Dixon’s writings.⁴⁰ In a minor subplot based on actual events, a white community vows to get rid of Bud and Foresta Harper, a “peaceful” and “industrious” African American couple who represent an economic and ideological threat to the maintenance of white supremacy (126).⁴¹ After Bud kills a white man in self-defense, Griggs depicts the Harpers’ lynching not as an unpremeditated uprising of emotion, but as a scene carefully crafted “to serve as a warning to darkies.” For instance, the white mob select as the lynching site the Negro church, deciding that “it won’t hurt to perform this noble deed where they will never forget it.” After the Harpers’ deaths, their bodies are posed for photographs, and parts of their bodies are seized by the spectators as souvenirs of this “great...happening” (134-135). This scene demonstrates Griggs’ canny awareness of how the media – advertisements, fiction, photography, and the press – played a significant role in white supremacy as well (a phenomenon elaborated in Grace Elizabeth Hale’s *Making Whiteness* and Amy Louise Wood’s *Lynching and Spectacle*).⁴²

⁴⁰ Two of Griggs’ characters even discuss Dixon’s novel, deeming it a “venomous assault” full of “vile misrepresentations” (*The Hindered Hand* [Nashville: Orion Press, 1905], 206-207).

⁴¹ Griggs based the Harper lynching on the 1904 lynching of sharecropper Luther Holbert and his wife in front of over one thousand white spectators in Doddsville, Mississippi. See J. Todd Moyer, *Let the People Decide: Black Freedom and White Resistance Movements in Sunflower County, Mississippi, 1945-1986* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 3-21.

⁴² Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Knopf, 1999); Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle: Witnessing Racial Violence in America (1890-1940)* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009). For more on lynching souvenirs, see

Every perceived freedom gained for African Americans was greeted with racial violence. For example, as African American World War I veterans returned from their service abroad, newspaper editorials warned that they would no longer “accept the facts of white supremacy” and might “foment[.]...unrest among [their] people.”⁴³ In turn, they were greeted by the “Red Summer” of 1919, marked by over 25 race riots and countless lynchings.⁴⁴ A closer look at one of these riots discloses the extent to which violence was deliberately deployed as a mechanism to silence black voice and independence. On June 1, 1921, white mobs in Tulsa, Oklahoma led what Alfred L. Brophy deems “the most deadly American race riot of the twentieth century” in the black Greenwood neighborhood known as the “black Wall Street.”⁴⁵ The Tulsa Riot began as an act of retribution for the supposed rape by a black man of a white woman,⁴⁶ but the desire for one man’s lynching blazed into the destruction of 35 city blocks, hundreds of businesses, and thousands of homes. Writers both at the time and today blame the white need to reassert its authority over the largely autonomous – and therefore threatening –

Harvey Young, *Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory, and the Black Body* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), chapter 5.

⁴³ “Negro Conscription,” *The New Republic*, 20 October 1917 (12): 317. In his early novel *Flags in the Dust*, Faulkner depicts a newly returned black soldier who “returned to his native land a total loss, sociologically speaking, with a definitive disinclination toward labor”; the narrator’s consideration of Caspey in economic terms (“a total loss”) portrays the popular white Southern attitude towards African Americans as commodities, only useful in terms of their labor (*William Faulkner: Novels 1926-1929* [New York: Library of America, 2006], 588). See Chapter 4 for more on the novel.

⁴⁴ As Walter White bitterly noted in *Rope and Faggot*, “the far South tangibly demonstrated its gratitude to Negro soldiers for helping make the world safe for democracy by lynching...them, some in the uniform of the US army” (*Rope and Faggot: A Biography of Judge Lynch*, [New York: Knopf, 1929], 112). For more on the “Red Summer,” see Tindall, 151-156; Cameron McWhirter, *Red Summer: The Summer of 1919 and the Awakening of Black America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2011).

⁴⁵ Alfred L. Brophy, *Reconstructing the Dreamland: The Tulsa Riot of 1921: Race, Reparations, and Reconciliation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), xvii.

⁴⁶ The editor of the *Tulsa Tribune*, whose inflammatory front-page article about Rowland’s “attack” incited white outrage, later allegedly admitted that some of the details in the paper’s story were fabricated (Brophy 25). Brophy suggests that the “rapist,” Dick Rowland, might have tripped while exiting an elevator and brushed up against a white woman.

community, complete with its own hospital, law offices, school, newspapers, banks, churches, theaters, clothing and grocery stores. Though race riots were not uncommon in this era, James S. Hirsch writes that the Tulsa Riot was unique in its destruction of an independent black community and its institutions: “what began as a ‘riot’ or a ‘war’ in Tulsa...concluded as a massacre.”⁴⁷

The official narrative of the massacre sanctioned white-on-black violence and deemed black retaliation as a “negro uprising.” The Tulsa Police Department even deputized and armed about 250 white men to stop the violence, who in turn used this official designation to loot and burn black homes and establishments. Even the National Guard, ostensibly brought in to quell the violence, facilitated Greenwood’s destruction by solely arresting and disarming black residents and not the white rioters.⁴⁸ African Americans who fought back were later portrayed in the *Tulsa Tribune* as “all dope dealers or jake⁴⁹ drinkers with police records,” while others blamed black bravado on their service in WWI, which gave them “exaggerated ideas about equality” and the belief that “they can ‘whip the world.’”⁵⁰ In fact, many defenders donned their WWI uniforms, as if to visibly signify their patriotism and courage under combat; these were not lawless “dope dealers,” but US citizens defending their people and land, just as they had in the Great War.

⁴⁷ James Hirsch, *Riot and Remembrance: The Tulsa Race War and Its Legacy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002), 120.

⁴⁸ See Brophy, 38, 43.

⁴⁹ A cheap patent medicine from Jamaica with a high ethanol content.

⁵⁰ Quoted in Brophy, 33.

The aftermath of the Tulsa Riot proved equally harmful to the black community. The all-white grand jury exonerated white involvement in the riot and blamed negro insurrection and their “agitation for social equality.”⁵¹ And though white Tulsa boasted of its “generous relief program” to the displaced black community, no such reparations were ever made.⁵² While black journalist and NAACP leader Walter White estimated about 50 white deaths and 150 to 200 black deaths, the official report tallied the total number of deaths as 24 blacks and 10 whites. Most contemporary reports now estimate the total death toll to be between 75 and 150. Even the broad disparity between these figures reveals the lack of knowledge about the actual events of the riot, and the extent to which collective memory has generally dismissed its atrocity. As a journalist for the Oklahoma City *Black Dispatch* observed bitterly, “the truth is, and as usual, we have a white wash brush and a big one in operation in Tulsa.”⁵³

The Great Depression proved once again how economic turmoil went hand in hand with racial discrimination and violence. Prior to the Depression, public opinion, particularly in the North, had begun to balk at lynching and racial violence in the first two decades of the twentieth century, primarily for economic reasons. Tara McPherson

⁵¹ Ibid., 74-77.

⁵² Scott Ellsworth, *Death in a Promised Land: The Tulsa Race Riot of 1921* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 105. In 2004, a federal judge ruled against reparations for the victims’ descendants, citing the statute of limitations (see Litwack, *How Free is Free?: The Long Death of Jim Crow* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009], 153, footnote 80).

⁵³ “In Name Only,” *Black Dispatch* 4 (July 8, 1921), quoted in Brophy, 74. See also Walter White, “The Eruption of Tulsa,” *Nation* 112 (June 29, 1921): 909–910. Scholars today such as Joel Williamson, Grace Elizabeth Hale, Claudia Tate, Houston A. Baker, William Andrews, to name just a few, have made great strides in identifying black expression and countermemory in an era that denied their voice and experience. For example, W. Fitzhugh Brundage’s *The Southern Past* delves into alternate forms of African American public expression and commemoration (such as parades and memorials). Brundage also points out that whites frequently attempted to repress, belittle, or ban these spectacles, demonstrating their understanding of these rituals as expressions of cultural protest.

explains that lynching had become “bad for business,” hindering Southern efforts to court Northern business and driving away a cheap labor force as African Americans migrated North.⁵⁴ However, as America fell into an economic decline, the number of lynchings skyrocketed. For instance, while only seven lynchings had occurred in 1929, twenty-four lynchings were reported in 1933.⁵⁵ The return to violence after a period of abating tension demonstrates the tenuous maintenance of the ideology of white supremacy, bolstered through the expense of black civil rights and life.

Indeed, the 1930s was another period in which white American identity was in crisis, due to factors such as the aftermath of the Great War, economic turmoil and decline, a changing social and urban landscape, and shifting gender roles. These reasons in part explain why *Gone with the Wind* resonated so deeply with Mitchell’s audience in the Great Depression. Her readers could relate all too well to the Reconstruction-era Scarlett, who famously vowed amidst the scarcity and wreckage of the post-Civil War South never to go hungry again, and Scarlett’s eventual repossession of glittering excess and luxury must have offered a welcome escape. Moreover, Scarlett’s (and postwar Atlanta’s) mastery over the changing racial and political climate of Reconstruction must have offered vicarious wish-fulfillment to whites struggling to maintain their own social

⁵⁴ Tara McPherson, “Seeing in Black and White: Gender and Racial Visibility from *Gone with the Wind* to *Scarlett*,” *Hop on Pop: The Politics and Pleasures of Popular Culture*, eds. Henry Jenkins, Tara McPherson, and Jane Shattuc (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 520-521. In *A Festival of Violence*, Tolnay and Beck also perform an economic reading on lynching’s demise, as black migration and the subsequent loss of “cheap and pliant labor” presented a financial threat to the Southern community (232). For more on the decline of lynching in Georgia between 1910-1930, see Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), and Amy Louise Wood, *Lynching and Spectacle*.

⁵⁵ Keith M. Finley, *Delaying the Dream: Southern Senators and the Fight Against Civil Rights, 1938-1965* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 16. He finds that a similar rise in lynchings occurred at the end of WWI (while thirty-eight lynchings were reported in 1917, eighty-three lynchings were reported in 1919).

and economic supremacy. As Richard Gray notes, “it was precisely the disorienting experience of social change in the present that eventually drove the writers of the [S]outhern ‘renaissance’ to an investigation of their past.”⁵⁶

This period simultaneously saw a flourishing of Southern Civil War fiction and nonfiction, such as Allen Tate’s *The Fathers* (1938), Stark Young’s *So Red the Rose* (1934), Andrew Lytle’s *The Long Night* (1936), and Caroline Gordon’s *None Shall Look Back* (1937). Tate and Lytle also published biographies of notable Confederate figures (Lytle’s *Bedford Forrest and His Critter Company* (1931),⁵⁷ Tate’s *Stonewall Jackson: The Good Soldier* (1928), *Jefferson Davis: His Rise and Fall* [1929], and *Robert E. Lee* (1932). All of these authors (and in fact, the majority of Southern writers excavating the antebellum past who held institutional and cultural authority) were associated with the Agrarian movement. In their 1930 manifesto, *I’ll Take My Stand*, the Agrarians lauded the richness of the Southern past and its connections to agriculture as the foundation for a particular kind of Southern character, literature and exceptionalism, and announced their rejection of the industrialized, urbanized North.

The particularities of the Civil War had been previously elided in the earlier generation of plantation fiction due to the potential for reopening sectional discord. For instance, in *Red Rock*, Page declines to cover the war, asking “what pen could properly

⁵⁶ Richard Gray, *The Literature of Memory: Modern Writers of the American South* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 3. These writers combated their anxiety about the present by invoking the ideological disposition of the post-Reconstruction era: the effacement of black traumatic experience as a means to maintain (the myth of) white Southern sovereignty. The Agrarians downplayed the importance of slavery, both as a cause in the war, and its usage in antebellum agricultural life; psychologist and writer Frank Owsley even claimed that “without slavery the economic and social life of the South would not have been radically different” (“The Irrepressible Conflict,” *I’ll Take My Stand: The South and the Agrarian Tradition* (1930), Introduction Louis D. Rubin, Jr. [New York: Harper, 1962], 76.)

⁵⁷ Briefly discussed in chapter 3.

tell the story of those four years, what fittingly record the glory of that struggle, hopeless from the beginning, yet ever appearing to pluck success from the very abyss of impossibility?" (49). The passage of over half a century now gave writers and readers the psychological and temporal distance, while their own experience with World War I provided writers and readers insight into both the trauma of the Civil War and the subsequent rebuilding of society. Furthermore, the Agrarians' distrust of Northern influence in the 1930s led them to be more directly critical of Northern conduct during the Civil War and Reconstruction. The Agrarians adapted the ideology of the Lost Cause from an internal defense of Southern values and traditions to an external attack on the Northern influence on the South.

Caroline Gordon's novel *Penhally* (1931) manifests the incompatibility between the South's agricultural traditions and its Northern-influenced economic rise. At the novel's end, set in the present of the 1930s, Nick Penhally, the heir to the family plantation – six thousand of the most fertile acres in Kentucky – decides to sell the land to Northern investors, who turn Penhally into a grotesque simulacrum of the South: a "glorified hunt club" for "Eastern capital," complete with steeple chases and fox hunting. Nick is subsequently shot by his younger brother Chance, who loves "the very particles of the red clay" and sees Nick's decision to sell Penhally as a betrayal of the family, the land, and his heritage.⁵⁸ Though Chance's actions are both tragic and impotent – he kills his brother at the club house into which Penhally has already been transformed – Gordon,

⁵⁸ Caroline Gordon, *Penhally* (New York: Scribner's, 1931), 265, 246.

like that of her Agrarian associates, argues for the importance (and almost insurmountable difficulty) of maintaining and protecting Southern identity.

Other writers' explorations of the antebellum Southern past probe at rather than alleviate Southern wounds and anxieties. For example, Faulkner's novels like *Go Down, Moses* and *Absalom, Absalom!* reflect the fragmentation of modern society – and how that fragmentation is a symptom of the dissociation of self from moral culpability, a move necessary to justify the existence of slavery. Evelyn Scott's *The Wave* (1929), comprised of sketches and vignettes of varying characters and events, embodies the chaos and turmoil of the Civil War in its entirety. Unlike most popular Southern fiction at this time, the novel does not celebrate the Lost Cause or Southern bravery but rather exhibits the futility of human experience. Unsurprisingly, works such as these were less popular than a novel like *Gone with the Wind*, which offered its audience an idea of how their predecessors had remained resilient amidst, and even triumphed over, the uncertainty of their changing society (as manifested in Scarlett's continual refrain that "tomorrow is another day").

Popular literature and contemporary consumer culture worked hand in hand to create a particular vision of the antebellum past, the Civil War, and the history of slavery. Thus in considering the narrative strategies used by both characters and authors, an understanding of the texts' external readership – the audience's region, class, race, and gender – is crucial. The short fictions and essays by Page, Harris, Chesnutt, Dunbar, and Faulkner were all published in major magazines and periodicals, therefore making their constructions of memory consumable goods for a literate white public (the vast majority

of magazine readers). It is important to note that the traditional binarism between “popular” and “quality” fiction breaks down when one realizes that the genre of plantation literature, now regarded as trite, was published in “serious” literary magazines like the *Atlantic* as well as commercial magazines like *The Saturday Evening Post*. Though these writers were able to gain financial (if not critical) success from works such as these, they often felt circumscribed by the expectations of the marketplace. Such limitations are part of what Hans Robert Jauss deems the “horizon of expectations”: the cultural and social codes which shape a reader’s understanding of the text.⁵⁹ Tellingly, Faulkner and Chesnutt would revise their short stories for the magazines or for their own standalone volumes. These emendations exhibit how these authors, equally aware of the horizon of expectations, would have to negotiate what could and could not be said in their texts. They would learn the necessity of modifying their own texts in order to find publication in reputable and/or well-paying magazines and to win favor from the public.

The metaphorical price was higher for African American authors, especially as the audience for popular and literary magazines throughout the Jim Crow era was predominantly white.⁶⁰ To protest the conditions in which they lived and wrote, African American authors like Chesnutt and Dunbar had to conceal and encode within their stories indications of slavery’s atrocities and the indignities of race relations in the Jim Crow era, a significance that the majority of readers may have been blinded to because of

⁵⁹ Hans Robert Jauss, *Toward an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982).

⁶⁰ In *The Afro-American Periodical Press, 1838-1909* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), Penelope Bullock writes of the difficulties surrounding magazines such as the *Colored American Magazine* (which published Pauline Hopkins’s works) that targeted a strictly African American audience.

the genre in which they appeared. In looking for African American doubled readings, I am particularly indebted to Houston A. Baker's reading of the playful and inventive nature of vernacular and blues culture in African American texts and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s discussion of "signification" in *The Signifying Monkey*.⁶¹ Nonetheless, racism as a social and political force was hard to overcome, as the narrative of white supremacy demands the silencing of black experience.

This dissertation is divided into four chapters. In my first chapter, I examine the works of Thomas Nelson Page and Joel Chandler Harris, the most influential authors of plantation fiction in the post-Reconstruction era. I trace their anxious awareness of the fictive nature of their works, an attitude generally overlooked by other critics. In particular, I articulate how they portray fictive paternalism in their stories as a means to advocate for continuation of black subordination in the New South by any means possible, often by the less innocuous systems of black subordination such as convict leasing. By connecting their seemingly backwards-looking texts to modern elements of the New South, I expose a far more insidious effect of the seemingly benign ideology of paternalism, an attitude that will be invoked throughout the rest of the Jim Crow era.

My second chapter considers Charles Chesnutt and Paul Laurence Dunbar's bid for a countermemory of slavery. The first black literary writers to be published in the mainstream press, Chesnutt and Dunbar were acutely aware that their publication was predicated on their usage of formulae (dialect voice, portraiture of black inferiority and

⁶¹ See Houston A. Baker's *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford, 1988)

idleness) that ran counter to their avowed commitment to racial uplift. These narratives managed to make it into circulation precisely (and paradoxically) because they appeared to conform with the strictures of the genre of plantation literature, a genre unthreatening to the white readers who comprised the vast majority of their paying audience. In this chapter I claim that they subvert these forms through techniques of masking and doubling to divulge the trauma of slavery and its continued perpetuation in Jim Crow practices of labor exploitation and political disfranchisement. Yet their critiques prove to be limited, due to crippling generic limitations and the social strictures of their time. The silencing of Dunbar and Chesnutt themselves once again reasserts the sovereignty of white supremacy in social revisionist memory.

My third chapter jumps to the 1930s to study how the strictures of Jim Crow are manifested from the white female perspective in Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* and Caroline Gordon's *None Shall Look Back*. These female authors' imagining of the antebellum past are shaped by and restricted by their gendered subjectivities as they perpetuate black subordination in order to express the legitimacy of white female freedoms. Like Page and Harris, these white women craft narratives that enact the continual suppression of African American voice and agency in their texts. Unlike Page and Harris, they do so by focusing on the particular burden of Southern white women, both in and after the antebellum era (such as the fear of black-on-white rape). Contrary to the proto-feminist readings many critics have of Mitchell and Gordon, I argue these texts demonstrate their belief in the necessity of prolonging racial and gender hierarchy.

The fourth chapter focuses on Faulkner's *The Unvanquished*, a novel composed of short stories, most of which were originally published in *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Scribner's*. While in his other works Faulkner discloses the falsity of the plantation past and the injustices of slavery in the South, here he falls prey to the myth that he attempts to dismantle, such as in his never quite explicit intimations about slave subversion or even the miscegenation within the Sartoris family line. In exposing the limitations and problematics of black freedom in the white Southern imagination, the novel shows the power of melancholic traumatic narrative: the way in which dominant strains of white Southern memory outlast and overpower dissenting viewpoints.

If the body of my dissertation focuses on the limitations of trauma narratives to permit a full recovery or working through of the traumatic past, the conclusion of my dissertation provides a more optimistic alternative reading. In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Zora Neale Hurston moves beyond melancholic reproduction of the past (and the limitations of her gender which Mitchell and Gordon cannot move beyond) through the process of narrative memory. The novel is also a meditation on the importance of finding an ideal audience: Janie engages not with her hostile community (who “made burning statements with questions and killing tools out of laughs” [2]) but her friend Pheoby, whose ability to listen gives Janie the space and sympathy necessary to share her story and overcome her trauma. In doing so, the novel moves into a future of possibilities (however limited) in which storytelling can redeem and recuperate the traumatic past.

CHAPTER ONE
“T’se jes’ prodjickin’ wid ‘im”: Revisions and Elisions in Thomas Nelson Page and Joel Chandler Harris’s Plantation Fiction

At the close of Reconstruction, Joel Chandler Harris wrote an idealistic essay in the *Atlanta Constitution* about “The Old Plantation” (1877), in which he lamented the loss of “the old plantation,” with the romance of its fox hunts and negro songs. But Harris found redemption in how “the hand of time, inexorable, yet tender, has woven about it the sweet suggestion of poetry and romance, memorials that neither death nor decay can destroy.” As his essay continues, his sense of loss transforms into exultation, as “the memory of the old plantation will remain green and gracious forever”; what exists forever is one’s memory, not the site itself.⁶² Fifteen years later, fellow plantation literature author Thomas Nelson Page furthered this relationship between memory and writing. He begins his 1892 essay “Social Life in Old Virginia Before the War” with “let me see if I can describe an Old Virginia home recalled from a memory stamped with it when it was a virgin page. It may, perhaps, be idealized by the haze of time; but it will be as I now remember it.”⁶³ Page’s merging of past, present, and future verb tenses reflects memory’s capability to rewrite the past. While this recollection may be false (“idealized by the haze of time”), his mythologizing will replace history and become truth.

Though these two most prominent authors of plantation fiction during the post-Reconstruction era are nowadays not regarded as canonical objects of study, they were

⁶² Joel Chandler Harris, “The Old Plantation,” published on 9 December 1877, reprinted in *Joel Chandler Harris: Editor and Essayist, Miscellaneous Literary, Political, and Social Writings*, ed. Julia Collier Harris (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1931), p92, 91.

⁶³ Thomas Nelson Page, “Social Life,” 143.

published in elite literary magazines like the *Century*, the most influential and widely-read magazine at its time.⁶⁴ These magazines were geared towards a cultured and elite national readership (not just the South about which Harris and Page wrote). As Charles Johanningsmeier notes, reading fiction in periodicals had a direct didactic influence: it “provided important information for living life, just as the other [nonfiction] articles and advertisements did.”⁶⁵ Indeed, Page and Harris intended to redirect national attitudes about the Southern past and present and to facilitate Northern sympathy for Southern whites.

Nonetheless, their plantation fiction, instead of existing as a monolithic paean to the antebellum plantation idyll, exposes a deeper anxiety about the past and the present of race relations. Contrary to the readings of scholars like Lucinda MacKethan and Kimball King, I argue that an alternate history of terror and violence lies beneath these nostalgic, peaceable tales: the white fear of slave insurrection and its parallels to black freedom in the post-bellum era. For while Redemption was firmly in place at the height of plantation literature’s popularity, trepidation over black-white relations – and in particular, the necessity to maintain white control over black labor – still continued. These anxieties are manifested through the potentially subversive behavior of Page’s black characters (both

⁶⁴ The *Century* (later *Scribner’s*) boasted a circulation of over 200,000 in the 1880s. For more on the *Century*’s role in sectional reunification and print culture, see Timothy P. Caron’s “‘How Changeable Are the Events of War’: National Reconciliation in the *Century Magazine*’s ‘Battles and Leaders of the Civil War’” (*American Periodicals* 16.2 [2006]: 151-171). For a discussion of Harris’s publication history in this magazine, see Herbert F. Smith’s “Joel Chandler Harris’s Contributions to *Scribner’s Monthly* and *Century Magazine*, 1880-1887,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 47.2 (June 1963): 169-179.

⁶⁵ Charles Johanningsmeier, *Fiction and the American Literary Marketplace: The Role of Newspaper Syndicates, 1860-1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 196. The majority of magazine readers at this time were white, middle- and upper-class males living in the North (see Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, Vol. III: 1865-1885* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957]).

slaves and ex-slaves) and, more tellingly, in his oblique references to the Haitian Revolution and Nat Turner's Rebellion, the two most infamous and violent slave revolts that shook up the American South. In these narratives, Page conquers his anxiety by staging the victory of white supremacy, suggesting the analogous triumph of whiteness over the threat of black freedom in his own era. Harris similarly recasts the African American slave folk tales of slave resistance told by his "Uncle Remus" to maintain a tenuous grasp on white mastery, a view seconded by Remus's non-folk tales in the *Atlanta Constitution* and other short stories. Page and Harris's conservatism becomes even more overt in their political writings; both simultaneously published essay series on the "Negro Problem" in 1904 that reinforced their shared stance against black migration, black enfranchisement, and other policies that would undermine the position of neo-slavery for African Americans in the Jim Crow era. In these revisions of the antebellum past, Page and Harris transform antebellum paternalism into contemporary ideologies of white supremacy and racism, demonstrating the means by which the New South was founded on the continuation of black subordination.

It is important to differentiate between Page's and Harris's perspectives on race relations and how they convey the traumatic history of slavery in their literary works. Most critics regard Page as an uncomplicated champion of slavery and the antebellum way of life. For instance, Matthew R. Martin dubs him "the grand perpetuator of the plantation myth." Such scholars argue that Page was oblivious to the trauma of slavery; Kimball King, the editor of the 1969 University of North Carolina reissue of Page's *In Ole Virginia* wrote that Page "defend[ed] all the tenets of the plantation tradition

uncritically.”⁶⁶ I would stress, however, that a careful reading of Page’s texts reveals his awareness – and anxiety about – the trauma of slavery and of subversive black agency. In this way, I build upon the work of scholars like Taylor Hagood and Louis D. Rubin, who respectively examine subversive narrative techniques in Page’s short stories “Marse Chan” and “No Haid Pawn.”⁶⁷ In thinking more critically about Page’s use of black voice – its appropriation, theft, and silencing – I reveal the ways in which Page seeks to master black freedoms in his contemporary society.

Harris, on the other hand, is generally credited with a greater appreciation for African American voice and a larger awareness of the brutality of slavery. For example, Robert Bone and Bernard Wolfe point out the themes of violence and scarcity in the Uncle Remus folktales that speak to the conditions of slavery, rendering the motivations of the storyteller Uncle Remus in a much more complicated light.⁶⁸ Some critics have even gone so far as to try to recuperate Harris as an advocate for African Americans: Wayne Mixon argues that Harris used his stories to combat racism, and Eric J. Sundquist

⁶⁶ Kimball King, “Introduction,” *In Ole Virginia: or, Marse Chan and Other Stories* (1887) (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969), xxxv; Matthew R. Martin, “The Two-Faced New South: The Plantation Tales of Thomas Nelson Page and Charles W. Chesnutt,” *The Southern Literary Journal* 30.2 [Spring 1998]: 17-36.

⁶⁷ Taylor Hagood, “‘Prodjickin’, or mekin’ a present to yo’ fam’ly’: Rereading Empowerment in Thomas Nelson Page’s Frame Narratives,” *Mississippi Quarterly: The Journal of Southern Cultures* 57 (2004): 423-440; Louis D. Rubin, “The Other Side of Slavery: Thomas Nelson Page’s ‘No Haid Pawn,’” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 7.1 (Spring 1974): 95-99. Similarly, James Christmann points out Page’s “palpable anxiety about dialect’s ability to smuggle ‘outside sounds’ of black subjectivity and collective experience into the realm of the reassuring darky stereotype” (“Dialect’s Double Murder,” 235).

⁶⁸ Robert Bone, “The Oral Tradition,” *Critical Essays on Joel Chandler Harris*, ed. R. Bruce Bickley, Jr. (Boston: G. K. Hall and Co., 1981), 130-145; Bernard Wolfe, “Uncle Remus and the Malevolent Rabbit: ‘Takes a Bimber-Toe Gemmun fer ter Jump Jim Crow,’” *Critical Essays on Joel Chandler Harris*, 70-84.

too defends Harris's liberalism.⁶⁹ I would however suggest that Harris wholeheartedly invests in paternalism both before and after slavery, and in other ways retracts the possibilities of African American agency and freedom – both within the Uncle Remus folktales themselves and in his political treatises.

I connect their plantation literature texts with Page's and Harris's general political agendas and visions of the New South; in other words, these stories and their figurations of the limitations of black freedom were not just benign fictions but propaganda. It is therefore crucial to examine both authors' social treatises and essays on "The Negro Question" as extensions of the ideologies that were less overt in their plantation fiction, a consideration that scholars like MacKethan, who focuses on the nostalgic memorialization of plantation literature, overlook. I affirm a direct correlation between Page's fictional works – many of which seem to deny or elide the realities of the postwar South – and his social campaign for silencing and reconquering the negro in works like his 1904 treatise, "The Negro: The Southerner's Problem." I also reveal the ways in which Harris, too, was directly devoted to New Southern progress, combatting Nixon's claim that Harris opposed industrialization and urbanization.⁷⁰ Instead, Harris advocates for such progress through the continual subjugation of African Americans in the Uncle Remus sketches he published in the *Atlanta Constitution* and his essays on "The Negro Problem" for *The Saturday Evening Post*. While Harris maintained a guarded sympathy

⁶⁹ Wayne Nixon, "The Ultimate Irrelevance of Race: Joel Chandler Harris and Uncle Remus in their Times," *Southern Review* 56 (August 1990): 465; Eric Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 341-346.

⁷⁰ Wayne Nixon, *Southern Writers and the New South Movement, 1865-1913* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), 80.

for the negro and Page's rage against "negro domination" increased over his lifetime, their shared belief in the necessity of paternalism – both in their fictionalized past and their present culture – are what ultimately link the two in the literary and political realms.

Born in 1853, Page, the descendant of two F.F.V.s, was too young to fight in the Civil War.⁷¹ He was nonetheless old enough to observe the abrupt transformation of the South – from an agrarian economy to a more industrial one, from hierarchical plantocracy to seemingly chaotic individualism, from a self-contained region to a territory conquered and corrupted by Northern interference. He was also old enough to idealize and mourn the Southern past. Page particularly espoused a genteel Southern Cavalier tradition in line with the tales of Sir Walter Scott⁷² (gallant gentlemen, beautiful ladies, duels, and even jousting tournaments) with a uniquely Southern twist: stories of romance and pathos, love lost and of planter families ripped apart after slavery. His children's book *Two Little Confederates* (1916) is a thinly veiled account of Page's own boyhood and his loss of innocence during the Civil War. Though the story ends with his father's return, it is far from the triumphant homecoming he and his family imagined. Instead, that return represented "a funeral – the Confederacy was dead."⁷³

In "Marse Chan," published in April 1884 in the *Century* (and later the lead story in Page's *In Ole Virginia*), he introduced readers to a paternalistic vision of slavery, the

⁷¹ First Families of Virginia, prosperous and socially prominent families said to be descendants of the first Virginia colonials.

⁷² Regional writer Mark Twain famously derided Scott's influence on the South, incredulously remarking that "admiration of his heroes'...grotesque 'chivalry' doings and romantic juvenilities still survives here" (Mark Twain, *The Writings of Mark Twain: Life on the Mississippi* [New York: Harper, 1904], 309). Even the term "Lost Cause," Osterweis reveals, is derived from the doomed Scottish efforts for independence; "the phrase was already familiar in Dixie" when Edgar Alfred Pollard, Virginian journalist, published in 1866 the first volume of his history of the Civil War, also entitled *The Lost Cause* (11).

⁷³ Page, *Two Little Confederates* (New York: Scribner's, 1916), 178.

antebellum ideology in which the master took charge of the slaves out of a benign regard for their well-being. The slaves, in turn, served their master out of gratitude.⁷⁴ In the story, an unnamed white narrator encounters an ex-slave named Sam, who tells of the bravery and tragic deaths of his “old marster” and his son “Marse Chan” during the Civil War. Contrary to Page’s biographer Theodore Gross’s claim that he “offered a complete defense of Southern life before the war, of the white man’s relationship with the Negro,”⁷⁵ my reading of this tale demonstrates that Page complicates this genre of his own making. In fact, the story’s ending suggests that Page exploits the genre of plantation fiction – and reveals that paternalism is itself a fiction – as a means to rehearse the perseverance of white supremacy and the conquering of black subversive voice.

Though the story is set in 1872, in the midst of Reconstruction, little has changed in terms of white-black interactions. Sam’s instinct upon spotting the narrator is to say, “sarvant, marster” and “tak[e] his hat off,” immediately signaling his awareness of their positions in the class and racial hierarchies of the South (3). In fact, many critics have read Sam’s famous depiction of the Channing plantation as an uncritical championing of slavery:⁷⁶

Dem wuz good ole times, marster—de bes’ Sam ever see! Dey wuz, in fac’! Niggers didn’ hed nothin’ ’t all to do—jes’ hed to ’ten’ to de feedin’, an’ cleanin’ de hosses, an’ doin’ what de marster tell ’em to do; an’ when dey wuz sick, dey had things sont ’em out de house, an’ de same doctor

⁷⁴ Page, “Social Life,” 150.

⁷⁵ Theodore Gross, *Thomas Nelson Page* (New York: Twayne, 1967), 151.

⁷⁶ See for instance, Kimball King’s introduction, xxv; Caron, 159; Michael Flusche’s “Thomas Nelson Page: The Quandary of a Literary Gentleman,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 84.4 (Oct. 1976): 470; Theodore Gross, “Thomas Nelson Page: Creator of a Virginia Classic” (*The Georgia Review* 20.3 [Fall 1966]), 343; Matthew R. Martin, “The Two-Faced New South,” 22; Robert C. Nowatzki, “‘Passing’ in a White Genre: Charles W. Chesnutt’s Negotiations of the Plantation Tradition in *The Conjure Woman*,” *American Literary Realism, 1870-1910* 27.2 (Winter 1995): 28.

come to see 'em whar 'ten' to de white folks when dey wuz po'ly. Dyar warn' no trouble nor nothin'. (10)

What I want to suggest however is that embedded within this seeming advocacy of slavery lies a more subversive reality. Although the passage begins with a description of ease and luxury – “niggers didn’ hed nothin’ ’t all to do” – it is immediately undercut by the reality that they did, in fact, have many jobs to do. As Sam reveals, slaves “jes’ hed to ’ten’ to de feedin’, an’ cleanin’ de hosses, an’ doin’ what de marster tell ’em to do.” All of a sudden, the definition of slavery expands from leisure to an indefinable multiplicity of chores.

And “what de marster tells [his slaves] to do” is rendered problematically in the story. Sam relays to the narrator that during a barn fire, Mr. Channing instructs the carriage driver, Ham Fisher, to go into the barn and save the horses from the flames. Silently, Ham obeys, only to be trapped in the barn himself. Page depicts Old Mr. Channing’s rescue of Ham as paternalistic; cradling Ham in his arms, Mr. Channing shields his slave at his own expense and loses his eyesight to the flames. King notes that Page often wrote the “aristocrat as victim,” whereby “the privileged classes had been doomed by their excessive responsibilities to their dependents.” Yet the reader cannot forget that the master was metaphorically blind even before the fire, when he deemed Ham’s life to be equivalent to the rest of his property. That he is blinded afterwards suggests a fitting retribution for the price of slavery itself. By this reading, I do not mean to suggest that Page is consciously undercutting his apologia for slavery. But I do want to question King’s claim that Page “wholeheartedly believed in the plantation myth he

portrayed.”⁷⁷ After all, this is a story in which the worst threat that Marse Chan can make to his father is to threaten to free Sam – a moment that exposes the contradictory logic in which one treats slaves as family by retaining them as property.

While Sam appears to be almost entirely uncritical of his masters, Page himself highlights the potentially subversive and performative aspects of Sam’s storytelling. As John R. Robeson reveals, the manuscript of “Marse Chan” originally began with this passage:

I made a chance acquaintance with an “ole fam’ly nigger,” as he proudly styled himself, who illustrated well the close union of the comical and pathetic which is so striking a characteristic of his race. His narrative, which I have endeavored to reproduce in his own language in the following pages, exemplified strikingly the loving fidelity to his old master so astonishing to the outside world and so touching to those who alone know and appreciate the negro at his true worth.⁷⁸

The deletion of this passage from the published version of the text denies the story’s foregrounding within the “loving fidelity” of “an ole fam’ly nigger” for his masters. Instead, the reader’s first contact with Sam occurs when the narrator comes across Sam unawares, chiding his dog for running away: “Jes’ like white folks—think ‘cuz you’s white and I’s black, I got to wait on yo’ all de time. Ne’m mine, I ain’ gwi’ do it!”. Here we see Sam’s frustration with having to serve the needs of “whites” (the dog formerly belonged to Marse Chan) and his refusal to comply with their demands, whether stated or tacit.

When he spots the narrator, however, he quickly changes his tune, saying “he know I don’ mean nothing by what I sez...he know I’s jes’ prodjickin’ wid ’im” (3).

⁷⁷ King, “Introduction,” xxxv.

⁷⁸ John R. Robeson, “The Manuscript of Page’s ‘Marse Chan,’” *Studies in Bibliography* 9 (1957): 260.

Taylor Hagood suggests this notion of “prodjickin’” – a rhetorical style of willing dissimulation on both the parts of the speaker and the audience – is the best lens through which to read the story.” It “speak[s] against and disrupt[s] order in a way that claims to be benign. It is performative, spitting in its superior’s eyes and then telling the superior the spit was just a joke.”⁷⁹ Sam’s confession, “I don’ mean nothing by what I sez,” renders his narrative about his love and devotion for his masters ambiguous. Even this minor suggestion of unreliability should be enough to make the reader question the reality of anything Sam says about the plantation past and his old masters.

Sam’s temporary “marster,” the frame narrator, however takes Sam at his word, and rewards him for his story (and by extension, for his professed devotion to whites) with “several spare ‘eighteen-pences’, as [Sam] called them” – long outdated English currency (38). While it is perhaps not out of the realm of possibility that a free man in 1872 has never seen any contemporary American currency, this moment seems intentionally peculiar, and offers another moment of instability in the text. Either Sam’s (mis)recognition of the coins serves as a pathetic reminder of the poverty of free blacks, or he is again “prodjicking”: playing the faithful ex-slave, pleasingly oblivious to the new kind of capitalist society in which the South has been transformed.

Storytelling becomes a new task for Sam to perform for white masters. As Hagood puts it, “obviously, the white narrator’s paying Sam for his story signifies the former’s understanding that the latter expects something for his storytelling.”⁸⁰ Acutely aware of his expected role of continual servitude (to man and dogs alike), Sam puts on a

⁷⁹ Taylor Hagood, “Prodjickin,’” 431.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 433.

minstrel-style performance about the past to appeal to a white audience. This scene, however, suggests Page's own "prodjickin'" in telling a fiction about paternalism to appeal to his Northern readership. This moment suggests, even more radically, that paternalism itself is a fiction, an effective form of propaganda that facilitates sectional reconciliation on the foundational premise of black inferiority. Even the notion that Sam can be so easily "bought" or won over by the charity of white men undercuts his subversive agency and the potentially more radical story about slavery's atrocities. Page's "prodjickin'" instead becomes a projection upon which white supremacy is reconstituted.

One has to wonder then how much Joel Chandler Harris's narrator Uncle Remus "prodjicks"—or rather, how much Harris wanted Remus to "prodjick." For these tales are a composite of Harris's own narrative frame of the elderly ex-slave who "has nothing but pleasant memories of the discipline of slavery" and the African American folk tales he collected which belie the "pleasant" nature of slavery and expose it for the brutal power struggle it was. These folk stories did not originate with Harris but instead, as he explains in his introduction to his first volume of Uncle Remus stories, were passed down and disseminated amongst slaves. Yet by claiming ethnographic realism in his transcription of these folktales, Harris also claims mastery over black folklore and black voice.⁸¹ The combination of white frame stories and African American folk tales in his "Uncle Remus" tales reveals Harris's patterns of exposing and repressing the history of violence

⁸¹ For a consideration of how African Americans became "active participants, rather than merely passive repositories...in the study of and representation of black folklore" (4), see Shirley Moody-Turner's *Black Folklore and the Politics of Racial Representation* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2013).

and trauma within the system of slavery, a process that enables him to demonstrate the victory of white supremacy over black traumatic experience.

The landscape of Harris's tales – far from benign and harmonious – is clearly intended as an allegory for the relations between masters and slaves. Harris writes that “it needs no scientific investigation to show why [the Negro] selects as his hero the weakest and most harmless of all animals, and brings him out victorious in contests with the bear, the wolf, and the fox.”⁸² This is a world in which animals so continually plot against each other for mastery that the title “brer” (or brother) in front of each animal's name comes to seem largely ironic. In almost all the tales, the seemingly inferior animals like the terrapin, rabbit, and opossum outwit the larger, more powerful animals like the fox, bear, and wolf. Brer Rabbit does not just always get the better of Brer Fox, but he often humiliates him as well (for instance, he rides him as a horse in “Mr. Rabbit Grossly Deceives Mr. Fox”). Just as these animals' facades of docility and weakness are unmasked to reveal their desire for power, so too do these stories constitute a defense against or even more alarmingly, an attack on white dominance.

The folktales are also marked by violence, fear, and lack – the true environment of the plantation. Harris directly invokes patrollers, whippings, and other forms of white control in countless stories. “A Story About the Little Rabbits,” in which Brer Fox orders three young rabbits to perform difficult tasks such as breaking sugar cane and putting a log on the fire, functions, as Robert Bone proclaims, as “a parable of survival under a

⁸² Harris, “Introduction,” *Uncle Remus*, xxv. All quotations for Harris's Uncle Remus tales (unless otherwise specified) are from *The Complete Tales of Uncle Remus*, ed. Richard Chase (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1955).

forced labor system,” with Brer Fox as oppressive overseer. The prevalence of hunger and food quests, Lawrence Levine and Bone have noted, convey the “chronic undernourishment of the labor force”: Brer Rabbit steals Brer Fox’s and Brer Wolf’s food in stories like “Mr. Fox Goes A-Hunting, But Mr. Rabbit Bags the Game” and “How Mr. Rabbit Saved His Meat.”⁸³ Almost every tale includes an instance of violence ranging from beatings to death. In a gruesome but by no means anomalous example, “The Sad Fate of Mr. Fox” discloses how Brer Rabbit gets Mr. Fox killed and then gives the head to the Fox family to eat (113). In “Brother Fox Follows the Fashion,” Brer Rabbit tricks Mrs. Fox into cutting off Mr. Fox’s head (651). Brer Rabbit even boils Mr. Wolf and displays his hide on the back porch in “The Awful Fate of Mr. Wolf” – an act of violence motivated by the fact that Brer Wolf perpetually raided Rabbit’s home to “tote off some er [his] fambly” (45). Brer Rabbit’s extreme retaliation suggests the desire of African American slaves to regain some small victory over their masters for the theft of their children.

Notably, Harris does not impugn these characters, suggesting instead that theft, chicanery, and even murder are appropriate human responses to the trauma of slavery. His introduction to the first volume of Uncle Remus stories even diminishes what could be read as “malice” into mere “mischievousness” (xxv). As Bone says, “the moral vision projected in these tales is that of men who have been brutalized, degraded, rendered powerless –and yet who manage to survive by dint of their superior endurance and

⁸³ Bone, “The Oral Tradition,” 139, 140.

mother wit, their cunning artifice and sheer effrontery.”⁸⁴ Brer Rabbit uses his resourcefulness and quick thinking to deflect blame onto others (see “Mr. Rabbit Nibbles Up the Butter,” “Mr. Fox is Again Victimized”).⁸⁵ After Brer Rabbit escapes punishment for eating all the butter while Brer Possum is killed, Uncle Remus explains that “in dis worril, lots er fokes is gotter suffer fer udder fokes sins. Looks like hit’s mighty...wrong; but hit’s des dat away” (57). Remus justifies Brer Rabbit’s amorality as a necessity for survival, and his devouring of the butter is small pence compared to the larger crime of slavery.

Brer Possum represents another, more passive slave strategy: survival. In “Why Mr. Possum Loves Peace,” he and Brer Coon face off against Mr. Dog. Knowing that he doesn’t have the ability to actually fight Mr. Dog, unlike the more powerful and aggressive Brer Coon, Brer Possum instead pretends to be dead – playing possum – until “de coas’ cle’r” (10). Afterwards, Brer Possum justifies his cowardice to Brer Coon by explaining that he believed Brer Coon to be more than capable of defeating Mr. Dog single-handedly. When that excuse fails to placate Brer Coon, Brer Possum elaborates that Mr. Dog’s nose tickled him in the ribs so that “I laughed twel I ain’t had no use er my lim’s” (11). While he lacks the capacity to directly confront those more powerful than him, he alleviates outside threats through his ability to pretend. In this way, Brer Possum seems analogous to the black storyteller or creator of folk tales, using the power of his

⁸⁴ Ibid., 138.

⁸⁵ MacKethan identifies three major themes in Brer Rabbit’s triumphs that serve as forms of slave wish fulfillment: getting free, outdoing, and exploitation, for “freedom, pride, and power are the three things Brer Rabbit has a precarious hold on that a slave would be most aware that he himself lacked completely” (*The Dream of Arcady: Time and Place in Southern Literature* [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980], 75).

imagination to escape his environment. Yet that Brer Possum isn't always as successful as Brer Rabbit (such as his aforementioned death in "Mr. Rabbit Nibbles Up the Butter") demonstrates that the more passive role of creating fiction is not as effective as retaliatory action.

As one moves into Harris's non-animal world, examples of slave abuse are overtly revealed, all the more startling for the way in which they are casually inserted into the texts. In "A Story of the War," in which Uncle Remus "disremembers freedom" and shoots a Yankee soldier to save his Confederate master, Remus mentions how his mistress, in preparing for the Yankee invasion of her home, arranged herself "ez prim en ez proud ez ef she own de whole county. Dis kinder hope me up, kaze I done seed Ole Miss look dat away once befo' w'en de overseer struck me in de face wid a w'ip."⁸⁶ This incident contradicts the paternalism elsewhere the story (with his young master even calling him "Daddy") by exposing the cruelty and violence meted out on even trusted servants like Remus. And Ole Miss's reaction is strange: why would she look "prim" and "proud" while her faithful slave is being whipped? Or – in a slippage of the text – is she instead "look[ing]...away," refusing to acknowledge the system of oppression in which she participates? The collection of plantation songs appended to *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings* further emphasize the system of inequality. "A Plantation Serenade" laments that while "de niggers make de cotton en co'n...de w'ite folks gits de money" and one stanza of "Time Goes By Turns" baldly reveals slave discontent: "One en all on

⁸⁶ "A Story of the War," *Uncle Remus*, 211. Despite the volume's title, *The Complete Tales of Uncle Remus* only contains the Remus *folktales*. It omits this story and the other sketches on contemporary issues, some of which are discussed in this chapter, such as "As to Education" and "Intimidation of a Colored Voter."

us knows who's a pullin' at de bits / like the lead-mule dat g'ides by de rein, / en yit,
somehow er nudder, de bestest un us gits / mighty sick er de tuggin' at de chain."⁸⁷

Though moments like these reveal Harris's own understanding of the traumatic nature of slavery, he, like Page, strives to erase and elide these revelations from his and the white American consciousness.

For example, Harris revised some folk stories from their original versions to less violent renditions to render them less threatening to white readers. Linda Chang points out that an anonymous writer from Senoia, Georgia in 1881, sent a synopsis of a folk story that Harris would revise into "The End of Mr. Bear," tempering the violence of the story's ending "to make black liberation seem less threatening to [Harris] and his white audience."⁸⁸ While the Senoia version concludes with Brer Rabbit chopping off "Bro Bare's" head with an axe, Harris's rendition ends with Brer Bear trapped in a tree trunk surrounded by stinging bees. More importantly, Harris omits Brer Rabbit's motivation for revenge. Whereas the Senoia version explains that Brer Bear ate Rabbit's children and set his house on fire, Harris vaguely notes that "atter w'at done pass 'twix um dey wa'n't no good feelin's" between Brer Bear and Brer Rabbit (95). Through these revisions, Harris not only mitigates the black threat of violent reprisal, but also the catalyst behind such violence: the system of slavery that consumed any hope for an inviolable black community.

⁸⁷ Harris, "A Plantation Serenade," *Uncle Remus*, 197; "Time Goes By Turns," *Uncle Remus*, 200.

⁸⁸ Joel Chandler Harris, *Life and Letters of Joel Chandler Harris*, ed. Julia Collier Harris (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1918), 197. Linda S. Chang, "Brer Rabbit's Angolan Cousin: Politics and the Adaptation of Folk Material," *Folklore-Forum* 19.1 (1986), 42-47.

Furthermore, Harris's use of the frame story helped white audiences dismiss these potentially unsettling depictions of slavery in favor of the present-day loving relationship between Uncle Remus and his audience, a young white boy, evoking cross-generational, cross-racial, and cross-regional cooperation. In Harris's "A Story of the War," Remus tells the child that the wounded soldier, John Huntingdon, was nursed by and eventually married Remus's mistress, Sally. The young boy is in fact the result of this marriage, or, as Harris put it in his introduction to *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings*, "the product of that practical reconstruction which has been going on to some extent since the war in spite of the politicians."⁸⁹ In wryly dismissing the efficacy of forced political Reconstruction, Harris instead suggests the alternative to be a natural, progenerative union occurring on the individual level. "Practical reconstruction" is literally enacted by John and Sally, and Remus and the little boy, seemingly erasing any ideological differences.

But Harris deliberately unsettles the benign relationship between whites and blacks in the frame stories as well, even if his white public did not acknowledge it. For instance, in "Mr. Rabbit Grossly Deceives Mr. Fox" and "Mr. Fox is Again Victimized," Uncle Remus tells the young white boy that Brer Rabbit humiliates Mr. Fox by turning him into a saddle-horse, mounting him "same's ef he wuz king er de patter-rollers" (22). Brer Rabbit – the stand-in for slaves – is suddenly head of the patrollers, the white forces

⁸⁹ "Introduction," *Uncle Remus*, xvii-xviii. However in the original version of the story (published in the *Constitution* as "Uncle Remus as a Rebel: How He Saved His Young Master's Life, The Story as Told By Himself," on October 14, 1877), Remus shoots and kills an unnamed Yankee soldier. See Eric L. Montenyohl's "Joel Chandler Harris's Revision of Uncle Remus: The First Version of 'A Story of the War,'" *American Literary Realism 1870-1910* 19.1 (Fall 1986): 65-72.

which patrolled plantations to police slave behavior. The sudden intrusion of the plantation into this seemingly ahistorical folk story reiterates the struggle between blacks and whites, as does the frame story's conclusion:

Remus laid his rough hand tenderly on the child's shoulder, and remarked, in a confidential tone: "Honey, you mus' git up soon Chris'mus mawnin' en open de do'; kase I'm gwinter bounce in on Marse John en Miss Sally, en holler Chris'mus gif' des like I useter endurin' de farmin' days fo' de war, w'en ole Miss wuz 'live. I bound' dey don't fergit de ole nigger, nudder. W'en you hear me callin' de pigs, honey, you des hop up en onfassen de do'. I lay I'll give Marse John one er dese yer 'sprize parties.'" (25)

Though Harris claims this to be a benign, "tender" moment, there is something subtly and deliberately unsettling about Remus's promise of giving his masters something that "dey don't fergit." The "Christmas gift," a ritual in which a slave would "catch" the master and refuse to "release" him until a small Christmas gift was granted in exchange, acted as a small measure of temporary and carefully inscribed power. However, Remus proposes something quite different – a secret between himself and the naïve young white boy in which the latter "onfassen de do'" to let Remus in to "sprize" his masters. Here one can glimpse Bernard Wolfe's famous description of how "within the magnanimous caress is an incredibly malevolent blow."⁹⁰

Why, then, were these tales so popular with the white public? Did they feel only the caress and not the blow? For while these stories might have functioned for slaves as "an elaborate psychic drainage system" that worked to "prevent inner explosions by

⁹⁰ Bernard Wolfe, "Uncle Remus and the Malevolent Rabbit," 71.

siphoning off these hatreds,”⁹¹ this hardly explains the enjoyment of the white public, which experienced a catharsis as well. The imaginary realm of Harris’s Uncle Remus tales offers an alternate staging of black domination as merely temporary, with the return to white sovereignty inevitable by the end of each story. Harris’s stories almost always reset themselves by the end. Even deaths are not final – Mr. Fox might be beheaded in one text yet reemerge none the worse for wear in the next tale. Though the little boy chides Uncle Remus for his lack of continuity in “How Mr. Rabbit Saved His Meat” (65), it is only through Harris’s trope of resetting that Uncle Remus can get away with his stories with his white audience, in which black agency and triumph – with all its subversive, even malevolent intent – is neatly erased by the next tale.

The resetting structure of Harris’s universe is blatantly laid out in “Old Mr. Rabbit, He’s a Good Fisherman.” In this text, Brer Rabbit accidentally falls in a well in a bucket, but escapes by enticing Brer Fox to jump into the well too, proclaiming that he’s “fishin’ fer suckers” and that there are “lots un um” in the well (52). As Brer Fox’s bucket descends and Brer Rabbit’s ascends back to the surface, the latter taunts the former:

“Good-by, Brer Fox, take keer yo’ cloze,
fer dis-is de way de worril goes;
some goes up en some goes down,
you’ll git ter de bottom all safe en soun’.” (53)

I read this overt role reversal as a deliberate invocation of black domination – the “bottom rail on top” of the Reconstruction era. Harris temporarily licenses a narrative of

⁹¹ Ibid., 79. See also Lawrence Levine’s *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 105-120.

black resistance and agency in which the weaker character can establish dominance and reprisal against the typically dominant figure. Yet Harris quickly reneges on this narrative, demonstrating that black mastery is ridiculous, undesired even by those characters figured as black. Brer Rabbit's reign on top in "Old Mr. Rabbit, He's a Good Fisherman" is fleeting, and, moreover, he himself undoes that mastery: "w'en Brer Rabbit got out, he gallop off en tole de fokes w'at de well b'long ter dat Brer Fox wuz down in dar muddyin' up de drinkin' water" and immediately circles back to warn Brer Fox to run after he is hauled up (53). That Brer Rabbit saves Brer Fox from death suggests that he himself does not want to maintain control. The end of the story ends with a return to the status quo, just as black Reconstruction ended with white Redemption in the South. Another Brer Rabbit story, "When Brer Rabbit Was King," details how he plays a trick on Mr. Dog, but the corresponding illustration demonstrates Brer Rabbit's inability to rule. Slumped back in his throne, the too-large robe obscuring his body, he is not a grand figure but a ridiculous one (637). Unsurprisingly, Brer Rabbit's reign does not last long, only "playin' King fer de day" (638): a phrase that alludes to the illegitimacy of African American governance during Reconstruction.⁹²

⁹² Harris's 1904 essay, "The Negro of Today," similarly portrays the post-Emancipation black elected to political office as "a little child who had wandered, quite by accident, into the halls of legislation...Like a novice learning to play chess, he moved whatever pieces he was told to move...behind him was the imported carpetbagger and the native scalawag, and these, receiving their orders from Washington, played havoc with things in general, and with the negro in particular" (published in *The Saturday Evening Post*, January 30, 1904; reprinted in *Editor and Essayist*, 135. Illustration by Arthur Burdette Frost and J. M. Condé from *Told By Uncle Remus: New Stories of the Old Plantation* (New York: McClure, Phillips, and Company, 1905).



Similarly, Remus – though the little boy’s educator in many ways⁹³ – is figured as the latter’s inferior. The little boy’s sense of supremacy, based not on knowledge or age, but on his race and all the privileges that come with it, is never questioned. He is able to bribe Remus to do his bidding with his superior resources, from candles to food. In “Mr. Fox Is Again Victimized,” the offering of teacake is a luxury so scarce for Remus that he saves half for later: “deze I’ll tackle now, en deze I’ll lay by fer Sunday” (21). Likewise, “The Night Before Christmas” begins with the little boy persisting in wrapping a shawl around Uncle Remus’s head, “so blinding him that there was danger of his falling.”

⁹³ Raymond Hedin points out that Harris changed the title of the opening story from “The Story of Mr. Rabbit and Mr. Fox” (when published in the *Atlanta Constitution*) to “Uncle Remus Initiates the Little Boy,” suggesting that Remus is instructing the little boy about a world entirely different from his own white world: a world in which he “can speak the language of animals,” for instance. See “Uncle Remus: Puttin’ on Ole Massa’s Son,” *The Southern Literary Journal* 15.1 (Fall 1982): 83-90.

When Remus protests his ill treatment, noting that “I’m des teetotally wo’ out wid beggin’, en de mo’ I begs de wuss you gits,” the boy justifies his actions as mere “playing” (403-404). Even more tellingly, “The Awful Fate of Mr. Wolf,” the child laughs at Remus’s threat to punish him, “and playfully shook his fist in the simple, serious face of the venerable old darkey” (42). Remus and the child have an amicable relationship because they both are assured of their position in the hierarchy of race.

Only rarely does Remus try to unsettle that relationship, and when he does, he must try to obscure any semblance of resentment. At the beginning of “When Brother Rabbit Was King,” the little boy espies a sleeping Uncle Remus and decides to jump on him to startle him awake. Before he can do so, Uncle Remus “uttered a blood curdling yell” that renders the little boy “almost paralyzed with fright.” This incident reenacts the struggles of the interior tale in which the weaker one gets the better of the dominant one preying upon him; however benign the little boy’s intentions may be, Harris’s narrative figures his “stealthy...creeping” movements as irrefutably predatory. Nonetheless, when reproached by the little boy, Remus must invent a rationale for his act of aggression. Uncle Remus pretends that he had been dreaming he was on a runaway train about to crash, and that the little boy waking him up “saved [his] life.” Remus’s fiction, “intended to change the course of the little boy’s thoughts” successfully placates the little boy, whose temporary defeat is instead reconfigured as a heroic salvation of the weaker Remus (627-628). As Page does with Sam in “Marse Chan,” Harris nullifies Remus’s subversion in favor of white authority. It is this image of Remus that remains engraved in the American consciousness today: a cultural symbol that, as Alice Walker puts it,

evokes “a kind of talking teddy bear” for “patronizing white children” and not a repository of the rich oral tradition of African Americans.⁹⁴

Like the little boy, the reader is fundamentally seduced by Harris’s framing image of the peace of the plantation and the bucolic image of blacks and whites coexisting peacefully, an image that overrides and overpowers the subversive messages of the folktales. No story illustrates this as evocatively as “The Night Before Christmas,” which Eric Sundquist calls “a virtual hymn to paternalism.”⁹⁵ In this tale, the blacks, singing “fer de sakes er ole times,” serenade the whites at the big house, who “listened with swelling hearts and with tears in their eyes” (404-405). Though the story is set in the postbellum period, one would never know it. Tellingly, Sundquist refers to the singers as “slaves”: a testament to how effectively Harris transitions the reader back to the antebellum past. After the singing, the little boy falls asleep and is carried in Remus’s arms back to the big house. He dreams “he was floating in the air, while somewhere near all the negroes were singing, Uncle Remus’s voice above all the rest; and then, after he had found a resting place upon a soft warm bank of clouds, he thought he heard the songs renewed” (407). This imaginary paradise is one in which the plantation past (the “ole times”) has become the Southern present and even its future, “renewed” in the songs of Uncle Remus, and in the tales of Harris.

⁹⁴ Alice Walker, “The Dummy in the Window: Joel Chandler Harris and the Invention of Uncle Remus,” *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), 31. Walker charges that Harris “stole a good part of my heritage...by making me feel ashamed of it” and that in creating Remus, “[Harris] placed an effective barrier between me and the stories that meant so much to me, the stories that could have meant so much to all of our children” (32).

⁹⁵ Eric Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations*, 350-351.

Nonetheless, these fictions could not fully elide white concerns about how black emancipation threatened white supremacy. Sometimes, fiction was used as a means to rehearse and work out such anxieties, as seen in Page's "No Haid Pawn." The potentially subversive narration of Sam in "Marse Chan" or Remus in his folktales is made more insidious as black voice and agency, which Page links deliberately to dissemblance and violence, present a concrete threat to white mastery that must be suppressed. Page's most overtly critical story about the South and his most critically misunderstood text, "No Haid Pawn" stands out in *In Ole Virginia* for two reasons: first, for its aberrant chronology (the rest of the stories are set in Reconstruction, while "No Head Pawn" is fixed solely in the antebellum past), and, second, for its blatantly paranoid, dark vision of the plantation South. Though Gross, Page's biographer, writes that it "do[es] not represent any progress in essentials," and King dismisses it as "less interesting" than his other stories, merely a "schoolboy's nightmare,"⁹⁶ the story, while eerie, does not warrant scholarly dismissal as a derivative of Poe's Gothic writings.⁹⁷ Instead, the story's full horrific meaning hinges for Page upon a secondary fear, one repeatedly repudiated and hauntingly unresolved: the threat of slave insurrection, which Page connects to the necessity of black policing in the new wage economy of the South.

The story begins with the narrator's musings on the legends surrounding "No Haid Pawn" – a pond whose name is derived from its lack of a discernable source, but

⁹⁶ Gross, "Thomas Nelson Page," 349; King, "Introduction," *In Ole Virginia*, pxxxii-xxxiii.

⁹⁷ Louis D. Rubin notes its similarities to Poe's "Fall of the House of Usher" in "The Other Side of Slavery," 97, and Theodore Gross writes of Page's admiration for Poe, a fellow Virginian (*Thomas Nelson Page*, 35).

which more suitably reflects the number of decapitations that occurred near its waters.⁹⁸

The pond and surrounding plantation, in the middle of a forbidding swamp, has a history of death and horror: “one of the negro builders had been caught and decapitated between two of the immense foundation stones,” and many other negroes “died by dozens,” due to sickness and overwork (167). Buried next to the pond, the bodies were said to “float around in the guts of the swamp and the haunted pond” in their coffins (168). Finally, the plantation falls into the possession of a man from the West Indies known for his superhuman size and “brutal temper and habits.” After he decapitates a slave, the horrified white community judges and hangs him for his crime. Somehow while being hanged, he is also decapitated: “at his execution, a horrible coincidence occurred which furnished the text of many a sermon on retributive justice among the negroes” (170). Now, his headless ghost as well as that of his hapless victim are rumored to haunt the deserted plantation.

The narrator seeks shelter in the abandoned and “uncanny” mansion during a severe storm, and falls asleep until he hears “a very peculiar sound...like a distant call or halloo” (177, 183). All outward signs indicate that the myth of “No Haid Pawn” is true. He sees a boat with a man in it – “the story of the dead rowing in their coffins was verified!” – and hears a “string of fierce oaths, part English and part Creole French...I knew that the murderer of No Haid Pawn had left his grave, and that his ghost was coming up that stair” (184). Finally, he encounters “a gigantic figure...and stretched out at his feet lay, ghastly and bloody, a black and headless trunk,” and faints in terror (185).

⁹⁸ Page, “No Haid Pawn,” *In Ole Virginia*, 166.

In the narrator's coda, he returns back to the plantation with reinforcements, only to realize it has burned down.

Such is the supernatural, Gothic plot that one encounters upon first reading.⁹⁹ However, Page covertly refers to a more horrific reality of 1850s plantation life: the trauma intrinsic within the system of slavery. While the tale is narrated by a white, "well grown lad" (174), the legends of the plantation's history are passed down through the folk stories of African American slaves, who "know the most about [the woods]," warn others to "never go nigh dyah...hit's de evil-speritest place in dis werll," and speak of the scores of dead bodies that give the pond and story its name (162). They declare that the West Indian slave-owner "preserved his wonderful strength by drinking human blood, a tale which in a certain sense I have never seen reason to question" (169). This claim is at least metaphorically proven to be true as the narrator recounts the many slaves who died building the house and maintaining its grounds. The plantation's foundation is built not only through the labor of but on the bodies of slaves: the decapitated negro builder was said to have been "sacrificed in some awful and occult rite connected with the laying of the corner stone," and the collapse of the building's scaffolding that kills several men is also "alleged to be by hideous design." African American blood must be spilt as an assertion of white mastery – which the narrator himself does not refute or have "reason to question."

Notably, the murderous slave-owner is not a native Virginian, but remains culturally distinct as a West Indian. His origin has a double meaning. First, it suggests

⁹⁹ This is in fact the only reading that Page's biographer Theodore Gross has of the story; see *Thomas Nelson Page*, 35.

that the racial and cultural differences – Creole vs. Anglo-Saxon, West Indian vs. American – constitute the divergence between appropriate and unfit masters. The narrator is careful to emphasize that the West Indian master is an aberration in the genteel South – “his life was a blot upon civilization” – who is punished by the other white slave-owner “under the law [for] the full penalty of his hideous crime” (169-170). MacKethan comments that Page believes that the plantation “reflects its owner and thus the true plantation will symbolize and proclaim the ethical superiority of its inhabitants,” a superiority that the West Indian owner intrinsically lacks.¹⁰⁰ Next, and more crucially, the slave-owner’s origin directs the reader’s imagination back to the West Indies, the site of the first successful slave revolution, one marked by intense violence.¹⁰¹ Sundquist writes that the San Domingo/Haitian Revolution, which lasted from 1791 to 1804, represented to white Southerners the “fearful prophecy of black rebellion throughout the world.” The bloody and chaotic thirteen-year conflict led to 100,000 white and Creole deaths, 60,000 black deaths, and the displacement of 10,000 colonizers, many of whom migrated to the United States.¹⁰² American newspapers recounted the carnage with

¹⁰⁰ Lucinda MacKethan, *The Dream of Arcady*, 45.

¹⁰¹ The specter of Haiti haunts the Southern imagination, from E.D.E.N. Southworth’s *Retribution* to Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom!* See Alfred Hunt, *Haiti’s Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988).

Page later returns to Haiti as a dangerous precedent for what could happen to the US under “negro domination” in his essay collection, *The Negro: The Southerner’s Problem* (New York: Scribner’s, 1904), discussed later in this chapter. He warns that while Haiti was governed by white rule, it was “teeming with wealth,” but exists presently “in a state of decay and ruin.” He warns that the United States could fall into the same pitfalls – “barbarism substituted for civilization” (261) – should whites fail to assume command of the social and political realms.

¹⁰² Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations*, 141. Page seems well aware of the history of these Creole immigrants: he writes that the West Indian “spoke only a *patois* not unlike the Creole French of the Louisiana parishes” (169) – the most popular site for Creole refugees from the West Indies (see Hunt, 45). Hunt notes that before 1791, New Orleans had only 4,446 inhabitants; by 1809, 5,754 Saint-Dominguan refugees – more than the original population – had settled in the territory (47). Many of the West Indian refugees flourished

fascinated horror. For instance, it was reported that the rebels used as their flag “the body of a white infant impaled upon a stake.”¹⁰³

Page’s narrator in “No Haid Pawn” admits that the fear of slave insurrection – the violent reversal of power and mastery – was “a shadow that always hung in the horizon” (a statement that contradicts Page’s own assertion that slaves’ “heart[s] [were] light and the toil not too heavy”).¹⁰⁴ Rumors of the unwelcome presence of abolitionists and the Underground Railroad in the neighborhood further these fears: “it was as if the foundation of the whole social fabric was undermined.” Here Page’s narrator gestures towards a much more foreboding future:

the slaves were in a large majority, and had they risen, though the final issue could not be doubted, the lives of every white on the plantations must have paid the forfeit. Whatever the right and wrong of slavery might have been, its existence demanded that no outside interference with it should be tolerated. So much was certain; self-preservation required this. (174)

But despite the terrible vision he tries to repress, Page’s white narrator is inevitably drawn into the conflict. He is forced into the mansion during a storm which he had expected to “‘blow over’ but...as the time passed, its violence, instead of diminishing, increased” (180). The literal storm – which leads him into the abandoned mansion, and face to face with the ominous figure before him – seems analogous to the “shadow” of possible slave insurrection which he and other white Southerners attempt to deny.

there; certainly, this character did well enough there to move to Virginia and settle on a plantation in its fertile Tidewater region.

¹⁰³ Quoted from a 1792 pamphlet entitled *A Particular Account of the Insurrection of the Negroes of St. Domingo* in Hunt’s *Haiti’s Influence on Antebellum America*, 3.

¹⁰⁴ William Link reports that during the 1850s, there were advertisements for more than 600 runaway slaves in Virginia alone (*Roots of Secession: Slavery and Politics in Antebellum Virginia*. [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003], 99). Page, “Social Life,” 150.

In fact, during the 1850s (the time period in which Page situates “No Haid Pawn”) white fear of “the black terror” swept across the South. In the fall of 1856, a particularly widespread rumor of slave insurrection on Christmas Day stretching from Delaware to Texas plagued the nation. Harvey Wish reports that in Virginia alone, slave plots were “discovered” in Williamsburg and Montgomery County, Millwood, and New Kent County, and the governor “sent arms upon request” to Fauquier, King and Queen, Culpeper, Rappahannock counties and the towns of Lynchburg, Petersburg, and Gordonsville.¹⁰⁵ In New Kent, a lawyer, John P. Pierce, described the general mood of hysteria: that the “suspicious whites...imagine[d] that they were standing on a volcano, almost ready to burst forth with fury and destruction... momentarily expecting to hear the cries, groans, and shrieks of women and children who were being murdered by the hands of slaves.”¹⁰⁶ Hence, the logic of fallacy in “No Haid Pawn”: Page’s narrator identifies the “gigantic figure” before him as a ghost instead of the runaway slave (described as “a fine butcher, a good work-hand, and a first-class boatman” [173]).¹⁰⁷ His narrative is full of false certitude – “I knew that the murderer of No Haid Pawn had left his grave,” “the story of the dead rowing in their coffins was verified!” – because by Southern white logic, even a murderous ghost is preferable to a mutinous slave.

For the fear that blacks would rise against their masters is so traumatic it cannot be fully contended with in the white imagination. Instead, the narrator dismisses slave

¹⁰⁵ Harvey Wish, “The Slave Insurrection Panic of 1856,” *The Journal of Southern History* 5.2 (May 1939): 220.

¹⁰⁶ Quoted in Clement Eaton, *The Freedom-of-Thought Struggle in the Old South* (New York: Harper and Row, 1940), 101-2. John Brown’s raid of Harpers Ferry (then part of Virginia) in October 1859 also heightened white suspicions and fears.

¹⁰⁷ Rubin suggests that the “black and headless trunk” is in fact a pig, a favorite delicacy of the runaway slave.

violence and improper master-slave conduct as confined to a site that is “other” and past – part of the unfortunate history of the West Indies – rather than the plantation next door. But by bringing the history of the West Indies home to the American South, Page implicates the entire system of slavery of the New World. Furthermore, the runaway slave is Congolese, another indication of Page’s larger anxieties about the trajectory of slavery. In a tidy microcosm, he presents the reader with the spatial history of slave trading in the New World: African slave, West Indian slave-owner, and Virginian plantation. Moreover, the narrator’s description of the runaway negro – his size, his brutality, his power – renders him nearly identical to the dead West Indian slave master. While the narrator makes clear that these figures are similar in their negative qualities (brutality, strength, strange dialect), the idea that a white body (of the master’s ghost) could be read as a black body (of the live fugitive slave) suggests the shared effects cultivated by the oppressive system of slavery. The vampiric notion that the West Indian slave-owner’s strength derives from the blood of his slaves symbolizes the wealth and power of *all* slave-owners profiting from their slave holding economies. Even the Virginians’ condemnation of the West Indian slave-owner’s cruelty functions obliquely as a means for them to disavow their own complicity in this system of violence and dehumanization.

Page raises the possibility of all slave-owners suffering the same terrible fate of the West Indian, including the narrator himself. The narrative betrays the potential for a network of black defiance that threatens the “foundation of the whole social fabric.” The “distant call or halloo” heard by the narrator suggests that the runaway slave is

communicating with others, perhaps the supposedly docile slaves on the plantations. In fact, the ghost stories told by the slaves could function as an active stratagem to keep others away from the seemingly abandoned plantation, a possible site for the “underground railway.” Historian William Link writes that hiding in swamps was a popular strategy for runaway slaves, with one slave noting that “niggers was too smart fo’ white folks to git ketched” there.¹⁰⁸ The plantation is haunted, not by ghosts, but by the unacknowledged, hidden network of runaway slaves, colluding slaves, and sympathetic abolitionists – all of whom (in the eyes of white Southerners) – must remain unacknowledged. After all, “self-preservation required this.”

“Self-preservation” also requires a different ending than the terrified narrator’s vision of the runaway slave/ghost appearing in the doorway. Had the story concluded here, it could have suggested that the “ghost”/runaway slave killed the narrator. This fugitive slave – who is described “as fearless as he was brutal” (172) and “exercis[ing] considerable influence over the other slaves” – is a deliberate invocation of Nat Turner, who in 1831 led a slave revolt that killed fifty-five whites in Southampton County, less than one hundred miles from Page’s birthplace.¹⁰⁹ Page even mentions Turner explicitly in his otherwise idyllic essay, “Social Life in Old Virginia.” When talking of the ritual of

¹⁰⁸ William A. Link, *Roots of Secession*, 101. For more on the notion of swamps as a revolutionary site for Africans (and a threat to Anglo-Americans), see Monique Allewaert’s “Swamp Sublime: Ecologies of Resistance in the American Plantation Zone,” *PMLA* 123.2 (March 2008): 340-357, and William Tynes Cowan’s *The Slave in the Swamp: Disrupting the Plantation Narrative* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

¹⁰⁹ The slave’s master is congratulated by the other slaveowners for not getting his throat cut (173) – a reference to Nat Turner’s 1831 “Confession,” in which he relays how he and his accomplices killed Turner’s own master with an axe. Thomas Gray’s introduction warns that “whilst every thing upon the surface of society wore a calm and peaceful aspect; whilst not one note of preparation was heard to warn the devoted inhabitants of woe and death, a gloomy fanatic was revolving in the recesses of his own dark, bewildered, and overwrought mind, schemes of indiscriminate massacre to the whites” (Nat Turner and Thomas Gray, “The Confessions of Nat Turner” (1831), [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010], 15).

fox-hunting, he recalls “a legendary fox known as ‘Nat Turner,’ after the notorious negro of that name, who, after inciting the riot in Southampton County in the year 1832 [sic], known as ‘Nat Turner’s Rebellion,’ in which some fifty persons were massacred, remained out in hiding for weeks after all his followers were taken before he was captured” (169-170). Though the next sentence reverts swiftly to the mood of gaiety and frivolity (“Great frolics these old red hunts were...”), this is a telling moment of anxiety that Page conquers only through a deliberate staging of mastery (170). The fox hunt – a Cavalier tradition where men on horseback chase, along with their bloodhounds, the object of their pursuit – itself functions in this moment as the tracking down and punishing of a runaway slave. Neatly reversing the actual Turner’s actions (what his biographer Thomas Gray deemed an “indiscriminate massacre to the whites”), this “Nat Turner” is hunted down and killed by eager white men. Indeed, the violent retribution following Turner’s rebellion – the white militia and mobs killed more than two hundred African Americans – indicates a desperate and violent act of remastering.

In the same way, “No Haid Pawn’s” afterword attempts a return to a stabilized South by conveniently dissolving this overt threat to white sovereignty. After a break signified by several asterisks, the narration concludes:

When we could get there, nothing was left but the foundation. The haunted house, when struck [by lightning], had literally burned to the water's edge. The changed current had washed its way close to the place, and in strange verification of the negroes' traditions, No Haid Pawn had reclaimed its own, and the spot with all its secrets lay buried under its dark water. (186)

Somehow the narrator has escaped, only to return some time later with a group of other white men to investigate, but “nothing” remains but the foundation. What has happened

to the runaway slave (death or flight) is of no importance so long as he no longer presents any overt threat to white society. The story ends on this uneasy note of “secrets...buried under...dark waters,” suggesting that the white South may only rest when the threat of violence or unease lies “buried” – not only within black interiorities but in white minds as well.

In their writings, Page and Harris bridge the ideology of the Old and New Souths by controlling and subordinating African Americans psychologically, socially, and politically. They respond directly to the trend of Southern black migration in the late 1870s through the 1890s, a period marked by black mobility and the opportunity to command payment for their labor. Nonetheless, what paying jobs African Americans could garner were the difficult, life-threatening tasks once relegated to slaves, while Southern whites, like Page, criticize the “laziness” and “shiftlessness” of African Americans who refused to maintain long-term labor contracts.¹¹⁰ In response to their restrictive conditions, African Americans began dreaming of migration. William Cohen quotes a young black lawyer in South Carolina who wrote to the Colonization Society of how “colored men are daily being Hung, Shot and otherwise murdered and ill-treated because of their complexion and politics,” and ends the letter entreating them to “send us to Africa or some where else where we can live without ill treatment.”¹¹¹ And the specifics of “some where else” mattered less than the need to leave where they were: they

¹¹⁰ In *At Freedom's Edge: Black Mobility and the Southern White Quest for Racial Control, 1861-1915* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), William Cohen argues that these peripatetic tendencies made sound economic sense, as short-term, occasional jobs in what he terms the “transient subeconomy” such as railroad construction, levee building, coal-mining, even day laboring on plantations paid significantly more than long-term labor contracts on plantations (127-128).

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 155.

moved to Liberia, Kansas, and the North in search of economic profitability, freedom from discrimination, and a change in their conditions.¹¹²

“No Haid Pawn” addresses not only the outdated fear of slave insurrection but reflects the economic necessity of containing black labor in the South while maintaining psychological subjugation. Just like slave insurrection in Page’s story, black migration threatened “the foundation of the whole social fabric,” and his dismissal of the “vain counterfeit of freedom” (164) represented by the abolitionists in “No Haid Pawn” could be used by Southern whites to dissuade blacks seeking out labor opportunities elsewhere.¹¹³ Similarly aware of the importance of black labor to Southern progress, Harris warned in a 1904 essay that black migration would constitute a blow to “the material and industrial interests of the South from which we should not recover in a generation.”¹¹⁴ Harris found his own economic and social solution: the continuation of slavery through the rejection of education and enfranchisement, and the coercion of labor known as convict leasing.

Harris’s desire to maintain the “material and industrial interests of the South” can be traced as far back as his Atlanta *Constitution* sketches, which he wrote at the onset of

¹¹² See Cohen for more on Liberia (he explains that though the Liberia movement had almost completely died out during the Civil War and Reconstruction, in the late 1870s, it became revitalized again). For more on Kansas, see Nell Painter’s *Exodusters: Black Migration to Kansas After Reconstruction* (New York: Knopf, 1976). All efforts were met with limited success, and the numbers of those who participated in these movements were incredibly small in comparison to those who stayed (because of obligation to family members, lack of finances to fund movement, etc.)

¹¹³ In actuality, Page’s rejection of the North as a land of opportunity was not inaccurate as discrimination and increased immigration in the North made it difficult for blacks to obtain desirable jobs. Cohen writes that the blacks in the North were most often used as strikebreakers in industrial factories – hardly an enviable position – while European immigrants took over many of the service positions (waiters, maids, cooks, etc.) previously availed to African Americans (97).

¹¹⁴ Harris, “The Negro Problem,” *Editor and Essayist*, 154.

his career in the 1870s.¹¹⁵ These sketches generally took the form of a dialogue between Remus and journalists from the *Constitution* or other real-life Atlantan citizens; in them he regales his audience with his opinions about African Americans in the post-war South. Here Harris uses Remus not only as an apologist for slavery but as a spokesperson for white supremacy, through his advocacy of practices that restricted black freedoms such as literacy, enfranchisement, and migration. Harris's presumed readership – a middle-class, white, urbane (and urbane) audience much like, or striving to be like, the audience Remus directly addressed in the sketches – would have been swayed by these views as necessary for Southern progress.¹¹⁶ Harris's ideas resonated with both local and national audiences; plans to publish Harris's Uncle Remus stories by his New York City publisher D. Appleton and Company were underway even *before* Harris wrote his folklore tales.¹¹⁷

That the Remus of the sketches, who comments on the urban present, predates the backwards-looking, plantation dwelling Uncle Remus reveals how the plantation romance is created by current circumstances. Though Harris would later dismiss these

¹¹⁵ Harris acquired his position at the *Constitution* through his friendship with Henry Grady, the orator and journalist/spokesperson for the New South Creed (see *Editor and Essayist*, 35-37, and Chapter IX of *Life and Letters* (125-141), both by Julia Collier Harris, for more on Harris's career at the *Constitution* and his relationship with Grady. At the time of Harris's hiring, the *Constitution* was much smaller in terms of regional reach and audience, but, due in large part to the work of Harris and Grady, the *Constitution* would develop into one of the most influential and widely read papers in the South. Johanningsmeier cites an 1884 editorial that boasted that the paper "reaches almost every point in Georgia, and penetrates into every adjoining state on the day of publication" (*Fiction and the American Literary Marketplace*, 23). For more on the history of these sketches, see Eric Montenyohl's "Origins of Uncle Remus," *Folklore Forum* 18.2 (Spring 1986): 136-167.

¹¹⁶ As Bryan Wagner explains in his thorough examination of the *Atlanta Constitution* sketches, Harris attempted to sway his readers' view in favor of those political and social advancements advocated by the paper, such as the rise of the police force and industrial development in Atlanta (*Disturbing the Peace: Black Culture and the Police Power After Slavery* [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009], 159). For more on the black public's rejection of the *Constitution's* New South Agenda which came at the expense of their own liberties and rights (see Wagner, 144-151).

¹¹⁷ See Montenyohl, "Origins of Uncle Remus," 156.

sketches as “without permanent interest,” solely included in the first volume of his stories to “present[] a phase of Negro character wholly distinct from that” in the legends, an analysis of the relationship between the sketches and the legends presents not “distinct” but identical ideologies, especially in maintaining white domination. While the urban sketches of the *Constitution* were published only in the first volume of Remus tales, Harris’s push for white supremacy at the expense of black freedoms remained consistent through his lifetime. For instance, his anti-emigration stance in “Views on the African Migration” in *Uncle Remus and His Friends*, was published in 1892, more than a decade after his last *Constitution* sketches. Many of Remus’s complaints about emancipated African Americans, whom he refers to as “sunshine niggers” or “scurshun [excursion] niggers,” are borrowed from racist arguments about black inferiority. He complains in “A Story of the War” that emancipated African Americans “er too lazy ter wuk...en dey specks hones’ fokes fer to stan’ up en s’port um....dey begs my terbacker...en steals my vittles.”¹¹⁸ Even the movement to Africa – one with great symbolic meaning for African Americans who felt displaced in America – is disparaged by Remus as a mere scam to get money from gullible blacks. He chastises the Huntingdon’s cook, Chloe, that “you dunner whar [the preacher promoting a return to Africa] come fum. You dunner how long he gwine stay...yit de niggers is givin’ ’im der money, en makin’ ready to go ter Affiky.” Instead, he dismisses their desire to go to Africa not as the desire to return to their cultural origins but as an opportunity to be idle – “some un um bin runnin’ fum work ever

¹¹⁸ Harris, “A Story of the War,” 206-7; “In the Role of a Tartar,” 239.

sence de farmin' days wuz over...somebody done gone en tole um dat all dey got ter do atter dey git dar is ter set in de sun.”¹¹⁹

Harris's narrator's disapproval for these “sunshine niggers” suggests that the trickster values of chicanery and theft – necessary for survival in the era of slavery and even celebrated in his “Brer Rabbit” tales – are untranslatable to the New South. Instead, this new reading of African Americans as idle, foolish, and amoral, was a common argument made by whites for white policing and control.¹²⁰ Remus rejects black education as “de ruinashun er dis country” and regards enfranchisement as an annoyance rather than an asset (“Man go up en vote, en he ain't got time ter change his cloze 'fo' he gotter rack up and vote aga'in”).¹²¹ In fact, the latter sketch's title – “Intimidation of A Colored Voter” (in which his employers attempt to sway Remus's vote) – trivializes the violent suppression of would-be African American voters into a comic domestic dispute. And while Harris claimed in a letter that “the only ambition I have ever had [is] the obliteration of prejudice against the blacks...and the uplifting of both races,”¹²² such motivations are hardly discernable in “As to Education” where Remus says “put a spellin'-book in a nigger's han's, en right den en dar you loozes a plow-hand.”¹²³

¹¹⁹ Harris, “Views on the African Exodus,” *Uncle Remus and His Friends* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1892), 321.

¹²⁰ See Joel Williamson's *A Rage for Order* and Glenda Gilmore's *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). While her work focuses on the social politics of North Carolina, the white beliefs in “racial degeneracy” (“the Negro...is not what he or she used to be”) – was widespread across the South (76).

¹²¹ Harris, “As to Education,” *Uncle Remus*, 260-261; “Intimidation of a Colored Voter,” *Uncle Remus and His Friends*, 240.

¹²² A letter to Andrew Carnegie, dated Nov. 2, 1907, quoted in Jennifer Ritterhouse's “Reading, Intimacy, and the Role of Uncle Remus in White Southern Social Memory,” *The Journal of Southern History* 69.3 (Aug. 2003): 599.

¹²³ Harris, “As to Education,” *Uncle Remus*, 261. Harris's personal views on education are as conservative as his literary spokesman's. In his essay “How Education Will Solve the So-Called Negro Problem,”

Harris, using Remus as his mouthpiece, directly advocates for the continued white control of black labor.¹²⁴ In “The Emigrants,” Remus advises would-be migrants that it is preferable to “go an’ rob somebody an’ git on de chain-gang” than go to Alabama: “You kin make yo’ livin’ [on the chain gang] w’en you can’t make it nowhar else.”¹²⁵ Remus’s position in “The Emigrants” not only promotes the policing of black migration, it increases convict leasing: a form of neo-slavery in which the worker was unable to control his wages or his time. Even the Ku Klux Klan is palliated in Remus’s stories as a harmless and even comic form of labor discipline. In “Death and the Negro Man,” Remus tells an unnamed African American boy a story in which a slave shirking work is visited one night by “Death,” his master dressed in a white bed sheet with “two eye-holes in a piller-case.” This visit terrifies the slave into “work[ing] harder dan any er de res.”¹²⁶ A visit from a white-sheeted figure named “Death” seems not dissimilar to one from the Klan, the postbellum organization that policed black behavior by terrifying them into submission. Blurring the lines between antebellum and postbellum forms of white mastery enables Remus to warn the young boy of the repercussions of not laboring or behaving according to white demands.

Harris declares that education for African Americans should follow the model promoted by Booker T. Washington, who asserted that only the industrial or vocational training of his race could benefit the South as a whole.

¹²⁴ While Wayne Mixon argues for Harris’s liberal and sympathetic agenda towards blacks in “The Ultimate Irrelevance of Race,” he overstates Harris’s liberalism. He does not fully account for Remus’s dismissal of black education, he defends Remus’s shooting of John as “not a foe of freedom but a friend to a defenseless human being” (as if Jeems is a baby, not a soldier who had “achieved considerable distinction in the Confederate army” [“A Story of the War” 203]), and reads Remus’ advice to join the chain gang in “The Emigrants” without any sense of irony.

¹²⁵ Harris, “The Emigrants,” *Uncle Remus*, 243-244.

¹²⁶ Harris, “Death and the Colored Man,” *Uncle Remus and His Friends*, 36, 38.

Remus functions directly as propaganda for the New South as well as the Old. As Wagner points out, Remus's advocacy for the chain-gang in "The Emigrants" makes sense when one considers that the *Constitution* "always counted prison profiteers among its closest allies and investors." But far more important a contributing factor than appeasing its investors was the *Constitution's* social vision of the New South. Led by managing editor Henry Grady and his "New South Creed," the paper promoted industrialization and modernity. Cheap convict labor was the most practical way to effect such change. Wagner explains that "there was just no way that the huge industrial and infrastructural development envisioned by the New South Creed would have been possible without the superexploitation permitted by the convict lease" to the development of the coal, iron, timber, and railroad industries that transformed Atlanta into an economic force on the world stage.¹²⁷

Though one could see Remus as outmoded, an "Old Negro" in the time of the New, he is nonetheless the prescribed focal point for white readers. While a comic figure (particularly in contrast to the well-educated, eloquent white Atlanta citizens he encounters), Remus is imbued with a peculiar dignity. Harris almost always grants Remus the last word or some other indication that his views are valid; for instance, "The Emigrants" concludes with the would-be migrants deciding not to leave Atlanta. Even if Remus seems ridiculous or foolish, his beliefs are more valid and more influential than the other African Americans he encounters in the text. His correctness stems from his full

¹²⁷ Wagner, *Keeping the Peace*, 133. Wayne Mixon writes that "by the turn of the century, Harris had become skeptical that any good could come from industrial progress...to him the phrase was merely a euphemism for materialism" (*Southern Writers*, 80).

acquiescence to white superiority and the structure of paternalism, such as in “The Emigrants,” in which he justifies the exploitation of black labor as beneficial for both blacks and whites alike. At the end of “Uncle Remus as A Rebel,” the original version of “A Story of the War,” Remus asks the editor/interlocutor, whom he refers to as “boss,” for money immediately after he announces his intention to return “home” to his former master Jeems, tidily connecting white patronage from the antebellum South to the New.

Turning away from fictional mouthpieces, Harris and Page both wrote essays to directly address the white public on the “negro problem”: how to contend with African American emancipation. Harris’s 1904 essay series in *The Saturday Evening Post* entitled “The Negro Problem” is a cautious avowal of sympathy for African Americans in the New South: a sympathy predicated on his paternalistic belief in their incapacity for freedom and their need for white guardianship.¹²⁸ Page also published an essay collection on the “negro question” in 1904¹²⁹ in which he interprets freedoms – political enfranchisement and office, free labor, and social equality¹³⁰ – as a dangerous threat to whiteness in all its facets (note how his title, *The Negro: the Southerner’s Problem*, creates a binary opposition of “Southerner” against “Negro”). In marked contrast to Harris’s feelings of patronizing geniality toward contemporary negroes (i.e., “I have

¹²⁸ See “The Negro of Today,” first published in *The Saturday Evening Post*, January 30, 1904; reprinted in *Editor and Essayist*, 135.

¹²⁹ Harris’s essay series was published in *The Saturday Evening Post* from early January to late February 1904, and Page’s book *The Negro: The Southerner’s Problem* was published by Scribner’s that November). I should note that Page was picking up ideas from an earlier essay, “The Negro Question,” published in 1892 in *The Old South*, and that – even twelve years later – Page continued to consider “the Negro question” “the most dangerous problem which confronts the American people” (280). Again, by “American people,” Page emphatically means “whites,” once again denying African Americans their citizenship and national identity.

¹³⁰ Page argues the term “social equality” “signifies but one thing: the opportunity to enjoy, equally with white men, the privilege of cohabiting with white women.” (113). This anxiety of black-on-white rape – which fomented panic and suspicion between the races – is explored in Chapter 3.

never understood or felt that the presence of the negroes in the South constitutes a menace to the whites”), Page’s views are much more negative (he reads the “new issue” as “lazy, thriftless, intemperate, insolent, dishonest, and without the most rudimentary elements of morality”).¹³¹ Nevertheless, I want to suggest that Page’s agenda makes explicit the racism lurking behind Harris’s seemingly more liberal views.

These authors return to the antebellum past as palliation from the threat of black power and political enfranchisement. In his essay “The Negro as the South Sees Him,” Harris claims that during the plantation past, “the relations between master and slave were as perfect as they could be.”¹³² And even amidst all his anxiety in *The Negro*, Page cannot resist indulging in the “relation of warm friendship and tender sympathy” that previously existed between master and slave.¹³³ This nostalgic, fond tone, recognizable to readers of *In Ole Virginia* and *The Old South*, reemerges as an incongruous oasis in a book charged with grief and apprehension about the present. By eliding their own awareness of the fictive conception of the “perfect” and “warm” relationship between master and slave, Page and Harris once again attempt to escape their anxieties about the potential reversal of domination and subjugation in their contemporary era. Page relays countless anecdotes about slaves who preserve their ex-masters’ legacies, even long into the era of freedom, and the whites who reward them for their devotion (for example, a faithful mammy is escorted by Robert E. Lee during a wedding to stand next to the bride, her former charge). In doing so, Page reverts to a fictive vision of the Southern past as an

¹³¹ Harris, *Editor and Essayist*, 152; Page, *The Negro*, 80.

¹³² “The Negro as the South Sees Him,” published in *The Saturday Evening Post*, January 2, 1904; reprinted in *Editor and Essayist*, 129, 124.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 174

attempt to represent ideal African American behavior in the present: grateful, subservient, silenced.¹³⁴

Both Page and Harris in fact advocate a return to the antebellum practices of paternalism, now structured as the overt white control of black bodies, politics, and wages. Page claims that the recovery of “kindliness” between the races is contingent upon black acceptance of their inferiority, for white supremacy is “inherent and essential...based on superior intellect, virtue and constancy.” His proposal for solving the “negro problem” included segregation, a severely restricted enfranchisement and

¹³⁴ In fact, Page’s short story “The Spectre in the Cart” -- published in his short story collection *Bred in the Bone* (New York: Scribner’s, 1904) just months before *The Negro* -- makes explicit the violent consequences of black speech and political participation. The main action of the story takes place amidst a heated political campaign during Redemption, and while the whites have regained state and local governments, their position is precarious. The tale’s narrator, a white man named Stokeman, canvasses for reelection against black Absalom Turnell, whose “violent speeches...stir[s] up the blacks and array[s] them against the whites” (62) but his bravado is easily quashed by the presence of courageous white John Holloway. The night of the elections and Absalom’s subsequent defeat, Absalom and his father Joel murder Holloway and his wife. After a trial, Joel is executed by the state, but Absalom is granted a stay of execution several times by a series of legal technicalities until he is lynched by an impatient white mob, despite Stokeman’s protestations. A year after Holloway’s murder, Stokeman spies the ghosts of Absalom, hanging on the tree and Joel near the tree where he last saw Holloway: Ab, hanging on the tree on which he was lynched, and Joel, “bowing...civily” in his execution cart (91). Page deliberately couples the acts of black voting and black violence: in his rallying speech, Ab exhorts his fellow blacks “to go to the polls...[and] wade in blood to their lips.” The practice of voter intimidation is turned on its head, as now blacks are the ones inciting violence. Ab, pistol and knife in one hand, even boasts that “he had ‘drunk blood’ before, both of white men and women, and he meant to drink it again” (66). Except for the brief mention of the polls, his speech could be construed as a call for white massacre, in the vein of Nat Turner (and Ab’s last name indirectly invokes his violent predecessor). Stokeman obliquely suggests that Holloway’s wife was raped, nothing that “she had lived to taste the bitterness of death, before it took her” (74); a violation that demonstrates the danger of “social equality.” After relaying this sad history, “Stokeman, with a little shiver, put his hand over his eyes as though to shut out the vision that recurred to him,” a gesture repeated at his story’s end: “once more he put his hand suddenly before his face as though to shut out something from his vision,” saying that ““Yes, I have seen apparitions...but I have seen what was worse”” (93). While Page links Stokeman’s purposeful obstruction of his vision to the rape, I want to suggest that the greater trauma to Page is the loss of the former, congenial relationship between whites and blacks, a loss which Stokeman cannot bring himself to envision. For Joel, not Ab or even either of the Holloways, is the titular character of the story, the “spectre” that haunts Stokeman and Page. Unlike Ab, who always manifested “a deep seated animosity against the whites,” his father’s complicity in the Holloways’ deaths is a complete shock (60). Joel’s transformation from meek subordinate “with kindly manners and a likeable way” to murderous rapist represents the dangerous future of race relations in the South.

primarily industrial education, with a lucky few – those “who have proven themselves capable of appreciating it” – “awarded” a college education. This scheme is but another form of white mastery over blacks (intrinsic within the paternalistic language of blacks being “awarded” higher education). Page’s promotion of African American labor in lieu of political participation merely relocates the structure of slavery onto free black citizens.¹³⁵

Harris also advocates limiting suffrage, claiming it is the “obvious duty” of the state “to purge the ballot-box of ignorance” and the “unfortunate...delusion” of African American political involvement.¹³⁶ While he claims disfranchisement and ballot policing were nonracially directed, only African American would-be voters were actually targeted. In fact, white conservatives openly flaunted the prohibition of black voters. Politician and lecturer Rebecca Latimer Felton announced “it is a fact that the negro has no ballot privilege in the Solid South, effectually hampered by registration laws.”¹³⁷ Even Harris’s claim that “in Georgia, the colored people have ceased to take any great interest in politics” is an intentional elision of the stringent anti-voting measures used to restrict African American suffrage.¹³⁸ Surprisingly, this series in *The Saturday Evening Post* garnered Harris with favorable letters from African American intellectuals. Booker T.

¹³⁵ Page, *The Negro*, 293; “The Negro Question,” 284.

¹³⁶ Harris, *Editor and Essayist*, 157, 158.

¹³⁷ Williamson, *A Rage for Order*, 169.

¹³⁸ Harris, “The Future of the Negro,” an 1877 editorial for the *Atlanta Constitution*, reprinted in *Editor and Essayist*, 158. Harris even claimed rather speciously that Georgia “refused to restrict the privilege of suffrage” (157); for the specific measures Georgia took to prevent black enfranchisement, see Joel Williamson’s *The Crucible of Race: Black-White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984). Williamson concludes that “[i]n Georgia, the line was clearly drawn: white men would vote in perpetuity as long as other white men so chose, and black men would not” (234).

Washington praised the “liberal and helpful article,” while R. R. Wright, president of the Georgia State Industrial College, wrote that he saw Harris’s views as “one of the fairest and most sympathetic that I have read from the pen of any Southern man.”¹³⁹ That Harris’s views, still rooted in white attitudes of paternalism and self-preservation, are regarded as “liberal” and “fair” by African American intellectuals suggests the grim state of race relations in this era. Indeed, one can read the qualification in Wright’s statement (“*Southern man*”) as a sign of his awareness of the extremely minimal sympathies towards African Americans.

Ultimately, Page and Harris sought to not only memorialize white supremacy in the past but reinscribe white supremacy in the New South by denying African American political and social representation and voice in the post-Reconstruction era. The next chapter explores the ways in which African American authors Charles Chesnutt and Paul Laurence Dunbar use the tropes and conventions of plantation literature established by Page and Harris to fashion their own alternative narratives about the antebellum past and its ramifications on the present. And fittingly, Chesnutt and Dunbar demonstrate the accuracy of Page and Harris’s fears; their demonstrations of the power of black voice indeed threaten the narrative of white supremacy that Page and Harris so desperately tried to maintain.

¹³⁹ Harris, *Life and Letters*, 504-506.

CHAPTER TWO

“Some kine er foolishness w’at nobody could n’ make out”: Charles Chesnutt and Paul Laurence Dunbar’s Subversive Plantation Fiction

In 1887, the same year as the publication of Page’s *In Ole Virginia*, the *Atlantic*’s editor in chief Thomas Bailey Aldrich plucked from the stack of unsolicited manuscripts a story by an unknown author named Charles Chesnutt. This tale, which capitalized upon the vogue of plantation literature, opened in a near-identical manner to Page’s “Marse Chan.” On an abandoned plantation, John, a white, Northern visitor to the South, encounters a former slave named Julius who then tells him of the plantation’s history. The story’s initial tone appears to mirror Page’s nostalgia: John relates that as Julius begins his interior tale, “his eyes assumed a dreamy expression, and he seemed to lose sight of his auditors, and to be living over again in monologue his life on the old plantation” (7).¹⁴⁰

Yet Chesnutt was not just another white author memorializing and romanticizing the plantation past. Instead – unbeknownst to his white editors and readership for several years – he was an African American author, and his choice of the genre of plantation literature was a counterintuitive but deliberate means by which he intended to “uplift” and prove the dignity and agency of his race.¹⁴¹ Chesnutt was not the only African American author adopting this strategy: Paul Laurence Dunbar, his direct contemporary, wrote plantation poetry and fiction as well. These two authors found success and long-

¹⁴⁰ All quotations and pagination of Chesnutt’s short stories from *The Conjure Stories*, eds. Robert Stepto and Jennifer Rae Greeson (New York: Norton, 2012).

¹⁴¹ For a closer look at the competing notions of uplift within the black community, see Kevin K. Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996).

lasting relationships with major literary periodicals, all of which promoted white sectional reconciliation after the Civil War at the expense of African American rights.¹⁴²

So how does one explain Chesnutt and Dunbar's participation in a genre that, while garnering them individual profit, seemed incompatible with their desires to uplift their race? After all, Chesnutt recognized that such literature perpetuated stereotypes of blacks as servile and stupid. He wrote in an 1890 letter that he disliked Harris's and Page's stories about "the sentimental and devoted negro who prefers kicks to half-pence," and even that he saw dialect as deleterious to African American advancement.¹⁴³

Chesnutt and Dunbar saw the genre as an opportunity to signify¹⁴⁴ on and subvert Page and Harris's plantation tales, which simultaneously commemorated slavery's legacy and justified postbellum practices of white supremacy. In their exploration of black voice (and particularly, black dialect voice), Chesnutt and Dunbar incorporate techniques of

¹⁴² Dunbar's works were published in notable periodicals like the *Century Illustrated Magazine*, *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Lippincott's*, and Chesnutt enjoyed a lasting relationship with the *Atlantic Monthly*, whose later editor Walter Hines Page championed his works at major presses Houghton Mifflin and Doubleday, Page, and Co. Nancy Glazener notes how the *Atlantic* group of magazines "had the power to confer legitimacy on certain kinds of texts" (*Reading for Realism: The History of a U.S. Literary Institution, 1850-1910* [Durham: Duke University Press, 1997], 5). For more on Chesnutt and the *Atlantic*, see Kenneth M. Price's "Charles Chesnutt, the *Atlantic Monthly*, and the Intersection of African American Fiction and Elite Culture," *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth Century America*, eds. Kenneth M. Price and Susan Belasco Smith (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 257-274.

¹⁴³ Chesnutt, "To Be an Author": *Letters of Charles W. Chesnutt, 1889-1905*, eds. Joseph McElrath, Jr., and Robert C. Leitz III (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 66. See also William Andrews' *The Literary Career of Charles W. Chesnutt* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980) and Richard Brodhead's *Cultures of Letters: Scenes of Reading and Writing in Nineteenth Century America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993) for more on Chesnutt's background and biography.

¹⁴⁴ In thinking about Chesnutt and Dunbar's creation of an alternative space for African American voice in mainstream literature, I am of course indebted to Henry Louis Gates, Jr.'s influential theory of signification. In *The Signifying Monkey*, Gates proposes a theory of black "signifying" on white texts: the way that black authors make "the white written text speak with a black voice" (143). While this particular quotation is in relation to slave narratives, Chesnutt's and Dunbar's participation in the white genre of plantation fiction is equally applicable.)

masking and doubling that enable them to create an alternative collective memory, one that acknowledges the trauma of slavery and the fictive constructs of paternalism.

Though Chesnutt's opening of "The Goophered Grapevine" ostensibly initiates readers into yet another nostalgic, "dream"-like tale of "life on the old plantation," what follows is no tale of paternalism and mutual fidelity. Instead, Julius tells John and Annie of a slave named Henry who, through an act of conjure magic, flourishes and withers concurrently with the plantation's grapevines. When Henry is youthful and strong in the spring, his master sells him to other plantation owners at a high profit, then, when Henry is infirm in the winter, buys him back cheaply. Julius explains that the master treats Henry kindly in the wintertime not out of paternalistic obligation but greed, for "a nigger w'at he could make a thousan' dollars a year off'n didn' grow on eve'y huckleberry bush" (11) – a subversion of Page's ex-slave narrator's characterization of his own master as self-sacrificing and kindly to his "niggers [who] didn't hed nothin' 't all to do." Chesnutt thus exposes slavery to be a system of capitalistic growth made possible through the exploitation of human labor – an unwelcome truth that Julius's white audience will refuse to accept as the conjure tales continue.¹⁴⁵

Chesnutt and Dunbar's inversion of the accommodationist genre of plantation literature as a form of protest hazarded misinterpretation. Ralph Ellison famously denounced these two authors as perpetuating "white stereotypes" of African Americans

¹⁴⁵ See Stephanie Camp, Walter Johnson, and James Scott for historical analysis of slaves' attempts to resist the imposition of dominant white narratives.

that did not reflect the “human complexity of Negroes.”¹⁴⁶ Even today, these stories risk being misinterpreted by literary critics, who in particular dismiss Dunbar’s plantation fiction as an extension of, rather than a subversion of, the genre.¹⁴⁷ I argue, however, that this kind of double-writing—with its potential for misreading—constitutes a deliberate strategy by these authors that, on the one hand, enabled mainstream literary presses to present their works to established white audiences for the genre, while, on the other, fashioned an alternative collective memory of black trauma and remembrance for their readers. In particular, they play with and subvert stereotypes like black illiteracy and ignorance to extend portrayals of black agency beyond Thomas Nelson Page and Joel Chandler Harris’s texts.

Their tales do more than just condemn the past of slavery. They indict its afterlife in the post-Reconstruction South, which sought to dismantle black freedoms through forms of political disfranchisement and labor exploitation that drew on the plantation tradition for both their material practices and cultural narratives. Through this process of double-writing, Chesnutt and Dunbar point out the continued dehumanization of African Americans through lynching and convict leasing, practices that enabled white progress and profit at the expense of black life. These authors use the frame narratives of their plantation tales, and the perspective of their white, Northern narrators, to point out the

¹⁴⁶ See *Conversations with Ralph Ellison*, eds. Maryemma Graham and Amritjit Singh [Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1995], 113-114.

¹⁴⁷ Lillian S. Robinson and Greg Robinson explores generational responses to Dunbar’s work by African American authors and critics in “Paul Laurence Dunbar: A Credit to His Race?,” *African American Review* Vol. 41.2 (Summer 2007): 215-225.

nation's continued cultural and financial investment in ignoring such truths about slavery to maintain white supremacy in the Jim Crow era.

Scholars in the past two decades have recuperated much of both writers' legacies, yet there is still much work to be done in considering the specific facets of slavery's afterlife in Dunbar and Chesnutt's era. While Dunbar's veiled critique of plantation conventions and his revelation of the richness of black interiority in his poetry have been explored by scholars such as Shelley Fisher Fishkin, John Keeling, and Megan Peabody,¹⁴⁸ his short fiction – published in four volumes and reprinted in many periodicals in his day – has been far less examined. What scholarship does exist – by critics such as William Ramsey, Shirley Moody-Turner, and Gavin Jones – pertains to Dunbar's more explicitly protest texts such as “At Shaft 11” or “The Lynching of Jube Benson.” Focusing on these short stories in which Dunbar openly condemns racial injustice nonetheless risks neglecting his more subtle critique in those tales that conform to plantation conventions. I find that these seemingly accommodationist texts (in Jones' representative view, his “reassuring account of happy ‘darkies’”¹⁴⁹) subtly signify on the genre by virtue of their very generic formulation. That is, Dunbar does not merely concede to but plays with the stereotypes and distortions of plantation literature's

¹⁴⁸ See Shelley Fisher Fishkin, “Race and the Politics of Memory: Mark Twain and Paul Laurence Dunbar,” *Journal of American Studies* 40.2 (August 2006): 283-309; John Keeling, “Paul Dunbar and the Mask of Dialect,” *Southern Literary Journal* 25.2 (Spring 1993): 24-38; Megan Peabody, “Dialect in *Lyrics of Lowly Life*,” *We Wear the Mask: Paul Laurence Dunbar and the Politics of Representative Reality*, ed. Willie J. Harrell, Jr., (Kent: Kent State University Press, 2010), 59-72.

¹⁴⁹ Quotation from Gavin Jones, *Strange Talk: The Politics of Dialect Literature in Gilded Age America*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 186. For more on Dunbar's protest fiction, see also Willie Harrell, “Creating a Representative Community: Identity in Paul Laurence Dunbar's *In Old Plantation Days*,” *We Wear the Mask*, 154-169; Jarrett and Morgan, “Introduction,” *The Complete Stories of Paul Laurence Dunbar*, eds. Gene Jarrett and Thomas Morgan (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2005), xv-xliii; Shirley Moody-Turner, *Black Folklore*.

“reality” so blatantly that its fictitiousness is exposed. In particular, I see Dunbar’s interplay of black and white voices in “A Family Feud” and “The Stanton Coachman” – the only two of his many short stories about black antebellum and postbellum plantation life which incorporate the frame narrative format standard in plantation literature – as his attempt to portray the simultaneous power and limitation of black voice and representation.

Beyond discussing black voice and silencing in Chesnutt’s short stories like “The Goophered Grapevine” and “Dave’s Neckliss,” I also want to direct critical attention to “The Dumb Witness,” a short story usually overlooked in Chesnutt scholarship. Its manuscript history¹⁵⁰ speaks to Chesnutt’s constraints as an African American author working in the plantation literature genre, compounded by the plot of the tale itself, in which black voice and experience are rendered unintelligible by white listeners. In considering how Chesnutt accepts these constraints as a way to work against them, I build upon the work of scholars like Eric Sundquist and Richard Brodhead who have pointed out Chesnutt’s subversions of plantation literature and his exploration of black voice in his conjure tales. As useful as their works have been, I find that none so far have fully articulated the specific elements of the post-Reconstruction South that emerge from the continued repression of black rights, such as the coerced black labor in “The

¹⁵⁰ The story itself played a pivotal role in Chesnutt’s reception as an author. Richard Brodhead notes that “The Dumb Witness” was “tentatively accepted” for the *Atlantic* by editor Walter Hines Page on October 2, 1897 (*The Conjure Woman and Other Conjure Tales* [Durham: Duke University Press, 1993], 23). Less than three weeks later, Page requested to see all of Chesnutt’s works to evaluate their viability as a book. It seems logical to surmise from this chronology that “The Dumb Witness” sparked Page’s confidence in the viability of Chesnutt’s career and the success of a book. Yet this story was not included in Houghton Mifflin’s ensuing collection in 1899, *The Conjure Woman*, even though it was commissioned and edited by Page; in fact, “The Dumb Witness” was never published in Chesnutt’s lifetime in its original form.

Goophered Grapevine” and “Po’ Sandy.” Furthermore, by bringing in the cultural history of Chesnutt’s era, I counter the claims of critics such as Dean McWilliams and Sandra Molyneaux who propose that Chesnutt reveals a “hopeful future” of white understanding.¹⁵¹ Instead, I argue that his writings anticipate the failure of white recognition of both his works and their message.

It is imperative to ground these texts in their authors’ biographies for a clear understanding of how and why they came to see signifying on plantation literature as the most effective means to disperse their social and political subversions. Furthermore, such an examination enables us to see how they work through their anxieties and shortcomings not only as writers about the African American race, but as writers *of* the race as well – in fact, the first writers of their race to be published by the mainstream literary press. Their individual revisions and concessions to their editors and publishers indicate larger patterns of so-called black voice (or lack thereof) and white understanding (or lack thereof). Similarly, the interplay of these stories – and the connection between writer and audience and editor and publisher – demonstrates how the trauma of slavery could be potentially reworked or repressed. The patterns of silencing and misinterpretation within their stories represent Chesnutt and Dunbar’s larger awareness of the strictures of plantation fiction and of the possibilities and limitations of representing black voice in the Jim Crow era. That is, only through this accommodationist form could Chesnutt’s and

¹⁵¹ Quotation from Sandra Molyneaux, “Expanding the Collective Memory: Charles W. Chesnutt’s *The Conjure Woman* Tales,” *Memory, Narrative, and Identity: New Essays in Ethnic American Literatures*, eds. Amritjit Singh, Joseph T. Skerrett, Jr., and Robert Hogan (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1994), 165.

Dunbar's works reach the largest audience, even if only a small margin of that audience were truly moved by the veiled revelations within.

While the tension between white understanding and black voice is an intrinsic property of African American literature, the very notion of "black voice" was especially problematic in this era. Through the nineteenth century, white performers and writers utilized racist iconography and caricatures associated with the cultural construct of blackness in minstrel shows to assert the intrinsic and natural division between white superiority and black inferiority. In addition, the mid-nineteenth century saw the rise of "black minstrelsy" in which black entertainers performed for white audiences this construct of "blackness" to the great acclaim of the white public. Robert Toll writes that the success of black minstrelsy led to the continued "credibility of minstrel images of Negroes" in society, as their audiences applauded the "authenticity" of these black minstrels, whom they saw "as simply being themselves on stage, without artifice, cultivation, or control."¹⁵² These notions of artistry, authenticity and appropriation would also be of paramount importance to a writer like Dunbar, who – as the first known African American professional author born after slavery – both participates in and challenges the stereotypes of this culturally constructed blackness.

Dunbar notoriously enjoyed a privileged relationship with *The Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine*, which was at its time the most widely circulated and read magazine

¹⁵² See Robert C. Toll, *Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 202. For more on black minstrelsy, see Gene Jarrett, *Deans and Truants: Race and Realism in African American Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2006); Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

in the United States. Thirty of Dunbar's poems were published in the *Century* between 1895-1901, an especially impressive figure considering that the magazine received more than eight hundred manuscripts each month, with poems comprising sixty percent of the submissions.¹⁵³ As David Blight explains, at the heart of the *Century*'s enterprise was its maintenance of national unification, achieved through the silencing of African American experience.¹⁵⁴ This mission was carried out through its publishing of both non-fiction (its incredibly popular *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* series, memoirs by both former Confederates and Yankees characterized by a non-partisan tone) and its literature (such as Page's "Marse Chan" in April 1884 and "Meh Lady" in June 1886). In selling magazines the *Century* was selling a particular kind of ideology; therefore it is perhaps surprising how much Dunbar desired to be published in the *Century*, unsuccessfully submitting stories for nine years before his initial publication in 1895. Of course, one reason for his dogged interest in the *Century* was pragmatic opportunism. In the late 1890s, the *Century* had a circulation of around 150,000 and offered one of the highest payments for its

¹⁵³ See Henry Martyn, "History of the *Century Magazine*," *The Quarterly Illustrator* 1.2 (April-June 1893): 93-96. For more on the *Century*, see Frank Luther Mott's *A History of American Magazines*, Vol. III, 457-480; Arthur John's *The Best Years of the Century: Richard Watson Gilder, Scribner's Monthly, and Century Magazine, 1870-1909* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1981); Mark Noonan's *Reading the Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine: American Literature and Culture, 1870-1893* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2010). Chesnutt submitted "Her Virginia Mammy" to the *Century* in 1898, but it was rejected, with a note from editor Richard Watson Gilder commenting that "it seems to lack something in the way of charm and mellowness" ("Century Magazine," Box 3, Folder 18, Charles Chesnutt Archives, Fisk University Special Collections, Nashville, TN).

¹⁵⁴ See Blight, *Race and Reunion*, esp. chapters 6 and 7, for more on the *Century*'s *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War* – memoirs about Civil War from both former Confederates and Yankee soldiers. The overwhelming success of the series, which doubled the magazine's circulation in the mid-1880s from 127,000 to 225,000, was predicated on its nonpartisan tone: the writers valorized the bravery of each side, while omitting the war's controversies and causes, such as race and slavery.

authors (around \$500 for a poem).¹⁵⁵ To be published in the magazine would endow him with financial success and a national literary reputation. In an early letter to his future wife Alice Ruth Moore, he confided that he believed “the past and all its capital literary materials” – “those quaint old tales and songs of our fathers which have made the fame of Joel Chandler Harris, Thomas Nelson Page, Ruth McEnery Stuart, and others!”¹⁵⁶ should not be ignored by black authors. Clearly Dunbar believed these “capital literary materials” could in turn boost his personal capital.

It must of course be acknowledged that Dunbar’s writings – which usually commemorated rural black life, putatively replete with idle, simple-minded blacks who enjoyed banjo-playing, dancing, and chicken-eating – often indulged in those racist stereotypes that reinforced white supremacist notions of African Americans as inferior beings. Dunbar’s participation in black minstrelsy is palpable in a poem like “Possum” (originally published in the *Century*’s March 1898 issue).¹⁵⁷ This poem commemorates the eating of possum, a common racial stereotype of African Americans:

huh-uh! Honey, you’s so happy
 dat yo’ thoughts is ‘mos’ a sin
 when you’s settin’ dah a-chawin’
 on dat possum’s cracklin’ skin. (21-24)

Dunbar’s aspirations to write like Page, Harris, Stuart, and others seems to have been fully realized, as poems like “Possum” appear indistinguishable from the *Century*’s other

¹⁵⁵ See Ellery Sedgwick, *The Atlantic Monthly, 1857-1909: Yankee Humanism at High Tide and Ebb* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 178 -180 for the *Century*’s pricing, and Frank Luther Mott’s *A History of American Magazines, Vol. III*, 475 for the *Century*’s circulation numbers.

¹⁵⁶ Letter dated 17 April 1895, reproduced in Jay Martin and Gossie H. Hudson’s *The Paul Laurence Dunbar Reader* (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1975), 428.

¹⁵⁷ All poetry from *The Collected Poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar*, ed. Joanne M. Braxton (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993).

examples of plantation literature which dehumanized and caricatured black life. And though Dunbar once declared “my natural speech is dialect,”¹⁵⁸ this claim is all the more disingenuous when considering his background as an educated, urban Westerner who first travelled to the South at the age of twenty-seven. Though his mother had been a house slave in Kentucky, Dunbar was largely unfamiliar with rural, Southern black plantation life, and wrote to Henry Tobey in 1895 of his hopes of studying “my own people.” Reynolds J. Scott-Childress points out that “Dunbar learned dialect not as a native language, but much as an ethnologist – and in a way, rather similar to the white writers of ‘Negro’ dialect literature,” and his desire to “study” his own race indicates his sense of difference from them.¹⁵⁹

This difference did not seem apparent to the white reading public, however. William Dean Howells’ famous rave review of Dunbar’s poetry turned out to be a mixed blessing. While it brought Dunbar instant fame and prestige, it hemmed him in further as a dialect writer, as Howells made clear his preference for the dialect poetry and corresponding indifference for the poems in “literary English”:

In nothing is his essentially refined and delicate art so well shown as in these [dialect] pieces, which, as I ventured to say, describe the range between appetite and emotion, with certain lifts far beyond and above it, which is the range of the race. He reveals in these a finely ironical perception of the negro's limitations, with a tenderness for them which I think so very rare as to be almost quite new. I should say, perhaps, that it was this humorous quality which Mr. Dunbar had added to our literature, and it would be this which would most distinguish him, now and hereafter...[but] I do not know how much or little he may have preferred the poems in literary English. Some of these I thought very good, and even

¹⁵⁸ Quoted in *The Paul Laurence Dunbar Reader*, 262.

¹⁵⁹ Reynolds J. Scott-Childress, “Paul Laurence Dunbar and the Project of Cultural Reconstruction,” *African American Review* 41.2 (Summer 2007): 369-370.

more than very good, but not distinctively his contribution to the body of American poetry. What I mean is that several people might have written them but I do not know any one else at present who could quite have written the dialect pieces.¹⁶⁰

Howells clearly saw Dunbar's writing as biologically determined, with his race "distinguishing" his dialect poetry, unlike his poems in literary English, which "several people might have written." And while Howells praised Dunbar's poetic abilities (his "refined and delicate art"), he stressed far more Dunbar's "primitive" content and his rare ability to capture the "appetite and emotion" (which apparently comprised the "range") of his race. Similarly, a later reviewer in the February 1897 *Bookman* praised the "clever and original" dialect verse, which he saw as the "spontaneous and natural" product of African American thought, but condemned the "irritating...artificial 'literary' verses" as "comparatively feeble and ineffective...he is merely imitating the Caucasian."¹⁶¹

Dunbar chafed against these precepts of African American "literariness" as "artificial" and dialect as "natural." He later complained that "I see now very clearly that Mr. Howells has done me irrevocable harm in the dictum he laid down regarding my dialect verse," and that despite "send[ing] out graceful little poems, suited for any of the magazines...they are returned to me by editors who say, 'we would be very glad to have

¹⁶⁰ William Dean Howells, "Life and Letters," *Harper's Weekly: A Journal of Civilization* Vol. 40 (June 27, 1896): 630. Dunbar and his publisher, Dodd, Mead and Co. would use a revised version of Howells' essay as the introduction to *Songs of Lowly Life* (1896). Marcellus Blount reads Howells' introduction as "bear[ing] all the trappings of the authenticating preface to the typical slave narrative" ("The Preacherly Text: African American Poetry and Vernacular Performance," *PMLA* Vol. 107.3, Special Topic: Performance [May 1992], 586).

¹⁶¹ Harry Thurston Peck, "An Afro-American Poet," *The Bookman* 4.6 (February 1897): 568.

a dialect poem, Mr. Dunbar.’”¹⁶² His publication history verifies his statement. The *Century* and other magazines in which he was published were primarily interested in publishing dialect poetry (which comprised twenty-five of the thirty poems chosen for publication in the *Century*), rather than the poems in Standard English with which he began his career and personally preferred.¹⁶³

Yet Dunbar’s poems in the *Century*, which conform to the magazine’s ideologies, represent an incomplete picture. Though there is already much scholarship on Dunbar’s “We Wear the Mask,”¹⁶⁴ it is the lens, I argue, through which we should examine Dunbar’s literary and social aspirations. This poem reconciles the problematically conciliatory texts with his more explicitly protest works. With its emphasis on speech, voice and performance, “We Wear the Mask” points out the connection between African American authorship and identity, and the suffering and rage behind the stance of cheery servility. Its first verse makes clear the division between exterior performance and interior truths:

¹⁶² Benjamin Brawley, *Paul Laurence Dunbar: Poet of His People* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936), 60, and Linda Keck Wiggins, *The Life and Works of Paul Laurence Dunbar* (Naperville, IL: Nichols and Company, 1907), 109.

¹⁶³ Scott-Childers tallies that “Of the 13 poems Dunbar published in periodicals before his first *Century* poem, none was in Negro dialect...what is more, none of the so-called Standard English poems had a racial theme. All were about nature, love, and other traditionally romantic subjects.” Of the remaining five poems published in the *Century*, three addressed black themes (i.e., “Harriet Beecher Stowe,” an 1898 sonnet), only two addressed more general/universal themes and were written in standardized English (371-2). For more on Dunbar and the *Century*, see Nadia Nurhussein, *Rhetorics of Literacy: The Cultivation of American Dialect Poetry* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2013), 132-137.

¹⁶⁴ The poem was published first in Dunbar’s self-published *Majors and Minors* (1895), and then in Dodd, Mead and Co.’s *Lyrics of Lowly Life* (1896). For a representative sampling of criticism on the poem, see Keeling, Baker, Gates, Jones, Peter Revell, *Paul Laurence Dunbar* (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1979), James Smethurst, *The African American Roots of Modernism: from Reconstruction to the Harlem Renaissance* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); Elston L. Carr, Jr., “Minstrelsy and the Dialect Poetry of Paul Laurence Dunbar,” *We Wear the Mask*, 49-58.

We wear the mask that grins and lies,
 It hides our cheeks and shades our eyes,
 This debt we pay to human guile;
 With torn and bleeding hearts we smile,
 And mouth with myriad subtleties. (1-5)

The last line of the first stanza reiterates the divide between speech and intent through Dunbar's choice of the verb "mouth" (instead of, for instance, "speak") to show the emptiness of its expression. Moreover, Dunbar doubles the meaning of "subtleties" – not just the differing techniques utilized by Dunbar – but even the suggestion of lying and dissemblance. The mask, not the wearer himself, is the entity which "grins and lies," shielding the private, painful interior life from hostile view and speculation ("Why should the world be over-wise / in counting all our tears and sighs?" (ll. 6-7). Dunbar's mask further operates not just as defense mechanism but as apologia for his own opportunism. He recognizes that the world does not want to hear or see the "torn and bleeding hearts," but prefers instead the empty "smile" of performance itself. The poem anticipates and atones for the "grin" and "lie" of minstrelsy in his poems, his stories, the *fiction* of African American docility and pleasure under white dominance that he at times perpetuated.

Like his dialect poetry, Dunbar's short fiction often seems to uphold the values of plantation literature as well. For instance, "The Strength of Gideon" (1900) celebrates Gideon's steadfast loyalty to his plantation masters, even as his beloved fiancée and the other slaves migrate North in search of freedom. The last line of the story, as he turns away from the Yankee soldiers back to his mistress, reads "Gideon had triumphed mightily" (94); as William Ramsey notes, "Gideon's 'strength' is that of political and

erotic self-effacement.”¹⁶⁵ And “Mammy Peggy’s Pride” ends with a wedding between the destitute but still genteel Southern belle and the sympathetic Yankee soldier who takes over her plantation. The latter at one point even muses to himself that “these Southerners...cannot understand that we sympathize with their misfortunes. But we do...we were first taught to sympathize with the slave, and now that he is free, and needs less, perhaps, of our sympathy, this, by a transition, as easy as it is natural, is transferred to his master” (98). Dunbar’s masters, too, are incredibly beneficent and good-natured, and their slaves are granted an unusual amount of freedom and luxuries (two slaves compete over who has finer hair ribbons and other accessories).¹⁶⁶

Nonetheless, essays like “Recession Never” (1898) and “The Fourth of July and Race Outrages” (1903) and his novel *The Sport of the Gods* (1903) prove that Dunbar indicts the reality of white racism and black persecution.¹⁶⁷ But this awareness is also paradoxically, partially revealed via his participation in the racist and stereotypical tropes

¹⁶⁵ William M. Ramsey, “Dunbar’s Dixie,” *The Southern Literary Journal* Vol. 32.1 (Fall 1999), 36. All pagination from *The Complete Stories of Paul Laurence Dunbar*.

¹⁶⁶ See “Anner ‘Lizer’s Stumblin’ Block,” the first story of *Folks from Dixie*. Jarrett and Morgan, however, point out that these most stereotypical stories are often “front-loaded” at the volumes’ beginnings, only to give way to “the subtle racial-political critique and depictions of African Americans that appear hereafter” (xx).

¹⁶⁷ Dunbar wrote “Recession Never” (the title of which refers to his refusal to relinquish African American rights) in response to the Wilmington, North Carolina race riots of 1898. In this essay, he castigates white America’s hypocrisy and violent desire to take away black citizenship and other hard-earned rights: “thirty years ago the American people told the Negro that he was a man with a man’s full powers. They deemed it that important they did what they have done few times in the history of the country – they wrote it down in their constitution. And now they come with the shot gun in the South and sophistry in the North to prove to him that it was all wrong” While *McClure’s* had originally commissioned the essay, they declined to publish it, evidently finding the content “too strong to publish.” Rather than tone down the content or his trenchant tone – submitting to white editorial demands – Dunbar instead dispatched the editorial to various newspapers across the country (*The Paul Laurence Dunbar Reader*, 39). Dunbar’s “The Fourth of July and Race Outrages,” published just two months before *In Old Plantation Days*, invokes Frederick’s Douglass’s speech “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” given just over half a century before. Both attack the disparity between the freedom of white Americans and the enslavement of blacks, literally in Douglass’s time, and socially and politically in Dunbar’s, with white practices of disfranchisement and peonage.

of plantation literature. His celebration of plantation life and convivial relationships between masters and (ex-)slaves is itself a mask, a guise which exposes his awareness of the genre's total fictive nature. While these stories seemingly celebrate harmonious master/slave and post-bellum master/ex-slave relationships, careful readings of their subtext and Dunbar's usage of the frame reveal his signification (the "myriad subtleties" to which Dunbar referred in "We Wear the Mask").

In fact, Dunbar's frame narration in "A Family Feud," published in *Folks from Dixie* (and in the April 1898 *Outlook*¹⁶⁸), exposes an intent more subversive than the story's plot – a story about the reconciliation of old and white masters facilitated by a slave mammy – would suggest. I suggest that Dunbar's structure overrides his tale's content, particularly in the story's climax in which the line between white and black voice is blurred (or "shaded"). In doing so, he suggests both the possibility for black narrative freedom and its constraints. "A Family Feud" is introduced by a narrator who hears a story of reconciliation of old and young masters by Aunt Doshy, a faithful ex-slave who "was never weary of detailing accounts of their grandeur and generosity." The frame narrator speaks in Standard English and is almost certainly white, as evidenced by the distanced and condescending (while sympathetic) tone he takes while depicting her values:

¹⁶⁸ Mott explains that the *Outlook*, a weekly paper with a circulation of around 30,000, was experimenting with its content around the time of its publication of "A Family Feud," moving from its Christianity-focused origins (originally named the *Christian Union*) to a more socially and politically-minded paper (it would publish Booker T. Washington's autobiography *Up from Slavery* serially in 1900, as well as Theodore Roosevelt's post-presidency column (see Mott, *A History of American Magazines*, Vol. III, 422-435). Dabbling in plantation literature like "A Family Feud" seems to have been a logical step for the magazine in terms of increasing public interest and circulation.

What if some of the harshness of reality was softened by the distance through which she looked back upon them; what if the glamour of memory did put a halo round the heads of some people who were never meant to be canonised? It was all plain fact to Aunt Doshy, and it was good to hear her talk. (45)

Though he initially believes he possess a keener insight into the “interesting past” than Doshy and even evinces some mild skepticism in Doshy’s “canonization” of her masters, his appreciation of her story suggests the ways in which the “the glamour of memory” transforms to “plain fact” not just for Doshy but for the narrator as well.

Printed on the first page of *Folks from Dixie*, even before the title page itself, a cartoon sketch of “Old Aunt Doshy” serves as an illustrated instruction for how to read the text.¹⁶⁹ E. W. Kemble’s drawing inscribes in the reader’s mind the archetype of a faithful darky¹⁷⁰: her hair is wrapped in a white turban that contrasts the ink-dark hue of her skin, her mouth, agape in a half smile, shows a sparse array of crooked teeth, her gaze half meets, half evades the viewer’s own. The darkness of her skin render her almost indistinguishable from the background of the portrait itself, a fitting if unintentional move on Kemble’s part to point out how plantation stories, though narrated by slaves, generally focus on whites instead.

¹⁶⁹ All four of Dunbar’s short story collections were originally published by Dodd, Mead, and Company of New York. Three volumes, *Folks from Dixie* (1898), *The Strength of Gideon and Other Stories* (1900), and *The Heart of Happy Hollow* (1904), were illustrated by Edward Windsor Kemble, while *In Old Plantation Days* (1903) was illustrated by B. Martin Justice. (For more on Kemble and Dunbar, see Adam Sonstegard, “Kemble’s Figures and Dunbar’s Folks: Picturing the Work of Graphic Illustration in Dunbar’s Short Fiction,” *We Wear the Mask*, 117). E. W. Kemble, a prolific illustrator in his day, illustrated Harris’s and Page’s stories in magazines and Page’s *Two Little Confederates*. He is best known today for illustrating Twain’s *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885).

¹⁷⁰ See Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “The Face and Voice of Blackness,” *Facing History: The Black Image in American Art*, eds. Guy McElroy, Christopher C. French, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Washington D.C.: Corcoran Gallery of Art, 1990), xxix-xlix, for more on stereotypes in African American images.



OLD AUNT DOSHY.

That Dodd, Mead, and Co. chose to place Kemble's illustration of Aunt Doshy at the beginning of the volume (and not within the story, like all of the other illustrations) suggests they used this particular sketch to meet and inform reader's expectations of what kinds of stories – and what kinds of African Americans – they would encounter in the volume. For while other characters and stories at least fleetingly gesture to racial injustice and violence in both the antebellum and postbellum South, Doshy, "inordinately proud of her family, as she designated [her masters]," does not seem to disrupt the cultural myth of the Old South (50).

Like "Marse Chan," the interior tale of "A Family Feud" revolves around the forbidden courtship between neighboring planter children whose fathers are feuding.

After the two children run away and get married, Doshy's Mas' Jack threatens to disown his son, young Mas' Thornton, until his mammy Aunt Emmerline intervenes:

Dey bofe tu'ned an' looked at huh s'prised lak, an' Mas' Jack sta'ted to say somep'n,' but she throwed up huh han' an' say 'Wait!' lak she owned de house. 'Mas' Jack,' she say, 'you and Mas' Tho'nton aint gwine pa't dis way. You mus'n't. You's father an' son. You loves one another. I knows I ain't got no bus'ness meddlin' in yo' 'fairs, but I cain't see you all qu'l dis way. Mastah, you's bofe stiffnecked. You's bofe wrong. (50)

Her scolding succeeds, and she not only reconciles master and son but resolves the decades-long feud between the neighbors as well. Unlike "Marse Chan," where Sam's only function is to testify to the greatness of his masters' actions and lament their loss, Doshy's story celebrates Emmerline's actions.

Dunbar's rare use of the frame narrative in this tale seems intentional, as the line between white and black voices, which compete for narrative control in the frame and interior narratives, becomes intentionally blurred. For as Mas' Jack both scolds and thanks Aunt Emmerline for her meddling, a strange slippage of the text proves the power of black speech. As recounted by Aunt Doshy, listening at the door, Mas' Jack tells Emmerline that "you seem to think you's white, an' hyeah's de money to buy a new dress fu' de ole fool darkey dat nussed yo' son an' made you fu'give his foolishness when you wanted to be a fool yo'se'f" (51). In this speech, the "you" he addresses shifts from Aunt Emmerline ("you think you'se white") back to himself ("yo' son"). Of course, though it is unclear whether the slippage occurs actually in Mas' Jack's speech or in Aunt Doshy's reportage of it, I suggest that Doshy herself has manipulated his language to subtly serve her own ends. In that way, white voice – generally used in plantation literature to encompass and interpret the black voice within – loses its controlling power, and in fact

becomes subject to manipulation by the black characters within and the black author without.

Dunbar signifies on plantation literature here, his “mask” dropping only in this rhetorical slippage in which the power to speak is granted to his black characters – Doshy’s and Emmerline’s. For black voice in this story has the power to speak over whites, as Aunt Emmerline not just once but twice stops Mars Jack from interrupting her remonstrations. Furthermore, her voice possesses the ability to revise white speech itself, through Doshy’s reconfiguration of Mas Jack’s speech to the white listener. By doing so, Emmerline is further empowered. Though Emmerline fears the repercussions of speaking out over and against her master, she is imbued with authority – not just the privileges granted through taking on whiteness, but even momentarily possesses the actual identity of Mas Jack himself. And that the frame narrator drops out of the story completely – the story ends with Doshy’s voice, not with the white narrator reasserting control of the story – again emphasizes the power of black speech. Kemble’s visual representation of blackness as docile and stereotypical is exposed as overly simplistic, even fallacious, and unwittingly replicates the text’s loss of white authority and vision. In creating a narrative that enfranchises black voice in an era in which black political enfranchisement is being revoked, Dunbar suggests both the potential and limitations of black voice. The irony of the story is that it celebrates black power and voice, albeit an extremely circumscribed kind utilized only to facilitate white reconciliation. That is, his own intervention in white

narrative and literary traditions is at its most appealing (and least threatening) when in service to white ideologies of black devotion to white supremacy.¹⁷¹

Yet if Dunbar mostly wears the mask in his plantation fiction stories, content to minstrelize minstrelsy behind it, Chesnutt's convoluted road to publication speaks to his own attempts to rip plantation literature's mask off to demonstrate the humanity of slaves and the depth of their trauma. Each of his conjure stores circulates around Julius's histories of the Southern plantation that Northern industrialist John and his wife Annie have purchased, yet Chesnutt deliberately renders ambiguous Julius' aims in storytelling. The wily ex-slave often seems motivated by self-interest (such as his determination to retain unofficial ownership of the grapevines in "The Goophered Grapevine), and Julius's attempts to profit from the traumatic past effectively mirror Chesnutt's own competing incentives to write. Even though Chesnutt declared himself reluctant to keep writing in dialect voice as early as 1889,¹⁷² he continued writing in this form when informed by editor Walter Hines Page that the "Julius" stories were the only stories that Houghton Mifflin was interested in printing.¹⁷³

Truthfully, Chesnutt, the formally-educated son of free blacks from Ohio who worked as a school principal, a stenographer, and a lawyer (and light-skinned enough to "pass" as a white man), often seems closer in temperament to John, another Ohioan

¹⁷¹ *Folks from Dixie* received favorable reviews, particularly in terms of the more light-hearted, humorous stories (few reviews focused on the more critical short stories). For instance, Jarrett and Morgan quote the *Independent's* reviewer, who says that "there is pathos in some of [the stories], but we like the humor better" (xxiv).

¹⁷² In a letter to Albion Tourg  e, dated September 26, 1889, Chesnutt wrote, "I think I have about used up the old Negro who serves as mouthpiece, and I shall drop him in future stories, as well as much of the dialect" ("*To Be an Author*," 44).

¹⁷³ See Page's letter to Chesnutt, dated March 30, 1898 (Helen M. Chesnutt, *Charles Waddell Chesnutt: Pioneer of the Color Line* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1952], 91-2).

transplanted to North Carolina, than to Julius.¹⁷⁴ His early writings prove that marketability and profit directed Chesnutt into the realm of plantation literature, rather than just a pure interest in uplifting the race. He pondered in his journal “why could not a colored man, who has lived among colored people all his life; who is familiar with their habits, their ruling passions, their prejudices...why could not a colored man who knew all this...write a far better book about the South than Judge Tourgée or Mrs. Stowe has written?”¹⁷⁵ That is, Chesnutt wanted to write about African American experience not necessarily because he felt a part of it, but because he had access to it. Yet while Julius and Chesnutt undeniably both seek personal enrichment from their tale telling, the fiction’s broader goals are to expose not just the darker side of slavery but the humanity of African Americans themselves, which in the genre of plantation literature too often is intentionally obscured.

The cover of Houghton Mifflin’s 1899 edition of *The Conjure Woman* speaks to Chesnutt’s difficulty in achieving racial uplift through his literature. It also shows, as Houston Baker puts it, “the graphics of minstrelsy,”¹⁷⁶ as Houghton Mifflin’s editors and illustrators sought to directly invoke similarities between Chesnutt and his literary precursor, Joel Chandler Harris, to capitalize on the latter’s financial and literary success.

¹⁷⁴Joseph McElrath, Jr. and Robert Leitz cite that in George Washington Cable’s journal on December 21, 1888, he encountered Chesnutt in Cleveland, where he first “began that he had contributed some stories to the *Atlantic Monthly*...and surprised me with the statement that he was a ‘colored man.’” (29-30, note 1). See Brodhead’s *Cultures of Letters* for more on Chesnutt’s biography (and Chesnutt’s feelings of superiority to the uneducated blacks he came into contact with in Fayetteville), 181. Also see Price, 264.

¹⁷⁵ Chesnutt, *The Journals of Charles W. Chesnutt*. ed. Richard H. Brodhead (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 125 (entry dated 16 March 1880) referencing Tourgée’s *A Fool’s Errand* (1879), and Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852).

¹⁷⁶ Houston A. Baker, *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 41.

The cartoon of Julius – balding, smiling, benevolent – mirrors Uncle Remus’s portrait in *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings* (1881), and the two rabbits penning Julius in on both sides speaks to the pervasive legacy of Remus’s Brer Rabbit tales. Chesnutt, after all, made no references to rabbits in his own stories.¹⁷⁷



While Chesnutt never publically or privately wrote of his reaction to the cover of *The Conjure Woman*, one can hardly imagine that the man who scorned Harris’s views would welcome the visual comparison of their literary creations. And while Houghton Mifflin’s decision makes financial sense in terms of the literary marketplace of the 1890s, it is all the more ironic, as Chesnutt’s “conjure stories” attempt to point out the problems of white misreadings of black texts and subtext. *The Conjure Woman*’s cover represents how easily Chesnutt’s writings could be misinterpreted, as well as how his own publisher deliberately attempted to imply that Chesnutt’s stories would present the same ideas

¹⁷⁷ Illustrations from the cover of *The Conjure Woman* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1905) and the title page of *Uncle Remus: His Songs and His Sayings* (New York: Appleton, 1881), illustrated by Frederick S. Church and James H. Moser.

about the memory of slavery as Harris or Page. Unlike those stories, though, no plantation idyll can ever be inferred from Chesnutt's texts. John reports that Julius "never indulged in any regrets for the Arcadian joyousness and irresponsibility which was a somewhat popular conception of slavery" (33).

Despite his antipathy to the views and values of other authors of plantation literature, Chesnutt's personal papers make it clear that he, like Dunbar, saw participation in the genre as not just the best, but the *only* way to achieve social awareness by whites and social uplift for his race. In a journal entry on May 29, 1880, Chesnutt announced in his journal his ambition to "head a determined, organized crusade" against racism. He admitted that

the subtle almost indefinable feeling of repulsion toward the negro—and easily enough accounted for—cannot be stormed and taken by assault; the garrison will not capitulate their position must be mined, and we will find ourselves in their midst before they think it.¹⁷⁸

This passage, with its military metaphor, neatly encapsulates why Chesnutt chose plantation fiction to infiltrate the literary market. By participating in the genre ("mining the position" of white literary and social attitudes) Chesnutt felt that he could instigate a new social and political understanding of race.

Despite his belief in himself as a race pioneer, Chesnutt's strategy of subtle infiltration is underscored by the fact that he did not divulge his race to the *Atlantic* or to its readers, even after publishing three stories there in as many years ("The Goophered Grapevine" in August 1887, "Po' Sandy" in May 1888, and "Dave's Neckliss" in

¹⁷⁸ Chesnutt, *Journals*, 140.

October 1889).¹⁷⁹ It seems that Chesnutt saw concealing and disclosing his race as strategies for publication to deploy at specific moments. After all, it is highly unlikely that the *Atlantic's* then-editor, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, infamous for his conservative stance on race and ethnicity, would have been as enthusiastic to publish Chesnutt's stories had he known of Chesnutt's race.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, that Howells – a former editor of the *Atlantic* – proclaimed *Dunbar* to be the first important African American author in 1896 (almost a decade after the publication of “The Goophered Grapevine”) confirms Chesnutt's success in masking his race.

It would not be until the summer of 1891, when Chesnutt approached Houghton Mifflin and Co. with a book proposal, that he made his racial makeup known. After spending the first few sentences in his letter touting the publication of his short stories in the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *Overland Monthly*, and the *Independent*,¹⁸¹ he then disclosed, “There is one fact which would give this volume distinction – though I must confess that I do not know whether it would help or hurt its reception by critics or the public. It is the first contribution by an American of acknowledged African descent to purely imaginative

¹⁷⁹ Chesnutt would publish three more stories in the *Atlantic* – one more conjure tale (“Hot Foot Hannibal” in January 1899) and two others, “The Bouquet” in November 1899 and “Baxter's Procrustes” in June 1904.

¹⁸⁰ Aldrich, who served as editor from 1881-1890, was classified by Bliss Perry (a later editor of the *Atlantic*), in a characteristic understatement, as “not of the ‘reformer type’” (quoted in M. A. DeWolfe Howe's *The Atlantic Monthly and Its Makers* (Boston: The Atlantic Monthly Press, Inc., 1919, p. 87). See Price, 260-264; Sedgwick, 161-200, and Susan Goodman's *Republic of Words: The Atlantic Monthly and Its Writers* (Lebanon, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2011), 268-269 for more on Aldrich's background and personal politics (for instance, his poem “Unguarded Gates” warns of the evils of immigration).

¹⁸¹ “The Sheriff's Children,” published in the *Independent* in November 7, 1889, was included in *The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line* (1899), and “The Conjuror's Revenge” was initially published in the *Overland Monthly* in June 1889). See *Charles Waddell Chesnutt*, 49.

literature.”¹⁸² Chesnutt’s phrasing here is worth remarking upon. He emphasized his American identity before his “African descent,” and then immediately clarified that “the infusion of African blood is very small –is not in fact a visible admixture,” as if to quell any trepidation on Houghton Mifflin’s part. He asserted, however, this “admixture” is an advantage, as it granted him “a knowledge of the people whose description is attempted...this is, so far as I know, the first instance where a writer with any of their own blood has attempted a literary portrayal of them.” In an idiosyncratic gesture, he simultaneously pronounced his similarities to and distinction from other African Americans as a reason for his publication. He added that

I should not want this fact to be stated in the book, nor advertised, unless the publisher advised it; first, because I do not know whether it would affect its reception favorably or unfavorably, or at all; secondly, because I would not have the book judged by any standard lower than that set for other writers. If some of these stories have stood the test of admission into the *Atlantic*...I am willing to submit them all to the public on their merits.
(69)

Clearly, unlike in 1887, Chesnutt now believed that making his race known was a canny strategy for publication – a potential appeal to Houghton Mifflin to a “new point of view” which would “give this volume distinction.” Perhaps now that he had been published and already endorsed by the most prestigious literary magazine of his day, he felt could use his race strategically to gain attention, if “the publisher advised it.”

¹⁸² Reprinted in *Charles Waddell Chesnutt*, 68. The actual first novel written by an African American was William Wells Brown’s *Clotel* (1853), but was published only in London. For more on Chesnutt’s dismissal of Brown, which Henry Louis Gates, Jr. reads as an attempt to “wipe[] the slate of black authors clean so that he could inscribe his name...upon it,” see Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, 116-117.

Houghton Mifflin, however, declined to publish, advising Chesnutt to “acquire[] a good deal of vogue through magazine publication” first.¹⁸³ Though Houghton Mifflin made no commentary on Chesnutt’s race, it is curious that one of the *Atlantic*’s most prolifically published short story authors at that time would have been denied a book deal, especially as Chesnutt made it clear he would work with Houghton Mifflin at almost any price (“I would prefer that your house bring out the book,” recognizing “the imprint of your house having the value that it has”). Chesnutt would have to wait another six years before the opportunity to have his works published would arise again, this time through the aid of Walter Hines Page.¹⁸⁴

On October 20, 1897, after reading Chesnutt’s “The Dumb Witness” and “The Bouquet” three weeks before, Page wrote to Chesnutt proposing a book.¹⁸⁵ While Chesnutt eagerly submitted twenty different short stories just two days later, he waited fruitlessly for Page’s response for over five months.¹⁸⁶ Page wrote back on March 30, 1898 announcing his regret that Houghton Mifflin did not see fit to publish a volume of

¹⁸³ See letter dated October 27, 1891 in *Charles Waddell Chesnutt*, 69-70.

¹⁸⁴ Page unofficially served as editor from 1896-1898, though the title remained nominally with Horace Scudder. For more on Walter Hines Page, see Goodman, *Republic of Words*, 193-205; Hobson, *Tell About the South*, 129-179. After only a year at the helm of the *Atlantic*, he would move on to a partnership at Doubleday and Co. (renamed Doubleday, Page, and Co.), and would initially back some of Chesnutt’s novels there, including *The Colonel’s Dream* (New York: Doubleday, 1905).

¹⁸⁵ Chesnutt had unsuccessfully submitted “Mandy Oxendine” to the *Atlantic* in February of 1897 and “Rena Walden” (later *The House Behind the Cedars*) in September 1890 (see “*To Be an Author*” 84, footnote 3, and 71).

¹⁸⁶ An unsolicited letter written two months after their initial correspondence betrayed Chesnutt’s anxiety and impatience: “I sat down to write a long letter, in which I was going to tell you something about my literary plans, how long I had cherished them, the preparation I had made for them by study in our own language and other languages, by travel in our own country and in Europe; how I had in a measure restrained myself from writing until I should have something worth staying, and should be able to say it clearly and temperately, and until an opportune time should have come for saying it....but it occurred to me that you were a busy man....so I concluded that I would write you a simple business letter, and say that I sincerely hope your house will see its way to publish that volume of stories for me.” (*Charles Waddell Chesnutt*, 85-86, letter dated December 7, 1897.)

the works Chesnutt had submitted. Instead, he proposed an alternative, adding that “if you had enough “conjure” stories to make a book...I cannot help feeling that that would succeed.”¹⁸⁷ Though Chesnutt had declared himself finished with dialect and Uncle Julius nearly a decade before, he again rose to the task, sending on May 20, 1898 six more conjure tales. Chesnutt’s reversal of his aims to find publication once again shows how his desire to be published was predicated on self-censorship. But his tactics succeeded: on September 9th, Houghton Mifflin sent Chesnutt a formal acceptance of his works – which came, unsurprisingly, at a further cost to Chesnutt’s initial artistic vision.

Chesnutt’s position as the first African American to be published by Houghton Mifflin would have been extremely delicate. As one of the most reputable book publishers of his day, Houghton Mifflin could legitimize Chesnutt and by extension his entire race as producers of culturally and aesthetically elite works. Yet Howells’ racial assessment of Dunbar and other African Americans as composed of only “appetite” and “emotion” and lacking any finer aesthetic tendencies is echoed in Chesnutt’s ostensible champion, Page. His assessment of Chesnutt’s writings in *The Bookman: An Illustrated Literary Journal*, in which he first publicizes Chesnutt’s race, betrays this cultural logic. Unlike a typical book review, which would discuss the content of Chesnutt’s stories, Page’s review spends far more time and space marveling at the “strangeness” of a black man who is “cultivated,” “capable,” and “artistic”: “[he] has proved himself not only the

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 92. Although six of the stories Chesnutt submitted featured Uncle Julius, Page said that “the trouble at present is there are only about three of these stories” which he saw fit to publish, and asked Chesnutt to submit “five or six more.” Of that initial list, Page would select “The Goophered Grapevine,” “Po’ Sandy,” and “The Conjuror’s Revenge.” Four of Chesnutt’s new stories “The Gray Wolf’s Haunt,” “Mars Jeems’s Nightmare,” “Sis’ Becky’s Pickaninny,” and “Hot Foot Hannibal” would make it into the volume.

most cultivated but also the most philosophical story writer that his race has as yet produced; for, *strange to relate*, he is himself a coloured man of very light complexion” (emphasis mine).¹⁸⁸ Chesnutt later thanked Page “for the graceful and tactful way of alluding to my connection with the colored race, by which it is made an element of strength instead of a source of weakness.”¹⁸⁹ Whether Chesnutt is genuine in thanking Page’s questionable “tact” is debatable, but it seems clear that – wanting to take advantage of the prestige of Houghton Mifflin’s name, and cognizant that he could at last achieve his hope of “head[ing] a determined, organized crusade” against racism – Chesnutt would make whatever concessions necessary.

Chesnutt’s lack of authorial control is further manifested by the fact that Page selected the stories for the volume. The seven stories published as *The Conjure Woman* presented a much softer critique of slavery than many of the stories that went unselected by Page for publication. The editor omitted the most violent and radical texts, such as “Dave’s Neckliss,” despite its publication (and its aesthetic endorsement) in the *Atlantic* in 1889. Indubitably, the volume’s emphasis on comedic, happy stories rather than scathing indictments of post-Reconstruction race relations contributed to its positive reception. The collection was a financial and critical success and was even reissued by Houghton Mifflin in 1927. If, as Richard Brodhead suggests, Page’s editorial selections “functioned as virtual censorship” through his omission of those tales which betrayed

¹⁸⁸ Walter Hines Page, “Chronicle and Comment,” *The Bookman: An Illustrated Literary Journal* 7 (August 1898): 452.

¹⁸⁹ Chesnutt, “*To Be an Author*,” 110.

“Chesnutt’s darkest assessment of the power of official orders,”¹⁹⁰ we must consider these other, unselected stories as equally indicative of Chesnutt’s overall political and social agenda, even if – or rather, especially if – those views were not palatable to his white literary audience.

Chesnutt’s strategic and critical encoding within his fiction is evident from the onset of his literary career. Like Dunbar in “A Family Feud,” Chesnutt’s use of the frame narrator John portrays the gradual loss of white control of the narration, and how white interpretation is subject to manipulation by black voice. While “The Goophered Grapevine” ends with John’s apparent mastery – he rejects Julius’s tale, buys the plantation, and instills Julius as his coachman – John is far from an authoritative figure. Though the frame narrator in tales like Page’s and Harris’s fictions served to contain and thereby control black voice, Julius’s subtleties often escape John. Sandra Molyneaux’s characterization of John is a representative critical view: “he is blind, lacking a receptivity that can suspend protective accretions of overrationalization and lofty rhetoric.”¹⁹¹ Chesnutt’s use of terms like “assumed” and “performance” when first describing Julius suggests the ex-slave’s artful control of the situation, far more than his deprecating posturing in front of John and Annie would suggest (5,7).¹⁹² Julius plays on

¹⁹⁰ Brodhead, “Introduction,” *The Conjure Woman and Other Conjure Tales*, 18.

¹⁹¹ See Molyneaux, “Expanding the Collective Memory,” 166. For more on John’s unreliability as narrator, see Sundquist’s *To Wake the Nations*; Lori Robison and Eric Wolfe’s “Charles Chesnutt’s ‘The Dumb Witness’ and the Culture of Segregation,” *African American Review* 42.1 (Spring 2008): 61-73; Robert C. Nowatzki’s “‘Passing’ in a White Genre,” 20-36.

¹⁹² Julius remains John and Annie’s coachman for the rest of the stories. In fact, Dunbar seems to pay tribute to Chesnutt in his third collection of short stories, *In Old Plantation Days*, which includes a plantation coachman named Julius. Dunbar’s Julius is largely a supporting character in the collection of stories, which revolve around antebellum life on the Mordaunt family’s Kentucky plantation, but plays a prominent role as a would-be suitor in “Aunt Tempe’s Revenge” and “The Trouble about Sophiny.”

John's expectations through deploying racist stereotypes about African Americans ("ef dey's an'thing a nigger lub, nex' ter 'possum, en chick'n, en watermilliums, it's scuppernon's" [7]), and John so successfully falls for this trick that he misses Julius's greater designs.

Chesnutt gestures towards Julius' intentional deployment of this tale as a way to critique John to his face. Though John believes he's outsmarted Julius, he remains oblivious to how Julius has implicated him as an example of white greed. For, as Julius tells John, Henry and the grapevines die and Mars MacAdoo's profit plummets accordingly after a Yankee businessman implements his grand scheme to increase MacAdoo's wealth and "make de grapevimes b'ar twice't ez many grapes" and "twice't ez many gallons er wine" (12). This comment none-too-subtly references John's own acquisitiveness, who exults that in the South "labor was cheap, and land could be bought for a mere song" (3). Like John, contemporary readers seemed to overlook Chesnutt's indictment of racism and slavery, perhaps because they were unaware of Chesnutt's own race. What seemed palatable from a white writer would, as we see later on in Chesnutt's career, be too threatening from a black perspective. Or maybe Julius – and Chesnutt – were too skilled at playing up African American stereotypes of docility, drunkenness, and circumventions easily seen and mastered by whites. It was obviously possible for Aldrich, like John, to miss Julius's subtext in "The Goophered Grapevine," and to overlook how the ex-slave puts on a performance that undermines the white man's mastery. And so, too, through his subtle signification on the plantation literature's

conventions, Chesnutt succeeded in tricking his white audience and achieved publication in the *Atlantic*.

Dunbar also commented on plantation literature's limitations by invoking its characteristics so heavily that the genre itself is exposed as caricature. Counter to Peter Revell's reading of Dunbar's *In Old Plantation Days* (1903) as "his most nearly total concession to the stereotyping and obligatory distortion of reality that the form imposed,"¹⁹³ I read this volume – and in particular, Dunbar's later example of the plantation frame tale, "The Stanton Coachman" – as an overtly parodic rendition of plantation fiction. The story conspicuously lacks the originality or vivacity of Dunbar's other stories. Instead, it seems utterly and intentionally conventional in terms of its characters and themes (wealthy planters, faithful servants who eschew money and freedom to tend to their masters). In this story, the narrator, speaking in standardized English, spots "a strange equipage" from which a "shabby [Negro] servitor" escorts an equally shabby yet still "unmistakably a lady" into the church (282). The curious narrator, pondering to himself, "What had I stumbled upon – one of those romances of the old South," inquires about the two characters to a "dozing old negro." The negro tells him that she is the last of the Stanton family, formerly "de riches' folks anywah roun'" and the most beloved, too: "ef Miss Dolly had a stahted to put huh foot on de groun' any time she'd a had a string o' niggers ez long ez f'om hyeah to yandah a layin' daihse'ves in the earf fu' huh to walk on" (282-283). After emancipation, her faithful ex-slave Harrison rejects other opportunities granted by freedom ("I don' want to be no

¹⁹³ Revell, *Paul Laurence Dunbar*, 108.

Cong'essman, ner nuffin else...I don' want nuffin bettah den des to keep on drivin' huh" [284]) to remain in her unpaid service.

Dunbar uses the narrator's willful transformation of the "shabby" present into a "romance of the old South" to expose the process of reimagining slavery performed by plantation fiction's readers. Despite or perhaps because of this white Northern narrator's elite position (connoted by his references to trans-Atlantic markers of wealth and ease), he cannot resist romanticizing the stark inequality invoked in the racial and class divide of white lady and black (ex) slave. The continued servility of Harrison the "servitor" is construed not as pathetic but "dashing," with his rags transformed into the "splendid livery" of a coachman driving "the most dashing of victorias" (282). The story's end epitomizes the tropes of master/slave relationships, impressed upon readers time and time again in Page and Harris's writings: "when the old lady came out...her coachman suddenly became alive again as he helped her into the rude cart and climbed in beside her...then the oxen turned and moved off up the road whence they had come" (285). Dunbar's total adherence to the conventions of plantation literature (genteel lady, curious Northern narrator, faithful blacks) accentuates the genre's artificiality. The story's shift from the interior narrator's particular (though still conventional) histories of Dolly Stanton and Harrison to the frame narrator's utterly depersonalized descriptors of "coachman" and "lady" emphasizes this genericity of this tale – just another "romance," a fiction of the antebellum past.

In other words, I am arguing that Dunbar minstrelizes minstrelsy in this tale and throughout *In Old Plantation Days*, parodying it as a means to expose the vacuity of the

genre of plantation literature. Even the volume's title seems to be an intentional aping of Page's *In Ole Virginia*, and the interior narrator's description of slavery as "wunnerful times!" (283) draws unmistakable parallels to Page's slave narrator's claim that slavery was "good ole times...de bes' [he] ever see!" Other tales in *In Old Plantation Days* further indicate Dunbar's skepticism. For instance, the benevolent, self-sacrificing relationship of slave and master of "The Stanton Coachman" is directly undermined by the adjoining tale, "The Easter Wedding," which commemorates a slave wedding even as, unbeknownst to them, their white owners will soon be "forced" to sell them to pay their bills. This ending speaks to the far less romantic, much more financially driven relationship between masters and slaves. And even though master Robert Lancaster regrets having to sell his slaves, his wife reassures him that "never mind, Robert, never mind. We have...each other" (286). This is the kind of secure bond that his slaves cannot possess: "til death do them part...my God! Will it be death or the block!" (288) Such moments like this reminds the discerning reader of Dunbar's awareness that plantation literature focuses on white sentiment at the expense of black humanity. Furthermore, as evidenced by the repetition of "never mind," that attention to white experience is a deliberate, even fraught, process.

It must of course be acknowledged that this mask of conciliation could be so carefully constructed that it could seem like Dunbar's actual stance. Dunbar even dedicated *In Old Plantation Days* to George Harris Lorimer,¹⁹⁴ the white, accommodationist editor of *The Saturday Evening Post*, "out of whose suggestion these

¹⁹⁴ For more on Lorimer, see Jan Cohn, *Creating America: George Harris Lorimer and The Saturday Evening Post* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989).

stories were born and by whose kindness they first saw light” (eight of the stories, about a third of the volume, were initially published in the *Post* between 1900 and 1902).¹⁹⁵

Similarly, the *New York Times* reviewed the collection as “good stories, such as tend to the encouragement of good feeling between the races – black and white... Thomas Nelson Page himself does not make ‘ole Marse’ and ‘ole Miss’ more admirable nor exalt higher in the slave the qualities of faithfulness and good humor.”¹⁹⁶ Though Dunbar’s gratitude to Lorimer may not be ironic, it is difficult to believe that Dunbar found unreserved gratification in writing these stories. Even his crediting of Lorimer for the genesis of the collection adroitly displaces his responsibility for the volume’s contents onto the notoriously conservative Lorimer (who was editor of the *Post* when Harris’s “Negro” series was published in 1904). And even if none of Dunbar’s more overly critical stories (such as “The Lynching of Jube Benson” or “The Tragedy at Three Forks”¹⁹⁷) were published in any magazines, with only the more palatable, accommodationist or humorous Negro sketches chosen, these choices seem largely to be the decision of white editors who acted as custodians to the white mainstream literary audience. Any texts which would overtly complicate the overarching screen of black inferiority were to be silenced.¹⁹⁸

The publication history and content of Chesnutt’s “Dave’s Neckliss” further reveals the silencing of a radical black voice. Notably, this story was first selected for publication by Aldrich in the October 1889 *Atlantic Monthly* but rejected by Page for *The*

¹⁹⁵ See Jarrett and Morgan, “Introduction,” 535-536.

¹⁹⁶ *New York Times* review, 31 October 1903, quoted in Revell, *Paul Laurence Dunbar*, 113-114.

¹⁹⁷ See Jones for discussions of both texts.

Conjure Woman. Though the story's literary quality had already been vouched for through its publication in the *Atlantic*, perhaps the revelation of Chesnutt's blackness by the time of *The Conjure Woman*'s publication rendered it too radical for inclusion in the volume. Certainly its content was disturbing. While dining on ham with John and Annie, Julius laments the sad fate of Dave, a devout and literate slave. After a jealous slave frames Dave for the theft of their master's ham, the master punishes Dave by tying the ham around Dave's neck. While Dave at first "didn' mine it so much, caze he knowed he hadn' done nuffin," he soon deteriorates into madness. At one point Dave asks Julius, "did yer knowed I wuz turnin' ter a ham, Julius?" (40). Eventually the real thief confesses his crime, but it is too late for Dave. Julius finds him hanging from the smokehouse: "dey wuz a pile er bark burnin' in de middle er de flo', and right ober de fier, hangin' fum one er de rafters, wuz Dave; dey wuz a rope roun' his neck, en I didn' haf ter look at his face mo' d'n once ter see he wuz dead" (41).

This story confirms that Julius is not the only African American in the *Conjure* tales with the ability to subvert white traditions and ideologies. When Mars Dugal initially discovers Dave's literacy, which is "'g'in de law," Dave protects himself by transforming the subversive act into one beneficial to the master. Dave tells Mars Dugal that the Bible has taught him "it's a sin fer ter steal, er ter lie, er fer to want w'at doan b'long ter yer, en I l'arns fer ter love de Lawd and ter 'bey my marster" (34). But Julius subtly suggests that Dave's seeming indoctrination into those aspects of religion which promote white mastery and black compliance is a pretense, for Julius prefaces the story by adding that Dave "wa'n't no fool." This coded interaction between Dave and Mars

Dugal is an example of what James Scott calls the way in which “the public performance of the subordinate will, out of prudence, fear, and the desire to curry favor, be shaped to appeal to the expectations of the powerful.”¹⁹⁹ It seems evident that Dave’s profession of docility is in fact a subversive technique to win power for himself – a tactic which succeeds. Instead of being punished, he is appointed preacher of the plantation by Mars Dugal, who tells Dave that “dat’s what I wants all my niggers fer ter know” (35). Yet, after being accused of stealing the ham, Dave swiftly falls from grace, punished by the master now to wear the ham as a lesson to the other slaves (“I ‘spec’s yer ner none er de yuther niggers on dis plantation won’ steal no mo’ bacon” [37]), and all the other slaves turn against him as well.

Dave’s real crime is not theft, however, but blackness. The ham itself elicits reminders of the Biblical “Curse of Canaan,” in which Noah cursed his son, Ham, and his descendants to serve Noah’s other sons (Genesis 9:20-27). White antebellum interpretation of these verses justified slavery as divinely ordained.²⁰⁰ So in that way, Dave has actually always been a ham, and his “neckliss” – the sign of the master’s mastery over him – represents white conceptions of blackness as abjection and disgrace. It is a visible, inescapable manifestation of his status of objecthood:

w'eneber [Dave] went ter wuk, dat ham would be in his way...W'eneber he went ter lay down, dat ham would be in de way. Ef he turn ober in his sleep, dat ham would be tuggin' at his neck. It wuz de las' thing he seed at night, en de fus' thing he seed in de mawnin'. W'eneber he met a stranger, de ham would be de fus' thing de stranger would see. (38)

¹⁹⁹ Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, 2.

²⁰⁰ Note that Ham is the name of the hapless slave rescued by old Master Channing in Page’s “Marse Chan.”

This passage depicts the inexorable process by which Dave's recognition of his innocence and his personhood begins to diminish. Even when the master takes the ham away, believing Dave has learned his lesson, Dave ties a pine knot around his neck, as "de ham had be'n on his neck so long dat Dave had sorter got use' to it" (39). Dave's refusal to relinquish his "ham" symbolizes the lasting psychological effects of his dehumanization under slavery, and his belief that he *is* a ham demonstrates his assumption of this status of abjection.

An even more violent and disturbing tale – also rejected by Page – is Chesnutt's "The Dumb Witness," which, like "Dave's Neckliss," depicts an individual's silencing and loss of identity. Furthermore, it indicts the entire legal system that stymies and suppresses African American speech, a system that extends to the founding of the United States itself. Notably, "The Dumb Witness" is narrated by John, not by Julius, who instead watches in the margins as John attempts to piece together the history of the Murchison family. Unlike John's own modern, thriving and industrious plantation, "often referred to by the local press as a striking illustration of the opportunities open to Northern capital in the development of Southern industries" (13), the Murchison family seat lies decaying and in disrepair. This neglect and poverty are tied to the decades-long conflict between its master and his former slave and housekeeper, Viney,²⁰¹ whom John first encounters sitting in the porch. The master, Malcolm Murchison, continually asks Viney for some papers, to which she makes no intelligible response:

²⁰¹ Viney's name, "a Negro corruption of Lavinia," as Chesnutt wrote in *The Colonel's Dream* (171), seems to be an allusion to Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, the titular character of which has a daughter named Lavinia, whose tongue and hands are cut off by her rapists. She later exposes them by holding a stick in her mouth and writing their names.

I thought at first [she spoke] in some foreign tongue. But after a moment I knew that no language or dialect, at least none of European origin, could consist of such a discordant jargon, such a meaningless cacophony as that which fell from the woman's lips...she went on, pouring out a flood of sounds that were not words, and which yet seemed now and then vaguely to suggest words. (61)

The old man comprehends her, though, and replies penitently, "Yes, Viney, good Viney...I know it was wrong and I've always regretted it" (62). John learns from Julius that years before, when Murchison was a young man and the housekeeper a "comely young quadroon," he angered Viney by telling her that he planned to marry Mrs. Todd, a wealthy white widow. Though Viney reacts to the news of the engagement with "hysterical violence," Murchison responds dismissively: "You had better be quiet and obedient. I have heard what you have to say – this once – and it will be useless for you to repeat it, for I shall not listen again" (64-65).

Though Murchison refuses to listen to Viney, his fiancée does. Viney tells her "something – just what she told no one but herself and the lady ever knew." No one may know for certain, but it is not hard to infer that Viney has divulged an illicit relationship with Murchison,²⁰² especially after Mrs. Todd breaks off the engagement, saying "I have learned some things about you that will render it impossible for me ever to marry you."²⁰³ In retribution, Murchison tells Viney

²⁰² In *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), Elizabeth Fox-Genovese discusses the prevalence of master/slave sexual relationships, a common occurrence on plantations that was politely ignored in Southern society. Chesnut's text notes that "if [Murchison] had other failings, they were the heritage of the period, and he shared them with his contemporaries of the same caste" (64).

²⁰³ Mrs. Todd is a Northerner from Pennsylvania, evoking the popular trope of sectional reunion via marriage (see Silber). Once Mrs. Todd learns the truth about her fiancé's participation in the interracial sexual liaisons so common (yet disavowed so publically) in the South, she calls off the wedding – perhaps Chesnut's suggestion of the impossibility of true sectional reconciliation.

"I will teach you", he said to his housekeeper, who quailed before him -- "to tell tales about your master. ~~When I get through with you it will be~~ ^{put it} out of your power to dip your tongue in where you are not concerned."

There was no one to say him nay. The law made her his. ~~He carried out his threat.~~ It was a lonely house, and no angel of mercy stayed his hand. *

After this passage, the scene abruptly ends. What exactly Murchison does to "teach" Viney is elided completely, though later passages indicate that Viney has suffered an injury to her mouth. There is a telling gap in experience (Viney's and Murchison's) and knowledge (John's and the readers'). What has happened to Viney is too traumatic to be adequately rendered in narrative. While the original manuscript here has a hand-written asterisk, a symbol generally used by Chesnutt when he planned to incorporate another passage, the margins instead remain blank.²⁰⁴ Chesnutt ultimately decided to let this moment stand in all its unknowability, as if language itself cannot fully encompass the extent of this moment of psychological and physical violence.²⁰⁵

The next paragraph depicts a shift in time, further distancing the reader from Viney's trauma. One week later, Malcolm receives a letter from his dying uncle Roger, in which he learns that only Viney knows where the deed to the plantation and other riches are hidden. Now Murchison is desperate to hear Viney speak – but "she did not seem able

²⁰⁴ From "The Dumb Witness," Draft 1, p. 11, Box 10, Folder 10, Charles Chesnutt Archives.

²⁰⁵ Trauma theorist Kali Tal writes that "accurate representation of trauma can never be achieved without recreating the event since, by its very definition, trauma lies beyond the bounds of normal conception. Textual representations – literary, visual, oral – are mediated by language and do not have the impact of the traumatic experience. Literature describes, does not recreate the horrific events" (15).

to articulate...she seemed willing enough, but unable to tell him what he wished to know.” Even his attempts to make her literate (so that she may write down the information) fail; “she manifested a remarkable stupidity while seemingly anxious to learn” (68). In robbing Viney of her voice, Murchison ironically punishes himself, and this action leads to the demise of the plantation and his own mental health. At the end of the story, after Murchison’s death, John returns to the plantation (now being repaired by the new heir) and finally hears Viney speak, in her first and only line of quoted dialogue: “Yes sir, I’ll call him.” Julius tells the astonished John that Viney, who has disclosed the location of the papers to Murchison’s heir, “could ’a’ talked all de time, ef she had had a min’ ter” (70-71).

The full irony of the story’s title is made apparent at its conclusion, for Viney is neither stupid nor voiceless. In fact, her silence empowers her, while slowly driving Murchison insane. Crucially, Julius seems to have known of Viney’s revenge all along, “grinning and chuckling to himself in great glee” at John’s reaction (71). What this suggests is not only the performativity of African American behaviors but also the hidden potential for black speech, which while repressed by whites is recognized by the black community. Even without a voice, Viney still witnesses. Her eyes are expressive: “glow[ing] like the ashes of a dying fire,” “the slumberous fire in [her] eyes flamed up for a moment” (61). These are indications of her interior life, readable to those who are willing to see and listen.

The ignorance lies instead on the part of the white community, both in its past (represented by Murchison and Roger) and present (John). These white men and

plantation owners believe in her fidelity, and more broadly, in the trope of loyalty of black slaves trumping any wrongdoing by their white masters. Murchison's perceptions of reality are in fact false, for what he believes he knows ("I know you have forgiven me") is untrue. And the text's repeated implications of Viney's dissemblance – with words like "seems" and "manifested" – are immediately dismissed by John's narrative, which instead stresses her "willingness" and "anxiety" to aid Murchison. Viney plays on white conceptions of blacks as stupid and voiceless, implying that her inability to read is a pretense as well. John too believes in Viney's seeming stupidity, musing that "perhaps she had begun too old, or her mind was too busily occupied with other thoughts to fix it on the tedious and painful steps by which the art of expression in writing is acquired" (68). By creating these roles for herself – acquiescent, illiterate and stupid – Viney seizes control of the narrative, and authority over Murchison and the members of the dominant white community.

Furthermore, the history of the Murchison family, both white and black alike, comes to represent the history of the nation itself. Chesnutt details Murchison's genealogy, which includes a great-grandfather who served as "a delegate to the Constitutional Convention which established the fundamental law of the land": ordinances that formally denied black citizenship and proclaimed them to be merely three-fifths of a human being. His grandfather in turn is famed as a "distinguished jurist, whose name is still a synonym for legal learning and juridical wisdom in North Carolina," and his uncle Roger "had held high office under the state and National governments" (63). But these are not Murchison's only relatives. He learns that Viney "is

of our blood” (66) – a shared relation which does not prevent her from abuse and domination. After all, “the law made her his.” While Murchison’s ancestors preside over local and national laws and policies which perpetuated black inequality (forbidding literacy, freedom, rights, etc.), his family tree also includes a shadowy, legally unacknowledged black offshoot which suffered – physically and psychologically – from those regulations. In fact, Chesnutt revises the phrase “the Revolutionary War” in his first draft to the “war of independence,” emphasizing how white colonists’ independence was prioritized while black independence – both in the colonial era and his present – remains a nonissue.²⁰⁶

Tellingly, though the end of the story is set in the post-Reconstruction South, Viney’s position still remains one of servitude. Viney is more powerful as a non-actor than as a speaker. Her only line of dialogue in a story so obsessed with the power of speech and silence is subservient, not subversive: “Yes sir...I’ll call him.”²⁰⁷ Chesnutt imagines Viney’s victory as extremely circumscribed, a reprisal for a personal wrong, and not for the entire system of slavery that legalized such wrongs. In fact, by sharing with Malcolm’s descendant the location of the papers and jewels, she willingly perpetuates the legacy of the Murchison plantation into the New South – which the new owner plans to model on John’s plantation (Julius tells John that “young Mistah Roger...says he’s gwineter hab his’n lookin’ lak yo’n befo’ de yeah’s ober” [70]). By

²⁰⁶ See “The Dumb Witness,” Draft 1, p. 7, Box 10, Folder 10, Charles Chesnutt Archives.

²⁰⁷ Chesnutt’s second version renders Viney’s speech in dialect, “Yas, suh...I’ll call ‘im,” but he later chose Standard English. Does Chesnutt use Standard English to promote the notion of Viney as being more educated and more intelligent than her white spectators realized? Janet Gabler-Hover says that this was an “age that equated grammaticality with social and moral stature” (“The North-South Reconciliation Theme and the ‘Shadow of the Negro’ in *Century Illustrated Magazine*,” *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*, 247).

foregrounding John's Northern influence (and his misreading of Viney) in "The Dumb Witness," Chesnutt envisions a future in which white supremacy is embraced not just by the South but by the North as well.

John's narrative misreadings are a common thread throughout the *Conjure Tales*. In "The Dumb Witness," John willfully misreads the nature of Viney and Murchison's relationship as if to demonstrate continued white denial and abnegation of slavery's trauma. For example, when discussing Murchison's relationship with Mrs. Todd, John carefully surmises that "perhaps it was [Murchison's] avarice that kept him from marrying" earlier, but the far more obvious reason is Murchison's sexual relationship with Viney, made doubly taboo by their races and their shared blood. He also weakly explains away Viney's anger at the proposal with the suggestion that "the housekeeper had been in power too long to yield gracefully" (65) – rejecting Viney's feelings and her humanity. That white blindness about the effects of slavery persists even after slavery's end, and that even a Northerner is still blinded by assumptions of black fidelity and acquiescence, suggests the persistence of slavery's logic – the dehumanization of African Americans – decades after its abolition. John also dismisses Julius' narrative about Po' Sandy as "absurdly impossible" (22) and deems "Sis' Becky's Pickaninny" (a story in which Becky's baby, from whom she is separated by her master, is transformed into a hummingbird in order to fly to her side) "a very ingenious fairy tale," when clearly these stories are metaphors for the experience of slaves and their desire to be recognized as human (110). While John imagines that the story of Viney and Murchison as "a story of

things possible only in an era which, happily, has passed from our history” (73), he fails to decipher the themes of slavery still reverberating in the present day South.

Chesnutt’s inclusion of other white responses (or lack thereof) indicates his awareness of the limitations of his critique. In “Po’ Sandy,” the second story in *The Conjure Woman* (and the second of Chesnutt’s stories to be published by the *Atlantic* in May 1888), Tenie’s divulgence of her husband’s death by wood-chopping is met with her master’s indifference and scorn. Deeming her “the wuss ‘stracted nigger he eber hearn of,” the master dismisses her laments as a “kine er foolishness w’at nobody could n’ make out.” The double negative in the latter phrase suggests the master’s purposeful deafness to the sorrows and traumas of the black experience. In contrast, the other slaves on the plantation easily understand her “foolishness” and insanity as evidence of her immense grief (20-21). Similarly, Annie and John’s reactions to Sandy and Tenie’s fates are emblematic of white misunderstanding and misreading:

“What a system it was,” [Annie] exclaimed, when Julius had finished, “under which such things were possible!”
 “What things?” I asked, in amazement. “Are you seriously considering the possibility of a man’s being turned into a tree?”
 “Oh, no,” she replied quickly, “not that;” and then she murmured absently, and with a dim look in her fine eyes, “Poor Tenie!” (21-22)

Annie displays much more sympathy and understanding of the metaphorical message of Julius’s story, unlike John, who only interprets the tale literally. Chesnutt here moves into an explicit interplay of (mis)reading and (mis)recognition by white listeners to instruct his readers in the *Atlantic* and of *The Conjure Woman* of how to correctly interpret his stories: with condemnation for the plantation past and sympathy for its victims.

Sandra Molyneaux and Shirley Moody-Turner, among others, argue that Julius initiates Annie into an understanding of the trauma of slavery. Moody-Turner writes that Annie is “receptive to the affective nature of the stories” and forms an “‘in’ community” with Julius “based on their shared knowledge and understanding of the stories’ deeper meanings.”²⁰⁸ But I argue that Annie, while more sympathetic to Julius’ stories than John, remains a limited listener. Even as she counters John’s dismissal of “Sis’ Becky’s Pickaninny” as “true to nature, and might have happened half a hundred times, and no doubt did happen, in those horrid days before the war,” she relegates the systemic dehumanization of and violence against blacks solely to the South and its past of slavery, thereby absolving herself and her family (post-emancipation era Northerners) of their complicity in the present injustices facing African Americans. Chesnutt suggests that sentimental sympathy about the past serves as a diversion from present day exploitation of African Americans.

Chesnutt’s critique of white displacement of guilt is even more barbed in John and Annie’s reactions to Julius’ tale about Dave, the man who believed himself to be a ham (or, in other words, the slave who internalized his status as a commodity). For by the next morning, John has dismissed Julius’s tale altogether and asks Annie for more of the ham to consume – a pointed comment on how whites obviously and continually exploit blackness. Annie, on the other hand, admits “I couldn’t have eaten any more of that ham, and so I gave it to Julius” (42). Her bequeathal discloses both her sense of guilt (which would now taint every bite of the ham) as well as her inability or reluctance to contend

²⁰⁸ Shirley Moody-Turner, *Black Folklore*, 141-144.

with that guilt, instead displacing it with her seeming act of benevolence. In short, by giving Julius the ham, Annie is able to banish her racial complicity in the continued subordination of African Americans.

Contrary to those Chesnutt scholars who claim that he uses Annie's progression to instruct white readers how to "read" his stories (for instance, Dean McWilliams writes that Chesnutt's "purpose was gradual transformation of white readers from within"), I argue that Chesnutt abandons that hope.²⁰⁹ John and Annie's ignorance to the plight of African Americans throughout the entire course of Chesnutt's *Conjure Tales* indicates that the education they receive from Julius is insufficient. Such a pessimistic reading suggests Chesnutt's full awareness of the limitations of plantation fiction. The medium, while granting Chesnutt and Dunbar exposure to a mainstream white audience, does not allow the more veiled critique within to emerge. For Chesnutt recognizes that white publisher and white audience will only glean whatever message they want out of his text. Though he wrote to Walter Hines Page that he deliberately situated "Hot Foot Hannibal" at the end of *The Conjure Woman* to leave the reader with "a good taste in the mouth," only the white characters in the story in the story experience a happy ending.²¹⁰ Malcolm Murchison's nephew and John's Northern ward, Mabel, reconcile after quarreling, thanks to a story told by Julius of the tragic death of two slave lovers, one of whom is sold to a speculator and sent South. In this way, the story sardonically comments on how the black

²⁰⁹Dean McWilliams, *Charles W. Chesnutt and the Fictions of Race* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2002), 81. See also Andrews, Martin, Molyneaux.

²¹⁰ See Chesnutt's September 19, 1898 letter to Houghton, Mifflin, and Co., reprinted in Helen Chesnutt's *Charles Waddell Chesnutt*, 101.

experience is easily, irresistibly coopted for white needs, as the slaves' tragedy succeeds in achieving white sectional reconciliation.

While William Andrews proposes that Chesnutt's heroic African American characters suggest the race's ability to "meet and overcome the problems of a free status" in the post-Reconstruction era, Chesnutt's conjure tales stress the severe restrictions to their "freedom."²¹¹ Tenie may transform Sandy into a tree, but cannot protect him legally or socially. Nor can Viney fully extricate herself from her status as enslaved, and her one line of dialogue in "The Dumb Witness" is a statement of subservience that problematizes her victory. The social realities of Jim Crow, as Chesnutt was well aware, severely restricted the opportunities and voices of African Americans, fictional or otherwise. And Walter Hines Page, in refusing to publish works like "Dave's Neckliss" and "The Dumb Witness" in *The Conjure Woman*, further perpetuates white ignorance or refusal to acknowledge complicity in stifling or ignoring black humanity.

The emphasis in "The Dumb Witness" on silence – a subversive yet limited assertion of agency – exemplifies the uneasy and unequal power dynamics in the US literary marketplace—specifically, between African American authors, white editors and publishers, and literary readers during the Jim Crow era. In fact, Chesnutt would revise "The Dumb Witness" into a minor subplot in his 1905 novel, *The Colonel's Dream*, mitigating much of the sexual, psychological, and violent subtext of the original. Viney's blood relationship to her master, renamed Malcolm Dudley in the novel, is excised, and her lack of speech is attributed to a stroke-induced paralysis, rather than a direct result of

²¹¹ Andrews, *The Literary Career of Charles Chesnutt*, 69

violence (which in this story is disclosed to be whipping). Chesnutt renders Dudley into a more sympathetic character as well. Though he vows revenge against Viney for breaking off his engagement, he is not directly responsible for the violence, instead charging his overseer to whip her. (In fact, Dudley almost immediately repents his actions, even before he realizes Viney holds valuable information.) The transformation of Viney's plot from race-centered to romance-centered diminishes the subversive potential of African American voice and resistance. But I would also stress that Chesnutt's reduction of Viney's subplot symbolizes the way in which his own voice was silenced and dismissed by the white reading public.²¹²

Perhaps the absence of a sympathetic or understanding audience is precisely why Viney's injury is never fully divulged in "The Dumb Witness." The revelation of trauma can have a dual and contradictory effect. While it can be empowering for the survivor to expose her violator and gain agency for herself – agency robbed by the traumatic event – it can also potentially renew her trauma, by forcing her to relive that moment of terrible agony to an unfeeling public which may refuse to acknowledge its credibility.²¹³ Chesnutt's decision to leave Viney's injury untold and unseen, allows her a brief moment of inviolate protection within the system which granted her no such rights. Yet in leaving this moment unknowable, Chesnutt also recognizes its incompatibility with the genre of

²¹² After the success of *The Conjure Woman*, Chesnutt turned to explicit protest works such as *The Marrow of Tradition*, which was a thinly veiled retelling of the Wilmington race riots. While Houghton Mifflin published a collection of short stories and a few of his novels, they eventually dropped him as an author in 1904, saying that "the public has failed to respond adequately to your other admirable work in this line, and that we have netted a large aggregate loss on the several volumes of which we had such hopes" ("Houghton Mifflin," Box 4, Folder 6, Charles Chesnutt Archives).

²¹³ See Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises in Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

plantation literature. That is, there is no place for this kind of traumatic revelation in a genre and a culture that diminished black experience for its own needs.

In these texts, Chesnutt and Dunbar explore the continued abuse of black labor and the restriction of black freedom through the rise of sharecropping, tenant farming, and even convict leasing in the Jim Crow South. Even Chesnutt's narrator John's pragmatic but flippant remark on the cheapness of labor – "labor was cheap, and land could be bought for a mere song" – unknowingly (on his part) and intentionally (on Chesnutt's) exposes the extent of black victimization across regions and across time. In fact, John almost seamlessly disguises the black labor necessary to produce white wealth ("our income from grapes packed and shipped to the Northern markets is quite considerable" [13]), distorting the difficult burden of growing, picking, "packing and shipping" on the Southern plantation to produce Northern pleasure and wealth. In fact, he further disguises this labor with the racist stereotype of African American intemperance, jokingly commenting on how these "colored assistants" imbibe quite a bit of the products themselves. Though John's "colored assistants," who are most likely free laborers, are probably in a far more economically advantageous position than the majority of other African American laborers in the South, it is clear that white profit is at the heart of John's endeavors, not paternalistic impulses or black comfort.

"Po' Sandy" connects the bodily and psychological trauma of slavery to forcible black labor in the post-Emancipation era. Sandy, a good worker, is often hired off the plantation, and during one of his absences, his master sells Sandy's wife and "swaps [her] off fer a noo 'oman" (16). This telling detail speaks of the perceived interchangeability of

slaves in the master's complete disregard for their humanity: to be regarded as possession is to be dispossessed. Sandy eventually falls in love with his new wife and laments to her that

"I'm gittin' monst'us ti'ed er dish yer gwine roun' so much. Here I is lent ter Mars Jeems dis mont', en I got ter do so-en-so; en ter Mars Archie de nex' mont', en I got ter do so-en-so; den I got ter go ter Miss Jinnie's: en hit's Sandy dis en Sandy dat, en Sandy yer en Sandy dere, tel it 'pears ter me I ain' got no home...I can't eben keep a wife: my yuther ole 'oman wuz sol' away widout my gittin' a chance fer ter tell her good-by; en now I got ter go off en leab you, Tenie, en I dunno whe'r I'm eber gwine ter see you ag'in er no. I wisht I wuz a tree, er a stump, er a rock, er sump'n w'at could stay on de plantation fer a w'ile." (17)

In response, Tenie, with her conjuring abilities, turns him into a tree, so he can "stay right whar [he] wanten, ez long as [he] mineter" (17). The symbolic significance of this transformation is clear: a slave, tired of being continually displaced, wants to put down roots. Paradoxically, the best way for Sandy to feel like a human – with a wife he loves and a fixed home – is to become a material object ("a tree, er a stump, er a rock, er sump'n"). But Sandy, whether a man or a tree, cannot escape the ownership of his master, who soon thereafter has the tree cut down for lumber for his kitchen (and Tenie, herself loaned out to another slave-owner, is too late to save him).

Sandy finds rootedness through Tenie – or, through tenancy, which promised stability and a place of one's own – but this promise of stability becomes a curse, as Sandy's inability to escape its strictures leads to his death. This impasse speaks to Chesnutt's present as well, in which black free labor was transformed into forced labor, thanks to the multiplicity of laws and statutes designed to control and criminalize African American life. The vast majority of the blacks in the South were tenants, not landowners, throughout the era of Jim Crow, and white planters and farmers fought to keep it that

way. As scholars like Douglas Blackmon and Nell Painter have indicated, the necessity of black labor in the South led to restrictions in mobility for African Americans. The rise of sharecropping and tenant farming (and the system of total economic dependency it incurred) ensnared nominally free black farmers into an inescapable cycle of debt and poverty.²¹⁴ Though these black tenants were to be paid at least a portion of their profits, the unfair and unequal contracts signed with white landowners and storeowners who leased their land and gave them credit for supplies ensured that blacks would invariably accrue more debt than profit, thanks to outrageous interest rates and doctored accounts. In turn, black tenants would have no choice but to extend the contracts from which they could hardly hope to free themselves.

Black release or flight from these intolerable labor conditions was nearly impossible. Those who sought to migrate, like the Kansas Exodusters of the 1870s, often encountered violent resistance by their employers or even paramilitary groups like the White League and the Red Shirts.²¹⁵ The Exodusters were known as “Delta Runaways,” a term that indicates the white attitude of black obligation or indebtedness to the land and whites. Even being labeled a “runaway” implies one’s lack of authority over one’s body, and brings to mind the fugitive slaves of the antebellum era. Laws were passed in many Southern states (including Chesnut’s North Carolina) forbidding African Americans to change labor positions without letters from their previous employers. Sandy is unable to escape these restrictive conditions, either as a slave or a freedman (at best, he is still an

²¹⁴ See also Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Knopf, 1998), William Cohen, *At Freedom’s Edge*.

²¹⁵ See Painter, *Exodusters*, 79.

object and not a man) speaks to the extent in which white control regulated black labor and lives.

In Dunbar's "Stanton Coachman," the story ends with the image of Harrison's and Dolly's return "up the road from whence they had come," a seeming reiteration of their retreat into the antebellum past encountered in the narrator's present. But in fact, they represent the needs of the present day. This seemingly benign, paternalistic relationship between Dolly and Harrison takes on a more ominous bent when one contextualizes it as the analogue of the rise of convict leasing – another form of unpaid labor by free blacks – in the post-Reconstruction era South. As Dolly's unpaid servitor (he even allegedly begs for the privilege), Harrison embodies the wistful white fantasy of the perpetuation of free, black, acquiescent labor in the present of Jim Crow relations. For the Stantons' monetary downfall, the interior narrator explains, occurs when her master freed his slaves and could not pay their wages – an ominous warning of the dangers of free black labor. Yet when Harrison is offered wages, he "cried lak a baby" at the "disgrace" of payment, for which Miss Stanton begs his forgiveness. Their relationship restores the plantation past to the present through the willing perpetuation of black servility. Just as negroes in the past used to voluntarily prostrate "dahse'ves in the earf fu' [Dolly] to walk on," now Harrison takes great pride in "driv[ing] huh des lak he ben doin" – without (expectation of) payment (284).

The utterly fictionalized nature of the story suggests the fraudulent nature of the laws that transformed blacks into unpaid, silenced laborers without rights in the Jim Crow South. Convict leasing was a system which emerged out of the Southern need to

circumvent the Emancipation Proclamation and the 13th Amendment through a loophole in the latter, which deemed one could be held in involuntary servitude if found guilty of committing a crime (and of course, as seen in “Dave’s Neckliss,” blackness itself was a crime). The economic justification for convict leasing – which garnered the most monetary profit and industrial or agricultural growth for white Southerners – was also buttressed by the social necessity of policing African Americans’ freedoms. In Douglas Blackmon’s analysis of the “crimes” attributed to the coerced black miners at the Pratt Mines in Alabama, twenty-four were convicted for “obscene language,” three for “bastardy,” nineteen for gambling.²¹⁶ In fact, a black man could be arrested just for being in public (the intentionally vague sentence of “vagrancy”), indicating the extent to which whites attempted to prohibit black visibility.

Convict leasing was in fact a direct descendant of the slave hiring system in which slaves were leased from state prisons to labor for corporations or private individuals, building railroads and roads, working mines, or farming swamps and fields. Guards (the new overseers) were hired to discipline the “chain gang” by any means necessary, and little regulation to temper their brutality. But unlike slavery, in which black lives had financial value and thereby were at least minimally protected, the expendability of black life and labor was made even more apparent. That is, one worked until one died, and then was just as easily replaced by another convict.²¹⁷

²¹⁶ Douglas Blackmon, *Slavery By Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II* (New York: Doubleday, 2008), 99.

²¹⁷ The death rate of convict laborers was horrific: Blackmon writes that 128 of the 285 South Carolina prisoners sent to work the Greenwood and Augusta Railroad died between 1887 – 1880 (226).

The brutal manufacture of the man into commodity in “Po’ Sandy” – he is reduced to mere scraps, with only his stump remaining, “de sap runnin’ out’n it, en de limbs layin’ scattered round,” and the rest of him “cut...up inter bo’ds en scantlin’s” – serves as not just another metaphor for slavery but as an apt representation of the rise of lumber manufacturing in the industrializing South and its cost upon black bodies. Even Tenie’s interchangeability for Sandy’s first wife in “Po’ Sandy” speaks to the lack of regard for black individuality and humanity by white society, so long as black labor and white profit continued. A parallel instance occurs in Dunbar’s story “The Stanton Coachman,” in which a Northern narrator romanticizes compliant Southern labor, even as Dunbar observes how the inhumane aspects of the convict leasing system drew Northerners. For many of the Northern capitalists who invested in the industrial growth of the South in the post-Emancipation era, the promise of its cheap labor force and lack of regulation was immensely appealing. Alex Lichtenstein articulates in *Twice the Work of Free Labor* how Northern investors of Sloss Furnaces in Birmingham, Alabama and Dade Coal in Georgia (two of the largest Southern industrial corporations) lauded how the cheapness of convict labor allowed them to expand their enterprises in the South without depriving them of any profit.²¹⁸

Dave’s silencing in “Dave’s Neckliss” also represents the post-Reconstruction phenomenon of African American disfranchisement. Joel Williamson explains how North Carolina, alongside many other Southern states, rewrote its state constitution to

²¹⁸ Alex Lichtenstein, *Twice the Work of Free Labor: The Political Economy of Convict Labor in the New South* (New York: Verso, 1996), 93, 118. See also John F. Stover, “Northern Financial Interests in Southern Railroads, (1865-1900),” *Georgia Historical Quarterly* 39.3 (Sept. 1955): 205-220.

strip African Americans of the franchise, such as through special literary tests designed to be impossible to pass, or by the grandfather and understanding clauses, limiting voter registration for African Americans.²¹⁹ This discrimination was carried out on the federal level as well, as many of the Supreme Court rulings after the end of Emancipation further enabled state strictures of segregation and discrimination. For example, the Court upheld that segregation was constitutional and did not “imply the inferiority” of the African American race in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896). In *Louisville, New Orleans, and Texas Railroad v. Mississippi* (1890), the Court found that the carrier was required to provide “equal but separate” [sic] accommodations for the different races; furthermore, not to do so would be a misdemeanor. Their ruling in *Williams v. Mississippi* (1898) maintained that gerrymandering techniques and voter intimidation tactics were not discriminatory, setting a standard that all other Southern states would follow.²²⁰ That the highest court of the land so blatantly sided with flagrantly false ideas (that a black train car was no different from or inferior to a white car) suggested neither the federal or state governments would grant justice or equal rights to African Americans.

Furthermore, Chesnutt’s representation of Dave’s status as a slave preacher speaks to the limitations of African American religion in the face of disfranchisement and discrimination. Dave’s conciliatory and accommodationist attitude speaks not only of the needed guise for a slave preacher but for a post-Emancipation preacher, as both had to contend with white anxiety and suspicion towards black leaders. Even as churches

²¹⁹ Williamson, *The Crucible of Race*, 231-2.

²²⁰ See C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange History of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 70.

became the center of the African American community after Emancipation, and its preachers sought to foster moral values within the community (temperance, fidelity, economy, etc.), the black church's status as communal center and potential political site made it a threat to white hierarchy and supremacy. It was not uncommon for radically minded black churches to be burned to the ground and its leaders intimidated or even killed.²²¹

The most effective (or, to be more precise, the least threatening) strategy for preachers became not protest but accommodationism. Litwack points out that this kind of religious conservatism disenchanted many African American parishioners, who "viewed the church as a relic of bondage, using God to keep black people down and reinforce their submission and dependence."²²² Similarly, Dave's outward acquiescence (even with subversive logic behind it) cannot strengthen or empower his slave community. With his authority undermined by his perceived iniquity, the community not only turns against him but relapses into sin (his beloved takes up with the his rival who plays "sinful songs" on the banjo [38]). Dave's cautious, accommodationist strategy, while initially successful in winning privileges for himself, overpowers him in the end; his declaration of black subordination ("I la'rns...to 'bey my marster") indoctrinates him in its pernicious logic. That Dave kills himself rather than being killed only further proves his internalization of his abjection. Sundquist comments that "Dave turns his suicide into a self-inflicted act of cultural lynching in which he dramatizes not only the dehumanization of racism but also the self-destructive effects of African Americans' own acceptance,

²²¹ For more on slave preachers, see Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 388-393; Genovese; Levine.

²²² Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 400.

whether on the minstrel stage or in the arena of politics and economic struggle, of debasing minstrel stereotypes.”²²³ Just as Dave hangs himself up in the smokehouse to “kyo,” so the only true “cure” for blackness (at least in the white supremacist logic ruling the Jim Crow era) was the symbolic death of African American rights – and the literal death of African Americans.

The lack of value placed on black life in Southern labor is linked to the rise of lynching in the South. Chesnutt brilliantly positions Dave’s hanging in “Dave’s Neckliss” in the inescapable and haunting iconography of lynching – the lit fire, the hanging rope – of the Jim Crow era. Lynching was a postbellum phenomenon which enacted white superiority over blacks through the latter’s total dehumanization and commodification. Though generally rationalized in society as retribution for a black-on-white rape (the desecration of the most sacred element of civilization), lynching’s primary function was a cultural ritual that assuaged white anxiety over black economic, political, social, and sexual competition or insubordination. Dave’s punishment in “Dave’s Neckliss” is for his presumed defiance of his master’s authority, for professing “it’s a sin fer ter steal, er ter lie, er fer to want w’at doan b’long ter yer” – and allegedly doing those things anyway.²²⁴

The vast number of lynchings in the South in the Jim Crow era (now tallied around 4,000) is compounded by the sheer brutality and sadism of these murders. Sadly,

²²³ Sundquist, *To Wake the Nations*, 379-380.

²²⁴ Litwack writes in *Trouble in Mind* that lynchings were incited for seemingly trivial incidents: Harry Sykes was lynched for calling up white girls on the telephone, Jeff Brown for accidentally brushing against a white girl while running to catch a train, Rufus Moncrief for failing to doff his hat to a group of white men (307-8).

Dave's self-lynching, while macabre, is positively tame compared to other factual accounts. In 1904, Luther Holbert and his wife in Doddsville, Mississippi (memorialized in Sutton Griggs' 1905 novel *The Hindered Hand*) were tortured by having their "raw, quivering flesh" extracted from their bodies by corkscrews, and in Coweta County, Georgia in 1899, Sam Hose's fingers, toes, and genitals cut off by the white mob. Through incidents like these, it is clear that the lynched body itself is transformed into a memento to white supremacy. One of the Holberts' ears was presented to the man whose bloodhounds were used to track down the fugitives; in turn, he pickled and sent the ear as a souvenir to a friend in Illinois. Sam Hoses' bone fragments were sold for twenty-five cents a piece and "a bit of liver crisply cooked" went for ten cents.²²⁵ In that way, lynching reifies whiteness itself. To be able to witness the spectacle or own the souvenir is a means of proving one's own whiteness and all the privileges associated with whiteness. For the power of the lynched body as souvenir²²⁶ or fetish lies in its ability to remind the possessor or viewer of what he or she is not: alive, powerful, white. The transformation of the post-Emancipation black body into a commodity to be owned, displayed, sold or traded reenacted the conditions of slavery in an era in which African Americans were supposedly free. Owning the body part (or other artifacts associated with the lynching, such as rope, wood, or ash) allowed whites to recreate not only the moment of complete control over the lynched victim, but to return to the past of total white domination. Thus, lynching helped propel the belief system of the past of slavery

²²⁵ Quotations from the *Vicksburg* [Mississippi] *Evening Post* in J. Todd Moyer, *Let the People Decide*, 16; Tolnay and Beck's *A Festival of Violence*, 23.

²²⁶ See Susan Stewart, *On Longing* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984) for more on the souvenir (the term itself is French for "remembering").

into the present moment and the future. Just as blacks were property, so too would they be in perpetuity.

Julius's procurement of the ham at the end of "Dave's Neckliss" carries a charged meaning. The most cynical reading would suggest that Julius callously profits from Dave's tragedy for his own pleasure, a kind of macabre cannibalism, just as Chesnutt receives material profit from the telling of his story to the white community. But the tale also offers the possibility of raising awareness, however unwanted or discomfiting, about the commodification of black experience. Julius is able to recover Dave's body from the dehumanized spectacle of blackness, and testify to Dave's experience and trauma in a way that Dave could not. Furthermore, Julius's physical absorption and transmission of Dave's story suggests the process by which slave debasement could be transformed into empowerment. Julius's testimony about "Dave's Neckliss" gestures towards an alternative collective memory about black experience in the South.

The very political power of Dunbar's and Chesnutt's works lay in how they wrested – at least momentarily – narrative and social control from other white authors, editors, and publishers in an effort to represent and make present the trauma endured by African Americans in the antebellum and contemporary eras. The layers of misinterpretation within these texts enabled critical subterfuge to subtly present itself as a narrative possibility. As Raymond Hedin writes, such stories "became fit to survive by being fitted to their audience; at the same time, they could only survive an audience unfit

to hear them.”²²⁷ When Julius tells John and Annie not to ask him too many questions and that “it’s all in de tale” (123), the word “all” encompasses much, much more than John and Annie, and the white audience at large, could comprehend – or, perhaps more accurately, wanted to comprehend.

Nonetheless, Julius’s limited success represents Dunbar’s and Chesnutt’s struggles (as well as those of other black authors and public individuals) to re-present or make present the trauma endured by African Americans. Chesnutt would never find the same financial or critical success as he did with *The Conjure Woman*, although he continued to write race-relations texts for over a decade after its publication, and African American expression in the literary realm would be largely silenced until the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s. Despite both Chesnutt and Dunbar’s work in protest fiction and political activism, their most lasting contemporary legacy was to be found in accommodationist plantation fiction, their writing with the most limited and coded social and political advocacy. And, as the next chapter demonstrates, the desire to repress black trauma in order to perpetuate white social needs proved as urgent a need in the 1930s as it did at the turn of the century.

²²⁷ Raymond Hedin, “Probable Readers, Possible Stories: The Limits of Nineteenth-Century Black Narrative,” *Readers in History: Nineteenth Century American Literature and the Contexts of Response*, ed. James L. Machor (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 193.

CHAPTER THREE

“Jes’ weery loads”: Race and Gender Relations in *Gone with the Wind* and *None Shall Look Back*

In 1935, African American intellectual activist and historian W. E. B. Du Bois published *Black Reconstruction* to little attention – because, as he acidly remarks in his introduction, he affirms that African Americans are “human beings,” an attitude he predicts would “seriously curtail [his] audience.” As the title indicates, *Black Reconstruction* is a political and social counter to the current popular historiography: the Phillips and Dunning schools which respectively emphasized antebellum slavery as benevolent and Reconstruction as “a hideous mistake.”²²⁸ Instead, like Charles Chesnutt and Paul Laurence Dunbar, Du Bois examines the blighted potential of African American freedoms silenced under Jim Crow, writing “the slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery.” While today this view is largely reinforced by historians like Eric Foner, at the time, Du Bois’s vision was dismissed by many of his contemporaries (*Time*’s critic deemed him a mere “ax-grinder”).²²⁹ Furthermore, his text was largely eclipsed by the increased attention to plantation literature in the 1930s – particularly, in the following year, by the cultural juggernaut that is Margaret Mitchell’s 1936 novel *Gone with the Wind*.

Just as in the post-Civil War era, the interwar period saw a resurgence of plantation fiction after the Great War, as such literature gave readers a model of nation

²²⁸ See Ulrich B. Phillip’s *American Negro Slavery* (New York: Appleton, 1918) and William Dunning’s *Reconstruction: Political and Economic, 1865-1877* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1907).

²²⁹ W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay Toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), xliii; 24, 587. *Time* quotation from David Levering Lewis’s “Introduction,” xxxi.

rebuilding after trauma and loss. Mitchell's novel reintroduced the Civil War and Reconstruction for a generation now over half a century removed from its events, detailing the fall of the Confederacy and the rise of the New South, as embodied through her protagonist, the invincible Southern belle Scarlett O'Hara. Mitchell, in contrast to Du Bois, championed the convention of white Southerners valiantly suffering under a corrupt coalition of African Americans, Southern scalawags, and Yankee carpetbaggers during Reconstruction. And unlike *Black Reconstruction*, *Gone with the Wind* was an instant cultural and literary phenomenon, selling over one million copies in its first six months of publication by Macmillan (and more than thirty million copies to date).

Mitchell's novel so dominated her literary and cultural world that the publication of Caroline Gordon's own Civil War novel, *None Shall Look Back*, was pushed back to February 1937 by her publisher, Scribner's, to lessen the competition. Though Gordon was affiliated with the Agrarians, the leading Southern literary movement at the time, her novel failed to live up to her own financial expectations because, as she once ruefully confided to a friend, "Margaret Mitchell has taken all the trade."²³⁰ Much shorter in length yet even more ambitious in scope, *None Shall Look Back* is a panoramic vision of the Civil War, exploring both the domestic front and, notably for a female author, the battlefields of the war. It channels the narrative perspective of historical figures like Generals Nathan B. Forrest and Braxton Bragg as well as the fictional Allard family who

²³⁰Letter to Sally Wood, dated 8 January 1937, *Southern Mandarins: Letters of Caroline Gordon to Sally Wood, 1924-1937*, ed. Sally Wood (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1984), 204. She previously wrote to Wood that "Margaret Mitchell has got all the trade, damn her. They say it took her ten years to write that novel. Why couldn't it have taken her twelve?" (202). See Nancylee Jonza, *The Underground Stream: The Life and Art of Caroline Gordon* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 170-3, 191, for more on publication history and Gordon's comments on Mitchell.

struggle to hold onto their plantation Brackets and their quickly vanishing way of life amidst the chaos of the Civil War.

Mitchell and Gordon's novels are far more than just revivals of an era long past; they demonstrate the complex and fraught process by which white supremacy must be enacted anew in each generation. Much like their plantation fiction predecessors Thomas Nelson Page and Joel Chandler Harris, Gordon and Mitchell's texts revise and displace the trauma of slavery (and for Mitchell, its afterlife in Reconstruction) to advocate for the continuation of black subordination in the modern Jim Crow era. Their texts gesture towards an awareness of black traumatic experience and black subversive agency only to retract, silence, or dismiss such recognition, demonstrating their anxiety about the emergence of black expression in their own contemporary culture. Gordon and Mitchell further erase black presence through their particular investment in exploring the particular burdens and responsibilities of white Southern women, a surrogate trauma that elides black suffering by ranking Southern female "enslavement" over literal enslavement.

Mitchell and Gordon reveal their complex negotiations with both racial and gendered concerns in their obsessive repetition of scenes that depict the potential sexual violation of white women by black men. Both authors repress white-on-black sexual exploitation in the antebellum era and substitute for it the (invented) trauma of black-on-white rape in the era of emancipation, thereby transferring the status of African Americans from victims to villains. Mitchell and Gordon depict the trauma of black-on-white rape not only as a means by which the loss of racial hierarchy is negotiated, but the

means by which *gender* hierarchy is maintained; in each instance the fear of black-on-white rape is deferred or saved by a white male presence. While Mitchell is at first critical of how white male superiority represses burgeoning female independence, she becomes its advocate, thus suggesting that caste solidarity – whether modern or antebellum – is based on the traditional male-dominated hierarchy that these narratives, with their apparent progressivism and feminism, seem to disavow.

Critical misreadings and even outright dismissals of *Gone with the Wind* have existed since its initial publication. Malcolm Cowley's 1936 review of the book in the *New Republic* infamously classified the novel as "an encyclopedic history of the plantation legend," a legend "false in part and silly in part and vicious in its general effect on Southern life today."²³¹ Even astute historians today continue to misinterpret Scarlett and Mitchell's larger agenda. David Blight, for example, has written that Scarlett embodies the spirit of the Lost Cause, but Mitchell was in fact consciously working against that tradition.²³² In a letter to Julia Collier Harris, she wrote she did not consider *Gone with the Wind* to be "a sweet sentimental novel of the Thomas Nelson Page type."²³³ Her bold heroine Scarlett never embraces the sentimentality of the Lost Cause

²³¹ Cowley, "Going with the Wind," *New Republic* (16 September 1936), quoted in *Recasting: Gone with the Wind in American Culture*, Ed. Darden Pyron (Miami: Florida International University Press, 1983), 19. This vision seemed at least more apparent in the film version of *Gone with the Wind* (1939), directed by David O. Selznick, which I will not be focusing on in this chapter. For more on the differences between the film and the novel, see Jennifer Dickey's *A Tough Little Patch of History: Gone with the Wind and the Politics of Memory* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2014) and Anne Goodwyn Jones's *Tomorrow is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859-1936* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981).

²³² Blight writes in *Race and Reunion* of the transcendent appeal of the Lost Cause, which taught readers that "even when Americans lose, they win. Such was the message, the indomitable spirit, that Margaret Mitchell infused into her character Scarlett O'Hara in *Gone with the Wind*" (284).

²³³ Letter to Julia Collier Harris, 28 April 1936, *Margaret Mitchell's Gone with the Wind Letters*, ed. Richard Harwell (New York: Macmillan, 1976), 5.

mythology, which maintained that Southern defeat was noble, preordained, and demonstrated the indomitability of the Southern spirit. Instead, she explicitly rejects it as useless to her: “there was no going back and she was going forward” (429). Other scholars also counter this “moonlight and magnolias” image of *Gone with the Wind* and consider Scarlett to be an emblem of the New South. Drew Gilpin Faust reads Scarlett’s progression from a crafty belle to an opportunistic businesswoman as “the fulfillment, the logical culmination of the Old South, rather than its transformation or betrayal,” while Elizabeth Fox-Genovese examines the continuities between Scarlett’s behavior and that of “young bourgeois women of the twenties and thirties.”²³⁴ In doing so, these critics celebrate Mitchell’s subversion of traditional Southern femininity, and regard Mitchell and Scarlett as emerging feminist emblems.²³⁵

Though Gordon’s novels and her abilities as a writer garnered far more critical praise than Mitchell’s – the reviewer for the *New York Times* judged Gordon’s work “vastly superior” to *Gone with the Wind*²³⁶ – far less scholarship exists on *None Shall Look Back* and on Gordon as a whole. Instead, most criticism focuses on Gordon’s connection to the Agrarian movement of the 1930s, which endorsed a return to the values of an agrarian, pre-modern South. Other critics like Ann Waldron, Veronica Makowsky,

²³⁴ Drew Gilpin Faust, “Clutching the Chains That Bind: Margaret Mitchell and *Gone with the Wind*,” *Southern Cultures* 5.1 (1999): 12; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, “Scarlett O’Hara: The Southern Lady as New Woman,” *American Quarterly* 33.4 (Autumn 1981): 402; Richard King, “The ‘Simple Story’s’ Ideology: *Gone with the Wind* and the New South Creed,” *Recasting*, 167-184.

²³⁵ For readings of Mitchell’s feminism, see Anne Goodwyn Jones, *Tomorrow is Another Day*; Dawson Gaillard, “*Gone with the Wind* as Bildungsroman or Why Did Rhett Butler Really Leave Scarlett O’Hara?”, *Georgia Review* 28.1 (Spring 1974): 9-18; Marian J. Morton, “‘My Dear, I Don’t Give a Damn’: Scarlett O’Hara and the Great Depression,” *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 5.3 (Autumn 1980): 52-56; Tara McPherson, “Seeing in Black and White.”

²³⁶ Edith H. Walton, “Miss Gordon’s Civil War Novel,” *New York Times Book Review*, 21 February 1937, 6.

and Nancy Lee Novell Jonza perform largely biographical readings of Gordon's work, linking her treatment of gender to her anxiety over the problem of female authorship. Jonza writes that Gordon was conflicted between being a "true woman" and an artist (which she believed "unsexed" her).²³⁷ Despite – or perhaps because of – Gordon's anxiety over women's expected role, her female characters are often imbued with a strength and resilience that her male characters are not. Craig A. Warren and Ellen Gregory both articulate the ways in which Gordon brings female memory of the Civil War into the forefront of *None Shall Look Back* by valorizing the strength and bravery of women such as Susan and Lucy Allard, who tend to wounded soldiers on the battlefield, and Charlotte Allard, who maintains the household after her husband, Brackets' patriarch, collapses.²³⁸

As evidenced, the overwhelming majority of the literary analysis on Mitchell and Gordon focuses on their identity as female authors or their representation of gender in their novels. Such critical attention is not unjustified. It is true that in writing these novels, Gordon and Mitchell were performing a new kind of cultural work, particularly in considering the role of the Southern lady and her contributions to Southern memory and the Lost Cause. And the authors' own contemporary climate of the early twentieth century New South was marked by vast changes in women's roles, thanks to the suffrage movement, the rise of women's progressive organizations and their interest in social

²³⁷ Jonza, *The Underground Stream*, xii; Veronica Makowsky, "Caroline Gordon on Women Writing: A Contradiction in Terms?" *Caroline Gordon*. Spec. issue of *Southern Quarterly* 28.3 (Spring 1990): 43-52; Sharon Talley, *Southern Women Novelists and the Civil War* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2014); Katherine Hemple Prown, *Revising Flannery O'Connor: Southern Literary Culture and the Problem of Female Authorship* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2001).

²³⁸ Craig A. Warren, *Scars to Prove It: The Civil War Soldier and American Fiction* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2009); Ellen Gregory, "Preface," *None Shall Look Back* (Nashville: J. S. Sanders, 1992).

welfare, and the expansion of women's public role. Yet while feminist readings are useful – as Mitchell's *Scarlett* and Gordon's *Allard* women all represent new kinds of Southern ladies in novels – nonetheless this approach can limit our understanding of the cultural function of these novels.

Instead, what I want to suggest is that Gordon and Mitchell fixate on white female subordination as a way to obscure the actual subjugation of their black characters, who are purposely made peripheral in these texts. Such a reading is largely omitted in Gordon scholarship. Those who do consider Gordon's treatment of race generally acquit her racism as merely indicative of her social climate. For instance, Katherine Prown writes that Gordon's views of race are "hardly unusual, given her age and her background"²³⁹ and Sally Wood excuses Gordon's "dated view on blacks" due to being "a woman of her time and place."²⁴⁰ Only Nghana tamu Lewis foregrounds the problem of race in Gordon's works in *Entitled to the Pedestal*. She designates Gordon's views as a kind of "feminist conservatism" – a mixing of feminist and conservative values that emphasized her (and other white female's) agency and authority at the expense of poor whites and blacks.²⁴¹ While I agree with Lewis's readings, her focus on the mythology of white Southern womanhood that Gordon seeks to uphold in her writings does not fully explore the extent to which Gordon's novel reflects her anxieties about the modernizing South. In failing to do so, Lewis neglects to draw important parallels between Gordon's

²³⁹ See Prown, *Revising Flannery O'Connor*, 81

²⁴⁰ *Southern Mandarins*, xx.

²⁴¹ Nghana tamu Lewis, *Entitled to the Pedestal: Place, Race, and Progress in White Southern Women's Writing, 1920-1945* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2007), 6.

treatment of antebellum race relations and the threat to racial hierarchy seen in the changing economic and social climate of the 1930s.

Though Mitchell, a staunch proponent of the New South, advocates new freedoms and social reform for white women, those freedoms do not extend to blacks, whose hints of subterfuge or illicit longings for freedom are repressed by the dominant narrative. In this kind of reading, I directly counter Kenneth O'Brien claim that "race [is an] essentially negligible element" of *Gone with the Wind*,²⁴² and contend instead that Mitchell disregards the presence and treatment of African Americans as a way to elide greater anxieties about race relations in the 1930s. While critics like Tara McPherson and Elizabeth Young have also argued for the importance of understanding race relations and tensions in their analyses of *Gone with the Wind*, they do not fully explore how these moments reflect not only past but current anxieties over race relations in the 1930s – particularly in the economic realm.²⁴³ And even as Faust claims that Mitchell cannot imagine Scarlett's independence because of her inability to imagine African American freedom, I would suggest that Mitchell and Gordon are unwilling to fully envision female autonomy, as the necessity of maintaining white supremacy (and its traditional gender hierarchy) forbids it.

²⁴² O'Brien even says that "Mitchell's novel would still hold together and still make sense if all the comments on black characters were eliminated or even if black characters disappeared" (Kenneth O'Brien, "Race, Romance and the Southern Literary Tradition," *Recasting*, 163).

²⁴³ See Faust; McPherson; Hale; Elizabeth Young, *Disarming the Nation: Women's Writing and the American Civil War* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999). Racial analysis has even extended as far as the ways in which white characters such as Scarlett and Rhett transgress racial boundaries – see Diane Roberts, *The Myth of Aunt Jemima: Representations of Race and Region* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Joel Williamson, "How Black Was Rhett Butler?" *The Evolution of Southern Culture*, Ed. Numan V. Bartley (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 87-107.

The very titles of *Gone with the Wind* and *None Shall Look Back* indicate a preoccupation with the past and the future, a sense of loss and ephemerality, and – in Gordon’s title – even resilience. Each novel’s title, however, belies its content. Gordon’s novel steadfastly looks back, away from the industrial, modernized South of her own present, while Mitchell’s novel commemorates not the nostalgia of the Lost Cause but the rise of the New South. As I have discussed in a previous chapter, Page and Harris obliquely supported New South objectives like industrialization and urbanization. Here in *Gone with the Wind*, Mitchell makes her advocacy of the New South clear through Scarlett’s own capitalist trajectory. After the fall of the Confederacy, Scarlett rejects the traditional mores of her past in order to protect her monetary future. She fraternizes with Yankees and earns money through diversified ventures such as shop keeping and lumberyards, conclusively ceding social capital to acquire economic capital.

In this way, Mitchell’s Reconstruction rebuilding prefigures the development of the New South that emerged in her own lifetime. The first two decades of the 1900s saw the rise of both natural and manufacturing industries (tobacco, iron, millworks, textile and cotton mills), brought new technologies and wealth to the rapidly modernizing South, and led to increased urbanization. (The population of Atlanta, Mitchell’s hometown, jumped from 90,000 in 1900 to over 200,000 in 1920.²⁴⁴) Scarlett O’Hara’s rapid accumulation of wealth in the late 1860s by selling lumber is an appropriate fictionalization of the rise of the lumber industry in Mitchell’s contemporary South; by 1940, North Carolina, Virginia, Georgia, Alabama, and Mississippi all boasted more than

²⁴⁴ Pete Daniel, *Standing at the Crossroads: Southern Life in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 39.

1000 lumber mills each.²⁴⁵ Mitchell's celebration of the restoration of Scarlett's wealth as hand-in-hand with Atlanta's rebuilding speaks to her belief that the development of the New South was equally dependent upon such practices of capitalism, urbanization, and industrialization.

To fully understand Gordon's far more conservative cultural and political agenda, it is important both to explain Agrarian thought and its relation to social progress in the 1920s and 1930s. While Gordon was not officially an Agrarian writer (that is, anthologized in the [all-male] 1930 manifesto *I'll Take My Stand*), her work nonetheless deeply reveals her allegiance to their philosophy.²⁴⁶ The Agrarians promoted a return to the land²⁴⁷ and a rejection of America's increasing modernization and industrialization. They particularly condemned the New South as robbed of its uniquely Southern traits and history, now merely "an undistinguished replica of the usual industrial community," characterized by mindless consumption and capitalistic greed.²⁴⁸ They contended that laboring on the land was a kind of art in itself – even though the unprofitability and

²⁴⁵ Yet this burgeoning industry came at a great price to the agrarian, rural ways of the South: Tindall writes that by 1920, more than 156 million acres of forested land were harvested for logging – more than the size of Georgia, Mississippi and Alabama alone (82-84).

²⁴⁶ Gordon was married to Allen Tate, one of the founders of the Agrarian movement. The group considered asking Gordon to contribute an essay (Jonza, *The Underground Stream*, 86) but finally decided against it. Rosemary M. Magee points out the sexism of the Agrarians in her introduction to *Friendship and Sympathy: Communities of Southern Women Writers* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1992), saying that the Agrarians believed "women were not full-fledged members of literary society" (xix).

²⁴⁷ As Ann Waldron remarks, none of the Agrarians themselves had much experience with a rural lifestyle, other than Lytle (*Close Connections: Caroline Gordon and the Southern Renaissance* [New York: Putnam, 1987], 101).

²⁴⁸ Louis D. Rubin, "Introduction," *I'll Take My Stand*, xx-xxi.

unsustainability of agricultural life was already clear in their time – and that only a return to the land would save the South.²⁴⁹

Nonetheless, this view reveals a kind of racial myopia. That is, for a treatise extolling the virtues of the Southern agricultural past, it downplays the extent to which this agricultural tradition was founded on the dehumanizing system of slavery.

Furthermore, though they fear industrialism and mechanization of the South would exploit human labor, they did not recognize – or refused to recognize – that the entire agrarian tradition of the South was founded on the inhumane abuse of black labor.

Agrarian writer and psychologist Frank Owsley even goes so far as to dismiss the importance of slavery, asserting that it was “not an essential” element of the agrarian system and that “without slavery the economic and social life of the South would not have been radically different.”²⁵⁰ In terms of envisioning modern race relations, their thinking was not much more progressive; even though Robert Penn Warren advocates for African American economic equality in his essay “The Briar Patch,” he stresses the importance of maintaining social segregation.²⁵¹ While the Agrarians were criticized by

²⁴⁹ The unstable marketplace for crops was marked by periods of overproduction and collapse, while the natural disaster of the boll weevil invasion ravaged crops across the black belt South. By 1930, the annual income of farmers was \$189, less than one third of the income of industrial occupations (See Tindall, 111, 354: for instance, the price of cotton dropped from an all-time high of 41.75 cents per pound in April 1920 to only 6.52 cents in 1932, and tobacco prices dropped from 44 cents to 21.1 cents.)

²⁵⁰ Frank Lawrence Owsley, “The Irrepressible Conflict,” 73, 76.

²⁵¹ Robert Warren Penn, “The Briar Patch,” *I’ll Take My Stand*, 251. Nonetheless, Warren’s hardly liberal views became a source of great contention for other Agrarian writers. For example, Donald Davidson, the volume’s de facto editor, feared the essay “did not adhere to Southern racial norms and might offend the very Southerners they wanted to enlist in the Agrarian cause” (Paul K. Conkin, *The Southern Agrarians* [Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988], 72). Davidson and Owsley critiqued the essay’s so-called “progressivism,” such as the use of “Mrs.” as a title for African American women. (These titles were taken out as a concession to Davidson in the final edition).

Thirty-five years later, Warren would repudiate “The Briar Patch,” confessing that even while writing it he felt “some vague discomfort, like the discomfort you feel when your poem doesn’t quite come off, when

Southern intellectuals as backwards or illogical, their belief in white supremacy was, unfortunately, aligned with the rest of the South.²⁵²

Gordon herself was not shy about executing racial subjugation in her personal life. Her attitude towards African American labor in her own home – what Nghana Lewis deems a “modern antebellum domestic situation”²⁵³ – revealed Gordon’s indebtedness to plantation era beliefs about African American labor. In a letter to her friend Sally Wood, Gordon described her onerous responsibilities: “niggers to get out of jail, turkeys to run in, and all that.”²⁵⁴ Her off-handed remark about her responsibilities (evaluating her obligation to “niggers” as equal to those to her “turkeys”) transformed Gordon from employer to plantation mistress, whose duty it was to protect and help her hapless inferiors. Gordon’s racism and conservatism were further compounded in her remarks about a female servant Lucy, whom she regarded as “a gem, young and strong and good natured and old fashioned. I find myself thinking I own her. She really is more like slavery time niggers than any of the modern variety.”²⁵⁵ Gordon’s approbation stemmed from Lucy’s “old fashioned” nature (and her dissimilarity to “niggers...of the modern variety”) – which enabled Gordon to maintain the fiction of ownership.

you’ve had to fake, or twist, or pad it, when you haven’t really explored the issue.” He admits that despite his earlier advocacy for segregation, “no segregation was, in the end, humane” (12). Instead, he argues in favor of integration, justice, and change so that the (white) Southerner could “be able to see facts as they are, and the Negro as he is...might find that he can be better than he thought he had to be” (*Who Speaks for the Negro?* [New York: Random House, 1965], 429).

²⁵² See Howard Odum’s Regionalist movement out of the University of North Carolina, which argued for modernizing the South through industrial and agricultural development. See chapter four of James Cobb’s *Away Down South: A History of Southern Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005) for more on the clash between the Regionalists and Agrarians.

²⁵³ Lewis, *Entitled to the Pedestal*, 115.

²⁵⁴ Letter to Sally Wood, 6 June 1933, *Southern Mandarins*, 144.

²⁵⁵ Letter to Sally Wood, Fall 1933, *Southern Mandarins*, 156. Though Prown reads this comment as “sarcasm” (81), there is little else in Gordon’s private or public writings to corroborate this interpretation.

In turn, Gordon seemed to expect unwavering allegiance from her help. When, during Gordon's husband Allen Tate's long illness, their black cook Beatrice quit, Gordon complained, "I was never so shocked in my life. I am still puzzling over her sudden defection. Niggers are unfathomable."²⁵⁶ Yet Gordon's subsequent disclosure in the letter rendered Beatrice's "unfathomable" actions intelligible: "I was going to let her go anyway, once I got up – not being able to pay her any longer – but I intended to keep her until I was out of bed."²⁵⁷ Perhaps Beatrice was simply tired of serving a financially unstable family with an invalid employer-cum-mistress who denigrates her labor. And Gordon's racist disregard of African American logic as irrational or "unfathomable" portends her attitude towards African Americans as a group in *None Shall Look Back*.

Furthermore, Gordon's exaltation of the historic figure of Lieutenant General Nathan Bedford Forrest in *None Shall Look Back* reveals her racial biases. Gordon, like her husband Allen Tate and fellow Agrarian Andrew Lytle, believed that Forrest would have led the Confederacy to victory if he had had command of its entire armed forces.²⁵⁸ Her narrative fittingly represents Forrest as a heroic maverick and strategic fighter. He alone refuses to yield at the battle of Fort Donelson in 1862, proclaiming that "I didn't come out to surrender...I came out to fight" (112). The last battle scene of *None Shall Look Back* – with which Gordon had originally intended to end the novel – represents Forrest as a divine figure, inspiring his troops as he leads the charge against the Union

²⁵⁶ Waldron's biography on Gordon rather generously omits this last line (109).

²⁵⁷ Letter to Sally Wood, 12 March 1932, *Southern Mandarins*, 97.

²⁵⁸ Lytle deems Forrest "greater than his opportunity" (357) in his biography *Nathan Bedford Forrest and the Critter Company* (1931), ed. Walter Sullivan (Nashville: J. S. Sanders, 1984). Current scholars take the opposite view: Charles Royster writes that Forrest was "a minor player in some major battles and a major player in minor battles" ("Slaver, General, Klansman," *Atlantic Monthly* CCLXXI (May 1993): 126.

army. Larger than life, he sits atop his huge war-horse, his “voice sounding back against the windy plain” (374).

Gordon’s novel (alongside Lytle’s biography) invokes a far more sympathetic image of Forrest than that circulating in her contemporary era. While Gordon portrays him in the novel as “a negro trader of unusual probity” (15), historical accounts describe his greed and lack of regard for his slaves, traits that garnered him over one million dollars before the war. One report details how he and his brother would lash their slaves with bullwhips dipped in salt water to worsen their pain.²⁵⁹ After the war, Forrest maintained his racist record: he was integral in the founding of the Ku Klux Klan and served as its first Grand Wizard. Though he would distance himself from the organization after he found he could not control it properly, he initially saw it as a “damned good thing” that could “keep the niggers in their place.”²⁶⁰

Furthermore, Forrest was perhaps most infamous for his involvement in the Fort Pillow Massacre, an affair conspicuously omitted from Gordon’s own narrative. Though Gordon otherwise closely follows Forrest’s career (as well as Rives, who fights beneath him) from the onset of the Civil War up to the Third Battle of Murfreesboro in December 1864, she leaves out this event, undoubtedly recognizing her inability to redeem such a brutal episode. In April 1864, the “Butcher of Fort Pillow” and his men massacred three hundred Union soldiers (about half of the Union troops there) in what John Cimprich

²⁵⁹ Andrew Ward, *River Run Red: The Fort Pillow Massacre in the Civil War* (New York: Viking, 2005), 20.

²⁶⁰ Quoted in Ward, 386. Andrew Lytle’s 1931 biography justified Forrest’s involvement in the Klan as another example of his defense against the “destruction of Southern Culture” represented by Reconstruction (382) and that “the triumph of the Ku Klux Klan was the triumph...of the South” (385).

deems “the most famous atrocity of the nation’s bloodiest war.”²⁶¹ Significantly, while the majority of African American soldiers were killed (accounts range between 65 to 80 percent), only about one third of white Union soldiers were killed.²⁶² Though the Union garrison had already surrendered, Forrest, allegedly infuriated to see African Americans fighting as equals in Union uniform, massacred them outright. One of Forrest’s own officers, Sergeant Achilles Clark, reported that ““Gen. Forrest ordered them shot down like dogs”” for “fighting against [their] masters.”²⁶³ To deify a man with such outrageous disregard for African American equality and even African American life reveals Gordon’s own racism. And to elide some of his most infamously racist actions foreshadows that her novelization of the Civil War past will harbor other moments of obscured racism.

In her own imagining of the antebellum past, Mitchell returns willing African Americans to the control of whites by rendering slavery as a benign institution of paternalism. Scarlett’s father Gerald O’Hara buys slaves not to profit from their labor, but out of kindness, to keep black families together. In fact, slaves are seen as a part of the plantation family, “children” to whom their owners must tend out of God-given, moral obligation. As Scarlett’s mother Ellen reminds her, “you must remember that [slaves] are like children and must be guarded from themselves like children, and you must always

²⁶¹ John Cimprich, *Fort Pillow, a Civil War Massacre, and Public Memory* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005), vii.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 85.

²⁶³ Quoted in Ward, 229. Forrest, on the other hand, always maintained that he never “overstepped the bounds of civilized warfare” and blamed black depredation and drunkenness for the bloodbath that ensued at Fort Pillow (Cimprich, *Fort Pillow*, 110-113). Lytle also excuses the massacre as acts of “private vengeance” spurred by the “insults of former slaves” and “the drunken condition of the garrison” (279), and the reports of the massacre as a “masterpiece” of propaganda (281).

set them a good example” (472-473). Any exploitation within this system seems to be on the part of the slaves, who, Mitchell writes, “took shameless advantage” of Gerald’s benevolence (51). Mitchell’s characters – slave owners and slaves alike – dismiss Yankee assumptions about the ubiquity of slave abuse as preposterous and melodramatic.²⁶⁴ Mitchell was heartened to receive letters from fans who wrote that she had changed their views of the South. She wrote one reader, “it makes me very happy to know that ‘Gone with the Wind’ is helping refute the impression of the South which people...gained from [*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*].”²⁶⁵ In envisioning her novel as a corrective to the most influential antislavery novel of the 19th century, Mitchell betrays her propagandistic ideals about racial subordination at work in the 1930s.

The opening scene of Gordon’s *None Shall Look Back* likewise upholds the notion of black subjugation and white supremacy. It opens with the benevolent planter Fountaine (Fount) Allard, a man who has been “peculiarly blessed” (10), surveying his plantation, Brackets, a place of peace and fertility. As he settles down in his chair in the summerhouse, he treads on a “soft, yielding object.” When he looks down, he realizes the object is “a little negro boy, curled in a ball...sleeping on the ground” (3). What is seemingly invisible is the presence of slavery hidden in plain sight, imperceptible in terms of sight and sound; the boy remains silent throughout this opening scene. Instead,

²⁶⁴ Mitchell in fact directly criticizes Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) for perpetuating these unrealistic views of the South; Tara’s foreman Sam tells Scarlett of his journey North after the war: “[the Yankees] wuz allus astin’ me ‘bout de blood houn’s dat chase me an’ de beatin’s ah got. An, Lawd, Miss Scarlett, Ah ain’ nebber got no beatin’s! You know Mist’ Gerald ain’ gwine let nobody beat a ‘spensive nigger lak me!” (781). Yet this comment reveals how Sam can only evaluate himself in terms of his market value.

²⁶⁵ Letter to Alexander L. May, 22 July 1938, *Margaret Mitchell’s Gone with the Wind Letters*, 217).

the presence of slavery can only be gleaned after careful scrutiny, a scrutiny that Gordon barely allows her reader – or herself – to participate in.

In fact, Gordon generally undercuts the importance of slavery in *None Shall Look Back*. Fount's distant relation Rives Allard considers his duty to fight in the Civil War as unrelated to the issue of abolition: "it was not a question of slavery...our country had been invaded – it did not much matter on what grounds the invaders had come" (24). The Confederate men in the novel consider themselves to be fighting for "freedom" (11) – that is, states' rights and lack of federal interference – without ever considering that the freedom they seek to uphold comes at the expense of African American freedom. Though Rives' own-great grandfather Garrett had freed his own negroes because "he had been mightily concerned about his own soul" (17) – suggesting that not all slave owners were completely at ease with the morality of owning slaves – Rives feels no such sense of moral responsibility, and even offers to buy a negro during the war (281-2).

Gordon emphasizes the idea of antebellum hierarchy and peace through Fount's recollection of the family's annual barbecue:

There must have been twenty ladies to sit down at the log table in the dining room. The children and nurses, as was the custom, had been served on picnic tables spread under the trees. And off there in the grove thirty or forty men of the community, his friends and neighbors, had eaten a barbecue dinner. Not to mention the four carcasses served up to the negroes in the quarters. (5)

Fount's musings essentialize the separation and ordering of races, genders, and generations as something benign – at least, from his perspective at the top. But at the bottom are the negroes, literally only given the leftovers. After Fount drains a mint julep obtained for him by the formerly sleeping slave (who is now visible only because of his

labor), the little boy is permitted to drink its remnants, “the yellowish, sweetened fragments of ice” and “the few drops of syrup” (5). Strikingly, Gordon represents this scene as one of white benevolence and black greed: “Allard watched the pulse in the small throat leap as the boy greedily drained the few drops of syrup.” Fount is portrayed as a man of largesse (he is even criticized by his daughter-in-law for “spoiling” his negroes [125]), while the African Americans in the novel – eating the carcasses, greedily drinking the juleps – are interpreted as rapacious yet unthreatening scavengers of white generosity.

Gone with the Wind inverts this hierarchy of masters and slaves as a way to further disguise their actual relations. White characters within Mitchell’s text claim that they are owned by their slaves, who also allegedly believe themselves to be in charge. On top of the Tara slaves taking “shameless advantage” of Gerald, the narrator claims that “Mammy felt that she owned the O’Haras, body and soul” (22) and Scarlett’s first husband Charles Hamilton tells her that their house servant, Peter, “owns [their family], body and soul, and he knows it” (144). The inversion of master/slave relations seems to ring true at times. Mammy bullies Scarlett into eating before the Wilkeses’ barbecue to seem dainty and feminine in public, and Peter, appointing himself the surrogate head of the Hamilton household, decides when Mellie should wear her shawl and where Charles should attend university. Yet the idea that Peter and Mammy “own” their white masters is itself a pleasant fiction. Both Peter and Mammy know their actual place of servitude: to promote the interests of the aristocracy – and to do so willingly. It is apparent that any African American authority within the domestic realm is a ruse enacted by their white

superiors to shroud black slaves' lack of social or political power. Even as Peter regards himself, as the narrator puts it, as "the dignified mainstay of the Hamilton family," Scarlett regards Peter and other negroes in much more patronizing terms: "negroes had to be handled gently, as though they were children, directed, praised, petted, scolded" (674). Mitchell once again reinscribes power in terms of the white handlers who know how to appropriately control their slaves as "children."

Mitchell's narrative naturalizes not only the subjugation of slaves but even their labor in the antebellum era. When discussing Gerald's rise from poor Irish immigrant to respected planter, Mitchell's narrative elides the slave labor necessitated to build Tara. Instead, the plantation emerges naturally from the red Georgia clay through Gerald's own superhuman labor ("he cleared the fields and planted cotton") rather than the many invisible black hands necessary to plant cotton and clear fields. While Mitchell concedes in the next paragraph that "the white house...was built by slave labor," her narrative only momentarily acknowledges the presence of blackness before it reverts back to its erasure. The passage concludes triumphantly that "*he had done it all*, little, hard-headed, blustering Gerald" (48, emphasis mine). But this unacknowledged black labor enables Gerald's dream of "a house of whitewashed brick" and "rich river bottom land....gleam[ing] white as eiderdown in the sun – cotton, acres and acres of cotton" (47-48) to become a reality. In other words, these black hands enable Gerald to whiten himself from Irish immigrant to wealthy white planter.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁶ As Matthew Frye Jacobson explains in *Whiteness of Another Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), Irish immigrants, due to their Celtic ancestry, in the nineteenth century were not regarded by Anglo-Saxons as fully white but as "low-browed,"

Mitchell further ameliorates slavery by depicting it as a meritocratic educational system. Mitchell borrows heavily here from historian Ulrich B. Phillips' *American Negro Slavery* (1918), whose conception of slavery as a benevolent institution was the most predominant view of slavery in her era. He argues that "plantations were the best schools...invented for the mass training of...inert and backwards Negroes," and that slaves were impelled by "loyalty, pride, and the prospect of reward."²⁶⁷ Mitchell too suggests that slavery is a class system based on individual merit, not the intrinsic subordination of an entire race:

Just as Ellen had done, other plantation mistresses had put the pickaninnies through courses of training and elimination to select the best of them for the positions of greater responsibility. Those consigned to the field were the ones least willing or able to learn, the least energetic, the least honest and trustworthy, the most vicious and brutish. (654)

Slavery is therefore framed as a meritocracy where those who are "willing or able to learn" glean the benefits of their hard work and are promoted to better positions in the house.²⁶⁸ Mitchell emphasizes these "training courses" selected "the best" of the Negroes – to reward those who were energetic, honest, and trustworthy with "positions

"brutish," "Simian" and "marked by...[a] black tint of the skin" (48) These "black" characteristics were matched by their interior inferiority as well; they were seen as depraved and uncivilized. Gerald's own potential "blackness" is cancelled out -- "whitewashed," even -- by his ability to own and coopt black labor for himself.

²⁶⁷ Ulrich B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery*, 1918 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), 343, 294. Phillips may have been influenced in his interpretation of slavery by Booker T. Washington, who in his 1901 autobiography *Up from Slavery* (New York: Penguin, 1986) asserted, rather disingenuously, that slaves' "tenderness and sympathy" for their masters were so great that they "would have laid down their lives" for their masters (13). Phillips deemed Washington one of the few "outstanding" African Americans in the nineteenth century (alongside Paul Laurence Dunbar and -- interestingly enough -- Du Bois, who staunchly opposed Phillips' ideas [432]).

²⁶⁸ Mitchell envisions Reconstruction as an inverse of the hierarchical, ordered system of slavery where the "lowest and most ignorant [slaves] were on top," while underneath them, the "better class" of slaves "suffer[ed] as severely as their white masters" (654). Note Mitchell's continued use of the term "master," which should be obsolete in the era of Emancipation.

of...responsibility,” a means by which she could justify the coerced tasks demanded by slavery and soften its harsh realities.

Even though Mitchell generally presents “house slaves” as docile and servile, her own narrative occasionally undermines this ideal. At times, Mitchell gestures towards African American subtlety and subversion of thought – a depth of character that her white characters cannot allow themselves to indulge in imagining. Even Mammy, the novel’s foremost black champion of the plantation aristocracy, possesses an untapped interiority that occasionally bubbles to the surface:

Mammy had her own method of letting her owners know exactly where she stood on all matters. She knew it was beneath the dignity of quality white folks to pay the slightest attention to what a darky said when she was just grumbling to herself. She knew that to uphold this dignity, they must ignore what she said, even if she stood in the next room and almost shouted. It protected her from reproof, and it left no doubt in anyone’s mind as to her exact views on any subject. (65)

Mitchell reveals the power of black voice arises as a function of its limitations; that is, Mammy can be heard because her audience must pretend that her voice does not exist. This is a paradoxical inversion of power: Mammy can utilize the “privilege” of being unheard to make “her exact views on any subject” heard, while her white superiors become subjugated to this inescapable black voice. Mitchell makes it clear that this pretense of black invisibility or silence is a kind of compromise between white superiors and black subordinates. At the same time, this moment suggests that black voice has the power to erupt this fiction. After Scarlett announces her engagement to the reprobate Rhett Butler, everyone around her is scandalized, including her long-time love, Ashley Wilkes, and her maiden aunts, exemplars of the Charlestonian aristocracy. But no one’s

disapproval stings except for Mammy's, whose condemnation of Rhett (and accordingly, Scarlett) as "trash" stamps itself indelibly on Scarlett's mind (844). In this way, Mitchell empowers Mammy's voice only when it acts as a kind of spokesperson for the plantation aristocracy. And, as I will later discuss, Mammy's power and agency become subsumed in the novel to act as Scarlett's own.

Sam, Tara's negro foreman and Gerald's "right-hand man" (306) is a minor character in the novel whose singing embodies the limitations of white understanding. As Eugene Genovese and Lawrence Levine have demonstrated, the medium of song's importance for slave culture cannot be overstated. Songs enabled a radical kind of black voice through their ability to encode various levels of meaning.²⁶⁹ Frederick Douglass once wrote that, for slaves, the song "O Canaan, sweet Canaan / I am bound for the land of Canaan" indicated more than "a hope of reaching heaven. We meant to reach the North, and the North was our heaven."²⁷⁰ Though Sam appears to be wholly devoted to the Confederate cause – he greets Scarlett with "delighted recognition" and brags of being conscripted by the Confederates to dig trenches – he nonetheless sings "Go Down, Moses" as he marches down the streets of Atlanta (306). A curious choice for a loyal slave, "Go Down, Moses" is a spiritual that connects the African American slaves' desire for freedom with the Old Testament Israelites' own exodus from Egyptian slavery. The song repeatedly emphasizes emancipation as a right ordained by God:

²⁶⁹ See Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll* and Levine's *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*.

²⁷⁰ Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1892) (Mineola, NY: Dover Books, 2003), 109.

“Go do-ow, Mos-es! Waaa-ay do-own / in Eee-jup laa- an,
 an’ te-el O-le Faa-ro-o
 Ter let mah—peee-pul go!” (308).

Mitchell’s rendering of Sam’s voice deliberately renders his radicalism incomprehensible to his white audience, and his words are jumbled into prolonged vowels and missing consonants. Nonetheless, even though it goes unnoticed by his white audience, including Scarlett (who is preoccupied with thoughts of her immediate safety), Sam’s singing itself is a public revelation of emancipatory desire, literally paraded down the street.

The only person who seems aware of the provocative subtext of this song is Sam’s “harried, shouting” white commander (306). His fear of “mutiny and insubordination” suggests his awareness of the limitations of white supervision; he later confides to Scarlett, “God knows, I’ve had enough trouble with these boys this morning” (307). His warning to Sam and his friends to “get back in line, you fellows! Get back, I tell you or I’ll...” is an open-ended threat which denotes less a multiplicity of punishments than an awareness of his own impotence. The white desire for African Americans to “get back in line” socially, economically, and politically – and the fear that whites will be unable to force African Americans to do so – will in fact be a theme throughout the rest of the novel, as emancipation becomes a reality.

Mitchell thus depicts a slave who believes in emancipation to be a right ordained by God, a notion that seems distinctly at odds with Sam’s professed delight in being hand-selected to participate in a cause that would directly prolong his own subjugation. Yet Sam will later willingly reenter enslavement, begging Scarlett after the war to return to Tara. While telling Scarlett of his experiences in the North after Emancipation, he

expresses his discomfort with social equality, at being called “Mist’ O’Hara” and “set[ting] down wid w’ite folks...lak I wuz jes’ as good as dey wuz” (780-781). The one slave who has experienced the promise of Canaan dismisses it altogether: “Ah done had nuff freedom. Ah wants somebody ter feed e good vittles reg’lar, and tell me whut ter do and what not ter do” (781). His once radical voice now speaks not of his desire for freedom but for servility and obedience: a promise by Mitchell that black insurgent desire is fleeting and ultimately subdued by white control.

Finally, Prissy, Scarlett’s “pickaninny” slave generally characterized as inept and lazy (who can forget the infamous line “Ah doan know nuthin’ ‘bout bringin’ babies” [365]?), is also potentially more subversive than Scarlett realizes. Prissy, generally regarded as “silly” by both characters within the novel and even contemporary critics,²⁷¹ whines that “Ah’s sceered of cows, Miss Scarlett, Ah ain’ nebber had nuthin’ ter do wid cows” (401) and “pick[s] [cotton] lazily, spasmodically, complaining of her feet, her back, her internal miseries, her complete weariness” (456). Upon their first encounter, however, Scarlett notices her “sharp, knowing eyes that missed nothing and a studiedly stupid look on her face,” and deems her a “sharp little wench” (63).²⁷² And, as Tim A. Ryan argues, Prissy’s ineptitude and pleasure in informing Scarlett that no doctor is coming to aid in Mellie’s risky childbirth could be an act of malice: “the pleasure that

²⁷¹ Hale, *Making Whiteness*, 264.

²⁷² Of course, Prissy’s “studied stupidity” is no different than Scarlett’s own performance of foolishness for her beaux; her eyes, too, are described as “sharp” (107, 490) and she is well-versed in the art of “how to conceal from men a sharp intelligence beneath a face as sweet and bland as a baby’s” (59). She complains to Mammy that “I’m tired of everlastingly being unnatural and never doing anything I want to do...I’m tired of saying “How wonderful you are!” to fool men who haven’t got one-half the sense I’ve got, and I’m tired of pretending I don’t know anything, so men can tell me things and feel important while they’re doing it” (79).

Prissy takes in the misfortunes of Scarlett and Melanie...suggests that the black lower class did not love its white rulers, either before or after slavery, and was even capable of deliberately discomforting the master class and enjoying the discomfort it caused.”²⁷³ Yet Scarlett by this point has forgotten that Prissy’s “stupidity” is feigned, thereby embodying a kind of white cultural amnesia that enables black guile to be interpreted as mere imbecility.

In fact, Prissy’s perpetual uselessness and laziness has its own personal use value. It is Scarlett who must perform these tasks that Prissy refuses to do (or for which she professes her ineptitude). It is Scarlett who harnesses the cow, acts as midwife for Mellie’s baby, and labors in the fields until her hands are blistered and raw. The white lady therefore takes on the burden of blackness: when Rhett sees her calloused hands, he tells her that “these are not the hands of a lady...you’ve been...working like a nigger” (578). But such emphasis on Scarlett’s “back breaking” labor (455) as she struggles to rebuild Tara glosses over the way in which what is white sacrifice is in fact the normal experience of African Americans.

The relationship between white and black burdens – and blackness as a kind of burden for whites to bear – is manifested in *Gone with the Wind* through the obsessive reappearance of Stephen Foster’s song “My Old Kentucky Home” (1852).²⁷⁴ A fragment of the chorus– “just a few more steps for to tote the weary load” (403) – follows Scarlett

²⁷³ Tim Ryan, *Calls and Responses: The American Novel of Slavery Since *Gone with the Wind** (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 42.

²⁷⁴ The importance of this song is underscored by the fact that Mitchell considered titling her novel *Tote the Weary Load* (see Darden Pyron, *Southern Daughter: The Life of Margaret Mitchell and the Making of *Gone with the Wind** [New York: Oxford University Press, 1991], 280, 316.)

through her journey from white obliviousness to her own assumption of the “heavy load.” This is a song sung light-heartedly by Scarlett and Rhett (298), then picked up by Prissy (347), and finally repeatedly murmured by Scarlett during her treacherous journey from Sherman’s Atlanta to Tara (416). In the last episode, she “hummed...over and over” one particular line which ostensibly promises relief in “just a few more steps,” relief she believes will be found through “lay[ing] her head on [Mammy’s] broad, sagging breasts” for comfort (403, 415). But the stability that Mammy represents is soon shattered: Scarlett returns to Tara only to find her even more weak and uncertain than Scarlett herself. She asks Scarlett “whut is we gwine ter do?...Ain’ nuthin’ lef’ now but mizry an’ trouble. Jes’ weery loads, honey, jes’ weery loads.” This realization jogs Scarlett’s memory of the subsequent lyrics – “no matter, ‘twill never be light! / just a few more days till we totter in the road –” (416).

The notion of an unceasing burden makes sense in “My Old Kentucky Home”’s original context, in which Stephen Foster, inspired by *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, channeled the perspective of a slave. The song moves from a kind of generalized nostalgia for the days past (“they hunt no more for the ‘possum and the coon / on the meadow, the hill and the shore / they sing no more by the glimmer of the moon / on the bench by that old cabin door...”) to a lamentation of the particular burden of blackness in its last verse (“the head must bow and the back will have to bend / wherever the darkey may go”).²⁷⁵ Yet in Mitchell’s threefold use of the song in her novel, that tragedy is silenced or coopted. In its first iteration in the novel, Scarlett and Rhett pay no attention to the lyrics, singing it to

²⁷⁵ *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings*, eds. Philip Sheldon Foner and Yuval Taylor (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999), 329.

distract Fanny Elsing from her fiancé's death at Gettysburg, unwittingly demonstrating the way in which black suffering barely registers to whites. Prissy then sings the song while she and Scarlett await the arrival of Mellie's baby. The fact that a slave sings a song written by a white man imagining slave experience – a song she possibly learned by listening to Scarlett and Rhett sing – exposes the tortuous process by which the direct representation of black experience is attenuated, if not also misinterpreted or silenced. Now, though, “the song grated on Scarlett, its sad implications frightening her” (349). Here she recognizes that the song is about black experience, a fact that she will try to repress. She yells at Prissy to “shut up that singing” (349), foreshadowing the ways in which she will coopt or subvert “black” suffering for her own needs.

Though Frederick Douglass once lauded “My Old Kentucky Home” for its “anti-slavery principles” which would “awaken the sympathies for the slave,”²⁷⁶ Mitchell evokes sympathy not for the slave but for Scarlett: “would her load never be light? Was coming home to Tara to mean, not blessed surcease, but only more loads to carry?” (416). The novel commemorates Scarlett's single-minded resolve and shouldering of her burden through the coopting and erasure of black experience and suffering. The “load” that Scarlett carries is that of acute hunger and fatigue, a “weariness that shackled her limbs with heavy iron chains” following many hours of laboring, and suffering the loss of her mother – all experiences not uncommon to slaves. Moreover, this moment reveals the process through which African American burden is made into a *white* burden, and that black dependency (and uselessness) is a part of such a burden. Tellingly, Mitchell inverts

²⁷⁶ See Douglass's lecture “The Anti-Slavery Movement” (1855), published in his first autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York: Miller, Orton and Mulligan, 1855), 462.

the white child/Mammy relationship at this juncture, as Scarlett offers comfort to her grieving Mammy, whose breast can offer her no similar consolation. Furthermore, after Scarlett and Mellie prevent Yankee plunderers from burning down Tara, Mellie tells Scarlett that she “looks like the end man in a minstrel show” (469) – a remark that reveals more than perhaps Mitchell intended about white coopting of blackness (though in this case, not for humorous but sympathetic effect).²⁷⁷

Gordon and Mitchell substitute the “trauma” of white women’s experience – the hardships they suffer under the antebellum system of gender restrictions and expectations, and the difficult trials of the Civil War and its aftermath – for the trauma of slavery. Mitchell and Gordon insinuate that the experience of Southern white womanhood is a kind of enslavement itself – a gross misidentification that reveals their need to erase the actual trauma of slavery. After all, Gerald O’Hara’s status as planter arises not just from his procurement of slaves but his acquisition of his wife, Ellen. Mitchell repeatedly emphasizes the plantation mistress’s toil and sacrifice in running the plantation. Gerald and other male planters “had no knowledge of the dawn-til-midnight activity of these women, chained to the supervision of cooking, nursing, sewing, and laundering” (51). Just as slave labor was erased, so too is Ellen’s labor – which is configured as even more integral to the plantation than slave labor. The first part of the

²⁷⁷ Even though Scarlett’s shift into blackness develops the theme of victimization and transfers it into white suffering and endurance, certain remnants of black plight remain. Scarlett’s unyielding battle against starvation at Tara is aided by her pillaging of the slaves’ vegetable gardens at Twelve Oaks (427). Patricia Yaeger reads a Southern “economy of unknowing” as Ashley buries Gerald while reciting a burial service used for laying to rest an unacknowledged number of slaves; “the novel drifts toward a wider landscape of mourning and melancholia, of ungrieved grief for the thrown-away bodies of the black slaves who created Twelve Oaks itself” (Patricia Yaeger, *Dirt and Desire: Reconstructing Southern Women’s Writing, 1930-1990* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000], 107.)

novel, which glorifies the well-run plantation of Tara, makes clear that this idealization is founded on the hard labor of its mistresses, unacknowledged, unseen by its masters: “Ellen’s life was not easy, nor was it happy, but she did not expect life to be easy, and, if it was not happy, that was woman’s lot” (58). The women in *None Shall Look Back* are similarly figured as mentally stronger and more resilient than the men. After the Yankees burn down Brackets, Charlotte and her daughter Callie work to protect Fount from the knowledge that they are now destitute, a burden too heavy for him to bear. And Gordon too fixates on the sacrifice of the plantation mistress, Charlotte Allard, whom her granddaughter Lucy fears will “work herself to death waiting on [her slaves]” (131), thereby inverting the notion of white leisure and black labor under slavery.

Mitchell even suggests that marriage and courtship are forms of slavery. Elizabeth Young figures Rhett’s control of Scarlett in terms of racial domination and “romantic enslavement”; he tells Scarlett that “I’m riding you with a slack rein, my pet, but don’t forget that I’m riding with curb and spurs just the same” (860).²⁷⁸ At a dance auction to raise money for the war, in which potential partners pay for the chance to dance a reel with the lady of their choice, Melanie asks Scarlett, “Don’t you think it’s – it’s just – just a little like a slave auction?”. And “the excited laughing crowd surging around the platform, their hands full of Confederate paper money” transforms the purchase of the slave at the auction block into a romantic and patriotic gesture (190).²⁷⁹ Yet while the scene brings up the problem of the commodification of female bodies for white male

²⁷⁸ See Elizabeth Young, *Disarming the Nation*, 267.

²⁷⁹ See Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) for an in-depth exploration of the horrors and violence of slave auctions, far beyond Melanie’s experience or imagination.

pleasure and profit, Mitchell only renders this commodification problematic in terms of *white* female bodies – and not the black female bodies of the slave auction.

Miscegenation or the sexual abuse of slaves is never once suggested in Mitchell's novel, an elision that is itself a kind of willful cultural amnesia.²⁸⁰ Mammy is “shining black, pure African” (23), and the only mixed-race character, Dilsey, has not white but “Indian blood” (62). Mitchell even attributes interracial relationships to the effects of Reconstruction, with not her characters but her omniscient narrator commenting on the “the enormous increase of mulatto babies in Atlanta since the Yankee soldiers had settled in the town” (670). This kind of deliberate disavowal about the realities of antebellum miscegenation – acknowledged even by real life plantation mistresses such as Mary Chesnut²⁸¹ – speaks to a whitewashing of the Southern past, one which denies sexual trauma of African American women in order to replace it with white women's experience.

Gordon similarly depicts and retracts a scene of black female abuse by a white male to demonstrate the purposeful ignorance that the ideology of white Southern supremacy demands. Early in the novel, as Lucy, Fount, and her future husband Rives

²⁸⁰ The sheer lack of mixed-race characters led Alice Randall to write *The Wind Done Gone* (2001), an unauthorized retelling of the novel, from the perspective of Cynara, Scarlett's half sister via Gerald's sexual relationship with Mammy, and later wife of Rhett Butler.

²⁸¹ “I hate slavery. I hate a man who - You say there are no more fallen women on a plantation than in London in proportion to numbers. But what do you say to this - to a magnate who runs a hideous black harem, with its consequences, under the same roof with his lovely white wife and his beautiful and accomplished daughters? He holds his head high and poses as the model of all human virtues to these poor women whom God and the laws have given him. ...And the unfortunate results of his bad ways” – his offspring with his slaves – “were kept in full view, and provided for handsomely in his will. His wife and daughters, in their purity and innocence, are supposed never to dream of what is as plain before their eyes as the sunlight, and they play their parts of unsuspecting angels to the letter. They profess to adore the father as the model of all earthly goodness” (Mary Chesnut, *A Diary from Dixie*, ed. Ben Ames Williams [New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1905], 122-123).

visit her small plot of land, its day-to-day operations under the supervision of a white overseer, George Robbins. But the bucolic pastoralism of the plantation is ruptured as they learn that Robbins has abused one of his female slaves for the ambiguous crime of “sass[ing] him” (43). Fount asks Lucy to see how the slave, Lucy’s former playmate, is faring, a request which “frightens” her. As she sees Della, Lucy is struck “silent, staring fascinated at the wound...she had never before seen human flesh torn by a lash.” Even after seeing the wound, Lucy feels not sympathy (her “fright” even transforms into “fascination) but a need to displace or repudiate Della’s experience. Della’s body (her back is marked with “a great lacerated place clotted with black blood”) and her voice (“‘he say he goin’ to beat me to death’” [44]) attest to her trauma—trauma that Lucy will not allow herself to acknowledge. Despite her former intimacy with Della, Lucy sides with white solidarity instead of their shared history. She attempts to excuse Robbins’ behavior, musing that “people said that you could never be certain that negroes were telling the truth, could never trust them...perhaps Della had provoked the overseer beyond endurance” (45). With this thought, Lucy dismisses this experience not as a lesson to be retained, but a scene to be forgotten.

If Della’s trauma is too horrible for Lucy to acknowledge, Fount refuses to see it altogether. While it is possible he sends Lucy to look after Della as a nod to decorum (it might be improper for a man to see Della “strip down the waist of her linsey woolen gown” [44]), it also prevents him from bearing witness to the trauma itself. After they learn that Robbins has fled Cabin Row, the narrative shifts to Fount’s perspective, who likewise attempts to absolve white guilt – both Robbins’ and his own:

The flight...was certainly a confession of the man's guilt. And yet he wondered. Della was a bold, brassy piece if ever he had seen one. His imagination swiftly constructed scenes that might have been enacted night after night at the cabin. It was significant that she had rebelled at bringing water to the man's house. And yet, Della being what she undoubtedly was, there might be extenuating circumstances...he should never have assigned a young and untried man – an unmarried man – to such a responsible post. (46)

Fount, like Lucy, questions the veracity of what happened, and though he acknowledges the possibility of sexual abuse ("scenes that might have been enacted night after night at the cabin"), he still places the blame squarely on Della ("a bold, brassy piece if ever he had seen one"). Instead, he dismisses her trauma by perpetuating the stereotype of the black female as sexual succubus who seduces a "young," "untried," "unmarried man," rather than as rape victim.

Yet, Gordon's novel at least raises the tantalizing possibility that Della, the "bright-skinned" childhood playmate of Lucy, brought up on the home plantation before being sent off to the remote Cabin Row, is an Allard too. The "black blood" of her wound also suggests the traumatic secret that cannot be acknowledged by whites (that is, not her black but her *Allard* blood).²⁸² This is a possibility that can never be overtly acknowledged, as it would disprove the notion of Fount and Brackets as a fantasy of ideal white ownership. And Della's future remains as great a cipher as her trauma and her heritage; she disappears from the rest of the novel, forgotten. The chapter instead concludes with a return to Lucy's perspective as she rides away from Cabin Row:

²⁸² Gordon's 1931 novel *Penhally*, however, makes clear that miscegenation is a part of the white slaveholding Llewellyn family's legacy. A young, light-skinned slave boasts of how the two patriarchs, Ralph and Nick, "quoil[ed] over [her] mammy" (17), and Alice, another relation, notices that "Mally had a negro mouth and negro eyes, but her chin was shaped just like [Nicholas's], and her hands were like the hands clasped on the head of his cane" (129).

“between her two cavaliers she was so happy that she felt her heart would burst” (46).

Such is the privilege of white femininity – to have white men as cavaliers, not as overseers or abusers. To be a white woman is to ignore the trauma of black womanhood.

None Shall Look Back is a meditation on white survival, not because of but despite the presence of blacks. Gordon’s Lucy regards the blacks as a “furtive and forever alien race,” and her mistrust of the family slaves is a constant theme throughout the novel (128). In fact, the novel emphasizes blacks as an alien, threatening, even dangerous, presence, even under white plantation rule. Gordon at times implies begrudgingly the logic of African American behavior. As Lucy castigates the slaves’ abandonment of Brackets midway through the war, she compares them to “rats on a sinking ship” (126) – a remark which tellingly reveals Lucy’s own sense of the Confederate cause as unsustainable (“we are sinking, sinking; and they know it and have deserted us” [128]).

But Gordon glosses over the slaves’ quest for freedom as a disloyal but logical maneuver by construing it as an endeavor at which they are too inept to succeed. Lucy’s anger grows when their slaves unremorsefully return to Brackets seeking further aid from their white owners.²⁸³ They are unsuited for freedom: a baby dies because his unfit mother feeds him “some sort of strange meat” and the cook is struck by rheumatism and needs Lucy’s grandmother to tend to her (135). In the most damning example of all, the negroes trample a ninety year old man, an event recounted by one of the slave girls with “great excitement” and even laughter. Gordon both suggests the necessity of white

²⁸³ A character in *Penhally* uses identical language when considering how his family’s slaves left their plantation during the Civil War: “They were, perhaps, like rats, whose instinct told them to desert a sinking ship...” (137).

supervision and resents it as a burden. In fact, Lucy and her sister-in-law Belle both believe that “it might be better...if [the slaves] didn’t come back – ever” (133).

Only one African American character is granted any approval by Gordon, but her characterization of him remains inconsistent.²⁸⁴ While the narrator generally portrays Winston as a faithful house slave, the narrator describes him as laughing “maliciously” when he tells Mrs. Allard of the other slaves’ defection (124). This is a strange reading of his demeanor, as he alone has chosen to forgo freedom to maintain fidelity to his masters (and is building a fire for the Allards’ breakfast as he speaks). Later on, as Mrs. Allard and the rest of the women huddled up against the Yankee threat with Winston for protection, Mrs. Allard thinks to herself that “they could never be assailed by a more grateful odor” (162).²⁸⁵ More offensive than Winston’s “odor” is Mrs. Allard’s attitude: as Lewis points out, “even this unfailing slave is [not] exempt from white aversion.”²⁸⁶

What I want to suggest is that, like Winston, blackness becomes a kind of absent presence – physically there but socially, politically, and economically silenced – in *None Shall Look Back*. Tellingly, this moment of repulsion is the first time in which Mrs. Allard realizes that Winston is present in the room. All of his labors are invisible to whites (i.e., to save the Allard boys from Yankee discovery and to shield women from sexual predation or injury). Furthermore, at this moment in the text, more than half the

²⁸⁴ It is difficult to ascertain whether Gordon’s characterization of white attitudes towards blacks is *intentionally* inconsistent, but as Talley writes, “the accumulated evidence in the novel confirms that Gordon is reflecting her own racial bias rather than purposefully exposing her white characters’ bigotry” (241).

²⁸⁵ Scarlett also makes a denigrating comment about the “niggery smell” of Twelve Oaks’ slave cabins – a smell which contributes to Scarlett’s nausea even as she pillages the departed slaves’ vegetable gardens (427).

²⁸⁶ Lewis, *Entitled to the Pedestal*, 129.

novel remains – but there is almost no reference to African Americans after this, no indication of what happens to Della, to the errant slaves, and so on. Only Winston remains, an almost invisible presence in the background of the Allard family as he maintains his household duties. His only remaining line of dialogue, which occurs near the novel's end, works in service of perpetuating antebellum relations. Though Brackets has been burned down by the Yankees and the Allards are left financially destitute, Winston protects Fount, now insane, from realizing the loss of their way of life. Even as he looks after Fount, crooning, "Come on Marster...come on, less go see 'bout them horses," he still remains in a subordinate position, his "old black face peer[ing] up" at Fount (325). Winston thus is the only black presence allowed in the novel because he enables his own subservience and renders himself invisible.

By attempting to silence, appropriate, and coopt black voice, Mitchell and Gordon's texts obliquely respond to the emergence of black expression embodied by the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s. This immensely dynamic and influential period of black artistic production, with its assertion of race consciousness and pride through literature, art, and music, served as threat to the white supremacy being enacted by Mitchell and Gordon. Thus, while these novels at times acknowledge that blacks have newfound voices (as when Mammy condemns Scarlett and Rhett as trash), they also attempt to contain such expression through their myriad processes of suppressing, appropriating, and trivializing black voice (such as how Mammy fundamentally speaks in service of white aristocratic, antebellum ideologies). Yet the ways in which characters in both texts recognize the power of black counter-expression – Gordon's Winston, though

a trusted slave, is nonetheless potentially full of “malice” – suggests an anxious awareness that their attempts to silence black voice are inadequate.

Mitchell envisions the ideal black as one perpetually in freely willing (and unpaid) service. After Scarlett encounters Tara’s former foreman Sam after the war, “it did not enter Scarlett’s mind that [Sam] was free. He still belonged to her, like Pork and Mammy and Peter and Cookie and Prissy. He was still ‘one of our family’” (782-783). In other words, Mitchell’s narrative reveals that for a black to be part of the white “family,” the status of servitude is a requisite. Furthermore, these faithful blacks must denounce freedom as well. Pork, Dilcey, Peter, Mammy all use the epithet “trashy niggers” to refer to those who desire freedom – the classist, racist term denigrating freedom itself as a low-brow, uncivilized desire (407, 414, 504, 598). Even Sam, whose previous singing of “Go Down, Moses” suggested a kind of radical emancipatory desire, denounces this freedom after experiencing it in the North, and expresses “relief at once more having someone to tell him what to do” (783). Mitchell thus presents Sam’s longing for freedom as quelled by the desire for a return to the paternalistic structure of slavery.²⁸⁷

For Mitchell, freedom poses a disruption to the paternalistic relationship between whites and blacks, and the rise of “negro domination” leads to black degradation. Mitchell thus follows the predominant view of Reconstruction in the early twentieth century, the Dunning School, which presented the era as one of corruption and misrule. Historian William Dunning maintained that freedom was a “monstrous thing” for both whites and blacks as African Americans were incapable of self-governance (“a black skin

²⁸⁷ In this way, he is not unlike the Sam of “Marse Chan,” who longs for the “good ole days” of slavery again.

means membership in a race of men which has never of itself succeeded in subjecting passion to reason”).²⁸⁸ *Gone with the Wind* repeatedly drives home the danger of freedom for African Americans, who are “like monkeys or small children turned loose among treasured objects whose value is beyond their comprehension...they ran wild – either from perverse pleasure in destruction or simply because of their ignorance” (654).²⁸⁹

Though legally free, Mitchell suggests that these gullible African Americans are enslaved by the false ideologies of their “new masters”: corrupt Scalawags and Carpetbaggers who grow “shamelessly rich” off of the “waste and mismanagement and graft” of Reconstruction (904-905). For instance, Tara’s ex-overseer, Jonas Wilkerson, and their neighbor’s Yankee overseer, Hilton, “poison [freedmen’s] minds” by fomenting “hate and suspicion” “in a section long famed for the affectionate relations between slaves and slave owners (521-522). Unlike the altruistic intentions of Gerald and his ilk, these “new masters” manipulate and use African Americans for their own profit, and with little regard for the “children” under their care – only that they continue to vote the Republican ticket. Mitchell transforms African American political involvement into a grotesque spectacle of ineptitude, where illiterate “negroes sat in the legislature” and, instead of passing laws, “spent most of their time eating goobers [peanuts] and easing their unaccustomed feet in and out of new shoes” (904). Their political worth is no better than their economic value. Scarlett dismisses “free darkies” as “worthless,” as they drive

²⁸⁸ Quoted in Foner, *A Short History of Reconstruction*, 258.

²⁸⁹ Mr. Allard also sees black independence as a childish caprice: he compares his runaway slaves to “children...there was a circus in town and they had to go” (136). Mitchell uses near identical phrasing in her description of “free issue niggers” as having “the naïve curiosity of children at a circus parade” (555).

her profit margin down by demanding daily wages, which they squander on liquor and render themselves unable to work (639, 741).

Gordon also posits free African American presence as a menace – once suppressed, now overt – to white existence. Cally, with tears in her eyes, tells her family that there are no negroes they can trust, “not now” (157). Even the faithful Winston is not exempted from her fears. With his “malicious” laughter, he could be a threat as well. Gordon describes the relish with which the Allards’ slaves watch the Yankees plunder and burn down Brackets, and even participate in the looting and drunken debauchery themselves (161-164). Even the Yankee officers – the ostensible enemy of the Confederates – profess the need to stay at Brackets to maintain order and protection from the negroes, showing how racial fears eclipse sectional loyalties (163). Moreover, the Federal Major (who deems the negroes “scum”) admits that “I can’t control them. Nobody can” (158). Cally exclaims that even asking Reuben and Ed, two formerly trustworthy field hands, to cut down logs to rebuild Brackets is asking for trouble: “You saw those drunken negroes stumbling around on the lawn. You’d like to arm them all with axes, I suppose, so they could come here and kills us in the night” (164).

In highlighting ignorance, drunkenness, and violence as inherent traits, Gordon and Mitchell essentialize African Americans as threats to their current society. They also offer solutions in how to deal with this menace; Gordon seeks to remove the threat altogether while Mitchell promotes economic practices of African American subjugation. Gordon envisions another possibility for the future of the African American through her references to Liberia, which speak to a total removal of black presence. Rives’ great-

grandfather, though originally running a tobacco plantation as profitable as Fount's own ancestor, gives up the land and frees his slaves, sending most of them to Liberia (17, 20).²⁹⁰ But perhaps this decision was not as magnanimous or moral as it originally seemed to be, when one considers the founding history of Liberia. The American Colonization Society, founded in 1817, had not only "benevolent" but racist motivations for sending blacks to Africa. As they believed that African Americans presented a threat to American civilization and whiteness,²⁹¹ colonization was seen as advantageous as it would rid the United States of the threat of intermixture of an inferior race. Lucy's comments about blacks as "alien" suggest Gordon's belief that blacks are totally unassimilable. Fount too jokes about one of his neighbor's responses to black expatriation: "'Henry was perfectly agreeable but he didn't see any sense in hiring boats to take them. 'Hell,' he said, 'let the damn negroes walk'" (24). This quotation encapsulates the novel's racism -- the belief in black laziness, the white refusal to aid blacks, a desire for black erasure or expulsion, a death wish for blacks -- all interpreted as "humor." While the Liberia movement was outdated in Gordon's contemporary era, she seems to thus endorse the Great Migration, the period following World War I in which over three million African Americans left the South for the North. Gordon's ideal African American is not Winston, but one who is completely absent altogether ("it might be better...if they didn't come back -- ever").

²⁹⁰ Though a few black laborers remain on Rives' present-day family farm in Georgia, they are largely silent, invisible presences, while the focus on the labor and hard work rests on Rives and his mother.

²⁹¹ By 1865, the ACS had sent over 13,000 blacks there. For more on the American Colonization Society, see Cohen, *At Freedom's Edge* and P. J. Staudenraus, *The African Colonization Movement, 1816-1865* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961).

On the other hand, Mitchell wholly defends the continued presence of African Americans in the South, which she envisions as integral to its economic future. She tempers the threat of free African Americans by imagining their social and economic enslavement via the convict lease system. Its creation after Emancipation enabled the continuation of profit from coerced, unpaid, and overwhelmingly black labor, a practice that Mitchell regards as both economically and socially necessary. In fact, Mitchell demonstrates that the South's industrial future is made possible through a continuation of its agrarian past.²⁹² Scarlett's prioritization of profit over human rights violations is an element not of just convict leasing, but of the system upon which it was founded – slavery – one both exploitative and profitable, or, to be more precise, profitable because of its exploitative nature. For although Mitchell undeniably does not regard convict leasing in a positive light, she demonstrates to her contemporary readers how the modern South's wealth and development is contingent on the continued enslavement of African Americans.²⁹³ And, as the onset of the Great Depression led to the blurring of class lines

²⁹² Scarlett is almost entirely alone in recognizing this unwelcome truth. Just as Gordon and the other Agrarians might refuse to acknowledge the extent to which their vision of a Southern tradition to influence a Southern future was based on racial inequality, so too do most of Mitchell's characters refuse to accept this unpleasant truth. All of the Old Guard renounce convict leasing as a barbaric practice: "everyone said it was wrong to take advantage of the miseries and misfortunes of others." But to profit off of coerced human labor is itself an extension of slavery, a reality that Scarlett recognizes, protesting that "you didn't have any objections to working slaves" (759). Nonetheless, these economic benefits come at a price to Scarlett's already negligible morality. Though Scarlett's foreman Johnnie Gallegher approves of her tactics, he ends up further exploiting the convicts under his control through overwork, starvation, and abuse, and pocketing the money Scarlett sends for their food. Despite Scarlett's outrage, she decides to let his abuse continue, saying that "she couldn't part with [Johnnie] now. He was making money for her" (786).

²⁹³ As Blackmon notes, the 1908 commission by the Georgia legislature uncovered testimonies of rampant abuse and ill-treatment of convicts, nearly all of whom were black, starved, shackled and killed. Many of these corporations were owned by prominent elite Atlantans, such as Joel Hurt, railroad tycoon and real estate developer, and James W. English, owner of Durham Coal and Coke and former mayor of Atlanta (342-351). The revelations did little to disrupt their reputations or profit. Though Georgia's leasing of convicts to private corporations was officially "abolished" in 1909, Blackmon explains that the chain gang still persisted in actuality; "the new post-Civil War slavery was evolving – not disappearing." (352). In

between African Americans and whites,²⁹⁴ the economic tradition of white supremacy through convict leasing must have offered some reassurance to Mitchell's white audience.²⁹⁵

After emancipation, white Southerners attempted to elide their fear of "nigger equality" (which they saw as the profanation of white civilization) by literalizing that fear as the black rape of white civilization's exemplars: white women. As Joel Williamson explains, white "rage against the black beast rapist was a kind of psychic compensation" that stretched across class lines: "if white men could not provide for their women materially as they had done before, they could certainly protect them from a much more

addition, the practice of convict leasing continued in North Carolina, Florida, and Alabama. In fact, by 1930, eight thousand men across 116 counties still labored on chain gangs (371). Involuntary servitude would decrease in the Great Depression due to economic necessity: a 1932 North Carolina Highway Commission report lamented that "the more prisoners that are worked...the less opportunity is given citizens...now seeking relief" (quoted in Lichtenstein, 190). Thus, economic benefits, not moral costs, were driving the call for the total eradication of the system. Not until the 1940s would the federal government, under the guidance of Attorney General Francis Biddle, criminalize involuntary servitude, and in 1951, Congress finally banned the practice outright (Blackmon 351).

²⁹⁴ For more on white men's "status anxiety" during the Great Depression, see Walter Howard, *Lynchings: Extralegal Violence in Florida During the 1930s* (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press, 1995); John Olszowka, Marnie M. Sullivan, Brian R. Sheridan, Dennis Hickey's *America in the Thirties*, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2014); Mirra Komarovsky, *The Unemployed Man and the Family* (New York: Dryden Press, 1940).

²⁹⁵ Gordon cannot imagine the freedom – economic, political, or otherwise – of African Americans. Instead, the economic threat she imagines is that of the rise of a mercantile class, a viewpoint which speaks to her Agrarian background. This threat is embodied in the figure of Joe Bradley, who fixates on the capitalist future rather than on the Cause. He even converts his money into US bonds and transfers it to a bank in Ohio, a sign of his confidence in the failure of the Confederate cause. Worse still is that Fount's own son Jim, married to Bradley's daughter, has rejected the Allards' agrarian principles to embrace Joe's: he insists on payment in Yankee dollars rather than Confederate bills, saying that "there's no use in taking money that ain't worth the paper it's printed on" (331).

Sarah Gardner points out that a late version of the manuscript included a short scene in which Jim invents a mechanical corn shucker and schemes with Bradley to market it nationally; Jim thinks that the "machine...would take the place of five, ten, Lord knows how many men" (quoted in Gardner, 258). This scene demonstrates that "Gordon originally intended Jim to be much more complicit in his conversion to the Yankee worldview" (Gardner 258). The turn from human labor to mechanical production and industrialization demonstrates the future of the New South, one in which even the labor of the land is divorced from man himself, with a machine as intermediary. Jim embraces the capitalist future of the South, one which seems utterly removed from African American presence; he thinks to himself that "I'd rather [oversee the store] than go back to Brackets and fool with a lot of ungrateful niggers" (331).

awful threat – the outrage of their purity, and hence their piety, by black men.”²⁹⁶ The Atlanta Riot of 1906 – a three day onslaught of violence against African Americans that resulted in at least twenty-five deaths and the destruction of black businesses and homes – exemplifies this process by which the threat of black economic and social equality was viciously misrepresented as the crime of rape. For while the riot was ostensibly provoked by the (never substantiated) rumors of a “Negro uprising” and the assault of white women by black men, the actual catalyst for the violence was the potential influence of the black vote in the 1906 gubernatorial election and the economic competition represented by independent black businesses. Leon Litwack reveals that the mob targeted the “most industrious, the most respectable, the most law-abiding, the most accommodating, the most educated” African Americans.²⁹⁷

Mitchell was deeply affected by the riot. Only five years old, she witnessed some of the fighting that took place just beyond her own backyard, and the black brother of her family cook was attacked.²⁹⁸ Mitchell expresses her childhood trauma – and its consolidation of the fear of white female rape and racial violence as a metaphor for the violation of social order – in the infamous passage in which Scarlett, driving her carriage home from a business deal, is assaulted by a black man. While almost every essay on the novel reads this as a “rape scene,” the black “gorilla” who attacks Scarlett seems initially motivated by her wallet, not her body (“she’s probably got the money in her bosom!”).

²⁹⁶ Joel Williamson, *The Crucible of Race*, 115.

²⁹⁷ Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind*, 317.

²⁹⁸ Twenty years later, she would relay her terror: “They fought all day just a block behind our house...I also recall that no sight has ever been so sweet to these eyes as when I crawled out from under the bed where I had prudently taken refuge to see the milita [sic] tramp up Jackson Street and camp on our lawn and the street” (quoted in Pyron, *Southern Daughter*, 32).

But Mitchell's language – his “leering grin” as he tears open her dress “from neck to waist” while his “black hand fumble[s] between her breasts” – rekindles the fear of sexual violation in Scarlett and in the reader (788).²⁹⁹ Scarlett is saved from assault by Sam, who once again serves as the representative of proper African American behavior (complete subservience to his white superiors). Sam's near identical description of Scarlett's attacker as a “black baboon” (788) suggests his own internalization of white racist ideology. Even his “big body crowding her on one side” of the cart after the attack is not figured as a sexual threat; Scarlett realizes that Sam “quickly avert[ed]” his eyes after the assault because her “bare bosom and corset cover were showing” (789).³⁰⁰ The only sanctioned relationship possible for a white woman and a black man is that in which the latter protects and defers to the former's whiteness.

Though Scarlett is later avenged by the Ku Klux Klan, Mitchell complicates the intentions of white Southern men in other references to the attempted violation of white women. Prior to this incident, Tony Fontaine, one of Scarlett's former beaux, flees to Texas after he kills Jonas Wilkerson, Tara's former overseer turned Scalawag government official and profiteer. Ostensibly his primary motivation is because Wilkerson has incited the Fontaines' “drunken buck” of a foreman to make an advance on Tony's sister-in-law (646-7). Tony's true outrage, however, primarily stems not from

²⁹⁹ Yet, in a moment of surely unintentional irony, this threat of theft-as-rape obliquely comments on how Scarlett has stolen the labor of men and worked them for free; though Mitchell never gives the race of the convict laborers, historically the majority of such laborers in the South were black.

³⁰⁰ Nonetheless, this encounter between black man and white woman is charged with erotic possibility that is simultaneously averted. As I discuss later on in this chapter, it is only through Scarlett's relationship with Rhett Butler can the taboo of “black” sexuality be expressed.

the violation (he admits he does not know what was actually said to Sally) but from his and other white Southern men's social and political impotence:

“Now the Yankees are talking about letting the darkies vote. And they won't let us vote. Why, there's hardly a handful of Democrats in the whole County who aren't barred from voting, now that they've ruled out every man who fought in the Confederate Army. And if they give the negroes the vote, it's the end of us...soon we'll be having nigger judges, nigger legislators – black apes out of the jungle.” (646)

Tony's outrage – and the Ku Klux Klan and other forms of extralegal justice – are thus figured as responses to disfranchisement and powerlessness. On the other hand, Scarlett has little interest in the politics of Reconstruction: “what did the ballot matter when bread, a roof, and staying out of jail were the real problems?” (661). As a woman, disfranchisement is not a new injustice. She sees Frank's involvement in the Ku Klux Klan as a direct threat to her economic stability: “now, the Yankees will come and take away my mills and my store and put [Frank] in jail,” she exclaims bitterly (798).

Mitchell thus traces how Scarlett's economic rise by exploiting convict leasing and mastery of African American labor is eclipsed not by the threat of black rape but by the Ku Klux Klan's retaliation against her attacker. For the true economic threat to white men in *Gone with the Wind* is not posed by black men (who are repeatedly described as ignorant and incompetent), but by Scarlett. No longer is Scarlett the independent capitalist who is repeatedly denounced as “unwomanly” (637, 640, 642, 663, 839, 959) and conducts business without male supervision. The rape attempt on Scarlett re-genders her as a woman, a passive, helpless object in need of the Klan's avenging. Mitchell thus figures the threat of rape as a way to limit (the threat of) female freedom and mobility;

the defense of white women acted as a way for white men to make known their own power, and in turn, white women's powerlessness.

Mitchell goes beyond the trauma of black-on-white rape as a metaphor for the defiling of white civilization (a common trope in Southern white supremacist politics and literature such as Thomas Dixon's *Ku Klux Klan* trilogy). Instead, she criticizes the gender politics that justifies the subjugation of white females as their protection. She relays another incident in which a woman was raped by a black male, and "rather than have her appear [in court] and advertise her shame, the father and brother would have shot her" (745).³⁰¹ The complicated commingling of racial, gender, and economic power relations conclusively reinstates white patriarchal authority. Though Faust asserts that "racial fears [were] the basis for reimposing subordination upon white women of the postwar South," I suggest it is not the actual attempted violation by the black beast rapist but the white male deployment of that fear that finally suppresses white women's economic and social independence.³⁰²

While Mitchell is at least initially critical of the assumption of white male mastery over women, Gordon uses the fear of black rape – repelled through the triumph of whiteness – as a means to celebrate that same white male hierarchical protection and authority, necessary to the maintenance of white supremacy. Like Mitchell, she initially warns of the menace that emancipated blacks represent for white civilization. Right after the slaves leave Brackets, the Allard women learn that just ten miles away, a "competent

³⁰¹ "The only decent solution possible," the text explains without any irony whatsoever, was to lynch the negro instead.

³⁰² Drew Gilpin Faust, "Clutching the Chains that Bind," 16.

negro overseer” kidnapped and violated a young girl named Flora (133).³⁰³ Competence is transformed into terrorization, as blacks, now freed from the strictures and structure of slavery, are now capable of not only causing harm to themselves (trampling old men, killing babies, and so on) but whites as well.

Just three pages later, the threat of black rape seems to be realized. Gordon’s narrative inexorably builds tension as a “dark mass” frightens the women on the porch:

A dark mass had detached itself from the low-hanging cedar boughs and was moving slowly toward the house. The scream died in [Lucy’s] throat under the fierce pressure of Cally’s fingers on her arm. The two sat silent watching the dark mass move slowly over the lawn. Then Cally on her feet was whispering: “Get in the house. Quick. We must all get in the house...it was at that moment that the moving mass resolved itself into figures that ran, like dogs, over the lawn. As they gained the gallery in one swift bound, Lucy caught the gleam of eyeballs, saw the gaunt faces under the roping hat brims. (136-137)

Gordon’s narrative evokes the suggestion of black violence, a terror so profound that it renders Lucy voiceless. It is only after she glimpses their faces that the “dog”-like “dark mass” becomes human again. For, as she cries out with hysterical relief, “they’re white, Aunt Cally! They’re *white!*” (137, emphasis Gordon’s). The chapter ends here, with the absolute reprieve of a white presence on the porch, even though this could be the enemy presence of Yankees, who turn up just a few pages later. But their race – not the affiliation, not even the identity of these individuals, who are revealed to be Rives and Fount’s son Ned in the next chapter – is what matters.

³⁰³ A probable nod to Thomas Dixon’s Flora in *The Leopard’s Spots* (1902), another innocent victim of rape. Both *Gone with the Wind* and *None Shall Look Back* are indebted to Dixon’s Clansman trilogy: Mitchell even wrote effusively to Dixon of her love of his books, and performed his plays as a child (*Letters*, 52-53).

In this way, the threat of black assault is transformed into white relief: perceived black rapists are instead white protectors of women and Confederate values. In other words, the trauma of white-on-black rape, transferred into the post-bellum fear of black-on-white rape, transforms into the reinforcement of whiteness. This passage suggests not only another form of black erasure but also that the return to white male protection and aid is what Lucy and the other women need and desire. As Hazel Carby points out in *Reconstructing Womanhood*, while “white men used their ownership of the body of the white female as a terrain on which to politically oppress the black male...white women who felt that caste was their protection aligned their interests with the patriarchal power that ultimately confined them.”³⁰⁴ Such a move is also seen in the second rape scene in *Gone with the Wind*, in which Scarlett is attacked by another “drunken beast,” a “terrifying faceless black bulk” with “large brown hands”: Rhett Butler (937, 933). As Joel Williamson reveals, Rhett is often configured in the text as black in terms of his physiology and temperament. Mitchell makes repeated references to his “brown face” (304, 621, 773, 1030) and many of his negative personality traits – his insolence, idleness, enjoyment of liquor – are stereotypical attributes of African American men.³⁰⁵ As Rhett overpowers the unwilling Scarlett, she is “wild with fear,” a reaction similar to the ostensible black rapist on the road. But her terror soon transforms into desire: “she was darkness and he was darkness...she had a wild thrill such as she had never known; joy, fear, madness, excitement, surrender” (939-940).

³⁰⁴ Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 115.

³⁰⁵ Williamson, “How Black Was Rhett Butler?”, 97-99.

Up until this point, despite her three marriages, Scarlett has felt little sexual desire. Even her love for Ashley Wilkes is characterized by restraint rather than passion. Her status as a “pure” Southern belle seeks to divorce her from her body and her passions and appetites itself. Scarlett is forbidden to eat in public: Mammy tells her that “you kin sho tell a lady by whut she *doan* eat” (77, emphasis Mitchell’s). Yet here those appetites are unleashed in full, appetites figured in terms of “darkness” and blackness.” By turning this sexual encounter (formerly figured in terms of “terror” as in the first episode) into “dark” lust, Mitchell obliquely suggests that it is not potentially a fear of but a *desire* for interracial sex³⁰⁶ – a desire that is defeated by transforming and even domesticating this taboo sexuality into whiteness.

Mitchell displaces the potential for interracial desire onto whiteness alone. As Elizabeth Young writes, “in Rhett and Scarlett, then, Mitchell invents a romantic couple whose racial instabilities function both to energize white sexual fantasy and to control white racial anxiety.”³⁰⁷ That is, Scarlett’s transformation into “darkness” is no longer illicit or threatening, because the “darkness” of sexual passion exists within a legal marriage between two white Southern aristocrats. Furthermore, what is initially figured as rape becomes, at least in Scarlett’s mind, a satisfying sexual experience with “someone she could neither bully nor break, someone who was bullying and breaking her” (940).³⁰⁸

³⁰⁶ To demonstrate Mitchell’s interest in exploring miscegenation and interracial desire, Joel Williamson points out that in 1926, right before she began work on *Gone with the Wind*, Mitchell wrote a 15,000 word novella entitled “‘Ropa Carmagin,” a white lady who falls in love with a mulatto and is driven from her home by her neighbors (“How Black Was Rhett Butler?”, 102-3).

³⁰⁷ Elizabeth Young, *Disarming the Nation*, 272.

³⁰⁸ Of course, critical debates still rage on how to read this sexual encounter as rape or consensual sex. See Tom Kuntz’s “Word for Word. A Scholarly Debate; Rhett and Scarlett: Rough Sex or Rape? Feminists Give a Damn” (*New York Times*, 19 February 1995).

Moreover, she is grateful for it: “he had humbled her, hurt her, used her brutally through a wild mad night and she had gloried in it” (940). Scarlett, the once “unsexed” economic and social maverick is once again reinscribed in the Southern social order of whiteness and femininity, thanks to Rhett’s mastery over her. It is unsurprising that Rhett subsequently coerces Scarlett into giving up her mills – “the tangible evidence” of her economic success, accomplished “unaided and against great odds” (975). Though Mitchell at least initially resists the ways in which white female protectorship is figured on male domination, she finally advocates for such white male domination through her second figuration of rape in the novel.

Ultimately, these novels cannot imagine full female autonomy, as to do so would threaten the maintenance of maintain white supremacy and the subsequent hierarchy of gender relations that white supremacy demands. Perhaps the character who most befits this prototype is Cally Allard in *None Shall Look Back*, whose fierce strength and resilience are channeled solely towards maintaining the white patriarchal authority of the antebellum South. In some ways, Cally seems to be a feminist model. During the war, she is figured as a soldier on the domestic front, “stand[ing] guard” and “striking a military attitude” against returning negroes and Yankees alike (140).³⁰⁹ But after the war, her strength and smarts are dedicated to protecting her father from realizing that he is now landless and penniless. She condemns her brother Jim, now working for his merchant father-in-law Joe Bradley, for his disloyalty to the Confederacy and for only accepting “the enemy’s money”: grinding the bill into the floor, she denounces Jim as “no better

³⁰⁹ White women even appear on the battlefield. Lucy and Rives’ mother Susan tend to the wounded soldiers at Chickamauga; Susan is even regarded as a “captain” (283).

than a spy or a deserter” (330). Even though she acknowledges that “people like [the Bradleys]’ll run the country” (340-1), her energy is concentrated on denying the progress and industrialization represented by the Bradleys and maintaining the vanishing order of her father.

It is worth pointing out that this celebration of antebellum values was already an untenable attitude in the progressive 1930s. This era saw a white women’s movement to assert their own autonomy: the rise of lobbying groups promoting women’s interests, increased participation in the wage force, as well as an increased interracial cooperation between white and black women for social reform.³¹⁰ Yet in celebrating antebellum race and gender relations, Mitchell and Gordon reinforce the strictures of white supremacy and offer their novels as a kind of wish fulfillment for imagined race relations in the Jim Crow era, with African Americans either as continually servile or as an absent presence. Gordon and Mitchell cannot move beyond antebellum race and gender relations in their novels to imagine new possibilities for the New South in which they lived. It is little wonder, then, that Mitchell and Gordon obsessively return back to the past that they seemingly repudiate – or, to paraphrase Mitchell’s famous refrain, perhaps the “tomorrow [that] is another day” proves to be the yesterday of white supremacy.

³¹⁰ Susan Ware highlights feminist advancements in the 1930s: “more women served in high administrative positions in the 1930s than ever before” and were appointed to high positions in government (*Holding Their Own: American Women in the 1930s* [Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982], 89. Ware also points out that by 1940, 13 million women (or 25.4% of all women over fourteen years of age) were part of the American work force (25).

CHAPTER FOUR
“A hope and a doom”: Competing Racial Narratives in William Faulkner’s
The Unvanquished

In one of his lectures at the University of Virginia, William Faulkner revealed that MGM Studios had purchased the film rights to *The Unvanquished*, his series of stories celebrating the boyish hijinks of Bayard Sartoris and his loyal slave, Ringo, under the care of Bayard’s father Colonel John and grandmother Rosa Millard during the Civil War.³¹¹ Though Faulkner received \$19,000 for the film rights (a fortune for the perpetually penniless author), he explained that MGM in actuality “had no intention of making a moving picture out of it.” Instead, MGM’s acquisition of *The Unvanquished* was a bargaining chip in their attempt to gain the studio rights to Margaret Mitchell’s *Gone with the Wind*, which its producer David O. Selznick originally opposed. Only after MGM threatened to use *The Unvanquished* as direct theatrical competition did Selznick capitulate.³¹² That apparently both Selznick and MGM believed *The Unvanquished* could compete with *Gone with the Wind* speaks to its marketability, a term generally inapplicable to Faulkner’s works.

The Unvanquished is unique among Faulkner’s novels as one targeted for and almost entirely derived from texts published for a mass audience. Between 1934 and 1936, six of its seven stories were published in the popular magazines *The Saturday*

³¹¹ Faulkner admitted that he envisioned *The Unvanquished* “as a series of stories” because he deemed it “too episodic to be...considered a novel” (*Faulkner in the University*, Ed. Frederick L. Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner [Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1959], 252). However, for shorthand purposes, I will refer to the overall volume of stories as a novel (pagination from the 1990 Vintage edition).

³¹² Faulkner’s fee was less than the \$50,000 Mitchell received for *Gone with the Wind* (Joel Williamson, *William Faulkner and Southern History* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1993], 260, 256). For his part, Faulkner claimed never to have read *Gone with the Wind*, deeming it “entirely too long for any story” (*Lion in the Garden: Interviews with William Faulkner, 1926-1962*, eds. James B. Meriwether and Michael Millgate [New York: Random House, 1968], 34.)

Evening Post and *Scribner's*,³¹³ and as such were marked by simpler prose, setting and characterization. Faulkner said in his lecture series at UVA that he would recommend *The Unvanquished* to first-time readers of his works because “it’s easy to read. Compared to the others, I mean.” Contemporary reviewers of *The Unvanquished* were in agreement: Dale Mullen wrote in Faulkner’s hometown paper, *The Oxford Eagle*, that “The Unvanquished is a book of wider and more immediate appeal than any other that Mr. Faulkner has written.”³¹⁴ And at first glance, *The Unvanquished* has much more in common with Mitchell’s novel than the rest of Faulkner’s works. It too evinces a sense of nostalgia for the antebellum way of life, articulates the setbacks and triumphs endured by its Confederate protagonists during and after the war, and, as the title of the volume indicates, celebrates the indomitability of the Southern spirit.

However, in this chapter, I want to consider how *The Unvanquished* functions as (to use Ted Atkinson’s terminology) a “cultural artifact” and “a revealing document of American cultural history” in both its novelistic form and the original magazine short stories.³¹⁵ Though Atkinson reads the novel in terms of Faulkner’s economic climate, the Great Depression, I am interested in the problem of race in *The Unvanquished*. To be

³¹³ The first five stories were published in *The Saturday Evening Post*: “Ambuscade,” *Saturday Evening Post* 207.13 (September 29, 1934); “Retreat,” 207.15 (October 13, 1934); “Raid,” 207.18 (November 3, 1934); “The Unvanquished” (titled in the novel as “Riposte in Tertio”) 209.20 (November 14, 1936); “Vendée,” 209.23 (December 5, 1936). The sixth story, “Skirmish at Sartoris,” was published in *Scribner's* 97 (April 1935). Faulkner unsuccessfully submitted “An Odor of Verbena” to publishers as well (Noel Polk, Editor’s Note to *The Unvanquished*, 255-256).

³¹⁴ *Faulkner in the University*, 2. Mullen quotation from the *Oxford Eagle*, 10 February 1938, reprinted in Arthur F. Kinney’s *Critical Essays on William Faulkner: The Sartoris Family* [Boston: G. K. Hall, 1985], 128.)

³¹⁵ Ted Atkinson, *Faulkner and the Great Depression: Aesthetics, Ideology, and Cultural Politics* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 222. Atkinson envisions Bayard’s grandmother, Rosa Millard, as a “Scarlett O’Hara type” who manipulates the ideology of the Southern lady and the respect the role commanded to gain property through illegitimate means; “like Scarlett at the helm of the timber mill, Granny has a grand design on power and profit” (232).

more precise, I identify two competing racial narratives in the novel. One is invested in the recovery of black presence in *The Unvanquished*, and in lamenting the limitations of black freedom and agency, both during the novel's setting of the Civil War and Reconstruction eras, as well as the current political and cultural climate of Faulkner's own 1930s. For instance, Faulkner undercuts the trope of the loyal slave through his creation of Loosh, whose tragically blighted quest for self-emancipation comprises one of the minor plots of the novel.

The second narrative is that of white Southern apologia, which counters and overwhelms the attention to black traumatic experience. For example, Faulkner explores only to revoke the promise of freedom in a failed slave exodus following Sherman's march through Mississippi. Faulkner's vacillation between the two racial narratives is embodied in Ringo, who, I argue, has not just ideological but actual blood ties to whiteness. Yet while Ringo acts as a spokesperson for white supremacy in his youth, as an adult he is silenced by the narrative, diminished in status to remain Bayard's "boy." Faulkner's inability to relinquish the trappings of plantation literature – such as his failure to contend with the history of miscegenation that Ringo embodies – stems not just from generic expectations and limitations (though he, like Charles Chesnutt and Paul Laurence Dunbar, stretches and subverts the genre of plantation fiction). Instead, as he demonstrates throughout the novel, storytelling itself is the privilege of whites in the novel's discourse used to maintain, even enact, white supremacy. For instance, Granny Sartoris and Ringo, despite the latter's enslavement, forges requisition orders to steal supplies from the Yankees and bolster the Confederacy. *The Unvanquished* itself

epitomizes the narrative commandeering of reality (such as instances of Yankee victory or black agency) in the determined attempt to transform defeat and loss into white Southern triumph, however fictional or fleeting. In doing so, Faulkner demonstrates the power of traumatic melancholia – a narrative process of “acting out” – that overrides the possibility of social or racial justice in the white South.

In acquiescence with Faulkner’s self-evaluation of *The Unvanquished* as “trash” and “pulp,” many critics deem *The Unvanquished* as a reductive regurgitation of plantation literature.³¹⁶ For example, Myra Jehlen dismisses his portrayal of the cavaliers of plantation fiction as “uncritical,” even charging him with “failing (or refusing) in this work to distinguish between myth and history,” while Daniel Singal succinctly writes the novel off as a “a vintage Civil War potboiler.”³¹⁷ Criticism of *The Unvanquished* is perhaps all the more pronounced because of its perceived shortcomings in regards to the novel Faulkner was writing concurrently, *Absalom, Absalom!*. Published the year that *Gone with the Wind* won the Pulitzer Prize (and funded by the money Faulkner received from magazine publications of *The Unvanquished* stories), *Absalom, Absalom!* is generally regarded as *The Unvanquished*’s opposite: a scathing critique of the plantation legend that, in its tortuous yet elegant prose, exposes the tragedy and corruption of the antebellum way of life through the Sutpen family’s rise and fall. Richard Gray argues that *The Unvanquished* serves for Faulkner as “a kind of safety-valve, a means of indulging in

³¹⁶ *Selected Letters of William Faulkner*, ed. Joseph Blotner (New York: Vintage, 1978), 84.

³¹⁷ Myra Jehlen, *Class and Character in Faulkner’s South* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1976), 50-51; Daniel Singal, *William Faulkner: The Making of a Modernist* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 221.

forms of closure and...nostalgia that he simply could not and would not entertain in *Absalom, Absalom!*”³¹⁸

To be clear, I am not arguing that *The Unvanquished* is as great a novel (in terms of theme or style) as *Absalom, Absalom!*. Rather, it functions as more than *Absalom, Absalom!*’s “safety-valve” or counterpoint: that is, in Faulkner’s revisions of the published short stories, he moves beyond the generic limitations of the plantation literature format to a greater interrogation of its values. Faulkner might have consciously attempted to market the individual short stories in *The Saturday Evening Post* as a form of popular memory for a mass reading audience. But his revisions of the short stories – and his addition of the last – reveal a much more complicated and even contradictory engagement on his part with Southern history and ideology.

Scholars such as Joanne Creighton and Susan Donaldson have explored the ways in which Faulkner’s revisions of the stories in the novel version complicate the more conventional plots of the stories seen in the *Post* and *Scribner’s*. Donaldson even suggests that these stories function as Faulkner’s own private vengeance on the *Post*. For example, she argues that the final story, “An Odor of Verbena,” insinuates that “reader expectations attuned to tales of adventure and glory can be misleading.”³¹⁹ In Creighton’s

³¹⁸ Richard Gray, *The Life of William Faulkner: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 227. Carolyn Porter in *Seeing and Being: The Plight of the Participant Observer in Emerson, James, Adams, and Faulkner* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1981) similarly writes that “it almost seems as if *The Unvanquished* helped [Faulkner] to write *Absalom, Absalom!* by siphoning off his romantic attachment to the cavalier legends passed down in his own family” (219).

³¹⁹ Susan V. Donaldson, “Dismantling *The Saturday Evening Post* Reader: *The Unvanquished* and Changing ‘Horizons of Expectations,’” *Faulkner and Popular Culture: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha, 1988*, eds. Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1990), 180. In particular, she points to how Bayard’s naïve interpretations of Col. John’s stories are conditioned by his “romantically charged expectations”: such that they do not listen to the specific details of Col. John’s

exploration of Faulkner's revisions of the *Post* and *Scribner's* short stories, she detects two major transformations in terms of the "alteration of the perspective and diction of the narrator, and heightening of the issue of race." Like Creighton, I too examine Faulkner's increased attention to race relations between the Sartorises and their slaves. Yet, while she posits that "many of the revisions emphasize the positive aspects of antebellum life which are being threatened by the disruption of war and abolition," I interpret Faulkner as instead unsettling the "camaraderie" and "mutual concern of blacks and whites," as his revisions expose the subversive agency of the Sartorises' slaves.³²⁰ Faulkner intentionally expresses imaginative contradictions throughout the novel: he draws attention to African American agency (even if he cannot fully imagine it himself) and exposes the falsity of the Lost Cause (though he cannot escape romanticizing it). In doing so, he exposes the limitations and problematics of black freedom (such as voting rights or participation in the army), and the subsequent impossibility of white Southern elites to imagine full social and racial equality in his contemporary climate of Jim Crow.

Bernard DeVoto once wrote that "there are [only] two classes of writers who do not write for *The Saturday Evening Post*: those who have independent means...and those who can't make the grade."³²¹ Faulkner, who did not count himself amongst the former

stories, only believing in the "smell of powder and glory, the elected victorious" adding – that he "know[s] better now" in the revised version of "Ambuscade." Yet while critics like Donaldson, Joanna Creighton (*William Faulkner's Craft of Revision*, [Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1977]), Cleanth Brooks (*William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha County* [Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1963]), and Michael Millgate (*The Achievement of William Faulkner* [New York: Random House, 1966]) all read "An Odor of Verbena" (in which Bayard rejects avenging his father's murder with more murder) as a more progressive vision of the New South, none have pointed out how utterly traditional Bayard remains in terms of race relations.

³²⁰ Creighton, *William Faulkner's Craft of Revision*, 74, 80-81.

³²¹ Bernard de Voto, "Writing for Money," *Saturday Review of Literature*, 29 October 1937.

class, was infamously derisive of the texts he wrote for pay: “As far as I am concerned, while I have to write trash, I don’t care who buys it, as long as they pay the best price I can get.” The *Saturday Evening Post* was the venue through which his fiction could be most broadly dispersed, and for which he would be most handsomely compensated.³²² Under the nearly four decade long editorship of George Harris Lorimer, *The Saturday Evening Post* was America’s most culturally influential magazine, boasting a circulation of about 8 million readers in the mid-1930s.³²³ The *Post* sought to create not just readers but consumers. The third page of Faulkner’s “Ambuscade,” for example, features a sidebar with ads for Jones Dairy Farm sausages, sleep shades, and Rolls Razors, neatly summing up its market—a middle class audience, both male and female, who can afford personal and household luxuries (such as the alleged “thoroughbred of razors”).

Lorimer was acutely aware that he was shaping not only what his readership bought but what they wanted to read as well. The *Post* published a variety of genres (romance, adventure and detective tales, biographies, business treatises, sports columns, and advice columns) all intended “to entertain and to reassure, not to unsettle and to question.” Donaldson explains that the image of the typical *Post* reader was a conservative WASP with an “appreciation of business, hard work, [and] celebration of

³²² *Selected Letters*, 84. *Scribner’s*, on the other hand, while boasting a higher cultural capital, was far less financially lucrative than the *Post*: Faulkner confided to his agent that “I would like for [managing editor Alfred] Dashiell at Scribner’s to see this. But they wont pay much” whereas “we might get \$1000 from the *Post*” (Letter to Morton Goldman, Winter 1933-1934, *Selected Letters*, 77). Faulkner published eighteen of his short stories and novel excerpts in the *Post*, far more than any other magazine.

³²³ Mott, *A History of American Magazines*, Vol. IV, 699. The *New York Times* said *The Saturday Evening Post* “probably had more influence on the cultural life of America” than any other periodical (quoted in Mott, 701).

the past” and American patriotism.³²⁴ In his review of *The Unvanquished*, Dale Mullen noted that “the simple fact that the greater part of this book appeared originally in *The Saturday Evening Post* should be sufficient evidence of [its] intelligibility and morality.” Such a review proves that the *Post* succeeded in its mission to represent itself as a cultural bastion of simple, American virtues.

An examination of the first story, “Ambuscade,” in both *The Saturday Evening Post* and its revision in the novel discloses Faulkner’s complicated negotiation with these values, particularly in how he problematizes racial identity and even the ideology of white supremacy. The story opens simply in the *Post*:

Behind the smokehouse we had a kind of map. Vicksburg was a handful of chips from the woodpile and the river was a trench we had scraped in the packed ground with a hoe, that drank water almost faster than we could fetch it from the well.

This is a direct and descriptive reportage of the events, simplistic in terms of theme and style; the Bayard who narrates is the present-day twelve-year-old character who plays at a fictional Vicksburg. The subject of the story’s introduction is a plural entity (later revealed to be Bayard and Ringo) who acts as one, scraping the earth and filling it with water. In representing the siege of Vicksburg as merely a child’s game – “a handful of woodchips and...a trench scraped into the packed earth” – s Faulkner renders the grandiosity of warfare to mere child’s play.

In the revised version for the novel, Faulkner expands the narrative and temporal scope of the scene. Now Bayard functions as both the present participant and the older, retrospective narrator aware that this prelapsarian South has already fallen:

³²⁴ Susan V. Donaldson, “Dismantling *The Saturday Evening Post* Reader,” 181.

Behind the smokehouse that summer, Ringo and I had a living map. Although Vicksburg was just a handful of chips from the woodpile and the River a trench scraped into the packed earth with the point of a hoe, it (river, city, and terrain) lived, possessing even in miniature that ponderable though passive recalcitrance of topography which outweighs artillery, against which the most brilliant of victories and the most tragic of defeats are but the loud noises of a moment. (12)

Here Faulkner gives a greater sense of distance between the participants. This is no longer a communal “we,” but two separate individuals, “Ringo” and “I.” This sense of separation leads to one of Faulkner’s most prominent themes in the novel: the estrangement between whites and blacks. Moreover, this Bayard is a far more complex narrator (that is to say, a far more typically Faulknerian narrator) who, in his meandering train of thought, has a greater perception of the temporality of time. Now the Battle of Vicksburg’s import is further diminished, as all warfare is; regardless of victory or loss, it is merely “the loud noise[] of a moment.” The War is not current experience, but a recollection. Memory itself becomes “the living map,” something static yet alive.

Faulkner’s focus on the power of imagination (and its attempts to rewrite the past) echoes Bayard and Ringo’s restaging of Vicksburg as both a valiant and lost cause. Adult Bayard is fully aware of the impossibility of Confederate victory, admitting that their mimicry of “furious victory” was itself “a cloth, a shield between ourselves and reality, between us and fact and doom.” For Vicksburg has already fallen (a fact not yet known to Ringo and Bayard), and Pemberton’s surrender to Grant after the seven-week siege

dealt the Confederacy an economic, psychological, and tactical blow from which it never recovered.³²⁵

Though Bayard and Ringo are not yet aware of Pemberton's defeat at Vicksburg, a slave named Loosh somehow has this knowledge. With a triumphant expression, he destroys their "living map" – knocking the woodchips down while announcing, "There's your Vicksburg" (5). Loosh makes it clear that Bayard and Ringo's playacting is founded on real-life stakes, openly exulting in the prospect of Confederate defeat and his own emancipation. In the *Post*, Bayard attempts to distract Ringo from Loosh's unwelcome news:

“Do you reckon [Father] ‘d be away off at Tennessee if there were Yankees at Corinth? Do you reckon that if there were Yankees at Corinth, father and General Pemberton both wouldn’t be here?” I stooped and caught up the dust. But Ringo didn’t move; he just looked at me. I threw the dust at him. “I’m General Pemberton!” I said. “Yaaay! Yaaay!” Then we both began and so we didn’t see Louvinia at all. (12)

Faulkner's expansion of this passage in the novel demonstrates young Bayard's obliviousness about race as well as older, narrator Bayard's unwillingness to acknowledge it. Now, Bayard says:

“Do you reckon he’d be away off at Tennessee if there were Yankees at Corinth? Do you reckon that if there were Yankees at Corinth, Father and General Van Dorn and General Pemberton all three wouldn’t be there too?” But I was just talking too, I knew that, because niggers know, they know things; it would have to be something louder, much louder, than words to do any good. So I stopped and caught both hands full of dust and

³²⁵ Vicksburg was the decisive turning point of the war; President Lincoln said that "the war can never be brought to a close until that key is in our pocket" (quoted in Steven Nathaniel Dossman, *Vicksburg 1863: The Deepest Wound* [Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, LLC., 2014], 4. Both sides knew that whoever controlled Vicksburg controlled the Mississippi River and access to the supplies and troops it could carry. Furthermore, the Mississippi was essentially the dividing line of the two parts of the Confederate States, and after its fall, Texas, Arkansas and Louisiana were subsequently cut off from the rest of the Confederacy.

rose, and Ringo still standing there, not moving, just looking at me even as I flung the dust. "I'm General Pemberton!" I cried. "Yaaay! Yaaay!" stooping and catching more dust and flinging that too. "All right!" I cried. "I'll be Grant this time, then. You can be General Pemberton." Because it was that urgent, since negroes knew. The arrangement was that I would be General Pemberton twice in succession and Ringo would be Grant, then I would have to be Grant once so Ringo could be General Pemberton or he wouldn't play anymore. But now it was that urgent even though Ringo was a nigger too; because Ringo and I had been born in the same month and had both fed at the same breast and had slept together and eaten together for so long that Ringo called Granny "Granny" just like I did, until maybe he wasn't a nigger anymore or maybe I wasn't a white boy anymore, the two of us neither, not even people any longer: the two supreme undefeated like two moths, two feathers riding above a hurricane. So we were both at it; we didn't see Louvinia, Joby's wife and Ringo's grandmother, at all. (6-7)

Irving Howe reads this passage as "a longing in the guise of memory." In fact, it exposes the unrealistic nature of Bayard's racial ideologies.³²⁶ He represents his relationship with Ringo as egalitarian – they share the same breast, bed, and meal – to the point that their racial differences are expunged: "maybe he wasn't a nigger anymore or maybe I wasn't a white boy anymore." He even describes himself and Ringo as "dust-colored," a kind of ambiguous shade that is neither white nor black, but even this is not enough. Bayard must reject race and color altogether – "we were neither...the two supreme undefeated" – transforming himself and Ringo into adjectives or inhuman objects, a repudiation of status and labels.

In truth, Bayard's relationship with Ringo conforms to the benign master/loyal slave system of paternalism in which both have an assigned role to play of superior and inferior. Only a white boy, not his enslaved companion, has the prerogative to assert that

³²⁶ Howe also suggests that this "memory fed by guilt" is "too lovely and in some final sense too real to be discarded entirely" (Irving Howe, "William Faulkner and the Negroes," *Commentary* 12 (1951): 360-361.

he has transcended race. Furthermore, Bayard does not understand Loosh's triumph or what "freedom" means. Bayard reiterates Loosh's declaration to Granny – "[the Yankees] are coming here! They're coming to set us free!" (22) – as a kind of threat or punishment.³²⁷ Bayard's ignorance reveals that he has always been secure in the freedom and triumph granted by the privilege of whiteness. For Bayard gets to play Pemberton twice as frequently as Ringo does; Bayard has partaken of "cokynut cake," while Ringo can only imagine what it tastes like (19); Bayard sleeps in a bed, while Ringo is relegated to a pallet on Bayard's floor (17).

Faulkner nonetheless bestows upon Bayard's narrative a twinge of unease; he is not as blithely unaware of racial difference as he might profess to be. Faulkner's revisions emphasize Bayard's acute awareness about the "urgent" need to reassure Ringo about the inevitable victory of the Confederates. This becomes less a way to calm Ringo's anxieties than a means by which Bayard can assuage his own fears about the loss of white supremacy that Confederate defeat would portend. While Craig Warren suggests this moment embodies Ringo and Bayard's ability to "transcend the limitations of the war itself" and that "they are free to change race, name, and nationality," I would suggest that this is but Warren buying into the fantasy of transcending race that Bayard himself perpetuates.³²⁸ For Ringo's and Bayard's relationship is a continual power struggle. In Faulkner's revised, extended version in the novel, Ringo refuses to accede to Bayard's reassurances that the Confederacy has prevailed until he himself can play Pemberton.

³²⁷ Bayard's childish misunderstanding is nonetheless an accurate fear, as the freedom of blacks does represent a threat to whiteness.

³²⁸ Craig Warren, *Scars to Prove It*, 99.

Ringo therefore empowers himself to explicitly embody white Confederate power as Pemberton (and Bayard is demoted to playing Grant): a reversal of the two's normal positions of power. Ringo's unwillingness to go along with Bayard's scheme until he can win certain concessions points to a kind of limited but clever bargaining power of which Bayard seems to be at least partially aware.³²⁹

Soon thereafter, Colonel John returns to Sartoris to safeguard the household from Yankee invaders and from an equally insidious threat within. He warns the housekeeper Louvinia to watch Loosh, because he will possess knowledge of Yankee whereabouts: "Father said that Louvinia would have to watch him too, that even if he was her son, she would have to be white a little while longer" (21). Colonel John imposes on Louvinia her obligation as a slave to maintain fidelity to her white "family" (that is, her owners), which comes at the expense of negating her own family and race. Furthermore, by Bayard's logic that secret, innate knowledge is a condition of being a "nigger," Louvinia also falls outside this category, for it is not by intuition but careful observation that she can discover Loosh's movements. Hence Louvinia is, as her master orders her to be, "white" rather than black.

The trope of the loyal slave in plantation literature is thoroughly undercut in *The Unvanquished* by Faulkner's portrayal of Loosh, who opposes the cross-racial, collective

³²⁹ Bayard's attempt to gloss over racial differences may not simply be out of boyhood innocence but rather his concerted attempt to excise the threat of what being a "nigger" entails. His sense of egalitarianism is disrupted by his suspicion that "niggers know, they know things": that Ringo might be aware of – and gloating over – Confederate defeat, despite his friendship with Bayard and his professed admiration for Pemberton. Yet who the "nigger" is in this scenario seems unclear. Though Ringo is racially a "nigger," he lacks the requisite knowledge that "niggers" allegedly have, a knowledge that Bayard himself seems to have; it is Bayard who is able to grasp Loosh's news of Confederate defeat, not Ringo.). As I will later discuss, even if Ringo at times appears to be more "white" than "black," so too does Bayard unintentionally imagine himself as black in this early narrative.

fantasy of “we” embodied by Bayard and Ringo. Unlike previous portrayals of traitorous slaves in plantation literature (such as Gus in Thomas Dixon’s *The Leopard’s Spots*), Loosh is not a rapist, murderer, or a violent threat to white civilization. He is not ignorant, either: in a passage that did not appear in the original version of “Raid” published in the *Post*, Faulkner divulges that Loosh is the one who taught Bayard to read (125). In presenting the black slave as the conferrer of literacy, Faulkner reverses the pervasive trope of black obtuseness in plantation fiction. Faulkner also bestows upon Loosh a tragic dignity when, in the climax of “Retreat,” Loosh reveals the location of the buried Sartoris silver to the Yankees. The moment reverses a standard episode in plantation literature, in which the loyal slave protects the household goods against Yankee marauders. By contrast, Loosh’s betrayal of the Sartoris family is portrayed as a willful rejection of the entire system of slavery that has dehumanized him and made him less than a man. As he rides off with the Yankees – his prophecy in “Ambuscade” that “Ginral Sherman gonter sweep the earth and the Race gonter all be free” finally coming to fruition (23) – he transfers the agency from General Sherman and the Yankee troops to himself: “I don’t belong to John Sartoris now. I belongs to me and God” (74).

Loosh’s self-emancipation proclamation justifies his betrayal of the Sartoris silver’s location to the Yankees: “Let God ax John Sartoris who the man name that give me to him. Let the man that buried me in the black dark ax that of the man what dug me free” (76). He interprets John’s ownership of the silver to be as specious as his ownership of humans, insinuating that for black slaves to be asked to defend white wealth (one form of property produced by other property) is an unethical farce. Furthermore, Granny had

forced the other slaves and him to bury the silver, recover the silver, drag it up to her room, haul it back down to the wagon (37-45) – an exhaustive sequence that discloses the extent to which black bodies are coerced under white demands. Loosh imagines the process of unburying and recovering the silver as similar to his own status of self-recovery, in which slavery constitutes a state of burial and freedom a physical emancipation from this metaphorical condition. And his triumphant, poignant statement that “I belongs to me and God” reveals Faulkner’s recognition that plantation literature – with its depiction of the mutual, paternalistic relationship between African American slaves and their white masters – is as specious as the logic of slavery itself. However, by the novel’s end, Loosh is back at Sartoris, currying the horses in the stable as if he had never left (242): a silent return to the “man that buried me in the black dark.” And Bayard’s failure to comment on what has befallen Loosh between his assertion of selfhood in “Retreat” and his return to this place in which that selfhood was denied indicates the extent to which white narrative and ideological concerns limit the possibility of black agency and freedom in the post-Civil War era.

Furthermore, Loosh is seemingly unique in his emancipatory desires. His betrayal of the silver is seen as foolishness and treason by the Sartorises, who interpret his yearning for freedom as drunkenness (4, 22): a mechanism by which they can dismiss his emancipatory desires as vice. Bayard, Granny, and Ringo denigrate his assertion of self-ownership, referring to him as a “bastud” – a favorite curse of Bayard that here seems to comment on Loosh’s illegitimate status as a man (75). Even Loosh’s wife, Philadelphia, is reluctant to pursue freedom, though she, unlike Louvinia, chooses not her white family

but her husband: “he my husband. I reckon I got to go with him.” Nonetheless, she expresses her own misgivings about freedom. “Cringing” and “crying,” she says that “Fore God, Miss Rosa...I tried to stop him. I done tried” (76).

Though Faulkner portrays the rest of the slaves on the Sartoris plantation to be seeming adherents to the system of paternalism -- Louvinia encourages Rosa and the boys to “whup” her son for his desertion (“take that pairsawl and wear hit out on him!” [79] – intimations of black subversion can be glimpsed. An earlier remark of Louvinia’s suggests her actions may be a self-interested performance rather than an actual investment in the maintenance of white supremacy. For after Loosh tells Bayard and Ringo that “the Race gonter all be free,” Louvinia gives him a beating of her own, “hit[ting] Loosh across the head hard” and exclaiming, ““You black fool!...Do you think there’s enough Yankees in the whole world to whip the white folks?”” (23). Perhaps Louvinia is just hedging her bets, siding with whom she believes will inevitably win the war – “the white folks.” Similarly, Philadelphia’s fears about emancipation seem not to be anguish about leaving her owners but the more pragmatic fear that “whut [the Yankees] tole him [about freedom] cant be true” (74).

Another seemingly innocuous example of slave resistance is conveyed in “Ambuscade,” as Colonel John, Bayard, Ringo, and Loosh and Joby build a stock pen to hide their animals from potential Yankee invaders. Joby and Loosh’s presence seems more a hindrance than an aid, to the point that Colonel John must perform the majority of the labor: “Father was everywhere...racking the rails into place while Joby and Loosh were still arguing about which end of the rail went where” (11-12). This performance of

African American incompetence could be a tacit rebellion against white interests.

Nonetheless, this failed effort – one which might reinforce racist stereotypes – illustrates the limitations of black efforts to combat white supremacy.

Following Loosh's defection, Granny's ominous prophecy of "misery and starvation" comes true. In "Raid," Bayard, Ringo and Granny, in pursuit of the Yankee troops for their lost possessions, encounter a mass of self-freed slaves with "an impulse to move which had already seethed to a head...reasonless, following and seeking a delusion, a dream...blind to everything but a hope and a doom" (81). Bayard's use of oppositional terms – "delusion" and "dream," "a hope and a doom" – represent opposing white and black interpretations of the slaves' journey towards freedom. The first is the black interpretation of their journey as an Exodus. This is an overtly typological interpretation of their emancipation, envisioning themselves as akin to the Israelites crossing the Jordan into their promised land, as in the Old Testament book of Joshua.³³⁰ Loosh has already invoked this Biblical rhetoric at the end of "Retreat," as he announces his intent to "cross Jordan" with General Sherman as his Moses (91). And at first, even Bayard is swept away by the power and single-minded resolution of this vision. He describes them in distanced but almost awestruck terms: "an infiltration of floodwater" with a "slow and ruthless power [that] gather[s] you in and sweep[s] you remorselessly on" (102).

The power of this desire for freedom – such that it blocks out white presence ("mostly they did not even look at us. We might not have even been there" [103]) – represents a threat that must be eradicated. Faulkner soon reveals the white dismissal of

³³⁰ For more on slaves and Biblical parallelisms, see Levine, Genovese.

the exodus as a “delusion” (81) and a “doom” to be the legitimate interpretation. For awaiting the slaves is no miraculous crossing into the Promised Land. Instead, they are just moving from Alabama to Tennessee (or one Confederate state to the next). In an ironic twist, Granny, the white Southern lady, assumes the role of savior during the exodus. Though an ailing negro woman, child in tow, tells Granny that “hit’s Jordan we coming to. Jesus gonter see me that far,” it is not Jesus but Granny who carries her along in the wagon and gives her bread to eat (85). Furthermore, Drusilla’s sardonic commentary that the runaway slaves are merely “waiting for a chance to drown in homemade Jordan” (101) proves prescient. The slaves are barred from crossing the Tennessee River, their “homemade Jordan,” by their seeming redeemers, the Yankees, who instead blow the bridge up.

After the chaos of the explosion has diminished, the slaves are far from free. When Granny demands the two mules Ole Hundred and Tinny and the single chest of silver confiscated by the Yankee troops, she is instead, through a miscommunication with the Yankee officers, given ten chests of silver, a hundred and ten mules, and an equal number of runaway slaves. Tellingly, the Yankees bemoan the loss of their supplies, minus the slaves; the orderly comments that “I guess the General will be glad to give them twice the silver and mules just for taking that many niggers” (109-110). Sure enough, they are given “another hundred with [the General’s] compliments” (111): an ironic rejoinder to Loosh’s declaration “Let God ax John Sartoris who the man name that gave me to him” (76).

But Faulkner's portrayal of these slaves as passive, worthless burdens grateful for white mastery (promising to "mind [Granny] from now on," they all seem to obey her orders to "go home" [115], that is, back into reenslavement) rewrites the role of slave agency in influencing the outcome of the Civil War.³³¹ As historians Ira Berlin, Barbara J. Fields, Steven F. Miller, Joseph P. Reidy and Leslie S. Rowland explain, some Union commanders objected to slave refugees, arguing that they blocked roads, impeded army movement, and spread disease. Nonetheless, contraband were considered huge assets for the Union army, striking both a psychological and strategic blow against the Confederacy.³³² On top of demoralizing Confederates, who lost their sense of authority and their primary labor force, the exodus of slaves to the Union Army enabled the white soldiers to utilize them as laborers, scouts, ditch diggers, road builders; even black women were utilized as cooks and laundresses. Furthermore, many male slaves – including potentially Loosh – enlisted with the Yankees; in Mississippi alone, 18,000

³³¹ Faulkner similarly denigrates the role of negro soldiers in WWI in *Flags in the Dust*, another novel examining the Sartoris family and originally published in a highly edited form as *Sartoris* (1929) (not until 1973 would *Flags in the Dust* be published in its original form). Though Caspey (Simon's son in this novel) boasts that "it wuz de cullud soldier saved France and America bofe," he has spent the war not fighting but by playing craps and hiding in foxholes. His laziness and ineptitude in war is alarmingly translated to his civilian life: he refuses to obey white directives, and – even more alarmingly – announces his intentions towards white women: "I got my white in France, and I'm gwine git it here, too" (592). However, Caspey's short-lived rebellion is easily quashed by Bayard. Feeble and deaf as he may be, Bayard still has the strength and the hearing capability to hear and combat the threat to white supremacy. After Caspey refuses to perform his chores and, moreover, refers to Bayard contemptuously as "big boy," Bayard "reached [for] a stick of stove wood from the box at his hand and knocked Caspey through the opening door and down the steps at his father's feet." Put literally in his place by Bayard, this incident is a staging of how black defiance is easily tamed by strong white authority.

³³² Berlin, et al., *Slaves No More*, 43-47.

men (about one fifth of all military-age black men) enlisted in the Federal ranks.³³³ As W.

E. B. Du Bois writes in *Black Reconstruction*:

the freedmen, far from being the inert recipients of freedom at the hands of philanthropists, furnished 200,000 soldiers in the Civil War who took part in nearly 200 battles and skirmishes, and in addition perhaps 300,000 others as effective laborers and helpers. In proportion to population, more Negroes than whites fought in the Civil War...yet one would search current American histories almost in vain to find a clear statement or even faint recognition of these perfectly well-authenticated facts.³³⁴

Faulkner's portrayal of the slaves as passive and inert reaffirms his skepticism in the possibility of full black independence and agency. In his later lectures at UVA, he expresses his doubts about the potential for actualized African American freedom, even nearly a century after the setting of these stories. Though he acknowledges white culpability in the lack of African American progress, saying that "the white race can never really know the Negro, because the white man has forced the Negro to be always a negro rather than another human being in their dealings," nonetheless

the Negro[] is not yet capable of, or refuses to accept, the responsibilities of equality. So we, the white man, must take him in hand and teach him that responsibility...let us teach him that, in order to be free and equal, he must first be worthy of it, and then forever afterward work to hold and keep and defend it. He must learn to cease forever more thinking like a Negro and acting like a Negro. This will not be easy for him.³³⁵

For all of his recognition of white culpability in the past and present of race relations, Faulkner cannot escape the strictures of paternalistic logic (his advocacy for the necessity

³³³ Ibid., 130. By the end of the Civil War, 179,000 blacks had donned the Yankee blue, despite unequal pay and distribution of duties (206, 220-221).

³³⁴ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 587.

³³⁵ *Faulkner in the University*, 210-211.

of white men “teaching” blacks how to behave) which in turn limit him from recognizing the humanity of African Americans.

In *Shadow and Act*, Ralph Ellison castigates Faulkner on this very issue, in particular noting the “obscurity” of Ringo giving his “loyalty...where [his] humanity is unrecognized.”³³⁶ Yet in “Raid,” Ringo too does not recognize the humanity of other African Americans. He regards the slaves’ re-enslavement not as a tragedy but an annoyance, grumbling to Granny and Bayard, “whut we gonter do with all these niggers?” (114). Tellingly, he regards himself as part of the “we,” well removed from the dependent “niggers” whom he is in charge of. After Granny dismisses a slave from her herd to run an errand, Ringo announces that he is glad to be “shed of...one more mouth to feed” (117). Ringo’s comments indicate that he believes himself to be imbued with whiteness and the privileges that that status grants.

At times Ringo seems to be more “white” – or at least, more fully aligned with whiteness and its interests – than Bayard himself. In “Riposte in Tertio,” set in the fall and winter of 1864, he is the instigator of a complicated requisition scheme to steal mules and supplies from the Yankee troops, thereby thwarting the efficiency of the troops sent to free him and his race. Unlike Loosh, he looks for Yankee troop movement not in search of freedom but in search of more of their mules to acquisition. And while literacy was forbidden to slaves,³³⁷ Ringo expressly learns to read and write not to forge passes for himself or other runaway slaves but to imitate Yankee generals’ signatures for their mule requisition scheme on the letterhead he has stolen.

³³⁶ Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: Vintage, 1953), 43.

³³⁷ See Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 561-566.

Ironically, it is in the preservation of white Confederate interests that Ringo's agency and cunning assert themselves most predominantly. While Granny initially ascribes the requisition order to "the hand of God," Ringo boasts of his own instrumentality in putting the scheme together: "Hah...whose hand is that?" (112-114). Ringo takes an active role in this scheme, while relegating Bayard to a subordinate position; Bayard says that Ringo "had even got to treating me like Granny did – like he and Granny were the same age instead of him and me" (126). He even orders Bayard around – "Get the pen and ink" (127) – a terse command that echoes those commands given to him by his white superiors and owners. Notably, while Bayard's discontent is registered on the narrative level, he does not outwardly express his dissatisfaction to Ringo or Granny, indicating the full reversal of authority and power. In another none-too-subtle moment, Ringo literally takes the reins away from Granny while Bayard is reduced to riding in the back of the wagon (115).

What I want to suggest is that Faulkner intimates Ringo is not just Bayard's slave companion but his unacknowledged brother as well. Ringo's closeness with the white Sartoris – unlike the other slaves, he even calls Granny "Granny" instead of "Miss Rosa" – suggests a kind of intimacy and privilege that is tied not just to ownership but to blood as well. For example, in the novel, Faulkner adds repeated references to Colonel John's pronouncement that Ringo is smarter than Bayard (81, 99, 125), implying a closer, preferential relationship between Col. John and Ringo than seen in the *Post* stories. Even Ringo's swaggering bravado in front of the Yankees – commanding them for extra horses, even when the order is for mules (116) – echoes the dashing exploits of Colonel

John himself, who, for instance, puts on the persona of an imbecile to escape Yankees at Sartoris (73). In these moments Ringo seems much more like the heir of Sartoris's cunning and derring-do than Bayard.

Ringo even accompanies Bayard on the mission to avenge Granny's death at the hands of the marauder Grumby and his men – an act of vengeance given to kinsmen. In fact, Ringo plays as important a role in avenging Granny's death as Bayard, a detail overlooked by previous critics. For although Ringo does not wield the gun that finishes off Grumby, he notably draws first blood. After Grumby has already shot at Bayard twice, the two white men wrestle on the ground for control of Bayard's gun. While Bayard is at risk of losing his weapon – “I could hear my arm socket, and I thought *In a minute I will hear my fingers breaking, but I have got to hold onto it* [the gun]” – Ringo comes to the rescue, straddling Grumby's back and stabbing him with his pocket knife (183, emphasis Faulkner's). Buck McCaslin's bellow of approval at “Vendée's” end – “Aint I told you he is John Sartoris' boy? Hey? Aint I told you?” (186) – is, I suggest, Faulkner's sly joke that *Ringo* is John Sartoris's boy: courageous, quick to act, cunning, capable of defending his family's honor. Not for nothing does Bayard note that “no matter what might happen to either of us, I would never be The Sartoris to him” (215).

Despite Ringo and Bayard's closeness, or perhaps because of it, the reader can glimpse Bayard's attempts to disavow the threat that their blood relationship implies. (He even identifies Colonel John's body-servant Simon as Ringo's father, a man with whom Ringo never interacts in the novel [17].) And though Bayard would have been killed in the altercation with Grumby without Ringo's intervention, the latter's heroism is

undercut by Bayard's comical and pejorative comment that Ringo's expression is "exactly like a frog, even to the eyes" (183): a premonition of the tension between the two that will arise. By "An Odor of Verbena" (set in the mid-1870s), Bayard has fully developed into a racial conservative, deeming "outrageous" Ringo's "assurance gained from too long and too close association with white people" (218). What was admirable or only potentially threatening as an adolescent – the command and tenacity that enabled him to guide Granny's mule requisition scheme – is "outrageous," even offensive for a black man to possess, at least in the eyes of a white man. Counter to Bayard's previous belief that their racial difference was of no import ("the color of our skins...didn't count with us" [81]), now he believes that their closeness was deleterious to Ringo – and, the narrative intimates, himself.

My interest in pointing out Ringo's potential Sartoris blood is tied to Faulkner's overall obsession with miscegenation in white Southern families in his fiction: one which reflects not the racist, paranoid, black-on-white rape fantasies of his contemporaries (such as Thomas Dixon or Margaret Mitchell) but the unacknowledged historical reality of miscegenation as the unequal power exchange between white master and female slave, an act enabled by the legal and social denial of black humanity. As Eric Sundquist notes, in other novels, Faulkner explores "the debacle of miscegenation" as the "curse and sin" that brings not just individual families but the South itself to collapse.³³⁸ I should clarify that Faulkner's Sartoris genealogy is not entirely consistent across his works involving the Sartoris clan, but the very erasure or replacement of certain characters (such as Ringo

³³⁸ Eric Sundquist, *Faulkner: The House Divided* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 124.

in other works) or revision of others' histories is in itself evocative of the blurred or repudiated genealogies of miscegenated families across the South.

In *Flags in the Dust*, the first novel Faulkner wrote about the Sartoris family (which takes place in the post-WWI years), Faulkner implies that Bayard and Simon's relationship is linked by blood. Though modified from his appearance in *The Unvanquished*,³³⁹ Ringo's alleged father Simon takes full advantage of his paternalistic relationship with Bayard. After he embezzles money from his church, he assumes Bayard will repay the funds: "Now, Cunnel...you aint gwine let dem town niggers 'cuse a member of yo' fambly of stealin', is you?" (738). While Simon's death at the novel's end is scarcely remarked upon and goes unmourned (unlike Bayard's own death midway through), Faulkner insinuates that Simon is also, as he puts it, "a member of [the] fambly" not just figuratively but literally. After Jenny Du Pre, Bayard's aunt, hears the news, she thinks to herself; "Well, that *is* the last one of 'em" (867).³⁴⁰

Similarly, in "There Was A Queen,"³⁴¹ a short story published in *Scribner's* in 1933, depicts the final collapse of the Sartoris family in the 1920s, with Jenny's death.

³³⁹ In *Flags in the Dust*, Simon was only three years old when he witnessed his grandfather Joby bury the Sartoris silver (571). Ringo does not appear in *Flags*; instead, Simon's son is the overly bold Caspey, who is also put in his "place" by Bayard (see footnote 43).

³⁴⁰ Though she immediately repudiates the thought – "But no, he was hardly a Sartoris: he had at least some shadow of a reason, while the others....." (867) – the "reason" for his death is less Simon's than Faulkner's himself. As Pamela Rhodes notes in "Who Killed Simon Strother, and Why?: Race and Counterplot in *Flags in the Dust*," *Faulkner and Race: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha*, 1986, eds. Doreen Fowler and Ann J. Abadie (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1987), "it is Faulkner, then, who steps in as the authoritarian author, with his own stick of stove wood, to hit an awkward character over the head and murder him" (108). Rhodes argues that Simon, as exploiter of white paternalistic pride and bankroller of black business, represents an alternative future of the Southern black that Faulkner cannot fully allow himself to imagine.

³⁴¹ First published in *Scribner's* XCIII (January 1933): 10-16. A preliminary version entitled "Through the Window" was rejected by *Scribner's* in 1929 (Theresa M. Towner and James B. Carothers, *Reading*

While in *Flags in the Dust*, Elnora is described as “the tall yellow daughter” of Simon, the short story divulges – somewhat – that Elnora is an unacknowledged Sartoris herself, and that Bayard is her half brother, “(though possibly but not probably neither of them knew it, including Bayard’s father)” (571). The obliqueness of Faulkner’s language in this parenthetical aside demonstrates the layering of truth and denial surrounding the miscegenated family lines of the white Southern family. As John T. Matthews notes, “if ‘possibly but not probably neither of them knew it,’ then the narrator is uneasily, indirectly asserting that Elnora and Bayard likely *do know* that they are brother and sister.”³⁴² Faulkner muddles Colonel John’s presumable knowledge of his black offspring with a convoluted schema of negations and contingencies, and ends in referring to him as “Bayard’s father,” not Elnora’s: an elision that epitomizes the legal and social reality of race relations across the South.

Faulkner further addresses the open secret of miscegenation in *The Unvanquished* through his inclusion of characters whose own miscegenated family histories encompass two of his other works, *Go Down, Moses* and *Absalom, Absalom!*. In “Retreat,” Faulkner relays the history of reluctant slaveholders Buck and Buddy, whose treatment of their slaves is likened to “a game with rules” (47); they sleep in a slave cabin while their slaves are “locked” in the big house (and easily escape from the back, a ritual in which both slave and slaveholder are aware of its strictly symbolic nature). Similarly, Thomas Sutpen, the main character around whom *Absalom, Absalom!* revolves, appears

Faulkner’s *Collected Stories* [Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2006], 287). Pagination from *Collected Stories* (New York: Vintage, 1977), 727.

³⁴² John T. Matthews, *William Faulkner: Seeing Through the South* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 15.

momentarily in “An Odor of Verbena” as a man too singlehandedly focused on his own design to join Sartoris’s nightriders.

In these already inscrutable and tortuous texts, Faulkner’s language become most indecipherable around the white characters’ traumatic discovery of incestuous miscegenation at the heart of their families’ histories. In *Absalom, Absalom!*, Shreve McCannon and Quentin Compson finally conclude that the mystery of why Sutpen’s son Henry shoots his friend and sister’s fiancé Charles Bon is because Bon is his unacknowledged, black brother. As Bon bitterly puts it, “it’s the miscegenation, not the incest, which you cant bear” (285). Though Henry attempts to acknowledge Bon as his brother, Bon repudiates that relationship: “No, I’m not. I’m the nigger that’s going to sleep with your sister” (286). As Bon knows, the status of being a “nigger” cancels out all other possible relationships: brother, friend, husband. Fittingly, Henry’s murder of Charles is deemed in the novel as “almost a fratricide”(10): a not-quite disclosure that manifests the barriers between whiteness and blackness.

In *Go Down, Moses*’s “The Bear,” Buck and Buddy’s descendant Ike McCaslin struggles with the unwanted knowledge he encounters in their plantation ledgers. Here Faulkner’s language is at its most convoluted and circuitous, as sentences spiral into paragraphs and then into pages of text, baffling and thwarting the reader’s attempts at cognition at every turn. By contrast, Buck and Buddy’s notes are frustratingly terse, written in crabbed, barely decipherable handwriting, similarly defying access to the information at the heart of the ledgers: that a slave, Eunice, has drowned herself because her daughter, the product of a relationship with their master, Cass McCaslin, has herself

had a son, Tomey's Turl, with Cass. This knowledge of double incest, sexual exploitation, and willful denial of these blacks' humanity echoes through the generations of the white branch of the McCaslin family ("who in hell ever heard of a niger drowning him self," muses Buddy in the ledgers³⁴³, while Cass merely settles a sum of money on his unacknowledged black son).

I suggest that the presence of miscegenation is further concealed in *The Unvanquished* than in Faulkner's other novels in part because of the generic limitations of plantation fiction. After all, magazine stories written deliberately for a popular audience with particular expectations and conventions could hardly include anxious revelations – however coded – about the reality of miscegenation in the antebellum past. Nonetheless, Faulkner deploys similar narrative strategies of repudiation and rejection in *The Unvanquished* as a means by which Bayard will attempt to elide his uneasy knowledge of Ringo's kinship. Though Bayard does not kill Ringo literally, as Henry Sutpen does, or try to buy him off, like Cass McCaslin, he destroys their bond by denying Ringo's humanity. In "An Odor of Verbena," Bayard once again sets out to confront the murderer of his relative: in this case, Colonel John, shot by his former business partner Ben Redmond. Once again, Ringo announces his intention to accompany Bayard, carrying a pistol which Bayard identifies as "probably the one we had taken from Grumby the day we killed him," the weapon that effectually symbolizes his own birthright. But Bayard as Colonel John's legitimate, recognized heir, repeatedly repudiates that right:

³⁴³ Faulkner, *Go Down, Moses, and Other Stories* (1942), (New York: Vintage International, 1990), 256.

“No you aint,” I said.
 “Yes I am.”
 “No you aint.” So I walked on... (246)

The terseness of this exchange – each word a simple antithesis of the declaration of the other – is inevitably won by Bayard, who possesses the privileged status of legitimate kinship and whiteness.³⁴⁴ In doing so, Bayard denies Ringo the privilege of kinship to whiteness that killing Redmond would entail. Bayard’s verbal and social negation reduces Ringo to his “boy” (212-213): a servile, silent figure for the remainder of the novel whose only purpose is to obey and tend to his white master (251-252).

Fittingly, halfway through “Skirmish at Sartoris,” Ringo asks Bayard, “Do you know what I aint?...I aint a nigger anymore. I done been abolished” (199). The idea that the status of being a “nigger” can be “abolished” is, as he and Bayard both know, an absurdity. Instead, when Ringo says that “they [there] aint no more niggers, in Jefferson nor nowhere else,” he seems to be pointing out the difference between an imaginary political status of “freedom” and the actual status of African Americans in Jefferson and everywhere else: to continue to be used, abused, silenced. As Patricia Yaeger writes, “Faulkner’s little joke has a devastating ring”: Ringo’s misstatement of his “abolition” (his nullification) instead of his “emancipation” (his freedom) signifies an ending for African Americans rather than a beginning.³⁴⁵ Ringo’s comment on being “abolished” –

³⁴⁴ This moment, too, mirrors Charles Bon’s self-negation in *Absalom, Absalom!*: “No, I’m not” versus “No, you aint.”

³⁴⁵ Patricia Yaeger, “Faulkner’s ‘Greek Amphora Priestess’: Verbena and Violence in *The Unvanquished*,” *Faulkner and Gender: Faulkner and Yoknapatawpha*, 1994, eds. Donald M. Kartiganer and Ann J. Abadie, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996), 218. Yaeger explores the other “battle” taking place in “Skirmish”: that of Southern principles of purity and womanhood” (192) which ends in the coerced marriage of Drusilla and Colonel John by her mother. See Richard Gray, *The Life of William Faulkner: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994) and Brooks for more on Drusilla and gender relations.

erased, removed – proves far more prescient than he perhaps realized. To be a nigger is a kind of negation, a lack (of social, legal, economic rights, or, as Loosh put it so many years before, a burial “in the black dark.”

The title of “Skirmish at Sartoris” suggests that although the Civil War is over (the story takes place in the fall of 1865), the battle over racial and regional supremacy continues; now, though, as Ringo puts it, “stid of the gun [the Yankees] got a clutch of [patents] in one hand and a clutch of nigger voting tickets in the yuther” (199). The position being so fiercely contested is the relatively minor position of Town Marshal, for which the Republican candidate is Uncle Cash, a man who “druv the Benbow carriage twell he run off with the Yankees two years ago” (199). Faulkner compounds Cash’s unsuitability for this political position by rendering him illiterate; Cash can profligately distribute scrip dollars but cannot even write his own signature, only “a big sprawling X” (199).³⁴⁶ Uncle Cash scarcely lives up to the absurd grandiosity of his name; one can sense the irony dripping off of Colonel John’s tongue when he uses the honorific “Honorable Cassius Q. Benbow” (210).

Faulkner indulges in the kind of racist rhetoric of plantation fiction that perpetuates the gross inferiority of African Americans in this story, portrayed not as political agents but as pawns manipulated for Northern, Republican interests. He depicts the would-be African American voters on Election Day as a docile, easily controllable

³⁴⁶ Nonetheless, Cash’s power to distribute the scrip dollar – a kind of unofficial currency – speaks to the white anxiety over the ruination of the postwar Southern economy through the unscrupulous overspending of funds by those ill-equipped to control them. In *The Negro: The Southerner's Problem* (1904), Thomas Nelson Page alleged that “the eight years of Reconstruction possibly cost the South more than the four years of war had cost her. To state it in mere figures, it may be said that when the eight years of Negro domination under carpet-bag leaders had passed, the public indebtedness of the Southern States had increased about four-fold” (44-45).

“herd”: “the crowd of niggers kind of huddled beyond the hotel door with six or eight strange white men herding them” (206). Faulkner depicts the Northern carpetbaggers Burdens’ protectorship of the Negro voters from Southern white interference in such a way that it invokes slave ownership: “the Burdens already had their nigger voters camped in a cotton gin on the edge of town under guard” (203). This is a pointed image of continued black enslavement at the site that historically transformed their labor into commodity and white profit, now under Northern control. Cash’s identity – or lack thereof – is only made clear by the literacy of the unseen but undoubtedly Yankee Republican, who has written his name neatly above the “X.” Faulkner renders the black community almost completely extraneous: what is an even greater, more insidious threat is who controls the black figurehead of power. This control is easily resumed by white Southern men. Just as Granny tamed the rebellious negroes at the end of “Raid” and returned them to their masters, so too does Colonel John tame the threat of “negro domination” by shooting the Burdens and taking control of the ballot box.³⁴⁷

In “Skirmish at Sartoris,” Faulkner effectively perpetuates the social disfranchisement of African Americans through his cheery celebration of voter fraud and intimidation. Yaeger notes that “even the most minimal power of inscription is stolen from the black community” with little condemnation on Faulkner’s part; “Faulkner’s text seems determined to ride over these voting men’s bones with the nonchalance of Granny’s wagon when it crushes black women and children en route to Yankee silver.”³⁴⁸ The “election” is carried out in what Faulkner’s characters might consider a counter-farce

³⁴⁷ The story is retold from their relative Joanna Burden’s perspective in *Light in August* (1932).

³⁴⁸ Yaeger, “Faulkner’s ‘Greek Amphora Priestess,’” 218-219.

to the absurdity of black enfranchisement. George Wyatt writes all the ballots and assures them after the “vote” has been carried out that “you needn't bother to count them...they all voted No” (210). Such a situation was far from outdated in Faulkner’s day; voting discrimination was very much a social reality in the South during the first half of the twentieth century. For example, though the U.S. Supreme Court struck down Oklahoma’s usage of grandfather clauses as unconstitutional in *Guinn v. US* (1915), Oklahoma quickly invalidated the ruling by passing a law that automatically registered all those who had been able to vote in 1914, when the grandfather clause had still been in effect.³⁴⁹ Disfranchisement measures such as these were so effective that Southern blacks were essentially barred from local, state, and national politics until the civil rights movement of the 1960s.³⁵⁰ Tellingly, the story ends with the Confederate war cry ringing over the Sartoris plantation: a celebration of the continued triumph of Southern white supremacy over the threat of Yankee and black intervention.

I do not mean to imply that Faulkner was a racist or an apologist for white supremacy. Instead, his work manifests the impossibility of full racial and social equality both in the setting of the novel and in his own contemporary climate. Even as his work tentatively divulges the potential of African American subversive agency on both

³⁴⁹ In doing so, as Richard Vallely points out, the state continued to disfranchise black citizens “by setting an impossible condition for their acquisition of registered status” – a period of only twelve days (*Two Reconstructions: The Struggle for Black Enfranchisement* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010], 141). Not until 1939 would the Supreme Court intervene; in *Lane v. Wilson*, it ruled that this twelve-day registration window violated the 15th Amendment. For the NAACP’s legal campaign for African American voting rights, see Manfred Berg, *The Ticket to Freedom: The NAACP and the Struggle for Black Political Integration* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005) and Tindall, *The Emergence of the New South*, 560-564.

³⁵⁰ See Charles S. Aiken, *The Cotton Plantation South Since the Civil War* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 25. Berg estimates that in 1940, the number of registered black voters in the South was less than 5% of the total eligible population (*The Ticket to Freedom*, 88).

structural and individual levels, it simultaneously overrides such possibilities. The tension between the novel's two oppositional narratives – of black determination and (neo-) Confederate fortitude – coalesces in Faulkner's motif of the railroad, one largely expanded upon in the novel and therefore taking on a greater significance. Early in "Raid," the railroad matters chiefly as a means of competition between the two boys; Bayard says that "what counted was[] what one of us had done or seen that the other had not" (80). In this case, while Bayard has seen one, Ringo has not: yet another signifier of Bayard's racial privilege, like the "cokynut cake" that only Bayard has eaten. Time, though, has given him greater critical distance:

Only I know now it was more than that with Ringo, though neither of us was to see the proof of my belief for some time yet and we were not to recognize it as such even then. It was as if Ringo felt it too and that the railroad, the rushing locomotive which he hoped to see symbolized it—the motion, the impulse to move which had already seethed to a head among his people... (81).

Now Bayard realizes that the railroad represents the possibility for mobility and, in effect, the freedom for which Loosh and other African Americans had been striving. (At the time though, Ringo has no such awareness: though Bayard and Granny want to discuss this "impulse to move" manifesting itself through the black exodus, he announces his lack of interest: "I been having to hear about niggers all my life...I got to hear about that railroad" [91]).

Though Bayard connects the railroad with the possibilities of black independence, its meaning soon transforms into an emblem of *Confederate* independence when Drusilla tells Bayard and Ringo about the Great Locomotive Chase of 1862, otherwise known as Andrews' Raid. In Drusilla's telling, a Confederate train narrowly eludes the Yankee

train just yards behind, gallantly blowing its steam whistle for the Confederate audience witnessing its “momentary flash and glare of indomitable spirit” (97). This “desperate gamble,” Bayard explains, was meant not for “preservation” of the Confederacy but for “prolongation” of the cause that they already know is lost (95). After the Confederate train’s triumphant escape, Drusilla explains that “the next day [the Yankees] came and tore the track up...so we couldn’t do it again; they could tear the track up but they couldn’t take back the fact that we had done it” (98).

Nonetheless, the “fact” is that Drusilla’s reprisal is a revision of the events, and a deeply inaccurate one at that. In actuality, Yankee sympathizers were the ones who commandeered a Confederate engine; they were eventually captured and their leader, James Andrews, summarily executed.³⁵¹ Even the destruction of the tracks that Drusilla claims to be a retaliatory act was a tactical maneuver by Andrews and his men to thwart Confederate pursuit during (and the distribution of supplies after) his raid. Yet Faulkner’s – and Drusilla’s – inaccurate rendering of Andrews’ Raid shows more than “his casual attitude towards fact,” as Elmo Howell puts it.³⁵² Drusilla’s story indicates the extent to which the glamor of the Lost Cause endures in the Southern imagination: “it was as if the gray generals themselves...had told them, ‘You have suffered for three years; now we will give to you and your children a glimpse of that for which you have suffered and been denied’” (97).

³⁵¹ For more on Faulkner’s discrepancies, see Elmo Howell, “William Faulkner and the Andrews’ Raid in Georgia 1862,” *The Georgia Historical Quarterly* 49.2 (June 1965): 187-192.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 187.

Just as in “Ambuscade,” in which Bayard and Ringo’s recreation of Vicksburg functions as “a shield between us and doom,” Drusilla’s story reshapes the past into a commemoration of Southern valor that transcends defeat, history, and time itself: “now Ringo and I began to see it...we were there, as if Drusilla’s voice had transported us to the wandering light-ray in space in which was held the furious shadow [of the train]” (97-98). Even as Bayard and Ringo actually behold the aftermath of the event, such as the railroad ties “knotted and twisted about the trunks of trees” (96),³⁵³ their imagination overpowers their reality such that “for us [the railroad] ran still pristine and intact and straight and narrow as the path to glory itself” (96). Faulkner wants to provoke a similar reaction in his own readership. His language is at its most enthralling and transportive as he describes the engine “arrested in human sight in thunderous yet dreamy fury, lonely, inviolate and forlorn” (98).

Drusilla’s mythmaking also parallels an earlier fictionalization that ensures white Southern triumph: Ringo and Granny’s falsified ledgers. While it is, as Cleanth Brooks claims, “wildly improbable” that the Union Army would actually hand over large quantities of silver and mules to a Confederate lady and two boys, any attempt at rationalization is beside Faulkner’s point.³⁵⁴ Instead, Faulkner proves how what is false can solidify into a kind of truth to which others are unable to counter. When presented with Ringo’s forged documents, the Yankee captains, incredulous or maddened as they may be, are powerless to disobey their requisition orders. David Ball also connects the

³⁵³ The destruction of railroad ties (nicknamed “Sherman’s neckties”) was a popular technique used by the Union Army to sabotage the movement of Confederate troops and supplies.

³⁵⁴ Cleanth Brooks, *William Faulkner*, 96.

falsification of documents with racial usurpation, pointing out that “Colonel Dick’s order neatly reproduces the logic of Rosa’s property claims to her slaves,” and that the “indelible power of documents” in the story “seems to guarantee the success of white property rights while ensuring the failure of black emancipation.”³⁵⁵

If we retrace the parallels between the attempts for black freedom and Confederate freedom in “Raid,” both constitute a “dream” and a “delusion,” a “hope” and a “doom.” Nonetheless, their meaning is not to be found in the outcome – defeat – but the fact that they were “done not for the end but for the sake of the doing” (98). Both will continue to resonate with those who have witnessed or heard about it, “so long as there should be defeated or the descendants of defeated to tell it or listen to the telling” (98). Yet the white narrative soon drowns out the legacy of black freedom: Bayard’s haunting description of the failed but unyielding black exodus (“behind us, they were still marching down the bank into the river, still singing” [108]) is pejoratively diminished in “An Odor of Verbena” as merely a band of “crazed singing niggers” (223).

Faulkner thus represents the overwhelming power of narrative melancholia in his limited revision of the mythology of the antebellum Southern past. Dominick LaCapra explains that the melancholic response to trauma is an “acting out” that leaves the subject “locked in compulsive repetition [and] possessed by the past” (unlike mourning, which enables a “working through” of trauma). Such a subject “remains...identified with the lost object” and “faces a future of impasses.”³⁵⁶ In the same way, Faulkner imagines a

³⁵⁵ David M. Ball, *False Starts: The Rhetoric of Failure and the Making of American Modernism* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2015), 122-123.

³⁵⁶ LaCapra, *Writing History*, 66.

South trapped in the past, unable to recognize a future in which racial equality or social justice exists. By Faulkner's era, the railroad had crystallized into a site by which white racial superiority was enforced (most overtly in *Plessy v. Ferguson* [1896]). Fittingly, the notion of the railroad as a symbol of black hope and progression is diminished by the novel's end. In "An Odor of Verbena," Colonel John has rebuilt the railroad in order to resurrect his fortune and the Southern economy, ushering in industrial and economic modernity.³⁵⁷ In the same way, the railroad is now transformed from a symbol of "indomitable spirit" into an emblem of Colonel John's "violent and ruthless dictatorialness and will to dominate" (224).³⁵⁸ Colonel John seeks to dominate not just business enterprise but maintain white racial superiority. On top of rigging the election in "Skirmish at Sartoris," he has established an order of "nightriders to keep the carpetbaggers from organising the negroes into an insurrection" (222). Furthermore, this violent usurpation of power is, in Drusilla's words, his "dream," intended to benefit "this whole country which he is trying to raise by its bootstraps so that all the people in it, not just his kind nor his old regiment, but all the people, black and white" (223) – a self-justifying statement that defends white supremacy at the expense of black voice and experience.

³⁵⁷ Based in part off of Faulkner's own grandfather, William Falkner. See Williamson, *William Faulkner and Southern History*, 50-52.

³⁵⁸ The whistle of the train – once meant to lift the spirits of the Confederates is now utilized in a needless, petty taunt; Colonel John "blow[s] blast after blast on the whistle when he passed [his former business rival's] Redmond's house." Colonel John's continual needling of Redmond (i.e., running against him and winning a legislative seat) contributes to his death at Redmond's hands.

Even though Bayard rejects Colonel John's methods – electing not to shoot Redmond – he is still entrapped, entranced by his father's legacy. At the end of the novel he considers how despite Colonel John's death, "he was there, he would always be there; maybe what Drusilla meant by his dream was not something which he possessed but something which he had bequeathed us which we could never forget, which would even assume the corporeal shape of him whenever any of us, black or white, closed our eyes" (253). Colonel John is equally inescapable in *Flags in the Dust*. The narrative repeatedly points out his "palpable" presence; even decades later, "John Sartoris seemed to loom still in the room" (543). What remains truly palpable is the power of the white narrative, the grandeur and valor of the Lost Cause, and of the way in which Faulkner's language and story-telling cannot escape this power – "so long as there should be defeated or the descendants of defeated to tell it or listen to the telling."

CONCLUSION

“That oldest human longing – self-revelation”: Working through Trauma in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*

In his review of Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), Richard Wright lambasted her for “voluntarily continu[ing]...the tradition which was forced upon the Negro” (emphasis Wright’s)—that is, the minstrel performance of inferiority for the pejorative entertainment of white audiences. Wright further indicted the novel for containing “no theme, no message, no thought” other than to capitalize upon the African Americans’ perceived “quaintness,” a term “which evokes a piteous smile on the lips of the ‘superior’ race.”³⁵⁹ In this way, he dismissed Hurston’s text as betraying not only the aims of other Harlem Renaissance authors like himself (who sought to mobilize and politicize the black community through their artistic endeavors) but also their literary predecessors like Charles Chesnutt and Paul Laurence Dunbar, who sought to overcome the limitations of creating art for a predominantly white, racist audience.

What I would suggest, however, is that the very “theme” and “message” of Hurston’s novel are found in her examination of the folkways and traditions of African

³⁵⁹ Richard Wright, “Between Laughter and Tears” (1937), originally printed in *New Masses* (5 October 1937): 22, 25; reprinted in *Critical Essays on Zora Neale Hurston*, ed. Gloria L. Cronin (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998), 76. Wright’s condemnation was emblematic of the attitudes of many members of the black literary establishment at the time. Alain Locke, though praising Hurston’s talent for “poetic phrase” and “folk humor,” condemned her novel’s “oversimplification” and apoliticism (“when will the Negro novelist of maturity...come to grips with motive fiction and social document fiction?”), while Sterling Brown comments that her characters “escape the worst pressures of class and caste.” See Alain Locke, *Opportunity*, 1 June 1938 (reprinted in *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives, Past and Present*, eds. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and K. A. Appiah [Amistad Press: New York City, 1993], 18; Sterling Brown, *The Nation*, 16 October 1937, reprinted in *Zora Neale Hurston: Critical Perspectives*, 20). Many other scholars since Wright, Locke, and Brown have sought to recuperate Hurston’s legacy. Though Hurston fell out of favor and out of print in the 1950s and 1960s, the 1970s saw a flourishing of interest in her work and ideals, thanks to scholars like Robert Hemenway and Alice Walker. For an overview of critical reception of the novel, see Philip Goldstein, *Communities of Cultural Value: Reception Study, Political Differences, and Literary History* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2001).

American life.³⁶⁰ It should be noted that Hurston deliberately situates her story in the early 1920s, a period that marks the beginning of the Harlem Renaissance. Janie's telling her story to Pheoby – and through it, the development of her voice and community – is tacitly figured as a political and cultural act that complies with the Harlem Renaissance's insistence on African Americans to speak for themselves as a racial or ethnic group. While Hurston poses her protagonist Janie's divulging of her story to her friend Pheoby as “that oldest human longing – self-revelation,”³⁶¹ the novel expands from an individual testimony to a cultural revelation about the possibility for overcoming the traumatic history of slavery.

Many critics have discussed the ways in which Janie achieves a voice and thus a self. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. notes, “for Hurston, the search for a telling form of language... defines the search for the self,” and Susan Lanser reads the novel as “a record of Janie Crawford's struggle to find voice and through voice an identity.” Others, like Barbara Christianson and Robert Hemenway, have highlighted Janie's search for a community. For instance, Hemenway writes that Janie's “self-fulfillment” derives from her sense of community with the black townspeople of Eatonville, and that “Janie's ‘blossoming’ refers personally to her discovery of self and ultimately to her meaningful participation in black tradition.” Carla Kaplan, on the other hand, argues that the novel is about the impossibility of finding an ideal community, and ultimately suggests that

³⁶⁰ Her literary integration of folk stems from both her own upbringing in Eatonville, Florida (the first incorporated black town in the United States and the site of a rich folk community) and the academic lens afforded to her as a cultural anthropologist. This dual perspective led her to envision the past as a rich ore to mine and cultivate.

³⁶¹ Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), Ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Harper Perennial, 2000), 7.

“Janie’s black female longing for narration and self-revelation” is never fulfilled.³⁶²

None of these readings, however, have centered themselves on how voice and community are achieved precisely by the working through of slavery’s traumatic legacy, and how such a process enables Janie – and Hurston herself – to be understood.

Hurston explores the process of working through trauma in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in two ways. First, she exposes the traumatic aspects of African American history by revealing the afterlife of slavery in the Jim Crow era: namely, the sexual exploitation of black women and the coercion of black labor. I argue that Hurston in fact gestures back to Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), thus figuring her narrative as the literary continuation of other black women’s traumatic histories, both real and imagined. Hurston further reclaims collective black history by celebrating the folk culture of black communities in Florida like Eatonville and the migrant community in the “muck” of the Everglades. Second, Hurston frames Janie’s self-narration to Pheoby as a form of narrative memory – a social process that enables the survivor, through the mediation and ordering of her past with her audience, to achieve authentic closure – and connects it to the community as a whole. In creating this communal narrative memory, Hurston transcends the limitations of the black communities within her novel, and suggests the potential for recovery from a collective traumatic history.

³⁶² Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, 183; Susan Lanser, *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 201-2; Barbara Christianson, *Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition, 1892-1976* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980); Robert E. Hemenway, *Zora Neale Hurston: A Literary Biography* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977), 239; Carla Kaplan, “The Erotics of Talk: ‘That Oldest Human Longing’ in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*,” *Zora Neale Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God: A Casebook*, Ed. Cheryl A. Wall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 137-164.

Hurston initially positions the novel as a frame narrative in which the grown-up Janie, now in her forties, returns from the Everglades to Eatonville and recounts her experiences to her friend Pheoby. The first major conflict that the adolescent Janie experiences is her unwillingness to conform to the restrictive sexual strictures her grandmother set in place for her, constraints founded on Nanny's own traumatic history as a female slave. *Their Eyes Were Watching God* addresses the centuries-long history of depicting black females as sexually rapacious and promiscuous (used in particular to justify white male indiscretions on plantations).³⁶³ Here Hurston subverts that stereotype by depicting black females – “de mule[s] uh de world” (14) – as defenseless against such predatory advances.

In trying to educate Janie, Nanny exposes her traumatic history as “a work-ox and a brood-sow” (16): bred and used for sexual and physical labor. She soon contextualizes this metaphor, explaining that when her master left for the battlefield in an attempt to stave off Sherman, he returns to her cabin for a private farewell: he “made me let down my hair for de last time. He sorta wropped his hand in it, pulled my big toe, lak he always done, and was gone after de rest like lightnin’” (17). Nanny's narrating of their interaction obliquely alludes to a nonconsensual sexual relationship in which she is the entirely passive recipient of his advances, who is “made” to silently perform for his pleasure. Her encoding of their interaction through the substitution of intimate yet seemingly desexualized acts, such as his pulling of her big toe, is all the more revelatory

³⁶³ See for instance, Hazel Carby's *Reconstructing Womanhood*: “racist sexual ideologies proclaimed the black woman to be a rampant sexual being, and in response black women writers either focused on defending their morality or displaced sexuality onto another terrain” (176).

of her trauma. Either Nanny's memory of the event is entirely divorced from her bodily experience or she has purposely evaded her actual sexual violation. Even after all this time, she is unwilling to expose that part of her traumatic history to an audience – even an audience she desires to warn and enlighten.

This episode recalls Jacobs' autobiography, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), in which Jacobs (who renames herself Linda Brent) describes the sexual predations of her master, Dr. Flint, and the jealousy of his wife. In her narrative, Jacobs references the repeated sexual aggressions of Dr. Flint, who “told me I was his property; that I must be subject to his will in all things.”³⁶⁴ Jacobs is notably secretive about what exactly happens between herself and Dr. Flint, stating only that he “resorted to many means to accomplish his purposes” (44). This restraint is in part due to Jacobs' intended audience of Northern white female abolitionists. Jacobs had to respect domestic decorum, even in her attempts to expose the far-from-decorous behavior of slave masters. Moreover, as Saidiya Hartman points out in *Scenes of Subjection*, “the impossibility of adequately representing the violence of slavery is due not only to the enormity of the degradation and the unwillingness of the reader to believe the extremity or obscenity of violence but also to the fact that by speaking of these crimes the narrator carries the burden of the indecent and the obscene” (107).

Jacobs points out that her own abuse was far from exceptional: “the secrets of slavery are concealed like those of the Inquisition. My master was, to my knowledge, the father of eleven slaves. But did the mothers dare to tell who was the father of their

³⁶⁴ Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 45.

children? Did the other slaves dare to allude to it, except in whispers among themselves? No, indeed! They knew too well the terrible consequences” (55).³⁶⁵ In writing her narrative, Jacobs empowers herself by exposing the sexual predation of masters upon female slaves. Nonetheless, her disclosure has its limits. Jacobs asserts her master never sexually assaulted her: a claim that, considering the strictures of slavery, seems rather specious.³⁶⁶ While this distortion might be an attempt to protect some of her most painful, traumatic memories, it also transforms her story into a narrative of resistance against domination, one likely to inspire a sympathetic allegiance with her audience.

Like Linda, Nanny is reluctant to detail the specifics of her sexual trauma and abuse, instead resorting to euphemisms or elisions. Nonetheless, while Jacobs remains reticent about her abuse, Hurston establishes that the sexual abuse of black women by white men during and after slavery was an unavoidable reality. Soon after Master Roberts leaves, Mistress Roberts subsequently appears in Nanny’s chambers to see the baby. She then unleashes a tirade of physical and verbal abuse: “‘Nigger, whut’s yo’ baby doin’ wid gray eyes and yaller hair?’ She begin to slap mah jaws ever which a’way...she asted me dat maybe twenty-five or thirty times, lak she got tuh sayin dat and couldn’t help herself” (17). Though Nanny is literally unable to respond to her mistress’s interrogation,

³⁶⁵ In her first description of Mrs. Flint, Linda notes with irony that her mistress “had not strength to superintend her household affairs; but her nerves were so strong, that she could sit in her easy chair and see a woman whipped, till the blood trickled from every stroke of the lash” (22). It is not hard to infer that violent scenes like these might be the “terrible consequences” of discussing the paternity of certain slave children.

³⁶⁶ She writes that she makes the “less degrading” choice to “give [her]self” to a white neighbor, finding “something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you” (84-85). Saidiya Hartman interprets this scene as a “reconsideration of seduction” and “a glimpse of possibility in the context of peril” while also acknowledging that Linda’s relationship with this neighbor, Mr. Sands, still falls “within the scope of power and domination that invariably structure the relations between white man and slave woman” (*Scenes of Subjection*, 102, 104).

Mistress Robert's question requires neither explanation nor reply. Both women already know why her baby possesses those white features.

Their Eyes Were Watching God and *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

demonstrate the victimization of both black and white women. After growing suspicious of her husband's attentions to Linda, Mrs. Flint interrogates the slave, even making her swear upon the family Bible to tell the truth. Though Mrs. Flint believes Linda, she treats her not as a victim but as "the object of her jealousy and...hatred." She can perceive only the insult to herself; "she felt her marriage vows were desecrated, her dignity insulted" (53). When Mrs. Flint finally confronts her husband with the evidence of his perfidy, she remains powerless: "the power was still all in [Dr. Flint's] hands" (54). Even Mistress Roberts' extravagant rage in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* – she declares she will lash Nanny one hundred times and to sell her baby – can be explained as the manifestation of her own trauma. Her repetition of verbal interrogation and physical abuse, a compulsion over which she seemingly has no control, conveys her own impotence in a system in which white planters hold true mastery. Of course, Nanny, as a female slave, is even more powerless. Being well-versed in the system that enables her traumatization and nullifies her humanity, she explains that "Ah didn't cry and Ah didn't do nothin' else." Nanny's passive response to Mistress Roberts – "'Ah don't know nothin' but what Ah'm told tuh do, 'cause Ah ain't nothin' but uh nigger and uh slave'" (17) – only further enrages her mistress. Nanny's helplessness demonstrates the extent to which not she but Mistress Roberts' own husband is the instigator of her shame and rage.

The cycle of black female abuse continues with Nanny's daughter, Leafy. The expectation of black redemption in Reconstruction is embodied in Nanny's aspirations for her daughter to be a schoolteacher, a profession that would contribute to the community's progress and allow Leafy upward mobility. These hopes, just like the promise of Reconstruction, are cruelly, ironically dashed after Leafy's own schoolteacher kidnaps and rapes her. After Leafy gives birth to Janie, "she took to drinkin' likker and stayin' out nights. Couldn't get her to stay here and nowhere else. Lawd knows where she is right now" (19). Hurston explains Leafy's dissolute behavior – all racist stereotypes of post-Reconstruction era blacks freed of the civilizing effects of slavery – as the very afterlife of slavery itself, in the perpetual usage and mistreatment of black women's bodies. Even Leafy's abandonment of her mother and daughter is an understandable effect of trauma. As Kai Erikson notes, "the experience of trauma at its worst can mean not only a loss of confidence in the self, but a loss of confidence in the surrounding tissue of family and community."³⁶⁷ Though Leafy's sexual trauma is not unlike that of her mother's, she rejects the family and community that could potentially enable some kind of healing. Instead, Leafy disappears from the narrative and even from the thoughts of her daughter; years later, Janie admits to herself that she has "no interest" in finding her mother (89). The novel foreshadows the importance of a community as a means to recovery, and testimony as an integral part of that recovery.

Though Nanny ends her story by begging her granddaughter for understanding and sympathy ("put me down easy, Janie, Ah'm a cracked plate" [20]), Janie refuses to

³⁶⁷ Kai Erikson, "Notes on Trauma and Community," *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 198.

acquiesce. Even in her middle age, she continues to condemn Nanny for her narrow-minded vision: “Nanny had taken the biggest thing God ever made, the horizon...and pinched it in to such a little bit of a thing that she could tie it about her granddaughter’s neck tight enough to choke her” (89). Indeed, Janie’s criticism of her grandmother momentarily redirects the trope of lynching from the white policing of black behavior to the intraracial restricting of black behaviors. In repudiating her grandmother’s story and advice, Janie in turn negates the formation of a traumatic community, just as her mother before her. Janie can only interpret Nanny’s past by how it has affected and “twisted” Janie, scorning Nanny’s good intentions as “mislove” (90).

Janie’s limited understanding of her family’s history is meant to serve in contradistinction to that of the more discerning reader of the novel, who has a greater empathy for what Nanny has endured. Such a reader can appreciate how Nanny’s aspirations for Janie – masculine protection, economic security – are all the things that he herself could not acquire. As Houston A. Baker notes, “Nanny conflates the securing of property with effective expression. Having been denied a say in her own fate because she was property, she assumes that only property enables expression.”³⁶⁸ Had Janie listened to Nanny’s proclamation that “Ah wanted to preach a great sermon about colored women sittin’ on high but they wasn’t no pulpit for me” (16), she would have realized the similarities between her grandmother and herself in their separate searches for their own voice and space. The importance of an imagined ideal audience – one who can listen to the countless stories that the black community can offer up – shades the rest of the text.

³⁶⁸ Houston A. Baker, *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature*, 57.

Hurston's novel recovers the black community's folk culture and rituals, particularly in terms of speech and performance. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr., points out, the narrative voice which takes over the interior narrative is beyond just Janie's: "Hurston realized a resonant and authentic narrative voice that echoes and aspires to the status of the impersonality, anonymity, and authority of the black vernacular tradition, a nameless, selfless tradition, at once collective and compelling, true somehow to the unwritten text of a common blackness."³⁶⁹ The novel celebrates the "play" of the community as they conduct a mule funeral or play the dozens, rituals that convey the expansive capacities of language. For instance, two of the townspeople engage in "eternal arguments. It never ended because there was no end to reach. It was a contest in hyperbole and carried on for no other reason" (63). Men and women engage not in courtship but in "acting-out courtship": a performance in which "everybody is in the play" (67).

However, this community is not nearly as inclusive as these rituals would suggest. Though Hurston figures story-telling and play-acting as integral aspects of the African American community, Janie is barred from participation by her husband Joe "Jody" Starks, who forbids her to engage in "dat mess uh commonness" (60). Just like Nanny, who longed for a pulpit on high, Janie too is forbidden from speaking in public; Joe is the one with the "big voice," not Janie (46). In fact, her attempts to verbalize are countered with his abuse (80) or rejection: "You getting' too moufy, Janie" (75). Joe's mistreatment and silencing of his wife is in part figured as the afterlife of slavery; "he wanted her

³⁶⁹ Gates, *Signifying Monkey*, 183. For a reading on how *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is itself a formal revision of Frederick Douglass's slave narrative, see 170-216. Gates deems the novel a "speakerly text" in its amalgamation of the black oral and English literary traditions, "a text whose rhetorical strategy is designed to represent an oral literary tradition" (181).

submission and he'd keep on fighting until he had it" (71). In fact, this subjugation was something Nanny warned her about years before: "de white man is de ruler of everything...de white man throw down de load and tell de nigger man tuh pick it up. He pick it up because he have to, but he don't tote it. He hand it to his womenfolks" (14). Racial hierarchy merges into a hierarchy of gender, with black women perennially relegated to the bottom as "de mule[s] uh de world."

Hurston portrays the rest of the community in terms of their limited understanding. For instance, Eatonville's curiosity at the novel's beginning is depicted as intrusive and hostile; "they made burning statements with questions and killing tools out of laughs" (2). In response, Janie chooses to silence herself. While this is a choice that in some ways mirrors Nanny's earlier inability to answer Mistress Roberts' interrogation, Nanny is figured as a victim of her circumstances ("Ah ain't nothin' but uh nigger and uh slave"). But Janie's refusal to engage with her intolerant audience is an assertion of her own agency – a refusal to open oneself up to more pain and judgment. Kevin Quashie points out that "the expressiveness of silence is often aware of an audience, a watcher or listener whose presence is the reason for the withholding."³⁷⁰ Janie's willful silence is used at times as a protective physical and even psychological measure. Nonetheless, Janie's self-worth and potential for growth are stunted as a result of her silencing. She tells Joe on his deathbed that "mah own mind had tuh be squeezeed and crowded out uh make room for yours in me" (86). While suggesting that silence can be a form of

³⁷⁰ Kevin Quashie, *The Sovereignty of Quiet*, 22.

empowerment, the novel nonetheless foreshadows the need for Janie to create for herself a different kind of community in which her own voice can develop.

In presenting Janie as the product of her mother and grandmother's sexual and psychological trauma alongside her refusal to acknowledge it, Hurston foreshadows how Janie's initial attempts to overcome the past fail. Part of her traumatic legacy is literally manifested in Janie's hair. Despite its signification of the sexual and racial exploitation of her kin, her hair is figured as a source of desire by those around her. Though "Jody never told Janie how often he had seen the other men figuratively wallowing in it," he forces her to tie it up in public: "she was there in the store for *him* to look at, not those others" (55, emphasis Hurston's). After he dies, Janie takes her hair down, reappropriating its power for herself, but that power is soon reclaimed by her third husband, Tea Cake, who repeatedly lays his hands on her hair (103). Like Nanny, Janie's hair and body are repeatedly figured as vulnerable to the control of others.

Many critics have written on how Hurston seems to reconfigure sexuality for black females from nonconsensual subjection into a harmonious and natural relationship between two equals. This is foreshadowed in the famous pear blossom scene, in which Janie witnesses "a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of a bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace." Marveling at the sight, Janie deems this exchange to be "a revelation" and "a marriage!" (11). Janie searches for such equality and beauty in her relationships with her three husbands, and seemingly achieves it with Tea Cake, whom she explicitly deems to be "a bee to a blossom, a pear tree blossom in the spring" (106). However, Janie does not escape the history of abuse that she and her

maternal predecessors have encountered. Hurston's initially promising description of Tea Cake as "a bee to a blossom" deviates in the next sentence: "he seemed to be crushing scent out of the world with his footsteps. Crushing aromatic herbs with every step he took" (106). Hurston's foreshadowing that Tea Cake might potentially "crush" Janie's own selfhood soon becomes a reality. For instance, he strikes her after feeling threatened by the presence of another man. The narrative notes that while he recognizes Janie's innocence, "being able to whip her reassured him in possession" (147). Tea Cake's figuration of his wife as a slave – someone who can be whipped and possessed – renders her powerless once more.

The narrative frames Janie's verbal and physical mistreatment at the hands of her husbands as a repetition of her grandmother's and mother's experiences, the return of the repressed history that Janie refuses to acknowledge has birthed her. Tea Cake's boast to the community of Janie's subservience – "Janie is wherever *Ah* wants tuh be. Dat's de kind uh wife she is and *Ah* love her for it" (148) – in fact replicates Logan's warning to Janie that "you ain't got no particular place. It's wherever *Ah* need you" (31). That Janie has supposedly "escaped" the abuse of her first two husbands (for instance, Logan threatens to kill Janie with his axe after she talks back to him [31]) only to encounter it again with Tea Cake demonstrates the extent to which black female subjugation is a direct aftereffect of slavery. Nanny's fear that "de menfolks white or black [will make] a spit cup outa you" (20), as she and Leafy were used, has tragically come to pass.

Hurston extends the afterlife of slavery beyond Janie's individual history to the black community at large. In the novel's most pointed critique of Jim Crow regulations,

after the hurricane, Tea Cake is conscripted into working a mass gravesite by two men armed with rifles. Though Tea Cake affirms that he is a ‘workin’ man wid money in [his] pocket” and that he “ain’t done nothin’” to be stopped by the guards, he is no match against the stringent vagrancy laws used to police African American mobility. The men easily commandeer him into the work gang, saying “dat’s whut we want yuh fuh – not doin’ nothin’”: an ironic gloss on Tea Cake’s protestation of guiltlessness (170). And despite the democratizing experience of death, segregation and racial binaries are still enforced. Tea Cake is instructed to place whites bodies in coffins in the “cemetery,” while blacks are dumped to the “graveyard.” Difficulties arise when he and the other laborers point out that “nobody can’t tell nothin’ ‘bout some uh dese bodies, de shape dey’s in” (171). The guards finally conclude to identify them by their hair (a gruesome detail that hints at how grotesquely decomposed the bodies must be). Yet if bodies can be classified on their hair alone, then by such logic Janie herself, with her covetable hair, would “pass” as white.

In this moment, Hurston reveals the speciousness of racial boundaries as well as the callousness of Jim Crow regulations that ignore the humanity of African Americans, both dead and alive. The black community’s celebration of play and the performance of various identities serves as an ironic counterpart to the farce of racial binaries. Yet Hurston demonstrates that even the black community falls prey to the cultural indoctrination of racism and prejudice. For instance, Mrs. Turner, another woman of mixed-race descent, urges Janie to “lighten up de race,” saying “Ah can’t stand black niggers...Ah hates tuh see folks lak me and you mixed up wid ‘em” (141). Similarly,

Joe's desire for status and a "big voice" leads him to usurp whiteness and its hierarchical status for himself. He builds a "gloaty, sparkly white" house, that makes "the rest of the town look[] like servants' quarters surrounding the "big house" (47). Other townspeople complain that "you kin feel a switch in his hand when he's talkin' to yuh" (49). Moments like these suggest that the black community, for all of its celebration of talk and play, is still tethered to social customs of racial inequality and racism. The means by which Janie overcomes her (and her community's) traumatic past is not through her burgeoning sexuality, her relationship with Tea Cake ("the bee to [her] blossom") or even her self-defensive killing of the rabid Tea Cake towards the narrative's end.³⁷¹ Instead, what liberates Janie is the "self-revelation" achieved through narrative memory.

French psychologist Pierre Janet, a contemporary of Freud's, proposed that the process of translating traumatic memory into narrative memory enacted a cure for trauma. Unlike traumatic recollection in which the past returns, unwantedly and unexpectedly, narrative memory orders the event so that the survivor can recognize the past as past. Janet explains that a traumatic situation cannot be "satisfactorily liquidated" or "fully assimilated" until the survivor achieves

an inward reaction through the words [she] address[es] to [herself], through the organization of the recital of the event to others and to [herself], and through the putting of this recital in its place as one of the chapters in [her] personal history.³⁷²

³⁷¹ See Missy Dehn Kubitschek, "'Tuh De Horizon and Back': The Female Quest in *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," *Black American Literature Forum* 17.3 (Autumn 1983): 112.

³⁷² Pierre Janet, *Psychological Healing: A Historical and Clinical Study*, Vol. II (1925), trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (New York: Arno Press, 1976), 273.

Janet proposes that through flexibility and adaptability, the survivor can achieve a personal truth (rather than strict accuracy) that enables her to move on. Furthermore, unlike traumatic memory, which lacks a communal component (Anne Whitehead writes that “[it] is not addressed to anybody and....does not respond to anyone”), narrative memory is a social act. In fact, it requires an outside audience for the survivor’s testimony. Janet argues that telling her story to an audience enables the survivor more control over her memory, which in turn allows her to wrest control over her trauma.

Psychologists of trauma like Ruth Leys and Cathy Caruth have criticized as facile Janet’s notion of narrative memory as psychological cure. Leys argues that Janet stresses the importance of narrative over truth-telling and that “narration cures...[only] because it makes possible a form of self-understanding even in the absence of empirical verification”).³⁷³ Also skeptical of narrative memory, Caruth finds that it seeks to elide the fundamental incomprehensibility and lack of control that trauma entails such that the effect of the trauma is lost in its retelling. While Caruth and Leys’s concerns from a psychoanalytic perspective are valid, I would stress that *fiction* about trauma demands narrative flexibility and an audience in its search for resolution. If Hurston (like her literary predecessor Jacobs) ameliorates certain aspects of her characters’ trauma to the reader, she does so in order to transfer that trauma into something productive: only through the process of telling her story and the mediation of her audience can Janie come to terms with her traumatic past.

³⁷³ Quoted in Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, 142.

As Janet's theory makes clear, narrative memory requires not only internal reflection but also a particular kind of audience. For Janie, it requires Pheoby, described by Hurston as "eager to feel and do through Janie, but hating to show her zest for fear it might be thought mere curiosity" (7). Her respect for Janie imbues her with an empathy that transcends "mere curiosity," a "zest" for knowledge and insight into what Janie has experienced. Pheoby represents a sympathetic, open listener whose empathy both before and after Janie's interior tale allows Janie the opportunity to unpack and reexamine her history without fear of judgment or censure. In fact, Pheoby offers Janie an alternative to the public judicial system in which Janie, on trial for killing Tea Cake, must testify to "twelve strange men who didn't know a thing about people like Tea Cake and her" (185). Notably, Janie's testimony at the trial is not represented textually to the reader. Instead, it is merely described: "she just sat there and told and when she was through she hushed" (187). Though, as Kaplan suggests, this silence seems to "enact the social history of [the repression of] African American voice," in fact Janie's courtroom testimony should not be rendered for the reader.³⁷⁴ Hurston makes clear that the unreceptive nature of Janie's audience on trial renders her testimony ineffectual (in contrast to the private space she shares with Pheoby). Even though she is found not guilty of murder, she remains unabsolved by the hostile black community, and is merely regarded as a spectacle by the "white people [who] came to look on this strangeness" (185).

The power of storytelling has a measurable effect upon the ideal listener. After listening to Janie's story, Pheoby proclaims her own self-growth: "Ah done growed ten

³⁷⁴ Kaplan, "Erotics of Talk," 150.

feet higher from jus' listenin' tuh you...Ah ain't satisfied wid mah self no mo'" (192).

Though Janie professes a lack of interest in the rest of the community, she willingly gives Pheoby permission to share her story. Janie even says that Pheoby telling her story is "just de same as me [telling it] 'cause mah tongue is in mah friend's mouf" (6). This remarkably evocative phrase – "mah tongue is in mah friend's mouth" – demonstrates not just the transmission of knowledge but the transcendence of self that occurs through story-telling.³⁷⁵ Pheoby's earlier desire to "feel and do through Janie" is now reversed. If Pheoby is able to live through Janie's experience, so too can Janie's reintegration into the community be achieved through Pheoby's reiteration of her story.

Their Eyes Were Watching God is ultimately not a story of total communal integration. Eatonville's envy of and hostility towards Janie at the novel's opening suggests that the rest of the community may not be as receptive towards Janie's – and now, Pheoby's – story. Janie admits the limitations of testimony, saying to Pheoby that "talkin' don't amount tuh uh hill uh beans when yuh can't do nothin' else" (192): a statement which Kaplan reads ironically, saying that "Janie's staged self-silencing, after all, occurs within a text that does tell her story, which is not silent, which in fact delivers Janie's self-revelation to a larger reading public."³⁷⁶ Janie clarifies this assertion, adding that "yuh got tuh *go* there tuh *know* there"; in other words, narrative never quite closes the gap between experience and knowledge. Nonetheless, this interaction between Pheoby and Janie seems to suggest that what matters is not just the ability to talk but the

³⁷⁵ For queer readings of this phrase, see Carla Kaplan, "Erotics of Talk," and Molly Hite, "Romance, Marginality, Matrilineage: Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* and Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 22.3 (Spring 1989): 257-273.

³⁷⁶ Kaplan, "Erotics of Talk," 152.

importance of listening. Moreover, it establishes the specific, contingent relationship between speaker and listener necessary to even approach the possibility of communal healing and change.

The novel does not conclude here, however; it ends on a moment of private reintegration of Janie's "inside and outside," no longer estranged from each other. In telling her story, Janie is able to recuperate her own history, and the last paragraph of the novel empties itself of the pain of the traumatic past:

the kiss of his memory made pictures of love and light against the wall. Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over her shoulder. So much of life in its meshes! She called in her soul to come and see. (193)

In these last lines, Hurston moves from an exploration of individual and collective trauma back to a moment of individual healing: "here was peace," she states succinctly. Sharing her memories with her ideal audience transforms Janie's remembrances from painful recollection to "pictures of love and light." She even now interprets her grandmother's "pinching" of the horizon into a noose around Janie into a "fish-net" she wears like a blanket. Janie's much more generous reassessment of her grandmother's attempt to protect her conveys the way in which storytelling has enabled Janie to develop into an ideal audience as well, finally possessing the "understanding" necessary to come to terms with her (and her race's) traumatic past.

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