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Izabela Hopkins

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IZABELA HOPKINS
Birmingham City University

Passing Place, or the Elusive Spaces of Southern Whiteness in Thomas Nelson Page's *Red Rock* and Ellen Glasgow's *The Deliverance*

IN HIS ATTEMPT TO DEFINE WHITENESS IN *MOBY-DICK*, HERMAN MELVILLE concedes that “not yet have we solved the incantation of this whiteness, and learned why it appeals with such power to the soul” (169). Melville struggles gamely with the proliferation of its transcultural significations that include innocence, blankness, mourning, and alterity. Though inconclusive, Melville’s endeavor to define whiteness is not a failure; rather, it reveals what Mike Hill terms the concept’s “epistemological stickiness and ontological wiggling” (3). Rather than seek a remedy, current scholarship on whiteness has succumbed to two maladies of its own. The first is the overwhelming urge to explain whiteness in conjunction with the exploitation and subjugation of the racial other resulting from Western colonialism and imperialism that has led to “commonplace” assumptions “in cultural theory that whiteness requires blackness in order to define itself” (Adams 164). The other is a tendency to generalize that results in vague definitions of whiteness as “largely an invented construct blending history, culture, assumptions, and attitudes” (Babb 10) and “a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed” (Frankenberg 1). In attempting the impossible, which is the formulation of a universal definition, such propositions reduce the complexity of whiteness and compound its “epistemological stickiness” (Hill 3). For Peter Kolchin, the solution lies in paying closer attention to “historical and geographical context” (172). What is required is an approach to whiteness that will demonstrate its inherently differential nature through an engagement with a particular place and time. The South, as a region instrumental in “shaping American notions of race” through the presence of the peculiar institution of slavery, has inadvertently contributed to the homogenization of whiteness that reduces it to the confines of the black-white dichotomy (Kolchin 172). Confining the analysis of the construct to the post-Reconstruction South

will move beyond the limitations imposed by this binary opposition and allow for an examination of the influence of the notion of place—in historical, cultural, and regional terms—on both the conceptions of the Southern variety of whiteness and its literary reconstructions.

For Virginia-born Thomas Nelson Page in *Red Rock: A Chronicle of Reconstruction* and Ellen Glasgow in *The Deliverance: A Romance of the Virginia Tobacco Fields*, the imagined space of the fictional narrative provides fertile ground for pondering this elusive concept. That both Page and Glasgow see whiteness as a place-specific construct is hardly surprising considering their shared social and cultural legacy and place among the South's elite. What merits scrutiny, however, is the way they negotiate whiteness through a web of historically loaded tangible and phantom spaces that resist simplistic reductions to the black-white binary. To understand the significance of these spaces to Page's and Glasgow's interrogations of whiteness requires the formulation of a definition of Southern whiteness.

Among the constituent components of whiteness, Valerie Babb includes "civility, cultivation [and] piousness," as well as "sexual restraint" in men mirrored by the asexuality and weakness of women (68, 76). These attributes have historically been associated with the upper classes, reverberating in nostalgic echoes of courtly love and chivalry. In the South, they became part of the Southern aristocratic myth that rested on "the conviction that the region's slaveholders had descended almost entirely from the English Cavalier aristocracy" (Watson 15). To preserve the aristocratic myth, the self-styled descendants of Cavaliers espoused the European model of parental kinship, whereby "we are defined by where and whom we came from" (Turner 48).¹ Thanks to the valorization of this historic model of descent, the notions of heredity, blood, and tradition constitute inextricable components of Southern whiteness that become synonymous with hereditary gentility. And the gentleman planter and Southern belle are cast as the living embodiments of Southern whiteness who, replete with the lofty qualities of cultivation, civility, chastity, and piety, serenely dwell on their plantations. The upheaval of the post-Reconstruction years—"the era [which] represented the worst abuses heaped upon a

¹For historical accounts of the founding of the colony see Theodore W. Allen's *The Invention of the White Race / 2: The Origin of Racial Oppression in Anglo America* and Richard Gray's *Writing the South: Ideas of an American Region*.

righteous civilization”—irrevocably altered the relationship between the land and its inhabitants (Gardner 269).² This newly emerged space of the post-Reconstruction South, when “De overseer is in de gret house, and gent’man’s in de blacksmiff shop,” called for reimagining Southern whiteness (Page, *Red Rock* 254). Crucial to such a conceptual shift, according to Michel de Certeau, is “the creation of a *universal and impersonal subject*” (127), and for Page and Glasgow the Old South furnished a malleable image. Page colored the picture with nostalgic perfection and saw the Old South as an idyll that “partook of the philosophic tone of the Grecian, of the dominant spirit of the Roman, and of the guardfulness of individual rights of the Saxon civilization” suitably augmented by the values of “Chivalry and Christianity” (Page, *The Old South* 5). Although Glasgow saw such eulogizing as anachronistic and stultifying to the Southern culture that “was satisfied to exist on borrowed ideas, to copy instead of create,” she never managed to dispel the “lingering fragrance of the Old South” (*A Certain Measure* 28, 12). For better or for worse, both cast the Old South and its tangible remnant, the plantation house, as crucial to sustaining the fiction of Southern whiteness. Yet, the evocation of these places inadvertently opens up spaces of difference between the imagined perfection of the Old South and the here and now of the post-Reconstruction region, against which claims to whiteness are measured, qualified, or nullified. And in negotiating these spaces of difference between the ideal and actuality, the protagonists of *Red Rock* and *The Deliverance* attempt to reclaim Southern whiteness.

Page, who “gave the plantation legend its clearest voice,” remains under the spell of the elusive space of the plantation and the Old South in *Red Rock* (Gardner 267). Published in 1898, the novel chronicles the fortunes of two patrician families: the Grays and the Carys. Beginning on the cusp of secession, the narrative follows the heroes on the battlefields of the Civil War and continues into Reconstruction. In the “Preface,” Page establishes a connection between place and myth. The Red Rock plantation is situated “*in the South, somewhere in that vague region partly in one of the old Southern States and partly in the yet vaguer land of Memory*” (vii). Such a precarious setting, suspended between the *hic*

²Grace Elizabeth Hale offers a detailed account of Post-Reconstruction realities and the struggle to reassert the antebellum model of society in *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*.

et nunc and memory, inscribes *Red Rock* with timelessness. The plantation, owned by the Grays, takes its name “from the great red stain, as big as a blanket, which appeared on the huge boulder [sic] in the grove, beside the family grave-yard” (Page, *Red Rock* 1). The blood on the stone belonged to

the Indian chief who had slain the wife of the first Jacquelin Gray who came to this part of the world: the Jacquelin who had built the first house at Red Rock, around the fireplace of which the present mansion was erected, and whose portrait, with its piercing eyes and fierce look, hung in a black frame over the mantel, and used to come down as a warning when any peril impended above the house. (1)

The roots the first Jacquelin planted in this place reach across the Atlantic to England where “he was a scholar, and had been a soldier under Cromwell and lost all his property.” The same Jacquelin later “fell in love with a young lady whose father was on the King’s side, and married her . . . and came over here” (27). The rock from which the plantation derives its name is imbued with historical meaning, since proper names “make the place they clothe with a word habitable and believable. . . they recall or evoke the phantoms (dead and supposedly gone) that still stir, lurking in gestures and walking bodies” (de Certeau 141). It carries connotations of permanence and indelibility, while evoking ghosts of the Grays’ past and linking them to the England and Scotland of the Stuart era. Once transplanted to the South, this unique brand of gentility, where puritan sympathies coexist happily with royalist ones, is cemented by the conquest of the Indian chief and, rather tellingly, sealed in blood. As a proper name, Red Rock externalizes the meanings of whiteness to which the Grays subscribe, while the blood stain still visible upon the stone literalizes the metaphor of blood as heritage. Curiously, the Indian chief’s blood forms an inextricable and constant component of the symbolism of Red Rock, emphasizing the hybrid nature of the space of the plantation: the invariability of the “red” in its name is pitted against the mutability of the Grays’ whiteness. Within the space of Red Rock, the literal and the symbolic unite to perpetuate the Grays’ gentility. Even the deeds to the house are stamped red by the feet of Jacquelin’s descendant, Rupert Gray, who dabbed them in red paint while “playing in the hall,” thus marking the floor and the papers that the wind happened to scatter there. Rupert’s mother, in a gesture reminiscent of Mary Queen of Scots, “would never allow the

prints to be scoured out, and so they have remained” (Page, *Red Rock* 29).³ In refusing to have the prints removed, Mrs. Gray actively perpetuates the Gray tradition and reinforces the family’s hereditary hold on the place wherein lies their claim to gentility. When the plantation is unjustly seized by Hiram Still, a former overseer, it is one of the Grays’ former slaves, Doan, who, as the only witness to Rupert’s exploits, is able to verify the authenticity of the bond and becomes instrumental in effecting the Grays’ claim to Red Rock and, consequently, to the whiteness that the place symbolizes.

The drama of the Grays’ whiteness unfolds within the space of the Red Rock plantation, where told and retold, it becomes endemic to the place, part of the local folklore perpetuated in the stories “believed by the old negroes (and, perhaps, by some of the whites, too, a little)” (Page, *Red Rock* 1-2). For Patrick D. Murphy, “one participates in a place about which one tells stories, rather than merely observing it passively or domineeringly” (46). Such stories are “*the product of the interaction between speakers* and the product of the broader context of the whole complex *social situation*” (Vološinov 79). Through story-telling, Red Rock, in the eyes of the locals and of the Grays, becomes synonymous with the seat of the Southern “truth” of whiteness. The plantation house is transformed, in Henri Lefebvre’s terms, into a representational space—“space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols” (39). Grounded in Red Rock, stories about the Grays acquire a mythical dimension in the act of telling, and through evocations of the family’s ancestry and courage, they construct the Grays’ whiteness, rooting it firmly in place, while the allusion to the Indian blood endows it with a continuity that predates the establishment of the colony. It is therefore quite fitting, if hardly surprising, that this cradle of gentility is “a little world in itself—a sort of feudal domain: the great house on its lofty hill, surrounded by gardens; the broad fields stretching away in every direction, with waving grain or green pastures dotted with sheep and cattle, and all shut in and bounded by the distant woods” (Page, *Red*

³In the “Introduction” to *The Fair Maid of Perth; Or St. Valentine’s Day*, Sir Walter Scott includes an account of the murder of David Rizzio, Queen Mary’s favorite. His blood stains are said to be still visible on the floor in Queen Mary’s apartments in Holyrood Palace, and “The constant tradition of the Palace says, that Mary discharged any measures to be taken to remove the marks of slaughter, which she had resolved should remain as a memorial to quicken and confirm her purposed vengeance” (xii-xiii).

Rock 29). Lucinda MacKethan observes of the plantation house that “It was intended to be a symbol of the quality of the man who lived in it, testifying to his virtue, his isolation from the common, and his kinship with the land he had conquered” (44). The elevated setting of the place mirrors the status of the owners of Red Rock, separating them from the other inhabitants of “*the Red Rock section*” (Page, *Red Rock* vii).

Mr. Langstaff, the local rector, remarks to Mr. Welch, an entrepreneur from the North, that the natural splendor of the place provides “evidences that the Garden of Eden was situated not far from that spot, and certainly within the limits of the State” (Page, *Red Rock* 29). By extending the pastoral of the place to the whole region, Mr. Langstaff voices the difference between the idyllic South and the North, while the allusion to Eden firmly mythologizes Red Rock and grounds it in Christian tradition. Unsurprisingly then, the path to this place leads “by the highway of Sincerity and Truth” (ix). As quixotic as the remark appears, it nonetheless reifies the notion that truth can only be found and cultivated in one place: Red Rock. Since, according to Julius Evola, ascending a mountain has been historically the privilege of gods and heroes, the elevated setting of Red Rock endows its inhabitants with not only a divinity that implies sincerity and truth, but also a purity of purpose. To Dr. Cary, the owner of Birdwood, who is related to the Grays by blood since his sister married Mr. Gray, honor constitutes one component of the truth. In his impassioned speech against secession, Dr. Cary proclaims that “War is the most terrible of all disasters, except Dishonor” (12). Despite his anti-war sentiment, when the conflict erupts, the Doctor joins the Confederate army because his honor demands it. This heightened sense of honor conquers common sense and pragmatism and, in Red Rock, becomes an element of Southern whiteness. Honor also demands that one be kind to one’s servants. On the eve of his departure for war, General Gray leaves the overseer, Hiram Still, in charge of the plantation “as long as he treated the negroes well” (47). As befitting a conscripted benevolent planter, the General’s sense of honor encodes a moral obligation towards those in his care so that the tradition of planter benevolence carries on *in absentia*. His orders to his son Jacquelin, a gentleman in the making and the heir apparent to the plantation, are to care for his mother and younger brother, Rupert. Above all, however, Jacquelin must “keep the old place. Make any sacrifice to do that. Landholding is one of the safeguards of a

gentry” (47). Landholding may be the safeguard of the gentry, but it excludes “participating in that life at its most elemental level” (MacKethan 51); in the Grays’ genteel tradition, the dichotomy between owning the land and tilling it is irreconcilable. Consequently, Jacquelin is not made privy to the financial circumstances of the family, for this would tarnish his gentlemanly upbringing.

Although his father’s dictum remains etched deeply in Jacquelin’s memory, he is prevented from fulfilling this filial duty by Still’s mendacious scheming. When the plantation eventually passes to Still, without Red Rock and land where his genteel benevolence could be effected in the everyday, Jacquelin’s whiteness will be an incomplete imitation of the antebellum ideal that his father embodied. When Jacquelin returns to the region after an absence of several years, he is still “Marse Jack” to Waverley, an old servant, to whom Jacquelin materializes as his “ole marster—er de Injun-Killer” (Page, *Red Rock* 253). Bearing the name of one of Sir Walter Scott’s protagonists, Waverley supplies a direct link to one of the originary spaces of Southern whiteness, namely the Scotland of heroic exploits.⁴ It is therefore quite fitting that Jacquelin’s resemblance to both his father and his famous ancestor is verbalized by Waverley, whose name internalizes the continuity of tradition, just as Jacquelin externalizes blood heritage. This is the only place where Jacquelin can signify as “Marse Jack” and where the appellation carries historical and hereditary connotations, becoming symbolic of the continuity of the past and present. Since, according to Werner Sollors, the subject who passes is considered “a ‘counterfeit’ X” or an “impostor” (249), without the representational space of the Red Rock plantation, the title becomes an empty signifier and Jacquelin’s whiteness is transformed into passing for a gentleman. For Jacquelin, however, the Red Rock plantation monumentalizes the wholeness of the antebellum ideal of gentility and its recovery is essential to his assertion of whiteness. Assuming the authority of his ancestors, he announces to Still that “you will not be in this place always. We are coming back here, the living and the dead” (Page, *Red Rock* 262). Jacques Derrida observes that “One never inherits without

⁴Edward Waverley is the name of one of the protagonists of Sir Walter Scott’s *Waverley, Or, 'Tis Sixty Years Since*. Published in 1814, it is considered “the first political novel,” and it recounts the heroic, though unsuccessful, struggle to regain Scottish independence (*Waverley*, “Introduction” xv).

coming to terms with . . . some specter,” and for Jacquelin Red Rock is the only space where such a reconciliation can occur (23). Within its walls, where the spaces of the past and the present converge, Jacquelin’s ancestors serve as constant reminders of his heritage and whiteness. The space of Red Rock enshrines the fantasy of the resurrection of Jacquelin’s whiteness and, as such, it “mediates between the formal symbolic structure and the positivity of the objects we encounter in reality” (Žižek, “Seven Veils” 7). Ironically, as a tangible remnant of the past, the plantation house frustrates the possibility of revivifying the antebellum ideal of whiteness, marking it as a space of *jouissance*: as “the ‘place’ of the subject” in relation to which “the subject is always-already displaced, [and] out-of-joint” (49). Although reentry may be impossible, this illusion of completeness the plantation house promises is crucial to sustaining Jacquelin’s conception of whiteness.

The respect for land instilled in Jacquelin by his father and shared by Dr. Cary constitutes a hallmark of their gentility, establishing a “natural” difference between them and those representing a darker shade of whiteness or, indeed, nonwhiteness. Still, the former overseer vehemently declares, “I know good land, and when you’ve got land you’ve got it, and everybody knows you’ve got it” (Page, *Red Rock* 229). Although Still acknowledges that the possession of land denotes prestige in this place, he remains oblivious to the fact that it is *hereditary* possession of land on which such prestige, and thus gentility, rests. Regardless of his ownership of Red Rock, for Still, the place can only signify as a passing place. His lack of genteel heritage prevents him from forming a bond with the place and limits his perception of it to the literal. Unlike Still, Dr. Cary is fully aware of the symbolic value of land; however, even such awareness cannot withstand dire necessity, and he is forced to sell part of his property to pay off his debts. To accomplish this transaction, he travels to the city, accompanied by General Legaie, to meet Mr. Ledger, a banker. Mr. Ledger, true to his name, is unmoved by the Doctor’s laudatory evaluation of his land from which “not an acre has ever been sold from the original grant,” a fact which in the Doctor’s estimation “manifestly added to the value of the terms offered” (222). For the Doctor, the connection to the royal grant aggrandizes the place and links it to the originary space of his whiteness that is England, but it fails to impress Mr. Ledger who, though not unsympathetic to their plight, represents Northern capitalism, which has no place for the reverence for

heredity so esteemed by the Doctor and the General. Incomparably rich in sentiment, Dr. Cary and General Legaie lack Mr. Ledger's Northern business acumen, so much so that, according to Mr. Ledger, "They are about as able to cope with the present as two babies" (223). Mr. Ledger fails to discern the motivation behind the Doctor's and General Legaie's resistance to the demands of the zeitgeist, namely, the loyalty to tradition which characterizes their whiteness and sets them apart from himself.⁵ Here, Southern whiteness is constructed at a boundary space where gentility, benevolence, and reverence for history and tradition are juxtaposed with the lack of these attributes in usually, but not exclusively, Northern others.

Elsewhere in the novel, when Mr. Welch, accompanied by his daughter, Ruth, returns to the region with a view to settling there, they are accidentally, or serendipitously, directed to Dr. Cary's residence. Dr. Cary has, by now, lost his plantation and resides in a little cottage. Even such impoverished surroundings have not diminished the Doctor's nobility of breeding, which still shines brightly. Ruth is enthralled by the bow he makes to her "with an old-fashioned graciousness" which "set her to blushing." Nonetheless, amidst all the blushing, Ruth remarks to herself, "What a beautiful nose he has, finer even than my father's" (Page, *Red Rock* 284). In admiring the beauty of the Doctor's nose, Ruth both verbalizes and locks the space of Southern whiteness within the realm of comparison, contrasting the South and the North. Despite Ruth's flattering assessment, without his ancestral plantation, Dr. Cary, like Jacquelin, only passes for a gentleman. Ruth's admiration extends to the Doctor's daughter, Blair, whose "figure so slim" and "face . . . so refined" compensate amply for the plainness of her dress, adorned only with "a brass button," and whose "manners were as composed and gracious as if she had been a lady and in society for years," which is precisely what Blair had been reared to be (282). In her admiration for Dr. Cary and Blair's gentility, Ruth names distinct qualities such as gallantry and graciousness of deportment as its constitutive components

⁵MacKethan observes of Dr. Cary and General Legaie that "They are allowed to survive the war in order to show the great disparity between the Old and New South and to emphasize how much has been lost" (49). Notwithstanding the pertinence of her observation, the fact that their gentility is depicted as anachronistic suggests the impossibility of reconstructing antebellum ideals in the face of postbellum realities, which, if attempted, can only result in passing since it brings into sharp relief the temporal divide between the past and the present.

and renders them endemic to the South. Ironically, Ruth's assessment of Blair's attire evokes the space of the mythical Old South, symbolized by the brass button she observes even though its significance is lost upon her. As a Confederate button, it is imbued with a dual, if contradictory, significance. On one hand, it is a symbol of the Lost Cause, acting as a link to the historic space of the antebellum South as the source of the gentility that Ruth admires; on the other hand, the button highlights passing for gentility in the present, branding it as a "lost cause." To a Northerner like Ruth, however, such intricacies of history and tradition are beyond comprehension—as they are to her father, who is amused by the doctor's reluctance to inquire as to whether he is a carpetbagger. Dr. Cary finds the term offensive because it combines opportunistic materialism with Northern occupation, and he "would not insult" Mr. Welch under his roof by evoking the appellation (287). Although Mr. Welch hails from the North, he is a gentleman and thus Dr. Cary deems him worthy of welcome and respect. In this place, being a carpetbagger is a sin that cannot be expiated, conjuring up a social space reserved for nonwhiteness. Dr. Cary's insistence on preserving the genteel tradition, while echoing nostalgically the space of the Old South, "misplaces" him in the irrevocably altered context of his reduced circumstances. Uprooted from the patria of plantation, his reconstruction of whiteness remains a partial replica of the antebellum ideal of gentility.

Red Rock is both a eulogy for the lost perfection of the antebellum ideal and an explanation for its protagonists' diluted version of whiteness, for which Page blames the harsh realities of Reconstruction. Impoverished and misplaced but undaunted in spirit, his gentlemen and ladies cling to the memory of the Old South with the conviction of zealots. Unlike Page, Glasgow resists "the elegiac impulse" in *The Deliverance*. Questioning the enduring interdependence between the ideal of Southern whiteness and place, hers is "a valediction to the Old South, forbidding mourning" with undertones of social determinism (Gray, *Southern Aberrations* 72).⁶ Her protagonists are doubly misplaced, because of the social upheavals attendant to Reconstruction and because they are caught in the inertia of collective memory which fixes them in socially and historically predetermined spaces and against which

⁶Richard Gray's paraphrase of John Donne's "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" is particularly apposite to the rendering of the difference between Page's and Glasgow's approaches to the theme of the Old South.

rebellion is futile. Glasgow's tale, published in 1904, is set in postbellum Virginia, where the vagaries of war have irrevocably altered the fortunes of the Blake family. Mr. Carraway, a lawyer, observes the changes firsthand when he is summoned to the region by his client, Mr. Fletcher, on a matter of business. On the way to Blake Hall where Fletcher resides, Carraway is regaled with the story of the Blakes by Sol Peterkin. Peterkin, a local tobacco farmer with a "wiry, sunburned neck," from whose mouth "a thin stream of tobacco juice" trickled, fits the stereotypical description of a "redneck" (Glasgow, *The Deliverance* 4).⁷ The narrator's account of Peterkin sets the tone and scene for the ensuing narrative and indicates its distance from the refinements of the mythical Old South. Carraway learns from Peterkin that "tobaccy's king down here, an' no mistake" and that the Blakes' fortune depended on its cultivation. With pride and fondness Peterkin reminisces about the grandeur of the family's estate: "you might stand at the big gate an' look in any direction you pleased till yo' eyes bulged fit to bu'st, but you couldn't look past the Blake land for all yo' tryin'" (6). Neil Evernden observes that "There is no such thing as an individual, only an individual-in-context, individual as a component of place, defined by place" (103). The story of the Blakes' gentility is defined by, and revolves around, the possession of this vast plantation and the cultivation of tobacco.

The fact that Peterkin consigns his narrative to the past foregrounds the Blakes' fall. Deprived of his inheritance by the cunning of his father's former overseer, Fletcher, Christopher Blake toils in the fields with other common laborers. Carraway's first impression of Christopher is far from flattering: he is "the product of the soil upon which he stood" and "an illiterate day-labourer" (Glasgow, *The Deliverance* 12, 7). To Peterkin, however, Christopher is "a Blake, skin an' bone, anyhow, an' you ain't goin' to git this here county to go agin him" (8). Peterkin's respect for Christopher is largely, but not solely, based on his family's former standing in the community; it is also grounded in blood which, as Carraway wisely remarks, "will tell, even at the dregs." Blood symbolizes the superiority of Christopher's lineage which is externalized in his appearance, and Christopher, Peterkin observes, is "the very spit of his pa" (12). Frederick McDowell observes, "Defeat in war left essentially unchanged the Southerner's attitudes, including an

⁷David Roediger describes the etymology of the term "redneck" (136-37).

instinctive reverence for his social superiors" (92). Peterkin's "instinctive reverence" for Christopher is a product of place where the old hierarchies, though they no longer obtain, are still respected. Told and retold by Peterkin, the fiction of Christopher's whiteness becomes endemic to the place; however, to sustain its believability, the space in which Peterkin recreates Christopher's whiteness is detached from the here and now and consigned to the realm of reminiscence together with the family's large estate. Drawing upon such unique knowledge, Peterkin is able to recreate Christopher's gentility, whereas Carraway fails, despite being aware of the connection between property, heritage, continuity, and place, which he voices in a conversation with Fletcher:

The property idea is very strong in these rural counties, you see . . . They feel that every year adds a value to the hereditary possession of land, and that when an estate has borne a single name for a century there has been a veritable impress placed upon it. (25)

Effectively, Carraway expresses an indispensable component of Southern whiteness, namely, the hereditary possession of land. Since the Blakes had occupied Blake Hall for two hundred years, the relatively short period of Fletcher's tenancy cannot erase the impress left by its previous occupants, the impress which has been transformed into local lore. Indeed, Fletcher's uncouthness and lack of noble lineage, which Carraway observes, serve to effect the gentility of the previous occupants of the house and emphasize Fletcher's unsuccessful passing for a gentleman. Having summoned Carraway to discuss his will, Fletcher intends to bequeath everything to his grandson, William, who will one day "make his mark among the quality." His granddaughter, Maria, will receive "a share of the money" which will "make her child-bearing easier" since, as far as Fletcher is concerned, "that's the only thing a woman's fit for" (37). Fletcher's lack of chivalry and undisguised disdain for women emphasize his plebeian status which even his possession of Blake Hall cannot erase. The very setting of the exchange, Blake Hall—"a manifestation in brick and mortar of the hereditary greatness of the Blakes"—makes Fletcher's remark doubly offensive. Set against the backdrop of this hereditary grandeur, adorned with "the clean white Doric columns" harking back to antiquity, Fletcher's lack of gentlemanly manners renders him out of place while evoking the ghosts of the Blakes' past (Glasgow, *The Deliverance* 15). Maria Fletcher, who eventually

inherits the residence and returns it to its rightful owners, feels acutely her inadequacy to occupy this place. Having been educated to become a lady, Maria observes of returning to Blake Hall: "When I come back here I seem to lose all that I have learned, and to grow vulgar, like Jinnie Spade, at the store" (133). Blake Hall seems to unmake Maria's tenuous claim to gentility that her education and grandfather's wealth have furnished. Confronted with the heritage of the Blakes the Hall represents, Maria realizes that, despite her acquired gentility, in this particular place, she only passes for a lady. Within the walls of Blake Hall, imbued with history and tradition, Maria's gentility unravels, for "Its [Blake Hall's] very age is a reproach" to the Fletchers, evoking their "newness" and "lack of any past" of which they could speak with pride (407). Though formulated more sophisticatedly, Maria's sentiment echoes that of Peterkin: both see the notions of a suitable past and heredity as crucial to one's status and inextricably bound up with the material space of the plantation house. Maria's statement seems the more poignant, as it emphasizes her precarious status as passing for a lady by acutely rendering her awareness of her lack of an acceptable past—her lack of a genteel legacy.

Maria's acknowledgment of being out of place highlights the nature of her whiteness as a fiction based on wealth and education, but not endowed with genteel heritage. Christopher's claim to whiteness, by contrast, rests on heredity and historicity, both of which are inextricably connected with not only Blake Hall and the region, but also the Old South. Christopher, together with his frail mother, whose Southern belle fame still reverberates in a nostalgic echo across the region; two sisters, Cynthia and Lila; his uncle; and several of their former slaves occupy the overseer's house. This is the place where Mrs. Blake has been living in darkness, literally and metaphorically, for the past twenty years. The stroke she suffered before Fletcher took over Blake Hall has left her blind and paralyzed. She continues in this state, unaware of the family's altered circumstances, dwelling in a world in which "the Confederacy had never fallen," where "the three hundred slaves" are constantly present in her visions "tilling her familiar fields" (Glasgow, *The Deliverance* 74). She lives in a world in which it is customary for a gentleman, as she admonishes her son, to discuss matters of business in the library "over a bottle of burgundy" in keeping with his "grandfather's custom" (72-73). Mrs. Blake's condition literalizes the principles of

Southern whiteness, “where ancestry, gentility, and the backward view counted most” (McDowell 93). Ironically, her instruction in gentlemanly conduct evokes the “split between the image” and “the real,” one of the results of which is the “representation without existence” (Žižek, “Love Thy Neighbor” 166). The scholium undermines the facade of gentility which her family has painstakingly maintained and effectively forces Christopher to pass for a gentleman, since he feels obliged to postpone his discussion with Carraway until they can remove to the library. The failure of the endeavor is predetermined by the simple fact that their lodgings do not boast a library, and thus Christopher’s passing is foiled. Thanks to the efforts of her family, who have woven an “intricate tissue of lies . . . around her chair,” Mrs. Blake can pass for an aristocratic matron—the epitome of Christian charity who graciously gives audiences to her inferior neighbors such as Jim Weatherby (Glasgow, *The Deliverance* 74). Before Jim can present himself to her illustrious personage, Mrs. Blake instructs Cynthia “to make him wipe his feet” (269). If, following Richard Dyer, cleanliness is counted among the attributes of whiteness, then Mrs. Blake’s request opens up a space of difference between her and Jim in which she can reassert her gentility (70). Indeed, only when reassured of her visitor’s cleanliness does Mrs. Blake nostalgically remark, “I remember his father always was [clean]—unusually so for a common labourer” (269). Such remarks, belied by her surroundings, transform the cottage into a passing space where Mrs. Blake can graciously receive her inferior callers and accentuate the incompleteness of her gentility.

Interestingly, Mrs. Blake’s remark about Jim’s father’s cleanliness elevates the Weatherbys above other laborers and reaffirms the existence of “shades of whiteness” (Murguía and Forman 65)⁸, inadvertently validating their tenuous claim to whiteness. Later, Jim’s marriage to Mrs. Blake’s daughter, Lila, legitimates this claim. Mindful of Lila’s heritage, however, the Weatherbys treat her as the belle that she never was, thus ensuring her continuing to pass for a lady: Jim’s mother, Sarah, “would rather work her fingers to the bone than have that gal take a single dishcloth in her hand” (Glasgow, *The Deliverance* 487). In this place, where the past haunts the present, the Blakes cannot eschew passing for

⁸Edward Murguía and Tyrone Forman use the term “shades of whiteness” in their discussion of preconceived notions of whiteness which lead to the emergence of hegemonic whiteness.

gentility. On one hand, the fiction of the Blakes' whiteness is propagated by their formerly poor, but now financially equal, neighbors for whom the very connection with the Blakes stands for an elevation in status. On the other hand, however, the family writes its own fiction of whiteness, equally populated by the ghosts of the past. Cynthia spends her nights plotting "all sorts of pleasant lies" that she can "tell [her mother] about the house and the garden, and the way the war ended, and the Presidents of the Confederacy" whose names "she made up" (486). Since the Blakes' whiteness is bound up with the Old South, it is imperative that the place be reinvented in order for Cynthia's narrative to be believable. Cynthia, after having "lied for almost thirty years," has lost her "taste for the truth," and the imaginary space in which she reconstructs the family's whiteness supersedes the dimension of the everyday, becoming a site of the only acceptable truth (486). To sustain the fiction of this whiteness, Cynthia reinscribes the history of the region; it is not merely the mythical Old South that lives on in the former overseer's cottage, but an entirely new construct. Cynthia's reconstruction of their whiteness, grounded in a resurrected and rewritten space of the Confederacy, cements the signification of the construct as a simulacrum, "for which no original has ever existed" (Jameson 18). Conjured up alongside the reinvented history of the region, the whiteness thus reconstructed is as imaginary as the place that inspires it.

Although the Blakes' whiteness is grounded in their genteel heritage, Christopher perceives such fiction as untenable. When Maria offers to restore Blake Hall to him, he bluntly answers: "It is too late. . . . You can't put a field-hand in a fine house and make him a gentleman. It is too late to undo what was done twenty years ago. The place can never be mine again" (Glasgow, *The Deliverance* 419). While Christopher's retort evokes Maria's feeling of being out of place in Blake Hall as a result of her plebeian origin, it also problematizes it by highlighting the futility of claims to whiteness based on lineage and heritage alone. Christopher is acutely aware that without his ancestral home and the adjunct acres, hereditary whiteness becomes an empty signifier. Having tasted "the abject bitterness and despair of those years" when he "tried to sink [himself] to the level of the brutes—tried to forget that [he] was any better than the oxen [he] drove," Christopher places himself beyond the pale of whiteness (420-21). For Christopher, displaced from the ancestral

seat of his forefathers, the return to the fantasy of whiteness that the edifice symbolizes is impossible, and he vehemently declares, “No, there’s no pulling me up again; such things aren’t lived over, and I’m down for good” (421). Christopher’s anguished outburst is redolent of social Darwinism, whereby once his enforced metamorphosis into a field laborer has been accomplished, its reversal is impossible; he will never be able to rise above his current station in life.⁹ A similar social determinism is evident in Maria. Whenever in Christopher’s presence, Maria feels “the appeal of the rustic tradition, the rustic temperament; of all the multiplied inheritances of the centuries, which her education had not utterly extinguished” (172). What Christopher resents but accepts Maria finds appealing because of her plebeian roots which no amount of education can elevate. Just as Maria’s lowly legacy invalidates the accomplishments that her grandfather’s wealth helped to acquire, Christopher’s status as a field laborer belies his hereditary claim to whiteness. Implicit in his status is a relationship with the land “at its most elemental level” (MacKethan 51). While his forefathers supervised the cultivation of tobacco, Christopher literalizes the metaphor of “living *with* the land and its processes” (Barnhill 5), so much so that “The smell and the stain of it [tobacco] are well soaked in”; he bitterly wonders whether “all the water in the river of Jordan could wash away the blood of the tobacco worm” (Glasgow, *The Deliverance* 182). The blood of the tobacco worm is thus transmuted into the stain of original sin without the possibility of redemption, and this is what will always preclude his rebirth in whiteness. Even if he is restored to Blake Hall, for Christopher it can only be a passing place, just as it has been for Maria.

Although Glasgow did not share Page’s passion for mythopeia, she recognized the potency of the imagined space of the Old South. Whether inflected with heroic pathos by Page in *Red Rock* or treated with ironic indulgence by Glasgow in *The Deliverance*, the Old South is evoked as the originary space of Southern whiteness. For their protagonists, the notion of this imagined place is indispensable to the creation and

⁹McDowell observes that Glasgow was dominated, like many of her contemporaries, “by a realism which had assimilated Darwinian concepts” (20). Nonetheless, he also stresses that “Her application of Darwin to the social scene” was “less rigid than” Zola’s. Consequently, “Like many of the other American realists contemporary with her, she accepted only a modified determinism” (22). See Peter Dickens for a detailed account of social Darwinism.

continuity of the fiction of whiteness resting on the staples of heritage and blood. These enduring symbols of gentility, born out of the idyllic space of the Old South, are monumentalized in the space of the plantation house. Though perhaps admitted reluctantly, the power of the plantation house to unmake Southern whiteness, while remaining its continuing emblem, is also evident in Page's *Gordon Keith* and Glasgow's *The Voice of the People*. But it is not restricted to Page and Glasgow. Its shadowy presence lingers in the works of William Faulkner and Robert Penn Warren, for example, where its influence does not show any signs of abating. The plantation house is an ambiguous and elusive place, a borderland, where the ideal and actuality collide. As these authors demonstrate, it is a space that occupies an indisputably central position in the Southern sensibility yet also registers as perversely liminal, and this liminality of the plantation house merits further inquiry. For Page and Glasgow, perhaps unconsciously, the plantation house, even when lost, remains a "half-presence" that conveys the "true absence" of the wholeness of the antebellum ideal which the edifice symbolizes (Macherey 82). Pierre Macherey notes that meaning is constructed "in the *relation* between the implicit and the explicit" (87). For those of aristocratic descent, the explicit loss of the plantation translates into the implicit, though no less acute, loss of gentility; for those of plebeian origin who come into possession of the plantation, the edifice renders explicit their lack of acceptable heritage. In combining the symbolic and physical spaces of whiteness, the plantation house becomes not only a tangible locus of difference, but also a medium through which it may be accessed and negotiated—the place where the story of whiteness can be retold, but never realized. Its enduring presence blights the gentility of the upstart and displaced aristocrat alike, while the illusion of completeness it furnishes is indispensable to the functioning of the rhetoric of whiteness.

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