White Sympathy: Race and Moral Sentiments from the Man of Feeling to the New Woman

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Declaration

My signature certifies that this thesis represents my own original work, the result of my own original research, and that I have clearly cited all sources and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

Lise Sorensen
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A different version of the first part of chapter two of this thesis has been published in 2009 by Cambridge University Press in Native Americans and Anglo-American Culture, 1750-1850: The Indian Atlantic (eds. Tim Fulford and Kevin Hutchings) under the title of ‘Savages and Men of Feeling: North American Indians in Adam Smith’s The Theory of Moral Sentiments and Henry Mackenzie’s The Man of the World.’
This PhD thesis explores the role of sympathy in the discursive formation of race in Scottish and American eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature. Offering insight into Adam Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* as one paradigm that underpins the philosophical terms of sympathy in the Atlantic world, I argue that sympathy as a mode of control and a mechanism of normalisation played a formative role in the transatlantic history of the literary construction of whiteness. My introductory chapter delineates key debates on sentimental literature and argues that race in general and whiteness in particular have been ignored in revisionist accounts of the genre. My second chapter outlines Smith’s concept of sympathy in the context of Scottish Enlightenment theories of stadial history, suggesting that sympathy is always already bound up with a racial understanding of others in a categorical system of cultural development. I examine this dialectic of race and sympathy in the novels of Henry Mackenzie, which present social inequality, colonial exploitation, and slavery as conditions that the sentimental genre cannot rectify. This discussion is continued in chapter three, which deconstructs Harriet Beecher Stowe’s sentimental rhetoric in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, suggesting that while it is employed to foster fellow-feeling for the black slave, it also reduces others to the terms of the white self. Chapter four demonstrates that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*’s philosophy of white sympathy is fully articulated in Stowe’s New York novels, *My Wife and I* and *We and Our Neighbors*, as a discourse of affinity, which functions as an advertisement for white bourgeois homogeneity in a developing consumer culture. The concluding chapter explores sympathy in relation to race passing and scientific racism in Jessie Redmon Fauset’s *Comedy: American Style*, where the passing protagonist embodies the gaze of sympathy that cares for others according to their degree of whiteness. Fauset, I argue, critiques the legacy of nineteenth-century sentimental literature, just as she, along with Du Bois and others, opposes eugenicists’ vision of a ‘White Atlantic’ as a new world order.
The instinctive comity of the white peoples is, as I have already said, perhaps the greatest constant of history. It is the psychological basis of white civilization. Cohesive instinct is as vital to race as gravitation is to matter. Without them, atomic disintegration would alike result...

White race-consciousness has been of course perturbed by numberless internal frictions, which have at times produced partial inhibitions of unitary feeling. (198)

Lothrop Stoddard,

*The Rising Tide of Color against White World-Supremacy* (1920)
ONE

Introduction:

**White Sympathy: The Power to Look and Read Selves**

‘It may seem a long way from the man of feeling to the modern consumer. But this self-conscious savoring of sentiment – what the later generations of cognoscenti would deride as kitsch – would become the heart of many national advertising campaigns in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries,’ historian Jackson Lears argues in his history of advertising in America (*Fables of Abundance* 48). The inquiry of this PhD thesis falls within the cultural trajectory that Lears identifies: it examines Adam Smith’s notion of sympathy, which is conceptualised as an exclusive product of commercial society in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759), in literature from Henry Mackenzie’s notorious man of feeling to Harriet Beecher Stowe’s proto-consumer heroines in the late nineteenth century. Adding to Lears’ observation, I suggest that this shared discursive development of sentiment and consumption cannot be divorced from the discursive production of race in general and whiteness in particular. Offering insight into Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* as one paradigm that underpins the philosophical terms of sympathy in the Atlantic world of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, I argue that sympathy as a mechanism of normalisation plays a formative role in the transatlantic history of the literary construction of whiteness.

If existing accounts of sympathy in the British and American sentimental novel adopt *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* as a point of departure for their analysis, they pay little or no attention to the transatlantic dialogue that Smith’s text itself evokes. My account of Smithian sympathy, then, seeks to draw attention to the transatlantic
framework within which Smith theories sympathy, the four-stage societal model of conjectural history, which presents Native American society as a temporal looking glass to European civil society. In addition, I want to complicate the (mis)conception of Mackenzie’s man of feeling as the ideal embodiment of the eighteenth-century culture of sensibility by considering Mackenzie’s other body of novels, which questions the role of sympathy in civil society through transatlantic encounters with racial others. These encounters, staged by Smith and Mackenzie, thus bring sympathy and race into a shared discursive realm and call for a reassessment of both in an explicitly transatlantic dialogic context. Suggesting that ‘our received view [of the Age of Sensibility] needs to be extended temporally and geographically and made more complex’ (446), Julie Ellison notes that,

One can trace the prestige of manly tears from the political plays of the Exclusion Crisis, through Addison’s Cato (1713), to the pamphlet literature of the American Revolution. The project of sympathy takes shape in and through the historical stresses of racial and cultural difference in European empires. As early as Addison’s treatment of Juba in Cato or Steele’s “Inkle and Yarico” essay in The Spectator...race relations and sexual relations in the empire are represented in terms of sympathetic transactions. Sensibility becomes an international style, both in the sense of being exportable (especially, in the American instance, to white colonial literati) and also in the sense of being about race. (446)

Ellison identifies the underlying assumptions of my argument; namely, that ‘Sensibility becomes an international style’ and that its “moving” qualities, to borrow Michelle Burnham’s apposite phrase (3), are bound up with representations

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1 *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* defines ‘sensibility’ as ‘an important 18th-century term designating a kind of sensitivity or responsiveness that is both aesthetic and moral, showing a capacity to feel both for others’ sorrow and for beauty...Its major significance, though, is as a concept or mood of 18th-century culture. In terms of moral philosophy, it signalled a reaction against Thomas Hobbes’ view of human behaviour as essentially selfish: the 3rd Earl of Shaftesbury and other 18th-century thinkers argued that human beings have an innate ‘benevolence’ or sympathy for others’ (Baldick 202-3). This thesis deploys the term ‘sensibility’ in this broad cultural and philosophical sense, whereas it deploys the term ‘sympathy’ in the specific Smithian sense in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. 
of race. Participating in this critical discussion of the twined transatlantic literary discourse of sensibility and race, I ask how this moving literature informs and privileges sympathetic readings of whiteness.

This thesis investigates Smithian sympathy, not so much as a moral value, but as a process of normalisation aligned with the development of racialised subjects. Indeed, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is part of the wider discourse of Scottish conjectural history that generated theories of a four-stage model of cultural development wherein Native American society figures as a prototype of ‘the savage stage’ of societal growth and where ‘European civilisation’ is represented as the ultimate state of social progress. Sympathy, to Smith, is the defining feature of this advanced stage of society. The very epistemology of Smith’s enlightened sympathy, then, is always already racialised. As a model that regulates intersubjective and social relations, sympathy thus establishes a set of parameters for reading race. ‘Enlightenment philosophy,’ as Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze reminds us, ‘was instrumental in codifying and institutionalizing both the scientific and popular European perceptions of the human race...“reason” and “civilization” became almost synonymous with “white” people and northern Europe, while unreason and savagery were conveniently located among the non-whites, the “black,” the “red,” the “yellow,” outside Europe’ (5). Indeed, the four-stage theory of progress would provide nineteenth-century racial scientists with historical evidence of the inferiority of non-white peoples.

Reading sympathy as an enlightenment philosophy that was instrumental in the institutionalisation of whiteness, to draw on Eze’s words, I understand its function as one of normalisation in Foucauldian terms. Elizabeth Barnes writes thus of Smith’s notion of sympathy: ‘In a move that anticipates Foucault’s study of modern
disciplinary forms, sympathy is revealed to be a self-regulating practice. What we might call the conscience, and what Smith refers to as the “impartial spectator” or the man “within the breast,” is an agent of disciplinary sympathy arising out of the psychological interplay of real and imagined feeling’ (18). Smith’s impartial spectator, the abstract figure who guards the modern passionate self, whom we may read as an agent akin to Michel Foucault’s ‘judge of normality’ (*Discipline and Punish* 1645), is the leitmotif of my argument. Emerging as an agent of whiteness in my chosen literature, I read the spectator figure as embodying the white narrative gaze that grants and withholds sympathy in proportion to the degree of whiteness of characters.

Reading is central to Smith’s understanding of the imaginative function of sympathy. Conditioned by imaginative identification, it is methodologically linked to novelistic conventions and lends itself susceptible to interpretive strategies akin to those in literary study. Indeed, Smith draws on the reading process as an ideal example of the fulfilment of sympathy’s promise: to make the sentiments of others our own. David Marshall suggests that ‘to some extent [*The Theory of Moral Sentiments*] can be read like a novel that offers a view of the world strangely similar to that presented by Defoe and Eliot; Smith is as concerned as a novelist with the fictions that we use to represent others and ourselves’ (*The Figure of the Theater* 3). Sympathy’s representation of others, and by extension sentimental literature’s, is embedded in affinity, according to Barnes, who argues that its underlying assumption is that others are constituted in relation to oneself:

> By displacing a democratic model that values diversity with a familial model that seeks to elide it, sentimental literature subordinates democratic politics to a politics of affinity, employing a method of affective representation that dissolves the boundaries between “self and “other.” By contrast to critics who
view sentimentality as distinctly democratic in nature and practice, I suggest that sentimental literature teaches a particular way of reading both texts and people that relies on likeness and thereby reinforces homogeneity. In the sentimental scheme of sympathy, others are made real – and thus cared for – to the extent that they can be shown in relation to the reader. (4)

While Barnes’ reading of Smithian sympathy and sentimental literature informs this thesis, I extend it by suggesting that sentimentalism as a literary discourse can be understood as a philosophy of white affinity. Barnes argues that ‘we must see that sentimental literature’s reliance on the concept of familial attachment to evoke sympathy counters democratic principles and ultimately constructs the framework for future “identity politics”’ (98). Supplementing Barnes’ argument, I suggest that sentimentalism as a white identity politics forms an ideological backdrop for nineteenth- and early twentieth-century theories of racial science, like those of phrenology and eugenics, seeking to inscribe whiteness as a fixed notion of identity.

**Sympathy: A White Aesthetic**

With its notion of spectatorship as the basis for the facilitation of sympathy and of the representation of selfhood, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* is a theory of imaginative and theatrical relations that foregrounds sensory perception: Smith’s ethics is always also an aesthetic. Sympathy, as an intersubjective ethical model, in other words, is also an aesthetic response to others, a response that I identify in terms of whiteness in the sentimental novels under examination. The character of little Eva, in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), stands as the ultimate figure for this white aesthetic of sympathy. In *White*, which examines the relationship between the discourse of whiteness and technologies of visual culture, Richard Dyer suggests that scenes of visual effect in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* featuring little Eva have formed the basis for a
general white aesthetic practice in film and photography. Dyer concludes ‘that the aesthetic technology of the photographic media, the apparatus and practice par excellence of a light culture, not only assumes and privileges whiteness but also constructs it’ (122). Proposing that the same argument can be made in the case of sympathy as a visual and aesthetic technology, the third chapter of this thesis explores the intertwinement of the technologies and practices of daguerreotypy, phrenology, and sympathy in Stowe’s era, arguing that they seek to represent whiteness as a transparent optical phenomenon. Lears explains the culture’s obsession with ‘perfect transparency’: ‘In painting, theatre, and literature, devotees of realism assumed that the artist could (and should) provide an unproblematic window on reality, the same sort of clear and unadorned perception embodied in the positivist ideal of scientific observation’ (Fables of Abundance 83). My project, then, examines sympathy as a white aesthetic within the wider questions of mimesis and (mis)representation that occupied the emerging bourgeois culture throughout the nineteenth century into the twentieth.

This PhD thesis offers an account of sympathy that seeks to penetrate into its white identity politics and aesthetics that have remained strangely invisible in studies of sensibility: criticism, as Toni Morrison argues, labours under ‘images of blinding whiteness’ (Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination 33). As a case in point, the excellent study Transatlantic Stowe: Harriet Beecher Stowe and European Culture interprets Stowe’s racial depictions mainly within the parameters of the Black Atlantic:

With slavery such a fraught topic in Europe in the 1850s as well as in the United States, it is clear that Uncle Tom’s Cabin should be considered crucial to the history of the Black Atlantic...Along with Stowe’s other books on slavery, The Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin and Dred, Uncle Tom played a
formative role in the transatlantic history of race relations and in the representation of black people. (Kohn, Meer, and Todd xxiv).

While *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*’s clearly should be read within Paul Gilroy’s paradigm, I would argue, it must also be understood as having fostered a particular white sensibility in the Atlantic world.

If my study charts a trajectory of white sympathy, I am mostly concerned with exploring certain episodes in that trajectory, which my individual chapters particularise, rather than with proposing a coherent literary history of sympathy. Arising out of the organising principles and imagery of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, my readings are ultimately conceptual in nature, and my methodology is informed by Susan Manning’s in *Fragment of Union: Making Connections in Scottish and American Writing*, which ‘mov[es] away from the traditionally influence-led methodologies of comparative literary studies...and works through more associative and analogical models of comparison initially derived from the structuring principles of the Scottish and American texts themselves’ (4). Like Manning, I am more interested in ‘intertextual clusters of associations’ than in demonstrating ‘direct pressure of one writer or piece of work on another’ (5), and thus my work departs from traditional schools of Comparative Literature ‘based in “influence” studies of a very empirical kind’ (Manning and Taylor 7). Underlying such studies is the problematic, as Manning and Andrew Taylor note in their introduction to *Transatlantic Literary Studies: A Reader*, that ‘The “influence” story assumes hierarchical forms of connection that answer to politically- and culturally-inflected historicism, in which a dominant (prior) position exerts power and imposes uniformity on a subdued other’ (7). ‘Hans Jauss’’s perception that literary history needs to be understood in terms of “dialogue as well as process,”’ on the other hand,
'would seem to lend itself well to transatlantic literary studies,' according to Manning and Taylor (7). Reading my chosen sentimental literature in intertextual dialogue with *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, then, my study foregrounds textual evidence as opposed to the kind of empirical evidence valued in the traditional discipline of Comparative Literature. Conducting its critical inquiry by examining the rhetorical strategies of Smithian sympathy in literature, this thesis investigates the discursive role of sentimentalism in reflecting and forming conceptions of whiteness.

**The Canon and ‘Images of Blinding Whiteness’**

In the wake of the so-called ‘Douglas/Tompkins debate,’ Elizabeth Ammons opened up the canon of American literature to writers like Jessie Redmon Fauset whose work has been rendered invisible by a male-dominated academy. While the issue of race was ignored by Ann Douglas and Jane Tompkins in their debate over the ‘cultural work’ of sentimental fiction, Ammons, like Morrison in *Playing in the Dark*, challenges critics to explore discourses of whiteness in literature. Reassessing overlooked women writers from the early 1890s through the 1920s in order to explore whiteness in a ‘New Literary History,’ to evoke the title of her 1987 essay, Ammons juxtaposes Fauset and Edith Wharton suggesting that,

The other broad issue that Fauset forces into the open is, of course, race. Placing Fauset and Wharton side by side forces us to see Edith Wharton as a white writer. As I have argued elsewhere, it is a measure of racism of American culture that, even in the academy, which prides itself on intellectual objectivity and fairness, a double standard prevails: race matters when it is people of color who are the subject but not when it is whites. In literary study, black is to white as woman is to man; the subordinate category – black, female – receives separate analysis, scrutiny, and argument, while the privilege and equally group-specific values and issues implied by the dominant term – white, male – go unexamined. Bringing together Fauset and Wharton forces into the field of vision Edith Wharton as a white writer. (‘New Literary History: Edith Wharton and Jessie Redmon Fauset’ 214)
Responding to the critical observations of Ammons and Morrison, this thesis seeks to bring ‘into the field of vision’ writers and work which have been marginalised by a white male academy throughout the twentieth century, most notably by F. O. Matthiessen’s *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (1941). In a similar move to Ammons’, my concluding chapter reads Fauset’s *Comedy: American Style* (1933) as a critique of the white legacy of the sentimental novel against the backdrop of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and the neglected New York novels, *My Wife and I* (1871) and *We and Our Neighbors* (1875), by Stowe, whom I, in turn, discuss as ‘white writer.’ Just as James Baldwin, in his seminal 1949 essay ‘Everybody’s Protest Novel,’ places Richard Wright’s *Native Son* and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* together, writing that ‘it seems that the contemporary Negro novelist and the dead New England woman are locked together in a deadly, timeless battle’ (501), I place Stowe and Fauset together in a battle over sentimentalism. Reading Fauset’s novel in response to the scientific racism of early twentieth-century, perpetuated by eugenicists like Madison Grant and Lothrop Stoddard, moreover, I suggest that sympathy, as a white philosophical and psychological doctrine in sentimental literature, helped shape the sentiments underlying ‘race solidarity’ as the basis of eugenicists’ vision of pan-whiteness.

Like *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the New York novels were immediately popular in their day but have since fallen into obscurity. If Henry James and most of his fellow reviewers of these novels dismissed them, primarily on the grounds of their supposedly vulgar language and inaccurate depictions of urban life, Stowe herself was ‘very gratified with the success of “My Wife and I,”’ writing that ‘I get a great many more letters about it than I received about anything except “Uncle Tom”’ (qtd.
in Fields 332). The contemporary critical consensus on the New York novels – amongst the small handful of scholars who do consider them – may best be summarised by Perry D. Westbrook: ‘Fortunately for Stowe’s present reputation, all three of these novels are unread – and unknown – today’ (217). Even Tompkins’ groundbreaking study, Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860, which brought Uncle Tom’s Cabin back into the spotlight in the 1980s, ignores these novels. I would argue that they are problematic to Tompkins’ reassessment of sentimental fiction, because they dismantle her favoured term of ‘sentimental power.’

One critic who has sought to open up the canon to My Wife and I and We and Our Neighbors is Ann Romines who argues that they belong in the realist canon with the likes of William Dean Howells, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Mary Wilkins Freeman. In her study The Home Plot: Women, Writing and Domestic Ritual, which may be read as a successor to Sensational Designs, Romines argues that,

We and Our Neighbors is a significant experiment because in it we see Stowe alluding to utopian domestic rituals, through Mrs. Henderson and the rural relics she preserves, cautioning against abuses and atrophy of domestic ritual through Aunt Maria’s malicious and ultimately pointless machinations, and simultaneously, through Eva’s fledgling household, making an evanglistic attempt to present benign domestic ritual as contemporary social reality. We and Our Neighbors is quite as ambitious as Uncle Tom’s Cabin or A Hazard of New Fortunes. Even Stowe’s choice of the unexceptional Eva as a vehicle for her contemporary domestic vision suggests a prototypically realistic commitment to the artistic possibilities of the ordinary. (28-29)

Following Tompkins’ position, Romines views domestic ritual as liberating and empowering, thereby endorsing the novels’ own reactionary premises. While the New York novels may deserve a place in the realist canon, I want to rediscover them because they ‘force into the field of vision’ a twinned discourse of whiteness and
sympathy that challenges the picture drawn by the likes of Tompkins and Romines, which overlooks the powerful race and class politics of Stowe’s novels in its quest to reclaim the female tradition of domesticity as proto-feminist. Like Tompkins, I am less interested in the question of literary value – ‘But Is It Any Good?’ (Tompkins 186) – than in the politics of these texts, a politics which I suggest is a white identity politics. In response to the ‘Douglas/Tompkins debate,’ which, according to Cindy Weinstein, has taken more traditional methods of literary analysis ‘off the critical radar screen, as if questions of ideology and more conventional matters of literary form were mutually exclusive’ (5), my objective, moreover, is to subject Stowe’s sentimental language to close reading, rendering its white aesthetic visible.

While Tompkins’ work has been seminal for placing *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in the canon – where it indeed belongs – and for reinvigorating a welcome debate on women’s sentimental literature, it has, like its object of critique, F. O. Matthiessen’s *American Renaissance*, ignored the pressing issues of race. This is in spite of the fact the Tompkins’ cover image begs the question, featuring, as it does, Uncle Tom, ‘a large, broad-chested, powerfully-made man, of a full glossy black’ and little Eva, with her ‘violet blue eyes’ ‘always dressed in white,’ to use Stowe’s own descriptions from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (18, 126). Eric J. Sundquist comments on this problematic in his introduction to *New Essays on Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which appeared the year after the publication of *Sensational Designs* in 1985: ‘Any reformation of the canon of American literature that sets out to give *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* the central place it deserves cannot afford to take lightly, much less ignore altogether, such problems in the book itself or in the cultural images it has engendered’ (4). Or, as Arthur Riss puts it, ‘This revisionist account of *Uncle Tom’s*
*Cabin* has effectively recast the tenor of investigations into the novel; positive characterizations of Stowe’s gender politics have subsumed anxieties about her racial politics’ (‘Racial Essentialism and Family Values in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*’ 516). Reassessing the hangover from the ‘Douglas/Tompkins debate,’ I discuss the New York novels against the backdrop of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to propose a more complex picture of Stowe’s racialised sentimentalism in my fourth chapter. As Maurice S. Lee reminds us, ‘*Uncle Tom’s Cabin* may rightfully dominate discussions of Stowe’s work. The novel was a major event in the nineteenth-century American literature and culture, and it continues to speak to scholarly interests across a range of fields. The problem is that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* tends to occlude Stowe’s subsequent writings, so much that her sentimentality becomes too monolithic, too static’ (78).

Rethinking the canon of nineteenth-century sentimental literature, this thesis looks back to its philosophical foundation established in the eighteenth century. While a number of scholars do consider *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* in their critiques of sentimental literature, they often disregard Smithian sympathy as part of a model of cultural development which favours masculinity, approaching it as a genre written by and for women. The forthcoming chapter therefore discusses sympathy and the notion of the impartial spectator as a particular masculine ethos. That chapter, moreover, allows us to reconsider the notion of the man of feeling as the embodiment of the culture of sensibility through the lens of Mackenzie’s later novels. Reading his now largely overlooked, though immediately popular with readers of its day, *The Man of World* (1773) and *Julia de Roubigné* (1777), as novels in an aesthetic debate with *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, I suggest that they problematise sensibility as a guide to social practice. Indeed, *The Theory of Moral*
Sentiments itself remains sceptical of the imaginative possibilities of sympathy, presenting it as a philosophical conundrum. In addition, Smith grapples with white historiography as he seeks to map out a linear model of progress in which Native Americans are represented as prototypical savages but also as bearing an uncanny resemblance to the impartial spectator. Smith’s and Mackenzie’s epistemological ambiguities, it appears, question the enlightenment values of sympathy and civil society. Bringing ‘into the field of vision’ of criticism these ambiguities, this thesis presents sentimental literature as informed by Smithian sympathy and conjectural history; discourses which have helped establish a framework for imaginative readings of race in the modern Atlantic world.
TWO

Laboratories of Emotion: Testing White Sensibility across the Atlantic in Henry Mackenzie’s *The Man of the World* and *Julia de Roubigné*

There is a helplessness in the character of extreme humanity which more than any thing interests our pity. There is nothing in itself which renders it either ungraceful or disagreeable. We only regret that it is unfit for the world, because the world is unworthy of it. (63-64)

The hardiness demanded of savages diminishes their humanity; and, perhaps, the delicate sensibility required in civilized nations sometimes destroys the masculine firmness of the character. (321)

Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*²

Introduction

‘I was somehow led to think of introducing a man of sensibility into different scenes where his feelings might be seen in their effects,’ Mackenzie wrote to his cousin about the composition of *The Man of Feeling* in 1769, situating his protagonist in a sort of laboratory of emotion (qtd. in Vickers xii). In this chapter I want to suggest that Mackenzie’s testing ground for feeling is staged through transatlantic encounters in the novels that succeeded *The Man of Feeling*. *The Man of the World* features a sentimental protagonist who is re-educated by stoical Indians in North America. In the epistolary experiment of *Julia de Roubigné*, the slave-holding colony of Martinique sets the stage for the exercise of sentimental rhetoric against the backdrop of colonialism. These novels’ transatlanticism, predicated on depictions of North American Indians and black Africans, calls for a critical reassessment of Mackenzie’s novels within Gilroy’s paradigm of the Black Atlantic and the newly conceptualised paradigm of the ‘Indian Atlantic’ by Tim Fulford and Kevin Hutchings. They note that ‘in the sense of a continuing colonial involvement on the

²Smith quotations are from the 3rd edition of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (London, 1767) except as specified.
level of multiple personal relationships as well as the levels of commerce, politics, war, discourse etc., there was a ‘Red Atlantic’ just as deserving of our attention as the ‘Black Atlantic’ (Native Americans and Anglo-American Culture, 1750-1850: The Indian Atlantic 18).

‘All civilized beings, [Mackenzie] seems to suggest, must respond to suffering with sympathetic feeling and charitable action’ (xxii), Brian Vickers writes in his introduction to The Man of Feeling. Vickers, I would argue, fails to see the ambivalence with which Mackenzie treats the sentimental genre. The Man of Feeling, I suggest, reads as a cynical experiment, testing and failing the philosophy of sympathy as a social practice, wherein Mackenzie exposes his protagonist to various social situations which he misjudges. Maureen Harkin reads Mackenzie’s man of feeling, Harley, as an observer and interpreter who ‘constantly makes the mistake of conflating sign for thing, signifier for referent, in a naïve misunderstanding of the slippage between appearance and reality’ (330), and concludes that ‘in demonstrating Harley’s failures, Mackenzie highlights the inadequacies of sensibility as a basis for social practice’ (‘Mackenzie’s Man of Feeling: Embalming Sensibility’ 321). As novels in intertextual dialogue with Smith’s Theory of Moral Sentiments, which does, however ambivalently, present ‘sensibility as a basis for social practice’ in civil society, I first explore The Man of the World and then Julia de Roubigné as texts that suggest that ‘respond[ing] to suffering with sympathetic feeling and charitable action,’ in Vickers’ words, does not rectify colonial exploitation and slavery. Indeed, sentimental politics, Mackenzie seems to suggest, is closely intertwined with colonial politics.
In the wake of Smith’s *The Theory of Moral Sentiments, The Man of Feeling* provided the eighteenth-century culture of sensibility with its title character while also representing its decline. ‘Unfit for the world,’ Mackenzie’s man of feeling dies in a state of emotional excess and, as Manning has suggested, Smith’s words in the opening quotation above may best exemplify Harley’s predicament (*The Works of Henry Mackenzie* xv-xvi). In Enlightenment Scotland, sensibility was a distinct mark of modernity, but as a guide to social practice it seemed increasingly incompatible with modern society. The first part of this chapter explores a figure that would seem to represent an attractive, if highly ambivalent, alternative to the modern passionate self: supposedly from the edge of time, the figure of the stoical Indian offered the possibility of reinvigorating the virtues of self-command and prudence that were thought to have flourished in an age before the capitalist *Zeitgeist* weakened the character of Britons.

Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* is part of the wider discourse of Scottish conjectural history that generated theories of a four-stage model of societal progress in which North American Indians figured as the prototypes from which civilised Europeans had developed. In his influential 1767 *Essay on the History of Civil Society*, the Edinburgh historian Adam Ferguson presented Indians as living evidence for the first stage of development, writing that ‘It is in their present condition, that we are to behold, as in a mirrour, the features of our own progenitors’ (80). In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith insisted on sympathy as the ultimate product of progress, maintaining that Indian society could be seen as an example of a generic savage society where sensibility could not be cultivated. Smith’s Indians, however,
are slippery evidence for the stadial thesis, bearing, as Harkin has argued in ‘Adam
Smith’s Missing History: Primitives, Progress, and the Problems of Genre,’ an
alluring resemblance to his impartial spectator, the abstract figure of the ideal
modern self in whose image civic man should mould himself. Possessing the stoical
virtue of self-command, the distinctive characteristic of the impartial spectator and of
masculine superiority, Smith’s Native Americans cannot comfortably be contained as
backward others who fill in the slots in a linear historical scheme. This uncanny
alignment of Native Americans with the didactic figure of the impartial spectator
implies that Indians could provide a rich source of identity to European men of
feeling. In Mackenzie’s novel *The Man of the World*, a doomed man of feeling is
transported to America where he is recast in the image of the stoical Indian. To
Mackenzie, I want to argue, Indians are living embodiments of a Smithian impartial
spectator; Native Americans are at the heart of the didacticism in the novel
functioning as a temporal mirror in which Britons may recapture the stoical virtues
they seemingly once possessed.

As opposed to *The Man of Feeling*, *The Man of the World* has received little
attention in studies of sensibility on both sides of the Atlantic. Indeed, historian
Andrew Burstein argues that the Scottish Mackenzie and his man of feeling were at
the heart of the formation of the American democratic project and its romantic self-
image. As a point of departure for this argument Burstein notes that an excerpt from
*The Man of Feeling* appeared next to Thomas Jefferson’s version of ‘The Speech of
Logan’ in an obscure American pamphlet, presumed published in 1803 (*Sentimental
included the sentimental speech of the eloquent but doomed Indian leader Logan in
his 1787 *Notes on the State of Virginia* to document Native Americans’ capacity for enlightened rhetoric, refuting the Comte de Buffon’s claim that Indians were naturally inferior to Europeans. On the alignment of Jefferson’s and Mackenzie’s texts Burstein writes that ‘The message – Jefferson’s as well as Mackenzie’s – is that in an enlightened society, positive passion and the sympathetic imagination can be applied to remedying ill and instituting social justice’ (xiii). Indians, however, were not imagined to play any part in Jefferson’s enlightened society of white American farmers, and thus Logan, as the last representative of his race, like James Macpherson’s Ossian, could safely be appropriated as a figure of sympathy and of virtue. An excerpt from *The Man of the World* would perhaps sit slightly more uneasily next to ‘The Speech of Logan,’ as this novel exposes an admirable portrait of Indian life as a stark contrast to the hypocritical societies of colonial America and Europe. But while *The Man of the World* launches a harsh critique of benevolent sentimentalism and colonial discourse, it also reduces Indians to rhetorical constructs as part of sentimental re-education. In what follows, I examine how depictions of Indians are appropriated in the discursive construction of sympathy and in stadial theory as paradoxical figures of the past that simultaneously stabilise and destabilise Enlightenment narratives of progress.

After the union with England in 1707 that gave Scotland access to the British Empire, and especially in the wake of the Seven Years’ War, various images of Indians figured in Scottish Enlightenment literature and in ‘the science of man’ project. Travel accounts, newspapers, plays, essays, and novels featuring Indians brought the empire to the doorstep of North Britons. The Scottish thinkers drew on popular travel accounts such as those of the French Jesuits Joseph François Lafitau
and Pierre de Charlevoix and their fellow Scotsman Cadwallader Colden in their formulations of the four-stage theory of cultural development. Frequently referring to the works of Lafitau and Charlevoix as authoritative sources in his *Essay*, Ferguson constructed the Indian as an historical and cultural prototype from which modern Europeans had progressed. Ferguson conceptualised the history of societal development as a four-stage model of progress, suggesting that all societies derive from ‘a feeble original’ and develop in stages, from ‘savage’ to ‘barbarian’ and on to ‘commercial’ and ‘polite’ (74). The first societal stages were defined by hunting, gathering and herding as the prime modes of existence, whereas societies that had progressed to stage three and four were agricultural and commercial. Ferguson’s notion of the ‘feeble original,’ of which the North American Indian was seen as the embodiment, implied that all so-called savage societies were uniform and backward (74). ‘Mankind, when in their rude state, have a great uniformity of manners,’ Ferguson writes, ‘but when civilized, they are engaged in a variety of pursuits’ (179).

The Scottish theorists paid little attention to different Indian cultural practices and were often in error in their assumptions, but, as Troy O. Bickham has argued, ‘The Scots philosophers were primarily interested in establishing a hierarchical system in which societies might be categorized’ (198). Depictions of the Indian helped shape Europe’s white self-image of cultural superiority – failing to cultivate sensibility, delicacy, and commerce, the Native American was constructed as Enlightenment’s other.

But if the Indian was conceived as a savage figure against whom enlightened Europeans could define themselves, accounts of Native Americans also implied that

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3 For examples of the use of the travel accounts of Lafitau, Charlevoix, and Colden, see Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, 13, 23, 27, 82-88, 90-93, and 113.
Europeans could benefit from contact with their temporal other. Peter Williamson’s captivity narratives, notably, suggested that Europeans could reinvent themselves amongst wise Indians who were seemingly more sincere and unaffected than Europeans. Linda Colley has argued that Williamson’s narratives should be seen as examples of a wider acceptance in Britain ‘that Native American societies were complex, possessed of valuable qualities as well as evils, and that whites held captive in them might find the experience attractive and even alluring’ (Captives 192). The motif of the transcultured individual functioning as a cultural broker would be explored in texts emerging in the wake of the Seven Years’ War and generate more nuanced pictures of Native Americans. Indeed, The Man of the World and Robert Bage’s Hermsprong (1796) expose their heroes as being better Britons for having been educated by Indians in America. Described by Charlevoix as possessing an ‘eloquence [that] has a strength, nature, and pathos, which no art can give,’ Native Americans themselves seemed beyond didacticism: ‘Most of them have really a nobleness of soul and a constancy of mind, at which we rarely arrive, with all the assistance of philosophy and religion. Always masters of themselves in the most sudden reverses of fortune, not the smallest alteration is seen even in their countenances’ (Journal of a Voyage to North-America 83). Apparently naturally eloquent, and with a firmness of character, Indians had, after all, something to offer to civilisation as Europeans defined it.
Americanising Scotland

When James Boswell set out on his tour of the Hebrides with his English mentor Samuel Johnson in 1773, he imagined they would witness regression to the first stage of human society as they travelled westwards:

Martin’s Account of those islands had impressed us with a notion that we might there contemplate a system of life almost totally different from what we had been accustomed to see; and, to find simplicity and wildness, and all the circumstances of remote time or place, so near to our native great island, was an object within the reach of reasonable curiosity. (*Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* 163)

Boswell’s *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides* (1785) cast Scottish Highlanders in the role of Indians and transformed the scene of Western Scotland into America. Americanising Scotland, Boswell reports that ‘Our boatmen were rude singers, and seemed so like wild Indians, that a very little imagination was necessary to give one an impression of being upon an American river’ (354-55). The rude, bardic Highlander, then, was assigned attributes similar to the romantic, ‘untutored American’ (Ferguson 88). Evoking the image of Ossian, Ferguson writes that ‘The most admired of all poets lived beyond the reach of history, almost of tradition. The artless song of the savage, the heroic legend of the bard, have sometimes a magnificent beauty, which no change of language can improve, and no refinements of the critic reform’ (166). Hugh Blair, who set the tone for rhetoric and *Belles Lettres* in both Britain and America, compared Indians to children and the ‘most ignorant peasants,’ but appreciated their rhetorical skills and saw them as proof that ‘the principles of Taste’ are ‘deeply founded in human mind,’ suggesting that Indians represent an original but uncultivated type (11). ‘Even in the deserts of America, where human nature shews itself in its most uncultivated state,’ Blair writes, ‘the
savages have their ornaments of dress, their war and their death songs, their harangues, and their orators’ (11). Thus, the attraction of romanticised savage figures, of which Ossian is the prime example, was their unstudied nature. Living ‘beyond the reach of history,’ their genius is artless and timeless and thus unaffected by the modern Zeitgeist (Ferguson 166). Ossian was, of course, a modern poet’s rhetorical construction, just as Scottish images of Indians were the productions of modern theorists. Arguably, Ossian had been conditioned by Macpherson’s exposure to Scottish Enlightenment constructions of romanticised Indians, and thus the Ossianic past was written as the North American present (Carr 60-68, Fulford Romantic Indians 7-15).

The representation of Scottish Highlanders as artless savages may have portrayed them as romantic and valiant, but it also excluded them from enlightened Britain. As Robert Crawford has argued: ‘In the eighteenth century Lowland Scots themselves could regard the Highlanders as barbarously savage, which may sometimes have lent them a primitive nobility but which also set them apart in terms of the progress of society’ (16-17). Boswell’s travel journal may be seen as a journey backwards through time; the spatial remove from the urban landscape is also a temporal one. While Boswell represents Johnson, ‘the alleged embodiment of anti-Scottish prejudice’ (McGowan 16-17), as admiring the old, patriarchal fashions of Highland life, the remote Highlands are also constructed as a non-progressive social space in which the two civilised travellers find themselves in a spatial and temporal vacuum. ‘We were in a strange state of abstraction from the world,’ Boswell writes, ‘we could neither hear from our friends, nor write to them’ (384). Johnson’s comment, ‘I want to be on the main land, and go on with existence. This is a waste of life,’ further
emphasises this temporal isolation that the travellers experience at a seemingly
disadvantaged stage of society (384). Scotland’s inclusion in the union, according to
Johnson, has allowed parts of Scotland to progress. Boswell cites Johnson as
contrasting Indians with the state of civilisation that the union has promoted: “‘I see
a number of people bare-footed here: I suppose you all went so before the
Union’” (194). “‘We have taught you,” Johnson says, “and we’ll do the same in time
to all barbarous nations, – to the Cherokees, – and at last to the Ouran-Outangs’”
(347-48). Scotland, in Boswell’s text, is a scene on which the historical types of the
stadial theory are dramatised.

Like Boswell’s journal, Tobias Smollett’s *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*
(1771) engages in cultural comparison, having been written, according to Horace
Walpole, to vindicate the Scots during the Bute administration. This epistolary novel
portrays a group of Welsh travellers touring England and Scotland who function as
cultural observers. To Matthew Bramble, the head of the family, Scotland is a
discursive figure for reinvigoration of a Britain contaminated by imperial contact.
Scotland represents to Bramble an uncorrupted, pre-capitalist state untouched by
excess – consumption in Scotland is associated with local spaces, not with the larger
empire (Irvine 88-107). Bramble writes to his doctor about the healing effects of
Edinburgh: ‘I eat like a farmer, sleep from mid-night till eight in the morning without
interruption, and enjoy a constant tide of spirits, equally distant from inanition and
excess’ (219). Glossing over Scotland’s role in the empire, Bramble’s Edinburgh as a
local space is a distant refuge from the empire and represents the possibility of
domestic revitalisation. ‘Our people have a strange itch to colonize America,’
Bramble writes, ‘when the uncultivated parts of our own island might be settled to greater advantage’ (256).

Bramble’s nephew, Jery Melford, however, finds himself in a state of estrangement in Scotland, and his discourse destabilises the notion of Scotland as a site of pre-capitalist idyll. When in Scotland, the young Oxonian ‘can hardly believe’ himself in Britain due to different customs such as the culinary habit of eating sheep’s-head, which puts him ‘in mind of the history of Congo, in which’ he ‘had read of negros’ heads sold publickly in the markets’ (214, 222). Jery implicates Scotland in the empire and reveals the novel’s overall anxiety about the damaging effects of imperial commerce, an anxiety that culminates in the novel’s description of cannibalistic Indians, the Miamis. In particular, female Indians, who castrate male captives, are described as agents of consumption, and thus a clear parallel can be drawn to the English Mrs. Baynard whose wealth is based on East Indian trade and whose taste for luxury threatens to emasculate her husband. In other words, the depiction of the Miamis suggests that the excess and luxury of a runaway imperial culture is literally lethal to Britons. Ferguson feared that excess of luxury and effeminacy could make civilised societies regress: Smollett’s Indians seem to serve as a warning against just that.

Indians, then, as represented by Scottish Enlightenment writers, serve as paradoxical objects of projection; as bardic figures and stoical heroes, they are appreciated for their remoteness from the modern world, yet they are also fearful figures born of an empire seemingly out of control. Moreover, while Indians are invoked to play a considerable formative role in Enlightenment theorising on civil
they seemingly have no progressive role to play in an age of enlightenment; like the Highlander, they are living in the past.

Modern Europeans, on the other hand, in Ferguson’s words, are ‘the supposed standards of politeness and civilization,’ and thus they are distinguished as exemplars of ultimate distinction (75). Europeans’ state of advancement had come at a price, however; European men were in danger of losing their manliness. Societal progress involves a potential loss of masculine valour, Ferguson maintains, defining military bravery as the manifestation of civic virtue:

We may, with good reason, congratulate our species on their having escaped from a state of barbarous disorder and violence, into a state of domestic peace and regular policy….But we cannot, meantime, help to regret, that they should ever proceed, in search of perfection, to place every branch of administration behind the counter, and come to employ, instead of the statesman and warrior, the mere clerk and accountant. (214)

Ferguson values the masculine virtues of rude, tribal life that do not flourish in the commercial stage of society. As Fania Oz-Salzberger puts it in her introduction to Ferguson’s essay, ‘Society, for Ferguson, is made of men who compete, fight, interact and rise to challenges. Human nature in the Essay is synonymous with playful, aggressive masculinity’ (xviii). Native Americans, then, become somewhat ambivalent figures in Ferguson’s account of progress; they are the standards of savagery, yet, at the same time, they represent manliness, and enjoy the personal freedom that life at the first stage of human development was thought to have granted. ‘The savage is personally free,’ Ferguson writes, ‘because he lives unrestrained, and acts with the members of his tribe on terms of equality’ (247). Civil society, on the other hand, with its complex systems of administration, restrains individual freedom, and its capitalist practices create unequal relations between its members. Sympathy, according to Smith, is the glue that holds civil society
together; as a sentiment regulating social and intersubjective relations, it prevents disharmony in a society based on asymmetry.

**Sympathy and Savagery in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments***

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith presents sympathy as the cornerstone of modern society, and uses Native American society as an example of an initial savage state that is altogether devoid of sensibility. Smith suggests that savages are ‘too much occupied with their own wants and necessities, to give much attention to those of another person’; thus he opposes the savage to the civic man, who does not need to consider his basic needs, and is therefore at leisure to feel for others (313). A particular product of commercial society, sympathy, to Smith, is facilitated in networks of refined sociability; enjoying sympathetic social relations is reserved for members of this advanced stage of society. In his essay ‘The Language of Sentiment: Hume, Smith, and Henry Mackenzie,’ John Mullan understands Smithian sympathy as an exclusive sentiment ‘which the educated and responsible few might be expected to achieve’ (286). Indeed, he goes on to argue that sympathy in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* emerges as an abstract ideal as opposed to the reality of lived ethical relationships:

Smith has forsaken the ambition to imagine a sociability which could be a common habit, a shared possession. In a sense, the ideally socialized individual has become, in his moral theory, the abstracted spectator. Philosophy cannot now propose, as Hume’s *Treatise* did, the experience of society in shared passions. When Smith’s philosophy ‘of moral sentiments’ is set alongside Mackenzie’s ‘sentimental’ novels, there become visible the limitations of a theory which could only warn against the loss of self in excessive feeling. However formulaic it might have been, the fiction could express needs unstated by the philosophy. (286)
In what follows I explore the tension in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* between the stoical impartial spectator and the passionate modern self as it plays out in Mackenzie’s *The Man of the World* and *Julia de Roubigné*. Stoic philosophy is at the heart of Smith’s ethical thought (this is nowhere better exemplified than in his notion of the self-commanding impartial spectator), whereas his theory that ethics derive from sentiment is influenced by Francis Hutcheson and David Hume (D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie 14). ‘Smith accordingly took the view that there are several kinds of moral approbation,’ as D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie note, and believed there to be ‘a variety of moral feelings or sentiments’ (14). For the purposes of this thesis, however, I concentrate on sympathy, the jewel in the crown of commercial society, and the notion of the impartial spectator, suggesting that they become subject to scepticism when read alongside Smith’s exposition of savage society.

While Indians are prototypes of the rudest state of mankind, they represent a methodological problem to Smith because they also resemble his ideal modern subject, the impartial spectator, which will be examined below. Drawing on Harkin’s work in order to investigate this paradox in Smith’s text, I shall argue that Mackenzie’s *The Man of the World* dramatises this ambivalence, subverting the notion of the savage as he problematises the discourse of sensibility. In her essay ‘Adam Smith’s Missing History: Primitives, Progress, and Problems of Genre,’ which examines Smith’s relation to historiography, Harkin proposes that the striking similarity between the savage and the ancient Stoic in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* ‘suggests continuities and values very foreign to the four-stage model of historical progress’ (440), concluding that the savage figure ‘provides a challenge to the assumed dominance of a commercial society and the regime of sympathy’ (443).
Indians in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* are sand in the very machine of progress and of sympathy; they bear witness to the loss of stoical values that produces the need for sympathy in civil society. In this sense, sympathy is a symptom of a lack, suggesting the shortcomings of modern man. Sympathy, then, may not be an exclusive product of improvement; indeed, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* initially questions whether sympathy, the sentiment that sets civic man apart from the savage, is an actual epistemological possibility.

Curiously, Smith casts doubt on the principle of sympathy in its very first pages. The first scenario that Smith presents to the reader is one that questions whether one person’s experience can be communicated to the consciousness of another – the very transaction on which sympathy is imagined to be based. For sympathy to be enacted the spectator has to transport himself in his imagination into the body of the sufferer. Smith writes:

> Though our brother is upon the rack, as long as we ourselves are at our ease, our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did and never can carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations....By the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments, we enter as it were into his body and become in some measure him, and thence form some idea of his sensations, and even feel something which, though weaker in degree, is not altogether unlike them. (2-3)

This sceptical account of the exchange of sympathy reveals the limitations of the enlightened system of communication that is supposed to harmonise the members of civil society; neither can the spectator’s senses inform him of what the other suffers, nor can his imagination form a clear idea of the sufferer’s sentiments. Thus, Smith begins his theory of sympathy by exposing an epistemological contradiction. As Marshall argues, ‘the epistemological impossibility of sharing another person’s sentiments means that he [the sufferer] will never meet with complete sympathy’
Sympathy is always already a compromised notion.

If complete sympathy is not an epistemological possibility, Smith introduces the abstract notion of the impartial spectator to secure a sense of harmony between the sentiments of the sufferer and the spectator. The impartial spectator serves as the parameter for moral judgement in Smith’s theory; ideally, the suffering actor should seek to regulate his behaviour in such a way that it would secure the approval of the spectator. Smith constructs his concept of the impartial spectator around his dualistic model of the self, a model in which the self as actor is judged by the self as spectator:

‘We suppose ourselves the spectators of our own behaviour, and endeavour to imagine what effect it would, in this light, produce upon us. This is the only looking glass by which we can, in some measure, with the eyes of others, scrutinize the propriety of our own conduct’ (201). Thus, Smith’s moral system fosters theatrical social relations, unlike the ostensible artlessness of the savage. Smith describes how the actor has to modify his behaviour to get the applause of his audience: ‘He must flatten, if I may be allowed to say so, the sharpness of its natural tone, in order to reduce it to harmony and concord with the emotions of those who are about him’ (27). Smith’s philosophy, then, is one of social regulation, privileging, as it does, the position of the spectator as a figure of judgement in the asymmetrical relation between actor and spectator. Or as Charles L. Griswold puts it, “the theory of moral sentiments” is a theory of the spectator’s approval of the emotions’ (104).

Mediocrity and concord, moreover, become objectives when complete sympathy is an epistemological impossibility. ‘The propriety of every passion excited by objects peculiarly related to ourselves, the pitch which the spectator can go along
with,’ Smith writes, ‘must lye, it is evident, in a certain mediocrity’ (37). The spectator serves to ensure that the actor does not appear as a ‘slave of the passions’ to borrow David Hume’s famous phrase in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40) in which he insists on the will of the passions (266). Controlling that which the feeling individual in modern society is otherwise unable to control, the impartial spectator serves to command the passionate self. Hume’s and Smith’s conflicting views of the self, I shall suggest in the second part of this chapter, are dramatised in *Julia de Roubigné*.

For Smith the ideal civic man is he who strives to adopt the characteristics of the impartial spectator. In order to highlight the strong correlation that Smith develops between the stoical virtue of self-command and the impartial spectator, the following passage is worth quoting at some length:

> The man of real constancy and firmness, the wise and just man who has been thoroughly bred in the great school of self-command, in the bustle and business of the world, exposed, perhaps, to the violence and injustice of faction, and to the hardships and hazards of war, maintains this control of his passive feelings upon all occasions; and whether in solitude or in society, wears nearly the same countenance, and is affected very nearly in the same manner. In success and in disappointment, in prosperity and in adversity, before friends and before enemies, he has often been under the necessity of supporting this manhood….He has been in the constant practice, and, indeed, under the constant necessity, of modelling, or of endeavouring to model, not only his outward conduct and behaviour, but, as much as he can, even his inward sentiments and feelings, according to those of this awful and respectable judge. He does not merely affect the sentiments of the impartial spectator. He really adopts them. He almost identifies himself with, he almost becomes himself that impartial spectator, and scarce even feels but as that great arbiter of his conduct directs him to feel. (146-47)

Here Smith celebrates a heroic figure, not unlike Ferguson’s ideal masculine warrior, who stoically faces the dangers of warfare. As a result of exposure to hardship, this

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figure does not show any outward signs of emotion; indeed, he virtually
metamorphoses himself into the impartial spectator who bears an uncanny
resemblance to the North American Indian. The spectator is not the only figure in
*The Theory of Moral Sentiments* that is attributed characteristics worthy of
reproduction: Smith’s Native Americans possess the self-control that Europeans were
thought to have lost, and thus are figures of great, if mixed, attraction.

Like the man who controls his feelings upon all occasions, North American
Indians’ capacity to conceal their passions is, according to Smith, ‘almost beyond the
conception of Europeans’ (313). Smith portrays the Indian as a savage undergoing a
Spartan discipline whose situations of hardship ‘not only habituate him to every sort
of distress, but teach him to give way to none of the passions which that distress is
apt to excite’ (313). Indians do not need to consult an impartial spectator to regulate
their behaviour: self-command is that which defines their savage nature. ‘The
savages in North America, we are told, assume upon all occasions the greatest
indifference,’ Smith reports, ‘and would think themselves degraded if they should
ever appear in any respect to be overcome, either by love, or grief, or resentment’
(313). Indians, to Smith, possess the ‘masculine firmness of the character’ that the
European man of feeling was thought to have lost (321). Smith’s telling language
suggests admiration for the savage character and reveals a pronounced sense of loss:
‘This heroic and unconquerable firmness, which the custom and education of his
country demand of every savage, is not required of those who are brought up to live
in civilized societies’ (316). North American Indians not only provide Europeans
with a mirror in which they can see the reflection of their progress, they also serve as
a vexing reminder of that which Europeans had lost in their strivings for
advancement.

Indians are a source of anxiety in Smith’s text. Contrasting Hume’s *A Treatise of Human Nature* to Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, John Mullan has argued that ‘Sympathy in the *Treatise* involved a letting loose of the self which the language of Stoicism in the *Theory* is to guard against’ (‘The Language of Sentiment: Hume, Smith, and Henry Mackenzie’ 286). This conflict of the self within the discourse of sympathy is projected onto Native Americans. Native Americans are characterised as self-controlling Stoics, yet Smith also expresses anxiety that their tranquil pose is merely a mask covering up uncontainable passions:

> The passions of a savage too, though they never express themselves by any outward emotion, but lye concealed in the breast of the sufferer, are, notwithstanding, all mounted to the highest pitch of fury...His countenance and discourse indeed are still sober and composed, and express nothing but the most perfect tranquillity of mind: But his actions are often the most furious and violent. (319)

North Americans are uncanny; their ability to conceal their passions may render them attractive, but also dangerously dubious. ‘A polished people being accustomed to give way, in some measure, to the movements of nature, become frank, open and sincere,’ Smith writes; ‘Barbarians, on the contrary, being obliged to smother and conceal the appearance of every passion, necessarily acquire the habits of falshood and dissimulation’ (319). Paradoxically, the very habits of dissimulation and compromise are the very ones necessary to secure the sympathy of the impartial spectator and to maintain the order of civil society. Desirable but dangerous, Smith’s Indians are at the heart of the unresolved tension in his characterisation of civil and savage societies.
An Indianised Man of Feeling

If _The Man of Feeling_ represents the decline of the ambiguous discourse of sensibility, _The Man of the World_ seems to pick up this dead-end, remodelling a passionate man of feeling by giving him the heroic qualities associated with stoical Indians. _The Man of the World_ portrays a perverse capitalist society symbolised by the villainous aristocrat Sir Thomas Sindall, whose quest for pleasure culminates in attempted incestuous rape, suggesting the self-destruction to which such behaviour inevitably leads. If Smollett’s Indians consume Britons, the vilest of Mackenzie’s Britons consume their own offspring. The protagonist, Billy Annesly, the well-meaning but naïve son of a humble clergyman in the service of the Sindall family, becomes financially and emotionally enslaved by the calculated benevolence of Sindall, who plans to seduce Billy’s sister. Like Harley, Billy is not a successful sentimental navigator in the bustle of the world; caught in an intricate web of finance and feeling spun by Sindall, he commits robbery to settle his debt and ends up being transported to America as punishment. The brother out of the way, Sindall is free to ruin the sister whom he, as a member of the ruling classes, ought to protect. In America, Billy eventually gets adopted by Indians, and here he acquires the stoical valour that European men had lost according to Scottish Enlightenment thinkers. To renovate itself, Mackenzie seems to suggest, civil society needs an Indianised man of feeling. America, like Bramble’s Scotland in Smollett’s novel, becomes the site for revitalisation of domestic moral sentiments.

The transatlantic crossing in _The Man of the World_, like Boswell’s and Johnson’s journey to the Highlands, is a spatial remove as well as a temporal one; Mackenzie transfers his protagonist from one societal state to an earlier one in order to return to
values that were thought to have been lost in the process of European advancement.

Having exposed the tensions in the continuities conceptualised between capitalism and sentiments of modern society, Mackenzie juxtaposes this economy with that of a pre-capitalist one by situating his character in the first stage of social organisation. When Billy tells his story to his sympathetic listener, Harry Bolton, he adopts the discourse of conjectural history

When we consider the perfect freedom subsisting in this rude and simple state of society, where rule is only acknowledged for the purpose of immediate utility to those who obey, and ceases whenever that purpose of subordination is accomplished; where greatness cannot use oppression, nor wealth excite envy; where the desires are native to the heart, and the languor of satiety is unknown; where, if there is no refined sensation of delight, there is also no ideal source of calamity; we shall the less wonder at the inhabitants feeling no regret for the want of those delicate pleasures of which a more polished people is possessed. (299-300)

In Native American society the causes of Billy’s ruin are erased; there is ‘no ideal source of calamity’ because the pleasures towards which polished people in capitalist society strive are unknown (300). As a result, hardly any subordination exists in such a pre-capitalist society, and thus the asymmetrical relation that underlies sympathy and benevolence is non-existent. Billy concludes that ‘going native’ is not a sign of regress; indeed, the European almost seems naturally inclined to Indian custom:

‘Certain it is, that I am far from being a single instance of one, who had even attained maturity in Europe, and yet found his mind so accommodated, by the habit of a few years, to Indian manners, as to leave that country with regret’ (300). In other words, Billy’s discourse suggests a kinship with Native Americans, embracing the conception that Indians are the prototypes of modern Europeans.

Billy gets his true Bildung in the forests of America, not in Oxford and London where he has been ruined by the pleasures of polished society. Billy is re-educated
amongst the Indians who bestow on him the stoical values that Smith so admires. The Indian figure in *The Man of the World*, I have suggested, serves the function of Smith’s impartial spectator; the Native American is, paradoxically, the living embodiment of that abstract figure that secures the harmony of modern society. Indeed, Billy’s Indian mentor, who later becomes Billy’s adopted parent, resembles Smith’s Stoic, evoking a parallel between the Native American and the ancient philosopher: ‘The composure with which the old man met his dissolution, would have done honour to the firmest philosopher of antiquity’ (301).

Billy’s transatlantic transformation, then, is brought about by Indian spectator-philosophers who guide him to wisdom. Billy is taught the self-command that is attributed to Native Americans by being exposed to torture during which his mentor and Indian alter-ego observes his character: ‘I perceived the old man whom I have before mentioned, keep his eye fixed upon me during this inhuman solemnity’ (295). In the position of a self-conscious actor, Billy is awaiting the judgement of the impartial spectator in a Smithian scenario. Securing the approval of his spectator, Billy passes the test and can embark on his Indian transformation, a transformation reminiscent of Smith’s ideal man striving to adopt the qualities of the impartial spectator. Having proved that his European disposition can be moulded in the image of the Indian, Billy’s mentor approves of his character. “‘It is thus,” said he, “that the valiant are tried, and thus are they rewarded; for how should’st thou be as one of us, if thy soul were as the soul of little men? he only is worthy to lift the hatchet with the Cherokees, to whom shame is more intolerable than the stab of the knife, or the burning of the fire”’ (298). No longer a slave of passion, Billy’s soul is now ‘as fearless’ as his ‘body [is] robust’ and when his Indian father dies Billy, now a fully
fledged member of the community, is encouraged by his tribesmen to take his place
(287).

Nevertheless, Billy’s stay amongst the Indians does not result in a complete
transformation of his European disposition: he has become a hybrid of two cultures
and of two historical stages. Thus, as an Indianised man of feeling, Billy can return
to the corrupted Old World. Revealing that he is still in part a European man of
feeling, Billy sheds tears at his adopted parent’s deathbed: ‘he observed, at the close
of his discourse, that I retained so much of the European, as to shed some tears while
he delivered it’ (301). Like Bage’s transcultured hero Hermsprong, who, in Fulford’s
words, ‘embodies liberal Britons’ fantasy of renewing the morals of true gentility by
encounter with an other that still lived as Britons themselves once had lived,’ Billy is
a product of transatlantic encounters (Romantic Indians 114). As a cultural and
historical broker, Billy can reveal the shortcomings of European civilisation, because
his education amongst Indians functioning as ancient philosopher spectators has
renewed his moral sentiments. Upon leaving the Indians, Billy juxtaposes these two
societies, doubting European progress:

I stood for some minutes, looking back, on one hand to the wilds I had
passed, and on the other, to the scenes of cultivation which European industry
had formed; and it may surprise you to hear, that though there wanted not
some rekindling attachment to a people amongst whom my first breath had
been drawn, and my youth spent, yet my imagination drew, on this side,
 fraud, hypocrisy, and sordid baseness, while on that seemed to preside
honesty, truth, and savage nobleness of soul. (305-6)

Billy’s return journey ‘to a people who sell affection to their brethren for money,’
as one of the elder Indians phrases it, demonstrates such a decline (304). Indeed, the
very moment Billy exchanges ‘the wilds’ of the Indians with the ‘scenes of
cultivation’ of colonial America, he encounters the baseness of the Old World. That
is, when Billy again becomes part of a market economy, he is inevitably drawn into a
network of fraud and hypocrisy. The crude colonists whom Billy meets are driven
solely by the prospect of making profit. One of them is, significantly, a shop owner,
and while he initially acts in the most benevolent manner, he makes himself ‘entirely
master’ (309) of Billy’s story, and ends up looking at his labour as a ‘matter of right’
(312). This colonist and his shop are a microcosm of colonial American and
European exploitative societies at large defined by asymmetrical relations.
Contrasting Indian society with that of Europe and colonial America, the novel
suggests that the worst among Europeans and colonists have regressed into a state of
barbarity. As Billy’s discussion of a previous fur-trading transaction suggests, the
dubious shop owner represents the hypocrisy of such debased colonists and
Europeans:

> When I mentioned my having sold my beaver-skins for a certain sum, he
started aside, and then lifting up his eyes in an ejaculatory manner, expressed
his astonishment how a Christian could be guilty of such monstrous
dishonesty, which he said, was no better than one would have expected in a
*Savage*; for that my skins were worth at least three times the money. I smiled
at his notions of comparative morality. (309-10)

Thus, the novel subverts the notion of the savage and ironically undermines the
attributes of so-called civilised Christians. Moreover, it exposes the colonists’
cultural comparison as pseudo-anthropology, making such a practice susceptible to
critique as part of its broader critical concern with European colonialism. *The Man of
the World*, then, appears self-conscious about its own position as a work of cultural
translation within the wider intellectual framework of eclecticism. The cheating fur-
trader, who casts himself as an anthropologist, constructs a faulty narrative of savage
life, and his assumed superiority is revealed as mere ignorance and is thus undercut:
He asked a thousand questions about customs which never existed, and told me of a multitude of things, of which all the time I had lived in that country, had never dreamed the possibility. Indeed, from the superiority of his expression, joined to that fund of supposed knowledge which it served to communicate, a bystander would have been led to imagine, that he was describing, to some ignorant guest, a country with whose manners he had been long conversant, and among whose inhabitants he had passed the greatest part of his life. (307)

Billy’s journey forward in time, then, is not one of progress and enlightenment. His voyage back to Europe is characterised by encounters with ignorant Europeans whose attitudes reflect those of the colonists. Indeed, when Billy is back on European ground, after various episodes of captivity and shipwreck, he is attacked by Englishmen whom he mistakes for barbarians: ‘I learned, that those Englishmen, who (as our mate, by way of comfort, observed) were not savages, had the idea transmitted them from their fathers, that all wrecks became their property by the immediate hand of God’ (322). Billy, on the other hand, on the coast of Europe appears as a chivalrous warrior, protecting his companion: ‘I…stood astride my companion with the aspect of an angry lioness guarding her young from the hunter. The appearance of strength and fierceness which my figure exhibited, kept my enemies a little at bay’ (321). Billy has returned to Europe with the soul and body of an Indian – and just enough of the European man of feeling to render him didactic in a sentimental tale.

Nevertheless, it is not with Billy Annesly at the heart of story that The Man of the World concludes; it is with Harry Bolton, the sympathetic listener to Billy’s story. Bolton is the immediate object of the didacticism of Billy’s narrative, which serves as an educational warning to young Bolton. ‘Let me warn you, from sad experience,’ Billy says, ‘to beware of those passions which at your age I was unable to resist, and which, in the commerce of the world, will find abundant occasion to overcome...
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incautious and inexperienced youth’ (285). Bolton, like a true man of feeling, manifests his sympathy in a physical reaction to Billy’s tale of hardship and torture, lacking the self-command that Billy has acquired: ‘But I see you shudder at the horrid recital; suffice it then to say, that these, and some other such experiments of wanton cruelty, I bore with that patience, with which nothing but a life of hardship, and a certain obduracy of spirit, proceeding from a contempt of existence, could have endowed me’ (297). Bolton, then, who is prone to shed ‘unmanly’ though decorative tears, needs to adopt a few Indian attributes before he can marry the girl he loves and the novel can conclude (190).

Bolton, who is the cousin of the villain Sindall and his very antithesis, gets money, marriage, and mansion at the end, while Billy, unaccustomed to the ways of capitalist society, retires to a moneyless life:

“I know not,” said Annesly, “how to talk of those matters, unacquainted as I have been with the manners of polished and commercial nations; when I have any particular destination for money, I will demand your assistance: in the mean time, consider me as a minor, and use the trust already reposed in you, for my advantage, and the advantage of those whom misfortune has allied to me.” (348)

From being a fierce warrior figure, Billy is transferred back to the position in which he was placed prior to his transatlantic journey; once again he is dependent on an aristocrat, albeit a benevolent one. Now a minor, Billy needs the protection that a charitable aristocratic administration can offer. The novel thus leaves its radical potential unrealised as Billy’s isolated position does not seem to offer a viable alternative to the roles available in the capitalist society that the novel places at the heart of its critique. If Billy’s character serves to question the discourse of benevolent sentimentalism, the novel undermines that critique by ultimately reducing him to an object of Bolton’s management. While the novel suggests that the
mediation of an Indianised other would restore the European man of feeling to his lost manliness, it also remains sceptical about British society’s ability to sustain the admirable values that the image of the Indian as a looking-glass to Europeans’ past recalls. Billy’s story may make Bolton a better and more benevolent aristocrat, but the asymmetry characteristic of capitalist society remains intact. The Man of the World seems to suggest, as Fulford has argued in the case of Bage’s Hermsprong, ‘the only good aristocrat...is an Indianized one’ (Romantic Indians 114).

Billy’s Indianness is that which allows him to be didactic in the novel; adopting the perspective of an outsider allows him to comment on the drawbacks of European civilisation. But if Billy can be admired for the indifference that he has acquired to money and to the pleasures of polished society during his time in America, his transculturation, paradoxically, has also made him rather unfit for modern society as he ends up in an obscure position as a remnant of a bygone age. Billy may be noble like romanticised Highlanders and Indians, but like them he is set apart from modernity. As an Indianised character, Billy seems to be ‘in a strange state of abstraction from the world,’ as Boswell described his own and Johnson’s sentiments while travelling in the remote wildness of the Scottish Highlands, exiled in what is apparently a temporal and social vacuum.

Thus while Mackenzie’s Indians are attractive moral exemplars functioning as Smithian spectators in a morally disintegrating society, the novel seems unable to resolve the tension that it exposes, struggling with its transcultured hero’s return. Moreover, if the novel’s Indian figures challenge the assumed superiority of Europeans inherent in the four-stage theory of cultural development, it also adopts its premise that Indians are an historical type, suggesting that the Indian other is always
also the temporal other. Indians function as rhetorical constructs, not as viable alternatives to modern society.

The somewhat uneasy conclusion of *The Man of the World* may suggest something about the extent to which Scottish Enlightenment writing romanticises Indians while also dooming them. To write Indians as living evidence for the first societal stage and as living examples of poets of the past was in some paradoxical sense to write them out of existence. Stranded in a temporal vacuum, Indians are eloquent but doomed voices of the past like Jefferson’s Logan. As Manning reminds us, ‘Enlightened Americans, like their Scottish counterparts, compensated for their destruction of native culture by simultaneously reincorporating it within an idiom of sentimental conservatism, a generalising and harmonising – but strategically fragmented – “voice of feeling”’ (*Fragments of Union* 185). The sense of loss and nostalgia in which romanticised Indians and Highlanders are embedded made it possible to insist that their present was always already the past. At worst, then, the Scottish Enlightenment texts that I have examined above helped establish an intellectual framework that would justify westward expansion in nineteenth-century America – but at best they created compelling Indian figures that point to some of the ambiguities in colonial discourse. Mackenzie’s last dark epistolary experiment, *Julia de Roubigné*, to which I now turn, further explores these ambiguities, pitting moral sentiments against slavery.

**Julia de Roubigné and the Black Atlantic**

In his essay ‘Joseph Knight: Scotland and the Black Atlantic,’ which reads James Robertson’s 2003 novel, *Joseph Knight*, within Gilroy’s paradigm of the Black Atlantic, Michael Morris asserts that the ‘theme of a nation facing its own historical..."
truths points to the drive of Robertson’s historical novel: to open up the established national narrative of Scotland to the black Atlantic issues of slavery, rebellion, race and class. Scottish involvement in the slave trade and slave produce has long been an uncomfortable area for a nation which prides itself on being built on ideals of liberty’ (1). The publication of Mackenzie’s *Julia de Roubigné* sprang from the controversial context of the case of Knight versus Wedderburn – indeed, ‘it has been suggested that Mackenzie, himself a lawyer, may have helped prepare some of the briefs of the defence’ (Ellis 118) – and is a novel that opens up the national narrative of enlightenment to the black Atlantic questions that Morris identifies. Written against the backdrop of an expanding empire built on slave labour, wherein the Scots played a significant role, and where texts like *Theory of Moral Sentiments* established human sympathy as the defining characteristic of civil society, *Julia de Roubigné* wrestles with such conflicting discourses. Thus it is an early example of a novel that questions ‘Scotland’s overwhelmingly white historiography and its supposed innate democratic racial conscience’ (Morris 2) like Robertson’s.

The case of Knight versus Wedderburn, then, provided Mackenzie with a test case – both as a novelist and a as lawyer (Ellis 117-18). Scotland was faced intimately with the question of slavery in the mid 1770s when Joseph Knight, a slave who had been brought from Jamaica to Scotland to function as a personal servant, fled his master, John Wedderburn, declaring himself a free man. Knight was arrested on Wedderburn’s request, but the Sheriff of Perthshire stated that the Jamaican laws could not be supported by the Scottish laws, and Knight was free to go. Wedderburn appealed, and in 1777 the Court of Session in Edinburgh dealt with the appeal case and declared that the institution of slavery was to be illegal in Scotland, and thus
Knight was a free man. The Knight case stirred controversy; there was little debate on slavery in Britain prior to 1780. According to Debbie Lee and Peter J. Kitson, earlier criticism had targeted the enslavement of the Caribbean Indians in the Spanish West Indies, while there was shown little regard for the condition of the enslaved African. ‘This was largely because Africans suffered from an established prejudice against their skin colour, which made it easier to regard them as inferior to Europeans,’ Lee and Kitson write, ‘and therefore suitable for slave labour, believed to be essential to the prosperity of the colonies and the mother country’ (x). The Knight case, moreover, challenged one of the key principles of Scottish political economical thought; the right to property. As Iain Whyte argues, ‘Issues of property weighed as heavily in the minds of some Scottish judges as they would for many of those representing commercial interests’ (11).

If Mackenzie’s scenes set in the slave-holding colony of Martinique in Julia de Roubigné juxtapose moral sentiments with commercial interests, it also suggests that moral sentiments and commercial cannot be divorced: the exchange of sympathy is also a kind of financial exchange Mackenzie suggests. Aligning market economy with marriage economy, the novel conflates ideologies of gender and race and suggests that the black slave’s situation can be seen ‘as a literalization of Julia’s,’ in the words of Marshall who argues that in Julia de Roubigné the story of sentiment is the story of business (‘The Business of Tragedy’ 157). Before I read the scenes in Martinique, then, I turn to Mackenzie’s exploration of gender relations and sympathy.
An Experiment with Genre

In a Shakespearean fashion Julia’s husband describes his mother-in-law thus: ‘She talks of the world as of a scene where she is a spectator merely’ (24). The language of Mackenzie’s novel reflects Smith’s formulation of human relations as fundamentally theatrical. Almost each letter talks of a scene into which a spectator transports himself, characters constantly observe each other, and notions of impartial spectators are evoked. Yet, while Smith imagines that sentiments can be channelled into harmony, Mackenzie exposes actors and spectators as unable to change parts; the fictions in which agents move are characterised by fragmentation, not concord. Indeed, the sentiments of characters in Julia de Roubigné have no correspondence with one another, which is underlined by the fact that this epistolary novel does not expose actual correspondence between letter writers; we are confined to the perspective of a solitary voice of one correspondent.

Mackenzie casts his characters as spectators and spectacles, reminiscent of the notion of spectatorship in The Theory of Moral Sentiments, in a play of the passions in which there is ‘no need of an Iago, no call for a dropped handkerchief,’ as Manning puts it in her introduction to Julia de Roubigné (xiii), to cause the downfall of Julia and her husband, the Count de Montauban. Indeed, Smith’s vehicle for sympathy, the imagination, is the very key to the tragedy of Julia and Montauban; caught in a web of surveillance and paranoia, the ill-fated couple’s excessive imaginations prevent them from sympathetic engagement with each other. In this quasi-Shakespearean epistolary drama, Julia, a former wealthy heiress, marries the rich and powerful Montauban, in spite of her love for her poor childhood companion, Savillon who has relocated to Martinique to save her indebted father. Spurred by the
intercepts letters between Savillon and Julia, and suspecting her of adultery, he
poisons her. As the virtuous Julia draws her last breaths, her husband realises that he
has phantomed the illicit affair and, in turn, poisons himself.

*Julia de Roubigné* is composed of letters that may be read as a fictional
commentary on Smith’s philosophy of sympathy. Manning argues that ‘If we accept
that the correspondents in *Julia de Roubigné* are not so much characters as they are
counters in an ethical and aesthetic debate, it is possible to suggest that it may be best
read as a sceptical inquiry, at once very much a product of its time, and not bound by
the limitations of any single train of thought’ (xii). The letters from Julia to Maria,
Savillon to Beauvaris, and Montauban to Segarva recall Smith’s model of the
dualistic self. The missing replies to the protagonists’ letters, moreover, open up a
reading of the letters as a projection of self. Indeed, Julia describes Maria as ‘my
judge’ (66), ‘my other conscience’ (66) and ‘my best monitor’ (77). Montauban
imagines that his correspondent has been transported into his presence: ‘I sit down to
write to Segarva, with the idea of his presence’ (35). When Savillon describes the
character of Herbert to his correspondent Beauvaris, his description echoes Smith’s
ideal of sympathetic concord achieved through exchange of parts. Savillon writes,
‘Herbert was a sort of proxy for my Beauvaris; he spoke from the feelings of a heart
like his. To him I could unbosom mine, and be understood; for the speaking of a
common language, is but one requisite towards the dearest intercourse of society’
(110). Thus, in its ideal state correspondence equals sympathetic identification, the
letter functioning as the site where one can identify with the spectator. Indeed, Smith
articulates the reading process as one that reflects sympathy’s process of imaginative
identification; when we read we ‘become the very person whose actions are
represented to us: we transport ourselves in fancy to the scenes of those distant and
forgotten adventures, and imagine ourselves acting the part of a Scipio or a Camillus,
a Timoleon or an Aristides’ (75). Thus, Smith imagines literature as a kind of script
according to which one can perform one’s identity.

Julia de Roubigné, by contrast, is a novel in which ‘the speaking of a common
language’ is presented as an impossibility; language itself breaks down and
mediation of sympathy cannot take place. I want to suggest that the characters can be
seen as exiles unable to construct any sympathetic ties through their epistolary
communication because language itself is the very fiction of home from which they
are estranged. Savillon, for example, complains that his heart is wrung ‘beyond the
power of language’ (90) when parting from Julia. Montauban cannot engage
sympathetically with his wife because ‘the question [of Savillon is] stuck in [his]
throat’ (124). The novel exposes a divided self that cannot identify with itself, as the
self cannot reconcile thought and feeling with language. Julia calls for her other self,
Maria, when she finds herself in an epistemological vacuum reminiscent of
very thoughts are not accurate expressions of what I feel: there is something busy
about my heart, which I cannot reduce into thinking – Oh! Maria!’ (68). Indeed, the
last letters of Julia and Montauban are characterised by disjointed paragraphs and
hyphens as if writing itself is dissolving like the self, exposing language as a fragile
medium through which to communicate.

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If sentiment cannot be managed on paper, the eighteenth-century valorisation of fictional letters as transparent mediation of feeling is complicated by Mackenzie. ‘Form and feeling are intimately connected,’ Manning writes, ‘Fictional letters were a favoured device of mid-eighteenth-century literature for several reasons, the most obvious being that their illusion of immediacy seemed the appropriate vehicle for the unmediated expression of personal feelings’ (Introduction to *Julia de Roubigné* xi). The inclusion of a fictional introduction by Mackenzie further obscures the genre as a transparent vehicle for the communication of an epistolary voice. The editor in this introduction, an Englishman, has translated the French letters and structured them into a narrative. He assures his readership, however, that little change has been made: ‘The only power I have exercised over them, is that of omitting letters, and passages of letters, which seem to bear no relation to the story I mean to communicate’ (5). His translation and selection thus add another level of fictionality to the epistles, disrupting them as unmediated thought. Thus, there is always already an epistemological gap between the letters and readers: meaning is lost and transformed in translation. I read these slippages as a breakdown of genre, a genre that Mackenzie continuously questions in his succession of novels. Successful epistolary communication presupposes a transparent relationship between ‘form and feeling,’ as Manning notes, yet *Julia de Roubigné* resists any reductionist label; it offers no stable generic framework within which we can read its letters. The various layers of fictionality thwart the reader’s expectations; in the meeting between text and reader, like that of Smith’s actor and spectator, there is a gap that seemingly cannot be bridged by genre.
Sympathy, in *Julia de Roubigné*, is not successful in facilitating the mediation of selfhood and the process of socialisation that Smith places centre stage in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. As thoughts and feelings cannot be mediated transparently in the form of the novel, sympathy is not mediated through the imaginations of characters. Indeed, the imagination is the road to downfall in *Julia de Roubigné*. Husband and wife constantly misread each other and cannot engage in a shared emotional realm. After Montauban has discovered Savillon’s picture in his wife’s room ‘still wet with the tears she had shed on it’ (134), Julia observes ‘nothing in his behaviour that should have followed such a discovery’ (132-33). She imagines that her husband ‘seemed more pleased than usual, and was particularly attentive’ (133). Montauban’s version of the same scene reads like this: ‘We dined alone, and I marked her closely: I saw (by Heaven, I did!) a fawning solicitude to please me; an attempt at the good humour of innocence, to cover the embarrassment of guilt’ (135-36). Thus, there is no correspondence between man’s and wife’s readings of each others’ sentiments. Instead, Smith’s scenarios with self-conscious actors and sympathetic spectators seem to have turned into nightmarish scenarios of paranoia and surveillance. Montauban watches his wife ‘when she thinks she is not observed’ (123), while his wife, the spectacle, fearfully tries to read him as a spectator: ‘methought he looked steadily, and with a sort of question at me; or rather my own mind interpreted his look in that manner (150). In *Julia de Roubigné*, acts of the imagination, then, never translate into sympathetic acts because the characters fail to adopt each others’ cases. Thus, sympathy’s underlying assumption that the experience of others can become our own through the imagination and through the sympathetic impulses of the self is questioned by Mackenzie. This scepticism, I have
suggested above, is the reflected in the novel’s breakdown of genre just as Smith’s scepticism is reflected in the breakdown of his linear narrative of progress. As Manning argues,

> It is characteristic of epistolary fictions – as of love letters – not only to convey the writer’s own part, but to invent dialogues with the absent correspondent, and to imagine the effect of the letter on the reader. *Julia de Roubigné*, however, is unusual, if not unique, in its extension of this convention to the epistolary discourse of the whole novel: Mackenzie constructs the story so that there are literally no answering letters, no ‘other’ voices in the text not created in the imaginations of the protagonists – to the extent that it is perhaps more appropriate to describe its narrative form not as that of the epistolary novel, but rather as a series of dramatic monologues which, fatally, fail to converge in an agreed or shareable version of reality. All the letter writers (and this is most extremely true of Julia and Montauban) live within inturned imaginations which fail to register modifying contact with another viewpoint. (Introduction to *Julia de Roubigné* xix)

Mackenzie’s extension of the epistolary novel as a detached ‘series of dramatic monologues’ is further illuminated by his representation of the self as a mask behind which an alienated actor is trapped in existential isolation.

**Sympathy’s Mask**

In *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume writes that ‘the open declaration of our sentiments is called taking off the mask’ (102). ‘Hume’s wild sympathy – spontaneous, passionate, embodied,’ Ian Duncan notes, ‘is the disciplinary target of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*’ (269). Smith’s Indian savages, I have suggested, figure as embodiments of Hume’s and Smith’s conflict over the self in the Scottish Enlightenment discourse of sympathy. As Mullan reminds us, Smith’s notion of sympathy is ‘corrective’ and ‘responsive,’ and it is the actor’s ‘duty to moderate passions sufficiently to arouse sympathy that can always be withheld’ (‘The Language of Sentiment’ 285). *Julia de Roubigné*, I want to suggest, may be read as a
dramatisation of the tension between Smith’s quest for self-command and Hume’s insistence on the will of the passions. The characters in the novel appear as isolated selves, trapped in a conflict between a self-conscious actor with his or her monitor, struggling with a mask that can neither be taken off, nor fully taken on. Julia, who ‘has grown up under the eye of the best parents,’ (36) cannot muster self-command and has to go off stage because she cannot deliver a performance that will secure her parents’ applause: ‘I started out of my reverie, and finding myself unable to feign a composure which I did not feel, walked out of the room to hide my emotion’ (12). Indeed, at the critical moments of her mother’s illness and her fatal wedding where Julia’s maid, Lisette, writes on behalf of her mistress may be read as moments where Julia has to remain off stage, because she has lost the self-command that allows her to be cast in her role. After her wedding, Lisette writes to Maria, quoting her mistress, “I cannot write, I cannot indeed” (74). ‘Form and feeling,’ as it were, are genres apart.

The exploration of mask wearing, in Julia de Roubigné, is also an exploration of gender performance. Julia’s inability to write reflects the limited agency which she has been assigned in a patriarchal economy of sympathy. As Julia seeks the approval of her spectator, her father: ‘I concealed my uneasiness, however, and attended him with that appearance of cheerfulness, which I make a point of duty to wear in his presence’ (33). The first part of this chapter explored Smith’s inscription of the ethos of Stoicism in the male subject wherein his impartial spectator figures as the ultimate ideal. The male actor should moderate his passions, as he is otherwise regarded as weak and effeminate in the eyes of spectators. ‘We esteem the man who supports pain and even torture with manhood and firmness;’ Smith writes, ‘and we can have
little regard for him who sinks under them, and abandons himself to useless cries and womanish lamentations’ (244). When facing financial ruin, Julia’s father seeks to act out Smith’s stoical notion of masculine identity, ‘gather[ing] up his features, as if it were to hide the effect of the recital’ (11). Indeed, Monsieur de Roubigné cries out that he does not want to be ‘unmanned’ when his daughter lets her tears fall on his hands (46). Julia describes her father as an actor who seemingly cannot reconcile himself with his script: ‘His words were the same they were wont to be; but I could discover, that his thoughts were different. He looked on me with a determined countenance, as if he prepared himself for contradiction’ (33). Thus, Julia de Roubigné stages a Cartesian split between actor and character, suggesting an impossibility of knowing what another feels, as there is always a slippage between performance and actor in the novel. If Smith articulated the relation between the actor and the spectator in terms of a looking glass, Mackenzie articulates it terms of a blankness that the sentimental genre cannot fill in.

**Reason, Feeling, and Gender Trouble**

When Julia, ‘the last treasure of Roubigné’ (69), as her father puts it, asks, ‘must I now be robbed of the little treasure I had saved, spoiled of my peace of mind, and forbid the native freedom of my affections?’ (42), she articulates the underlying assumption of ‘Hume’s wild sympathy’ in Duncan’s words. Julia, as the property of her father, and later of Montauban, has no claim to ‘the native freedom’ of her affections. By articulating ‘affections’ as a ‘treasure’ that can be stolen, Julia’s discourse locates sentiment within a market economy controlled by men. This is nowhere better exemplified than when Julia says, ‘this bosom is the property of
Montauban’ (132). Bosom, besides its sexual connotations, is also the container of emotions, the site of ‘the man within the breast’ in Smithian terminology (TMS 153); emotions that are not Julia’s own on which to act and from which to judge. In The Man of the World the female protagonist, Billy’s sister Harriet Annesly, who is literally sold by one villain to be married to another, makes a similar acknowledgement, exclaiming that she has been stolen from her father: ‘“Away!” said she, and let me hear no more! Or, if thou wouldst show thy friendship, carry me to that father from whom thou stolest me’’ (2: 125). Mackenzie’s fiction makes it clear that there is no distinction to be drawn between women and property, marriage economy, and market economy.

If Julia can be seen as representing the camp of the passions, her correspondent and other self, Maria, can be seen as representing reason, evoking Hume’s ‘combat of passion and of reason’ in A Treatise of Human Nature (266). Julia dismisses her impartial spectator, Maria, by claiming that ‘There is reason in all this; but while you argue from reason, I must decide from my feelings’ (57). Yet, Julia does not decide from her feelings, as she agrees to marry the rich count Montauban to save her father’s financial situation. Indeed, Julia does not have a choice in the patriarchal economy of her father’s house; Julia is reduced to a token in a financial exchange which mocks the exchange of sympathy. But because Julia is not the judge of her emotions and her feelings are overruled, she cannot perform the role of a wife in which she has been cast. Instead she seems to be dramatising Hume’s moral imperative, ‘Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them’ (266). Julia cannot perform the role of a wife because her performance, like her behaviour towards her father, is
embedded in duty, and not passion; indeed, she describes herself as ‘a wife, without a wife’s affection’ (131). In other words, Julia’s performance as a wife is unconvincing because she cannot will passion. Although Julia has been reduced to a passive object in the marital transaction, robbed of her passions, she is, at the same time, obliged to act as if her act is motivated by those very same passions.

In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith argues that one of the objectives of female education is to train women to perform wifehood convincingly: ‘A wife, in the same manner, may sometimes not feel that tender regard for her husband which is suitable to the relation that subsists between them. If she has been virtuously educated, however, she will endeavour to act as if she felt it’ (162). Seemingly women need training as wives because they, according to Smith, do not have a natural disposition to perform sympathetic acts that demand the self-denial characteristic of the masculine impartial spectator. Indeed, men embody the greater ‘exertions of public spirit’ according to Smith (191). ‘Humanity is the virtue of a woman,’ Smith writes, ‘generosity of a man’ (190). The distinction between these attributes is that ‘the most humane actions require no self-denial, no self-command, no great exertion of the sense of propriety,’ whereas generosity requires that ‘we prefer some other person to ourselves’ (Smith 191). In other words, Smith suggests that men have a greater moral capacity and, maybe, that true sympathy is a man’s business. Savillon, Mackenzie’s slave-holding man of feeling, defines sentiment as a particular female attribute, yet, he expresses doubt that it is a natural characteristic: ‘There is a little world of sentiment made for women to move in, where they certainly excel our sex, and where our sex ought, perhaps, to be excelled by them.
This is irresistibly engaging, where it is natural; but of all affectations, that of sentiment is the most disgusting’ (113).

Smith’s gendered language unmasks his theory’s regulatory function; in order to secure sympathetic harmony in a marriage, as a case in point, a wife ought to act as if her act is expressive of natural attributes. Thus, the performative and regulatory character of gender should be concealed in order to maintain the fiction of natural asymmetrical gender relations, as postmodern theorist Judith Butler suggests in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Indeed, Smith’s articulation of gender roles is susceptible of Butler’s interpretation of gender as ‘instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*’ (140). ‘As a strategy of survival within compulsory systems, gender is,’ according to Butler, ‘a performance with clearly punitive consequences’ (139), that is, a ‘regulatory fiction’ (141). In a similar fashion, sympathy can be interpreted as a regulatory fiction. If a wife does not seem to embody true feeling, her husband, the spectator as judge, does not give the actor applause, and sympathy is withheld. As Smith writes, ‘A husband is dissatisfied with the most obedient wife, when he imagines her conduct is animated by no other principle besides her regard to what the relation she stands in requires’ (172). Curiously, he demands genuine feeling, while also insisting on emotional constraint and mediocrity. Smith, then, appears to be anxious that feeling is no more than a mask to be worn, but, at the same time, the wearing of masks is fundamental to the social harmony that *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* imagines.
The Man of Real Sensibility

If Mackenzie tests the power of sympathy through an exploration of genre, he tests it further by exercising sentimental rhetoric against the backdrop of colonial slavery. Emerging in the wake of Sarah Scott’s *The History of Sir George Ellison* (1766), *Julia de Roubigné* is one of the earliest British fictional responses to slavery. In his analysis of race, gender, and commercial interests in the sentimental novel, Ellis proposes a comparative reading of *Julia de Roubigné* and *The History of Sir George Ellison* and suggests that Mackenzie’s novel ‘provides a significant restatement of the Ellisonian slavery-reform scenario’ (115), concluding that the novels’ joint position on the question of slavery is ameliorative and ‘concerned, above all, with the hyperbolically asymmetrical power relation of slavery – in other words, sentimentalist’ (127). While I endorse Ellis’ critical position on *The History of Sir George Ellison*, I want to suggest that *Julia de Roubigné* is less a restatement of Scott’s novel than a critique of the kind of sentimentalism that it advocates. Where *The History of Sir George Ellison* validates benevolent sentimentalism as a response to slavery, *Julia de Roubigné* suggests its inadequacy by exposing the tensions in the continuities conceptualised between sentiments and capitalism. Mackenzie shows that the genre cannot rectify the institution of slavery; with *Julia de Roubigné*, I have suggested, he challenges the very assumptions of the sentimental novel.

In colonial America of 1774, a condensed version of *The History of Sir George Ellison* was published under the title *The Man of Real Sensibility*; a project, Betty Rizzo, notes ‘Scott almost certainly had nothing to do with’ (xxxvi). Rizzo suggests that the ‘title of the condensation may have been a reflection on James [sic Henry] Mackenzie’s popular *The Man of Feeling* (1771), about a protagonist with extreme
sensibility of no use either to himself or to others’ (xxxvii). The novels’ suggested transatlantic dialogue may reveal something about the extent to which Scott’s and Mackenzie’s work push against each other; if Scott supplied the framework for the representation of a man of real sensibility as a model for social practice, Mackenzie, as Manning argues, ‘never presents sensibility as a model for action’ (The Works of Henry Mackenzie xv). As a point of departure for my discussion of Julia de Roubigné and slavery, I examine Scott’s sentimental rhetoric and argue that her didacticism ultimately deconstructs itself, as that which cannot be conceived of within white virtue is glossed over. In short, real sensibility is always already a compromised discourse. Scott’s narrator seeks to control a sentimental discourse that is riddled with ambiguity, an ambiguity that Mackenzie lets loose in his experimental use of the epistolary form.

In The History of Sir George Ellison, the eponymous protagonist travels to Jamaica to make his fortune on behalf of his family in the mother country. While Ellison clearly relocates to the colony due to financial reasons, the novel underscores his enlightenment project of improvement and education in the colony. Upon Ellison’s arrival in Jamaica, the colony is represented as enlightenment’s dark other, and Ellison, freshly arrived from England, and Mrs. Ellison, born and bred in the colony, stand as figures of the enlightened mother country and its dark empirical child. Ellison explains this relationship to his wife:

you have been bred in a country, where scarcity of natural inhabitants introduced slavery, which can never be established but at the expense of humanity; the master becomes a tyrant, for human nature always abuses a power which it has no right to exert; and the slave’s mind being as heavily fettered as his body, he grows sordid and abject. I, on the other contrary, was born in a country, that with all its faults is conspicuously generous, frank, and merciful, because it is free; no subordination exists there, but what is for the benefit of the lower as well as the well as the
higher ranks; all live in a state of reciprocal services, the great and the poor are linked in compact; each side has its obligation to perform. (16-17)

Ellison thus dissociates the ‘generous, frank, and merciful’ mother country from slavery and frees it from any responsibility; indeed, slavery has generated itself as ‘scarcity of natural inhabitants introduced slavery.’ The man of sensibility glosses over the realities of slavery, refusing to implicate England and himself in the institution of slavery, thus emerging as a spotless role model, bringing enlightened virtue to a debased world. Like Ellison’s explanation of slavery, his description of the harmonious class system in England is obscured. Even Mackenzie’s man of feeling, Harley, who infamously misreads every situation in which he finds himself, has a better eye for the injustices underlying English society.

Toning down Ellison’s implication in Jamaica’s slave economy through his marriage to slave-holding widow, Scott introduces him as a model for imitation. The narrator articulates the didactic objective of the novel thus:

As my intention in the following sheets is, not so much to give a minute detail of Mr. Ellison’s actions, as to record his virtues, and rather to represent him as an object of imitation than of wonder, I shall pass over a few succeeding years of his life very succinctly; nor do they afford any great variety of incidents, his whole attention being turned to the business he came upon. (6-7)

The novel, then, sets up Ellison as a kind of alter ego, like little Eva in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and the model on which the reader should base her response to suffering. The text, however, brings into question its representation of Ellison as a role model by suggesting that details of his actions must be omitted in favour of recording his virtues. *The History of Sir George Ellison*, I suggest, cannot display the realities of colonial practice as that would undercut its enlightenment goal of promoting virtue.
Nevertheless, by gesturing towards actions that may not be conceived of within virtue, the text starts to unravel itself, leaving itself susceptible to other interpretations of Ellison’s character.

In its attempt to control the representation of Ellison, the novel focuses on scenes of misery that would appeal to a man sensibility. Ellison reflects: ‘The thing which had chiefly hurt him during his abode in Jamaica, was the cruelty exercised on one part of mankind; as if the difference of complexion excluded them from the human race, or indeed as if their not being human could be an excuse for making them wretched’ (10). This is Ellison’s initial response to Jamaican slavery, and it encapsulates the tension and ambiguity that the novel is never able to solve: the significance of the difference of complexion. Ellison argues that his right to enslave blacks is ‘merely political’ not ‘divine’ nor ‘natural’ (16); he is, however, ‘sensible he [can] not abolish this slavery,’ because his affairs could not ‘go on without’ it (10). Yet, he is frustrated that he sees ‘no means of rendering happy the poor wretches, whose labours were to yield him affluence’ (10). As a result of such conflicting interests, Ellison is torn between the man of feeling and the man of commerce, and again the text slips into areas that may not be accounted for in terms of didacticism, areas that may not be wholly defined by virtue. Scott relieves this tension by directing attention to an injured lap-dog, the only creature over whom the unfeeling Mrs. Ellison, who opposes her husband’s ideas about slavery-reform, sheds tears. Mrs. Ellison is appalled that Mr. Ellison defines ‘negroes’ as ‘fellow creatures,’ and that he challenges her to prove that ‘the distinguishing marks of humanity lie in the complexion or turn of features’ (13). Unable to contain this lager question, the text abandons it and turns to the practical effort of relieving the dog’s
pain, an action that foreshadows Ellison’s benevolent slavery-reform. Ellison says:
‘But we will not at present pursue this subject; the best action we can now do is to
relieve the poor little sufferer; let us go into the house and get its leg tied up’ (13).
Scott’s narrator, then, puts a full stop to this potentially explosive debate, producing
an apparently satisfactory sense of closure, stating that ‘We will leave them therefore
busied in their present care, equally placid, and equally attentive to the poor lap-dog’
(13).

The novel thus rewrites slavery as an institution defined by the bonds of paternal
affection as opposed to the bonds of commerce. The History of Sir George Ellison
envisioned the organising principle of slavery as that of a family where the white
patriarch grants and withholds sympathy. To make such a vision convincing the text
attempts to divorce slavery from the exploitative financial system that underlies it.
The narrator articulates this division, reporting that Ellison’s ‘desire of mitigating the
sufferings of his slaves was so great, that he resolved to withdraw his whole attention
from commerce, till he had devised some means of effecting this first wish of his
heart’ (13). Ellison’s rhetoric, nevertheless, quickly slips into economical discourse
as he articulates slavery as an institution where slaves are considered as low class
citizens in a kind of compact society similar to that in England:

“While you perform your duty,’ continued he, ‘I shall look upon you as
free servants, or rather like my children, for whose well-being I am
anxious and watchful. I have provided you with convenient habitations;
given you a plentiful portion of all necessaries; assigned to each a small
share of peculiar property; taken care of you in sickness; and considered
your ease in health; I have increased your liberty; promoted your
amusements; and much lightened your punishments...The man who after
so happy a change in his condition can repeatedly offend, is not worthy
to be the object of my care; and shall become the property of some
master, whose chastisements may keep within the bounds of duty the
actions of that man, whose heart cannot be influenced by gratitude, or his
own true interest.” (14-15)
Ellison’s gesture of assigning slaves pseudo ownership seems grotesque, considering that the slaves’ condition of bondage remains unaltered. Moreover, his sentimental argument is essentially a commercial one, as healthy, happy slaves are ‘able with ease, to do so much more work’ (17). Ellison’s notion of ‘free servants,’ who are motivated by the prospect of property, anticipates Smith’s view in *The Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776), and one may argue that Scott tries to balance her argument between moral sentiments and the wealth of the nation.

Ellis notes:

> Reading Ellison against [Adam] Smith, then, we might observe that Ellison’s reforms fail to improve the condition of the slave to a status where they might acquire property. Since Ellison does not free his slaves, the relationship between greater reward and greater work remains in the arbitrary gift of the master and is in fact of that category of behaviour called benevolence or charity in the sentimental novel. (101-2)

Ellison’s gestures can only be termed as charity, because slaves are never considered to be given the rights of civic man. Curiously, the text suggests that slaves have a right to happiness if not to freedom. They cannot, of course, pursue happiness through the acquisition of property; the acquisition of happiness can only take place by making oneself worthy ‘to be the object of [Ellison’s] care’ (15). Ellison looks upon his slaves ‘as his own private property, persons for whose happiness he was obliged in duty to provide, because it was in his power to do it’ (138). Characterising his power as God-given, Ellison assures his slaves that all the worldly prosperity he enjoyed, all the good dispositions which led him to impart the blessings he received, came from above, and to the Power who had given them, it was their duty to render their thanks. All this he frequently urged, but still their affections could not be weaned from their visible benefactor. (18)
Sorensen 61

Ellison’s relationship to his slaves reflects the ambiguity with which the text struggles; black slaves are ‘persons, yet private property.’ Slaves are simple childlike creatures, incapable of entertaining abstractions, who are better off by being guided by their visible benefactor Ellison. In Scott’s text, black characters remain objects enslaved by benevolent sentimental rhetoric.

Even when Ellison returns to England, the land of freedom, where he relieves the poor with his money made on slavery, his former slaves are placed in a situation of servitude no different from that of slavery:

Mr. Ellison’s house contained also many children of inferior rank; his servants had intermarried, the blacks with blacks, the white servants with those of their own colour; for though he promoted their marrying, he did not wish an union between those of different complexions, the connection appearing indelicate and almost unnatural. (139)

Ellison’s fear of miscegenation, which reflects Scott’s fear of losing authorial control, I suggest, underlines his belief in a certain natural order. The text cannot allow miscegenation as it would disrupt all established hierarchies, all the naturalised superior attributes of civilised men of sensibility. Ellison’s charity would be disclosed to be hollow at the core if black and white, servant and master, were equal, removing the blueprint for his benevolent project. Therefore, if black slaves are rendered more complex than lap-dogs, Scott’s genre enters a dead end.

*Julia de Roubigné* explores this dead end of sentimental rhetoric. By setting the story of Julia’s true love, Savillon, in the colony of Martinique, Mackenzie investigates the racial conscience of a man of sensibility, albeit in a radically different manner from Scott’s: Mackenzie’s text does not endorse but rather questions Savillon’s role as a slave-holding man of feeling. Just as *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* theorises on the basis of the spatial and temporal distance that that
the Atlantic context evokes, Mackenzie’s novel charts transatlantic ground in its exploration of sentimentalism. Sympathy, according to Smith, is rendered superfluous if the object of suffering is without the spectator’s mental and physical realm. Smith writes: ‘Whatever interest we take in the fortune of those with whom we have no acquaintance or connexion, and who are placed altogether out of the sphere of our activity, can produce only anxiety to ourselves, without any manner of advantage to them’ (140). Indeed, it ‘seems wisely ordered by Nature’ that we should show little interest in those ‘who are in every respect so very remote from us’ (140). In other words, geographical distance forms an obstacle to sympathy’s transport in the imagination. In *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume suggests that physical resemblance secures sympathy between actors and spectators, arguing that ‘nature has preserv’d a great resemblance among all human creatures’ and, indeed, ‘remarkable resemblance’ fosters sympathy and that can be embraced with ‘facility and pleasure’ (207). Hume concludes that ‘the stronger the relation is betwixt ourselves and any object, the more easily does the imagination make the transition, and convey to the related idea the vivacity of conception, with which we always form the idea of our own person’ (207).

As a man of feeling, Savillon finds himself in a state of exile in the colony Martinique, where there are no spectators with similar dispositions to reflect back his self-image. Repulsed by the treatment of black slaves in the colony, he critiques its capitalist ideology for disregarding moral sentiments. In an Ellisonian fashion, Savillon ponders, ‘It is supposed, that, in these wealthy islands, profit is the only medium of opinion, and that morality has nothing to do in the system; I cannot easily imagine, that, in any latitude, the bosom is shut to those pleasures which result from
the exercise of goodness’ (92), appealing to Smith’s ‘man within the breast.’ Unable
to silence his conscience, Savillon sets out to promote moral conduct by changing the
conditions of the enslaved labour force through sympathetic engagement. In the
testing ground of the colony, Savillon attempts to prove that the slave’s savage
disposition indeed can be influenced by benevolent treatment: ‘I was still induced to
believe, that the most savage and sullen among them had principles of gratitude,
which a good master might improve to his advantage’ (97). Already before Savillon
has embarked on his sympathetic project, he cannot separate the language of
sympathy from the language of capitalism and colonialism.

Savillon’s prime object of benevolence is a physically impressive, but stubborn
slave, Yambu, who, Savillon is told, used to be a prince in Africa. Portraying a royal
slave as the subject of sympathy, Mackenzie seemingly alludes to Aphra Behn’s
Oroonoko (1688). Yambu’s fellow-slaves, on the other hand, are simply described as
‘the negroes’ and are not characterised in any further detail, and thus they remain
distant, unnamed objects (99). By definition, a slave is reduced to an object without
the ability to reflect on his or her condition. Savillon’s measures ostensibly
counteract this objectification as he initiates his sympathetic interaction with Yambu
by taking his hand uttering, ‘“I wish to be the friend of Yambu,”’ implying a
relationship defined by equality (98). Yambu, however, is naturally suspicious of
Savillon, ‘a white man,’ and, showing awareness of their asymmetrical racial
relationship, wants to know if Savillon will ‘“use men goodly”’ (99). Yambu’s three-
word phrase, ‘use men goodly,’ suggests exploitation glossed over by benevolence
and discloses the tension that lies at the heart of the two discourses that are
disturbingly intertwined in benevolent sentimentalism. Where Scott’s narrator suppresses this ambiguity, Mackenzie’s fragmented epistles bring it centre stage.

Savillon does indeed ‘use men goodly.’ Like George Shelby in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, he gives Yambu his freedom in exchange for his work, but the freedom that Savillon offers is one that still supports the plantation economy. Yambo’s conception of freedom, on the other hand, is associated with his native home; Yambu asks to have his country back. But Savillon cannot afford to loose a good worker as he is, after all, in the colonies for monetary, not moral, reasons. Instead, Savillon promises the slaves equality and social harmony in a sort of sympathetic community: “I cannot give you back your country, Yambu; but I can make this one better for you. You can make it better for me too, and your people!” (99). Savillon tells Yambu and a fellow slave that they are free to go if they do not want to work, but Yambu’s fellow slave and former subject, begs his ‘master,’ if he and his people may stay and work for him (100). Savillon answers like a true benevolent patriarch, disguising colonial capitalism with fellow-feeling: “Then if you think it better, you shall both stay; Yambu shall be my friend, and help me to raise sugars for the good of us all” (100). Upon hearing these words, the former slave falls at Savillon’s feet and kisses them. Yambu, on the other hand, stands in silence, and Savillon notices ‘a tear on his check,’ ‘the token of sensibility’ in Ellison’s words (100). Due to this sentimental response, Savillon is convinced that Yambu possesses a higher degree of civilisation than his fellow slaves and concludes: “This man has been a prince in Africa!” (100). Savillon then reorganises the slave system into feudalism, ‘motivated by the power of self-interest,’ as Ellis notes (122). The power of sympathy, Mackenzie seems to suggests, is always also ‘the power of self-interest.’
The discourse of sympathy uncomfortably disguises the project of capitalism that Savillon in reality is undertaking. As he ponders, ‘I am under no apprehension of desertion or mutiny; they work with the willingness of freedom, yet are mine with more than the obligation of slavery’ (100). Savillon’s discourse is disturbing because he still conceives of his black workers within the parameters of ownership. Seemingly the ‘obligation of slavery’ has been substituted for the obligation of sympathy, and Mackenzie churns up the question whether they are not one and the same. While Savillon sets out to disprove that ‘profit is the only medium of opinion’ (92) and introduce morality as an alternative to such a system, he has done nothing but turn the latter into an instrument of the former. The slaves have been seduced by sentimental language to participate loyally in the capitalist project of colonisation. Indeed, Yambu becomes an efficient supervisor, and the freed men work better than they did before as slaves, increasing profit as Smith theorises in The Wealth of Nations. Savillon’s sympathetic project is naive at best, cynical at worst, as he exploits his workers’ capacity for feeling to his own financial gain. Sympathy, Mackenzie’s novel proposes, is uneasily entangled with market economy, and actors and spectators, like Julia and Yambu, in Smith’s theatre of sympathy are always also monetary tokens in a financial exchange.

**Shipwrecked Sympathy**

With Savillon’s problematic slavery-reforms Mackenzie suggests that sensibility as an ethical and aesthetical response enters a cul-de-sac, because in sentimental economy slaves, women (and lap-dogs) are conceived of as ‘persons, yet private property,’ to revisit Scott’s entangled rhetoric. As Marshall puts it, ‘The story of
Yambu seems to offer an aesthetic perspective as an alternative to the account of human relations in terms of property and financial transactions; yet it also suggests the failure of an aesthetic response, the inability of a romantic argument to respond to the story of sentiment and suffering’ (‘The Business of Tragedy’ 161). Mackenzie underscores sentimentalism’s dead end by evoking the notion of exile, a notion that underscores sympathy’s epistemological and geographical limitations. The novel’s letter writers and black slaves alike are represented as shipwrecked exiles. Savillon denies his slaves – or subjects in his new feudal economy – what he wants the most himself; Savillon wants his country back too. He begs Beauvaris, his correspondent, that his ‘letters must give [him] back [his] country’ (91). In his essay ‘Reflections on Exile,’ Edward Said defines the state of exile thus: ‘It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home’ (178). Savillon imagines that the letters of Beauvaris can heal the rift between him and his native France. In other words, he proposes that a letter functions as a tie, a bond of sympathy, providing its recipient with a mirror in which the self becomes itself as in Smith’s theory. Indeed, Montauban writes to his correspondent: ‘your letter has given me back myself’ (145).

The letters written by Savillon from Martinique may be read as a reflection of sympathy’s inability to construct ties between individuals where the Atlantic Ocean speaks of Said’s ‘unhealable rift’ between correspondents. Savillon’s transatlantic letters suggest slippage in communication and bear witness to the exile’s predicament, that is, the struggle of self-assertion. When Savillon leaves the coast of France, the bonds of sympathy are broken and letters, as mediation of feeling, are needed to tie them again. Identifying himself as an exile, Savillon utters: ‘In the
mean time, I am torn from her, from France, from every connection my heart had formed; cast like a shipwrecked thing on the other side of the Atlantic, amidst a desert, of all others the most dreadful, the desert of society, with which no social tie unite me!’ (90). On Savillon’s side of the Atlantic, there are no like-minded spectators to provide him with a mirror to his self. The Atlantic Ocean, then, may be read as a literalisation of the epistemological vacuum between actor and spectator in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Perhaps, to draw on Marshall’s reading of Smith, the Atlantic crossing in Mackenzie’s novel can be seen as a metaphor for ‘the ultimate threat in the world that Smith represents is the prospect of spectators who would deny sympathy’ (‘Adam Smith and the Theatricality of Moral Sentiments’ 609). Indeed, Savillon seems to lose part of his humanity during the crossing; from a feeling self, Savillon is transformed into a ‘shipwrecked thing’ (90). Yambu and his fellow slaves are the physical reminders of this process of dehumanisation. When Yambu asks permission to return to his country, he looks ‘wistfully towards the sea,’ wanting to reverse this metamorphosis (99). When Savillon returns to France, he remains an exile: ‘I feel as if I were in a foreign land,’ he says (127). Savillon cannot have his country back either, it seems. Thus, the sea-crossing may be seen as standing for the novel’s scepticism of the power of sympathy to heal the rift between self and other, between actor and spectator.

In *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume employs the imagery of a sea-crossing to express the limitations of the imagination to envision a scenario of suffering:

I must think on the miserable condition of those who are at sea in a storm, and must endeavour to render this idea as strong and lively as possible, in order to make me more sensible of my own happiness. But whatever pains I may take, the comparison will never have an equal efficacy, as if I were really on shore, and saw a ship at distance, tossed by a tempest, and in danger every moment of perishing on a rock or sand-bank. (379)
Julia de Roubigné reflects such scepticism. The letters’ voyage across the Atlantic Ocean seems to underscore the vulnerability of sympathetic relations. Just as language is exposed as a fragile medium, sympathy in the novel is ‘in danger every moment of perishing on a rock or sand-bank,’ in Hume’s words. Just as the ocean claims lives, letters may not reach their target or may be misread. As Savillon warns Beauvaris, ‘Do not let slip the opportunity of this ship’s return to write me fully’ (109). When Montauban reads his wife’s letter to Savillon, in which she agrees to grant him an interview, he reads it as proof of her adultery without consulting her. The consequence of this misreading is fatal. Julia de Roubigné is a novel about slipping as characters constantly fail to make meaningful contact with each other through exchange of points of view. The Atlantic Ocean, with its associations of slavery and exploitation, is symbolic of the limitations of the genre; that is, when sympathy suffers shipwreck because it cannot transform objects of trade into moral subjects.

Savillon’s letters describing his slavery-reforms thus leaves us to question whether a sentimental response leads to an ethical social practice, as Marshall suggests. While Savillon has demonstrated his ability to respond emotionally to slavery, Mackenzie reminds us that the question still remains: “Who shall set these poor people free?” (102). We are left to ask if sentimental literature can enable anything but a response in the imagination. In what may be read as a self-conscious moment of behalf of Mackenzie, Savillon says:

Among the legends of a European nursery, are stories of captives delivered, of slaves released, who pined for years in the durance of unmerciful enemies. – Could we suppose its infant audience transported to the sea-shore, where a ship laden with slaves is just landing; the question would be universal, “Who shall set these poor people free?” –
The young West Indian asks his father to buy a boy for him, that he may have something to vent his spite on when he is peevish. (101-2)

In true Smithian fashion, Savillon imagines that children of Europe, who have been exposed to romantic literature on slavery, are transported to the colony in fancy. The children, however, remain mere spectators devoid of agency. As in Hume’s example of the sea crossing, this imaginative transport does not have much efficacy. Though the European children may ‘feel right,’ to employ Stowe’s moral imperative from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (385), they are not that different from the West Indian boy who asks his father to purchase him a slave: failing to free the slaves their sympathetic gestures are no more than empty in themselves, like Ellison’s and Savillon’s reforms. As Marshall formulates this impotent eighteenth-century aesthetics; it can ‘make one weep for Yambu in the theater while remaining impassive before the slave ship’ (‘The Business of Tragedy’ 166).

The eighteenth-century Scottish culture of sensibility resonated across the Atlantic and well into the nineteenth century. Smith’s theory of sympathy came to play a significant role in young America’s construction of identity, and Mackenzie’s man of feeling fuelled dreams of a sentimental democracy, as Burstein has argued. With the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in the antebellum period, Stowe put sentimental rhetoric to the test anew in her crusade against slavery and its immense domestic and international success speaks of a heartfelt commitment to the legacy of enlightenment sympathy. But perhaps even the author who supposedly was greeted by Abraham Lincoln in the White House as the “‘little woman who wrote the book that made this great war’” (qtd. in Kazin ix) entertained feelings of doubts regarding her chosen genre. In 1853 Stowe published *A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to authorise
the characters and scenarios depicted in her sentimental novel. The tears, the physical tokens of imaginative sympathy in sentimental literature, shed over *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* were thus supplemented by the *Key* with its recorded ‘evidence’ of historical persons and situations. The ambivalent relationship between these two texts reveals an anxiety about the adequacy of a sentimental response explored in *Julia de Roubigné*, where the sentimental reader is cast as a passive spectator in a ‘theatre of rapine, of slavery, and of murder!’ (101). In Mackenzie’s last dark novel, the genre seems outplayed as it struggles with the vacuum between the imaginative and social realm; feelings, as Julia writes to her correspondent, cannot be ‘manage[d] on paper’ (76).
THREE

Reading Racial Character: Sympathy, Daguerreotypy, and Phrenology in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin

One makes of art in general an object in which one claims to distinguish an inner meaning, the invariant, and a multiplicity of external variations through which, as through so many veils, one would try to see or restore the true, full, originary meaning: one, naked. (22)

Jacques Derrida, The Truth in Painting

Introduction

Unlike Mackenzie’s bewildered heroine, Stowe, at the outset of her career as a novelist, did not doubt that feelings could be managed on paper. Conceiving of herself as a painter who could transparently capture sentiments with the stroke of her brush, she said to the editor of the National Era in which Uncle Tom’s Cabin was first serialised, “‘My vocation is simply that of a painter, and my object will be to hold up in the most lifelike and graphic manner possible Slavery, its reverses, changes, and the negro character, which I have had ample opportunities for studying. There is no arguing with pictures, and everybody is impressed by them, whether they mean to be or not’” (qtd. in Hedrick 208 emphasis in the original). In this assured statement, Stowe imagines her readership as susceptible spectators whose responses would reflect her own. In other words, she conceives of the reading process as a kind of ideal Smithian exchange of sympathy where the spectator’s imagination moulds itself upon the actor’s. Stowe’s naked pictures, however, are always already arguable, I suggest in this chapter. Drawing on Derridean paradigms, I explore how Uncle Tom’s Cabin manages the epistemology of feeling and its representation on paper, proposing that A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin functions as a supplement and therefore compromises Stowe’s philosophy of ‘feeling right.’
In her study *The Perverse Gaze of Sympathy: Sadomasochistic Sentiments from Clarissa to Rescue 911*, which serves as one source of inspiration for my thesis title, Laura Hinton suggests that the figure of the spectator links the tradition of the eighteenth-century epistolary novel and the nineteenth-century novel of realism, which traditionally have been defined as formally and historically separate. ‘Literary epistles fanned the desire for immediacy, directness, and a camera-like visual agency,’ Hinton argues, ‘Hence, I see the novel of realism as one of the epistolary tradition’s literary legacies’ (4). Employing Hinton’s position as a starting point for this chapter, I explore Stowe’s concern with realistic representation and visual monitoring against the backdrop of my preceding discussion of the eighteenth-century sentimental and epistolary novel. I read Catharine Beecher’s 1837 *Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism, with Reference to the Duty of American Females*, in which she portrays abolitionists as men of feeling out of control whose passionate measures threaten to cause civil disunion, as a conceptual link between Smith’s masculine impartial spectator and Stowe’s notion of ‘female influence.’ Beecher introduces the notion of ‘female influence’ as a corrective to Smith’s ‘man within the breast,’ a notion that promised to save the nation from civil war.

Focusing my discussion of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* on spectatorship, I explore whiteness as an optical phenomenon through the lens of sympathy, daguerreotypy, and phrenology. In *White*, Dyer examines the relationship between whiteness and the technology of photography and concludes that its ‘apparatus and practice par excellence of a light culture, not only assumes and privileges whiteness but also constructs it’ (122). Dyer identifies one scene from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, featuring little Eva, of visual effect that has formed the basis for a general aesthetic practice in
film and photography: ‘Eva came tripping up the veranda steps to her father. It was late in the afternoon, and the rays of the sun formed a kind of glory behind her, as she came forward in her white dress, with her golden hair and glowing cheeks’ (122). Adding to the work of Dyer, I explore how Stowe’s reliance on the visual mechanisms of sympathy, daguerreotypy, and phrenology informs whiteness as a superior identity. In other words, I demonstrate how Stowe’s ethics, which reduces others to the terms of the white gaze, develops into the aesthetic that Dyer identifies,

**Abolition and Angry Passions**

If Jefferson had united the country as a ‘sentimental democracy,’ urging, in his 1801 Inaugural Address, ‘its citizens to “unite with one heart and one mind,”’ to restore, after a decade of heated politics, the sentimental values of “harmony and affection”’ (Burstein 3-4), Beecher feared that the slavery debate had sparked a dangerous passion that could break the nation’s one heart into two. In *An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism, with Reference to the Duty of American Females* (1837), Beecher repeatedly warned against ‘angry passions’ (6, 7, 18) in her critique of the Garrisonian abolitionist movement which she saw as causing political turmoil with the potential of causing civil disunion. Beecher was not alone in her sentiments; ‘the tiny band of Abolitionists were execrated by most Northerners; they seemed to threaten the unity of the country far more than slavery did’ (Kazin xii). Less interested in the debate on slavery and the plight of the slave, Beecher’s main target of attack is the measures adopted by passion-ridden abolitionists: ‘Now, the question is not, whether these things, that were urged by Abolitionists, were true. The thing maintained is, *that the method taken* by them to remove this prejudice was neither
peaceful nor Christian in its tendency, but, on the contrary, was calculated to increase
the evil, and to generate anger, pride, and recrimination, on one side, and envy,
discontent, and revengeful feelings, on the other’ (11 emphasis added). Stirring up
emotional strife, abolitionists have neglected to ‘soothe the feelings and
apprehensions that had been excited,’ according to Beecher (12), who locates control
of passion at the very heart of the slavery debate, reformulating it as a debate over
the discipline and emotional excess, thereby echoing the Enlightenment debate over
the passionate self with Smith, Hume and Mackenzie at the forefront. Thus, Beecher
calls for a mediating figure, not unlike Smith’s impartial spectator, to harmonise pro-
and anti-slavery sentiments; if not controlled, she fears, the ‘angry passions’ of the
respective camps will tear the body politic apart.

Beecher saw the slavery debate as alienating the nation from itself, causing
disharmony between its southern and northern states. Indeed, the first obstacle that
Beecher identifies in her essay, which was designed as a public response to Angelina
Grimke who wanted to recruit Northern women as abolitionists, is that Miss Grimke
is ‘not sufficiently informed in regard to the feelings and opinions of Christian
females at the North’ (3). In other words, North and South have lost the ability to
adopt each others’ states of feeling; the abolitionists, according to Beecher, have
brought about an epistemological gap that hinders any exchange of communication
between North and South:

Every avenue of approach to the South is shut. No paper, pamphlet, or
preacher, that touches on that topic is admitted in their bounds. Their own
citizens, that once laboured and remonstrated, are silenced; their own clergy,
under the influence of the exasperated feelings of their people, and their own
sympathy and sense of wrong, either entirely hold their peace, or become
defenders of a system they once lamented, and attempted to bring to an end.
(34)
Jefferson’s nation of ‘one heart and one mind’ has been split into a divided self, as it were, and is stranded in a vacuum. ‘Exasperated feelings’ threaten to divide Americans, who no longer see their selves reflected in each other, to evoke Smith’s model of the dualistic self, and ‘excited by those passions which blind the reason’ (35), they are aroused to violent action. ‘This is no picture of fancied dangers, which are not near,’ Beecher writes, ‘The day has come, when already the feelings are so excited on both sides, that I have heard intelligent men, good men, benevolent and pious men, in moments of excitement, declare themselves ready to take up the sword’ (35). The passion that abolitionists have unleashed is so destructive to the nation, to Beecher’s mind, that it will literally dismember it: ‘who can estimate the mischiefs that we must encounter while this dismemberment, this tearing asunder of the joints and members of the body politic, is going on?’ (53). Figuratively, then, the dismemberment of the political union is at stake.

Unwilling to step out of her ‘sphere,’ however, Beecher wraps up this political issue in sentimental language, envisioning the disintegration of the political union as a disintegration of sympathetic union through the destruction of the nation’s infrastructure. Mapping exchange of sympathy onto the canals and railway; that is, the feeling’s transport in fancy are made vivacious by Beecher through the evocation of the physical means of transportation, which binds the nation together like heart-strings: ‘What shall be done with our canals and railways, now the bands of love to bind us, then the causes of contention and jealousy? What umpire will appear to settle all these questions of interest and strife, between communities thrown asunder by passion, pride, and mutual injury?’ (53). Beecher foregrounds control as a central mechanism in the management of the nation’s feelings, as the notion of an ‘umpire’
in this example suggests. Reformulating Smith’s impartial spectator, albeit in a more explicit Christian framework, Beecher invites passionate Americans to ‘study the character and imitate the example of the Redeemer of mankind. He, indeed, was the searcher of hearts’ (56). But ‘the searcher of hearts,’ Beecher reminds her readers, cannot be led astray by feelings: ‘a man is not fitted for the duties of a reprover, until he can bring his feelings under...control’ (55).

Like Smith, Beecher is extremely anxious about the potential dangers of feeling; feeling in its various manifestations holds the key to the making and to the destruction of civil society. Elsewhere in this thesis, I have argued that Smith projects his anxieties onto Native Americans whom he regards as representatives of savages unable to cultivate sympathy, yet they also uncannily resemble the admirable, stoic impartial spectator. In a similar fashion, Beecher sees black slaves as embodiment of passion that is uncontrollable once unleashed, an attribute that Smith also assigned to ostensible savages. Warningly she writes, ‘a period will come when the physical power will be so much with the blacks, their sense of suffering so increased, that the volcano will burst, – insurrection and servile wars will begin’ (35). Indeed, Beecher suggests that the power of sympathy may encourage the violent passion that she ascribes to blacks with the potent image of the bursting volcano above: ‘When this point is reached, will the blacks, knowing, as they will know, the sympathies of their Abolition friends, refrain from exerting their physical power?’ (36). Beecher’s discourse, moreover, suggests that if the passion of blacks is not contained, they will take their revenge on the South, as many southern slaveholders feared. The abolition movement is a dangerous emotional liaison that has made the feelings of white and black alike run amok.
If Beecher translated the slavery question into a question of management of angry passions, her essay is also a discussion of the appropriateness of women’s participation in a public debate, a discussion that culminated with the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. As she writes, ‘I cannot but apprehend that there is some need of inquiry as to the just bounds of female influence, and the times, places, and manner in which it can be appropriately exerted’ (37). Where Beecher’s conservative, gendered views on the ‘different stations of superiority and subordination’ (37) would prevent her from accepting women as active participants in the public debate on slavery, she assigns to women the role of a kind of impartial spectator who could soothe the violent feelings of the conflicting parties within their ‘sphere’ behind the scenes: ‘In the present aspect of affairs among us, when everything seems to be tending to disunion and distraction, it surely has become the duty of every female instantly to relinquish the attitude of a partisan, in every matter of clashing interests, and to assume the office of a mediator, and an advocate of peace’ (48). Feminising and relinquishing the public role of Smith’s impartial spectator, Beecher reformulates this figure’s attributes of control and discipline as ‘influence,’ the exercise of female power that her sister would popularise in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. As Douglas reminds us in her introduction to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, ‘The British minister who greeted [Stowe] on her triumphant tour of the United Kingdom in 1853 – *Uncle Tom* did as well there as at home – thanked her for teaching the world “that the voice which most effectively kindles enthusiasm in millions is the still small voice which comes forth from the sanctuary of a woman’s breast and from the retirement of a woman’s closet”’ (14). Arguably, the Beecher sisters, with Catharine as the forerunner, metamorphosed Smith’s idea of a public, stoic ‘man within the breast’ into a notion
of a private ‘woman within the breast,’ to play on Smith’s and Douglas’ phrases, whose voice resonated from the closet of the home.

Lee notes that ‘In the interests of source study, [Beecher’s philosophy] serves as a link between Stowe and Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, suggesting that Stowe does not vaguely circulate in a generalized discourse of sentimentality, but rather with Catharine revises Smith’s thinking toward more feminist and reformist ends’ (73). ‘[W]hile quietly holding her own opinions, and calmly avowing them, when conscience and integrity make the duty imperative,’ Beecher’s female mediator should ‘employ her influence, not for the purposes of exciting or regulating public sentiment, but rather for the purpose of promoting a spirit of candour, forbearance, charity, and peace’ (48). As Smith had ascribed the figure of the impartial spectator increasing importance throughout the editions of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Beecher apocalyptically suggests that the nation will stand or fall with this feminist reform of influence:

> There probably will never arrive a period in the history of this nation, when the influence of these principles will be more needed, than the present. The question of slavery involves more pecuniary interests, touches more private relations, involves more prejudices, is entwined with more sectional, party, and political interests, than any other which can ever again arise. It is a matter which, if discussed and controlled without the influence of these principles of charity and peace, will shake this nation like an earthquake, and pour over us the volcanic waves of every terrific passion. (51)

Reemploying the masculine image of the bursting volcano to underscore the dangerous potential of passion, Beecher identifies female influence as passionless judgement as opposed to ‘men of ardent and impulsive temperament, whose feelings are likely to take the lead, rather than their judgement’ (9).
If abolitionists had let their feelings take the lead, they had also generated the slavery debate in public and made a spectacle out of the southern slaveholder, instead of influencing him in his own parlour. Like Smith’s fearful scenario of spectators who withhold sympathy for the actor exposed to the public, Beecher feels for the southerner who has been turned into an object of ridicule by abolitionists: ‘How cruel the suffering, when his moral delinquencies are held up to public scorn and reprehension! Confiscation, stripes, chains, and even death itself, are often less dreaded’ (42-43). Contrasting the British abolition of the slave-trade with the American slavery debate, Beecher devotes numerous pages to Wilberforce, whom she sees as an ideal example of a reformer who drove home his point by influence, concluding that ‘As a general fact, the pious men of Great Britain acted harmoniously in this great effort’ (8-9). Beecher’s immediate concern with the American slavery debate is not a concern for the slave’s plight, but that it has brought the nation out of harmony with itself; North and South have entered into a state of disagreement in feelings.

The project of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, to evoke Elizabeth Barnes’ title phrase, is to restore the nation to a state of sympathy, carrying out the task of influencing the South at its own doorstep, the task that abolitionists had failed to perform according to Beecher. Indeed, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* reads as a fictionalisation of Beecher’s imperatives in her *Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism*: in Stowe’s domestic novel reform takes place in the home, ‘by the fire-side of the planter,’ and she gives life to a ‘southern Wilberforce’ in the shape of George Shelby for which her sister calls:

I would now ask, why could not some southern gentleman...have acted the part of Clarkson, and quietly have gone to work at the South, collecting facts, exhibiting the impolicy and the evils, to good men at the South, by the fire-side of the planter, the known home of hospitality and chivalry...What right
has any one to say that there was no southern Wilberforce that would have arisen, no Southern Grant, Macaulay or Sharpe, who, like the English philanthropists, would have stood the fierce beating of angry billows, and by patience, kindness, arguments, facts, eloquence, and Christian love, convinced the sceptical, enlightened the ignorant, excited the benevolent, and finally have carried the day at the South, by the same means and measures, as secured the event in England? (33)

This is nothing less than the conclusion of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. If abolitionists, according to Beecher, had divided Americans and made them feel wrongful, it was her sister’s mission to unite them and make them feel right. Stowe’s novel presents a vision of redeeming the South through the example of Christian sympathy, thereby abolishing slavery without violent conflict and maintaining national unity. But ‘feeling right’ posed challenges to a nation defined by increasing diversity as Stowe would acknowledge and struggle with in her writings; the harmonised difference with which Smithian sympathy settles appeared inadequate in a nation torn over the explosive issues of race and slavery. In her appeal to the South, Beecher identifies this obstacle of ostensible differences between whites and blacks that hinders southern sympathy:

Cannot the South bear in mind that at the North the colour of the skin does not take away the feeling of brotherhood, and though it is a badge of degradation in station and intellect, yet it is oftener regarded with pity and sympathy than with contempt? Cannot the South remember their generous feelings for the Greeks and Poles, and imagine that some such feelings may be awakened for the African race, among a people who do not believe either in the policy or the right of slavery? (54)

Beecher suggests that the South’s ability to ‘imagine...some such feelings’ depends on the sympathetic mediator’s harmonising function. In the *Oxford English Dictionary*, one definition of sympathy reads thus: ‘Conformity of feelings, inclinations, or temperament, which makes persons agreeable to each other;
community of feeling; harmony of disposition.’ The notion of ‘conformity of feelings’ that fosters ‘the agreeable’ is at the crux of Beecher’s anti-slavery project as she suggests that blacks be stripped of any ‘disagreeable’ attributes that hinder white sympathy:

The best way to make a person like a thing which is disagreeable, is to try in some way to make it agreeable, and if a certain class of persons is the subject of unreasonable prejudice, the peaceful and Christian way of removing it would be to endeavour to render the unfortunate persons who compose this class, so useful, so humble and unassuming, so kind in their feelings, and so full of love and good works, that prejudice would be supplanted by complacency in their goodness, and pity and sympathy for their disabilities. If the friends of the blacks had quietly set themselves to work to increase their intelligence, their usefulness, their respectability, their meekness, gentleness, and benevolence, and then had appealed to the pity, generosity, and Christian feelings of their fellow citizens, a very different result would have appeared.

(11)

Stowe did just that, and it made *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* a bestseller. Stowe’s appeal to the feelings of whites based on racial stereotypes was so powerful that the novel rivalled the Bible in popularity. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* made it very clear that the management of white feeling was paramount to the management of civic life. But this anti-slavery novel, and the New York novels that will be discussed subsequently, also makes it clear that sentimental democracy is strangely at odds with political democracy, having the potential to crush debate and diversity in its quest to render the disagreeable agreeable, therefore itself acting as a political ideology of quietism.

‘Feeling Right’: Stowe’s Theory of Moral Sentiments

If Stowe developed the idea of female influence in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* that Beecher’s 1837 essay had promoted as the peaceful solution to the conflict of slavery, she also saw the control of feeling that her sister had advocated as part of the
problem of slavery. By 1852 the nation’s conscience had been numbed by perverse 
laws, most notably the Fugitive Slave Law whose passing had induced Stowe to  
write *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and it needed to be reawakened to the callings of heart.  
True judgement, Stowe would assert, derived from feeling.

Feeling as the basis for moral judgement is Smith’s enlightenment legacy that 
pervades the ethos of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. In *Slavery, Philosophy, and American  
Literature, 1830-1860*, Lee notes that

As an ambitious and self-critical thinker, Stowe suffers from and intervenes  
in philosophical conundrums as she seeks fundamental mechanisms with 
which to settle the slavery crisis. In doing so, her writings engage richly 
related theories of emotion, including not only Adam Smith’s system of 
 moral sentiments, but Catharine Beecher’s sentimental psychology and 
Puritan notions of disinterested benevolence. (53-54)

Lee suggests that Stowe fails to unite her sentimental theory and practice into a 
coherent, workable reform, and that she is unable to establish a means by which to 
evaluate feeling, the problem that Smith addressed by introducing the notion of the 
impartial spectator. Pointing out the irony that Stowe abandons issues of slavery and 
race when America is on the brink of civil war, Lee proposes that this avoidance 
exposes Stowe’s struggle with the epistemology of feeling right. Using the work of 
Barnes and Lee as points of departure for my discussion, I explore the conceptual 
intersections between *Uncle Tom’s Cabin’s* discursive construction of whiteness and 
Smith’s philosophy of sympathy, intersections that are not examined by these critics.

In *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Stowe shares Smith’s premise that the capacity for 
sympathy is intrinsic to human nature as an ‘original passion’ (*TMS* 9). Smith writes 

That we often derive sorrow from the sorrow of others, is a matter of fact too 
obvious to require any instances to prove it; for this sentiment, like all the 
other original passions of human nature, is by no means confined to the 
virtuous and humane, though they perhaps may feel it with the most exquisite
sensibility. The greatest ruffian, the most hardened violater of the laws of society, is not altogether without it. (9)

D. D. Raphael and A. L. Macfie formulate this underlying assumption of Smith’s ethical theory thus: ‘He takes it for granted that moral rules are inductive generalizations and that moral concepts must arise in the first place from feeling’ (12). The moral authority that Smith assigns to feeling is echoed in Stowe’s much discussed philosophy of ‘feeling right,’ the solution to the slavery problem in Uncle Tom’s Cabin: ‘But, what can an individual do? Of that, every individual can judge. There is one thing that every individual can do, – they can see to it that they feel right. An atmosphere of sympathetic influence encircles every human being; and the man or woman who feels strongly, healthily and justly, on the great interests of humanity, is a constant benefactor to the human race’ (385). Being a devout Christian, Stowe submits to a system of higher law as opposed to the ‘the laws of society’ in Smith’s example, and she encouraged Northerners to break the Fugitive Slave Law if need be. In the novel’s world, the slave holder, like Simon Legree, stands as ‘the greatest ruffian,’ whereas women and feminised characters, most notably Uncle Tom, figure as ‘the virtuous and humane,’ to draw on Smith’s distinctions in the above example (Lee 74-75). But even Legree has once had a mother who used to influence him, and therefore he has not always been ‘altogether without’ sensibility. Indeed, mothers are the guards of the moral life of the nation, and if they do not ‘feel right’ men like Legree come of age: ‘If the mothers of the free states had all felt as they should, in times past,’ Stowe writes, ‘the sons of the free states would not have been the holders, and, proverbially, the hardest masters of slaves’ (384). Implicating northern mothers to this degree – Legree is a northerner, significantly – Stowe exposed slavery as a national problem of which even the
women of the North could not wash their hands, as she demonstrates with the figure
of Miss Ophelia who is brought straight from the haven of New England to the heart
of southern slavery in New Orleans.

Mothers, in the discursive realm of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, make the most ideal
readers and model moral citizens, because they, in Smith’s words, feel ‘with the most
exquisite sensibility’ (TMS 9). Indeed, Smith portrays despairing mothers as the most
complete ‘image of misery and distress’ (12), an image that Stowe most successfully
popularised to bring home the anti-slavery cause to the bosom of feeling America:

What are the pangs of a mother, when she hears the moanings of her infant
that during the agony of disease cannot express what it feels? In her idea of
what it suffers, she joins, to its real helplessness, her own consciousness of
that helplessness, and her own terrors for the unknown consequences of its
disorder; and out of all these, forms, for her own sorrow, the most complete
image of misery and distress. (TMS 12)

Almost every chapter of Uncle Tom’s Cabin includes this Smithian scenario of
suffering mothers, operating as ‘the source of our fellow-feeling for the misery of
others’ (TMS 10). Northern and Southern mothers alike could thus be united in their
sorrow, real or imagined, for a lost or an abused child, that is, they could ‘chang[e]
places in fancy with the sufferer,’ in Smith’s words (10). The plot line that dominates
the first part of the novel is the dramatic escape of the devoted, light-skinned slave
Eliza and her little Harry, and here Stowe teaches her readers to sympathise with the
lot of Eliza, because she is, like themselves – that, is, if they are true women – a
fountain of feeling. Writing of the Bird household, Stowe aligns the stories of Eliza
and Mrs. Bird, who has recently lost a child, and extends these stories of suffering to
the reader: ‘And oh! mother that reads this, has there never been in your house a
drawer, or a closet, the opening of which has been to you like the opening again of a
little grave? Ah! happy mother that you are, if it has not been so’ (75). In other words, Stowe’s narrator mediates between the characters’ and the readers’ reality, and, as Barnes suggests, ‘others (including characters) are made real by the feelings with which the individual invests them’ (96).

But if Smith had taught the eighteenth-century man of feeling to control himself, Stowe seeks to re-educate the nineteenth-century civic man to adopt a woman- or mother-figure to replace Smith’s stoic man within the breast. Augustine St. Clare, with ‘his fine face, classic as that of a Greek statue’ which ‘seem[s] actually to burn with the fervor of his feelings’ (104), who otherwise embodies the promise of white, feminised men, has failed to act on his mother’s and daughter’s sentimental teachings. Indeed, St. Clare has been so demoralised by the institution of slavery that he has shut his eyes to the lessons of his feelings: ‘Of course, in a community so organized, what can a man of honorable and human feelings do, but shut his eyes all he can, and harden his heart?’ (191). St. Clare’s scepticism has led him astray in ways of the heart; indeed, he has become something akin to Smith’s detached impartial spectator. Regretting his passivity, St. Clare identifies himself merely as spectator of agony: “And what,” said St. Clare, speaking abstractly, but with deep feeling, “what shall be said of one whose own heart, whose education, and the wants of society, have called in vain to some noble purpose; who has floated on, a dreamy, neutral spectator of the struggles, agonies, and wrongs of man, when he should have been a worker?”’ (272 emphasis added). St. Clare’s stoic impulses have overruled his sentimental ones, and as Lee argues, quoting Frederick Douglass: ‘Deep down where a man really hurts, St. Clare feels right about slavery. But he also exemplifies an affective failing noted by Frederick Douglass, “The grim and bloody tragedies of
outrage and cruelty are rehearsed day by day to the ears of the people, but they look on as coolly indifferent as spectators in a theatre’’ (65). Echoing Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The House of the Seven Gables* (1851) in her effort to correct this ‘affective failing’ of the detached spectator that Douglas identifies, Stowe aims to foster a model for ‘true men’ who could match the ‘true woman,’ serving as prototypes for the maturation of middle-class domestic sensibilities. This ideal of the ‘true’ middle-class man would culminate in the character of Harry Henderson in *My Wife and I* and *We and Our Neighbors*. Hawthorne’s character Phoebe Pynchon, who embodies Catherine Beecher’s ideal housekeeper, begs her future husband, Holgrave, to deny his role as a ‘too calm and cool an observer’ (177):

“I wish you would speak more plainly,” cried Phoebe, perplexed and displeased; – “and, above all, that you would feel more like a christian and a human being! How is it possible to see people in distress, without desiring, more than anything else, to help and comfort them? You talk as if this old house were a theatre; and you seem to look at Hepzibah’s and Clifford’s misfortunes, and those of a generation before them, as a tragedy, such as I have seen acted in the hall of a country-hotel; only the present one appears to be played exclusively for your amusement! I do not like this. The play costs the performers too much – and the audience is too cold-hearted!” (217)

In this scene, the sympathetic female gaze is pitted against the unfeeling male gaze that looks at others in terms of abstractions, like the slave trader. Hawthorne’s and Stowe’s novels suggest that virtuous female characters are *seeing right*, and their sentimental quest is to render the male spectator capable of adopting the perspective of the female gaze; dreams of an American sentimental democracy can only be fulfilled if an alienated aristocracy, like the Pynchons and the St. Clares, are transformed into a feeling, bourgeois middle class. Just as Phoebe Pynchon converts Holgrave into a “‘true’ middle-class man,’ in the words of Michelle Shawn Smith
In the domestic haven of Mrs. Bird, cool, indifferent male spectators become ‘true’ men when their abstract conceptions of suffering, like Holgrave’s clouded conception of distress as a tragedy, are rendered tangible though the ‘magic of the real presence of distress’ (77). Mr. Bird, a senator and therefore a representative of public America, has been alienated from the true morality of the heart by perverse, social laws, and as a detached monitor of the affairs of the state, he has been voting for the Fugitive Slave Law when ‘his idea of a fugitive was only an idea of the letters that spell the word’ (77). The chapter describing the senator’s conversion rehearses sentimental literature’s reliance on the reader’s willingness to invest ‘the letters that spell the word’ with feeling, thereby making them real. Debating with his wife whether to help the fugitive slaves, Eliza and Harry, to escape, the senator reasons thus: ‘we mustn’t suffer our feelings to run away with our judgement; you must consider it’s not a matter of private feeling, – there are great public interest involved, – there is such a state of public agitation rising, that we must put aside our private feelings’ (69). Stowe’s lesson is exactly that we need to consult our feelings as the basis for judgment, voicing this sentiment through the angelic Mrs. Bird, ‘Your heart is better than your head in this case, John’ (75). In other words, Stowe suggests that the physical sensations of the heart, as opposed to the mind’s abstract notions, dictate correct moral responses. In short, the moral wrongs of slavery ‘can’t [be] reason[ed]... away,’ as Mrs. Shelby utters in despair (63). In the Key, Stowe describes a grief-stricken slave whose heart had been ripped apart in sorrow, emphasising slavery’s violation of right feeling: ‘The physician accounted for this
situation by saying that there had been such a rush of blood in the body towards the heart, that there was actual danger of rupture of that organ, – a literal death by a broken heart’ (121). Indeed, it is the evils of slavery that literally kills little Eva as if she were stabbed in the heart; ‘these things sink into my heart’ (204), she confides to her detached father who does not free his slaves in time to heal his daughter’s heart. With Eva’s death, Stowe shows that slavery’s violation of the heart destroys the potential of white America as it is represented by Eva.

Validating the physical sensations of admirable characters as proper responses, Stowe suggests that slave-holding Americans and supporters of the Fugitive Slave Law are not in their right senses. Therefore, when the senator is brought to physically witness the suffering of Eliza and her child, Stowe’s narrator joins Mrs. Bird in ‘her desire to bring the senator quite literally back to his senses as well as her belief in the importance of aligning those senses along a common axis’ (Barnes 93), stating that ‘The magic of real presence of distress, – the imploring human eye, the frail, trembling human hand, the despairing appeal of helpless agony, – these he had never tried’ (77). Stowe’s ethics, like Smith’s, then, foregrounds sensory perception and demands the presence of a suffering, familiar object to make it truly powerful. The senator is not converted before an object of pity is brought into the picture; it is not until Eliza is under display of his gaze that the senator feels right. The senator is made to feel right because Eliza and Harry resemble his own white family; indeed, the senator encourages his wife to give Harry the clothing of the deceased baby and to provide Eliza with one of her dresses (85). These gestures symbolise the extent to which the Senator identifies with Eliza and Harry; they are so recognisable that they can be included in the portrait of the white family. Hence, the senator is restored to
his true (wo)man within the breast when he is presented with misery that might as well be his own.

**Reading Right**

To restore right feeling one must be brought to read right. The senator’s judgment has been obscured by his reading of the law, whereas his wife bases her judgement on reading the Bible. The scene at the Bird household shows how the Fugitive Slave Law as a law of politics conflicts with the law of the Scripture, causing chaos in the Christian family state. Stowe maintains that higher law demands should take priority over politics, because politics is grounded in the perverted discourse of polemics. Exposing human law as a manipulated linguistic discourse, Stowe demonstrates that higher law ethics transcend language and debate, because it is a God-given ethics that cannot be disputed. Interpretation or political discussion becomes superfluous within such a logocentric framework, as one can rely on the Bible as a transcendental signified. Mrs. Bird argues for this position: “‘Now John, I don’t know anything about politics, but I can read my Bible’” and “‘Obeying God never brings on public evils. I know it can’t. It’s always safest, all round, to do as He bids us’” (69). Mr. Bird, on the other hand, argues that relying on one’s feelings obscures one’s capacity for judgement and hinders one in carrying out one’s national duties. The senator’s arguments, of course, fail to convince his wife, because natural capacities cannot be negotiated. Right feeling, in other words, is outside political, legal, and linguistic interpellation.

Mrs. Bird’s, and Stowe’s by extension, higher law argument is thus an a priori argument that cannot be challenged. It cannot be deconstructed by polemics because
it transcends any kind of linguistic discourse as it is a self-sufficient. With *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as a sentimental novel aligned with the Bible (Stowe is famously supposed to have said that “God wrote it” (qtd. in Kazin x)), Stowe suggests that her writing is transparent; that is, there exists a direct relationship between feeling right and reading right. However, Stowe’s a priori stand is always already compromised, because her discourse of sympathy is embedded in white affinity; Eliza and Harry are moulded in the image of whiteness to facilitate the spectator’s sympathy. As Baldwin writes of the Harrises, ‘they are...as white as she can make them...They are a race apart from Topsy’ (497). Eliza may have ‘the impress of the despised race on her face’ (79), ‘yet none could help feeling its mournful and pathetic beauty’ (70). As Dinah, the old domestic, says, “Sure, now, if she an’t a sight to behold!” (70). Therefore, it is not Mrs. Bird’s discourse on the law of the Scripture that converts the senator, but the ‘living dramatic reality’ of Eliza’s beauty and his ability to identify with her.

Stowe’s discourse of sympathy echoes Smith’s notion that the engaged spectator-reader becomes the actor in the imagination as a result of the reading process. In other words, sentimental fiction relies on the reader’s ability to ‘chang[e] places in fancy’ (*TMS* 10) with characters, that is, on sympathetic identification. Smith articulates the reading process thus:

> When we read in history concerning actions of proper and beneficent greatness of mind, how eagerly do we enter into such designs? How much are we animated by that high-spirited generosity which directs them? How keen are we for their success? How grieved at their disappointment? In imagination we become the very person whose actions are represented to us: we transport ourselves in fancy to the scenes of those distant and forgotten adventures, and imagine ourselves acting the part of a Scipio or a Camillus, a Timoleon or an Aristides. So far our sentiments are founded upon the direct sympathy with the person who acts. (75)
The process of sympathy, engaged either when reading or when encountering a suffering agent, involves self-projection, that is, one becomes the other imaginatively. Barnes suggests that Smith’s articulation of the reading process reveals the characteristics and limitations of sympathy. ‘The link between reading, society, and subjectivity suggests several things at once,’ Barnes writes, ‘first, that sympathy requires mediation in order to operate; second, that an ability or inability to sympathize does not reflect on the viewer but on the one the viewer beholds; and third, that the self is constructed in relation to those with whom it feels an affinity, otherwise no act of the imagination will take place’ (22). Barnes situates this self-projection implicit in Smith’s ethical theory as underpinning ‘the American sentimental imagination for Smith bases both sympathy and the society it produces on a principle of relating. Terms traditionally having public political valence – sympathy, justice, mercy – get inflected with personal bias, as sympathy becomes dependent on how well the individual can imagine himself in another’s shoes or can imagine the other in his own’ (20). But for Barnes the third-mentioned notion of affinity above is where the shoe pinches; ‘sentimental literature subordinates democratic politics to a politics of affinity, employing a method of affective representation that dissolves the boundaries between “self” and “other”’ (4). Therefore, in Barnes’ view, sentimental literature ‘teaches a particular way of reading both texts and people that relies on likeness and thereby reinforces homogeneity’ (4). *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Barnes argues, perpetuates a tradition of constructing sympathy as a narcissistic model of projection and rejection’ (92). I want to extend Barnes’ position by suggesting that sympathy in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is an ambiguous racialised philosophy that projects whiteness onto its readers and
characters and rejects those who cannot be whitewashed. As Morrison puts it in *Playing in the Dark*, 'certainly no American text of the sort I am discussing was ever written *for* black people – no more than *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was written for Uncle Tom to be read or be persuaded by’ (16). Moreover, Stowe did not suggest that whites should literally become Uncle Tom in the imagination, as George Shelby’s speech to the freed slaves at the end of the novel bears witness. If George Shelby’s discourse is reminiscent of Smith’s language of imaginative sympathy, Stowe’s imagined communities of sympathy are divided according to colour. When George suggests that Tom’s Cabin ‘be a memorial to put you all in mind to follow in his steps’ (380), he speaks to the dependent, newly freed slaves, that is, to ‘you all,’ and not to ‘us all,’ that is, white and black Americans alike. George’s command of filling Tom’s shoes is not directed at readers or the white characters in the novel, and indeed the plantation economy is hardly changed in spite of the slaves having been emancipated. Proposing that Stowe’s novel presents a romantic racialist view, historian George M. Frederickson argues that, ‘It was never suggested that whites become literally like the black stereotype and sacrifice their alleged superiority in intellect and energy’ (125). In the following, I expand on the notion of white affinity, which I have introduced in my readings of the scenes at the Bird household, a notion that is central to Stowe’s facilitation of readerly sympathy and to visions of the nation.

**White Affinity**

Affinity as kinship between individuals, as Smith understands it in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ultimately translates into kinship between races in *Uncle Tom’s*
In his formulation of sympathy between family members, Smith suggests that familial affection is the greatest motivation for sympathy, because family members are understood as reflections of one’s own register of feeling. Smith writes:

> After himself, the members of his own family, those who usually live in the same house with him, his parents, his children, his brothers and sisters, are naturally the objects of his warmest affections. They are naturally and usually the persons upon whose happiness or misery his conduct must have the greatest influence. He is more habituated to sympathize with them. He knows better how every thing is likely to affect them, and his sympathy with them is more precise and determinate, than it can be with the greater part of other people. It approaches nearer, in short, to what he feels for himself. (219)

Indeed, the ultimate narrative of the nation, *The Declaration of Independence*, adopts the familial language of sympathy to construct America as an ‘affectnation,’ to use Peter Coviello’s term (19), that ‘must endeavour to forget [its] former love for’ its ‘unfeeling brethren,’ the British (719). The declaration’s notion that ‘all men are created equal’ (715), Barnes suggests, can be understood as reflecting the power of sympathy – ‘a power to reinvent others in one’s own image’ (2). This conflation of familial and national affinity, moreover, is captured by the Beecher sisters’ notion of the ‘family state’ whose integrity, they fear, became challenged by slavery and miscegenation. In his study *Intimacy in America: Dreams of Affiliation in Antebellum America*, Coviello argues that in the antebellum period the discourse of race, and in particular whiteness, emerges as a vehicle for imagining one’s fellow citizens as familiar objects of affection. ‘Race,’ Coviello writes, ‘becomes its own affective language, a way to describe one’s intimate connectedness to the distant and anonymous citizens of the republic’ (7). In the face of the crisis over slavery, Stowe is anxious that the white family state is turning into a ‘house divided,’ to employ the New Testament image that President Lincoln would employ in his famous 1858...
speech at Springfield, Illinois, in which he advocated union against the backdrop of
the national conflict over slavery. Drawing on Barnes’ and Coviello’s respective
arguments, I suggest that Stowe’s project of sympathy in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is
ultimately less about imagining black slaves as members of the family state than
about restoring white family members, like those of Mr. Bird and St. Clare, to their
God-given capacity to feel right, so that the ‘house divided’ can be healed and
redeemed.

Slavery, then, is represented as a white domestic problem in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin.*
Some major questions that occupy Stowe are who is to live ‘in the same house,’ to
draw on Smith’s words above, as family members, and who should manage the
house. As Gillian Brown puts it,

> In fashioning her abolitionist protest as a defense of nineteenth-century
domestic values, Stowe designates slavery as a domestic issue for American
domen to adjudicate and manage. The call to the mothers of America for the
abolition of slavery is a summons to fortify the home, to rescue domesticity
from shiftlessness and slavery. Someone has to get in the kitchen with Dinah
to eliminate hurryscurryation. (*Domestic Individualism* 16)

Slavery is mainly a problem when it interferes with domestic management, or put
differently, when the market economy interferes with the domestic economy.
Legree’s mansion stands as the ultimate domestic nightmare where the sins of the
marketplace are literally written on the walls of the parlour, suggesting the
intertwinement of capitalism and the home caused by slavery: ‘The wall-paper was
defaced, in spots, by slops of beer and wine; or garnished with chalk memorandums,
and long sums footed up, as if somebody had been practising arithmetic there’ (320).
Legree’s mansion, like the scarred body of the slave, conflates work and home and
defaces white domesticity. As a paradise on earth, the Shelby plantation in Kentucky
figures as a stark contrast to this hellish home until the sinful moment when Mr. Shelby decides to sell Uncle Tom and little Harry, unleashing a serpent in this Garden of Eden. As Mrs. Shelby complains when her husband’s business overrides the morals she has instituted in her domestic circle of slaves: ‘I have taught them the duties of the family, of parent and child, and husband and wife; and how can I bear to have this open acknowledgement that we care for no tie, no duty, no relation, however sacred, compared with money?’ (29). Slavery, as it is initially represented in the novel, is an evil because it violates the white mistress’ management and sentiments, not because it violates the black slave’s right to freedom: domestic ideology cannot be reconciled with the marketplace and must be freed of slavery. Thus, Stowe’s responses to slavery are grounded in the asymmetrical, binary relationship of mistress and servant. As her biographer Joan D. Hedrick notes, Stowe ‘had “had ample opportunities for studying” African Americans; she did not consider, however, that her evidence was garnered mainly in domestic settings in which her position as white mistress to black servants radically compromised her perceptions’ (209).

If ‘Someone has to get in the kitchen with Dinah’ to rescue domesticity, as Brown suggests, Stowe, as a white mistress and author, remains ambivalent about this rescue operation; she is not sure if she really wants to get in the kitchen with Dinah, or if she wants Dinah out of the kitchen altogether. At the novel’s conclusion, the Shelby slaves might have been given their liberty, but the structure of the domestic economy remains the same: Dinah is still in the kitchen so to speak. At the very beginning of the novel, Aunt Chloe sanctions this segregated domestic economy, and the novel’s conclusion has not moved us beyond that: ‘Now, Missis, do jist look at dem beautiful
white hands o’ youn’, with long fingers, and all a sparkling with rings, like my white lilies when de dew’s on ’em; and look at my great black stumpin hands. Now don’t ye think dat de lord must have meant me to make de pie-crust, and you to stay in de parlor?’ (21). As Chloe’s words demonstrate, Stowe’s notions of domestic space are bound up with race, and her philosophy of interracial sympathy does not work to move Chloe or Dinah into the parlour with Mrs. Shelby, or to move Mrs. Shelby into the kitchen. In this sense, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* aspires to a white middle-class ideal, where white women are sheltered from the blackness of labour, and the home remains a house divided according to colour, at least until blacks have made their way to Liberia to institute the Christian middle-class values in which Mrs. Shelby has instructed them. Bridget T. Heneghan, in her study of material culture and race in antebellum America, comments on this classed ideal, which I will explore further in chapter four: ‘Stowe even invokes in this ideal the audience, or visitor to the house, claiming that we would never see the mistresses do work: the place of the proper lady, as far as we ever know, is always the parlor and never the kitchen or cellar’ (97). Domestic ideology, then, must render labour invisible in order to preserve ‘the proper lady.’ ‘In this sense the cult of true womanhood (re)produces the lady of leisure by denying the corporeality of women’s work,’ Brown writes, exemplifying her argument by referring to Hawthorne’s impoverished aristocratic lady, Hepzibah Pynchon, in *The House of the Seven Gables*, whose ultimate fall from grace is her exposure to the public gaze as a shopkeeper, having been removed from the private, protective sphere of the parlour (*Domestic Individualism* 80, 82). Upon meeting ‘the world’s astonished gaze,’ Hepzibah Pynchon entertains thoughts of becoming completely disembodied in order to safeguard her ladyhood: ‘It might have been
fancied, indeed, that she expected to minister to the wants of the community, unseen, like a disembodied divinity, or enchantress, holding forth her bargains to the reverential and awestricken purchaser, in an invisible hand' (The House of the Seven Gables emphasis added 40). While slaves in Uncle Tom’s Cabin are to be pitied because they cannot fulfil the domestic ideal and be true men and women because their bodies conflate work and the home, they also, paradoxically, serve to secure the invisible, white hand of the mistress: because Aunt Chloe ‘make[s] de pie-crust,’ Mrs. Shelby can ‘stay in de parlor’ (21).

An article in Littell’s The Living Age from 1846 reflects the wider culture’s obsession with the preservation of the white woman’s whiteness. Considering the history of the technology of daguerreotypy, the reporter is particularly concerned about early daguerreotypes that obscure the white attributes of proper ladyhood: ‘The lily white hand of a lady, in the old style of daguerreotype, had exchanged its lily whiteness for a gloomy tinge of pale green, or an intense sky-blue. Shirt bosoms that we positively know to have been of extraordinary whiteness, by the daguerrian process were villainously bronzed and smutched as by the overheated iron of an unthrifty huswife’ (‘Daguerreotypes’ 551). Imbued with race, class, and gender anxieties, this example, like The House of the Seven Gables, speaks of the fears of an industrially and technologically changing culture. The early daguerreotypes represent to the reporter a society where aristocratic, gendered notions are threatened: the lady does not appear a lady because her hand is not invisible; the housewife is not a ‘true woman’ because she is not successful in rendering her labour invisible. These images haunt Hawthorne and Stowe too in their quest to keep the white hand of the true woman unsmutched. Following Beecher in A Treatise on Domestic Economy (1841),
Hawthorne ascribes women’s work a spiritual quality and thus overwrites the corporal dimensions of labour: ‘Angels do not toil,’ as his narrator puts it (82). Stowe, in turn, washes her hands of physical work by imagining slave labour transformed into waged labour. At the conclusion of the novel, George Shelby, the liberator, formulates this problematic economy when the former slaves shriek at the prospect of freedom: ‘The place wants as many hands to work as it did before’ (379 emphasis added). In Hawthorne’s and Stowe’s capitalist paradises black hands work (the Pynchon fortune is partly made on slavery and Jim Crow cookies are sold in Hepzibah’s shop to be consumed by whites), so that ‘The lily white hand of a lady,’ to revisit the daguerreotype, remains invisible. While the article in The Living Age is telling in its racialised and classed conception of womanhood, it also conveys a general cultural anxiety about the nature of representation and new technologies and sciences, such as daguerreotypy and phrenology, which transformed but also complicated representation and the exposition of character. In the remainder of this chapter, I explore this anxiety in Uncle Tom’s Cabin and its Key against the backdrop of The House of the Seven Gables.

Uncle Tom’s Cabin itself stands as a veil that covers the blackness and corporality of work, just as it preserves the white lady’s hand. While it represents the lot of the slave, that is, rough, naked labour, it is covered up in white domesticity and almost seems as Edenic as the mistress’s house itself:

The cabin of Uncle Tom was a small log building, close adjoining to “the house” as the negro par excellence designates his master’s dwelling. In front it had a neat garden-patch, where, every summer, strawberries, raspberries, and a variety of fruits and vegetables, flourished under careful tending. The whole front of it was covered by a large scarlet bignonia and a native multiflora rose, which, entwisting and interlacing, left scarce a vestige of the rough logs to be seen. (17)
One might have been seduced by this flowery language to forget that Stowe is actually describing a house of bondage if she had not put in a few ‘rough logs,’ reminding us that slave-holding America has fallen from grace. The idyllic description of the cabin serves to ensure white America that blacks are domestically inclined and ‘home-loving’ and that there is no danger post emancipation. Guaranteeing the docile nature of southern blacks, Stowe writes that, ‘In order to appreciate the sufferings of the negroes sold south, it must be remembered that all the instinctive affections of that race are peculiarly strong. Their local attachments are very abiding. They are not naturally daring and enterprising, but home-loving and affectionate’ (82). Indeed, Aunt Chloe is sanctioned by white domesticity to the extent ‘as to suggest the idea that she might have been washed over with the white of eggs, like one of her tea rusks’ (17). Uncle Tom’s Cabin, then, is whitewashed to such a degree that Stowe’s narrator can safely take the white reader by the hand and lead her through its domestic interior, which reflects her own, albeit less refined. A ‘cracked tea-pot’ (22) in the cottage, like ‘the rough logs’ from the example above, speaks of the damaging effects of slavery on domesticity.

The chapter, ‘An Evening in Uncle Tom’s Cabin,’ where readers are introduced to Tom’s domestic establishment, is a telling example of sentimental literature’s evocation of sympathetic identification that works to break down the barrier between character representation and the reader’s perceived reality. The intrusive narrator reassuringly takes the reader by the hand, guiding her by directing the gaze, prompting her to become part of the dramatic illusion. As Mason I. Lowance notes, ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin is a classic, textbook example of Wolfgang Iser’s “reader response” theory, where the audience participates as much in the creation of meaning
as the author’ (xliii). The first paragraph of the chapter is narrated in the past tense, whereas the second shifts to the present tense, addressing the implied reader directly, ‘Let us enter the dwelling’ (17). The reader enters the dwelling in medias res and is swept into the dramatic illusion, watching the action in real time and space, suggesting unity of time and unity of place. The narrator is assigned the role of a daguerreotypist or painter, suggestive of Stowe’s belief in the mimetic quality of literature, and the reader, in turn, is constructed as a spectator whose imagination is to be engaged. Stowe writes, ‘Just at present, however, Aunt Chloe is looking into the bake-pan: in which congenial operation we shall leave her till we finish our picture of the cottage’ (17 emphasis added). This representation of Aunt Chloe’s actions taking place in real time and space suggests to the sentimental reader a shared verisimilar realm. As Barnes notes, ‘the lessons that readers learn are dependent upon the author’s ability to contract the distance, or, rather, to obscure the difference, between reality and representation, reader and character’ (4).

When introducing Uncle Tom to the reader as a spectator, Stowe obscures the difference between reality and representation by narrating him as being photographed by the daguerreotype process, and thus Tom’s character is made to appear as a reflection of a ‘real’ historical person, as the Key would attest in 1853. In antebellum America, the daguerreotype was the technology generally thought to produce the most intense and objective sense of realism; indeed, the American writer and physician Oliver Wendell Holmes called it ‘The Mirror with a Memory’ (qtd. in Newhall 22). Susan M. Barger and William B. White explain the nineteenth century’s fascination with the mimetic quality of the daguerreotype: ‘Much like the eye and the retina, the camera and the daguerreotype could capture all the
components of a scene seemingly without bias and provide powerful testimony to scientific truth and the wonders of nature’ (73). Therefore, by evoking the daguerreotype, Stowe situates the reader as an eyewitness to the scene, and Tom’s existence is proved by visual evidence: ‘At this table was seated Uncle Tom, Mr. Shelby’s best hand, who, as he is to be the hero of our story, we must daguerreotype for our readers’ (21 emphasis added). By employing the second person plural at these intrusive moments, moreover, the narrator includes the reader in the discourse, encouraging her to internalise the assumptions and judgements of the narrative gaze. The ideal reader is thus set up as an extension of the narrator as part of a homogenous interpretive community, assuming that there exists a relation of resemblance between the two.

The sentimental gaze is controlling, consuming gaze that watches from the standpoint of classed whiteness. The very marginal position of the cabin, ‘close adjoining to “the house” as the negro par excellence designates his master’s dwelling’ (17), suggests the hierarchical assumptions that underlie Stowe’s narrator’s observations. Harryette Mullen suggests that whiteness requires that ‘racial identity be reduced essentially to a white/not-white binary, allowing the maintenance of a white center with not-white margins’ (74). The notions of ‘our picture of the cottage’ and ‘our hero,’ Uncle Tom, stress the perception and position of the white narrator’s position centre stage, not Tom’s subject position or his perception of the cottage, and assumes a relationship defined by the possession. Stowe’s sentimental rhetoric cannot be disentangled from the notion of ownership in the sense that sympathy to a great extent relies on the spectator’s readiness, as the Oxford English Dictionary defines one meaning of ‘to own,’ ‘To call (a person or thing) one’s own; to
acknowledge as belonging to oneself, esp. in respect of kinship or authorship.’ In short, to recreate the actor in one’s own image. Hinton argues, ‘the forms of verisimilitude that the sympathetic spectator renders are interpretations based upon the needs of the spectator for self-recognition’ (25). Therefore, the construction of reality is one that is staged by the narrator for the white reader implicit in the discourse, ‘till we finish our picture of the cottage,’ creating the illusion of shared kinship and authorship, the notions that the Oxford English Dictionary attaches to ownership. This assumed control establishes a sense of safety for the reader; she is not going to be exposed to an alienating reality to which she does not hold the proper interpretive strategies.

The self-recognition that Uncle Tom’s Cabin fosters, then, is embedded in whiteness; the ideal white reader spectator is she whose self-image is reflected back in the characters of Mrs. Shelby, Mrs. Bird, and the Quaker, Rachel Halliday. Hedrick rightly notes that ‘Stowe’s political achievement was to make a national audience see the subjectivity of black people, but what she herself saw was filtered through a white woman’s consciousness’ (210). Rather than exposing black subjectivity, I add to Hedrick’s observation, Uncle Tom’s Cabin essentially creates the normative basis for a new white self in the spirit of what Peter Stoneley calls the ‘feminine aesthetic’ of which little Eva is the embodiment, a project that the New York novels would perfect. Debased male characters like planter Legree and the slaver trader Haley are set up as unrecognisable to the sentimental reader, whereas the feminised future redeemer George Shelby is a model image. The black inhabitants of the cottage may be presented as sympathetic and home-loving, but Stowe never sets the scene for more than transitory sympathy. Tom’s children are
introduced as a herd of sheep, described as a ‘pile of wooly heads’ (22), and thus they are defined by their black physicality stressed by the mention of their wooly hair. Hair, as Riss notes, ‘was typically cited as a means by which human groups could be empirically sorted’ (*Race, Slavery, and Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* 97). Stowe’s classification creates a racialised and classed space of difference between the white, genteel reader and the slave children. The presence of George Shelby as an authoritative teacher figure renders the difference safe and bridgable, but it also reinforces a sense of racial hierarchy. By emphasising the black cottage dwellers’ otherness, Stowe does not encourage white readers to ‘enter as it were into [their] bod[i]es, and become in some measure the same person with [them]’ (9), as Smith describes sympathy’s transport in fancy. The reader is encouraged to identify with the domestic setting of the black family; Stowe does not go to lengths to explicate their subjectivity, as she does with the white-skinned slaves like Eliza and George Harris. The cabin’s portrait of General Washington in blackface, a benevolent, domestic patriarch and an emblem of the segregated future of black slaves (*Race, Slavery, and Liberalism in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* 58), is familiar yet alienating, like Tom’s family, and speaks of Stowe’s hope that slaves will form a polity of their own, as Lincoln envisaged: ‘The wall over the fireplace was adorned with some very brilliant scriptural prints, and a portrait of General Washington, drawn and colored in a manner which would certainly have astonished that hero, if ever he had happened to meet with its like’ (18). As the reader leaves Uncle Tom’s Cabin, then, she has been confirmed in her white domestic ideology, and she has been made to realise that it is her duty to help black slaves on their way to an independent, segregated future, just as the Quakers do later
on in the novel. The picture of the cottage may be hers, controlled as it is by the white gaze, but Tom’s future is his alone.

**Supplementing Uncle Tom’s Cabin**

If Stowe as a sentimental writer expressed a great deal of confidence in her statement ‘there is no arguing with pictures’ in her ability to depict ‘a living dramatic reality,’ as she does in the above discussed chapter, her self-assurance fades toward the conclusion of the novel, where she writes:

> The writer has given only a faint shadow, a dim picture, of the anguish and despair that are, at this very moment, riving thousands of hearts, shattering thousands of families, and driving a helpless and sensitive race to frenzy and despair...Nothing of tragedy can be written, can be spoken, can be conceived, that equals the frightful reality of scenes daily and hourly acting on our shores, beneath the shadow of American law, and the shadow of the cross of Christ. (384)

Thus, Stowe fears that tragedy remains an abstract, theatrical notion, as it is to the calm observers St. Clare and Hawthorne’s character Holgrave, that cannot be rendered real in the hearts of her readers. ‘Our picture of the cottage,’ in the chapter ‘An Evening in Uncle Tom’s Cabin,’ then, is obscured as Stowe doubts the ability to speak of, to conceive of ‘the frightful reality of scenes’ of the day-to-day life of slaves, admitting she ‘has given only a faint shadow, a dim picture’ of the tragedy of slavery. This reflection on the epistemology of representation, I want to suggest, can also be understood as a reflection of the philosophy of sympathy and its limitations; namely, that the sentiments of others can only be reconstructed as faint images. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith uses the very notion of a shadow to describe the ‘reflected or sympathetic images’ of the sensations of others. He writes, ‘Every man feels his own pleasures and his own pains more sensibly than those of other
people. The former are the original sensations; the latter the reflected or sympathetic images of those sensations. The former may be said to be the substance; the latter the shadow’ (219). Stowe’s confident invitation, ‘Let us enter the dwelling,’ then, is complicated by her admittance that this very act of entering into ‘the frightful reality of scenes’ of domestic slavery is epistemologically impossible.

Indeed, ‘An Evening in Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ speaks of the reflected nature of representation in spite of Stowe’s attempt to capture the substance of original sensations, to employ Smith’s language. Controlled, self-consistent representation, I suggest, however, is always already deconstructed in this chapter, and its claim to depict reality transparently is undermined as the text emerges in tension with itself. Stowe’s conception of herself as a writer as ‘simply that of a painter’ and her narrator’s assigned function as a daguerreotypist push against each other. Painting, on the one hand, denotes a kind of scenic, composed representation, whereas daguerreotyping, on the other hand, has a journalistic nature trying to create a realistic impression of immediacy; the tension that is also at the heart of The House of the Seven Gables. In this way, the text itself struggles with conflicting representations, blurring Stowe’s claim of her text as a direct presence to her reader’s awareness, ‘Let us enter the dwelling.’ Underlying the narrator’s confident statement, ‘till we finish our picture of the cottage,’ is the assumption that the text is a limited, mimetic entity that can be boxed in on the canvas by the painter Stowe. Yet, inherent conflicting representation has already made the scene limitless, dissolving the frame of the picture. ‘There is always more,’ as Jacques Derrida writes with reference to his idea of the supplement (Writing and Difference 365).
The question of representation and how to read and capture character with which Stowe grapples in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* springs from contemporary debates on the new technologies of the day, such as the daguerreotype to which I have already referred. If the daguerreotype was widely regarded as the ultimate mechanism of realism, it was also viewed as a new egalitarian technology that was particularly suited to depict American democracy. ‘‘Tis certain that the Daguerreotype is the true Republican style of painting,’ Emerson noted in his journal in 1841 (Porte 271). It is therefore not surprising that Stowe would evoke the notion of daguerreotype to describe her Christian slave in her novel of realism that aimed to save America’s sentimental democracy. Indeed, at the crux of Hawthorne’s vision of new rising middle class of ‘true’ men and women in *The House of the Seven Gables* is the daguerreotype. Hawthorne’s young male protagonist, Holgrave whose working-class ancestors have been wronged by the aristocratic Pynchons, is a daguerreotypist whose art is seemingly capable of exposing the true characters of the degenerate Pynchons, thereby paving the way for a republican middle class. The new democratic artist, Hawthorne suggests, does not flatter the patron unlike the traditional painter who may ‘have found it desirable to study [the patron’s] face, and prove its capacity for varied expression; to darken it with a frown – to kindle it up with a smile’ (57).

An enthusiastic Ruskin wrote to his parents in 1845 about the new wonders of the daguerreotype: ‘It is such a happy thing to be able to depend on *everything* – to be sure not only that the painter is perfectly honest, but that he *can’t* make a mistake’ (qtd. in Swann 12). Describing his occupation as ‘mak[ing] pictures out of sunshine’ (91) to Phoebe Pynchon, Holgrave echoes Holmes’ conception of the daguerreotype as ‘The Mirror with a Memory’ and Ruskin’s concern with the honesty of
daguerreotypy; notions that Stowe evokes when she states that one cannot argue with pictures:

“I should like to try whether the daguerreotype can bring out disagreeable traits on a perfectly amiable face. But there certainly is truth in what you have said. Most of the my likenesses do look unamiable; but the very sufficient reason, I fancy, is, because the originals are so. There is a wonderful insight in heaven’s broad and simple sunshine. While we give it credit only for depicting the merest surface, it actually brings out the secret character with a truth that no painter would ever venture upon, even could he detect it. There is at least no flattery in my humble line of art. Now, there is a likeness which I have taken, over and over again, and still with no better result. Yet the original wears, to common eyes, a very different expression. It would gratify me to have your judgement on this character.” (91)

Charles Swann argues that Holgrave ‘suggests not merely that the camera cannot lie but that that the daguerreotype has an advantage over painting in telling truths the painter could not tell if he would’ (9). Like Holgrave, Stowe, whose ‘object [it is] to hold up in the most lifelike and graphic manner possible Slavery,’ aligns her work with the supposedly most pronounced expression of realism of the daguerreotype. ‘[B]ring[ing] out the secret character,’ the daguerreotype could provide access to the other’s consciousness, posing, as Shawn Smith puts it, ‘a visual map of interior essence’ (48), and would seem the ideal medium to remedy sympathy’s conundrum: the epistemological gap between the actor and the spectator. In a vignette, ‘The Magnetic Daguerreotypes,’ published anonymously in The Photographic Art-Journal in 1852, the daguerreotype is ascribed with the magical ability of an ‘inexplicable sympathy’ that renders the consciousness of the sitter ever present and accessible to the beholder: ‘Spiritually united, we could hardly be said to be materially separated; since the magic mirrors would, by the medium of the most noble of the senses, render us forever present to one another’ (355). Stowe’s statement that ‘There is no arguing with pictures, and everybody is impressed by them, whether they mean to be
or not’ (qtd. in Hedrick 208) conveys a not dissimilar faith in her own ability as a sentimental writer to expose to the mind’s eye ‘the magic of real presence of distress’ (Uncle Tom’s Cabin 77).

Conceiving of herself as a painter of pictures by which everybody would be impressed, Stowe makes a direct link between representation and her moral philosophy of ‘feeling right’; one feels right when exposed to ‘the most complete image of misery and distress,’ to revisit Smith’s picture of suffering mothers. ‘Feeling right’ is the key to Stowe’s abolitionist scheme, and she is convinced of her righteousness and her rightness, because there is ‘no arguing with pictures’ or with right feeling. Fellow-feeling, according to a self-assured Smith on the first page of The Theory of Moral Sentiments, is ‘a matter of fact too obvious to require any instances to prove it’ (9), but his conviction diminishes as his theory unfolds, and he introduces the notion of the impartial spectator to secure some kind of objective standard by which to measure one’s feelings. In the previous chapter of this thesis, I have examined this epistemological gap between the actor and spectator with reference to the novels of Mackenzie, and I want to suggest that this is finally a conundrum for Stowe too.

Complete sympathy is an illusion according to Smith, because what spectators ‘feel, will, indeed, always be, in some respects, different from what [the actor] feels, and compassion can never be exactly the same with original sorrow’ (22). Thus, sympathy is an incomplete impression, or a ‘dim picture’ as Stowe conceived of her writing, just as it is a temporary impression. Smith continues ‘that imaginary change of situation, upon which their sympathy is founded, is but momentary’ (21). Stowe’s assertive discourse that ‘everybody is impressed by pictures whether they mean to be
or not’ forms a contrast to Smith’s theory, insofar that he suggests that sympathy, incomplete and temporary by nature, can be, at its worst imaginable, a feigned fabrication of feeling, leaving no impression on the mind: ‘We may even inwardly reproach ourselves that with our want of sensibility, and perhaps, on that account, work ourselves up into an artificial sympathy, which, however, when it is raised, is always the slightest and most transitory imaginable; and generally, as soon as we have left the room, vanishes, and is gone forever’ (47). ‘Right feeling’ and ‘sympathetic influence,’ then, in the light of Smith’s discourse, are temporary and incomplete illusions which are conditioned by the impartial spectator. In what follows I suggest that Stowe would find herself compelled to ‘require an...instance to prove,’ to draw on Smith’s wording, the basis of the experience of ‘right feeling.’ That instance is *A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

The reading public did argue with Stowe’s pictures. ‘Feeling right’ was not self-evident. As Brown notes, ‘After the novel’s publication, Stowe found herself not so much surrounded by right-feeling people as under fire from critics concerning the accuracy of her representation of life among the lowly’ (‘Reading and Children: *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and *The Pearl of Orr’s Island*’ 78). One outraged, anonymous reviewer of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* wrote thus in the *Southern Literary Messenger*: ‘It is a fiction throughout; a fiction in form, a fiction in its facts; a fiction in its representations and coloring; a fiction in its statements; a fiction in its sentiments, a fiction in it morals...It is a fictitious or fanciful representation for the sake of producing fictitious or false impressions’ (qtd. in Rosenthal 35-36). A year after the publication of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, *A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was published to defend the truth-value and the realistic nature of the depictions in the novel. I would
argue that the *Key* can be seen as the manifestation of the ambiguities inherent in Stowe’s philosophical approach: ‘the angry passions’ that Beecher had identified in her 1837 essay had not all been channelled into right feeling by *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in 1852 and threatened the nation anew. Lee argues that Stowe’s sentimentality ends up in a cul-de-sac as she struggles ‘to tell sympathy and passion apart,’ and ‘how to master the epistemology of right feeling,’ having disposed of Smith’s ‘man within the breast’ (68). ‘Affective intensity, can for Stowe, save or ruin a person, a quandary that Smith’s *Theory of Moral Sentiments* answers by setting masculine objectivity over feminine feeling. When Stowe, however, dispenses with Smith’s impartial, judicious spectator, she leaves no mechanism with which to evaluate the transports of emotions’ (Lee 67-68). The *Key*, I suggest, can be seen as serving the function of Smith’s impartial spectator as an objective mediator that bridges the epistemological gap between the actor and spectator in Stowe’s attempt to restore right feeling and right reading. Moreover, the *Key*, with its focus on factual evidence bears witness to Stowe’s faltering faith ‘in [a] small voice which comes forth from the sanctuary of a woman’s breast and from the retirement of a woman’s closet,’” to revisit Douglas’ introduction to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (14). Female influence had to be supplemented by facts.

Implied in the idea of a key is the notion of a common resting place, that is, one master reading anchored in absolute logos, the invariant. The appearance of the *Key*, however, is also an expression of the anxiety that the reader of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* cannot become an extension of the narrator, or, put differently, that authorial intention and readerly experience have no common resting place in the novel. Moreover, the power of representation is compromised by the *Key*, suggesting that
characters need to be unlocked for the reader. Paradoxically, the Key can be seen as destabilising Uncle Tom’s Cabin as a master narrative, functioning as a supplement, designed to enrich the novel, the original, yet also pointing to that which it is missing, thereby undermining the very authority of that original. Derrida articulates the operation of the supplement as a

movement of play, permitted by the lack or absence of a center or origin, is the movement of supplementarity. One cannot determine the center and exhaust totalization because the sign which replaces the center, which supplements it, taking the center’s place in its absence – this sign is added, occurs as a surplus, as a supplement. The movement of signification adds something, which results in the fact that there is always more, but this addition is a floating one because it comes to perform a vicarious function, to supplement a lack on the part of the signified. (Writing and Difference 365-66)

The Key as a supplement replaces Uncle Tom’s Cabin as a point of reference, negotiating its textual authority by its decentering movement, nullifying it as a centre of meaning, turning it into a variant. In this way, the didacticism of Stowe’s sentimental pictures loses its self-consistent argument through ‘the vicarious function’ of the Key. Thus, Stowe argues with her own epistemology, expressing anxiety that Uncle Tom’s Cabin, as ‘the signified,’ cannot bring readers to feel right. As Gail K. Smith argues, the Key ‘suggests that Uncle Tom’s Cabin is not immediately self-evident as a text – that it is a hieroglyphic Bible, not simply that readers who misread it needed to be educated to read it right. The very move to publish a Key signifies the dichotomy between faith in the reader (which implies a faith in an unambiguous text) and a fear of misreading’ (227-28). Hawthorne’s character Clifford Pynchon in The House of the Seven Gables represents Stowe’s worst nightmare: a disinterested, unsentimental reader who is incapable of extending his own reality to that of literary depictions:
But the fictions – in which the country-girl, unused to works of that nature, often became deeply absorbed – interested her strange auditor very little, or not at all. Pictures of life, scenes of passion or sentiment, wit, humor, and pathos, were all thrown away, or worse than thrown away, on Clifford; either because he lacked an experience by which to test their truth, or because his own griefs were a touch-stone of reality that few feigned emotions could withstand. (146)

While Stowe published the Key to provide her pictures with ‘an experience by which to test their truth,’ attempting to translate ‘feigned emotions’ into ‘a touch-stone of reality,’ so that authorial intention and readerly experience can be harmonised, it performs, paradoxically, the vicarious function of the supplement. Just as Clifford ‘lack[s] an experience by which to test’ the truth of literary depictions, the Key functions ‘to supplement a lack on the part of the signified,’ in the words of Derrida, undermining Uncle Tom’s Cabin as a self-evident text.

Adding signification to her novel in the Key, Stowe states that Uncle Tom’s Cabin is a self-evident, realistic work:

Artistically considered, it might not be the best to point out in which quarry and from which region each fragment of the mosaic picture had its origin; and it is equally unartistic to disentangle the glittering web of fiction, and show out of what real warp and woof it is woven, and with what real coloring dyed. But the book had a purpose entirely transcending the artistic one, and accordingly encounters, at the hands of the public, demands not usually made on fictitious works. It is treated as a reality, – sifted, tried, and tested as a reality; and therefore as a reality it may be proper that is should be defended. (1)

Contrary to Stowe’s conclusion that ‘Nothing of tragedy can be written, can be spoken, can be conceived’ (384), the Key assigns ontological status to the novel. Uncle Tom’s Cabin as a text stands in for reality and is ascribed what Derrida calls a metaphysics of presence or logocentrism, constituting the crux of Western philosophical tradition, a belief in absolute parameters for truth, existence,
subjectivity, and essence, among other phenomena. Derrida writes, ‘Logocentrism would thus support the determination of the being of the entity as presence’ (Of Grammatology 12). Identifying her work as an ultimate referent, that is, as a testable objective reality and hence signifying absolute meaning, Uncle Tom’s Cabin ostensibly transcends fictionality, just as logos or presence is outside the play of language.

The Key’s conception of the novelistic text as a reality, however, exhibits great ambivalence. Stowe self-assuredly writes that her novel ‘is treated as a reality, – sifted, tried, and tested as a reality,’ yet these assuring conceptions clash against each other, as something that is tried and tested is not immediately present as ‘real incidents’ to the reader’s awareness (Key 35). Stowe’s formulation, ‘mosaic of facts,’ furthermore, points to a constructedness and implies that these ‘facts,’ just as they have been arranged together in the mosaic of the novel, can be broken into pieces, deconstructed. Finally, the idea that Uncle Tom’s Cabin as a sentimental text ‘should be defended’ as reality undermines its status as a centre of meaning, as defending suggests that meaning does not originate within itself, but that it is relational. The Key defends the novel, yet that very operation of defending compromises the power of Uncle Tom’s Cabin’s sentimental representation.

The Key functions to show where ‘each fragment of the mosaic picture ha[s] its origin’ (1), but Stowe’s discourse in the Key unravels it as the factual text she claims it to be. Indeed, at significant moments in the Key, Uncle Tom’s Cabin serves ‘the vicarious function’ of a supplement to the Key, as Stowe’s fictional characters from the novel become the referents for her interpretation of historical facts. When defending her exposition of slave laws, for example, Stowe ‘can now only give the
words of St. Clare, as the best possible expression of the sentiments and opinion which this course of reading has awakened in her mind’ (162). In another discourse on the law, Stowe invites us to ‘imagine a scene: Legree, standing carelessly with his hands in his pockets, rolling a quid of tobacco in his mouth; Justice Dogberry, seated in all the majesty of law, reinforced by a decanter of whiskey and some tumblers, intended to assist in illuminating the intellect in some obscure cases’ (216-17). By alluding to her work of imagination in her supposedly factual work, Stowe accredits her novel truth-value, but this move also shows that two works’ discourses of race, law, religion, and sensibility are embedded in each other’s fictionality; they are not abstract, separate entities, but they rather rely on each other, implying that a culture’s value centres are inevitably contained within their loopholes, to evoke Harriet Jacob’s trope in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1863). ‘The represented,’ as Derrida writes, ‘is always already a representamen’ (*Of Grammatology* 50).

Transparent mediation, in other words, cannot be defended. The *Key* is a product of the novel’s representation which, in turn, corroborates the *Key*. The *Key*’s represented facts are ‘always already *representamen*[s]’; a quadroon girl, mentioned in the *Key*, for example, is filtered through Eliza in the novel: ‘The description of Eliza may suffice for a description of her,’ Stowe writes (42). Thus, the gaze is always already framed; it does not ‘restore the true, full, originary meaning’ nakedly as Derrida puts it (*The Truth in Painting* 22).

Paradoxically, then, the *Key* relies on our sentimental response to the fictional characters from the novel, but it also points to Stowe’s faltering belief in the spontaneous response of the heart that underlies her philosophy of feeling right. The *Key* expresses a pronounced scepticism about the sentimental reader’s capacity to
feel right, and indeed its author seems to deem the novel an inadequate forum for bringing her reader to the desired state of feeling: ‘Let the reader now stop one minute, and look over again these two weeks’ advertisements,’ she writes, undermining the power of the novel’s ostensible realism, ‘This is not novel-writing – this is fact’ (333 emphasis in the original). As Lee notes, ‘for though Uncle Tom’s Cabin famously posits right feeling as the solution to slavery, Stowe comes to doubt the possibility of knowing and changing the heart’ (54). Turning to another ‘instance to prove,’ to revisit Smith’s words, the factual basis of Stowe’s pictures, I now explore her reliance on phrenology as an ostensible scientific tool to read and depict character.

**Reading Race: Phrenology as Interpretive Practice**

If the *Key* destabilises the textual authority of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Stowe’s representations of black and white bodies in these texts unsettle her sentimental argument further, I want to argue in the following, raising a deconstructionist critique of her phrenological readings of race. Stowe wanted to popularise the belief that white and black alike were united in their sentimental capacity; in other words, that right feeling transcended race. But while Stowe’s depictions of virtuous black characters become embedded in ambiguity when read in the light of phrenological racial typology, her pictures of whites suggest growing admiration for their character traits, ultimately implying that feeling right is bound up with whiteness.

Functioning as a gloss for Stowe’s position, one virtuous female character, who is a passenger on the steam boat that takes Tom and the readers closer to the heart of slavery in the South, says: “The most dreadful part of slavery, to my mind, is its
outrages on the feelings and affections, – the separating of families, for example”’ (107). Her fellow passenger, who represents the pro-slavery position that Africans were savages incapable of cultivating sympathy, suggestive of enlightenment theories of stadial history and nineteenth-century theories of race, utters in disbelief: “We can’t reason from our feelings to those of this class of persons”’ (107). Stowe’s project is to show that the white reader’s feelings can be extended to the slave; indeed, she claims that the ‘African race’ is a peculiarly forgiving, Christian race that ‘may prove to be, morally, of even a higher type’ as she expresses it through the character of George Harris (375-76). Tom embodies the potential of this type, and Mrs. Shelby grants him the sensibility of a white man: ‘Tom is a noble-hearted, faithful fellow, if he is black,’ she says to her husband, ‘I do believe, Mr. Shelby, that if he were put to it, he would lay down his life for you’ (28 emphasis added). If Stowe upholds the moral potential of blacks then, she simultaneously undermines it by articulating it within the parameters of whiteness. Feeling, it seems, can only be truly didactic if it is filtered through whiteness. One suffering slave father weeps in agony, but his tears are presented as white to make the picture particularly impressive: ‘Poor John! It was rather natural; and the tears that fell, as she spoke, came as naturally as if he had been a white man’ (106 emphasis added). While Stowe’s tone in these statements is clearly ironic as well and targets the hypocritical sentiments of whites, it is hard to read her irony as particularly powerful considering the white ethos of the novel as a whole. Indeed, Stowe’s rhetoric wavers throughout Uncle Tom’s Cabin and the Key and conveys anxiety that blacks have the potential to relapse into savage figures, and therefore their peculiar black Christian character emerges as a contradictory notion. It was Stowe’s original intention that the Key
should include ‘one whole department – that of the characteristics and developments of the coloured race in various countries and circumstances’ (Key vii), but she deemed it a subject for a whole volume and did not go on with the project. Uncle Tom’s Cabin and the Key, nevertheless, can be read as racial taxonomies and speak of Stowe’s conflicted views of black and white people and their bodies.

Where Stowe conceptualises ‘Africans’ as superior Christians, she also fears that there is a diabolical side to them that might surface. Christian dualism underlies her notions of black and white, just as she frames the slavery crisis as a question of sin and redemption. Legree’s black diabolic overseers suggest this Christian conception. Contemporary, popular science, however, also finds its way into Stowe’s description of the devil’s incarnations as she suggests that their faces reveal their true character: ‘The two gigantic negroes that now laid hold of Tom, with fiendish exultation in their faces, might have formed no unapt personification of powers of darkness’ (309). The then respected science of phrenology informs the way in which Stowe constructs her characters and how her readers should decode them. As Christopher Hanlon notes,

Perhaps an even greater testament to the “science’s” appeal, however, is that its overtly racist agenda did not prevent it from being embraced by abolitionist writers. Harriet Beecher Stowe, for instance, whose Uncle Tom’s Cabin was both the most popular book of the century and one of the most stridently abolitionist texts of the antebellum period, ranks right alongside of Whitman and Poe in terms of the “phrenological accuracy” of her writing. (290)

In the Key, Stowe invites the reader to study the shape of the head of a slave as a phrenologist would: ‘Let us further notice the portrait of Harry: “Eyes deep sunk into his head; – forehead very square. ”...”You will never subdue that woman,” said the ecclesiastic, who was a phrenologist before his age; “she’s got a square head, and I
have always noticed that people with *square heads* never can be turned out of their course.” We think it very probable that Harry, with his “square head,” is just one of this sort’ (201 emphasis in the original). Thus, the *Key* draws on the science of phrenology as another level of evidence to support the characterisations in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. The *Key* suggests, as it were, that there is no arguing with the “phrenological accuracy” of [Stowe’s] writing.’

Along with the European anatomist Franz Joseph Gall and his student Johann Christoph Spurzheim, the Scottish anatomist George Combe popularised phrenology in the Atlantic world with the *Phrenological Journal*, first published in 1823 in cooperation with his brother Andrew (Barger and White 78). In 1838 the science became particularly fashionable in America when Combe embarked on a two-year lecture tour there (Barger and White 78). Exposed to these proponents of phrenology, the Fowler brothers became keen advocates of phrenology in the United States and would eventually establish thriving consulting practices and sell publications and plaster casts of phrenological skulls. While a student at Amherst college in 1833, Orson Squire Fowler debated the merits of phrenological science with Henry Ward Beecher who won the debate but who would later endorse Fowler’s position (Trevino and Konrad 478). In 1866 a phrenological sketch of Lyman Beecher appeared in *The Illustrated Annals of Phrenology and Physiognomy*, published by Samuel Roberts Wells, the brother-in-law of the Fowler brothers and with whom they also published, to prove that ‘As a class, the clergy have the best heads in the world’ (26). Arguably then, phrenology is one paradigm within which to understand the Beecher family’s ethos. Phrenology, for example, provided the domestic ideology that Harriet and Catharine advocated with a scientific backdrop: whether or not one was a ‘true
woman’ could be read in one’s face, as the vignette ‘The Two Paths of Womanhood’ (1868) in Wells’ *The Illustrated Annals of Phrenology and Physiognomy* demonstrated. With the drawings of ‘No. 1,’ a perfect example of ‘Woman [who] is constituted with more of the emotional, the feelingful’ (55), and ‘No. 2,’ whose face is drawn with the ‘unmistakable indications of the tendency of her career’ (57), Wells could ostensibly provide scientific evidence of the merits of ‘the cult of true womanhood.’ ‘Bad habits make ugly faces, and bad spirits with bad temper spoil a naturally good physiognomy,’ Wells concludes warningly, ‘Reader, ponder well with these two sketches, and gather therefrom the instruction we have sought to impart’ (59).

Adrian Desmond and James Moore suggest that phrenology catered to middle-class needs in times that saw the rise of a professional class of domestics and clerks. ‘Mistresses knew how to vet servants, employers how to assess honest clerks, bachelors what bumps marked a good wife’ (35). Indeed, Fowler gave advice on issues such as matrimony and how to pick a partner according to head shape, training of children, and female education in *Fowler on Matrimony* (1843). Like the Beecher sisters, Fowler worried about the state of womanhood, and saw modern education as literally ruining the complexion of women:

> These schools teach the *graces* and *accomplishments* mainly, which are only polite names for beaux-cathching, cap-setting, coquetry, and such fashionable attainments. They only whitewash the *out-side* of these rough-painted, tight-laced sepulchres, but efface almost every element of the *true* woman. They teach her to screw her waist into artificial forms, and her face into artificial smiles, and to learn to say *soft* things very *softly*. (85)

In the following chapter I explore this anxiety about the fashionable woman versus the ‘true’ woman in Stowe’s New York novels, which I read as a whitewashing
project akin to Wells’ ‘The Two Paths of Womanhood.’ The shopworn coquette Lily in *Pink and White Tyranny: A Society Novel* serves as a warning to womanhood, like No. 2 in the vignette, and is killed off. Subsequently little Eva is resurrected to become, like No. 1 in the sketch, a true woman in *My Wife and I* and *We and Our Neighbors.* Fowler on *Matrimony* aims to whitewash the nation, serving as a guidebook offering advice on how to reproduce a class of true men and women through selective breeding, a project that would fully mature in *Hereditary Descent* appearing the same year. And, as Desmond and Moore rightly assert, ‘The serious point is that from “class” to “race” was a short jump’ (36).

As a case in point, *Hereditary Descent* presents readers with a racialised counterpart to Wells’ gendered and classed anecdote, ‘The Two Paths of Womanhood,’ telling the story of white parents who observe African features in their child’s physiognomy. The father, who ‘was thrown into a state of mind bordering on derangement, and suffered beyond endurance, first by suspicions of the incontinency of a wife whom he loved most dearly, and on whom he doted; and secondly, by the reproaches of his neighbors’ (34), eventually discovers that his wife has a black great-grandfather in France, which explains the child’s physiognomy and vindicates its mother somewhat. Seemingly, the instructive implications of this story are that if the husband had done his phrenological homework, he could have avoided tainting his white lineage, just as the parents of No. 2 in Wells’ vignette could have brought up a true woman if they had read their daughter’s face in time. Phrenology, it appears, could pave the way for a ‘true’ white ‘master race.’

Phrenology’s underlying assumption about the individual’s head shape as the key to his or her character became mapped onto gendered, racial, classed, and national
groups. What held a particular attraction for Combe was phrenology’s rationalisation of colonial power relations. ‘Time and again he reverted to the millions of “Hindoos” held in check by hundreds of British wallahs, something he never understood, he said, until phrenology revealed the “Hindoos”’ small organs of “Combativeness” and “Destructiveness,” Desmond and Moore note (36). Following Combe, Fowler held that faculties are innate and that different races had different head shapes, explaining their different mental and physical attributes:

Yet, though the fundamentals of our race are the same in all portions of the earth, different races and nations evince lesser differences in propensity and intellect, and even in the color of their hair, skin, &c....The colored race is characterized quite as much by the tone of their feelings, the peculiarities of their intellect and expressions, as by the color of their skin. Their movements are as different from those of white men, as are their noses, or eyes, or lips. (Hereditary Descent 34)

Phrenology minimised the influence of education (the ‘untutored Indian,’ for example, could never be civilised because of the considerable size of the organs of ‘Destructiveness,’ ‘Secretiveness,’ and ‘Catiousness’ (Hereditary Descent 37-8)), refuting the epistemological thesis of the mind as a ‘tabula rasa’: the mind was always already written:

The conviction is becoming universal (the learned Blacksmith to the contrary notwithstanding), that the disposition and mental powers of mankind, are innate – are born, not created by education, and that the human mind, instead of being a blank on which education and circumstances write the whole character, has an inherent constitution and character of its own, and that often in the very teeth of education. (Hereditary Descent 4)

The influence of phrenology on Stowe’s writing is apparent from the very first page of Uncle Tom’s Cabin. Here the reader is encouraged to contemplate the difference in character of the two men, the slave trader Haley and the gentleman Mr. Shelby, by considering their respective physiognomies. As already noted, St. Clare,
with ‘his fine face, classic as that of a Greek statue’ which ‘seem[s] actually to burn
with the fervor of his feelings’ (104), evokes tears of joy on behalf of the beholder:

‘It was not in nature to look into that gay, young, handsome face, without a feeling of
pleasure; and Tom felt the tears start in his eyes as he said, heartily, “God bless you,
Mas’r!”’ (131). In stark contrast to St. Clare’s face, which speaks of the intellect of
the ancient Stoic philosopher and the grace of a saint, Simon Legree emerges as the
embodiment of the darkness of hell: ‘From the moment that Tom saw him
approaching, he felt an immediate and revolting horror at him, that increased as he
came near. He was evidently, though short, of gigantic strength. His round, bullet
head, large, light-grey eyes, with their shaggy, sandy eye-brows, and stiff, wiry, sun-
burned hair, were rather unprepossessing items, it is to be confessed’ (289). Tom’s
feelings of fear are confirmed by the narrator, validating the method of phrenology as
an interpretive practice, the face constituting a slate on which the mind is written and
can be read unambiguously. When describing the kinship between St. Clare and his
daughter, Stowe narrates this relationship by presenting the form of their heads as a
kind of textual evidence, following Fowler’s belief that ‘children will be the very
transfer, or *image* of [their parents]; reflected in all their shades of feeling and phases
of character’ (14). Stowe writes thus of St. Clare and Eva: ‘It was quite evident, at a
glance, that the gentleman was Eva’s father. There was the same noble cast of head’
(129).

Heads and body parts, then, are understood as scientific narratives that expose
someone’s true character. As Hanlon suggests,

*Inasmuch as it emphasized the idea that “the soul” could no longer effectively
hide within the body but rather must be regarded as constantly speaking
through it – betraying and articulating its own presence through a vocabulary
of telltale bumps, depressions, and marks – the field of phrenology was an*
outgrowth of the older field of physiognomy, which treated the human body as a kind of “text” to be read by the trained professional. As the physiognomist John Caspar Lavater wrote in the 1770s, the “original language of Nature, written on the face of man” could be translated to the language of a plain and usable science. (285)

As Stowe had cast herself as a painter who could depict slavery ‘in the most lifelike and graphic manner, she then also saw herself as ‘the trained professional’ who could read the faces of African slaves, just as she assigns her narrator the function of a daguerreotypist. In the Key, Stowe highlights her ability to decode the physiognomy of ‘the African’ writing that ‘The woman was thoroughly black, thick-set, firmly built, and with strongly marked African features. Those who have been accustomed to read the expressions of the African face know what a peculiar effect is produced by a lowering, desponding expression upon its dark features. It is like the shadow of a thunder-cloud’ (3 emphasis added). Uncle Tom’s Cabin and its Key, I argue, reflect the culture’s twin enthusiasm for phrenology and the daguerreotype as sciences that could capture the truth about interior essences. ‘The underlying belief in the veracity of the camera added a potent new political tool to midcentury scientists who were laying down the fundamentals of both modern science and modern society. Central to the scientific applications of the daguerreotype portraits are various aspects of craniometrics, sciences based on the skull and brain measurements’ (Barger and White 78). The Living Age journalist, who expressed concerns about the early daguerreotypes’ accuracy, grants the latest daguerreotypes the merits of pinning down human nature itself as phrenologists conceive of it:

But the advantages resulting from this novel art, the aid which it affords to the successful study of human nature, is among the most important. Daguerreotypes properly regarded, are indices of human character. Lavater judged of men by their physiognomies; and in a voluminous treatise has
developed the principles by which he was guided. The photograph, we consider to be the grand climacteric of the science. (552)

Indeed, Fowler frames hereditary character traits through the lens of the daguerreotype: ‘And every close observer of this point, will be struck with the wonderful minuteness of this transfer, as though both father and son and grandson, were daguerreotype likenesses struck from the same original at different times’ (Hereditary Descent 51). This coupling of phrenology and daguerreotypy can also be traced in the literature of the day, playing a key role in the way writers conceived of representation. Fowler’s discourse here, one may argue, reads like a scene in Hawthorne’s The House of the Seven Gables that places the daguerreotype at the heart of its exploration of literary representation, human character, and modern society.

Shawn Smith suggests that while The House of the Seven Gables seemingly critiques the notion of an aristocratic bloodline and classed privileges, it actually accepts phrenology’s notions of hereditary descent. Echoing Fowler, ‘Hawthorne portrays character as an ancestral legacy, a kind of familial property bequeathed from father to son, and he thereby situates his romance within the conceptual purview of nineteenth-century race sciences’ (Shawn Smith 42). Shawn Smith continues to argue that the daguerreotype visualises the underlying assumptions of phrenology in Hawthorne’s text as the Living Age reporter suggests: ‘In Hawthorne’s romance of middle-class ascendance, a visual technology provides the mechanism whereby racialized logics of blood, heredity, and character are represented and established. The daguerreotype poses a visual map of interior essence’ (48). Critiquing the racialised hereditary relations that Hawthorne’s novel endorses, Shawn Smith
suggests that it anticipates eugenicists’ use of the photography as a medium that
could capture telltale physiognomical traces of an individual’s inherited racial
characteristics’ (49), concluding that ‘the “secret truth” of Holgrave’s daguerreotype
magically prefigures the eugenicist conceits that were to dominate middle-class
discourses of identity and culture privilege in the late nineteenth century’ (50). I
suggest that a similar argument can be made in the case of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and
its *Key* as their phrenologically informed racial pictures are aligned with the ‘truth’
of the daguerreotype. And just as Holmes articulated the daguerreotype as ‘The
Mirror with a Memory,’ we may see *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as ‘a mirror with a memory’
to Fowler’s racial types and to the overall Atlantic culture where Stowe’s racial types
have lived on, and taken, as phrenologists would, at face value. As Josiah Nott wrote
in *Types of Mankind* (1854), ‘how indelible is the image of a type once impressed on
the mind’s eye! When, for example, the word ‘Jew’ is pronounced, a type is instantly
brought up by memory’ (qtd. in Shawn Smith 49). This kind of cultural work, to
draw on the of term of Tompkins who disregards issues of race in her discussion of
stereotypes, I argue, is also part of the legacy of Stowe’s racial stereotypes, a legacy
that criticism cannot afford to forget to remember: Uncle Tom, in his various
manifestations, has been daguerreotyped onto our collective memory.

Stowe’s reading of ‘the African face’ aligns itself with Fowler’s in ‘The Colored
Race’ (*Hereditary Descent* 33). Decoding the ‘African head,’ Fowler concludes that

In harmony with this greater development of Self-Esteem and
Approbative in them than in the Caucasian race, they are proverbially
polite and urbane, and hence make excellent waiters; are fond of ornament
and show; love to swell, and are noted for feeling large and swaggering. In
harmony with their greater development of Philoprogenitiveness, they make
our best nurses, as far as fondness and patience with children are concerned,
and evince a most passionate attachment to their children, and the strongest
attachment to friends. Acquisitiveness, Secretiveness, and Cautiousness are
also generally large; Language and the Perceptive Faculties strong, and Causality less. (35)

The characteristics of Africans, according to Fowler, make them naturally suited to serve whites as waiters, nurses, and childminders, just as women are naturally suited to embody domesticity. It is curious that Stowe, in a novel dedicated to abolishing black slaves’ servitude, draws on such racial taxonomy. If Stowe wanted white readers to extend their realities to those of the slaves, she also creates an epistemological gap between the reader and the slave, writing them, in alignment with Fowler’s text, as fundamentally different. Eliza’s child, for example, while possessing a sense of white beauty that is meant to signify familiarity, I have argued, is also characterised by the particular Africanness that Fowler identifies: ‘The boy commenced one of those wild, grotesque songs common among the negroes,’ Stowe writes, ‘in a rich, clear voice, accompanying his singing with many comic evolutions of the hands, feet, and whole body, all in perfect time to the music’ (Uncle Tom’s Cabin 3). Fowler listed music as one of the defining features of Africans, writing that ‘Though colored people love music, yet the character of this song is peculiar, so that a practised ear can discriminate between an African tune and other tunes’ (36).

Generally, Stowe’s black characters are childlike and adore children. Tom and Topsy are defined by their ‘fond[ness] of ornament and show,’ in Fowler’s words, when they enter the oriental St. Clare mansion in New Orleans; Topsy’s mouth is ‘half open with astonishment at the wonders of the new Mas’r’s parlor’ (Uncle Tom’s Cabin 206). Stowe’s characterisation of the language and tempers of black characters, moreover, follows Fowler’s thesis that Africans ‘construct their sentences in a manner differing from our own, and also employ a different class of words’ (36).
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Stowe, of course, worked to turn this distinct mental character of Africans into an asset; they were a ‘more susceptible and passionate oriental race’ as opposed to the ‘cool, logical, and practical’ Anglo-Saxon race (Key 57), but her reliance on phrenology, nevertheless, asserts doubts about their suitability as fully-fledged American citizens, doubts that are arguably confirmed by her colonialist views. If Stowe’s sentimental rhetoric works to establish familial feelings for the slave on behalf of the reader, her flirtation with phrenology undermines such a conception as it suggest that blacks and white – literally and metaphorically – are families apart.

Paradoxically, the section in the Key dedicated to Uncle Tom, the embodiment of Christian sympathy, in particular, obscures the familial feeling for Tom that the novel works to establish. Phrenology underpins Stowe’s explanation of the ‘psychology with regard to the negro race’ (Key 56), claiming that the African body is a perfect reflection of the African mind, following Fowler who asserts that ‘A close similarity exists between the form of the body, or the looks of a person, and the tone and characteristics of the mind....And there are certain shapes of body, which invariably accompany certain traits of character, talents, and peculiarities (Hereditary Descent 125):

The vision attributed to Uncle Tom introduces quite a curious chapter of psychology with regard to the negro race, and indicates a peculiarity which goes far to show how very different they are from the white race. They are possessed of a nervous organization peculiarly susceptible and impressible. Their sensations and impressions are very vivid, and their fancy and imagination lively. In this respect the race has an oriental character, and betrays its tropical origin. Like the Hebrews of old and oriental nations of the present, they give vent to their emotions with the utmost vivacity of expression, and their whole bodily system sympathizes with the movements of their minds. When in distress, they actually lift up their voices to weep, and “cry with an exceeding bitter cry.” When alarmed, they are often paralyzed, and rendered entirely helpless. Their religious exercises are all colored by this sensitive and exceedingly vivacious temperament. Like oriental nations, they incline much to outward expressions, violent gesticulations, and agitating
movements of the body. Sometimes, in their religious meetings, they will spring from the floor many times in succession, with a violence and rapidity with is perfectly astonishing. They will laugh, weep, embrace each other convulsively, and sometimes become entirely paralyzed and cataleptic. (Key 56-57 emphasis added)

If Stowe, with *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, wanted to show that black slaves had the same capacity for feeling as their white counterparts, the *Key*’s description of their violent, uncontrolled dispositions seems strangely at odds with the novel’s sentimental project, emphasising ‘how very different they are from the white race.’ Indeed, the *Key*’s exposition of the ‘psychology’ of ‘the negro race’ is reminiscent of Fowler’s phrenological reading of ‘The Colored race’ (33), which stresses this very difference:

In short, they seem to have a cast of mind and tone of feeling, including intonations and gesticulations, differing materially from our own race. The fact is, there is an organization and a texture, both physical and phrenological, peculiar to the race, and which characterizes that race in all its ramifications and crosses, and which owes it cause to parentage, and descends from sire to son, from generation to generation, and which will last as long as the race lasts. (*Hereditary Descent* 36)

Fowler suggests that the mind and bodies of ‘Africans’ always will be trapped in this particular race category as its attributes are caused by parentage. Indeed, temporality underlies Fowler’s conception of ‘The Colored Race’ as his rhetoric opens up the possibility that the race may only ‘last’ a given number of generations.

Stowe’s discourse on blacks is embedded in a similar sense of temporality too, I would argue. Her colonialist stand and the death of Tom imply that is it only a question of time before America is not confronted with the question of race. By comparing Africans to ‘oriental nations,’ in the above example from the *Key*, Stowe adds a spatial dimension to her conception of the limited life span of the race issue, removing it at a geographical distance. The move to compare black slaves to
‘oriental nations’ also defines them by extreme otherness, as white Americans had harboured a long tradition of antagonism towards Asians that would culminate in the passing of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882 that forbade all Chinese immigration (Brogan 415). America, Stowe seems to imply, will be separated from the question of race in space and in time.

It is curious that Stowe chose the above passage quoted from the Key to verify Uncle Tom’s character, who in the novel is described as having ‘the soft, impressible nature of his kindly race’ (127), as that example stresses violence, agitation, rapidity, and convulsion. Thus, the characterisation of Tom as a susceptible, impressible sympathetic character is supplemented by an image of danger, violence, and revolution. The novel and its Key, then, present conflicting discourses and point to the ambivalence and fear underlying Stowe’s black characterisations; the childlike African and the undomesticated, brutish African uneasily blend into each other in the meeting of the two texts as well as within the texts themselves. In other words, the Key argues with the daguerreotype of a docile Tom in the chapter ‘An Evening in Uncle Tom’s Cabin,’ obscuring the novel’s claim to realistic representation.

To conclude, Stowe’s reading of ‘the African’ in Uncle Tom’s Cabin and its Key can be aligned with Fowler’s exposition of ‘The Colored Race’ in Hereditary Descent and therefore her notion of Africans as a particular superior type is compromised: their bodies and faces, apparently, tell another story; that of inferiority. However, the face as a scientific proof in the Key is merely circumstantial evidence, I have argued; if Stowe accredited herself with being ‘accustomed to read[ing] the expressions of the African face,’ her discourse also pushes against phrenological readings as the slave woman to which she refers in this incident from
the *Key*, does not have ‘the quick smile which the negro *almost always* has in reserve for the little child’ (4 emphasis added). Thus, Stowe’s development of Fowler’s hypothesis of ‘the African face’ is always already in deconstruction; opening itself to supplementarity.

**Whiteness: Transcending Racial Interpretation**

If the attributes of ‘The Colored Race,’ in Fowler’s words, are written and fixed upon the face and the body in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and its *Key* by the phrenologist Stowe, she presents admirable whites in terms of disembodiment, placing them in a spiritual and aesthetic realm, I want to argue in the following. Where the narrative gaze lingers on the bodies of black characters and detestable whites, like the slave trader Haley and the planter Legree, it rests on the faces of whites as the key to their mental superiority. Angelic whites, little Eva most notably, are de-racialised as iconic figures like the Virgin Mary. In short, whiteness transcends race.

In *White*, Dyer suggests that Stowe’s discourse of whiteness makes a distinction between soul, spirituality, and spirit, arguing that historically blacks have been conceived of as having soul and spirituality, yet they are denied a superior spirit, resembling the spirit of Christ himself: ‘It is not spirituality or soul that is held to distinguish whites, but what we might call ‘spirit’: get up and go, aspiration, awareness of the highest reaches of intellectual comprehension and aesthetic refinement. Above all, the white spirit could both master and transcend the white body, while the non-white soul was a prey to the promptings and fallibilities of the body’ (23). The *Key*’s chapter on Uncle Tom with its claim that Africans’ ‘whole bodily system sympathizes with the movements of their minds’ (56), discussed
above, suggests the ‘non-white soul[’s]’ inability to control and transcend the black body. Indeed, Stowe denies blacks the Cartesian dualism that she assigns to whites, seemingly suggesting that the mind/body dualism is conflated in the African race. In *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, blacks are fleshy whereas whites are transparent; the gaze is focused on the body of blacks, whereas the gaze rests on the faces of whites, suggestive of their ability to transcend their bodies. Aunt Chloe is described as having a ‘plump countenance’ and ‘fat sides’ (17), and Uncle Tom is ‘a large, broad-chested, power-fully made man of a full glossy black’ (18). Mrs. Bird, on the other hand, is ‘a timid, blushing little woman…with mild blue eyes, and a peach-blow complexion, and the gentlest, sweetest voice in the world’ (68), and St. Clare’s ‘gay, young, handsome face [evokes] a feeling of pleasure’ (104). The white face is a marker of individuality and ‘intellectual comprehension and aesthetic refinement,’ as Dyer puts it, whereas the stress on black bodies reduces them to unsophisticated, racial masses, like Tom’s wooly-haired children. As a journal noted, giving ladies advice on the harmony of colours when dressing in 1852: ‘There is so little variation in the complexions of the individuals of the other races, that the subject as regards them may be dismissed in a few words’ (‘On the Harmony of Colors, in its Application of Ladies’ Dress’ 359).

Stowe’s mixed-raced characters, however, can make a claim to individuality and mental superiority, the Harrises being the best example, because of their white heritage. With reference to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Sandra C. Duvivier notes that ‘In fact, mulattos, quadroons, and so on are depicted as beautiful human beings who possess a sense of intelligence and superiority that the “darkies” – the unmixed characters that all seem to be a shade of midnight black – lack’ (241). White
superiority associated with the mind and black inferiority understood in terms of the
body is apparent in *Hereditary Descent* which assumes that ‘the mind and soul of
man are higher in the scale of creation, and more prolific as instruments of
enjoyment and suffering, than is the body’ (124). Nowhere is this mind/body dualism
better exemplified than by Eva and Topsy onto whom this binary opposition is
mapped, serving in the economy of the novel as ‘the representatives of their races’
(213).

Her form was the perfection of childish beauty, without its usual chubbiness
and squareness of outline. There was about it an undulating and aerial grace,
such as one might dream of for some mythic and allegorical being...The
shape of her head and the turn of her neck and bust was peculiarly noble, and
the long golden-brown hair that floated like a cloud around it, the deep
spiritual gravity of her violet blue eyes, shaded by heavy fringes of golden
brown,– all marked her out from other children, and made every one turn and
look after her, as she glided hither and thither on the boat...Always dressed in
white, she seemed to move like a shadow through all sorts of places, without
contracting spot or stain; and there was not a corner or nook, above or below,
where those fairy footsteps had not glided, and that visionary golden head,
with its deep blue eyes, fleeted along. (*Uncle Tom’s Cabin* 126)

Eva St. Clare is *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*’s ultimate referent and represents beauty,
spirituality, and morality; that is, whiteness. The shape of her head speaks of her
noble character, but otherwise Eva’s whiteness is so untainted that she is ripped of a
physical form; she is more of a ‘mythic and allegorical being’ than a child. Gliding,
instead of walking, ‘always dressed in white,’ she ‘move[s] like a shadow,’ and when
exposed to this divine being Tom ‘half believed that he saw one of the angels stepped
out of his New Testament’ (127). Referring to this scene, Hortense J. Spillers notes
that ‘Since Tom cannot quite read or “see” the New, or Old, Testament on his own
terms, we know that the tracks through which he is reading the “golden” girl as
angelic have been planted in him by other eyes’ (560). Tom’s reading of Eva is
filtered through white eyes, and this scene demonstrates my argument that whiteness is the lens through which sympathetic selves are constructed by Stowe. Thus, reading is not a transparent process in the novel; the narrative gaze is always already framed by whiteness as the norm.

Transcending her physical form even in life, Eva signifies ‘the pure spirit that was made flesh in Jesus’ (Dyer 24), and imparted with that spirit she should be followed by readers like Christ himself. As the representative of true Christian sympathy, Eva is ready to nurse her Mammy in her own bed (158), and she adopts the case of old, abused Prue to the extent that she seems to feel her sensations: ‘Her cheeks grew pale, and a deep, earnest shadow passed over her eyes. She laid both hands on her bosom, and sighed heavily’ (189). Just as Eva is a reinstatement of St. Clare’s divine mother, Stowe invites the reader to mould her own image in Eva’s image: ‘St. Clare’s mother had been a woman of uncommon elevation and purity of character, and he gave to this child his mother’s name, fondly fancying that she would prove a reproduction of her image’ (134). The fantasy of reproducing Eva’s angelic image is realised in the New York Novels, *My Wife and I* and *We and Our Neighbors*, where Eva reappears as Eva van Arsdel and later Henderson when she marries. But even in these novels, featuring Eva as a married woman, she remains a child and therefore an ultimate bearer of whiteness, as untainted whiteness relies on virginal purity (Dyer 76-77). Eva’s death, the spirit’s ultimate release from the body, in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is the most didactic moment in the novel, and suggests Stowe’s Victorian belief in the moral authority of (child-)women and that whiteness at its best has no physical limitations: it is pure transcendence. The climatic death scene also underscores, as Brown rightly notes, that ‘Eva thinks and feels right’ (‘Reading and
Children’ 80), and thus right feeling reaches its highest expression in white transcendence.

If Eva’s character serves to confirm the moral potential of whites, Topsy’s is employed to test the moral potential of blacks. As Mackenzie conceived of his man of feeling in a kind of emotional laboratory, Topsy is Stowe’s experiment in sympathy’s effects on a ‘fresh-caught specimen’ as St. Clare puts it (207-8). “‘You find virgin soil there, Cousin; put in your own ideas, – you won’t find many to pull up,’” he continues (210). Topsy is a token in a debate on slavery battled out between North and South, as represented by Miss Ophelia and St. Clare. Accusing the North of hypocrisy, St. Clare suggests that Northerners would never bring it on themselves to convert ‘the heathen at home,’ voicing Stowe’s critique that ‘Christian men and women of the North’ neglect the missionary task at their own doorstep (385). ‘Let me see one of you that would take one into your house with you,’ he says ‘and take the labor of their conversion on yourselves! No; when it comes to that, they are dirty and disagreeable, and it’s too much care and so on’ (208). Miss Ophelia, who may be read as a self-ironic gloss for Stowe, accepts the job of Christianising and domesticating the savage at home, and Topsy becomes a test case for the power of sympathy. And, in the character of Miss Ophelia, whom Samuel Otter regards as ‘the most psychologically interesting portrayal in Uncle Tom’s Cabin,’ ‘Stowe dramatizes the challenge of identification,’ struggling as Ophelia does with her ‘racial discomfort’ (22).

She was one of the blackest of her race; and her round, shining eyes, glittering as glass beads, moved with quick and restless glances over everything in the room. Her mouth, half open with astonishment at the wonders of the new Mas’r’s parlor, displayed a white and brilliant set of teeth. Her wooly hair was braided in sundry little tails, which stuck out in every direction. The expression of her face was an odd mixture of shrewdness
and cunning, over which was oddly drawn, like a kind of veil, an expression of the most doleful gravity and solemnity. She was dressed in a single filthy, ragged garment, made of bagging; and stood with her hands demurely folded before her. Altogether, there was something odd and goblin-like about her appearance, – something, as Miss Ophelia afterwards said, “so heathenish,” as to inspire that good lady with utter dismay. (*Uncle Tom’s Cabin* 206-7)

The introduction to Topsy is unsettling and must have puzzled Stowe’s nineteenth-century reader who had been schooled in sympathy and phrenology as reading practices. Topsy, ‘odd and goblin-like,’ does not call for readerly self-extension as Stowe’s other black, if lighter-skinned, characters do. But perhaps that which is most unnerving in the economy of a novel that hitherto has been relying on physiognomy as the key to decoding characters is that Topsy’s figure eludes this reading practice. Topsy’s face cannot be articulated transparently by Stowe’s narrator because its expression veiled by another expression; Topsy is figuratively and literally two-faced: ‘The expression of her face was an odd mixture of shrewdness and cunning, over which was oddly drawn, like a kind of veil, an expression of the most doleful gravity and solemnity.’ Topsy, then, cannot be daguerreotyped like Uncle Tom, and presents a methodological problem to Stowe, the painter, and Stowe, the phrenologist, echoing Hawthorne’s concerns with this form of representation in *The House of the Seven Gables*. In a state of a constant, magical metamorphosis, Topsy’s face cannot be captured on the canvas: ‘Her motions were almost as quick as those of a practised conjurer, and her command of her face quite as great’ (215). With her goblin-like appearance, Topsy is attributed a demonic ability of passing into various shapes; her face imbued with layers of expressions, evoking the idea of multiple masks, complicates any consistent reading of her character. If Eva as a transparent
character could be read rightly and could be felt rightly about, Topsy obscures all such unequivocal readings.

Topsy introduces the carnival and the grotesque into the orderly systems of Miss Ophelia’s New England mind, and unravels the interpretive practice that the novel has been evoking so far. If unsupervised,

Topsy would hold a perfect carnival of confusion, for some one or two hours. Instead of making the bed, she would amuse herself with pulling off the pillow-cases, butting her wooly head among the pillows, till it would sometimes be grotesquely ornamented with feathers sticking out in various directions; she would climb the posts, and hang head downward from the tops; flourish the sheets and spreads all over the apartment; dress the bolster up in Miss Ophelia’s night-clothes, and enact various scenic performances with that, – singing and whistling, and making grimaces at herself in the looking-glass; in short, as Miss Ophelia phrased it, “raising Cain” generally. (216)

Transforming the home into a frontier, Topsy acts like a savage Indian, ‘with feathers sticking out in various directions,’ climbing posts head down, pillaging whenever she gets the chance. Topsy, then, does not only stand as a figure for the African but also as a figure for the Native American, whose plight upon which Stowe otherwise did rarely touch. Even if we read Miss Ophelia as an object of satire, Stowe is clearly anxious about the ostensible racial attributes of ‘the heathen at home,’ that is, the African slave and the Indian. The reference to Cain, the first fratricidal murderer in the book of Genesis, underlines this anxiety – anxiety about fratricide would grow as civil war eventually became a reality – but also gives some sense of the theological framework within which Stowe understands the savage character as embodied by Topsy; she represents nothing less than ur-vice. Topsy’s dangerous potential has already been suggested with the figure of the goblin, but Stowe drives her point home completely by associating Topsy with original sin, exhibiting a picture of an
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undomesticated Topsy as a cunning serpent in the Garden of Eden seducing little Eva: ‘Miss Eva, who appeared to be fascinated by her wild diablerie, as a dove is sometimes charmed by a glittering serpent’ (215). As opposed to Topsy, the ultimate sinner, Eva is depicted as a crowned redeemer; as Tospy sheds tears, Eva ‘ha[s] penetrated the darkness of her heathen soul’: ‘the beautiful child, bending over her, looked like the picture of some bright angel stooping to reclaim a sinner’ (245). If Stowe here suggests that Topsy’s vices can be overturned by true sympathy like Eva’s, she also suggests that Eva’s and Topsy’s physical and racial differences are a divine design.

Stowe’s racial anxiety is bound up with a religiously sanctioned discourse of whiteness that associates whiteness with cleanliness and blackness with dirt. Dyer explains this discourse: ‘Cleanliness is the absence of dirt, spirituality the absence of flesh, virtue the absence of sin…The cleansing metaphor of baptism is central. Sin is seen as a stain which water washes away. Baptism unites cleanliness and goodness…To be white is to have expunged all dirt, faecal or otherwise, from oneself; to look white is to look clean’ (75-76). Eva’s whiteness is grounded in cleanliness; earthly dirt cannot stain her because she is essentially a spiritual being as noted above: ‘Always dressed in white, she seemed to move like a shadow through all sorts of places, without contracting spot or stain’ (126). Topsy, on the other hand, can contract dirt because she is bound up with her very flesh. As Duvivier notes, ‘Similar to topsoil, this creature obviously grew from the ground, from dirt, which explains her heathenish, nonhuman ways’ (242). Miss Ophelia, the missionary, embarks on cleaning Topsy, who is ‘dreadfully dirty, and half naked’ (208), as a kind of symbolic baptism:
Miss Ophelia saw that there was nobody in the camp that would undertake to oversee the *cleansing* and dressing of the new arrival...

*It is not for ears polite to hear* the particulars of the first toilet of a neglected, abused child. In fact, in this world, multitudes must live and die in a state that would be too great a shock to the nerves of their fellow-mortals even to hear described...When she saw, on the back and shoulders of the child, great welts and calloused spots, *ineffaceable marks* of the system under which she had grown up thus far, her heart became pitiful within her...

When arrayed, at last, in a suit of decent and whole clothing, her hair cropped short to her head, Miss Ophelia, with some satisfaction, said she looked more Christian-like than [Jane] did, and in her own mind began to mature some plans for her instruction. (209 emphasis added)

Topsy cannot be depicted or narrated, as ‘it is not for ears polite’ to be exposed to her flesh on which the sin of slavery is written as ‘ineffaceable marks.’ Topsy’s body is a source of anxiety, as its very physicality and its open wounds can be translated into a sexualised or even promiscuous body; it can be penetrated as opposed to Eva whose lack of physical form deletes all sexual connotations. Whereas Eva’s aesthetic graciousness can be embraced with pleasure, Topsy’s physicality triggers disgust; indeed, the white reader is taken off stage, until Topsy is covered up in decent clothing. Unlike the chapter, ‘An Evening in Uncle Tom’s Cabin,’ where the narrator reassuringly took the reader by the hand, Stowe cannot provide the reader with safe interpretive strategies to deal with the fallen slave-child. The reader cannot become an extension of the narrator here, suggestive of the segmented, supplemented quality of Stowe’s reality, and Topsy cannot become an extension of the reader in turn. Stowe needs to get the appearance right, get the picture right, before sympathetic identification can take place, just as little Harry had to be dressed up in the Birds’ son’s clothes before the Senator could feel right. Stowe must make Topsy somewhat ‘Christian-like’ and cover up original sin, so she can resemble Miss Ophelia and the white reader and be presented as an object of sympathy. ‘Black,’ then, ‘equates with
evil and white with grace,’ in Baldwin’s words; Stowe ‘must cover their intimidating nakedness, robe them in white, the garments of salvation’ (498).

Miss Ophelia’s job is to make Topsy assimilable. When she attempts to domesticate and Christianise her, Topsy turns her world upside down; she is outside all points of reference in Miss Ophelia’s world – Topsy is Derrida’s movement of play. She cannot be conceived of within the text’s ultimate referents, and thus the interpretive strategies that the text has set up are rendered futile. God does not serve as a transcendental signified, the very condition of truth in the novel, to Topsy. Even her own existence is not a point of reference; Topsy understood as a text has no objective reality, disputing a philosophy of presence. Topsy claims that she was never born, but that she simply ‘grow’d,’ thinking that ‘nobody never made’ her (210). Hence, she cannot be put into a particular framework for interpretation; the experiment cannot be controlled or contained:

But what was to be done with Topsy? Miss Ophelia found the case a puzzler; her rules for bringing up didn’t seem to apply. She thought she would take time to think of it; and, by the way of gaining time, and in hopes of some indefinite moral virtues supposed to be inherent in dark closets, Miss Ophelia shut Topsy up in one till she had arranged her ideas further on the subject. (214)

Miss Ophelia tries to box Topsy in, to frame her, yet Topsy never becomes a stable entity in the text that can be approached with fixed, safe interpretive strategies. In spite of her redemption, Stowe never quite lets the reader trust in Topsy, conveying the anxiety that blacks may regress into a destructive chaotic state of nature. Topsy may have the potential to be an angel, but she also has the potential to relapse into the figures of the goblin and the serpent, Stowe seems to fear, finding it necessary to dispose of Topsy, even though Eva assures Topsy, and the reader, that Topsy can be
good, if she cannot be white: ‘He [Jesus] will help you to be good; and you can go to Heaven at last, and be an angel forever, just as much as if you were white’ (246).

Topsy, nevertheless, reproduces the novel’s claim that transcendence is a white matter: “Couldn’t never be nothin’ but a nigger, if I was ever so good,” said Topsy. “If I could be skinned, and come white, I’d try then” (245).

In conclusion, I want to suggest that the experiment with Topsy points to the limitations of Stowe’s means of representation, means which are always already embedded in whiteness. As an uncontainable textual unit, Topsy obscures the ostensible transparent relationship between the signified and right feeling, which has been discussed earlier in this chapter. Complicating this reading practice, Topsy cannot be framed as an unambiguous object of sentimental attachment: where Eliza’s little Harry could wear the Senator’s son’s cap and be conceived of within the white family portrait, Topsy remains veiled by her savage blackness. As Topsy herself puts it, if she were to be hailed by the culture’s sentimental ethos, she should ‘be skinned, and come white’ (245). Topsy, then, remains on the periphery of the text’s technologies of constructing meaning – those of sympathy, daguerreotypy, and phrenology – while also challenging the transparency of their mediation. Like the lady with the miscoloured hand in the daguerreotype discussed in The Living Age, Topsy is a source of anxiety in a culture obsessed with visual ‘truth,’ to which Hawthorne’s daguerreotypist’s and Fowler’s phrenological types attest. She cannot be daguerreotyped with ‘phrenological accuracy,’ as her extreme darkness and her ever changing facial expressions cannot be projected by light onto the dark plate in the daguerreotype process. Reduced to Eva’s backdrop, Topsy may be seen as the daguerreotypist’s black slate that enables Eva’s whiteness to shine; indeed, Dyer
suggests the visual effect of little Eva’s glory is the prototype of a light culture that has formed the basis for a general aesthetic practice in film and photography. A *Photographic Art-Journal* explains the effect on white against black to the ladies in 1852: ‘Let a person with very white hair be placed facing the light immediately in front of an open doorway, leading into a dark room: the hair will appear by contrast with the dark behind it, of a brilliant white’ (‘On the Harmony of Colors, in its Application of Ladies’ Dress’ 362).

At the conclusion of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the social implications of Topsy’s status as a textual misfit are spelled out. Telling the story of Topsy’s life in New England and her future as a missionary in Africa, the chapter entitled ‘Results’ can be read as pertaining to the social results of Stowe’s sentimental experiment with Topsy. While Topsy has been converted by the power of sympathy, Stowe never quite trusts her own creation and deletes her in her future vision of America. Topsy cannot be whitewashed to be included in a state of sympathy, remaining an estranging textual element that is eventually expunged in Stowe’s attempt to create order. If Stowe goes to great lengths to show, through various emotional experiments, that black slaves can be converted in the name of sympathy, these experiments, paradoxically, show the very limitations of her sympathetic imagination. Scipio, St. Clare’s guinea-pig in his rather cynical experiment on paternalistic benevolence, for example, is killed off as soon as he has nursed his master back to life; Stowe, it seems, is unable to imagine any other outcome of the experiment. Converted blacks are a blessing but also a problem to her; out of the laboratory, as it were, the existence of the test subjects is rendered futile. Topsy, Tom, or Scipio cannot be placed in any kind of meaningful social framework within the larger American experiment, and are literally and
figuratively brought to a dead end. The text, then, obscures the possibility of getting under the skin of black others whose lives are placed at a geographical distance or are brought to an end. As Brown concludes from the test case of Topsy, ‘Stowe takes us only as far with Topsy as sympathy will go’ (‘Reading and Children’ 85). Even if Topsy ‘rapidly grows in grace and in favor with the family and the neighborhood’ of ‘“Our Folks”’ in Vermont, she never becomes a fully-fledged member of that community, that is, an extension of the New Englanders, marked as she is by her Africanness – and Indianness. While Stowe asserts a certain measure of critical distance to the New Englanders’ notion of ‘“Our Folks,”’ she simultaneously upholds that notion of familial sympathy by assuring the reader that the serpent no longer will create chaos in America’s Garden of Eden, as Topsy’s energies are ‘now employed, in a safer and wholesome manner, in teaching the children of her own country’ (377 emphasis added). In her social novels taking place in the postwar period, Stowe would develop the New England notion of ‘Our Folks’ into a notion of ‘We and Our Neighbours’ in the urban setting of New York, I shall argue in the subsequent chapter, paving the way for a safe, white homogenous America. In the antebellum context of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, apparently the only way to make America safe is to erase the black (and red body) from the national narrative – either through a heroic death, as in the case of Uncle Tom or Scipio, or via colonisation: racialised bodies have to be kept separate to secure union.

Safeguarding White America

‘And is America safe?’, Stowe asks apocalyptically at the conclusion of Uncle Tom’s Cabin (388). A safe America to Stowe is an America where the white
community has redeemed itself from the sin of slavery, and the black body has been
written out of the national narrative. Safety to Stowe, moreover, resides in
benevolent patriarchy, as a sort of substitute matriarchy. Stowe flirts briefly with a
utopian matriarchy in form of the Quaker kitchen but anxious that all members are
not uniform enough to obey the same principles, she capitulates to white male
hegemony.

The Quakers represent Mrs. Bird’s ideal moral locus, or ‘higher law community’
as Gregg D. Crane defines it, with Rachel Halliday as the benevolent matriarch – the
ultimate referent in the community. Nevertheless, Stowe does not give this model
absolute credence, as she seems to be anxious that all members are not uniform
evenough to embrace each other with sympathy. Tompkins’ seminal Sensational
Designs suggests that the Quaker kitchen is set up as the ultimate vision in Uncle
Tom’s Cabin, a radically transformed society, locating redeeming power in the
domestic sphere: ‘The home is the center of all meaningful activity; women perform
the most important tasks; work is carried on in a spirit of mutual corporation; and the
whole is guided by a Christian woman’ (141). Tompkins thus articulates the Quaker
kitchen as an unproblematic whole defined by mutuality. Yet, I suggest, it is exactly
Stowe’s fear that ‘mutual corporation’ cannot be carried into practice, because of the
Quaker kitchen’s vulnerability to diversity. The mixed race characters Eliza and
Harry are not envisioned as future members of the community; the Quakers have the
specific function of rescuing them and pointing them towards a different, separate
future. Tompkins does not include questions of diversity and racial ideology in her
analysis, an aspect, I argue, that complicates her argument. For example, the outsider
Phineas Fletcher is a source of tension in the benevolent community, because neither
physically nor mentally does he resemble the other members: ‘He had not the placid, quiet, unworldly air of Simeon Halliday; on the contrary, a particularly wide-awake and *au fait* appearance’ (185), ‘and though he was an honest, sober, and efficient member, and nothing particular could be alleged against him, yet the more spiritual among them could but discern an exceeding lack of savor in his developments’ (188). Phineas is not an extension of the other members, even though his otherness cannot be defined; the resemblance that is needed to trigger the subject/object relation is simply not strong enough. The case of Phineas suggests the Quakers’ unwillingness to accept anything that is outside their fixed, a priori parameters. Phineas’ example, moreover, expresses an underlying fear that all people may not be converted like the senator. Thus, Stowe dismantles the power of higher law ethics and the discourse of sympathy; Rachel Haliday’s gentle suggestions will work only if all members of a community are like Mrs. Bird. The efficiency of moral suasion becomes subject to doubt too; seemingly Phineas cannot be radically changed by the benevolent Quakers, just as Marie St. Clare is not remotely influenced by her Christ-like daughter. Hence, the utopia is punctured; it cannot work as a model for the body politic, as the text unravels its potential. The Quaker model ends up in a deadlock, and Stowe abandons it at an early stage in the novel in favour of George Shelby’s plantation. Having cast doubt on the practice of higher law ethics and having rejected politics and discussion, Stowe seeks to uphold order in the form of patriarchy in the end. A white male, not Uncle Tom or a woman, is framed as the true redeemer and guardian of the American home.
The Substitute Matriarch

Echoing her sister in *An Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism*, Stowe calls for a Southern redeemer in the *Key*: ‘What nobler ambition to a Southern man than to deliver his country from this disgrace…There is a crown brighter than any earthly ambition has ever worn…waiting for that hero who shall rise up for liberty at the South, and free that noble and beautiful country from the burden and disgrace of slavery’ (288). The redeemer is George Shelby whose task it is to deliver white America; indeed, freeing his country from slavery is his main task, not freeing the slaves from slavery. In other words, the redeemer is required to wash the stain of sin off America. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin’s* correlation of whiteness and transcendence is highlighted in the *Key’s* appeal to the country’s deliverer, juxtaposing him with Christ; the redeemer’s ‘crown’ is ‘brighter than any earthly ambition ever worn.’ This statement suggests a belief that white America can redeem itself and inhabit the Garden of Eden, as the sin of slavery is not written on the white body, but the black body. Nevertheless, slavery is not exposed as a moral dilemma for slaves in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*; it is white America’s dilemma, and it is white America’s absolution that is at risk, I have suggested. Sarah Smith Duckworth, who reads *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* ‘as a social tract, reinforcing the values of the nineteenth-century mainstream white culture,’ argues that Stowe’s novel advocates abolition because slavery obscures white moral principles, and thus whites ‘not blacks, have the larger stake in creating the new world order’ (207) of which George Shelby represents ‘the kind of white leadership’ that is required (210).

Duckworth’s position can be extended if we read George Shelby as a kind of compromise for Stowe: a substitute matriarch. Though Stowe exposes white women
as morally superior as suggested by the scenes at the Bird’s house and at the Quaker kitchen, she is uneasy about women’s political role in future America. The Quaker matriarchy is not an option because of its vulnerability to heterogeneity, as already suggested. Active political resistance is not put forward as a possibility either, since that removes woman from the protective, domestic sphere. Cassy, for example, exercises active resistance through her escape from Legree’s plantation, and the Harris family is united due to her agency. Yet, Stowe does not let her remain in the role of an activist, thereby dismissing her activism as exemplary; Cassy is safely restored to her proper sphere, as ‘she yield[s] at once, and with her whole soul, to very good influence, and bec[omes] a devout and tender Christian’ (373). Cassy escapes from one patriarchy to another, from the malevolent patriarchy of Simon Legree to the benevolent patriarchy of George Harris. Obeying patriarchal discourse, seemingly unable to solve the paradox of woman’s position, Stowe tries to negotiate the binary of private and public by suggesting that if mothers feel right their sons will act right in the political arena, thus proposing a protective rather than enabling discourse. Stowe advocates this model in her ‘Appeal to the Women of the Free States’ (1854): ‘What, then, is the duty of American women at this time? The first duty for each woman, for herself thoroughly to understand the subject, and to feel that as a mother, wife, sister, or member of society, she is bound to give her influence on the right side’ (428). Stowe defines woman as both private individual and public member of society; two definitions that push against each other, just as Tompkins’ phrase ‘Sentimental Power’ (122) does. Being unable to combine the two, Stowe sets up George Shelby in the politically loaded role of a redeemer or liberator, because his mother cannot enter a political and legal arena. This politics is not
particularly subversive; power relations at the Shelby plantation are not fundamentally changed, as power is still exercised within patriarchal discourse. While Tompkins suggests that ‘The removal of the male from the center to the periphery of the human sphere is the most radical component of this millenarian scheme’ (145), I would argue that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* ultimately cannot be reconciled with such a centre/periphery structure, because the text constantly unravels its own centres; even the novel itself as centre is supplemented by its Key. ‘The woman’s centrality,’ in Tompkins’ phrase (144), is also decentred, because it is George Shelby and not Rachel Halliday who is going to lead America into the millennium.

George Shelby is a good compromise since he is a benevolent patriarch with female characteristics; he is a male version of Mrs. Shelby and, significantly, Uncle Tom, the novel’s black Jesus figure, sanctions this new leader. The embodiment of female piety, Tom has already set up George as feminine character at the beginning of the novel: ‘Al’ays keep close to yer mother. Don’t be gettin’ into any of them foolish ways boys has of getting too big to mind their mothers’ (87). George, in return, assures Tom that he will ‘build [his] house all over,’ and that Tom ‘shall have a room for a parlor with a carpet on it, when [George is] a man’ (88), suggestive of George’s domestically oriented character, but also his capacity for enterprise and accomplishment. Yet George is required to develop a soft, feminine side, because the South has been associated with destructive male desire symbolised by the Legree mansion. George’s femininity also brings him closer to Rachel Halliday and her higher law community, but his masculine central power erases the anxiety that uncontainable members like Phineas and Topsy will cause disorder.
Nevertheless, George as a leader is not an unproblematic resolution. The reader cannot easily rest with this conclusion, because George is also exposed as a hubristic character. He has been associated with excessive pride and excessive consumption of food, when we first encounter him; George ‘appear[es] fully to realize the dignity of his position as instructor’ (18), and ‘when he really could not eat another morsel…he was at leisure to notice the pile of woolly heads’ (21-22 added emphasis). Moreover, George’s reading of the Scripture is bound up with performance; a very unsettling notion in a novel that assigns the Bible ultimate authority. His reading of the Bible, according to Chloe, makes it ‘“so much more interesting”’ (24), a statement to which ‘George very readily consented, for your boy is always ready for anything that makes him of importance’ (24). George’s performative reading leaves us to wonder if he is ‘reading right’ and thus ‘feeling right.’ This exposition of George as a reader and a future leader makes Stowe’s resolution unsafe, unsettled – a downfall is always lurking in between the lines of the text. Stowe’s didacticism is thus unravelling itself, as she raises a critique of a system to which she inevitably capitulates.

Power in Stowe’s world is ultimately conceived of within patriarchy, then; woman has the role of influencing the patriarch who holds the key to accomplishment. Woman is reduced to a bearer of meaning, not a maker of meaning; woman’s existence is defined in relation to the patriarch; she is Emerson’s ‘parlour-soldier,’ denied self-reliance (Self-Reliance 1138). Paradoxically, white women may be representatives of the inherent power of whiteness, yet they do not have access to that power (Dyer 30); Mrs. Shelby, Eva, and Mrs. Bird all need men to accomplish whatever their hearts desire. In A Treatise, Beecher articulates this gendered power structure to which Stowe submits:
In this Country, *it is established*, both by opinion and by practice, that women have an equal interest in all social and civil concerns...But in order to secure her the more firmly in all these privileges, *it is decided*, that, in the domestic relation, she take a subordinate station, and that, in civil and political concerns, her interests be intrusted to the other sex, without her taking any part in voting, or in making and administering laws. (4 emphasis added)

Beecher’s passive constructions reflect her reliance on a transcendental signified. Societal structures need not be discussed nor interpreted, because they have been pre-defined by Christianity. Stowe is desirous of establishing such transcendental signification through controlled representation, yet the various textual slippages make her pictures frameless. The susceptibility of Stowe’s text to deconstructionist readings is a problem for its didacticism, because it negates centres of meaning; if Topsy is let loose our ways of constructing meaning will break down.

**Restoring the Meaning of Whiteness**

Like Topsy, whom I have read as a figure for deconstruction as invention, the passing images in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* are another example of a reformatory textual space outside the frame of Stowe’s pictures, opening up possibilities of interpretation. Derrida writes, ‘Deconstruction is inventive or it is nothing at all; it does not settle for methodical procedures, it opens up a passageway, it marches ahead and marks a trail’ (*From Psyche* 337). Just as Topsy ‘does not settle for methodical procedures,’ passing enables reversal of structures and signification within racial discourses, religious, classed, or sexual ones, exposing them as subject to penetration and thus transformation. Suggesting that representation is never representative, passing negates the novel’s belief that identities of race are innate based on the science of phrenology. In the last chapter of this thesis, I explore passing and sympathy within the shared discursive realm of whiteness more fully in
Fauset’s *Comedy: American Style* in which Topsy is evoked as a vehicle around which one passing character and her white friends try to fix the meaning of blackness. Needless to say, Topsy eludes them.

In their debate on slavery, St. Clare talks to his northern cousin as if she were a spectator of a drama: “‘Come, cousin, don’t stand there looking like one of the Fates; you’ve only seen a peep through the curtain, – a specimen of what is going on, the world over, in some shape or other’ (191-92). I have argued that Stowe wanted her readers to renounce their role as detached spectators, so that their feelings could form the basis of their judgement. But St. Clare’s statement here, I suggest, also bears witness to Stowe’s conflicted representation; his words suggest theatricality and slipperiness that push against the fixed ideas of gender, race, and class to which the text subscribes. The novel’s passing images indicate that identity can only be understood and captured as ‘a peep through the curtain,’ as St. Clare puts it, and that it is always already in flux, ‘in some shape or other’: George Harris, Cassy and Emmeline pass as European gentry when escaping, the St. Clare household servants appropriate their master’s and mistress’ identities by wearing their clothes and adopting their manners, and Eliza and little Harry cross-dress as they make their way to freedom in Canada. But if this evocation of class, gender, and race passing has liberating potential in the most literal sense in this context, the text withdraws from this position by restoring all passers to their appropriate socially prescribed roles. The passing female members of the Harris family are all eventually subjected to the benevolent patriarchy of George, who in turn is restored to what Stowe sees as his ‘true’ identity as an African. As George asserts this ‘true’ self:
though I hope to have no unchristian sentiments, yet I may be excused for saying, I have no wish to pass for an American, or to identify myself with them.

“It is with the oppressed, enslaved African race that I cast in my lot; and, if I wished anything, I would wish myself two shades darker, rather than one lighter.

“The desire and yearning of my soul is for an African nationality. I want a people that shall have a tangible, separate existence of its own...(374)

Through George Harris Stowe conflates race and nationality, and as Riss argues, Stowe operates with a notion of racial nationalism and ‘reproduces her notions of the family on the level of national identity’ (‘Racial Essentialism and Family Values in Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ 534). The family and thus the nation’s, or as the Beecher sisters formulate it, the ‘family state,’ can, according to Riss, ‘only be guaranteed if all involved are of the same race,’ because ‘Stowe imagines that ascriptions of race actually replace paternity as the ultimate mark of belonging to a family’ (534).

Therefore, in Stowe’s ideal vision as Riss understands it, it is so important for ‘the success of such a racialist logic’ that black family members are united and that biology is bound up with a notion of national allegiance (534).

I want to add to Riss’ position that by restoring former slaves to an ‘African nationality,’ to ‘a tangible, separate existence of its own,’ to use George Harris’ words (374), Stowe is also restoring American whiteness. In spite of its commitment to interracial sympathy, Uncle Tom’s Cabin is riddled with anxiety that whiteness is becoming intangible as a marker, because slavery produces perverted families, as Riss suggests. The rules of biology and phrenology, in other words, have been bent.

When Aunt Chloe sanctions the whiteness of her mistress at the Shelby plantation, we may recall, she uses biology as the basis for race and class distinctions: ‘Now, Missis, do jist look at dem beautiful white hands o’ yourn, with long fingers, and all
a sparkling with rings, like my white lilies when de dew’s on ’em; and look at my
great black stumpin hands. Now don’t ye think dat de lord must have meant me to
make de pie-crust, and you to stay in de parlor?’ (21). Chloe’s counterpart, Dinah, at
the St. Clare household dismisses the mixed race characters Adolph’s and Rosa’s
performances of whiteness, having internalised her own racial identity as essential,
thereby adhering to the ‘one-drop rule’: ‘“Don’t want none o’ your light-colored
balls,” said Dinah, “cuttin’ round, makin’ b’lieve you’s white folks. Arter all, you’s
niggers, much as I am”’ (187). Slavery, then, is obscuring whiteness as the ultimate
marker of citizenship and class and taints its potential. In the Key, Stowe expresses
the regret that slavery has debased and demoralised whiteness, having given rise to a
class of ‘poor white trash’:

But it will appear that the institution of slavery has produced not only
heathenish, degraded, miserable slaves, but it produces a class of white
people who are, by universal admission, more heathenish, degraded, and
miserable. The institution of slavery has accomplished the double feat, in
America, not only of degrading and brutalizing her black working classes, but
of producing, notwithstanding a fertile soil and abundant room, a poor white
population as degraded and brutal as ever existed in any of the most crowded
districts of Europe. (447-48)

Indeed, Stowe’s fears of the degraded status of whiteness are materialised in the
appearance of white slaves at the slave warehouse: ‘Stretched out in various attitudes
over the floor, he may see numberless sleeping forms of every shade of complexion,
from the purest ebony to white, and of all years, from childhood to old age, lying
now asleep’ (285 emphasis added). While this reference to white slaves serves as a
critique of the misconduct of slave-holding white men, it also speaks of Stowe’s
anxiety that whiteness has fallen from grace due to the malpractice of slavery. The
ultimate white nightmare in Uncle Tom’s Cabin, then, is not blacks passing for
white, but whites passing for slaves – the nightmarish vision that Mark Twain would entertain in *Pudd’nhead Wilson* which speaks of the white race fears at the end of the century grounded in the antebellum period. The very attributes of whiteness, the capability of the white spirit to ‘both master and transcend the white body’ (Dyer 23), Stowe suggests, are compromised if they become entangled with the darkness of slavery; indeed, the white spirit is literally becoming enslaved by its body. The image of Eva’s cousin’s light-skinned slave, moreover, seems to imply that the very national spirit of whiteness itself is entrapped in the black body of slavery, hindering its potential: ‘He had white blood in his veins, as could be seen by the quick flush in his cheek, and the sparkle of his eye, as he eagerly tried to speak’ (231). Untainted whiteness, in Stowe’s world, can no longer speak its name, because it ‘carries in its bosom great and unredressed injustice’ (388), and thus the curtain falls with an apocalyptic warning.

‘Feeling right’ is Stowe’s measure to abolish slavery, but it is a measure not only to free blacks, but also to free whiteness from blackness. The capacity to sympathise in the spirit of little Eva is that which can redeem white America; Stowe is just as interested in the redemption of ‘white trash’ as in the redemption of ‘her black working classes.’ But as the publication of the *Key* suggests, Stowe has lost faith in the spontaneous ways of the (female) heart and restores order by yielding to the white benevolent patriarchy of George Shelby in Kentucky, just as the Harris women yield to the black benevolent patriarchy of George Harris in Liberia. If Stowe had democratised Smith’s male-dominated theory of moral sentiments in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, she seems to doubt this very move when she frames George Shelby as the liberator. Rejecting the matriarchy of the Quakers, Stowe fears that ‘feeling right’
cannot not be harmonised by diverse individuals, opting for a central gendered power structure akin to Smith’s and Beecher’s. But Stowe’s ambiguous antebellum hopes and fears for whiteness would come back to haunt her in the broken post-war society where European immigration posed yet another challenge to the vulnerable white polity. The time is ripe for little Eva to return to manage the emotional life of the post-bellum nation; indeed along with her, Stowe restores the figure of the impartial spectator to internalise sympathy as a mode of control within the white subject in My Wife and I and We and Our Neighbors.
FOUR

From Fellow-Feeling to Narcissistic Sympathy: White Normalisation in Harriet Beecher Stowe’s My Wife and I and We and Our Neighbors

As to love our neighbour as we love ourselves is the great law of Christianity, so it is the great precept of nature to love ourselves only as we love our neighbour, or what comes to the same thing, as our neighbour is capable of loving us. (25)

Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments

Introduction

‘Well, then, set it down in your book that other people are like you’ (289), the narrator of We and Our Neighbors sermonises, and in this brief, polemical statement the politics of the novel can be summed up. Like Smith’s intersubjective ethical model quoted above, Stowe’s New York novels present sympathy as a mechanism of social equilibrium. Indeed, underlying Smith’s moral imperative here is the assumption that one’s neighbour is interchangeable with oneself and that sympathy as a reciprocal relationship is grounded in affinity. In this chapter, I want to argue that Stowe’s New York novels endorse this intersubjective ethical model as a form of normalisation that aims to inscribe a stable, shared sense of white subjectivity in a time faced with the dilemmas of reconstruction and modernity. Whereas Uncle Tom’s Cabin appealed to the spontaneous feelings of white readers in its quest to foster anti-slavery sentiments, My Wife and I and We and Our Neighbors reconstruct the role of sympathy as one of emotional policing.

The New York novels offer a domestic reconstruction of the national house – which still by 1870s seemed divided – that could counteract the changing demographical, industrial, and social realities of the day. If these novels, as one critic puts it, ‘reflect the decade around 1870 rather well’ (Adams 54), I would argue that they also reflect our post-9/11 world. Their fear of others, the extensive policing, and
the protection of the (white) Christian middle-class home are pressing concerns for American and European administrations now as they were then. In his Victory Speech, the then president-elect Barack Obama evoked Lincoln’s notion of ‘a house divided,’ encouraging Americans to heal the divides that have hindered progress in the spirit of the founding fathers: ‘I will ask you join in the work of remaking this nation the only way it’s been done in America for two-hundred and twenty one years – block by block, brick by brick, calloused hand by calloused hand.’ Stowe’s nineteenth-century domestic reconstruction, unlike Obama’s of the twenty-first century, I shall argue in this chapter, seeks to transform a ‘house divided’ into a homogenous white home.

I am employing Obama’s arch-American discourse as a starting point for my discussion of the New York novels because it asserts the image of building a house as the emotional architecture of the nation, fostering a proprietary stake in the republic as the condition for national identity. Unlike Obama, whose vision of reconstruction ostensibly transcends race, Stowe’s vision in the New York novels is one in which homogenous white households shall be constructed endlessly, mapping whiteness onto the nation as in an imperial conquest. The house of Eva Henderson, the protagonist of *We and Our Neighbors*, functions as the prototype that should be copied and extended in the streets of America, ‘block by block, brick by brick.’

White objects are represented as sympathetic extensions of self; indeed, they are both the bearers and articulations of shared sentiments. In this chapter I explore what Lori Merish calls ‘sentimental materialism,’ examining how this internalisation of whiteness is externalised through goods, buildings, and ultimately the landscape. In an era where slavery no longer fixes the meanings of citizenship and of race, material
objects and space emerge as significant parameters within which to determine racial identity and to determine the trajectory of modern America. While the New York novels demonstrate Merish’s theory to perfection, they are not included in her analysis, and thus this chapter adds to her body of work.

The New York novels anticipate the trajectory of modern America as one of consumerism. The ‘calloused hand’ of American labour, in Obama’s example, is ‘reconstructed into a vessel of aesthetic genius and emotional nurture’ in Stowe’s novels (Merish 147). ‘Stowe’s imaginative reconstructions,’ as Merish suggests, contribute to an assimilation process through which the ‘industrious frugal housewife [becomes a] tasteful female shopper’ (147). The New York novels trace this process from Harry Henderson’s mother’s ideal New England home to his wife’s New York household: Eva embodies a proto-consumer mentality in which sentimental identification is reconstructed as advertising techniques. Stowe, I argue, is branding, to use our contemporary lingua franca, the product of whiteness of which Eva, and her house by extension, functions as the brand image that creates within the minds of characters and readers the promises of white consumption. Eva’s household stands as a showroom and her letters describing it read as advertising circulars. Arguably, the novels’ publication history speaks of a developing consumer culture when mass consumption sets the agenda in the changing literary market. The circulation of the Christian Union, the periodical edited by Stowe’s brother Henry Ward Beecher in 1870-78 in which My Wife and I and We and Our Neighbors were serialised, skyrocketed due to the popularity of My Wife and I. The periodical had at the end of the fall of 1871 ‘a circulation of nearly 90,000, at least half of which had been added by the serial’ (Wilson 329). And as the Christian Union reported in its 1875
promotional article on *We and Our Neighbors*, ‘Mrs. Stowe’s New Story’: ‘Even after her admirable story of “My Wife and I” had run through the columns of the Christian Union, it sold over fifty thousand copies in book form, and is still selling, at $1.75 per copy’ (340). Like the merchandise that followed the success of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the advertisement of the New York novels ‘in book form’ speaks of a sentimental, proprietary relationship between readers, the physical object of the book, and the story that it tells. Merish explains this relationship as one where ‘the novel’s characters and their stories can (indeed, perhaps should) “belong” in some personal way to each individual reader. It is precisely such humanizing exchanges between the material and the affectional that sentimental consumption both promises and promotes’ (165).

But if *We and Our Neighbors* celebrates what Lears calls ‘commodity civilization’ (*Fables of Abundance* 75), *My Wife and I* is in many respects an anti-modern novel that reinvigorates Jefferson’s white dreams of physiocracy. Industrialisation, black migration from the South, and European immigration to the cities had shattered this dream in the postbellum era, yet Stowe keeps it alive by ‘propos[ing] to introduce the country sitting-room into [Eva’s] New York house’ at the conclusion of *My Wife and I* (382). With this anti-urban and nativist gesture, Stowe carves out an isolated space for a white New England elite in the city. Institutionalising *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*’s notion of white affinity through identification strategies that function as marketing techniques, I suggest that the New York novels fully articulate its vision of a future white homogenous polity. Indeed, little Eva from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the embodiment of white virtue, is resurrected as Eva van Arsdel and eventually Eva Henderson when she marries: in other words, aristocratic Eva becomes middle-class
Eva, that is, everybody’s property. Before I turn to discuss the New York novels, I shall briefly consider the Beecher sisters’ *The American Woman’s Home* (1869) as a text that sheds light on the twin pressures of reconstruction and modernity with which the New York novels grapple. An enlarged version of Beecher’s *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, *The American Woman’s Home* is a reactionary text that longs for pre-Civil War ‘innocence,’ where woman was ‘true’ and not ‘new,’ the tension with which Stowe struggles in her character of Eva.

**The American Woman’s Home versus the Anti-Home**

“‘After all, republics are on trial before the world. Our experiment is not yet two hundred years old, and we have all sorts of clouds and storms gathering,’ says Harry Henderson, the narrator of *My Wife and I*, as he reflects upon the social and political upheavals of post-war society ‘— the labour question, the foreign immigration question, the woman question, the monopoly and corporation question, all have grave aspects’” (234). The changing political, social and economic realities of the time, Stowe’s narrator suggests, threaten the stability and homogeneity of the American household: even if the Union had been saved, the republic still seems a ‘house Divided,’ a home broken by the war and by post-war events. With the publication of *The American Woman’s Home*, Stowe and Beecher sought to reconstruct this broken home, proposing the domicile of the family state as a stable site where white middle-class identity could become institutionalised. As Nicole Tonkovich argues in her introduction to *The American Woman’s Home*, ‘For the Beechers, domestic spaces and domestic places are sites in which national identity
can be planted and nurtured, where domestic acts and selfless daily habits can heal the wounds afflicting families divided by more public conflicts’ (xxiii).

But even if the Beecher sisters viewed the family state as inviolable, they feared that its whole foundation was under threat in this period. The Catholic Church, for example, with its commitment to celibacy, had ‘given its highest honors to those who forsake the family state as ordained by God’ (25). Moreover, in the ‘Appeal’ at the book’s conclusion, the sisters worried that women’s roles in newly industrialised society, such as factory jobs, wore them out to such a degree that they were not fit to reproduce, and, as a result, ‘the foreigners who supplant[ed] them in kitchen labor’ were ‘almost the only strong and healthy women to rear large families’ (342).

‘Domestic helpers from foreign shores,’ according to the domestic economists, were generally ‘thriftless, ignorant, and unscrupulous’ and in their hands the home would become ‘anything but a harbor of comfort and peace’ (342). In other words, Stowe and Beecher are anxious that the image of the family state is being distorted by foreign influence.

The sisters, then, inscribe the notion of keeping house as a racialised notion wherein one’s ability to keep house determines one’s level of humanity and civilisation, as Stowe showed so aptly in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* with her ‘home-loving’ slaves. In accordance with the Beechers’ notion of the family as a reflection of the state, they suggest that it is not only the kitchen that is in danger when domestic responsibilities are assigned to foreigners incapable of keeping house for America: ‘Thus it is that the controlling political majority of New England is passing from the educated to the children of ignorant foreigners’ (342). The Beecher sisters’ discourse suggests that the notion of the family state is an exclusive notion of the white
Protestant middle class and if exposed to diversity its house cannot stand.

Foreshadowing the concerns of eugenicists in the early twentieth century, their New England nativist discourse warns white America that it is on the edge of ‘race suicide.’

Where *The American Woman’s Home* points out the supposed dangers of the altering ethnic composition of New England, the New York novels compensate for this change by proposing a model of national identification that could preserve the white character traits ostensibly bred out of this region. The New England self, as it were, is projected onto others in these novels in a sentimental model where ‘Individual material differences are elided through models of sympathy that teach readers to view other “selves” as projections of their own and to care for others in proportion to how convincingly those others can be shown as related to oneself’ (Barnes 98). Drawing on Barnes’ argument, I suggest that in the New York novels’ sentimental politics is always also a kind of white identity politics, where sympathy’s imaginative possibilities become reduced to a projection of the white self. Presenting white individuals as mere copies of each other, Stowe is eager to fulfil sympathy’s problematic promise; namely, that the sentiments of others can become ours in the imagination; indeed, in Stowe’s narcissistic imagination, they are in fact identical. If *The American Woman’s Home* provides a practical guidebook to Beecher’s and Stowe’s model New England household, the New York Novels are its fictional sidekicks, rehearsing and performing white middle-class life for their readers: the household goods that *The American Woman’s Home* demonstrate figure as imaginative vessels for shared white sentiments in the novels.
In *The Syntax of Class: Writing Inequality in Nineteenth-Century America*, Amy Schrager Lang argues that the sentimental notion of the home emerges as a central ideology in the construction of the white middle-class in nineteenth-century America. As a democratic republic adhering to ideals of liberal individualism and mobility, writers ‘would struggle to find a social vocabulary adequate to the task of naming, ordering, interpreting, and containing the effects of class difference’ in the wake of the European revolutions of 1848 (4). Admitting the existence of class in America, Lang argues, was to admit the possibility of class warfare and to threaten the social harmony that supposedly characterised the democratic republic. Class, then, according to Lang, is rendered invisible in American discourse by an act of displacement; ‘Americans,’ she says, ‘displace the reality of class into discourses of race, gender, ethnicity, and other similarly “locked-in” categories of individual identity’ (6), that is, more easily discerned and more visible forms of difference. In particular, the middle-class home in sentimental fiction, with its emphasis on separate gender spheres, denies the reality of class, even if nothing is more class-ridden:

> But these narratives, with their attention to urban poverty, rural self-sufficiency, and fashionable hypocrisy, deny the efficacy of class in a particular way. Embracing an alternative system of classification centered in the home, domestic narratives use gender difference, rhetorically and ideologically, to order the disorderly engagements of class, to obviate the necessity of class consciousness. And insofar as domestic narratives employ the protocols of gender to harmonize differences of class in the creation of a normative middle class, they participate fully in what has been called “the sentimental fiction.” (17)

In nineteenth-century American sentimental fiction, class drama is staged as a struggle between what Lang calls ‘anti-homes,’ the homes of ‘the proletariat, the dank cellars and dirty hovels into which factory operatives and millworkers retreat at
night,’ and “homes, in the better sense,” ‘the loci of social harmony’ (12). Indeed, the home ‘in the better sense’ of the middle class is conceived as opting out of class and out of history altogether; ‘it was understood to be a place outside class, crucially, a private place,’ Lang argues, ‘in which the task of inculcating the ideals of female self-control and male self-creation essential to membership in the emerging middle class would proceed under the close supervision of the mother, insulated from the disorderly world outside’ (17). These homes, moreover, are conceptualised in an economy of racial capital; if the orderly home stands ‘as a figure for a racially homogenous and putatively classless national community from which African Americans are excluded,’ the disorderly ‘anti-home’ of the proletariat is a figure for the offstage other in blackface (Lang 12). According to Lang, whiteness is the condition for the performance of domestic middle-class life. She writes:

the literary and cultural representation of home “in the better sense” as a place in which the deficiencies of poverty can be offset by the virtues of femininity, in which social harmony is figured in the perfected relationships of middle-class domesticity, in which model women and promising young men achieve a self-possession that renders them invulnerable to “changes,” requires the unassailable, if usually unacknowledged, whiteness of its occupants. In that home, differences of wealth and power are dissipated – and racial differences consolidated – in the language of a gendered ideal shaped at the deepest levels by the ethos of the white middle class yet rhetorically sprung loose from class altogether. Whiteness, that is, is the a priori condition underpinning the possibilities – both literary and social – of domesticity. (48)

Extending Lang’s discussion of class and domesticity with a consideration of the role of sympathy in the discursive construction of white homogeneity, I suggest that My Wife and I and We and Our Neighbors as social novels are riddled with anxiety about the pressing issues of the day, issues that threaten the home ‘in the better sense.’

Anxious that social strife and difference cannot be contained in the American experiment, these novels adopt the ethos of empire and colonisation, triumphantly
celebrating a utopia in which the homogenous homes of white neighbours shall dominate the national landscape, and where the border that separates the white home and the blackened ‘anti-home’ is, like the frontier, pushed back endlessly.

**The ‘Cultural Podium’ of the Mother**

*My Wife and I*, a kind of *Bildungsroman* that chronicles the coming of age of the narrator Harry Henderson, the future husband of Eva, is a polemical text that promotes the family state and the home ‘in the better sense.’ As a native of New England and the son of a clergyman and an omniscient mother, Harry’s family could hardly be more ideal: his family home is nothing less than a prototype of Stowe’s and Beecher’s American woman’s home. The mother rules by gentle suggestions, like Rachel Halliday in the Quaker kitchen in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and ‘neatness, ‘order’ and ‘control’ characterise the domestic setting (6). Without any servants, the home does not house any members of the lower classes, and thus the social harmony of the family state is not threatened. Indeed, the work tasks normally performed by servants seem to disappear like magic under the hand of Harry’s mother, and the home appears as a self-contained unit, a domestic economy outside of a market- and a class-economy as in Lang’s analysis. ‘With a noiseless step, an almost shadowy movement,’ Harry’s mother seems like a revenant from pre-Civil War innocence returned to help reconstruct domestic order. The household is managed under her ‘perfect control’ and may be read as being subject to Foucauldian strategies of discipline and control:

> With a noiseless step, an almost shadowy movement, her hand and eye were everywhere. Her house was a miracle of neatness and order, her children of all ages and sizes under her perfect control, and the accumulations of labour
White femininity, then, is bound up with control and administration and characterised by the absence of the labour as a marker of class; the question of class is expunged by the absence of servants. Critiquing Tompkins’ position in her essay ‘Class and the Strategies of Sympathy,’ Lang suggests that sentimental power is always also embedded in class power, writing that ‘The sentimentalist’s “monumental effort to reorganise culture from the woman’s point of view” is not, that is, without its class bias; in fact, the achievement of sentimentalism depends on its reorganisation of culture from the point of view from the parlor, the “cultural podium” of the white middle-class woman’ (141). In other words, Lang argues that Stowe’s value centre is located spatially in the parlour and not in the kitchen as Tompkins suggests when she writes: ‘Stowe relocates the center of power in American life, placing it not in the government, nor in the courts of law, nor in the factories, nor in the marketplace, but in the kitchen’ (145). Tompkins, I would argue, proposes a reading of the kitchen as an institutional space that overlooks Stowe’s ambivalence towards it: the kitchen is a problematic space for Stowe, associated with labour, lower class individuals or slaves; it is a kind of anti-home within the home ‘in the better sense.’

Thus, in the setting of the home, space, as well as the gendered body, becomes racially coded and anticipates middle-class life as a white cultural practice. If slavery in Uncle Tom’s Cabin is ‘the testing ground of middle-class culture’ (Lang The Syntax of Class 84), My Wife and I and We and Our Neighbors institutionalise middle-class life. Lang suggests that Stowe ‘projects a rosy future in which the
enslaved black emerges as the free, Christian, and altogether respectable citizen of Liberia. That future is, of course, intimated from the outset by Uncle Tom’s cabin—a playhouse in which genteel life of middle-class adulthood is being rehearsed’ (80). The parlour, in the New York novels, with its absence of the dirt and blackness of labour, is the ultimate white space where middle-class life can be played out against the backdrop of the kitchen. In Uncle Tom’s Cabin, I have argued in the previous chapter, this spatial division, symbolic of class division, is repeatedly made present to Stowe’s readers, the prospective members of the white middle class. Reorganising white culture from the point of view of the parlour, as a place from which non-white others are expunged, it becomes the seat of empire I shall argue in the following. White children and not child-like slaves, like Uncle Tom and Aunt Chloe in their cabin, rehearse their roles as future guardians of the American woman’s home in Stowe’s reconstructed America.

**The Empire of ‘Child-Eden’**

In her study *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U. S. Culture*, Amy Kaplan locates the ideology of domesticity as a powerful force within the imperial project. “‘Manifest Domesticity,’” Kaplan argues, ‘turns an imperial nation into a home by producing and colonizing specters of the foreign that lurk inside and outside its ever-shifting borders’ (50). Drawing on the work of Kaplan and historian Mary Ryan, I argue that Stowe’s New York novels are informed by the ethos of empire and that they aim to expand and the fix the borders of white domestic space through the colonisation of the members of the ‘anti-home.’ The novels expose elaborate fears of the foreign, and their attempts to discipline and manage its unsettling potential is a
key cultural process in the narrative development; in short, how to keep the kitchen and the parlour apart.

In the first part of *My Wife and I*, readers are subjected to this cultural process, where the institution of white middle-class life is ‘in rehearsal,’ to use Lang’s phrase (*The Syntax of Class* 17). Like Aunt Chloe and Uncle Tom in their cabin, which Lang describes as a playhouse, Harry and his ‘child-wife’ (5) practice middle-class life in their ‘child-Eden’ (16):

> We made ourselves a house under a great button-ball tree…We used a clean pocket-handkerchief for a table-cloth; and Susie was wont to set our meals with great order, making plates and dishes out of the button-ball leaves. Under her direction also, I fitted up our house with a pantry, and a small room where we used to play wash dishes, and set away what was left of our meals…Susie was fond of ornamentation, and stuck bouquets of golden-rod and aster around in our best room, and there we received company, and had select society come to see us. Susie brought her doll to dwell in this establishment, and I made her a bedroom and a little bed of milkweed-silk to lie on. We put her to bed and tucked her up when we went into school – not without comprehension that those savages, the big boys, might visit our Eden with devastation…Susie rolled her nursling in a napkin and took her safely into school, and laid her away in a corner of her desk, while the dreadful big boys were having their yelling war-whoop and carnival outside. (11-12)

Susie’s and Harry’s ‘house’ is characterised, like Harry’s mother’s, by order and cleanliness. This idyllic ‘child-Eden’ foreshadows Harry’s ideal domestic establishment in New York, and Harry and Susie represent the kind of prospective middle-class citizens that will shape the future of the nation in the form of a home ‘in the better sense.’ The depiction of Harry’s and Susie’s playhouse, nevertheless, is riddled with anxiety about the disrupting force of the unruly children of the empire underscored by a secluded reference to the fall. This scene echoes the scene in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in which Topsy, envisioned as a savage Indian, turns Miss Ophelia’s New England order into a scene of carnival. Described as ‘savages,’ the ‘big boys
[who] might visit’ Harry’s and Susie’s ‘Eden with devastation’ (12), are dissociated from Christian civilization and are thus othered and might be seen as agents of the kinds of unofficial carnivalesque culture that Bakhtin sees as confronting the dominant cultural practices. Harry’s and Susie’s playhouse is the antithesis of the ‘carnival outside,’ where ‘the war-whoop’ of ‘the dreadful big boys’ (12) threatens the social harmony of the official culture. By presenting savages and carnival as the antithesis of ‘select society,’ Stowe establishes a stark contrast between an emerging white Protestant middle class and uncivilised racial and religious others, as The American Woman’s Home does. In this way, Stowe’s household is revealed as being vulnerable to diversity, haunted by the shadow of the ‘anti-home’ and by canivalesque laughter.

The integrity of the white woman is figured as a bulwark against the disorderly anti-home and underlies the integrity of the white middle class in Stowe’s logic. The fair Susie, who, like little Eva in Uncle Tom’s Cabin, always wears white, stands as a figure for an untainted white domestic space, representing the conflation of femininity, whiteness, cleanliness, and domesticity:

Then we used to play in the barn together. We hunted for hens’ eggs, and I dived under the barn to dark places where she dared not go, and climbed up to high places over the hay-mow where she trembled to behold me – bringing stores of eggs, which she received in her clean white apron.

This daintiness of outfit excited my constant admiration...little Susie always appeared to me fresh and fine and untumbled; she never dirtied her hands or soiled her dress. Like a true little woman, she seemed to have nerves through all her clothes that kept them in order...she somehow picked her way out bright and unsoiled. (13)

This scene in the barn is a microcosm of the imperial encounter as Harry's character symbolises white male imperial spirit and little Susie is cast in the role of the female civiliser. Indeed, Susie’s sensibility is so pronounced that ‘she seem[s] to have
nerves through all her clothes that kept them in order’ (13). This vivid image of Susie’s physique also erases any sexual connotations and excess; her clothes are understood as part of her very physique, and therefore she cannot be conceived as naked unlike Topsy. Her flesh denied, Susie transcends her body and represents the ultimate ‘true little [white] woman’ (13).

In Harry’s and Susie’s ‘child-Eden,’ then, space is defined by gender and colour; Harry enters the ‘dark places’ of the ‘anti-home,’ where Susie as a ‘true little woman’ dares not go, pushing the frontier back (13). This social differentiation is further emphasised by the fact that the dark places are located under the building, whereas Susie’s safe domestic space is located in ‘high places’ – a space where her ‘clean white apron’ will not contract dirt (13). A dark and dirty underworld is contrasted with white womanhood and suggests that cleanliness is the precondition for whiteness, as I argued with reference to Dyer’s work in chapter three. In 1885 Henry Ward Beecher would figure in an advertisement for Pears Soap that precisely captures his sister’s intertwined discourse of whiteness, cleanliness, and spirituality. Appealing to white sensibilities, Beecher proclaimed “‘If Cleanliness is next to Godliness, then surely SOAP is a means of GRACE’” (qtd. in Lears *Fables of Abundance* 143-44). Generally, many soap ads promised that imperial subjects, like Native Americans, could be whitewashed and restored to some state of grace if they used their particular product. Reading like an ad for soap, little Susie, like little Eva, is the embodiment of grace; indeed, Susie’s conscience, her morality, as it were, is materialised in her clean dress: ‘Being an only darling, she herself was brought up in the strictest ways in which little feet could go; and the nicety of her conscience was as unsullied as that of her dress’ (22). Susie’s clean dress, like her ‘fair complexion’
(14) and her ‘cheeks and neck’ which are ‘like wax’ (9), is to be understood as a window to her soul and signifies her white superiority and her status as an emblem of the integrity of the middle-class home. Susie’s purity and beauty prompt Harry to identify her with the white flower, the daisy: ‘I used to call her Daisy when we were by ourselves, because she seemed to me so neat and trim and pure, and wore a little flat hat on Sundays just like a daisy’ (19). Stowe’s discourse, then, participates in a supposedly transparent aesthetic that Lears defines as ‘a sentimental aesthetic of “sincere” fashion, wherein the clothes and cosmetics were valued primarily for the capacity to reveal the inner soul of the wearer’ (Fables of Abundance 84).

And if Susie becomes Daisy, she also becomes the white New England landscape. Stowe personifies the daisied meadow as a mother figure; the meadow behind Harry’s mother’s house is ‘white with daisies’ (16) and stands for the ideal white space, ‘a secure world of joy’ (17). Indeed, ‘the daisied meadow receive[s] [Harry and Susie] to her motherly bosom’ (17). The feminine body and the landscape, then, are conflated and have become interchangeable, suggesting that notions of race are not only notions of bodies but always also notions of space. Whiteness is bound up with the landscape in Stowe’s rhetoric; the climate and the character of the New England landscape indicate white virtues. She writes, ‘The cold mountain air and simple habits of New England country life are largely a preventive of open immorality; but there is another temptation which besets the boy, against which the womanly ideal is the best shield – the temptation to vulgarity and obscenity’ (37). White identity, as projected onto the New England landscape, is characterised by self-control, not giving in to temptation, or, as Dyer suggests, the ability to transcend one’s body. Blackness, on the other hand, signifies lack of self-mastery and the
promiscuous flesh, attributes which are mapped onto St. Clare’s oriental New Orleans and onto the character of Topsy in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Establishing an imaginative relationship to regional locations, Stowe sets them up as parameters for identification or rejection.

As a climactic conclusion to Harry’s and little Susie’s play house scenario, Susie passes away, and Stowe once again employs the trope of the dying, angelic Victorian child. The New York novels also repeat *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*’s ideal of whiteness that is understood in terms of the Cartesian mind and body divide, a divide that is conflated in the African race in that novel:

> My mother was one of that class of women whose power on earth seems to be only greater for being a spiritual and invisible one. The control of such women over men is like that of the soul over the body. The body is visible, forceful, obtrusive, self-asserting; the soul invisible, sensitive, yet with a subtle and vital power which constantly gains control and holds every inch that it gains. (33)

The culmination of this power is the death of a saintly female figure in Stowe’s literary imagination. Susie’s death, like little Eva’s, is climactic because it is the ultimate realisation of whites’ potential to transcend the physical body and signifies, as Dyer puts it, ‘their closeness to the pure spirit that was made flesh in Jesus’ (24). And, to Stowe, as Tompkins argues, ‘dying is the supreme form of heroism…death is the equivalent not of defeat but of victory; it brings an access of power, not a loss of it’ (127). But if Tompkins’ argument ignores the racial implications of little Eva’s death, ‘most often cited as the epitome of Victorian sentimentalism’ (Tompkins 127), the death of Susie reminds us that transcendence is a white matter. When Harry’s mother tells her sorrowful son about Susie’s death, she indulges in a fantasy in which the white female self has become angelic: ‘She sat down gently by my bed one night
and talked with me of heaven, and the brightness and beauty there, and told me that little Susie was now a fair white angel’ (27). Harry, in return, adopts this angelic self as his alter ego; he imagines Susie as a ‘shadow-wife,’ a ‘spiritual presence’ with ‘power to bless, to guide, to sustain and console’ (30), who ‘rose like a white, pure mist from that little grave. She formed herself like a cloud-maiden from the rain and dew of those first tears’ (30). Little Susie has become Harry’s conscience.

**Policing the Modern Self**

The notion of female conscience as a controlling force is at the crux of *My Wife and I*. If Stowe imagined that little Eva would become the nation’s alter ego in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, her representations of a ‘child-wife’ and a ‘shadow-wife’ in *My Wife and I* are a continuation of such an idea. I want to suggest that Stowe’s agents of policing can be understood as part of ‘the Victorian extension of self-control’ which, according to Lears, ‘meant the triumph of a modern superego, more thoroughly internalized, more systematically demanding than any of its historic predecessors’ (*No Place of Grace* 13). I argue that the female figures mentioned here serve a regulatory function similar to Smith’s impartial spectator, that is, the judge who secures the harmony of polite society. Harry’s sentiments are controlled by his mother, as they are later by his ‘shadow-wife’ and eventually by his real-life wife, Eva.

‘The power of such women over our sex is essentially the service rendered us in forming our ideal,’ Harry says, ‘and it was by my mother’s influence that the ideal guardian, the “shadow-wife,” was formed, that guided me through my youth’ (37). As in Smith’s model of the dualistic self, Harry’s shadow-wife constitutes his better
self whose approval should be sought: ‘My shadow-wife grew up by my side under my mother’s creative touch...She was to be to me adviser, friend, inspirer, charmer...Gradually, she became to me a controlling power...for her sake I abjured intimacies that I felt she could not approve’ (39). This policing of the self is part of sympathy’s homogenising operation and ultimately seeks to render individual and social differentiation invisible. Guidance and influence in the New York novels are key components in this process of unothering others, and Stowe is confident that imaginative sympathy can make the sentiments of others known to us. If she expressed epistemological doubts with the publication of *A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, she does not entertain such feelings of doubts when depicting the homogenous community of Harry’s mother’s New England; where she critiqued the New England notion of “‘Our Folks’” in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, it has become her norm in a time of reconstruction. Similar to the Smithian scenario, where the spectator ‘enter[s] as it were into his [the object of suffering] body, and become[s] in some measure the same person with him’ (*TMS* 9), Harry adopts his mother’s sensations as if they were transparent: ‘In the closeness of my communion with her I seemed to see through her eyes and feel through her nerves, so that at last a passage in a book or a sentiment uttered always suggested the idea of what she would think of it’ (38). For Stowe there is no epistemological difficulty involved in this ideal exchange of sentiments; the case of others can be adopted and thus become known.

Harry’s mother, as an impartial spectator figure, described as an ‘administrative power’ (35), is the intermediary between subjectivities who can negotiate difference into commonality and thus ensure harmony:

In the midst of our large family, of different ages, of vigorous growth, of great individuality and forcefulness of expression, my mother’s was the
administrative power. My father habitually referred everything to her, and leaned on her advice with a childlike dependence. She read the character of each; she mediated between opposing natures; she translated the dialect of different sorts of spirits, to each other. In a family of young children, there is a chance for every sort and variety of natures; and for natures whose modes of feeling are as foreign to each other, as those of the French and the English. It needs a common interpreter, who understands every dialect of the soul, thus to translate differences of individuality into a common language of love.

(35)

Stowe invites us to read the family as the state, claiming that the ‘state is nothing more nor less than a collection of families’ (35). If we read the notion of the family in the above quotation as synonymous with the state, different ‘modes of feeling’ are a threat to the stability of the state, as Beecher argued in her 1837 essay. Comparing different natures with the opposing sentiments of the French and the English, Stowe stresses the dangers involved if citizens of a state are too diverse. ‘Feeling right,’ then, as Stowe famously phrased her sentimental politics in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, is always a question of feeling the same. Barnes describes this politics as a kind of ‘political correctness’ that is not radical, as Tompkins has argued, but rather ‘ultra-conservative’: ‘Stowe’s version of political correctness – epitomized in her call for readers to “feel right” by sympathizing with others – turns out to be an ultra-conservative move. Although, according to Stowe, right feeling engenders right politics, the rightness of both is contingent upon how similar to oneself others can be made to appear’ (16). This is nowhere more apparent than in the quoted example above, where ‘differences of individuality’ [are translated] into a common language.’

Even if it is phrased in the language of feeling, this discourse suggests such an ‘ultra-conservative move’ that Barnes identifies:

> The state, at this very day, needs an influence like what I remember our mother’s to have been...it needs a divining power, by which different sections and different races can be interpreted to each other, and blended together in
love – it needs an educating power, by which its immature children may be trained in virtue – it needs a loving and redeeming power, by which its erring and criminal children may be borne with, and led back to virtue. (35-36)

The children of the ‘anti-home,’ ‘immature’ and ‘criminal,’ must be made similar enough to the virtuous children of the home ‘in the better sense,’ and become integrated into a homogenous middle class. The politics of mother-influence subsume class and race, so that the ‘different sections and different races’ can become ‘blended together’ and rendered invisible. Merish notes that, ‘sympathy can seem to neutralize the relations of political inequality it upholds; indeed, inequities structured into sympathetic identification are rendered invisible in theological and philosophical texts where sympathy is elevated into an inherent moral good’ (3-4).

Power relations and social inequalities within sympathy as a process of interpellation, then, are made to appear invisible, just as Harry’s mother’s power is described as an ‘invisible one’ (33), securing the promise of sentimental democracy. When the action of *My Wife and I* is moved from rural New England to urban New York, this promise stands its ultimate test.

**Familiar Strangers**

When Harry moves to New York, he is met with the most fearful scenario in sentimental fiction: strangers who withhold sympathy and therefore remain unknown. Harry, who comes ‘into New York a stranger’ (115), is terrified by the spectacle of the unfamiliar masses seemingly out of control:

I must confess that my first emotion in making my way about the streets of New York, before I had associated them with any intimacy of acquaintances, was a vague sort of terror, such as one would feel at being jostled among cannibals, who, on a reasonable provocation, wouldn’t hesitate to skin him and pick his bones. There was such a driving, merciless, fierce “take-care-of-yourself, and devil take the hindmost” air, even to the drays and omnibuses
and hackmen, that I had somewhat the feeling of being in an unregulated menagerie, not knowing what wild beast might spring upon me. (116)

Located in the streets and not the home, Harry is ‘outside’ the comfort zone of sentimental fiction: ‘inside was being established as the realm of fulfilment and emotional satisfaction’ in domestic ideology (Merish 141). Like the savage boys who threaten the idyll of Harry and Susie’s ‘child-Eden,’ the strangers of New York are described as ‘cannibals’ in ‘an unregulated menagerie’ reminiscent of the ‘carnival outside’ in the playhouse scenario. The prospect of withheld sympathy is imagined by Stowe as a kind of social death in this urban tumult; if sympathy is not cultivated, a place ceases to be civilised and regresses to a savage stage. Indeed, the savageness of the streets of New York is not dissimilar to the first savage state of society that Smith portrayed so paradoxically in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. This scene of the American metropolis also echoes the encounter of Mackenzie’s eighteenth-century man of feeling with urban London, where he is unable to interpret the proliferating scenarios and faces to which he is exposed. As Lears puts it,

> It was not only the anonymity, the sense of being a speck in an amorphous mass of similar specks, but also the mobility, the lack of sustained face-to-face knowledge of one’s neighbors and acquaintances, that made for feelings of incoherence. As society became more urban, more anonymous, what Walt Whitman called “the terrible doubt of appearances” became more widespread. (*Fables of Abundance* 55)

Stowe, the self-assured phrenologist from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, is at loss in this urban scene where faces cannot be read, and in the remainder of *My Wife and I* and in *We and Our Neighbors* the plot is constructed in such a way that her protagonists acquire ‘face-to-face knowledge of [their] neighbors,’ diminishing the epistemological gaps between characters, and as a result, establishing feelings of social coherence.

A forlorn Harry then seeks the company of like-minded strangers in the
sympathetic, civilised community of the church: ‘It was a congregation largely made up of young men, who, like myself, were strangers, away from home and friends, and whose hearts, touched and warmed by the familiar sounds, seemed to send forth magnetic odours like the interlocked pine-trees under the warm sunshine of a June day’ (118). If the streets of New York represent a nightmare scenario in sentimental fiction, this scenario in the church is a sentimentalist’s dream: strangers who turn out to be essentially familiar. The scene in the church exposes the harmonising effects of sympathy; the hearts of familiar strangers are connected by ‘magnetic odours’ like the ‘Magnetic Daguerreotypes,’ I discussed in the previous chapter, which render the consciousness of the sitter ever present to the beholder, interlocking the subjectivities of depicted subject and the viewer in a state of perfect sympathy. The churchgoers’ hearts, which ‘seemed to send forth magnetic odours like the interlocked pine-trees,’ speak of a similar sense of interlocked subjectivity that is enabled by an imaginative relationship to New England. As little Susie was an impersonation of the daisied meadow, the sentiments of the churchgoers are invested in the landscape of New England. And as the church, to Harry, resembles his mother’s home, he assigns to the unknown churchgoers the roles of family members:

In like manner I found an oasis in the hot and hurried course of my week-day life, by dropping in to the weekly prayer-meeting. The large, bright, pleasant room seemed so social and home-like, the rows of cheerful, well-dressed, thoughtful people, seemed, even before I knew one of them, fatherly, motherly, brotherly, and sisterly, as they joined with the piano in familiar hymn-singing, while the pastor sat among them as a father in his family, and easy social conversation went on with regard to the various methods and aspects of the practical religious life. (118-19 emphasis in the original)

Harry thus constructs others in his own image and in the image of the New England family state, and like the narrator in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, he teaches readers to view others as versions of oneself. As Barnes argues, ‘Stowe’s novel perpetuates a
tradition of constructing sympathy as a narcissistic model of projection and rejection: claiming that individuals are alike under the skin, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* makes diversity virtually unrepresentable, reinforcing the idea of humanity as dependent upon familiarity’ (92).

In the tumult of post-war society, Harry, as a first-person narrator, is the character who presents events according to this tradition of narcissistic sympathy. Harry makes threatening scenes, like that of the cannibalistic strangers of New York, safe and recognisable, like that of the familial church community. As Kaplan has argued in *The Social Construction of American Realism*, the project of realism is to render safe and familiar the heterogeneous space. Alice C. Crozier suggests that Harry represents the prototype of a new kind of American narrator, who the likes of Howells and James would develop, the observer ‘who both involves himself in the action and interprets it to the reader’ (190). Crozier argues that this observer-narrator makes sense of the many ‘alien scene[s]’ that the nineteenth-century reader would encounter either as a tourist in Europe or at home exposed to ‘the great spectacle of American diversity’ in the metropolis (191). Responding to such a scenario of dividedness, ‘The first-person narrator is not only an intermediary between the reader and the world of the novel; he is also a unifying thread, binding together the several scenes and characters he visits into a single fictional action. Henderson is an integrating figure’ (Crozier 191). Stowe uses the very physical image of a galvanic battery, similar to the image of ‘magnetic odours’ touched upon above, to stress Harry’s ability to unite characters who are poles apart:

There are people that cannot understand each other without an interpreter, and it is not unfrequently easier for men and women to speak confidently to each other than to their own sex. There are certain aspects in which each sex is sure of more comprehension than from its own. I served, in this case, as the
connecting wire of the galvanic battery to pass the spark of sympathetic comprehension between these two natures. (111)

I extend Crozier’s position by suggesting that Harry serves not only the role of an interpreter, he is also a judge, unlike James in this respect, like Smith’s impartial spectator, who regulates and sets the standard for public opinion. Harry is the public counterpart to the female figures in the novel; if they are imagined to be the nation’s better half, they would compromise the family state by undertaking a more public function. Acknowledging the newspaper as an increasingly powerful cultural space to advocate ideas, Stowe lets her hero, when it cannot be a heroine, forfeit his preordained role as a minister in favour of that of a reporter: ‘I wanted the anonymous pulpit of the editor to speak in, the opportunity of being the daily invisible companion and counsellor of thousands about their daily paths’ (122). Harry’s discourse here, emphasising the ‘anonymous’ and ‘invisible’ nature of sentimental power and influence, reiterates Stowe’s discourse of sympathy as one masked by transparency. Bordering on a critique, Stowe lets her narrator imagine himself in the hubristic position of serving as an impartial spectator figure to ‘thousands’ (122), thereby indicating that God has left the church for the pressroom. But if Stowe is uneasy about the power of the press and its reporters, it is nevertheless a power that cannot be ignored. Harry’s uncle, who serves as an authoritative counsellor to the young members of the family, explains the power of the press to influence the masses to an extent that is even competing with that of the novel:

“A very great power, Harry,” said my uncle; “and getting to be in our day a tremendous power, a power far outdoing that of the pulpit, and that of books. This constant daily self-asserting literature of newspapers and periodicals is acting on us tremendously for good or ill. It has access to us at all hours, and
In the developing consumer culture Stowe was well aware that power and influence, the very ambivalent discourses of sentimental fiction, now lay in the hands of the press and that women were to be the main consumers of the new periodicals. In ‘An Appeal’ in The American Woman’s Home, Beecher and Stowe knew that influence had to be channelled through this medium in order to be powerful. ‘Every woman who wishes to aid in this effort for the safety and elevation of our sex can do so by promoting the sale of this work’ (343), they write, urging ‘Ladies who write for the press, and all those who have influence with editors,’ to ‘aid by directing general attention to this effect’ (344). The female consumer was well in the making by the time the New York novels were published, and Stowe expresses her promises and pitfalls through the character of Eva to which I now turn.

‘The Girl of Our Period’

If mother-influence is at the heart of My Wife and I as an invisible but omniscient power, Stowe is nevertheless uneasy about women’s future role in America. At an early stage of My Wife and I, Harry wonders if the organisation of the family state should not be the model for the nation state: ‘It has often seemed to me a fair question, on a review of the way my mother ruled in our family, whether the politics of the ideal state in a millennial community, should not be one equally pervaded by mother-influences’ (35). But just as Stowe briefly flirts with a utopian matriarchy in the form of the Quaker kitchen in Uncle Tom’s Cabin and capitulates to white male hegemony in the form of George Shelby at the end, My Wife and I likewise embraces...
benevolent patriarchy. This position is best exemplified by Harry’s mother’s patronising piece of advice to her young son who is heartbroken that he cannot marry his fair playmate Susie at the age of seven: ‘But you must try and learn fast, and become a good strong man, so that you can take care of a little wife’ (16).

‘Harry Henderson’s History,’ which is the subtitle of My Wife and I, is essentially encapsulated in the above quotation; it is the story of the development of a benevolent patriarch made by the influence of women. Repeating her argument from texts like Uncle Tom’s Cabin and from her 1854 ‘Appeal to Women of the Free States’ that if mothers feel right their sons will carry out their sentimental politics, Stowe proposes a protective rather than a proto-feminist discourse on ‘the woman question.’ If George Shelby in Uncle Tom’s Cabin represents white leadership, Harry fulfils a similar function in My Wife and I. Echoing George’s assurance to Uncle Tom, ‘I’ll build your house all over, and you shall have a room for a parlor with a carpet on it, when I’m a man’ (99), Harry promises his ‘child-wife’ that he shall build her house: ‘I’m going to ride on horseback and go to mill, and go all round on errands, so I shall get to be a man fast; and when I get to be a man I’ll build a house all on purpose for you and me – I’ll build it all myself; it shall have a parlour and a dining-room, and kitchen and bedroom, and well-room, and chambers’” (20).

Moreover, Harry, like George, is portrayed as a character ruled by mother-influences. Both Harry and George have been redeemed by the deaths of Susie and Uncle Tom respectively. Witnessing the death of a saintly person is the most didactic experience in Stowe’s literary universe, and therefore her substitute matriarchs come out of the experience considerably better and wiser characters; in short, they become ‘true men.’ As feminine domestically-oriented characters, George and Harry, then, are
stripped of destructive male desire, symbolised by the Legree plantation in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, but they are also attributed enterprise and accomplishment – the defining features of white men in Stowe’s imagination. As Dyer puts it, ‘In *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe expresses very clearly and unembarrassedly what she takes to be the nature of white men: they are, a word she uses repeatedly, ‘enterprising’. From this flows their daring (another favoured term) and steadfastness, their capacity to organise, their hardness and also their rapacity’ (31).

As a first person narrator and as a newspaper editor, Harry organises and interprets events for Stowe’s readership and for the reading public in the world of the novel. Harry, an enterprising young man, represents the possibility of mobility in American society: ‘To be sure my foot was on the lowest round of the ladder, but it was on the ladder, and I meant to climb’ (114). Individual mobility is not a relevant ideal to the women in the novel; when the female characters in the novel speak in the first person, they do so in private letters and are thus removed from public agency. Female identity, in other words, is always asserted in private and is seen as having no influence on the course of social events that Harry as a public voice reports to readers. Half way through *My Wife and I*, Stowe introduces the epistolary form to give a private voice to Harry’s future wife, Eva, and his sister-in-law, Ida, the daughters of a ‘true American man’ (340), a nouveau riche, who has risen from the hard life on a New England farm to the fashionable life of a stock broker in New York. But as a model of ‘incorruptible integrity’ (340), Mr van Arsdel is still dedicated to the customs of New England and has furnished his favourite room ‘like the sitting-room of an old New England farm-house’ (174). If Eva’s father represents the transfer of New England sensibilities to the city, Eva, when she marries Harry,
represents a transition from aristocracy to middle class, that is, supposedly, a transition from elitism to mediocrity. At a time where the ‘woman question’ is being debated and where the American economy is radically changing into a capitalist system, the van Arsdel daughters’ letters are concerned with their sense of identity in this developing culture from which they are essentially isolated. In *We and Our Neighbours*, the van Arsdel daughters, as reinstated members of a consuming middle class, will reconnect with society through goods as bearers of shared social sentiments.

The sisters’ epistles constitute the chapter entitled ‘The Girl of Our Period’ (149), a title that only bears relevance to Eva, a disillusioned society belle. Ida, on the other hand, is anything but ‘the girl of the period’; she is dedicated a chapter called ‘The Young Lady Philosopher’ (174) and seeks to revolutionise the professional prospects for women. Ida works for her father as a clerk in order to save money to study medicine in France and open up that profession to women. The family and its circles are appalled at this prospect: ‘To work embroidery, go to parties, entertain idlers, and wait to be chosen in marriage, seemed to a girl who had spent six years in earnest study a most lame and impotent conclusion to all that effort; and when Ida van Arsdel declared her resolution to devote herself to professional studies, Aunt Maria’s indignation and disgust is not to be described’ (200). Ida answers back with pure American rhetoric. She writes to her old mentor thus:

> They do not try to control me, or enslave me. Why? Because I made my declaration of independence, and planted my guns, and got ready for war. This is dreadfully unamiable, but it did the thing; it secured peace; I am let alone. I am allowed my freedom, but everybody interferes with Eva. She is conquered territory – has no rights that anybody is bound to respect. It provokes me. (160)
Compared to a ‘Scottish heroine’ (174) and associated with the New England puritans, Ida, it appears, would be the candidate to lead America into the millennium. Detesting fashion and flattery, Ida is the anti-thesis of the mindless, selfish belle Lillie Ellis, a victim of fashion-slavery, who is an offence to New England living in Pink and White Tyranny (1871), the first of Stowe’s New York novels. Indeed, Ida’s description of her sister could easily be mistaken for a description of Lillie:

> Eva, poor child, wears down her health and strength with night after night in society, and spends all her money on dress; doing no earthly thing for any living creature, except in the pleasure-giving way, like a bird or a flower; and then is shocked and worried about me because I read scientific works on Sunday.

> I make conscience of good health, early hours, thick shoes, and mental and bodily drill, and subjection. Please God, I mean to do something worthy a Christian woman before I die, and to open a path through which weaker women shall out of this morass of fashion-slavery and subjection, where they flounder now. (161)

Described as nothing less than a Franklinesque figure, one would imagine that Stowe would hail Ida as a kind of founding mother in whose image a new generation of American women should be moulded. But she does nothing of the kind; when Ida is finally in France, she is virtually written out of the narrative and has no function in the sequel, We and Our Neighbors. As Lisa MacFarlane puts it, ‘The professional woman, it seems, must be in exile’ (290). Indeed, Ida’s double, Harry’s cousin, Caroline, who joins Ida in France for the study of medicine, realises that her uncle was right after all when he said, ‘The domestic sphere of wife and mother to which woman is called, is divine and god-like; it is sacred, and solemn, and no woman can go higher than that; and anything else to which she devotes herself falls infinitely below it’ (104-5).
Caroline, like Ida, has chapters dedicated to her in which she eloquently argues for her right to be an individual and to pursue a career as opposed to embracing the family state: ‘“A woman’s lot! and what is that, pray? to sit with folded hands and see life drifting by – to be a mere nullity, and endure to have my good friends pat me on the back, and think that I am a bright and shining light of contentment in woman’s sphere?”’ (93). Discussing her case with Harry, who is embarking on the grand tour to Europe after his graduation from college, Caroline declares her independence: ‘I don’t want to wait for a husband to make me a position. I want to make one for myself. I don’t want to take a husband’s money, I want my own. You have individual ideas of life, you want to work them out – so have I; you are expected to and encouraged to work them out independently, while I am forbidden’ (95). But Caroline, who has been in love with Bolton, a sensitive recovering alcoholic, whom critics read as a gloss for Stowe’s son Fred, since she was a young girl, acknowledges the truth of the doctrine of the family state when she renews her acquaintance with him. Lacking enthusiasm for her medical studies and longing for the domestic sphere, she writes to Eva regretfully in *We and Our Neighbors*: ‘Such a life as you two lead, such a home as your home, is worth a thousand “careers” that dazzle ambition. Send us more letters, journals, of all your pretty, lovely home life, and let me warm myself in the glow of your fireside’ (81). In conformity with the novel’s politics, Caroline abandons the ideas of individuality and independence of the ‘new woman,’ and, in the end, she becomes a ‘true woman’ converting Bolton, who, in turn, becomes integrated into the home in the ‘better sense.’ As we can infer from Caroline’s words and actions, it is Eva and not Ida who is going to lead America into the millennium; indeed, in *We and Our Neighbors* readers are not
exposed to Ida’s letters, whereas Caroline’s are quoted at length. Eva and Harry’s home becomes the prototype of the American woman’s home, while Ida’s ways, albeit admirable, are not set up as a model for imitation. One may argue that it is a rather curious choice that Eva who is a kind of American loafer, not unlike the infamous Lillie, gets valued over her sister who is self-made and self-reliant and perhaps even an American scholar. But as Douglas notes, ‘Stowe was much too intelligent not to have doubts about her new fashionable heroine…But if Lillie represents Stowe’s fears about the modish modern girl, Eva suggests her hopes’ (The Feminization of American Culture 250-51).

**A Weightless Heroine**

When first introduced to Eva van Arsdel through her letter to her former teacher in *My Wife and I*, which I read as a reactionary text and in that sense anti-modern, she sums up not only her character but also the plot of *We and Our Neighbors*: ‘I am an idler, the only thing that I am good for is that I help to adorn a house for the entertainment of idlers; that is about all’ (150). Completely powerless and without any purpose in life, Eva has no agency and no sense of self and her character speaks of ‘a weightless culture of material comfort and spiritual blandness’ (Lears No Place of Grace 32): ‘I can desire, but I cannot do,’ she says, ‘I am weak and irresolute. People can talk me round, and do anything with me, and I cannot help myself’ (*MWI* 153). Eva, as Douglas argues, ‘represents the proto-consumer mentality; formed by what are essentially advertising techniques, she is responsive to their pressure and skilled at their exercise’ (*The Feminization of American Literature* 68). Considering various marriage offers, Eva reduces her prospective husbands to goods for sale, just
as she herself is a product to be sold: ‘I like to feel that I may have the prize of the season – the greatest offer in the market. I know I am envied, and, oh, dear me! though it’s naughty, yet one does like to be envied’ (152). Admitting her weakness and dependence, Eva longs for a second self to elevate her; ‘I wish there was somebody that could strengthen me, and help me to be my better self’ (155). Eva’s redemption, of course, lies in her marriage to Harry, or as her sister Ida puts it, ‘Her only chance of escape and salvation is to marry a true man’ (159).

Harry makes Eva realise, as Caroline does after her, that her true vocation lies in being the head of the family state. As Crozier writes about the New York novels:

As a result of the failure of the society, including women, to recognize the sanctity of home and the proper role of women therein as the authors and models of virtue and moral strength, women feel undervalued and patronized. Consequently they take to “fashion-slavery” in defense of their femininity against the attacks of those who say they are, or ought to be, like men. These women should be made to see the true nobility of their function and influence in the home. (183)

Harry convinces the frustrated belle that in the administration of the family state lies true heroism, echoing the Beecher sisters’ sentiments in *The American Woman’s Home*: ‘He said that woman’s speciality was to idealise life by shedding a noble spirit upon its ordinary trifles’ (194). Harry teaches Eva, as little Susie has taught him, that the only power for a woman is sentimental power and that the true female self can only be asserted and contained within the home. Domesticity, then, offers Eva a place where her identity can become stabilised. In an era where Darwin’s theories challenge the church and where the nature of womanhood is being debated, Eva fears that there are no parameters within which she can define her weightless self:
Now-a-days there are so many things said that one doesn’t know what to think of; so many things disputed that one has always supposed to be true; such a perfectly fatiguing rush of ideas and assertions and new ways, that for my part I am glad to fall back on something old and established, that I feel sure isn’t going to melt away into mist before to-morrow. (206)

Unable to cope with modernity, Eva seeks to opt out of history in order to avoid the social concerns of the day, by regarding the church, ‘old and established’ (206) as she describes it, as isolated from the disorderly world outside, like the middle-class home in Lang’s analysis: ‘I fly back from this sort of thing, like a frightened bird, and take refuge in the Church – there is something fixed, positive, and definite, that has stood the test of time; it is noble and dignified, and I abide by that’ (207). In other words, the ultimate threat to Eva’s personhood is change and diversity characteristic of modernity. Longing for ‘visible unity’ (208), she becomes disillusioned when discussing with Ida’s radical friends, because ‘No two of them seem to believe alike on any subject…and as there is no standard with them, of course there is nothing settled. You feel as if life was built on water, and everything was rocking and tilting till you are quite dizzy’ (207). Modernity with its unsettling potential is problematic for My Wife and I as a text that works to secure the grounds for consensus and affinity.

Ida’s friends may be radical, but the character of Ida does not ultimately shake the ground underneath the family state as she does not represent a blueprint for the ‘new woman.’ Having already sanctioned her sister’s marriage, she also insists on essential gender attributes, claiming that ‘women are different from men, and have altogether a different class of feelings and wants and necessities’ (239). Based on these essential differences, Ida argues that an alteration of women’s social and legal position should not trigger a change in gender behaviour:
There really is not the slightest reason why a woman should cease to be a woman because she chooses to be independent and pursue a self-supporting career. And claiming a right to dispense with womanly decorums and act like a man is just as ridiculous as it would be for a man to claim the right to wear women’s clothes. Even if we supposed that society were so altered as to give to woman every legal and every social right that man has; and if all the customs of society should allow her to do the utmost that she can for herself in the way of self-support, still, women will be relatively weaker than men, and there will be the same propriety in their being treated with consideration and delicacy and gentleness that there is now. (234)

Ida’s politics, then, does not subvert the notion of separate gender spheres, but rather reinforce it. Moreover, Ida represents no immediate danger, because she does not promote a ‘destructive revolution’ (238), as she phrases it, but imagines that women’s rights will come by ‘gradual evolution’ (238). Indeed, if one is too radical one ceases to be a woman according to Ida. Launching an attack on the suffrage movement, she suggests that the radical reformer Miss Audacia Dangyreyes, a revengeful parodic portrait of Victoria Woodhull, the promoter of ‘free love’ who exposed the adultery of Stowe’s favourite brother Henry Ward Beecher, has become unsexed: “I think,” said Ida, “there is not sufficient resemblance to a real woman in her to make much trouble on her account”’ (240). Following Harry, women who are not ‘true women,’ in fact, undermine the whole women’s movement: ‘for the main argument for proposing it was to introduce into politics that superior delicacy and purity which women manifest in family life. But if women are going to be less careful about delicacy and decorum and family purity than men are, the quagmire of politics, foul enough, will become putrid’ (243). To Stowe, as argued above, the integrity of the family state depends on the notion of the ‘true woman,’ and therefore the ultimate threat to the home is not savage big boys and the cannibalistic strangers of New York, but rather women who cease to be women. But while Ida’s discourse is assuring, it also gestures towards the uncomfortable notion that gender is
performative. Referring to men who wear women’s clothes and to women who act like men in turn, Ida enters dangerous territory in a novel that locates its ethos in the sanctity of women as having essential attributes.

But if Ida casts doubt on accepted gender ideologies, Eva accepts them without reservations. And as the New York novels cast Eva as the lead, readers are invited to assign more authority to Eva’s words than to those of her sister. Eva formulates her view of femininity and masculinity based on the gendered body. When her sister encourages her to muster courage to make independent choices, Eva bases her response on her weak feminine constitution: “Why haven’t I the arm of a blacksmith? why can’t I walk ten miles? There are differences of power in mind as well body”’ (180). Eva identifies intellectual pursuit as a particular masculine pursuit when she wonders if she should ‘go through Darwin like a man’ (293). But no such thing is required from Eva because Harry is her ‘Man Thinking’ to use Emerson’s phrase from *The American Scholar* (1102): ‘I haven’t read it; but Mr Henderson gave me the clearest kind of a sketch of the argument, and that is the way it impressed me. That to be sure is among the things that I principally value him for; he is my milk-skimmer; he gets all the cream that rises on a book and presents it to me in a portable form’ (290).

It is rather curious that Stowe chooses for her heroine a character who is not a reader, but what Eva lacks in intellect she seemingly makes up for with her beauty and her aesthetic sense; ‘woman’s genius’ (383), according to Eva, lies in the realm of beauty: ‘To make life beautiful, to keep down and out of sight the hard, dry, prosaic side, and keep up the poetry – that is my idea of our ‘mission.’ I think women ought to be, what Hawthorne calls “The Artist of the Beautiful”’ (383). Like Annie
in Hawthorne’s tale who fails to appreciate the imaginative possibilities of the artist’s gift, Eva understands the ‘mission’ of the artist as one of merely materialistic and decorative value. Ironically, Eva’s reductionist view of art, suggestive of an emerging culture in which cultural capital is acquired in ‘portable form,’ are central concerns in Hawthorne’s text as a tale that opens up questions about the lack of aesthetic sense and cultural continuities in America. Rather intriguing then, Stowe appropriates a story that speaks of a culturally and aesthetically problematic past and a doomed future to suggest the promises of womanhood. Her narrator confirms Eva’s misconceived views by claiming that women’s very physical form is a divine, artistic design when talking about Eva’s wardrobe after their marriage:

If this picture seems absurd, then, it must be admitted that there is a reason in nature why the dress of a woman should for ever remain different from that of man, in the same manner that the hand of her Creator has shaped her delicate limbs and golden hair differently from the rugged organisation of men. Woman was meant to be more than a worker; she was meant for the poet and artist of life; she was meant to be the charmer; and that is the reason, dear Miss Minerva, why to the end of time you cannot help it that woman always will, and must, give more care and thought to dress than men. (385)

Whiter than men with their ‘rugged organisation,’ ‘her delicate limbs and golden hair’ (385), Harry reasons, speak of her unsuitability for hard work that would blacken her whiteness. Not a thinker, but a ‘charmer,’ Stowe’s heroine is uncritically reduced to her ornamental value, and one may wonder if Stowe imagined her readership as something akin to the unappreciative audience in Hawthorne’s tale.

Eva, who is a self-confessed ‘intellectually lazy’ (291) character, gets the last, telling word on the woman question: “Oh come,” said Eva, “the subject does get too dreadful; I can’t bear to think of it, and I move that we have a game of whist, and put an end to it. Come, now, do let’s sit down sociably, and have something agreeable”
(243). While nothing has been agreed, Eva’s final remarks suggest Stowe’s eagerness to create a solid basis for social affinity as a bulwark against modernity’s threatening diversity. Not bearing to think, Eva wants to remain in ‘child-Eden’ and live in a playhouse where there are no dishes to be washed. In *We and Our Neighbours*, Stowe realises this ideal of child-Eden in the middle-class home, where the ‘true woman’ can remain something of an aristocratic lady of leisure. As Merish notes, ‘This romantic model of work, partaking of an exemplary flexibility and emotional openness – a form of work which doesn’t interrupt, but rather is in tune with, the emotional nuances of daily life – absorbs an ideal of aristocratic ease and effortlessness into sentimental, middle-class practice’ (148). Indeed, Stowe’s celebration of sentimental democracy as an ideology of quietude and her romantic view of work are best exemplified in her flirtation with monarchical notions.

**The Queen of America**

As an anti-modern text *My Wife and I* upholds chivalry and nobility. The depiction of women as extravagant aristocrats and the downplaying of labour tell us that Eva is imagined as future member of a class where domesticity is bound up with leisure and not with work. Stowe is uncomfortable with this position in the beginning of the novel, painting an unflattering picture of idle female Americans comparing them to the aristocrats of Europe: ‘The young, unmarried women, therefore, remain the only aristocracy privileged to live in idleness, and wait for their duties to come to them’ (169). But Stowe withdraws that critique by pointing out that in aristocratic administrations women are subjugated by etiquette, whereas the democratic American republic grants its women individual freedom:
It is the very nature of republican institutions to give a sort of unconventional freedom to its women. There is no upper world of court and aristocracy to make laws for them, or press down a framework of etiquette upon them. Individual freedom of opinion and action pervades every school; it is breathed in the very air, and each one is, in a great degree, a law unto herself. (181)

The stress on individuality, unconventionality, and mobility in American mythology erases the explosive question of class that the previous quotation above addressed.

But, rather paradoxically, Stowe returns to the image of American women as aristocrats, albeit with another moral: from a compromising portrait, Stowe, towards the conclusion of the novel, flatters women as the noble aristocrats of America, in spite of her warning in *Pink and White Tyranny* that such an attitude creates characters like tyrannical Lillie:

In America, where we have a clear democracy, women hold that influence over men that is exerted by the aristocracy in other countries. They are something to be looked up to, petted, and courted. The human mind seems to require something of this kind. The faith and fealty that the middle-class Englishman has towards his nobility is not all snobbery. It has something of poetry in it – it is his romance of life. Up in those airy regions where walk the nobility, he is at liberty to fancy some higher, finer types of manhood and womanhood than he sees in the ordinary ways of life, and he adores the unseen and unknown. The American life would become vulgar and commonplace did not a chivalrous devotion to women come in to supply the place of recognised orders of nobility. The true democrat sees no superior in rank of men, but all women are by courtesy his superiors. (340)

Thus, while insisting that the American democracy is without rank, Stowe simultaneously argues that a society cannot function without a kind of hierarchy as its members require subjection. Stowe’s ‘clear democracy’ is clearly not without class-consciousness, but admitting it would open up the dangers of class struggle, as Lang suggests. Disguising the reality of rank by the ostensibly politically neutral language of ‘poetry’ and ‘romance,’ Stowe maintains that women, serving the function of supply aristocrats, protect and uphold the class of Americans ‘in the
better sense.’ The Van Arsdale household is the model picture of this American female-dominated aristocracy where there is no social strife, only flowery harmony: ‘The Van Arsdale house was an empire where women ruled, though as the queen was a pretty, motherly woman, her reign was easy and flowery’ (341). As Amy Kaplan argues, the notion of empire is central to the ideology of domesticity as a colonising force. But if Stowe uses feudal language to describe women’s position as superior rulers, it is never a threat to the gender power balance and to social harmony of the republic, because men’s ‘chivalrous devotion to women’ (340) suggests that women are weak and need protection. This apparent need for the practice of chivalrous behaviour indicates that women are not daring and enterprising, as Dyer describes Stowe’s white men, and thus they will (and should) never match men in terms of social mobility. In this logic, female power depends on the legitimisation of the male gaze. It is here worth noting that historically chivalry and honour ‘rested on a man’s ability to control the sexuality of his female relations,’ as Nancy MacLean reminds us (114). In this pastoral fantasy of ‘natural aristocracy,’ then, Stowe’s North seems more like the Old South, albeit redeemed from the burden of slavery, where codes of chivalry and honour define gender relations.

In this fantasy of ‘natural aristocracy,’ women, importantly, are never imagined as presidents but always only as monarchs. When Harry poses the question “why not a woman President, as well as a woman Queen of England?” (236) in jest, Mr Van Arsdale makes the argument that it is the queen’s natural vocation and not a question of upward mobility: ‘The woman Queen in England comes to it quietly; she is born to it, and there is no fuss about it’ (236 emphasis added). ‘Quietly’ is Stowe’s most favoured adverb to describe women’s activities, arguably because it dissociates
her from the radical women’s movement and the public sphere altogether. Quietude, I have suggested, is the underlying sentiment of Stowe’s sentimental democracy where sympathy operates to expunge the disagreeable. Mr Van Arsdel goes on to argue that no true woman could ever be president because her character would be ruined – the ultimate threat to the family state as argued above: ‘And what sort of a brazen tramp of a woman would it be that could stand it, and come out of it without being killed? Would it be any woman that we should want to see at the head of our government?’ (237). Eva proudly applauds her father’s discourse, ‘clapping her hands’ (237) as she utters: “Why how you go on! I never did hear such eloquence. No, Ida, set your mind at rest, you shan’t be run for President of the United States. You are a great deal too good for that”’ (237). With such discourse Stowe can uphold women’s superiority and remove all grounds for strife over the ‘woman question.’ By aligning woman’s role with that of a monarch in the old world, Stowe takes women out of history, as it were, thereby assigning them no viable function in the republic of the new world. Their power is ceremonial rather than executive; her American queens are rhetorical constructs with no real consequences in the social order of their day. The family state as a metaphor for the political state is revealed as nothing but figurative language; the matriarch is in temporal and social exile, and she will never run for president: the American queen reigns in a playhouse and not in any worldly sense. Ryan identifies a similar position of exile in domestic ideology as ‘imperial isolation’ and points to the contradiction inherent in this very term: ‘This contradictory nature of the mother’s imperial power gave a frustrating, phantom-like quality to women’s connection with society outside their private sphere’ (146). As Mr Van Arsdel puts it, ‘But in the great rough round of business she’s nothing but a
pretty baby after all, – nothing else in the world’ (237). It may be argued that
Stowe’s sentimental politics anticipates the politics of the Reaganite era, where
private life becomes prioritised over public life according to Lauren Berlant who
writes thus in her critique of the lack of political agency in the United States, The
Queen of America Goes to Washington City: ‘We might call this antipolitical politics
“national sentimentality”: it is sentimental because it is a politics that abjures politics,
made on behalf of a private life protected from the harsh realities of power’ (11).

At the conclusion of My Wife and I, Eva is crowned the ultimate American queen
to whom prospective members of the emerging middle class are going to be subject
and whose example they should follow. When Eva, who her sister describes as
‘conquered territory’ (160), finally makes her declaration of independence in the
form of her marriage to Harry, she expresses her revolution in monarchical terms:

You see papa, this is an age of revolution, and there is going to be a
revolution in the Aunt Maria dynasty in our house. She has governed mamma
and all the rest of us long enough, and now she must go down and I must rule.
Harry and I are going to start a new era and have things all our own way. I’m
going to crown him king, and he then will crown me queen, and then we shall
proceed to rule and reign in our own dominions. (344)

Liberated from the tyranny of her aunt, a figure for England in this example, Eva will
not rule in a republic but in a kingdom, and therefore her revolution has no social
relevance. If Eva is moving out of history, she is also, by her father’s financial ruin
and by marrying below her, moving out of class and therefore is, as Lang puts it,
‘outside the play of interests – economic, social, and political – that render the world
unstable’ (The Syntax of Class 18). In short, Eva is escaping modernity. The notion
that Harry and Eva ‘are going to start out on a new tack and bring in the golden age’
(345) stresses the idea of utopian middle-class domesticity as being somehow
immune from the upheavals of history; the promises of the ideal family state are
nothing less than the promises of the golden age. Harry and Eva triumphantly
pronounce themselves as ‘pattern folks for being rational and contented’ (345) and
‘models of rationality and decorum’ (372). In other words, Eva and Harry will
reclaim the family state, and, as Harry proudly concludes, ‘They will study us as one
studies a new State’ (382).

But even with such golden promises at the end of *My Wife and I*, Stowe has left
sand in the machine of the family state. In a self-conscious moment at the end of the
novel, Stowe expresses doubt about the social and literary convention that dictates
marriage as the ideal closure. Eva, and by extension Stowe, dwell on the subject
hesitantly: ‘Everybody says it’s what we’re made for, all novels end with it, all the
poems are about it’ (292). Indeed, after Eva’s sister, Angelique, wears ‘on her finger
an engagement-ring,’ Stowe’s narrator states: ‘There was no more to be said now’
(WON 372). But Stowe’s secluded critique of marriage as a value centre hits the
hardest when she indicates that marriage is a social death for women when she kills
Eva metaphorically by marrying her to Harry: ‘Here the clock striking twelve warned
me,’ Harry says, ‘that the last day of Eva van Arsdel’s life was numbered’ (372).
And Stowe does not stop at this. After Eva’s marriage we are reminded of her
ghostly status as a married woman when her husband reminds her that she is no
longer Eva van Arsdel: “‘Eva Van Arsdel is a being of the past, fortunately for me,
darling’” (396). This exchange, of course, also points to the fact that Eva has never
had a claim to her self; when she was Eva Van Arsdel she was her father’s property;
as Eva Henderson she merely has a new owner. But seemingly unable to solve the
‘woman question’ in a manner that will not conflict with her dedication to the
agreeable, Stowe capitulates by letting Eva write thus about the institution of marriage: ‘It seems to me that the only way to give most girls any concentration or object is to marry them’ (292). This sense of capitulation is further strengthened by Harry whose utterance trivialises the ‘woman question’ in order to secure social harmony: ‘“I want all nice people to be engaged if they have as good a time as we do. It’s my solution of the woman question”’ (352).

These self-conscious moments of critique, I suggest, unsettle the promises of the golden age and those of the new family state. Stowe’s didacticism starts to unravel itself, as she capitulates to a system, which she, at the same time, regards with a degree of ambivalence. But her doubts about marriage and her fashionable heroine Eva van Arsdel are diminished when she reappears as middle-class Eva Henderson in We and Our Neighbors as the model upon which women should be fabricated in America’s developing consumer culture. In this sequel, hesitation is replaced by reassurance, and ‘common consent’ dictates social relations in a self-congratulatory modern America as its concluding lines suggest: ‘Well, courteous reader, a marriage is by common consent the end of a story, and we have given you two. “We and Our Neighbors,” therefore, are ready to receive your congratulations’ (480).

‘We of the Interior’

‘I haven’t much independence myself, but it is no longer I, it is We’ (WON 29 emphasis in the original), Eva Henderson writes triumphantly to her bosom friend. This shift from the singular to the plural possessive demonstrates the logic of Stowe’s philosophy of sympathy as one of affinity. Affinity, in a marital relationship and in a relationship based on commonality generally between individuals, but also
in its meanings of neighbourhood and vicinity, is at the heart of the sequel to *My Wife and I* as a novel concerned with questions of relationships of identity and place: the telling title of *We and Our Neighbors; Or the Records of an Unfashionable Street: A Novel* invites us to ponder on the identity of ‘we’ and the location of ‘we.’ And one may further ask, as Lears does referring to the bourgeois cultural leaders of the mid nineteenth century: ‘How does a group sustain a solid ideal of selfhood in a solvent social setting?’ (*Fables of Abundance* 75). In answering his own question, Lears argues thus:

> By creating an agreed-upon, “common-sense” vision of reality, by certifying certain modes of perception, certain idioms of representation, and discrediting others. The middle and upper classes in the antebellum United States, turning to their own Protestant ethos, elaborated the distrust of artifice, and renewed the discourse of authenticity. They created an ideal of unified, controlled, sincere selfhood – a bourgeois self – as a counterweight to the centrifugal tendencies unleashed by market exchange. They articulated that ideal in several idioms that we have come to think of as “bourgeois” or “Victorian” – secular visions of the plain-speech tradition, which served to quiet moral or epistemological doubts and eased the transition to a developed commodity civilization. (*Fables of Abundance* 75)

Lears identifies domestic ideology as one of the idioms of control that helped shape bourgeois selfhood. In what follows I explore the role of sympathy in the construction of the white bourgeois self in ‘commodity civilization.’ Drawing on the work of Lears, Merish, and Douglas, I read Stowe’s key notions of sympathy and influence within the discourse of advertising in the developing nineteenth-century US consumer culture and suggest that sympathy as a philosophy of affinity translates into a kind of advertisement for white bourgeois homogeneity. If Stowe imagined that sympathy was the bond that could unite the country before the Civil War in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, she envisions mass consumption as the integrative glue of white middle-class society in her late reconstruction novel *We and Our Neighbors*. I argue
that against the backdrop of *My Wife and I*'s struggle with modern doubt, Stowe stabilises the weightless self by proposing a model of selfhood where consumption conditions self-identity. Eva Van Arsdel’s transformation into Eva Henderson is characterised by possession; through the acquisition of personal possessions Eva can make a bid for selfhood. As a prototype of sentimental democracy, *We and Our Neighbors* serve to ‘quiet moral or epistemological doubts’ to create an ‘agreed-upon’ version of reality through consumption.

Where she felt as if her ‘life was built on water’ (*MWI* 207) when she was a society belle, as a housewife, Eva’s ‘new sense of possession’ enables ‘a new and different hold on life’:

> Her china, her bronzes, her pictures, her silver, her table-cloths and napkins, her closets and pantries, all speak to her of a new sense of possession—a new and different hold on life. Once she was only a girl, moving among things that belonged to mamma and papa; now she is a matron, surrounded everywhere by things that are her own—a princess in her own little kingdom. Nor is the charm lessened that she no longer uses the possessive singular, but say *our*. And behind those pronouns, *we* and *our*, what pleasant security! (*WON* 153 emphasis in the original)

Through consumption Eva can claim a stable sense of self, but paradoxically her metamorphosis into Eva Henderson is also a loss of self, echoing the sympathetic exchange which involves a similar loss of selfhood. When Eva writes, ‘I haven’t much independence *myself*, but it is no longer *I*, it is *We*’ (29), she expresses the novel’s concern with homogeneity. The *I* that dominated the title of *My Wife and I* has become *We* in its sequel and speaks to the subjugation of the self that takes place in *We and Our Neighbors*. Here others become unothered, and thus the threat of diversity that haunts *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *My Wife and I* is seemingly brought under control. The threat of modernity is likewise controlled; the *I* as a free-floating
self becomes ‘a firm and compact We’ and serves as a bulwark against the chaos of the market place:

Eva Van Arsdel alone was anybody’s property; Mamma talked her one way, her sister Ida another way, and Aunt Maria a third; and among them all her own little way was hard to find. But now Harry and I have formed a firm and compact We, which is a fortress into which we retreat from all the world. I tell them all, We don’t think so, and We don’t do so. Isn’t that nice? (WON 29 emphasis in the original)

Eva’s use of the word ‘property’ to describe her own position in the world is significant; in *We and Our Neighbors*, selfhood cannot be divorced from property, as the very condition of selfhood is bound up with material things. As Merish puts it, ‘These [sentimental] novels helped write into existence a modern consumer psychology in which individuals “express themselves” through consumption” and “identify” with personal possessions’ (3). In *My Wife and I*, Harry talks of their house as ‘as much a part of’ Eva ‘as the shell on a turtle’s back’ (414). Eva’s very existence, then, is bound up with the house as a site of consumption and without it she would cease to exist: Eva shops therefore she is. The original Cartesian raison d’être has been assigned to Harry, her ‘Man Thinking,’ as noted above; indeed, Eva expresses the longing to ‘go on with the full consent without stopping to think’ (WON 46). Her inner life, as Douglas argues, has been commercialised (*The Feminization of American Literature* 255).

The American female self is stripped of all its intellectual qualities; the few intellectual women with which the New York novels deal cannot be contained within the American woman’s home and are sent into exile abroad when they cannot be domesticated, I have suggested. The following passage demonstrates how the self is
colonised and emptied out by ‘the empire of the mother,’ to use Ryan’s title phrase, in Stowe’s domestic ideology:

In the first period, the young girl herself is the object of attention and devotion. She is the permitted center of all eyes, the leading-star of her own drama of life. But with marriage the center changes. Self begins to melt away into something higher. The girl recognizes that it is no longer her individuality that is the chief thing, but that she is the priestess and minister of a family state. The home becomes her center, and to her home passes the charm that once was thrown around her person. The pride that she may have had in self becomes a pride in her home. Her home is the new impersonation of herself; it is her throne, her empire. (WON 152)

Establishing the home as a tangible counterweight to modern weightlessness, Stowe fixes and controls the self with the promise of stabilisation through possession and consumption. Stowe conflates, in the words of Merish, ‘middle-class interiority and the middle-class interior’ (140), and this is nowhere more apparent than when Eva writes thus to her mother-in-law: ‘I have a turn for letter-writing and can keep you informed of how we of the interior go on’ (WON 43 emphasis added). Eva has internalised the ideology of domesticity to the extent that the only parameter within which she does (and should) define her subjectivity is the home. Indeed, the home as the ‘impersonation of herself’ captures Stowe’s ideology of materialism wherein beloved objects are ‘sympathetic extension of self’ (Merish 152).

Eva’s subject position is at the heart of what Tompkins calls ‘sentimental power,’ exposing the ambivalence of that very notion; if Eva’s position is sovereign – she is described as nothing less than priestess, minister, and head of an empire – it is also powerless. While she is at the centre of the family state, she is simultaneously removed from history, I have suggested. Or as MacFarlane argues,

Eva’s home is both apart from society and at its very center; much like the visible church of Stowe’s Puritan ancestors, it is in the world but not of it. To paraphrase Mary Kelley, the home contains Eva as woman yet is contained
by her. Thus the doctrine of separate spheres simultaneously endows women with worldly power yet requests that she refrain from using it; it mobilizes her yet curtails her motion. (282)

Eva’s existence is strangely ghostly; she is not of the world, because ‘we of the interior’ is a state of temporal and social exile. Stowe’s emphasis on the notion of ‘centre’ in her description of Eva’s transformation into a housewife speaks to her eagerness to fix not only selfhood but also to fix ‘the centrifugal tendencies unleashed by market exchange,’ as Lears puts it (75 *Fables of Abundance*). Or, to draw on a Derridean vocabulary, Stowe attempts to establish a logocentric framework in which representation is transparent, as I have argued with reference to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Insisting on a central power structure, she aims at controlling the centrifugal forces that Bakhtin sees at work in language.

**Expanding New England**

Eva’s and Harry’s home is imagined as the centre of white homogeneity, serving as the stable ground for the bourgeois self to stand on. New England functions as the central parameter for a process of white normalisation; the Hendersons’ urban household should be seen as an extension of Harry’s mother’s New England home. Indeed, Eva ‘propose[s] to introduce the country sitting-room into [their] New York house’ (*MWI* 382). If the nature of New England landscape was located as being at the heart of white identity in *My Wife and I*, identity in *We and Our Neighbors* is bound up with the domestic space of Harry’s and Eva’s house as an extension of the New England landscape. The housewarming party at the conclusion of *My Wife and I* foreshadows the processes of homogenisation that take place in *We and Our Neighbors:*
I don’t think a dinner party was ever a more brilliant success than ours; partly owing to the fact that we were a mutual admiration society, and our guests felt as much sense of appropriation and property in it as we did ourselves. The house was in a sort of measure “our house,” and the dinner “our dinner.” In short, we are all of us strictly en famille. The world was one thing, and we were another, outside of it and by ourselves and having a remarkably good time. (421-22)

The possessive pronoun ‘our’ and the notion of the family is at the crux of Stowe’s process of normalisation where individuals must be made as similar as possible.

Indeed, middle-class homes must be made so homogenous that one does not realise that one has left one’s own house for that of one’s neighbour: ‘Harry is very anxious that we should have an evening once a week to receive our friends – an informal, quiet, sociable, talking evening, on a sort of ideal plan of his, in which everybody is made easy and at home, and to spend just such a quiet, social hour as at one’s own chimney-corner’ (WON 50 emphasis added). What characterises the sanctity of the home is its position ‘outside of’ the world and of the city.

The status of the home as being outside of the world aligns it with nature as a place of mimesis and sincerity; ‘It was everything, in short, that the mobile, shifting world “out there” – the American society that Charles Dickens saw as being pervaded by “universal mistrust” – was not,’ as Lear puts it (Fables of Abundance 75). When Harry and Eva sojourn in the mountains of New England for their honeymoon, they are like romantic travellers who are delivered from the insincerity of the urban landscape; ‘Nature, from the sentimental view, never lied; it was a book that could be read without being decoded,’ (Lear Fables of Abundance 84):

At once we seemed to have left the artificial world behind us – the world of observers and observed. We sat together on top of the stage, and sailed like two birds of the air through the tree-tops of the forest, looking down into all the charming secrets of woodland ways as we went on, and feeling ourselves delivered from all the spells and incantations of artificial life. We might have
been two squirrels, or a pair of robins, or blue birds. We ceased to think how we appeared. We forgot that there were an outer world and spectators, and felt ourselves taken in and made at home in the wide hospitality of nature. Highland, where my mother lived, was just within a day’s ride of the finest part of the White Mountains. The close of a charming leisurely drive upward brought us at night to her home, and I saw her sweet face of welcome at the door to meet us, and gave her new daughter to her arms with confident pride. (*MWI* 378)

Nature and by extension the New England home stand as a figure against ‘all the spells and incantations of artificial life’ that characterise the nightmarish carnivalesque of the lost control of urban life in New York. The ‘White Mountains’ speak of the virtues that underlie the white home with their ‘greater nearness to God above and the presence of the whitest thing on earth, snow’ (Dyer 21). And, true to Stowe’s logic, this sublime scene culminates in an embrace of Harry’s divine mother, interlocking the notions of the purity of nature, sacred domesticity and whiteness.

This association of whiteness with rural and agrarian life connects with a long strain of American anti-urbanism going back to Jefferson’s physiocrats. The city, then, is space defined by racialised otherness, a space that *We and Our Neighbours* aims to whitewash I shall argue below.

If Eva is engulfed by the embrace of ‘the empire of the mother,’ her housekeeping is not a continuation of that of her mother-in-law; the shopper Eva Henderson is completely without Harry’s mother’s faculty: she is Christ-like little Eva resurrected. Eva’s New York home is essentially not very different from little Eva’s southern plantation or little Susie’s ‘child-Eden.’ Always referred to as ‘little,’ Eva has remained a child and the kingdom in which she reigns is like Susie’s ‘child-Eden.’ Indeed, Eva may be seen as the embodiment of what Berlant calls ‘the vulnerable little-girl citizen of American culture’ (73), the ideal citizen in a sentimental culture
that privileges private acts as opposed to civic acts. No work is required from Eva, and when she on unusual occasions must perform household tasks she is in a state of despair. Relying on servants, unlike her mother-in-law, to run her house, Eva can simply kill time at her ease like little Eva on the plantation. Thus, while Stowe upholds the work ethics of the New England farm house, she also shows that it cannot be revitalised in modern New York. Or as MacFarlane puts it, ‘Stowe’s increasing inability to depict men and women bound productively to the home measures more accurately than her progressive contemporaries’ assessments domestic ideology’s staggering decline as a social model and a generative aesthetic’ (273). Domesticity in *We and Our Neighbors* has become an empty model of whiteness to be marketed.

**Advertising Whiteness**

In his studies of American anti-modernism and the discourse of advertising, Lears argues that the domestic ideal was closely bound up with the development of modern market capitalism. During the nineteenth century, Lears notes, subsistence farming grew into an urban market economy, and the family gave way to its productive role but ‘acquired new psychological and ideological burdens. Under urban conditions of life, “work” became radically separated from “home” and that separation reinforced each other: between productive adult males and non-productive women and children’ (*No Place of Grace* 15). In the following I want to argue that this separation between work and home that Lears identifies is at the heart of *We and Our Neighbors*, but also that spatial divisions within the home demarcate the working class and the middle class. If slavery no longer delimits the boundaries between the white body
and the non-white body, the kitchen and the parlour do; non-white servants labour in the kitchen, whereas middle-class women of leisure perform whiteness in the parlour. And, as noted above, our heroine, little Eva resurrected, represents the ultimate proto-consumer. In *The Feminization of American Culture*, Douglas argues that ‘Eva van Arsdel is in every way the fitting successor to Little Eva. It is not just that Eva van Arsdel is as pampered and idle in her urban environment as Little Eva was among her slaves on a plantation in the Old South. Both are promulgators of “influence”’ (68). Douglas argues that feminine ‘influence’ became bound up with advertising in the developing US consumer culture. She writes that ‘Eva’s own marriage is absolutely without content or meaning except as a model. It is an advertisement, not a product’ (252). I want to add to this argument by suggesting that Eva’s model household, functioning as a show room, is an advertisement for whiteness. Sympathy’s imaginative transport and its manipulation of appearance are central to the mechanisms of advertising in Stowe’s consumer paradise. As Merish notes, ‘Stowe’s sentimental housekeeper is the prototype of the modern consumer, whose sympathetic extension of self have been banked on and encouraged – often in quite explicit terms – by nineteenth- and twentieth-century advertisers’ (152).

Serving the role of an advertising agent is Eva’s prime function in the home where Harry, and the couple’s admiring friends, ‘shall always have the enjoyment of seeing beautiful things’ (*WON* 43), which serve as extensions of Eva’s self. ‘Housekeeping’ for Eva amounts to arranging flowers and drinking tea with her sisters, and they are as much an ornament as Eva’s house is ornamental, underscoring the novel’s conflation of goods, space, class and race identity. Eva’s servants, the Irish Mary and her ten-year-old daughter Midge, like the next door neighbours’ black servant, old
Dinah, perform the household tasks that require actual labour. Dinah justifies the labour division, ‘it just kills me to see ladies work’ (243), echoing Aunt Chloe’s raison d’être in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. And, as MacFarlane rightly notes, ‘It nearly kills Eva as well’ (286). When Eva is required to cook a meal in the absence of Mary, she seeks help from old Dinah as she fears she has ‘made some disgraceful blunder’ (*WON* 299). Eva reports the episode to her mother-in-law thus:

> when I left her getting up the turkey, and retired to wash my hot cheeks and burning hands and make my toilette; for I was to appear serene and smiling, in a voluminous robe, and with unsullied ribbons, like the queen of the interior, whose morning had been passed in luxurious ease and ignorant of care.

> To say the truth, dear mother, I was so tired and worn with the little I had done that I would much rather have lain down for a nap than to have enacted the part of charming hostess. (*WON* 303-4)

If Stowe mocks the performance of the white middle-class mistress here, she quickly restores order by having Eva conclude her letter to Harry’s mother by writing, ‘I am quite sure that I shall be a better mistress for having served an apprenticeship as a maid’ (*WON* 306). As in the carnivalesque world, roles are reversed and exposed as mere masks, but they are also reaffirmed. In one sense, then, this scene of role reversal further stabilises and justifies the class hierarchy that it, paradoxically, exposes as being performative. The ‘queen of the interior’ must play her role as if it is real and wash off the blackness of labour. The New York novels, then, do not reconstruct the labour division that George Shelby sells to the freed slaves at the end of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. As Bridget T. Heneghan has noted about the Northern home as it is depicted in that novel, ‘Stowe idealizes the dissociation of visible labor from feminity in her portrait of a Northern household, which fully expunges the blackness of slavery but not its implications’ (97).
Stowe’s discourse seeks to erase the traces of slave labour from the antebellum era through a whitening of the interior of the domestic space. In her study of whiteness and material culture in the antebellum period, Heneghan suggests that white goods became increasingly popular and functioned to segregate upper-class whites from their lower-class neighbours and household servants. She argues:

In the North, white houses found contrast against the increasingly segregated lower classes that came to live and labor in less visible places – alleys, basements, the backs of yards. White goods contributed to the upper and middle classes’ attempt to deny its dependence on labor, to expel the “blackness” of slavery and servitude and impose an imaginary segregation even where integration was absolute. (xiii)

I have already added the kitchen to the ‘less visible places’ that Heneghan lists. *We and Our Neighbors* proposes a segregated household, upstairs and downstairs, as it were, where non-white or lower-class individuals labour in the kitchen and are denied access to the parlour. When Eva throws little parties in her parlour, where ‘the statuettes ha[ve] backgrounds of ivy, which thr[ow] out their whiteness’ (179), black Dinah, characterised by a lack of self-mastery, must stay in the kitchen and eat the leftovers from the white parlour. Eva’s house resembles a shining advertisement stirring up desire in Dinah: ‘Across the way, old Dinah had watched the bright windows with longing eyes, until finally the spirit of the occasion was too strong for her, and bidding Jack lie down and be a good dog, she left her own precincts and ran across to the kitchen of the festal scene, to pick up some crumbs for her share’ (191). Indeed, Eva’s white tea-table speaks of the transformational qualities of exotic goods central to the promises of the discourse of advertising:

Eva’s tea-table was spread in one corner, dainty with its white drapery, and with her pretty wedding-present of china upon it – not china like Miss Dorcas Vanderheyden’s, of the real old Chinese fabric, but china fresh from the modern improvements of Paris, and so adorned with violets and grasses and
field flowers that it made a December tea-table look like a meadow where one could pick bouquets. (178 emphasis added)

The ‘china fresh from the modern improvements of Paris’ suggests Eva’s embrace of the new consumer era, and shows how Stowe invests material objects with virtues. Eva’s flowery china recalls the daisied meadow behind her mother-in-law’s New England home and carries with it the qualities of a past era, enabling a shared proprietary stake in the nation and its past on behalf of sentimental consumers. In the Vanderheyden household on the other side of Eva’s street, the family’s china symbolises untainted class privilege and pure lineage: “‘Yes,’” said Mrs. Betsey, “this china has been in the family for three generations, and we never suffer a servant to touch it’” (92).

Servants, the embodiment of labour, must be whitewashed in this domestic economy that denies the blackness of work. The ten-year-old waitress Midge, who might be read as an Irish version of Topsy, undergoes whitewash before she is granted access to the parlour. Eva equips Midge with ‘a white apron with pockets, in which her soul delights; and her mother has starched and ironed it till it shines with whiteness’ (*MWI* 415). Eva and her sisters, on the other hand, who rightly belong in the parlour due to their class status, cannot be divorced from the whiteness of the space. Angelique, Eva’s younger sister, is marked by her golden hair that shines like a glory around her head, just as the statuettes mentioned above radiate whiteness: ‘There sat Angelique, listening to the conversation, with the firelight falling in flashes on her golden hair, and her lap full of worsteds, rosy, pink, lilac, and yellow’ (*WON* 157). Even if Angelique and Eva had not been identified by those telling names, Stowe still leaves us no doubt that white women come the closest to ‘the pure
spirit that was made flesh in Jesus’ (Dyer 24). Driving home this point, Stowe represents white women as sexless and foreign domestics as prostitutes.

**Unsexing Adam and Eva**

If Stowe sought to revitalise the domestic ideal as a concept that excluded the blackness of work, she also imagined this white middle-class utopia as sexless. With her child-like characteristics, Eva is held up, like little Eva, as a pure virgin, and in the ‘child-Eden’ of her home there is neither a snake nor forbidden fruit. Indeed, there is hardly an Adam either. ‘Child-Eden’ is a perpetual state of innocence. Northern Eva’s white purity, then, is less subject to scrutiny and suspicion than her southern predecessor whose purity was always in jeopardy in the slave-breeding South. In the introductory chapter of *My Wife and I*, Harry, Stowe’s first-person narrator, assures his readership that the innocence of Eden will not be compromised in the forthcoming narrative: ‘Look not for trap-doors, or haunted houses, or deadly conspiracies, or murders, or concealed crimes, in this history, for you will not find one. You shall have simply and only the old story – old as the first chapter of Genesis – of Adam stupid, desolate, and lonely without Eve; and how he sought and how he found her’ (4). Stowe thus rewrites Genesis, erasing the burden of sin, and Harry and Eva are to be understood as prototypes for the ‘new Adams and new Eves’ in the ‘coming generation’ (*MWI* 4).

But Harry is perhaps more a new Eve than a new Adam. I have argued above that the notion of feminine influence is at the crux of *My Wife and I*; this novel shows how Harry is made (or unmade) by the influence of women. As Harry puts it, ‘This association with a womanly nature, and this discipline in womanly ways, I hold to be
an invaluable part of my early training’ (37). Indeed, when a young boy Harry is
dressed in ‘some of’ his ‘older sister’s cast-off white gowns’ (7), and appears, in
Douglas’ words, a ‘wistful would-be transvestite’ (250). Lears, furthermore, argues
that domestic ideologues aimed to manufacture sexless individuals:

Men who worshipped at the domestic shrine created an image of serene
womanhood, free from erotic and aggressive impulses they distrusted in
themselves. At the same time, by underscoring specific male responsibilities
the domestic ideal provided a means by which women could exert cultural
and psychological influence over men. As the historian Daniel Scott Smith
points out, “the literature of the utopian home demanded that husbands
consult their wives, avoid sexual assault, and even consciously structure their
own behaviour on the model of their spouses.” (No Place of Grace 16-17)

There are no Simon Legrees in the haven of We and Our Neighbors. Having been
influenced by his ‘child-wife’ and ‘shadow-wife,’ Harry is sufficiently domesticated
to be a match for the saint-like Eva. When Harry is at work he thinks of their home,
which he describes as ‘a perfect dream of loveliness,’ ‘all day from time to time’
(MWI 414). Needless to say, the couple have no children; completely sexless in all
meanings of the word, Harry is no threat to Eva’s whiteness which is underlined by
her spiritual and virginal status. As Dyer argues, ‘The model for white women is the
Virgin Mary, a pure vessel for reproduction who is unsullied by the dark drives that
reproduction entails’ (29). ‘Having sex, and sexual desire’, according to Dyer, ‘are
not very white: the means of reproducing whiteness are not themselves pure white’
(26). In this sense the reproduction of whiteness is embedded in a paradox; ‘Whites
must reproduce themselves,’ Dyer continues, ‘yet they must also control and
transcend their bodies. Only by (impossibly) doing both can they be white’ (30).
Stowe seems to solve this paradox by establishing Harry’s and Eva’s household as a
model of whiteness that their friends and family can copy endlessly: if bodies are
degradable, white goods are not. If physical reproduction would taint whiteness, self-extension through white goods upholds its promise of purity.

To erase the darkness associated with sex, Harry is expunged from most of the narrative. Where Harry was the narrator and protagonist of *My Wife and I*, he ‘is like a character always off-stage’ (Douglas *The Feminization of American Culture* 252) in *We and Our Neighbors*, while Eva is centre stage as a housewife. Harry is needed in the domestic economy as a bread-winner – in a capitalist society ‘the antipatriarchal operation of shaving’ that characterised the Quaker men in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (138) carries no weight – but otherwise he is completely engulfed by the female narrator and Eva’s letters to his mother. In this developing consumer society that *We and Our Neighbors* endorses, Harry is reduced to his money-making capacity and metaphorically devoured by fashionable woman consumers. As Lears argues,

In an industrializing market economy, the severing of production from consumption (and the gendering of both) symbolically divested women of their generative powers. Yet the mythic female consumer was not simply a passive totem of male achievement; in the emerging popular discourse of commodity civilization, she was empowered as an active, desiring subject – the Fashionable Woman – who retained the capacity to devour the male producer through the reckless wasting of his substance. (*Fables of Abundance* 38)

But if Harry’s earnings are needed to finance Eva’s consumption, he presents a problem to Stowe because he, at the same time, represents the unstable, public world of men where money is made, and therefore he intrudes on the domestic circle in spite of his effeminacy. In short, Harry brings disorder into the ordered world of the parlour. The narrator comments on Harry thus: ‘He was a man subject to domestic discipline for at times littering the parlor table with too many pamphlets, for giving imprudent invitations to dinner on an ill-considered bill of fare, and for confounding
Harry must exit the scene of the parlour in order for Eva and her sister to fulfil their true functions as ‘home artists’; they take ‘their work into the parlor so soon as Harry had gone for the day’ (WON 410). Indeed, Harry and Eva’s home is most ideal when Harry is absent and therefore all connotations of work, money and sex are erased:

“You know, now Eva, that you oughtn’t to sit up late. You’re not strong,” he preached from the staircase in warning tones, as he slowly ascended.

“Oh, no, dear; we won’t be long. We’ve just got a few things to talk over.”

“Well, you know you never know what time it is.”

“Oh, never you mind, Harry; you’ll be asleep in ten minutes. I want to talk with Ally.”

“There, now, he’s off,” said Eva, gleefully shutting the door and drawing an easy chair to the remains of the fire, while she disposed the little unburned brands and ends so as to make a last blaze; then, leaning back, she began taking out hair-pins and shaking down curls and untying ribbons, as a sort of preface to a wholly free and easy conversation. (WON 399-400)

This scene is just one of the many ‘monotonous nights of the Victorian bourgeoisie,’ to use Foucault’s phrase in The History of Sexuality (3), in We and Our Neighbors and speaks of the role of domestic discipline and repression as ‘an integral part of the bourgeois order’ (The History of Sexuality 5).

**We and ‘those Other Victorians’**

If Stowe discourages her readers from looking for ‘trap-doors, or haunted houses, or deadly conspiracies, or murders, or concealed crimes’ (MWI 4), and if Eva and Harry’s sex life is ‘driven out, denied, and reduced to silence’ (The History of Sexuality 4) in the name of whiteness, fleshy desire and excess are projected onto the Vanderheydens’ dog, Jack, and their immigrant servant’s daughter, Maggie, a prostitute, ‘those “other Victorians”’ that Foucault identifies quoting Steven Marcus (The History of Sexuality 4). In what follows I argue that the home in We and Our
*Neighbors* can be seen as Foucault’s ‘family cell’ (*The History of Sexuality* 108) and that policing it is central to the process of normalisation that the novel envisions. Characters that cannot be contained within the home are understood as deviants who must be regulated and domesticated. Policing in the novel has many faces; I have already argued that Harry’s mother and Harry as a first-person narrator in *My Wife and I* stand as figures for the impartial spectator who functions to police the self. Other agents of policing are Eva’s former teacher to whom she writes confessional letters, the Van Arsdel daughters who teach Sunday school, and Eva’s aunt who, in the words of James, ‘pervades the volume like a keeper of an intelligence office’ (61). Policing is bound up with spaces and institutional practice like that of the church, a ‘home in the better sense’ that stands as an opposition to the anti-homes of the brothel, the street, and the asylum.

Characters who are ‘going to the bad,’ which is the title of the chapter describing Maggie’s downfall (317-27), are always conceived of as homeless or as standing ‘outside the gate,’ another chapter title dedicated to Maggie. Significantly, the chapter in which Jack runs away from home concludes with the question, “‘Is Jack come home?’…No, Jack had not come’ (316), and the very next chapter is entitled ‘going to the bad.’ Stowe’s message is clear: the minute you step outside the ‘family cell’ you are in danger of becoming a deviant. Stowe’s description of Jack exposes the tension between Puritan, methodical control and nightmarish carnivalesque excess with which Stowe struggles in her New York novels, and it is therefore worth quoting at some length:

He was as warm-hearted, loving, demonstrative a creature as ever wagged a tail, and he was anxious to please his mistress to the best of his light and knowledge. But he had that rooted and insuperable objection to soap and water, and that preference for dirt and liberty, which is witnessed also in
young animals and of the human species, and Mrs. Betsey’s exquisite neatness was a sore cross and burden to him. Then his destiny having made him of the nature of the flesh-eaters, as the canine race are generally, and Miss Dorcas having some strict dietetic theories intended to keep him in a genteel figure, Jack’s allowance of meat and bones was far below his cravings: and so he was led to explore neighboring alleys, and to investigate swill-pails; to bring home and bury bones in the Vanderheyden garden-plot, which formed thus a sort of refrigerator for the preservation of his marketing. Then Jack had his own proclivities for society. An old lady in a cap, however, caressing and affectionate, could not supply all the social wants of a dog’s nature; and even the mixed and low company of Flower street was a great relief to him from the very select associations and good behavior to which he was restricted the greater part of his time. In short, Jack, like the rest of us, had his times when he was fairly tired out of being good, and acting the part of a cultivated drawing-room dog; and then he reverted with a bound to his freer doggish associates. (312-13)

All the transgressions listed here, bodily indulgence and the crossing of spatial and thus class and racialised boundaries, compromise whiteness and must therefore be projected onto Jack in this case or onto an Irish immigrant in Maggie’s case. When Jack is brought home again, it takes the Vanderheyden household ‘at least two hours to get him clean’ (423), so that he can enter the world of the parlour again as a ‘cultivated drawing-room dog.’ Merish identifies this motif of home coming, arguing that sentimental novels typically ‘map conventional liberal and Protestant oppositions – such as civility/savagery, salvation/corroption, heaven/fallen world – onto a gendered division between private and public, thus spatializing a Protestant structure of temporality and spiritual “progress,” and reconfiguring spiritual conversion in terms of the sentimental motif of “coming home.”’ (143). Jack, as an affectionate pet is an extension of self; indeed, he is ‘like the rest of us,’ Stowe’s narrator concludes, and therefore policing must operate at all levels of society and within the home itself. But if Jack can be made clean in a scene reminiscent of the whitewashing of Topsy in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Maggie’s ‘proclivities’ are a great
deal harder to regulate; if Topsy no longer causes disorder in America’s Garden of Eden, an Irish prostitute does. From ‘the neighboring alleys’ that Jack surveys, Stowe warningly takes us to the location where human ‘flesh-eaters’ satisfy their cravings; the brothel.

The brothel where Harry and Eva look for Maggie to bring her back to the ‘family cell’ is characterised by deceit and display. The promises of control and transparent representation implicit in the narrator’s command ‘Let us enter the dwelling’ in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (19), that I discussed in chapter three, lose their authority when we enter the brothel: here we are not given safe interpretive strategies. If ‘nature never lied,’ the brothel does. With its misleading representation, the brothel and its characters pose a challenge to the notion of mimesis that Stowe places at the heart of her writing. The clergy-man that serves as a guide for Harry and Eva in the seedy neighbourhood of the brothel warns the out-of-place, figuratively and literally speaking, couple that appearances can be deceptive:

“Mother Moggs is a character in her way,” he told us. “She has always treated me with perfect respect and politeness, because I have shown the same to her. She seems at first view like any other decent woman, but she is one that, if she were roused, would be as prompt with knife and pistol as any man in these streets.” As he said this, we turned a corner, and entered a dancing-saloon, in its features much like many others we had seen. Mother Moggs stood at a sort of a bar at the upper end, where liquors were displayed and sold. She seemed so respectably dressed, and so quiet and pleasant-looking that I could scarcely believe my eyes when I saw her. (381)

The mother of the brothel and of the sexual family could easily be mistaken for the respectable domestic mother of the legal family, and this scene reveals a fear of role reversal characteristic of the carnivalesque. But by having the clergy-man uncover the character of Mother Moggs, the scene becomes controlled again and can be seen as part of ‘the unmasking pattern that typified much didactic sensationalism: the
penetration of misleading surfaces to reveal corrupt depths’ (Lears *Fables of Abundance* 51).

But if Mother Moggs’ appearance lies, Maggie’s does not. With absolute assurance the narrator, like a phrenologist, states that Maggie’s dark features reflect her dark soul: ‘Certain it was, that Maggie, with her great, black eyes her wavy black hair, was no saint’ (245). Maggie, then, is constructed as a racialised other. Indeed, the refuge’s sisters’ ‘calm, refined spirituality’ are ‘too far above her’ (245), and Stowe strips Maggie of Cartesian dualism; like the black characters in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Maggie does not have the spirit that characterises whites: ‘In short, poor Maggie was yet a creature of this world, and of sense, and the spiritual world to her was only one dark, confused blurr, rather more appalling than attractive’ (246). There is no redemption for Maggie in the religious world of the refuge, and putting ‘her back into good respectable ways’ (230), as Eva says, happens at the ‘home altar’ (132). Taking charge of Eva’s wardrobe, ‘The very love of finery and of fine living which had once helped to entrap her, now comes in play for her salvation’ (247). In other words, Maggie’s redemption lies in the consumer culture that Eva’s brand of domesticity sanctions. Maggie, whom Stowe presents as ‘shop-worn’ like Lillie in *Pink and White Tyranny* (9), must, like her little sister Midge, be whitewashed to be allowed to enter the parlour again. Significantly, Maggie’s salvation takes place in ‘a little sewing room adjoining the parlor, where she had often sat at work’ (258); she must be domesticated to be integrated into the bourgeois order. As MacFarlane argues, ‘In clothing Maggie in a housemaid’s apron, Eva erases her essence, her sexuality, and therefore part of her person. Maggie, then, although “saved” by Eva’s ministry, is also diminished by it’ (289). Eva, then, can be seen as a missionary,
functioning as an agent of policing. In her essay ‘Servants’ (1864), Stowe aligns the role of the American mistress with that of a missionary:

The mistresses of American families, whether they like it or not, have the duties of missionaries imposed upon them by that class from which our supply of domestic servants is drawn. They may as well accept the position cheerfully, and, as one raw, untrained hand after another passes through their family, and is instructed by them in the mysteries of good housekeeping, comfort themselves with the reflection that they are doing something to form good wives and mothers for the Republic. (504)

If Eva as a missionary figure erases Maggie’s essence, as MacFarlane suggests, Maggie’s doctor, one of the other ‘judges of normality’ (Foucault Discipline and Punish 1645) in the novel, erases her physical person completely from the cityscape. As he says: ‘we must try and find her a place in some decent, quiet farmer’s family in the country, where she may feed chickens and ducks, and make butter, and live a natural, healthful, out-door life; and, in my opinion, that will be the best and safest way for her’ (268). The ultimate whitewash, then, takes places in a Jeffersonian physiocracy. Maggie and the brothel, and all their connotations of sexuality spatially located in the city, must be repressed if the domestic ideal is to remain untainted.

Standing as a figure for a reformed cityscape, the whitewashed brothel represents a safe, reconstructed America: ‘This building, Mr James told us, used to be a rat-pit, where the lowest, vilest, and most brutal kinds of sport were going on. It used to be, he said, foul and filthy, physically as well as morally; but scrubbing and paint and whitewash had transformed it into a comfortable home’ (377).

‘Unpalatable Facts upon Unwilling Ears’

If the blackness of slavery and the sexualised and promiscuous body have been erased from the national narrative, the presence of servants in the home brings with it
haunting memories. As Stowe notes in ‘Servants,’ ‘The condition of domestic service, however, still retains about it something of the influences from feudal times, and from the near presence of slavery in neighboring states’ (499). Work and the home are conflated in servants, as they are in slaves and prostitutes, and therefore they are problematic characters to house, as the home serves as a resort away from the market place. While they are necessary to uphold the white mistress’ purity, the presence of servants also compromises that purity. In my discussion of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, I suggested that Stowe, like Hawthorne, presents a disembodied notion of women’s work that could counteract the implications of slavery. But as Heneghan suggests, ‘Dinah’s hand tells the tale that Monticello and other plantations tell, and Miss Ophelia’s Northern home as well: that femininity is unavoidably soiled in its construction of white refinement and that the black hand that prepares both will leave neither fully white’ (115). To cover up the entrance of the market place in the reconstructed home in *We and Our Neighbors*, Stowe portrays servants as familiar objects of affection like the slaves in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

If Stowe advocated contractual relationship between domestic staff and their employers in ‘Servants,’ where she asks, anticipating Chesnutt’s novel, *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901), ‘What is the relation of servant to employer in a democratic country? Precisely that of a person who for money perform any kind of service for you’ (502-3), she retreats from that position in *We and Our Neighbors*. Here, paradoxically, she imagines a familial relationship between employer and servant reminiscent of the pre-Civil War era. Just like the brothel that has undergone whitewash, Eva covers up her servants behind the respectable masks of mother and friend; in her household there is ‘no black servant with white gloves to change the
plates, but only respectable, *motherly* Mary, who *had tidied herself* and taken the
office of waiter, in addition to her services as cook’ (285 emphasis added). When
Eva’s aunt mistakes Mary’s room, which ‘is furnished up for a princess’ (57), for
Eva’s, Eva tells her aunt that, ‘you know Mary has been in the family so long I don’t
feel as if she were a servant; she seems like a friend, and I treat her like one. I believe
Mary really loves us’ (58). Whether Mary feels like a servant or if she loves Eva we
are never told, but what Eva’s discourse tells us is that sympathy, in Stowe’s logic, is
always directed from the view of a white middle-class spectator. It also tells us that
while Eva does not seek to dissolve the class hierarchy in her household, she seeks to
remove the grounds for class strife by making her servants appear like family. By
this act Eva displaces the reality of class into the discourse of domesticity and
renders it invisible, to draw on Lang’s analysis again. Harry explains to an English
guest how this act of displacement works to ensure harmony in American
sentimental democracy: ‘with all the disadvantages and disagreeable results of our
democratic jumble in society, our common cars where all ride side by side, our hotel
parlors where all sit together, and our *tables d’ hote* where all dine together, we do
know each other better, and there is less of a chance of class misunderstandings and
jealousies, than in England’ (293).

But if class is to be made invisible, servants must be managed and preferably kept
off stage while they are needed to preserve the virtues of the white mistress centre
stage. The withdrawal of Mary, who is described as an ‘unseen, humble operator,’
‘would have been like the entrance of a *black frost* into a flower-garden, leaving
desolation and *unsightliness* around’ (52 emphasis added), the narrator tells us. Mary
must remain unseen to secure the integrity of her white mistress, just as the
Vanderheyden neighbours must ‘shut their eyes to’ the testimony of their black servant in order to repress the ‘foul and filthy’ (307) memories that she embodies:

Old Dinah was the very impersonation of that coarse, hard literalness which forces actual unpalatable facts upon unwilling ears. There was no disputing that she spoke most melancholy truths, that even the most infatuated dog-lovers could not always shut their eyes to. But Mrs. Betsey chose wholly to ignore her facts and treat her communication as if it had no existence, so she turned her back to Dinah and went on. (89)

Dinah’s ‘melancholy truths’ must be silenced into non-existence, as they cannot be digested in uncensored form by a middle-class audience. Her story is not one for polite ears and is reminiscent of Harriet Jacobs’ ‘Letter from a Fugitive Slave’ (1853) in which she wrote, ‘in Uncle Tom’s Cabin [Stowe] had not told the half” (170). But Dinah is not granted an audience, only the ‘unwilling ears’ of her employers, and as a racial relic, like Sandy in *The Marrow of Tradition*, she has no role to play in a reconstructed America:

Old Dinah, the sole black servant remaining, was the last remnant of a former retinue of negro servants, held by old Jacob when New York was a slave state, and a tribe of black retainers was one of the ostentations of wealth. All were gone now and only Dinah remained, devoted to the relics of the old family, clinging with a cat-like attachment to the old place.

She was, like many of her race, a jolly-hearted, pig-headed, giggling, faithful old creature, who said “Yes’m” to Miss Dorcas, and took her own way about most matters; and Miss Dorcas, satisfied that her way was not on the whole a bad one in the ultimate results, winked at her free handling of orders, and consented to accept her, as we do Nature, for what could be got out of her. (21)

Dinah is ‘the very impersonation’ of the slave-holding past, and therefore she must be expunged from the future utopia that *We and Our Neighbors* envisions. When the Vanderheyden sisters face financial ruin because of their brother’s ill-conceived investment of their money, Dinah offers to save them financially with her wages:

“‘oh, go ‘way, Miss Dorcas; ye don’t know what a lot I’s got stowed away in my old
teapot!” chuckled a voice from behind the scenes, and Dinah’s wooly head and brilliant ivories appeared at the slide of the china-closet, where she had been an unabashed and interested listener to the conversation’ (453). Dinah’s proposal, nevertheless, is the ultimate violation of domesticity: the money ‘stowed away’ in an old teapot brings the market place straight into the haven of the home just as slavery did in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Moreover, Dinah’s discourse evokes an image of the southern pastoral in which slavery was articulated in terms of family relations: “‘Dun no why you should n’t, as well as me live on yours,’ said Dinah. “It’s all in de family, and turn about’s fair play. Why, good land! Miss Dorcas, I jest lotted on savin’ up for de family’ (453). Dinah thus conflates the sexual family and the legal family and obscures the notion of the political family bound up with the white race. Whiteness, in Stowe’s work, is imagined as the true cohesion between citizens; Dinah’s old tea pot stacked with money speaks of slavery and the blackness of labour, whereas the Vanderheyden sisters’ china untouched by servants tells the story of white lineage. Dinah’s money, of course, is never used by the Vanderheyden sisters as Jim and Alice move into their house, and thus white middle-class respectability is preserved. Dinah’s voice ‘from behind the scenes’ must be suppressed as it speaks ‘unpalatable’ truths: she may have the cash to make a bid for middle-class domesticity, but she does not have the racial capital. Dinah, Mary, and Maggie do not qualify as neighbours to white Americans and must remain homeless. As Lang formulates the position of free blacks in America, ‘Their national homelessness as sure a sign of their degradation as the domestic deficiencies of the prostitute or the kitchen maid, free blacks were vagrants in America’ (*The Syntax of Class* 45). Blacks, in other words, have no proprietary stake in the nation. The next
chapter explores Fauset’s *Comedy: American Style* as text that writes back to Stowe’s empire of white domesticity; in this novel the protagonist passes to become integrated in white neighbourliness through the consumption of goods.

To conclude, *My Wife and I* and *We and Our Neighbours* fully endorse a logic of white identity politics as these novels can only integrate characters who are familiar, if not actual family, reducing others to projections of oneself. Stowe’s vision of citizenship, then, is divorced from the public sphere, which, in turn, can be defined as intimate rather than political as in Berlant’s analysis wherein she writes: ‘The modal normal American in this view sees her/his identity as something sustained in private, personal, intimate relations’ (185). The attraction of Alice’s suitor, Jim, as a telling case in point, is that he is already an intimate neighbour, or in Douglas’ words, he is ‘already domesticated; he sounds a bit like a prefab house, ready to be put up’ (*The Feminization of American Culture* 252). Eva sells Jim to her sister thus:

> “Well, really,” said Eva, “I do think it would be a nice thing for us all if you could like Jim, for he’s one of us; we all know him and like him…you might settle right down here, and live near us, and all go on together cosily. Jim is just the fellow to make a bright, pleasant, hospitable home; and he’s certain to be a devoted husband to whomever he marries.” (*WON* 403)

Jim is not valued as an individual, but rather because he is lacking individuality; he is a product with a guarantee: the household of Alice and Jim is guaranteed to be a replica of Eva’s. Sympathy, then, translates into a ‘narcissistic model of projection and rejection,’ to revisit Barnes’ words (92), where Eva’s home functions as the textbook example. Writing to her mother-in-law, Eva indulges in a narcissistic fantasy in which her self is being projected onto her neighbours repeatedly, as on a production line:
Mother, doesn’t it seem as if our bright, cosy, happy, free-and-easy home was throwing out as many side-shoots as a lilac bush?

Just think, in easy vicinity we shall have Jim and Alice, Angie and St John, and, as I believe, Bolton and Caroline. We shall be a guild of householders, who hold the same traditions, walk by the same rule, and mind the same things. Won’t it be lovely? (WON 462-63)

What is produced is white bourgeois homogeneity, and the notion of ‘a guild of householders’ can be read as a manifesto of Stowe’s ‘antipolitical politics’ of “national sentimenality,”’ to revisit Berlant’s term (11). A safe, reconstructed America is one in which ‘a guild of householders’ advertises whiteness and reproduces itself through consumption. The imperial implications of this white middle-class utopia are fully mapped out in *The American’s Woman Home*, where the ‘empire of the mother’ is envisioned to civilise the children of the ‘anti-homes’ of America, pushing back the frontier:

Let such a truly “Christian Family” be instituted in any destitute settlement, and soon its gardens and fields would cause “the desert to blossom as the rose,” and around would soon gather a “Christian Neighborhood”… The cheering example would soon spread, and ere long colonies from these prosperous and Christian communities would go forth to shine as “lights of the world” in the all the now darkened nations. Thus the “Christian family” and “Christian Neighborhood” would become the grand ministry, as they were designed to be, in training our whole race for heaven. (337)

Envisioning the world converted into one engulfing white neighbourhood, this image foreshadows eugenicists’ dreams of pan-whiteness in the early twentieth century. In this utopian universe where all difference has become invisible, the role of sympathy seems to have been outplayed, and perhaps the final promise of Stowe’s philosophy of sympathy is to pass others off as copies of the white self.
Passing before the White Gaze: Jessie Redmon Fauset’s Critique of Sympathy as a White Aesthetics in Comedy: American Style

Our first ideas of personal beauty and deformity, are drawn from the shape and appearance of others, not our own. We soon become sensible, however, that others exercise the same criticism upon us. We are pleased when they approve of our figure, and are disoblged when they seem to be disgusted. We become anxious to know how far our appearance deserves either blame or approbation. We examine our persons limb by limb, and by placing ourselves before a looking-glass, or by some such expedient, endeavour, as much as possible, to view ourselves at the distance and with the eyes of other people. (111-12)

Adam Smith, The Theory of Moral Sentiments

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (12-14)

W. E. B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk (1903)

What’s in a Name?

‘What’s in a name?’ (5), Ruth Frankenberg asks in her introduction to her study on the social construction of whiteness and women. Whiteness, however, eludes this question because its very power lies in its nameless status. ‘Naming “whiteness,”’ Frankenberg argues ‘would displace... it from the unmarked, unnamed status that is itself an effect of its dominance. Among the effects on white people both of race privilege and of the dominance of whiteness are their seeming normativity, their structured invisibility’ (6). In her seminal essay Playing in the Dark, Morrison argues that whiteness as represented in literature has remained successful in being unnamed; it has remained invisible because criticism, labouring under misguided politeness, has avoided asking ‘what’s in a name?’ Indeed, Morrison’s first novel The Bluest
Eye (1970) is an excellent example of a novel that begs that question. As Valerie Babb puts it, ‘The Bluest Eye represents an instance in American literature where a writer probes the meaning of an often uninvestigated racial construct, whiteness; but it is one of few such instances’ (8). This chapter investigates what may be considered the forerunner to The Bluest Eye, Fauset’s Comedy: American Style (1933), a novel that names whiteness, indeed spells it out by identifying its main character, a white supremacist, as ‘Olivia Blanchard’ and by drawing on the Grimm brothers’ fairy tale ‘Snow White’ as one of its structural motifs. Staged as a spectacle, the novel is divided into acts and prompts its readership, imagined as an audience, not to be ‘too polite or too fearful to notice a disrupting darkness before its eyes,’ to use Morrison’s closing lines in Playing in the Dark (91).

Fauset’s work, along with other women writers of the early twentieth century, has largely been invisible to the high white tradition in American literature. Ignored by the male-dominated academy in the beginning of the century when American literature was emerging as a professional field, it was not until the 1960s and 1970s that feminist scholars reassessed the importance of Fauset’s work. With her article ‘New Literary History: Edith Wharton and Jessie Redmon Fauset’ and her 1992 book-length study Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century, Ammons renders overlooked women writers visible in her picture of American literature from the early 1890s through the 1920, a period deemed of little significance by the mainstream tradition according to her. Following the period of the so-called American Renaissance, ‘The nation’s literature then descended into a valley at the turn of the century,’ Ammons writes, summoning up traditional scholarship, ‘before erupting in a second brilliant outpouring of talent, akin to that of
the American Renaissance, in the 1920s, which saw the emergence of Hemingway,
Fitzgerald, and most important, Faulkner’ (Conflicting Stories 3). Ammons suggests
that turning the critical gaze reveals a group of writers – she examines Frances Ellen
Watkins, Sarah Orne Jewett, Kate Chopin, Edith Wharton, Willa Cather, Alice
Dunbar-Nelson, Ellen Glasgow, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Pauline Hopkins, Sui Sin
Far, Gertrude Stein, Mary Austin, Humishuma or Morning Dove, Anzia Yezierska,
Edith Summers Kelley, Nella Larsen, and Fauset – that exist in tension with each
other but is also joined by two main concerns: a ‘radical experimentation with
narrative form itself’ and a ‘focus on issues of power’ (Conflicting Stories 5). In her
1987 article, Ammons argues that a reassessment and juxtaposition of these women
writers challenge critics to explore the discourse of whiteness. With the examples of
Fauset and Wharton, Ammons suggest that

The other broad issue that Fauset forces into the open is, of course, race.
Placing Fauset and Wharton side by side forces us to see Edith Wharton as a
white writer. As I have argued elsewhere, it is a measure of racism of
American culture that, even in the academy, which prides itself on intellectual
objectivity and fairness, a double standard prevails: race matters when it is
people of color who are the subject but not when it is whites. In literary study,
black is to white as woman is to man; the subordinate category – black,
female – receives separate analysis, scrutiny, and argument, while the
privilege and equally group-specific values and issues implied by the
dominant term – white, male – go unexamined. Bringing together Fauset and
Wharton forces into the field of vision Edith Wharton as a white writer – a
subject that I have never seen taken up in scholarship (my own included),
though it bears fundamentally on any full understanding of her work. (214)

Acknowledging Ammons’ approach as a point of departure for my discussion of
Fauset, I explore Comedy: American Style’s experiment with narrative form and its
investigation of power relations, the joint concerns of the Ammons’ women writers.
But most important for my purposes I read Fauset against the backdrop of Stowe,
Twain, and Grant, in the way that Ammons brings Fauset and Wharton together to
explore issues of race, to examine the development of whiteness in the American literary imagination for which Morrison calls. With its specific references to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and its general struggle with the legacy of domesticity and sentimentality, *Comedy: American Style* invites an examination of its intertextual dialogues with the nineteenth century just as much as it opens up a textual conversation with Morrison’s twentieth-century work. Sharon L. Jones observes that while African American writers like Charles Chesnutt and Paul Laurence Dunbar ‘made strides in challenging sentimentalized portraits of African Americans in the nineteenth century, their twentieth century counterparts confronted similar problems in refuting the one-dimensional and distorted images of African Americans in popular fiction’ (22). Indeed, Fauset’s first novel, *There is Confusion* (1924), was written to counteract *Birth of a Nation*, which had appeared in 1915 (Allen 54) as the film adaptation of Thomas Dixon’s infamous novels *The Leopard’s Spots* (1902) and *The Clansman* (1905). Dixon’s novels sought to remove the basis for race confusion; his 1902 novel, notably, with the telling full title of *Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots, The Leopard’s Spots: A Romance of the White Man’s Burden – 1865-1900*, bore witness to an anxiety of race passing in a period where the values of the Old South seemed to be gone with the wind, and only the past seemed to offer some consolation. *The Leopard’s Spots* is in a constant intertextual dialogue with *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in its nostalgic effort to renegotiate the past. Matthew Pratt Guterl explains this race nostalgia, which sprang from the legacy of the New South and found its ultimate expression in the emerging mass medium of the cinema:

The lure of whiteness and blackness in the 1920s and 1930s also owed a great deal to the intellectual and cultural legacies of the turn-of-the-century New South. Prior to the arrival of “the negro” in the North, Jim Crow’s influence on northeastern political culture was best reflected in D. W. Griffith’s wildly
popular film *Birth of a Nation*, first screened in 1915. *Birth of a Nation* inspired white citizens of the republic – both North and South – to recognize “the Negro” was a threat requiring a unified response, and to bury the “bloody shirt” of southern secession and rebellion. The political reunification of the national polity, symbolized by the election of the self-styled southerner Woodrow Wilson, likewise encouraged an intellectual marriage of North and South. The racialized politics of Wilson and *Birth of a Nation* thus signalled the intertwining of two crucial components of the southernization of northern racial discourse: the wartime nationalism of the period between 1914 and 1918 and the related emergence of the film and entertainment industry. (12)

Fauset’s novel, I suggest, opposes this legacy, lending itself susceptible to strands of investigation that lead us back to antebellum- and Civil-War America, as it takes us into modern America with moving pictures, cabaret, and cars.

**White Weightlessness**

My previous chapter explored Stowe’s New York novels as early examples of conflicted anti-modernist novels, which struggle with the hazy budding manifestations of modernity – what Lears calls weightlessness. Eva van Arsdel Henderson grasps in vain to capture a sense of a self that always seems fleeting. Stowe responded to this solvent setting by proposing a new brand of domesticity that offered the white self stability through consumption; that is, the vague impulses of the feeling self could be stimulated by white goods. The passing self, as it were, found a resting place in the interiors of the middle-class home. Indeed, as I shall argue in the following, one of the motivations for race passing, as Fauset understands it, is the desire to be part of a white middle-class consumer culture. In this chapter, I focus on the notion of passing as a vehicle for examining the correlation between whiteness and sympathy in the early twentieth century, where writers, black and white alike, struggled to come to terms with the past and with the future, and where Stowe’s characters would still intrigue and trouble the literary imagination.
Passing was, at the same time, a reassuring and an unsettling concept to white America at the turn of the century; it confirmed racial categories while it also deconstructed them. Kathleen Pfeiffer notes that ‘An individual’s ability to “pass for white” challenges the applicability of racial categories, yet those same racial categories are precisely what constitute the passing scene’ (12). The Supreme Court’s verdict in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896, notably, redrew the colour lines and reinforced the ‘separate but equal’ mandate, but it also staged the ground for passing. ‘To a nation that craved certainty,’ Pfeiffer argues, ‘*Plessy* offered the illusion of clear segregation. Yet it simultaneously invited subversion of the most dramatic sort: the number of light-skinned people passing for white best illustrates the potential for racial anarchy’ (9). Like a thief in the night, Twain robbed race manic America of certainty in 1894 when he suggested that a ‘black’ slave could pass undetected for a white aristocratic heir in his novel *Pudd’nhead Wilson*. While this novel was set in antebellum America and commented on the inconsistencies and paradoxes of slave society, *Plessy* was a reminder that Twain’s observations also spoke of its contemporary day.

Twain’s notions of ‘imitation nigger’ and ‘imitation white’ (39) may have given white supremacists some temporary comfort as these terms indicate there is some kind of inviolable, authentic white original: whiteness, as an expression of pure blood, was a kind a currency that was being counterfeited. But as the narrative develops, we learn that the scientific method of Pudd’nhead Wilson, the taking of finger prints, is relational and in itself it cannot account for racial identity. Indeed, Twain’s satire makes the controversial statement that to some extent all subjects are passing: Dawson’s Landing is a ‘scene’ (3), as Twain starts his chronicle, on which
subjects in all shapes and forms pass. Roxy and her child are of course the most
obvious examples, and they are the characters around which the main plot is spun.
Roxy is invisibly ‘black’ and visibly ‘white,’ and Twain mocks the law that deems
her black on the basis of a mathematical calculation of the fragments of her blood.
‘To all intents and purposes Roxy was as white as anybody,’ he writes, ‘but the one-
sixteenth of her which was black out-voted the other fifteen parts and made her a
negro. She was a slave, and salable as such. Her child was thirty-one parts white, and
he, too, was a slave, and by a fiction of law and custom a negro’ (9). With subtle
irony, Twain suggests that if Roxy indeed is black, so are all whites, because Roxy is
‘as white as anybody,’ and thus stirring up the colour categories on which the ‘fiction
of law’ is based, he deems them weightless. No scientific, legal, or novelistic
convention can represent race transparently Twain seems to suggest. In chapter three,
I suggested that A Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin functioned as a supplement to Stowe’s
racial depictions in Uncle Tom’s Cabin, undermining them as self-evident
representation. As a telling case in point, book covers which portray Roxy as a ‘black
mammy’ are in conflict with Twain’s problematisation of racial representation: like
Olivia in Comedy: American Style, Roxy cannot be staged because whiteness and
blackness are products of the imagination in Pudd’nhead Wilson.

Twain exposes the social categories of Dawson’s Landing as nothing but
deceptions; indeed, all the citizens, black slaves and white aristocrats alike, are a cast
of impostors who act out their socially prescribed roles. As Susan Gillman argues,

In a broader, metaphysical sense as well, Dawson’s Landing is populated by
nothing but imitation whites whose very names, customs, and values ape
those derived from an archaic feudal system with very little material
relevance to their own reality...This is a society radically confused about what
people are, who is black and who is white, what is imitation and what is real,
a society whose laws create and enforce strict boundaries to mask those confusions. (Dark Twins 78)

Including Siamese twins in his story, Twain introduces further confusion to the scene. The twins add to Twain’s occupation with personal identity and pose the question how selfhood can be distinguished. The answer ostensibly lies in fingerprints, but as Pudd’nhead Wilson’s science cannot fully account for personal and racial identity, Twain leaves his readers with the discouraging or the liberating assumption, depending on one’s perspective, that all identity is passing. Indeed, Pudd’nhead Wilson’s gender, race and class disguises or performances, as it were, point to a postmodern notion of identity like the one theorised by Butler in Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. Comedy: American Style, which we now consider a modernist text with its experimental form, based on the genre of drama, and provocative content, anticipates Butlerian ideas of the performative self. Provided with a table of contents, ‘The Plot,’ ‘The Characters,’ ‘Teresa’s Act,’ Oliver’s Act,’ ‘Phebe’s Act,’ and ‘Curtain,’ Fauset’s novel presents race-, gender-, and self-identity as ‘instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts’ (Butler 140). ‘As a strategy of survival within compulsory systems, gender is,’ to draw on Butler again, ‘a performance with clearly punitive consequences’ (139), that is, a ‘regulatory fiction’ (141). In Comedy: American Style, whiteness, ‘as a strategy of survival,’ is exposed as a ‘regulatory fiction’ wherein passing ‘is a performance with clearly punitive consequences.’ Fauset’s title, I would argue, can be read within the tradition of Shakespeare’s festive comedies, like Twelfth Night, which depend on the actor’s ability to transform him- or herself ‘through a stylized repetition of acts.’ Comedy: American Style, like Shakespeare’s play, employs the motif of doubling and suggests that race identity is a question of mistaken identity;
indeed, blackness and whiteness are always already mistaken notions of identity. The implications of the lines of Olivia in *Twelfth Night* resonate in Fauset’s novel: ‘Have you any commission from your lord to negotiate with my face? You are now out of your text. But we will draw the curtain and show you the picture’ (1.5 219-221). In Fauset’s text, as in Shakespeare’s and Butler’s, the self is a mask behind which the actor fills out a socially constructed persona. Raising a critique of whiteness as a stylised identity constructed to maintain white hegemony, Fauset shows that one is ‘out of [one’s] text’ when one negotiates the script of whiteness.

Before I consider Fauset’s novel in detail, I turn to a text that supposedly gave back white America the certainty which Twain had stolen: Grant’s *The Passing of the Great Race or the Racial Basis of European History* (1916) claimed to scientifically fix racial categories and document the greatness of whiteness, thereby returning to white Americans their birthright.

**The Passing of Whiteness**

At the turn of the century, African American writers like Chesnutt and Fauset were confronted with white anxiety that whiteness was becoming too invisible in American society in an era of migration. In 1916 Grant published his popular race history to dismiss theories of human development grounded in climate and nurture. Like the Beecher sisters’ *The American Woman’s Home*, Grant’s text expresses a deep fear of ‘race suicide’ and its pages spill over with intense nostalgia for New England as a national container of whiteness. Moreover, the social problems, like those of immigration and alcoholism, which the New York novels identified as a threat to the survival of a white New England elite are echoed in Grant’s discourse.
As Guterl puts it, ‘In the simplest of terms, Grant spelled out the roots of race-suicide: immigration, alcoholism, and a lack of historical perspective, failings that betrayed a dangerous lack of “race-consciousness”’ (32). Like the reactionary novels of Dixon, then, Grant longs for antebellum America as a state of national bliss before the war broke the racial hierarchy on which his white fantasy of a ruling ‘Nordic type’ is based. ‘The Civil War,’ according to Grant,

put a severe, perhaps fatal, check to the development and expansion of this splendid type by destroying great numbers of the best breeding stock on both sides and by breaking up the home ties of many more. If the war had not occurred these same men with their descendants would have populated the Western states instead of the racial nondescripts who are now flocking there. (88 emphasis added)

In other words, the racial home as white America knows it is at its deathbed, and if Dixon portrayed the birth of the nation, Grant predicts its death. Upon travelling the republic, Henry Fairfield Osborn concludes thus in his preface to The Passing of the Great Race:

With a race having these predispositions, extending back to the very beginnings of European history, there is no hesitation or even waiting for conscription and the sad thought was continually in my mind in California, in Oregon and in Plattsburg that again this race was passing, that this war will take a heavy toll of this strain of Anglo-Saxon life which has played so large a part in American history. (xii-xiii emphasis added)

The word ‘passing’ in Grant’s title and in the above example is obviously meant to signify death, but I want to suggest that it lends itself susceptible to being understood in the meaning of race passing. I would argue that the title and the text itself pass out of Grant’s hands; they slip out of the author’s controlling grip as the various slippages in his language point to the impossibility of capturing whiteness as self-contained, scientific essence. Grant attempts to pass off whiteness as a fixed category, but his own linguistic constructions like ‘racial nondescripts’ are in his
way. His theatrical language and the images of transatlantic movement that underpin his racial theory open up multiple interpretations of the use of the word passing, and ‘the passing of the race’ translates into ‘race passing’ at various moments in the text.

Referring to the European races of the past, Grant’s discourse evokes theatricality and the sense of transition that it seeks to suppress. ‘During that time,’ he writes, ‘numerous men have passed over the scene’ (13). Formulations like ‘the crossing of an individual’ (14), apparently used to describe a biological phenomenon, slip into the meaning of identity passing in the context of the Atlantic passage to which Grant often refers. Racial categories, as the passing novels of the era brilliantly demonstrate, are always already in flux and resist categorisation. The switched twins, the various disguises of Roxy, and the ostensible ‘Tom’ in Pudd’nhead Wilson showed that Sherlock Holmesque scientific methods were impotent in their attempt to disentangle ‘racial nondescripts,’ to revisit the term that so horrifies Grant. Fingerprints, supposedly the ultimate markers of identity, could reveal nothing about the racial identity of the ‘twins’ switched in the darkness of the night. Pudd’nhead Wilson also failed to suspect Tom’s gender crossing. With its changeling story and its piercing analysis of race passing, I shall argue that Comedy: American Style presents its readers with a character that seems to be an embodiment of Twain’s twins, thereby suggesting that there is confusion in America racial epistemology.

The spectre of race passing haunts Grant’s text throughout its pages. Images like Chesnutt’s mixed-race ‘future American’ which suggested that ‘It is only a social fiction, indeed, which makes of a person seven-eights white a Negro; he is really much more a white man’ (‘The Future American’134), disturb Grant’s text, because they dissolve the category of whiteness as a sealed entity. ‘That insatiable hunger for
cultural fixedness,’ Guterl writes, ‘was most profoundly expressed in Grant’s interest in racial classification, which grew out of the great turn-of-century debate over the “alien menace”’ (31). Immigrants, who are in pursuit of the American Dream, are another example of the ‘alien menace’ to Grant. Representing an American nightmare, they attempt to pass for ‘true’ Americans, like Twain’s imitation whites and imitation aristocrats, and threaten to erase the ostensible original, ‘the native American.’ Grant’s discourse, then, aligns itself with a tradition of counterfeiting embodied in the ‘Con Man’ in American fiction:

> These immigrants adopt the language of the native American, they wear his clothes, they steal his name and they are beginning to take his women, but they seldom adopt his religion or understand his ideals and while he is being elbowed out of his own home the American looks calmly abroad and urges on others the suicidal ethics which are exterminating his own race (91).

Riddled with anxiety, his discourse on immigration enacts the Butlerian notion of identity that it seeks to suppress; identity in this example is exposed as being performative of and not expressive of certain attributes. Indeed, to ‘immigrate,’ as the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it, is ‘to pass into a new habitat or place of residence’ (emphasis added). In short, Grant’s wording opens up the possibility of race passing. ‘Steal[ing] his name,’ immigrants perform the role of ‘the native American,’ showing that there is nothing in a name.

Seeking to ‘naturalise’ race identity, Grant claims that amalgamation, the notion on which Chesnutt’s ‘future American’ rests, is a faulty conception, because ‘race types’ cannot exist in mixed form. Grant asserts that a race is always replaced, never transformed: ‘The result is that one class or type in a population expands more rapidly than another and ultimately replaces it. This process of replacement of one type by another does not mean that the race changes or is transformed into another. It
is a replacement pure and simple and not a transformation’ (47). Reasserting the ‘one drop rule,’ Grant notes that ‘The cross between a white man and an Indian is an Indian; the cross between a white man and a Negro is a Negro; the cross between a white man and a Hindu is a Hindu; and the cross between any of the three European races and a Jew is a Jew’ (18). In other words, he makes an explicit link between ‘true’ Americanness and pure whiteness. Or as Osborn puts in the preface, race ‘has given us the true spirit of Americanism’ (ix). Mixed-race people, in Grant’s typology, are con men. The Nordic race type with the bluest eye (The Passing of the Great Race was reprinted in 1970, the year that saw the publication of Morrison’s The Bluest Eye), however, is nothing less that the impersonation of American exceptionalism: ‘Not that members of other races are not doing their part, many of them are, but in no other human stock which has come to this country is there displayed the unanimity of heart, mind and action which is now being displayed by the descendants of the blue-eyed, fair-haired peoples of the north of Europe’ (Osborn xi). America’s pioneer spirit, then, is bound up the physical attributes of ‘the Nordic type,’ whereas its antithesis is fleshed out in the dark skin of the ‘Negro.’ Echoing Hume’s notorious image of the black man as a parrot merely capable of mimicry in his footnote ‘Of National Characters’ (1748), Grant maintains that ‘Negroes’ cannot be written into a historical narrative of progress: ‘Negroes have demonstrated throughout recorded time that they are a stationary species and they do not possess the potentiality of progress or initiative from within. Progress from self-impulse must not be confounded with mimicry or with progress imposed from without by social pressure or by the slaver’s lash’ (77). Indeed, Grant sees abolition as a crime against the white man as well as the black man as social equality between the ‘races’ will
prove destructive to the American republic. Speaking like a white supremacist character out of *The Marrow of Tradition*, Grant explains that ‘Negroes’ are not fit to be part of the body politic because servitude is their very disposition – the position of Major Carteret in Chesnutt’s novel:

> The native American has always found and finds now in the black man wiling followers who ask only to obey and to further the ideals and wishes of the master race, without trying to inject into the body politic their own views, whether racial, religious or social. Negroes are never socialists or labor unionists and as long as the dominant imposes its will on the servient race and as long as they remain in the same relation to the whites as in the past, the Negroes will be a valuable element in the community but once raised to social equality their influence will be destructive to themselves and to the whites. (87-88)

An apologist for slavery, an opponent of miscegenation, a defender of Jim Crow laws, and a proponent of segregation and sterilisation, Grant’s race history fuels dreams of a New South like Dixon’s popular fiction. In the spirit of the New South leaders, he sees the overthrow of slavery and the migration of workers as sand in the glorious machine of whiteness. ‘The agitation over slavery,’ he writes, ‘was inimical to the Nordic race, because it thrust aside all national opposition to the intrusion of hordes of immigrants of inferior racial value and prevented the fixing of a definite American type’ (86). ‘The fixing of a definite American type,’ a question that has intrigued the literary imagination since J. Hector St. John Crèvecoeur explored it in his *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782), is repeatedly evoked in Grant’s text and unsettled in the shape of con men, immigrants, counterfeits, and passers.

Toning down the threatening notion of ‘transformation,’ Grant suggests that nineteenth-century America existed in isolation as the ultimate breeding ground for homogenous whiteness. Echoing Fowler’s utopia of selective white breeding through which ‘our world can again become a garden of Eden, and man a world of angels’
Grant sees America as having been designed by nature as a new world garden of Eden, where whiteness can be cultivated in the absence of snakes who possess the disturbing ability to shed their skin (unlike Dixon’s leopard):

Nature had granted to the Americans of a century ago the greatest opportunity in recorded history to produce in isolation of a continent a powerful and racially homogeneous people and had provided for the experiment a pure race of one of the most gifted and vigorous stocks on earth, a stock free from diseases, physical and moral, which have again and again sapped the vigor of older lands. (90)

But ‘the American sold his birthright in a continent to solve a labor problem’ (Grant 12), and let former slaves and immigrants into the garden who turned it into a genetic toilet and flushed out the ‘Nordic type’, the ‘native American.’ ‘Large cities from the days of Rome, Alexandria, and Byzantium have always been gathering points of diverse races, but New York is becoming a cloaca gentium,’ Grant reports with regret, ‘which will produce many amazing racial hybrids and some ethnic horrors that will be beyond the powers of future anthropologists to unravel’ (92). The horror to Grant is that the very science around which he has built his race history is ultimately proving inadequate; anthropology cannot establish secure, scientific parameters within which to define racial identity in the future.

In this nightmare scenario whiteness and blackness alike have become completely invisible; there is no ‘tell-tale color,’ to use Fauset’s term (225), to fix the American type, and hence no basis on which Grant can construct a meaningful national narrative. New York is envisioned as a modern, racial wasteland inhabited by ‘ethnic horrors,’ where the blue eyes of the pioneers are no longer to be seen, and the true American spirit is not to be felt. Grant has lost firm ground on which to stand and finds himself in quicksand, devoid of answers to the kind of questions that Twain so
powerfully churns up in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*. Anthropological science, Grant capitulates, cannot ‘unravel’ the identities of the future Americans. As Gillman articulates the central paradoxes that Twain highlights in America’s racial epistemology,

> From the very beginning in which Roxana, trading literally on the babies’ interchangeability, switches the two in their cradles, the novel detects a central ambiguity suppressed in law, if not custom, by slave society: if not by color or other unalterable physiological differences, how can we differentiate individuals and groups? How do we know who is master and who is slave, who is to be held accountable under the law and who is not? Finally, with the unsettling trial at the end, the novel asks, how sound is the basis of knowledge? How do we know what is true? (‘“Sure Identifiers’” 449)

Grant’s painful predicament is that we do not know what is true if we do not have racial categories and racial hierarchies. To him, ‘race lies at the base of all the manifestation of modern society’ (xxi), and without it as an incorruptible category he has lost the tools to make sense of the world; he has lost his only meaningful way of imaging America. Race is nothing less than his very epistemology. His confusion echoes Mrs. Ochiltree’s in *The Marrow of Tradition* whose world ‘is upside down’ (123), because some of the city’s proud, old antebellum mansions are now inhabited by black citizens, and thus whiteness as a marker is becoming highly unstable. ‘The fixing of a definite American type’ cannot be undertaken in modern America if whiteness as a signifier is proved to be empty. Disillusioned by modernity with its unsettling notions, Grant retreats to a fantasy of Colonial times where the ‘Nordic type’ supposedly created America in his image: ‘The “survival of the fittest” means the survival of the type best adapted to existing conditions of environment, which today are the tenement and factory, as in the Colonial times they were the clearing of forests, fighting Indians, farming the fields and sailing the Seven Seas. From the point of view of race it were better described as the “survival of the unfit”’ (92).
Darwin’s theory of evolution, nevertheless, shatters Grant’s fantasy as it unravels his scientific trajectory; if we are all the same species, if we are all the same blood, whiteness as a notion of pure blood is rendered meaningless.

Grant’s text on the whole exposes the tension characteristic of the period between an optimistic belief in progress and science and a pronounced pessimistic sense of doubt. Shaking off this sense of doubt, he indulges in an account of the historic past that stresses the violence that colonists employed in the name of whiteness and empire. Grant, however, is blind to the violent destruction that has characterised much of American history and its institutions. Human sympathy is put down as ‘misguided sentimentalism’ (51); the only true and justified sympathy, according to Grant, is the one that is cultivated among members of the Nordic race and based solely on that characteristic. ‘Linguistic sympathy’ (57), for example, must be dismissed, because language is mutable unlike race. Grant articulates his dreams of what one may call a ‘race renaissance’ in stark contrast to Chesnutt’s ‘future American’: ‘In the future, however, with an increased knowledge of the correct definition of true human races and types and with a recognition of the immutability of fundamental racial characters and of the results of mixed breeding, far more value will be attached to racial in contrast to national or linguistic affinities’ (60). The Passing of a Great Race, I have argued, does not tell us much about whiteness as a scientific category, but it tells us something about one of its ‘describers and imaginers’ to use Morrison’s words (Playing in the Dark 90), and shows us how white America in the Progressive era clings to a racial vocabulary because without it, it simply cannot articulate the nation. Without racialised language the nation becomes a nondescript. It passes.
Arguing with the Sentimental Novel

*The Passing of a Great Race*, as ‘the Ur-text of modern American nativism’ (Guterl 8), speaks of a legacy of nineteenth-century literature and science imbued with whiteness, just as it has helped shape racial sensibilities up until the Civil Rights era in which it was reprinted without a new contextualising preface. Osborn’s notorious preface still speaks to the readers of the 1970s, a readership that had seen the rise of Hitlerism and the Holocaust. As a telling case in point, *The Passing of a Great Race* became a text that would inflame ideas of a *Herrenvolk* in Germany and elsewhere; indeed, ‘Grant would frequently show visitors a personal letter from Hitler himself, in which the Nazi leader described *The Passing of the Great Race* as his “Bible”’ (Guterl 67). When it appeared in German translation in 1925 the *Führer* himself was listed as an author as well. The moral values that Grant attaches to white racial affinity, the scope of investigation in this thesis, were a formative influence on its present day and beyond, as well as a culmination of the past. Coviello, to whom I referred in chapter three, has argued that ‘race as a language of affiliation’ (4) came into prominence in the middle of the nineteenth century, and that whiteness became the ultimate marker of affinity. My own argument identifies sympathy as a key element in the discursive construction of whiteness in the nineteenth century. In what follows, I read the character of Olivia Blanchard in *Comedy: American Style* as a critical commentary on one of the legacies of sentimental literature that Stowe had popularised in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and further developed in *My Wife and I* and *We and Our Neighbors*: white narcissistic sympathy. But if mainstream nineteenth-century national literature sought to write a narrative of homogenous whiteness, it also revealed ‘the doubleness at the heart of the American experiment’ (8), as
Sundquist has phrased it, using *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as an example of ‘sentimental racialism’ that struggles with the ghost of the house divided, as represented by Simon Legree’s mansion, ‘the House Divided in extremity, the home of both domestic (sexual) and political (racial) perversions of the family’ (‘Slavery, Revolution, and the American Renaissance’ 17). Grant, in his story of race, seeks to expunge this ‘doubleness at the heart of the American experiment’ by proposing a scientific basis for a kind of racial cleansing that would lead to white homogeneity.

_Comedy: American Style_, like other passing novels, Nella Larsen’s, for example, explores the doubleness that white America is so eager to deny, and records the destruction of African American selfhood that such a white aesthetic has brought about as Morrison shows so brilliantly in *The Bluest Eye*. Apart from its intertextual dialogue with *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, what makes Fauset’s novel particularly interesting for my purposes is its elaborate explorations of the notion of spectatorship, divided selfhood, and mirror-images, all notions that inform imaginative sympathy as Smith understands it in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. The extensive treatment of these issues by Fauset in a passing novel, I suggest, calls for an examination of passing and sympathy in a shared discursive realm.

Critics remain divided over Fauset’s work. Cheryl A. Wall, for example, deems Fauset’s view of feminist concerns conservative, and argues that ‘Fauset attempted to adapt the conventions of the sentimental novel to her own purposes’ (66). Other critics like Deborah E. McDowell and Ammons suggest that division and ambivalence define the nature of Fauset’s work. In her excellent introduction to *Plum Bun*, McDowell suggests that Fauset’s novels themselves pass as conservative and that this disguise has often mislead critics:
We can say, then, that *Plum Bun* has the hull but not the core of literary conservatism and convention. Like Angela’s it is the case of mistaken identity. It passes for conservative, employing “outworn” and “safe” literary materials while, simultaneously, remaining suspicious of them. The novel moves toward dismantling the fantasy of racial passing, but more importantly, it moves toward de-idealizing romantic love and criticizing those literary and cultural structures that reinforce and promote that idealization. In other words, *Plum Bun* dares to explore questions about unconventional female roles and possibilities for development using the very structures that have traditionally offered fundamentally conservative answers to those questions. Fauset’s answers were risky, in the literary marketplace, but powerful, liberating alternatives nevertheless, both for herself as a writer and for the image of blacks and women in literature. (xxii)

Extending McDowell’s position that Fauset’s work pass, Ammons writes that Fauset’s ‘novels exist in tension with themselves’ (*Conflicting Stories* 159). To Ammons, Fauset’s fiction is ‘unstable,’ with ‘too much plot,’ ‘too much description,’ ‘too much concept,’ but exactly in this instability lies the real force of her work (*Conflicting Stories* 159). Ammons writes thus on the passing power of Fauset’s novels: ‘Often they are more compelling subtextually than textually, more vital in their covert, almost too well-disguised implications – for example, *Plum Bun*’s trope on passing or *Comedy: American Style*’s brilliant fusion of changeling, American Dream (Nightmare), and fairy-tale witch plots – than in their overt rhetorical and narrative aspects’ (*Conflicting Stories* 159). In other words, Ammons argues that the failure of Fauset’s novels is their very success. Wall, on the other hand, describes Fauset’s fiction as ‘crippled’ and writes of Fauset’s last novel: ‘to the extent that it recycles familiar themes, *Comedy: American Style* guarantees its own failure’ (81). Failing to see that *Comedy: American Style* passes, Wall concludes thus from it: ‘Although Olivia is not an autobiographical character, some of her attitudes were also Jessie Fauset’s’ (84).
Drawing on McDowell’s and Ammons’ approaches, I want to suggest that while *Comedy: American Style* may pass as a novel of white aesthetics, it is indeed a deconstruction of a white aesthetics; Olivia’s mask is not the narrative’s mask. The passing motif and the Snow White motif should not be mistaken for a sanctioning of a white supremacist ideology on the author’s behalf. Aligning the notion of passing with imaginative sympathy, where the actor regulates his acts to get the spectator’s approval, I argue that Fauset’s use of the passing trope is part of a critique of sentimental fiction. I read Olivia Blanchard as the embodiment of Chesnutt’s ‘American eye’ that filters the world through the lens of whiteness in *The Marrow of Tradition* (74): she embodies the gaze of sympathy that cares for others according to their degree of whiteness. The white sentimentalist’s mirror of sympathy, Fauset maintains, has no reflection for black Americans; indeed, Olivia’s darker skinned son, Oliver, represents to Olivia her flawed self-image that must be destroyed for her to pass before the spectator’s gaze. Fauset does not redraw the sentimental pictures of Stowe’s era as some critics have suggested: she argues with them.

**‘The Plot’: Passing as Neighbours**

The notions that Fauset place centre stage in the opening scene of ‘the plot’ are those of sympathy and whiteness. The setting of the scene is ‘one glacial January’ (3), and the neighbourhood is covered in the whiteness of snow. In this symbolic setting, Olivia’s self-hatred is born when she is rejected by her neighbour and interpellated as black even though ‘Olivia and her pleasant-spoken mother had been so completely like [their white neighbours] in appearance that they had not let all the implications creep into their minds’ (4). From the outset of the novel, then, Fauset
suggests that race is a construction of the mind; like Roxy’s, Olivia’s exterior is not expressive of particular racial attributes. Olivia, out playing in the snow, hits another small girl with a snowball, who, in turn, becomes furious as if Olivia’s presence in the snowy landscape is an act of trespassing, polluting whiteness: ‘The girl whom she had hit lived in the same block with her, but had never before spoken to her little colored neighbor. Now she turned and called out with raucous fury: “Don’t you ever hit me again with a snowball, you nasty little nigger!” (3-4). If the neighbours have previously been regarding Olivia as an extension of themselves, a neighbour living in the ‘same block,’ this girl does not recognise her own image in Olivia’s and withholds her sympathy. Olivia is denied the identity label with which society hails its subjects in what I described as a process of white normalisation in my previous chapter on Stowe’s New York novels, wherein neighbours were articulated as copies of Eva as a white prototype. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, Smith explains such as a process of socialisation as the very condition for selfhood with the hypothetical example of an individual who has grown up ‘in some solitary place, without communication with this own species’: ‘Bring him into society, and he is provided with the mirror which he wanted before. It is placed in the countenance and behaviour of those he lives with, which always mark when they enter into, and when they disapprove of his sentiments; and it is here that he first views the propriety and impropriety of his own passions, the beauty and deformity of his own mind’ (110). The mirror of white society rejects Olivia and, as a consequence, creates the deformity of her mind. In *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, as Duckworth reminds us, black characters ‘appear as distorted mirror images of whites’ (214), and we may read Fauset’s novel as a critique of such images that Stowe and others have engendered.
Appalled at this new-found gulf between herself and her white neighbours, Olivia broods on bitterly that she is ‘considered different!’ (4). Another little girl, ‘as nut-brown and as curly-haired as Olivia herself,’ offers Olivia her hand and her sympathy, whispering ‘“it doesn’t make any difference”’ (4), but Olivia refuses to recognise her own image in this girl’s. To Olivia it comes to make all the difference in the world.

The neighbour’s withheld white sympathy makes Olivia internalise a sense of dual selfhood, the state of divided self-identity that W. E. B. Du Bois, Fauset’s friend and mentor, famously dubbed ‘double consciousness’:

> After the Egyptian and the Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil and gifted with second-sights in this American world, – a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, – an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (12-14)

But what Fauset wants to show with her character Olivia Blanchard, I argue, is not Du Bois’ ‘warring ideals’ but a complete defeat to the ideal of whiteness: Olivia develops into Chesnutt’s American eye that only sees the world in terms of whiteness; she is not gifted with Du Bois’ ‘second-sights.’ Olivia wants to escape looking at her blackness, however invisible and however socially constructed, and completely internalises the world view of the white gaze. Carol Allen suggests that Jacques Lacan’s mirror stage ‘as a narrative, corresponds to the thematic textual progression of Fauset’s novels: from the protagonist’s state of fragmented reality to a state of self-perceived wholeness’ (66). While my argument is informed by work like
Allen’s, I propose that a reading of the mirror motif within the discourse of sympathy, given her negotiation of the sentimental novel, brings out different aspects of Fauset’s concern with the formation of racialised subjects. Like the exchange of sympathy, passing is about looking and imagining, about performance of identity, about punishment and reward. Smith’s dualistic model of the self, a kind of ‘double consciousness,’ as it were, underlies the regulatory mechanism of sympathy as one of visual monitoring:

When I endeavour to examine my own conduct, when I endeavour to pass sentence upon it, and either to approve or condemn it, it is evident that, in all such cases, I divide myself, as it were, into two persons; and that I the examiner and judge, represent a different character from that other I, the person whose conduct is examined into and judged of. The first is the spectator, whose sentiments with regard to my own conduct I endeavour to enter into, by placing myself in his situation, and by considering how it would appear to me, when seen from that particular point of view. The second is the agent, the person whom I properly call myself, and of whose conduct, under the character of a spectator, I was endeavouring to form some opinion. The first is the judge; the second the person judged of. (TMS 113)

Elaine K. Ginsberg emphasises the ocular as central to the process of passing, writing that ‘passing is about specularity: the visible and the invisible, the seen and the unseen’ (2). Akin to the privileged point of vantage of the impartial spectator in Smith’s theory of sympathy, Frankenberg defines whiteness thus: ‘First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of racial privilege. Second, it is a “standpoint,” a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society’ (1). It is through this lens that I look at the passing motif in Comedy: American Style; as a critical commentary on the white gaze of sympathy.

Fauset repeatedly presents readers with scenes wherein Olivia’s ‘black’ self, the agent ‘of whose conduct, under the character of a spectator,’ whites examine into and judge of, to employ Smith’s wording. After her ‘black’ father, whom she blames for
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her race predicament, has passed away, Mrs. Blanchard and Olivia move to a
different neighbourhood, and the stage is set anew for Olivia to reinvent herself
before the eyes of white spectators. Here the adolescent Olivia hopes she can leave
her double consciousness behind, just as the adult Olivia hopes to escape double
consciousness in France and adopt whiteness as the ultimate ‘standpoint,’ to draw on
Frankenberg’s observation above. “I don’t think anybody around here thinks we’re
colored, because nobody knows we’re colored. I think, Mother,” said Olivia,
struggling with an idea destined to become the cornerstone of many a latter-day cult,
“that if you really are one way and people see you another way, then it’s just as easy
for you to be their way as your way” (9). Olivia endorses the gaze that reflects back
whiteness, and she reinvents herself in its image. As Olivia explains her point of
view to her bewildered mother, “Well, then,” Olivia finished, coming to her point,
for her clear mind told her no further discussion was necessary, “since the girls, and
the teachers too, at school think I’m white, don’t you think I’d better be white” (10).
Exposing whiteness as completely essenceless – whiteness is a construct of the
imagination, a thought experiment – Fauset mocks whiteness and shows there is
nothing in a name. Or as Babb puts it, ‘The ideology that fuels whiteness strips us of
our individuality and makes us formulaic representations of what we imagine one
another to be’ (168).

Comedy: American Style also suggests that class ‘strips us of our individuality and
makes us formulaic representations of what we imagine one another to be.’ As
opposed to her daughter, Mrs. Blanchard adopts the standpoint of the black middle-
class bourgeoisie, and seeks to explain to her daughter that class should take
precedence over colour. Accusing her daughter of ‘sail[ing] under false pretenses’
Mrs. Blanchard herself, nevertheless, passes for white, to appear more American than the European immigrants at the factory, so that she can to secure her promotion. As Allen notes, ‘racial demarcations dictate the degree to which the subject will be able to relate to a national identity. Subjects, especially during the early part of the twentieth century, could see themselves as more American the closer they were to white’ (67). Indeed, Mrs. Blanchard dehumanises the immigrants at the factory, reducing them to ‘mill-hands’ (11), and leads a lonely existence due to her class prejudices. She is ‘the type of colored people,’ Fauset’s narrator notes, ‘who look with scorn on what they call with special attention “poor whites”’ (11). While Olivia is never able to divorce her conception of whiteness from economic privilege, as her mother clearly is, she is not willing to stay behind and pass for working-class white when her mother decides to leave for Boston. As the narrator puts it, ‘Olivia did not want to work in the mills’ (15).

Once in Boston, Mrs. Blanchard secures a bourgeois, light-skinned husband and thus secures her middle-class aspirations. Olivia likewise secures her white aspirations through marriage. The product of Mrs. Blanchard’s marital union, a set of handsome twins, ‘they were striking children, with Janet’s mat white skin, and with their father’s thick dark hair and blue eyes’ (24 emphasis in the original), provides Olivia with the ocular proof, echoing Twain’s switched twins, that it pays off, both in terms of capital and racial capital, to marry a light-skinned ‘black’ middle-class man as opposed to a working-class white. Indeed, Olivia’s sole motivation for marrying Christopher Cary, a Harvard-trained physician, is to secure the production of whiteness and its ostensible economic privilege. Olivia imagines that her white children will serve as an extension of her own white self: ‘They would have white
children. The twins had shown her that. So at last she would obtain her desire. And for that reason and no other she married Christopher Cary’ (29).

‘The Characters’: Imbued with Whiteness

Olivia Blanchard Cary cares for her children according to their degree of whiteness and to the degree they provide her with a mirror in which she can see her own white self reflected. Olivia, governed by the logic of the ‘one drop rule,’ imagines that her sense of ideology can hail her children as white subjects, so that their invisible blackness remains invisible to their mind’s eye: ‘She could, she was sure, imbue her offspring with the precept and example to such an extent that it would never enter their minds to acknowledge the strain of black blood which in considerable dilution would flow through their veins’ (37). Not unlike Grant, then, Olivia entertains a notion of whiteness as pure blood, essentially reducing her children to a kind of counterfeited racial capital. Imbuing ‘her offspring with the precept and example’ of whiteness, Olivia’s ways of impregnating, permeating, pervading, and inspiring feelings and habits are dyed with whiteness. Like her house ‘freshly “done over” every year’ (43), her children are whitewashed to erase any (in)visible signs of blackness, like the Irish servants in We and Our Neighbors: ‘As a rule her mother dressed her in pastel shades with the thought that in some way this brought out every possible delicacy of coloring and even of feature; refining her and taking away every possible vestige of connection with a cruder race’ (56).

Olivia’s capacity for imaginative sympathy is completely bleached out in her obsession with whiteness, and her husband, blinded by notions of ‘true womanhood,’ realises that he got more than he bargained for: ‘When he fully realized that her
much-prized “aloofness,” instead of being the insigne of a wealth of feeling, was merely the result of an absolute vacuum of passion, young as he was, he resolved not to kick against the pricks’ (38). Throughout her characterisation or perhaps more fittingly dramatisation of Olivia, Fauset continuously undermines white womanhood and renders its ostensible qualities empty. Sympathy and altruism, the attributes of ‘true women’ in sentimental literature, are exposed as means by which one can enhance one’s own privilege and not that of the object of one’s charity. As Tania Friedel rightly notes, ‘Another target of Fauset’s satire, Olivia’s failure to be truly kind, warm or giving to those closest to her while she devotes countless hours to her “precious welfare committees” is also closely linked to her passing for white’ (74-75). In her eagerness to pass for white and obtain its social and financial privileges at a Peace Conference, the notion of peace passes her by. Fauset, then, satirises the misguided charitable actions of women like Olivia: ‘But none of these things meant anything to Olivia. She was indeed unconscious of having assisted as a great feministic gesture...All she recalled was the cup of tea shared with Mrs. Bivins of Xenia; the time she and the Simmons “girls” shopped; their remark when she had tried on the dark blue dress with the red buttons, “which set off your Italian coloring, my dear”’ (104). In other words, Fauset identifies Olivia’s, and the other white women’s, desire to pass for true women as a desire for consumer culture.

Consumption, whiteness, and passing are all key themes in the Fairy Tale ‘Snow White’ that Fauset uses as a structural motif. Passing as a peasant woman, the Queen seduces Snow White with the promises of exotic goods. At the end of the fairy tale, the prince articulates a white aesthetics, directing his gaze at Snow White’s superior all-white body: ‘I can’t go on living without being able to see Snow White’ (188).
The passing of whiteness as it is embodied in Snow White is a horror to the prince, just as the hunter ordered to kill her takes pity on her ‘since she was so beautiful’ (182). Indeed, ‘Snow White’s perfect beauty seems distantly derived from the sun; her name suggests the whiteness and purity of strong light’ (Bettelheim 209). Whiteness and beauty in this famous fairy tale are determined by a magic, truth-telling mirror, and Fauset adopts this mirror motif to enquire into the social construction of the white gaze. Akin to the mirror of sympathy that reflects back a narcissistic sense of self, which I discussed in my previous chapter, Snow White’s ‘stepmother’s narcissism is demonstrated by her seeking reassurance about her beauty from the magic mirror’ (Bettelheim 202). The fairy tale, moreover, presents a dualist model of the ego in which it is divided according to colour, echoing Smith’s model of the divided self. As Bettelheim explains this model in Freudian terms, ‘Learning about good and evil – gaining knowledge – seems to split our personality in two: the red chaos of unbridled emotions, the id; and the white purity of our conscience, the superego’ (214 my emphasis). Indeed, in Smith’s Theory of Moral Sentiments the ‘chaos of unbridled emotions’ is embodied by red savages, just as it is by Topsy, who is both a figure for the wild Indian and the black slave, in Uncle Tom’s Cabin. The ultimate superego, ‘the white purity of our conscience,’ in that novel, on the other hand, is personified in little Eva. Moral sentiments, of which Grant’s text is a disturbing reminder, have been written into a racialised paradigm in the course of modernity.
‘Oliver’s Act’: Passing as a Colonised Subject

The birth of Oliver cracks the mirror to her white self that Olivia imagines her children to represent. Oliver, who ‘in appearance, in rearing, in beliefs...should be completely, unrelievedly a member of the dominant race’ (40) according to the expectant mother, is, as Thadious M. Davis suggests in his introduction to Comedy: American Style, to ‘embody the answer to the riddle “Mirror, mirror or the wall, who’s the fairest of them all?”’ (xxix). ‘Her chosen namesake is slated before his birth,’ Davis notes, ‘to become an obverse reflection of her dreams’ (xxix). Oliver, then, becomes Olivia’s darkest nightmare. Indeed, he is a figure of self-annihilation to Olivia, the ghost of her hated father, representing her racial fears; she ‘can’t go on living’ if she has to look at Oliver, to echo the fairy tale. Like the queen in ‘Snow White,’ moreover, Olivia is eventually destroyed by her own narcissism.

Emphasising specularity in the scene where Olivia is presented with her newborn, Fauset shows how the white gaze refuses to acknowledge the racialised other as its mirror-image: ‘Her eyes stretched wide to behold every fraction of his tiny person. But the expectant smile faded as completely as though an unseen hand had wiped it off. She turned to her husband sharply: “That’s not my baby!”’ (41). In his excellent analysis of visual and violent encounters in The Marrow of Tradition, Bryan Wagner argues that white ideology is punctured when others cannot be conceived of as being reproduced in image of the American Eye, the utopia that We and Our Neighbors visualised. Wagner writes that

Through a series of interpersonal encounters, Chesnutt exposes the ideological subtext that structures white responses to the African American middle class. These scenes suggest what happened in Wilmington when local whites encountered racialized objects (bodies, buildings, monuments) that could not be fully assimilated by the structures of white perception. I call these scenes “disturbances of vision,” a term that designates the intense
cognitive dissonance generated in these moments of apparent ideological collapse. (313)

Oliver is to Olivia one such ‘disturbance of vision,’ and his presence brings about the collapse of the stage of Olivia’s racial theatre: ‘To her Oliver meant shame. He meant more than that; he meant the expression of her failure to be truly white’ (205). He stands as her dark twin, like her namesake Olivia Carteret’s African American sister Janet Miller in *The Marrow of Tradition*, and must be kept out of vision to restore her white sense of self that Christopher Jr. and Teresa represent:

> Just as years ago she had felt that Christopher was the sign apparent of her white blood, so now she felt that Oliver was the totality of that black blood which she so despised. And there was too much of it. In her own eyes it frightened and degraded her to think that within her veins, her arteries, her blood-vessels, coursed through enough black blood to produce a child with skin as shadowed as Oliver’s. (205)

Like the criticism that ignores questions of race in its inquiry, Olivia seeks to render her darker skinned son invisible to her gaze. As Morrison puts it, ‘To enforce its invisibility through silence is to allow the black body a shadowless participation in the dominant cultural body’ (9-10). Indeed, Oliver’s eventual self-destruction is grounded in the fact that he is ‘shadowless’: he cannot find his reflection in the ‘dominant cultural body’ that Olivia represents. ‘Oliver’s Act’ is Fauset’s most elaborate exploration of doubleness and the mirror motif in *Comedy: American Style*, and she claims that the mirror into which African Americans look for self-recognition is always already framed by the white gaze. The Pandora edition of *Plum Bun* suggests this with its cover image, displaying a lighter-skinned woman in front of a mirror studying her darker-skinned reflection in the looking glass. Racialised subjects, Fauset maintains, are nothing but representation, a fictional invention that the spectator generates as reality, as Twain so brilliantly showed with the character
of Roxy in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*. The arbitrariness of race as textual invention is exposed by a young boy in *Comedy: American Style*, who comments on his blond, blue-eyed play mate’s social categorisation as black in a manner reminiscent of the boy in the Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale, who sees through the social illusion of the emperor’s new clothes: ‘“But if she ain’t white, why ain’t she white? She’s whiter than lots of those white girls at our school. What makes her colored and makes those white girls white?”’ (49).

‘Oliver’s Act’ is dominated by mirror scenes; indeed, Oliver ‘live[s] in a double world’ (187). Like a suffering actor in Smith’s account of sympathy, Oliver searches his reflection in the mirror to realise how he can modify his behaviour to get the approval of the spectator. ‘There must be some hidden, some inner defect,’ Oliver thinks, ‘which age would reveal to him’ (195). In the encounter with his mother’s gaze, Oliver’s sense of dividedness is continuously confirmed, as his sentiments are not reflected back in her eyes: ‘He turned his golden appealing face up to her; his face which itself could not show pride until her own had ratified his teacher’s pronouncement’ (199). Olivia turns her gaze away from Oliver, because she is unwilling to adopt his sentiments, and, as Smith writes, ‘and become in some measure the same person with him’ (9). A ‘disturbance of vision,’ ‘his presence in the house fret[s] and humiliate[s] her’ (205), and Oliver spends most of his childhood at his grandparents’ home, erased from Olivia’s white self-narrative.

Unable to sympathetically identify with her son, Olivia passes him off as the antithesis of her white super ego, labelling and rejecting him as a ‘wild Indian’ (201). Indeed, when Oliver returns to the Cary home as an adolescent, Olivia projects onto him the identity grid of a colonised other, making him perform the role of a Latino
butler, thus showing off her economic privilege and her racial superiority. As Allen notes, ‘Fauset shows her disapproval by including a scene where Olivia coerces her darker son, Oliver, into serving as a waiter when she entertains a few white friends with an afternoon tea, validating both tea and social separation on the basis of race, which indicates that she has been seduced by capitalism and a national segregationist ideology’ (63). Elsewhere I have argued that Stowe validated this kind of segregated household in *We and Our Neighbors*, where little Irish Midge, who waits on Eva and her friends, underscores the whiteness of the white middle-class parlour. Race, in the literary imagination, is a notion of space as well as a notion of bodies; the marrow of tradition in America, as Chesnutt reminds us, is the racialised house. Akin to the violence that white supremacists employ to recompose the racial geography of the city in Chesnutt’s novel, Olivia perpetrates psychic violence on Oliver, indeed on all her children, to restore the racial landscape of her home. Reminiscent of the queen in the fairy tale who eats the liver and lungs she believes to be Snow White’s because she stands in her way of passing before the looking glass, Olivia drives her son to suicide, because with his ‘tell-tale color’ (225), he appears to her a truth-telling mirror. Completely wrapped up in whiteness, Olivia is, like the Klan members, an agent of death. Dyer comments on this image of white death in *The Birth of a Nation*, the film Fauset’s first novel was published to oppose,

The image of the Ku Klux Klan decked out in white is an image of the bringing of death. When we see the Klan riding to the rescue of the beleaguered whites in *The Birth of a Nation*, it is undoubtedly intended that we should see them as bringing salvation, but it is now hard to see in these great splashes, streaks, and swirls of white on an white screen as anything but the bringing of death to African-Americans. In some set-ups...composition, placing the Klan where the natural light falls and outlining them with billowing white smoke, shows nothing but white death. (209)
‘Teresa’s Act’: Passing through a White Wasteland

Olivia does not kill Teresa but makes her life a living death. Like Snow White in the transparent glass coffin, Teresa passes her life as dead. ‘American Style,’ according to Fauset, is deadly, killing the inner life of African Americans. As one of her characters sums up this American wasteland: ‘But he did think America might by now try to live up to some of the tall sayings and implications of her founders...if only there could be some way of showing her the spiritual waste which she annually inflicted on a beautiful and deserving group!’ (91). Following the trail of the ghostly Eva van Arsdel, Teresa Cary’s character, with her mixed genealogy and her alienated sense of self, speaks of the dire modern condition that is bound up with a destructive white ideology and consumer culture in Fauset’s novel. As Friedel notes, ‘This modern condition is the “dusty desert of dollars and smartness” which Du Bois describes in *The Souls of Black Folks* as the state of America. It is the colorless and soulless condition of assimilation to a rootless standard of “Americanization” that shuns particularity and individuality rather than the “ultimate assimilation through self-assertion, and on no other terms” with which Du Bois credits Frederick Douglass’ (76). The rise of this modern condition, I have suggested, is apparent in Stowe’s New York novels, texts that grapple with diversity and ultimately shun individuality, opting for standardisation.

Teresa’s life is a process of white standardisation. Hailed by her mother’s ideology, she is produced as a white middle-class subject as on Eva’s assembly line in *We and Our Neighbors*. Teresa, however, cannot be assembled as a whole machine; she exists in components, in separately manufactured parts of whiteness:

Emotionally, as far as race was concerned, she was a girl without a country...Later on in life it occurred to her that she had been deprived of her
racial birthright and that that was as great a cause for tears as any indignity that might befall man. With no conscious volition on her part a metamorphosis had been achieved. She had become, and she would always remain, individual and aloof, never part of a component whole. (89)

Olivia robs Teresa of any sense of ‘true self-consciousness,’ in Du Bois’ words, and any sense of community, thereby turning her into a prop in her racial drama, a dummy on which to visibly display the markers of whiteness. As Olivia puts it, ‘I have brought Teresa up all her life to think of herself as white. Why shouldn’t I? Her father and I have scraped and saved and sacrificed to give her the proper environment and clothes and ideals so that when she grew up she could take her place in the white world....’ (142). In her tragic sense of cynicism, Olivia disregards how ‘unspeakably distasteful the whole sorry performance’ (90) is to her daughter, and fails to appreciate that she sends Teresa into mental exile, foreshadowing her future as an exile in France. Indeed, Teresa is reduced to an audience to the drama of her own life. As a child when she plays theatre with her friends, she dares not imagine playing another role: ‘Teresa accepted only a faded garland of flowers; she would be audience, she said. No one demurred; it was at times like this her favorite role’ (46).

In her quest for white normalisation, Olivia fully endorses the logic of New England nativism that texts like The American Woman’s Home and The Passing of the Great Race have helped shape. Sending her daughter to boarding school in New England, Olivia hopes that Teresa will reject her ‘black’ identity associated with the city, and adopt the sense of white identity which is projected onto the landscape of New England in nativist thought. True to the logic of this discourse, Olivia regards New England as the ideal breeding ground for whiteness; here the men are
‘thoroughly American’ (70). The school that Teresa attends is all white and has no black applicants, but as Fauset remarks with subtle irony: ‘And since the school advertised very little it seemed most improbable that any would apply; although of course you never could tell’ (70). None of the girls at the school do indeed tell, and Teresa passes her time at the school as a white girl, internalising middle-class values. Her black childhood friends, as Olivia had hoped they would, ‘fade into a background of distance and dimness. Compared with the cool sexlessness of this life...Phebe and her difficult, narrow little life str[ikes] her as pitiful and empty’ (74).

With the scenes at Teresa’s boarding school in New England, Fauset asserts that New England nativism perpetuates an institutionalisation of whiteness that is empty at best, annihilating at worst. Expanding her critique of this white discourse, Fauset suggests that white Americans look at African Americans through Stowe’s stereotypes from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as through a ‘mirror with a memory,’ to revisit Holmes’ term. When Teresa and her fellow students debate the prospect of having a black student attending the school, the common point of reference is Stowe’s Topsy. Fauset shows how Stowe’s pictures live on in the literary imagination and influence the ways twentieth-century white Americans think of African Americans. One girl comments thus: “What would we do with one dancing around here like Topsy, and her hair sticking up all over her head!” (76). Her friend, apparently an attentive reader of Stowe, reproduces the benevolent paternalism that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* encouraged: “It shouldn’t make any difference to us how they look. Suppose she should be someone like Topsy! It would still be our duty to teach her deportment and cleanliness and neatness. It’s our fault that they’re here. We brought them’” (76). Indeed, this student’s rhetoric reproduces Stowe’s ideology of whiteness as being
bound up with cleanliness. The girls’ naive discussion of the prospective African American student reveals the distorted ways in which white Americans imagine the reality of black Americans. A self-satisfied girl ends the discussion with a comment that confirms her own sense of class and colour privilege, ‘And they are the working class’ (77). Fauset’s novels, like Chesnutt’s, disillusioned white America by portraying complex black middle-class characters who had no resemblance to stereotypes like the exotic Topsy. Indeed, one editor who was presented with the manuscript of Fauset’s first novel, There is Confusion, rejected it saying that ‘white readers just don’t expect Negroes to be like this’ (qtd. in Austin 102). Fauset did not present readers with the exotic, sexualised stereotypes expected of Harlem Renaissance literature and was thus deemed unmarketable.

Olivia’s white experiment with Teresa fails initially. Contrary to her mother’s white dreams, Teresa becomes engaged to a black man. But as her plans to elope is discovered by Olivia, Teresa yields, having ‘no self beyond her mother’s gaze, and since she is ill-equipped to invent for herself a discourse of identity, she becomes the image of her mother,’ as Jacquelyn Y. McLendon notes (64). Engulfed by the white empire of her mother, to evoke Ryan’s term, ‘the breakdown in her resistance showed her clearly how completely her inner self was under her mother’s domination’ (Fauset 149), Teresa cannot assert any sense of self and resist the white gaze. Indeed, at the fatal moment of confrontation, she suggests to her fiancé, Henry, that he could ‘pass as Mexican’ (143). Henry, a proud, self-assured young man, leaves the two ‘make-believe white women’ (143) in anger. Marriage to Henry was the only thing that promised to make some meaning in the wasteland of Teresa’s existence, and with the loss of him any chance of self-expression and of coming to
terms with her personal history is lost: ‘She remembered how she had meant to relate
to Henry, with laughter and perhaps some tears, all her adventures in this nebulous
world of near whiteness. How she had hated it, how it had shut out the expression of
her true self’ (146). Teresa is a tabula rasa on which white America, as it is embodied
in Olivia, can write her story.

Trapped in a ‘world of near whiteness,’ Teresa marries a narrow-minded French
professor, Aristide, whose main interest is her dowry. Olivia, extremely pleased with
her daughter’s marriage, imagines that Teresa and she will once and for all escape
the double consciousness that has been haunting them in America. ‘Here there would
be no complexities,’ Olivia ponders, ‘Nothing to make Teresa feel that she was
abandoning her own...her own were not here to be abandoned’ (176). Teresa’s ‘world
of near whiteness’ becomes a world of complete whiteness in Olivia’s mind, as she
sees ‘herself a gracious hostess, her little house teeming with interesting people from
America...“my son-in-law; he is a professor at the University of Toulouse”...all of
these people would be white...she would be white’ (177). In her war against
blackness, Olivia has sacrificed her daughter, and Teresa must settle into a life of
white death: ‘Gradually her expectations of a change died away and she settled down
into an existence that was colorless, bleak and futile’ (183). At the end of Teresa’s
act, France appears, as it is represented by Teresa’s husband, as a landfill, and
underneath the layers of earth disturbing images are buried. Aristide, it turns out, is a
racist who only tolerates blacks as ‘cannon fodder’ (182), and as the curtains falls
upon Teresa’s act the image of burial lingers. The expatriate experience that Fauset
imagined for her mixed race characters in her last novel emerges as the ultimate
expression of modern alienation.
‘Phebe’s Act’: Passing the Portals of the White World

Phebe is Fauset’s future American. ‘Whiter than lots of...white girls’ (49), Phebe can pass before the white gaze, but she rejects it and the white aesthetics that Olivia represents in the novel. Phebe embodies a notion of human sympathy that is inclusive, one that does not reduce others to the terms of the white self. Through Phebe’s encounters with a white aristocrat, Llewellyn Nash, Fauset explores ‘how America feels’ (287) and how the promise of sympathy, that is, that the feelings of others can become ours in the imagination, is filtered through race.

Believing that Phebe is ‘white,’ Llewellyn falls in love with her in spite of their different stations in terms of class. Fully aware that Llewellyn will not accept her socially constructed black persona, Phebe tells him that ‘Between you and me there is a great gulf fixed, like those people in the Bible’ (232). Race, in other words, figures as the gap between subjectivities in 1933, just as it does in Stowe’s 1852 world of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Predictably, when Phebe tells him she is ‘a colored woman’ (286), Llewellyn is not willing to jeopardise his race and class privilege and rejects her on these grounds: ‘Men in my position simply don’t marry colored women’ (288). One’s capacity for feeling, Fauset suggests, is always already determined by race. Indeed, Llewellyn’s sentiments are described in terms of whiteness: ‘He went on, his pale face whiter than ever with the stress of his feeling’ (283). Race itself, according to Fauset, is nothing but a socially constructed feeling. As Nicholas, Phebe’s first love, articulates what it means to be black in America: ‘Agony, vexation, torment, all based on an idea, a feeling’ (237). Phebe’s white appearance, then, like Roxy’s in Twain’s novel, suggests that race is imbued with the meaning that we imagine it to have based on social and legal constructions. Phebe’s
raced body is generated as reality by the interpretative gaze, and with the conflicting interpretations of her body, Fauset underlines the conflictedness of America’s feelings on race: ‘She was a colored woman loving a colored man. But her skin was too white for him. So he had given her up...She was a white woman, deeply interested in a white man. But for him her blood was too black. So he offered her insult’ (295). Like Grant, mainstream America, in Fauset’s novel, operates with a notion of whiteness as a notion of pure blood.

Unlike Olivia and Teresa, Phebe, who ‘might have gone off forever into that white world into whose portals she had so easily stepped’ (247), resists the seduction of the consumer culture to which her skin grants her access. In what may pass for a submission to the ideals of the sentimental novel, Phebe’s integrity is not violated by the market place, and Fauset concludes her dark satire by having her marry Christopher Cary to rebuild his broken home. Indeed, Fauset’s future Americans, Phebe and Christopher, are so connected as individuals that they entertain mirror images of each other in their imaginations. In a moment of weakness, a worn-out Phebe is tempted to have an affair with Nicholas, but her husband appears to her mind’s eye, reminding her of his love: ‘As in a mirror she beheld that glance of trust which seemed to say: “I’m too tired, Phebe, to tell you of my love. But you know it and I trust you”’ (312). ‘Phebe’s Act’ ends by having its title character returning home to a doting mother and father-in-law and an even more doting husband. Phebe, ‘still a decent, faithful wife!’ (315), assures her husband that she adores him. If this seems like a problematic fairytale ending like the one in Plum Bun, I want to suggest it is not. Phebe is not engulfed by ‘the empire of the mother,’ to revisit Ryan’s term, but she remains an individual with the capacity to care for others, disregarding their
skin colour. Phebe might be a ‘true woman,’ but certainly one with important modifications. The home is a value centre in Fauset’s novel, like in the sentimental novels of Stowe’s era, but it is a reconstructed home where individuals may free themselves of the white gaze, a home that does not kill its inhabitants or send them off to an expatriate experience, as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* does. The home, as a figure for the nation, must leave the ideologies of the past behind, and adopt a worldly, cosmopolitan perspective to revive itself, Fauset seems to suggest. Indeed, she does not allow for a slow savouring of a sentimental moment at the end of her drama; when the curtain falls we are passed on to the scene of the bleak wasteland of Teresa’s existence.

‘Curtain’: The Shadow-Land of the Passing Self

Fauset lets the curtain fall before she introduces her two last chapters, and this gesture stresses the dark bleakness of the scenes. The audience is cut off from the dramatic illusion by the curtain, and one might imagine the audience as well as the cast being engulfed by darkness. In an epistemological sense, this gesture points to an immense sense of distance between the spectators and the actors which complicates the audience’s ability to represent to itself the characters in imagination. With her evocation of white passing images, underscored by the theatrical gesture of the curtain that can be drawn and closed, Fauset dismantles the sentimental novel’s promise that subjectivities can meet. The engulfing white gaze, of which Olivia is the embodiment, hinders any meaningful sense of intersubjectivity.

The last scene is set in France, and I want to suggest that Fauset uses this explicit transatlantic setting to counteract texts like Grant’s which had fuelled disturbing
ideas of pan-whiteness. Against the backdrop of the rise of Hitlerism in Germany, 
*Comedy: American Style* can be seen as a critical commentary on the destructive 
implications of eugenicists’ visions of white ‘race solidarity’ across the Atlantic. If 
Grant envisioned a race renaissance that could prevent ‘race suicide,’ Fauset 
demonstrates the annihilation that such a logic entails. The European setting of the 
‘Curtain’ that gets the last word in Fauset’s last novel is envisioned as a wasteland, 
where expatriate characters are still entrapped in the racial paradigms of white 
America; indeed, Fauset implies that France is a mirror image of them. In Toulouse, 
Olivia ‘f[inds] Teresa silent, pale, subdued, the ghost of her former self, still wearing 
dresses taken from the wardrobe which her mother had chosen and bought for her 
during her last year in college’ (324). The last image of Olivia reinforces this sense 
of destruction; wrapped in white smoke reminiscent of the image of the Klan as 
bringing white death, Olivia’s desire to pass for white is still all-consuming: broken 
and lonely in a Paris pension, Olivia projects her sense of identity onto the cigarettes 
she smokes, foreshadowing the nightmarish scenes in impersonal Paris hotel rooms 
in Jean Rhys’ *Good Morning, Midnight* (1939). Ever seduced by white goods, Olivia 
teaches another expatriate woman that ‘Miss Blanche is the only brand positively 
that you can smoke at all’ (321). Olivia, Fauset maintains, is blind to the fact that she 
is the one being consumed in the name of whiteness; Teresa’s ghostly existence is a 
bleak reminder of that. As Ammons reads the closing scene of Fauset’s novel, ‘Pale 
and withered, [Olivia] resembles the wicked witch of fairy tale – banished to a cold, 
lonely, barren world where significantly, she cannot speak the language nor be 
understood. Engulfed in silence and solitude, Olivia, obsessed all her life with 
passing, has finally and permanently passed. She is now totally “white”’ *(Conflicting*
Like Rhys’ hotel rooms, Olivia’s petty life in a Paris pension and Teresa’s bleak existence in Aristide’s household represent an indeterminate borderland between other places and other points in time, a state so brilliantly expressed by Rhys’ title *Good Morning, Midnight*, where the self remains unrecognisable; lost to the world, lost to itself. The destructive ideology of whiteness, as it is represented by American Olivia Blanchard and European Aristide Pailleron, has destroyed any means of a meaningful connection between subjectivities. The logic of race, of which Grant’s text speaks, rules sympathy and informs the spectator’s inward and outward gaze. The transatlantic passage in Fauset’s text, then, echoes the middle passage, bringing white death to African Americans while it also detects the deadly tendencies of the racial politics of its day.

The limitations of white sympathy and its destructive potential, underscored by the transatlantic passage, are tellingly captured in *Quicksand* (1928) by Larsen, to whom Fauset is often compared, in scenes set in Denmark, where the mixed-race character Helga Crane is staged to be consumed by the white gaze. Indeed, in a seeming intertextual moment, Fauset articulates Teresa’s slippery existence in the numbing embrace of whiteness as ‘fresh quicksands’ (4). As Olivia scripts her children’s performance of whiteness, Helga’s aunt scripts the racial theatre of her niece’s life, ‘For she was, in spite of all her gentle kindness, a woman who left nothing to chance,’ Larsen writes, ‘In her own mind she had determined the role that Helga was to play in advancing the social fortunes of the Dahls of Copenhagen, and she meant to begin at once’ (68). Helga’s white Danish relative wants to pass her off as an exotic other, the sexualised jungle creature of the Harlem Renaissance that editors could not detect in Fauset’s fiction. The ultimate subjection unto the white
gaze is Helga’s portrait painted by the artist Olsen commissioned by the Dahls. Helga’s fabricated self, like Teresa’s, becomes an item for sale, for collection, and for consumption. Helga, however, does not recognise herself as she is seen and represented through the eyes of Olsen, and Larsen churns up questions about the status of the self and of the gaze: ‘Now Helga went in and stood for a long time before it, with its creator’s parting words in mind: “...a tragedy...my picture is, after all, the true Helga Crane.” Vehemently she shook her head. “It isn’t, it isn’t at all,” she said aloud. Bosh! Pure artistic bosh and conceit. Nothing else. Anyone with half an eye could see that it wasn’t, at all, like her’ (89). Larsen shows how the gaze constructs the image it exposes and how subjectivities, blinded by whiteness, pass each other.

With its sophisticated treatment of the invented self, sympathy, and the mirror motif, Comedy: American Style, like Larsen, shatters the illusion of the looking glass of white sympathy: it does not reflect the self transparently, but is a function of social, legal, classed, and racialised ways of looking. ‘Having no genuine content other than a culturally manufactured one’ (Babb 16), whiteness as an empty category is nothing but an optical illusion to Fauset, just as it is a ‘fiction of law’ to Twain in Pudd’nhead Wilson. In his essay ‘Before the Law,’ dealing with Kafka’s short story of the same title, Derrida argues that the authority of the law lies in the illusion of categorical separateness: ‘What must not and cannot be approached is the origin of différance: it must not be presented or represented and above all not penetrated. That is the law of the law…The secret is nothing – and this is the secret that has to be kept well, nothing either present or presentable, but this nothing must be well kept’ (205). Comedy: American Style makes the same argument with regards to race: whiteness
and blackness are assigned no essence and are neither ‘present’ nor ‘presentable,’
and therefore the secret of race, which the texts of Dixon and Grant aim to keep, is
nothing. Whiteness can only be upheld as a scientific category if it is kept under a
veil of falsehood, veiling its nothingness.
Epilogue:

Early Twentieth-Century ‘Race-Consciousness’: Visions of a ‘White Atlantic’

“‘Well, it’s a fine book and everybody ought to read it. The idea is if we don’t look out the white race will be – will be utterly submerged. It’s all scientific stuff; it’s been proved,’” Tom Buchanan remarks in *The Great Gatsby* (1925), alluding to Stoddard’s *The Rising Tide of Color against White World-Supremacy* (Fitzgerald 17). If Fitzgerald’s novel is taught as one of the most important American writers of the twentieth century in today’s classrooms, Stoddard’s text has fallen into obscurity in spite of its popular appeal in its day. *The Rising Tide of Color*, as Hua Hsu notes, was hardly a fringe phenomenon. It was published by Scribner, also Fitzgerald’s publisher, and Stoddard, who received a doctorate in history from Harvard, was a member of many academic associations. It was precisely the kind of book that a 1920s man of Buchanan’s profile – wealthy, Ivy League – educated, at once pretentious and intellectually insecure – might have been expected to bring up in casual conversation. (2)

Using the word ‘submerge,’ which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as ‘To be covered with water; to be sunk under water,’ so as to describe white fears, Buchanan evokes the oceanic metaphors that constitute the organising principles of Stoddard’s white supremacy argument. Indeed, Buchanan’s rhetoric gives credence to Stoddard’s imperative that ‘a better reading of history must bring home the truth that the basic factor in human affairs is not politics, but race’ (5). If, as Morrison puts it in *Playing in the Dark*, ‘criticism remains too polite or too fearful to notice’ (91) the disturbing readings that Stoddard and the character of Buchanan bring to the forefront of historical interpretation, I suggest that they can be conceptualised as a literary paradigm of a ‘White Atlantic’ in stark contrast to the ‘Black Atlantic’ writings of the likes of Du Bois with which *The Rising Tide of Color* is in
intertextual dialogue (Stoddard 14). As Guterl notes, ‘Stoddard and Grant postulated a popular “White Atlantic” to match the “Black Atlantic” sensibilities of Du Bois, Garvey, and the New Negro Movement’ (9).

Following *The Passing of the Great Race* by Grant, who was Stoddard’s mentor, *The Rising Tide of Color* is a text that filters the world through ‘white race-consciousness’ (198), like Chesnutt’s ‘American Eye.’ A transatlantic history of race that triumphed a ‘white-over-black sensibility’ (Guterl 13), Stoddard’s text revolves around oceanic imagery to construct an overarching white historiography. ‘We can hardly conceive how our mediaeval forefathers viewed the ocean,’ he writes, ‘To them the ocean was a numbing, constricting presence: the abode of darkness and horror. No wonder mediaeval Europe was static, since it faced on ruthless, aggressive Asia, and backed on nowhere. Then, in the twinkling of an eye, dead-end Europe became mistress of the ocean – and thereby mistress of the world’ (147). The unmastered ocean is a vast black epistemological vacuum to Stoddard, waiting to be inscribed with meaning. The conquest of the ocean, then, opens up a white master-narrative that fills in these epistemological gaps of darkness:

> Out of the prehistoric shadows the white races pressed to the front and proved in a myriad ways their fitness for the hegemony of mankind. Gradually they forged a common civilization; then, when vouchsafed their unique opportunity of oceanic mastery four centuries ago, they spread over the earth, filling its empty spaces with their superior breeds and assuring to themselves an unparalleled paramountcy of numbers and dominion. (299-300)

History, in other words, begins with whiteness, emerging ‘Out of the prehistoric shadows..., filling its empty spaces’: whiteness is the precondition for the writing of history in Stoddard’s mythology. It is nothing less than his very epistemology.
Stoddard’s conception of whiteness rests on the haunting of a ‘numbing, constricting presence’ of blackness, the haunting that Morrison detects in American literature. We may then read Stoddard’s white master-narrative within the parameters of Morrison’s analysis of the role of ‘literary “blackness”’ in the construction of ‘literary whiteness’ (9). Indeed, Stoddard’s white images of world dominion are written against the metaphorical backdrop of the black ocean, ‘the abode of darkness and horror,’ which signifies death and impotence reminiscent of Morrison’s observation in *Playing in the Dark*, wherein she explains how images of whiteness in literature emerge out of the shadowy presence of blackness:

These images of impenetrable whiteness need contextualizing to explain their extraordinary power, pattern, and consistency. Because they appear almost always in conjunction with representation of black or Africanist people who are dead, impotent, or under complete control, these images of blinding whiteness seem to function as both antidote for and meditation on the shadow that is companion to this whiteness – a dark and abiding presence that moves the hearts and texts of American literature with fear and longing. (33)

The ocean, in Stoddard’s text, is a site onto which white ‘fear and longing’ are projected. As an imaginative site it suggests the nightmarish dark past against which dreams of ‘a true “symbiosis”’ between the members of the ‘Nordic race,’ ‘mingling their bloods and exchanging their ideas,’ can be fuelled (Stoddard 170).

Despite its ideological roots in nativism, Stoddard, like Grant, sought to foster a racial climate in which a vision of pan-whiteness could be nurtured, ‘a Pan-Nordic syndication of power for the safeguarding of the race-heritage and the harmonious evolution of the whole white world’ (Stoddard 200). An awakened sense of ‘white race-consciousness,’ cutting across national, linguistic, and religious borders, could compensate for the ‘race suicide’ that World War One signifies to Stoddard; ‘the white tide’ was seeing ‘the beginning of the ebb’ (155). Guterl reads Grant’s and
Stoddard’s white entente thus: ‘Members of the Nordic race, if they hoped to secure their tenuous grasp on world domination and genetic magnificence, needed to recognize the transnational, transreligious, translinguistic, and transatlantic nature of their racial identity’ (37). At this moment of white identity crisis, Stoddard does like Stowe, and Jefferson before her, in similar moments of potential disintegration: he resorts to sentimental rhetorical strategies to create ‘unitary feeling’ (Stoddard 198).

Evoking the unifying rhetoric of Jefferson and Lincoln, Stoddard writes that ‘The heart of the white world was divided against itself, and on the fateful 1st of August, 1914, the white race, forgetting ties of blood and culture, heedless of the growing pressure of the colored world without, locked in a battle to the death’ (16). Like Jefferson, Lincoln, and Stowe, then, Stoddard imagines that the body politic is held together by the shared sentiments of its white members. One could argue that sympathy’s ‘dangerous capacity to undermine the democratic principles it ostensibly means to reinforce’ (Barnes 4) are spelled out in Grant’s and Stoddard’s homogenising white rhetoric. As Grant puts it in his introduction to Stoddard’s text, ‘Democratic ideals among an homogenous population of Nordic blood, as in England and America, is one thing, but it is quite another for the white man to share his blood with, or intrust his ideals to, brown, yellow, black, or red men’ (xxxii).

*The Rising Tide of Color* may be read as text arising not only out of the tradition of nativism, but also out of a literary tradition of ‘white sympathy,’ which has been explored in this thesis. Indeed, Stoddard bases his understanding of ‘white solidarity’ on the nineteenth-century twinned discourse of imperialism and Christian mission that I have identified in Stowe’s and Beecher’s sentimental writings: ‘During the nineteenth century the sentiment of white solidarity was strong. The great explorers
and empire-builders who spread white ascendency to the ends of the earth felt that they were apostles of their race and civilization’ (198-99). ‘White solidarity,’ moreover, is facilitated through the Smithian trope of spectatorship central to sentimental literature. Indeed, Stoddard emerges as a sentimental writer who appeals to the fellow-feeling of white readers:

A good illustration of instinctive white solidarity in the early years of the twentieth century is a French journalist’s description of the attitude of the white spectators (of various nationalities) gathered to watch the landing in Japan of the first Russian prisoners taken in the Russo-Japanese War. This writer depicts in moving language the literally horrifying effect of the spectacle upon himself and his fellows. (205)

In this dystopian vision of transnational white racial relations, the disturbing potential of the ‘moving language’ of sympathy examined in this thesis seems fully fleshed out: the ability of the spectator to care for others as contingent upon their whiteness. Sympathetic identification, in Stoddard’s sentimentality, is a question of ‘instinctive white solidarity.’

‘White solidarity’ as an intersubjective ethical model, not unlike sympathy then, serves to bridge the social and political gaps that stand in the way of the fulfilment of Stoddard’s white fantasy: ‘As the years pass, the supreme importance of heredity and the supreme value of superior stocks will sink into our being, and we will acquire a true race-consciousness (as opposed to national or political consciousness) which will bridge political gulfs, remedy social abuses, and exorcise the lurking spectre of miscegenation’ (309). Echoing Fowler’s white dreams, Stoddard, like Grant, imagines that a systematic breeding of whiteness will exercise the ghost of miscegenation that obscures race as a scientific observable entity. Indeed, Stoddard perpetuates the nineteenth-century’s belief in race as an optical quality, which I have explored in daguerreotypy and phrenology. Nodicism popularised ‘a new visual
sense of what race looked like,’ as Guterl notes, ‘Celebrating the optical qualities of
race – “ivory whiteness” above all else’ (43). Like Stowe, the phrenological
transcriber of race, advocates of Nordicism wrote whiteness into existence as a visual
truth. Exposing that truth as an optical illusion, the passing novels of Fauset and
Larsen, as cases in point, would emerge as a counterdiscourse to Nordicism, a
counterdiscourse that would culminate in Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye*. These writers, I
would argue, counteract a narrative of a ‘White Atlantic,’ a disturbing narrative
written to foster a sense of ‘white race-consciousness,’ which could, according to
Stoddard, ‘salvage...a shipwrecked world!’ (309).
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