White Men Write Now:
Deconstructed and Reconstructed Borders of Identity in Contemporary American Literature by White Men

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Introduction: The permanent reinscription of white masculinity

> Now he could go anywhere, associate with anybody, be anything he wanted to be. He suddenly thought of the comely miss he had seen in the Honky Tonk on New Year's Eve and the greatly enlarged field from which he could select his loves. Yes, indeed, there were advantages in being white.
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> - George Schuyler, *Black No More*[1]

They reinscribe even as they erase. Contemporary literature by white men in the United States about the identity "white man" largely focuses on two themes: destabilized structures of identity and their reinforcement. This concern with the threat to identity structures, especially structures of race and gender, and the narratives that define them, is an old one in American literature. However, it takes on a new meaning in the present postmodern climate that challenges master narratives and their reinscription by forces which sustain them. The challenge to narratives of nation and civilization brings an analogous challenge to categories of national Selfhood. It is a challenge to the social structures of difference, the borders which inscribe difference, in turn complicating concepts that attempt to transcend those borders.

White Men Write Now sets this discussion against the background of the Cold War and cultural changes that emerged in it. This study will repeatedly return to the thesis that the rise of postmodernism and postcolonialism in that period created a contemporary era which critiques the Cold War as a master narrative. That means two things: that the Cold War is the master narrative which is now critiqued, and that the emergence of that critique has formed its own master narrative. These meanings are concurrent, and both have valence here.

For white masculinity, this double meaning brings with it the potential deconstruction of that identity and its conceptual borders as central to that narrative, coupled with the subversion of that potential through the reinscription of white masculinity as socially normative. That is not to say that non-whites and non-males in the United States confront the same material obstacles they did fifty years ago. Jim Crow laws were abolished decades ago, for example. However, similar to postmodern notions

[1] George Schuyler, *Black No More: Being an Account of the Strange and Wonderful Workings of Science in the Land of the Free, A.D. 1933 – 1940* (1931, Boston: Northeastern UP: 1989). 22.

of repetition with a difference, the identity "white man" is reiterated as socially normative against a background of being discussed as "beset",[2] "abject",[3] or deconstructed.

This introduction will provide a sketch of the historical and theoretical contexts in which *White Men Write Now* is written. It explains the use of postmodern and postcolonial theory, then briefly discusses some of the terms to be used. A point is **then** made to emphasize the complications, but also the importance, of discussing the United States in a postcolonial context and what effects that discussion has on the concepts of white masculinity. Finally, it concludes by introducing the novels to be discussed in the body of the book. They form a theoretical arc that begins with the circumstances for the contestation of white masculinity in the United States and ends with forces that repress that contestation.

Just as the postmodern critique of the *grand recit* would not be possible without that master narrative, the postcolonial language of margins, peripheries, interstices, and writing back to the center would not be possible without that imagined center of cultural structuration. *White Men Write Now* takes up the task of examining aspects of whiteness and white masculinity in that "center" and along the conceptual borders that define it. The search is taken to the purported center itself, to literature by white men in the United States which critically examines that privileging. The study traverses the borders of difference in an attempt to better articulate problems both the centering and critique of white masculinity entail. This focus on the nexus of gender and race (and ethnicity) is a strategic one designed to further reveal the nature of identity privilege. When used with respect to America, it also serves to complicate simple models of dominant and dominated peoples in a colonial or postcolonial space. That complication, in turn, sheds light on the difficulties of decentering white masculinity as socially normative and dismantling the structures upon which definitions of "white male" rest.

This study directs its gaze at the crossing of whiteness and masculinity in order to complicate both categories. Critics like Bhabha[4] and JanMohammed[5] have demonstrated

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[2] Nina Baym, "Melodramas of Beset Manhood: How Theories of American Fiction Exclude Women Authors", *American Quarterly* 33.2 (1981): 123-139.

[3] See, for example, Barbara Ching, "The Possum, the Hag, and the Rhinestone Cowboy: Hard Country Music and the Burlesque Abjection of the White Man", ed. Mike Hill, *Whiteness: A Critical Reader* (New York: New York UP, 1997): 117-133.

[4] Homi K. Bhabha, "The Other Question", Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994): 66-84.

[5] Abdul JanMohammed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature", Ed. Henry Louis Gates, jr., *"Race," Writing, and Difference*. Spec issue of *Critical Inquiry* 12.1 and 13.1 (1985-86), (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1986): 59-87.

how whiteness and non-white Otherness were based around allegorical, metaphorical axes of white and non-white to justify colonial exploitation. Numerous other theorists within and without postcolonial studies, such as Frankenberg, Bederman, McClintock, and Young, have unearthed discourses which characterize colonial projects in accordance with paternalistic patterns of domination.[6] A characterization emerged of powerful, civilized masculine colonizers subduing uncivilized, exploitable, mentally weak people reminiscent of European ideals of femininity. From this has emerged, in the case of the United States, a complex in which white and male interact with each other in a field of social privilege. This interaction works to turn other potential forms of identity peripheral in order to shore up material social advantage.

Whiteness, as Dyer points out, oscillates between a presence, an essence with which people identify themselves, and an absence, the lack of other forms of identity- the absence of difference.[7] Its ambiguity means that it functions in discourses of both race, alongside black for example, and ethnicity, alongside Chicanos. It also informs the constellations of white subgroups in America like Jewish or Italian American. Richards, for example, describes this in the process through which Italian American identity was formed "under circumstances of injustice based on American racism".[8] "Ethnic", as it is used in vernacular in the United States, has even come to mean all which is not white, or more specifically white Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP).

There are approaches which would seek to define whiteness as a distinct culture in the United States, or a specific ethnicity with regular, predictable practices. Others, like white supremacists, consider whites a genetic subspecies of **human being** subject to certain pre-determined behavior patterns and intelligence levels. When the elusiveness and contestation of whiteness interacts with the equally unfixable masculinity, the result is a highly malleable and versatile construction. It can be manipulated to constantly form and reform public discourse on nation, identity, and privilege. Therefore, in order to foreground this, in examining white masculinity in novels by white men, *White Men Write Now* will avoid a single, static definition of "white male". "White masculinity",

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[6] Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Race* (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 1993). Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880 – 1917* (Chicago, IL: U of Chicago P, 1995). Anne McClintock, *Colonial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995). Robert J.C. Young, *Imperial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995).
[7] Richard Dyer, "White", Dyer, *The Matter of Images: Essays on Representations* (London: Routledge, 1993): 141-163.

"whiteness", and "masculinity" are employed with intentional inexactness, representing fluctuating fields of potential social articulation.

Identity is a concept that is similarly located in a field of different meanings. To pursue a single, static definition of identity would be to analogously elide the oscillation which gives it such a strong elusive and eliding power. Nonetheless, identity will be looked at in terms of a social textual construction, so that it can be examined with reference to the texts in this study. It will be employed in a general sense in order to provide it with a certain flexibility. "Identity", stemming from the Latin *idem*, same, is directly related to "identical" as an expression of sameness. Crucially, it is a sameness which bears in it difference. It describes those qualities which enable the categorization of object into groups designated by common characteristics which are distinct from others. Thus, it enables identification. When applied to people and their societies, identity is then those discursive bases upon which individuals imagine themselves as part of a larger group. At the same time it enables them to imagine others as members of the same group or of different groups, and it is the very process for constructing difference among groups.

A rather beleaguered term, identity has often been invoked in discussions of social hierarchy and equality in a variety of contexts, and it has been attacked for its failures at least as often. Analogously, attempts to get to the source of identity construction, such as Kristeva's "abject"[9] or Althusser's "Ideological State Apparatus",[10] are invoked as frequently as they are criticized. The problem with identity that most vexes theorists is its seeming fixity and the effects that fixity has on social relations. By the early 1990s, the concept of the subject position emerged to oppose identity by denoting a place an individual takes within a matrix of identities. Butler, in turn, criticized this view as merely multiplying fixed identities. She wrote, "[I]t seems that what we expect from the term *identity* will be cultural specificity, and that on occasion we even expect *identity* and *specificity* to work interchangeably."[11]

However, the subject position is a useful model when it allows for the potential of multiple, coexistent, constantly shifting, changing, and competing systems of identity that

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[8] David A.J. Richards, *Italian American: The Racializing of an Ethnic Identity* (New York: New York UP, 1999): 181.
[9] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia UP, 1982).
[10] Louis Althusser, "Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)", ed. Slavoj Žižek, *Mapping Ideology* (London: Verso 1994): 100-140.

interact with an individual. Bhabha employs this dynamic field for his model of cultural hybridity in which forms of identity only emerge in a moment of contextual performance.[12] In terms of white masculinity and the fluctuating field it denotes, this latter model provides at least one means for accounting for specific permutations of what is a white male in specific instances.

Those instances indicated that white masculinity does not exist in a vacuum. It is intricately rooted in the society in which the concept receives its discursive power. Theodore Allen provides a good historical example. He traces the emergence of whiteness in America[13] to the English conquest of Ireland and structures of colonial identity that grew out if it. Whether or not one agrees with him totally, his analysis makes the important point that whiteness in America is a locally determined category. It is related to, but distinct from, white identities in other countries ranging from Argentina to Zimbabwe. Each has its own historical contingencies which have informed its in- or exclusive features. At the same time, as whiteness does inform identity in so many other countries, one can speak of a transnational interaction of whiteness.

This complexity has lent "white" some of its amorphous character, and at the same time created the figure of whiteness as a pillar of colonizing identity. Thus, though the English-Irish conflict may have provided the English with their first modern material for a discourse of racial superiority, it was also informed by scientific, sociological, anthropological, and political rhetoric from numerous other imperial powers. This all informed the subject of national identity in the United States as well. America may have directly inherited British notions of identity, but it also received notions of whiteness from other imperial powers and at the same time was engaged in its own project of creating a new identity, or as Toni Morrison puts it, a "new white man".[14]

The contextualization of white masculinity in concepts of American national identity is complicated by that country's disruption of simple models of colonizer versus colonized. Difficulties with national identity begin with the name of the country. The reader will by now have noticed that "United States" and "America" have both been used here, often apparently interchangeably. With respect to the tortured discussion that will

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[11] Judith Butler, "Response to *Identities*", ed. Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Identities* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995): 441.
[12] Homi K. Bhabha, "The Commitment to Theory", Bhabha, *Location*: 19-39.
[13] Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race*, 2 vols. (London: Verso Books, 1994 and 1997).
[14] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1993): 15.

not be rehearsed here about the proper shorthand designation for the United States of America, its citizens, and values, the position of this study will be to use both terms while acknowledging that neither is perfect. As a general differentiation, however, "United States" both as substantive and adjective will tend to refer more to concrete structures of state and civil society, while "America" and "American" more to the imaginative culture and the people in the sense of Anderson's "imagined community"[15]. These problems with naming are related in kind to concerns about white masculinity but are by no means specific to the "United States of America". The name of any country reflects basic conflicts in defining community that are imperfectly subsumed in it. The use of multiple names represents a rhetorical attempt to express yet another field of flux in which identity finds itself.

The flux of "white male" identity in America becomes more enlightening when one looks at the country as a colonial space. This again brings with it a series of epistemological and, by association, conceptual complications. Like the debate over the name "United States of America" and its short forms, the acrimony that makes the debate so wearisome over whether the country can be considered "postcolonial", still colonial, or ex-colonial reveals more about conceptual conflicts over such terms than the objects they to which they are applied. A longer assessment of the debate can be found in Singh and Schmidt's recent *Postcolonial Theory and the United States*.[16] The next chapter also addresses the subject at greater length. In short, *White Men Write Now* takes the position that the United States does not fit into the pattern of former colonies in which colonizing people were ultimately expelled, but its history is one of colonization, both before and after its independence from Britain.

As Ashcroft et al. (not uncontroversially) suggest in *The Empire Writes Back*, the use of "post-" in postcolonialism is not a temporal reference to a period after colonization but rather indicates thinking and representation that seeks to get beyond a preoccupation with colonial categorizations.[17] Therefore, postcolonial theory focuses on colonial spaces from the moment colonization begins, making it quite suitable as an analytical tool for American culture. They even point to the United States as an example

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[15] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2nd ed. (London: Verso, 1991).

[16] Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt, "On the Borders Between U.S. Studies and Postcolonial Theory", ed. Amritjit Singh and Peter Schmidt, *Postcolonial Theory and the United States: Race, Ethnicity, and Literature* (Jackson, MS: UP of Mississippi, 2000): 3-69.

of an ex-colony and the work it goes about creating a new national identity. Lawrence Buell developed that point in his essay "American Literary Emergence as a Postcolonial Phenomenon"[18] and earned a great deal of criticism for it.

While his critics acknowledge that the United States bears elements of an ex-colony they point out that it is at the same time an imperial power. However, Buell himself makes that argument repeatedly.[19] In the end, their disagreements seem to be over the extent to which the application of postcolonial theory in the United States affects "decentering" American myths. None of that changes the fact that today there is much cultural production in the United States that employs postcolonial strategies or bears postcolonial analysis for its negotiation between identities and cultural spheres affected by colonial-type power relations. Singh and Schmidt draw the connection that, "[M]any of the concepts associates with postcolonial studies that have proven so influential ... have a rich genealogy in U.S. ethnic studies as well, especially with reference to people of color."[20]

With this American complication of colonial models in mind, postcolonial theory proves a very useful tool. It provides revealing analysis not only for "literature of color" but also, in the case of this study, "literature of non-color", as it were, the projects of several contemporary white men who examine their "own" ethnicity or supposed lack thereof. Not all – indeed probably none – of those white men would describe themselves as postcolonial writers. It would be a fallacy to focus only on postcolonial analyses to the exclusion of other theoretical approaches when examining them. However, as members of contemporary society, they are influenced by other writers and theorists, white and non-white, male and female, and their work reflects that. They are well aware, as this study will demonstrate, of the constant movement in the categories of whiteness and masculinity, especially as it has been foregrounded since the end of World War II.

Our notion of a time when white male identity in America was also fixed in simple terms of heterosexual, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant has recently become complicated. Catholic Irish, Jews, and members of other minorities have contested the borders of white masculinity throughout their history in the United States and now have

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[17] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 1989): 2.
[18] Lawrence Buell, "American Literary Emergence as a Postcolonial Phenomenon", *American Literary History* 4.3 (1992): 411-442.
[19] For more see the discussion in the next chapter, section 1.1. "Postcolonial states of whiteness".
[20] Singh and Schmidt 4.

gained a certain acceptance as "white folks", as has been shown in work by people such as Ignatiev and Brodkin.[21] In addition, as various groups of "model minority" Asian Americans today become wealthier and enter into the fold of privilege in the United States, the definition of "the Man", to use the 1960s protest term, will continue to evolve. Not only postcolonial theorists but also historians and sociologists outside the field such as Allen show that whiteness has been constantly reinvented throughout American history in an attempt to stabilize social, political, and economic orders. In recent years, theorists of masculinity such as Bederman and Connell[22] similarly view masculine roles as socially stabilizing products of the times in which men lived, not eternal verities.

White Men Write Now, therefore, will focus on how white men today treat identity as a key to privilege and power and their views of the solidity or fluidity of the conceptual borders of that identity. It will focus on four aspects of the de-/reconstruction of the white masculinity as an identity. The writers face these issues against the background of the specific stress white masculinity has faced in America since the advent of the Cold War. The Cold War is decisive in this discussion because its conflicts layered white masculinity with a new set of discursive potentials. The attempt to rigidly define and defend the boundaries of what "America" meant in the face of the perceived outside threat of Communism inadvertently emphasized the problematics of white masculinity as central to that definition.

The first chapter of this book then begins with that theme of threat. It frames the literary contemporary in terms of Cold War fear and the emergence of the postmodern and postcolonial. In this context, white masculinity is shown to be simultaneously deconstructed and reconstructed as socially normative through a dialectics of "threat" that stems from a long history of white masculinity in America. Moments of that history are traced to demonstrate the conceptual layering of white masculinity. That layering includes current postmodern and postcolonial deconstructive concerns, demonstrating one of the main difficulties of decentering white masculinity in America. The chapter thus prepares the way for those that follow. Through literature they look in greater detail at the Cold War, geographical borders as sites for critiquing borders of difference, reverse-

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[21] Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (New York: Routledge, 1995). Karen Brodkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers UP, 1998).
[22] Robert Connell, *Masculinities: Knowledge, Power and Social Change* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1995).

passing as a popular but deceptive attempt to transcend those borders of difference, and the postmodern coupling of satire with apocalypse which reveals forces that maintain the privileging of white masculinity in America despite, even because of, attempts to decenter it.

Unfrozen categories in the Cold War

The first, theoretical, chapter that traces the theme of threat is followed by the first literary study which elaborates the effects of the Cold War "threat" to white masculinity. In the United States, the Cold War brought about the conflicts of the 1960s and early 1970s, the greatest racial unrest in recent times and the period in which many of today's ethnic awareness movements were born or radically reborn. It saw the Civil Rights movement become a dominant force in the national social agenda. Postcolonialism emerged internationally as a result of similar pressures worldwide, influenced as it was by Marxist and neo-Marxist theories of class and economic exploitation as functions of race and racial discourse. Feminism also reemerged in its modern radical form and with it gender studies. Queer studies as well emerged from this field, again partly in reaction to attempts at the time to rigidly maintain a social pyramid with heterosexual white men at the top.

Numerous films, books, television series, and other works of popular culture (created by white men) at the time depicted white men in danger but triumphing to regain an authoritative position. They were "beset" but victorious, whether in horror science fiction films such as *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956) and *It Came from Outer Space* (1953), war movies like *The Green Berets* (1968), or the specifically anti-Communist movies *My Son John* (1952) and *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962). Popular novels of the early Cold War period, such as the westerns by Louis L'amour or the Mike Hammer detective novels by Mickey Spillane, depict an angry white male violently fighting for his life in a hostile environment. Theories like Sebald's "momism"[23] appeared to warn that boys over-dominated by their mothers would be weak in the defense against Communism.

That is not to say that the period went without public criticism. It was extensive and reached cataclysmic proportions by the late 1960s. The Beats, among others, lead early critiques of the widespread repressive ethos in the United States and played

[23] Hans Sebald, *Momism, the silent disease of America* (Chicago: Nelson Hall, 1976).

pointedly with concepts of ethnic and gender identity. Alternatively, later work such as Kesey's *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962) and Vonnegut's *Breakfast of Champions* (1973) employed insanity as a motif for the state of the white man at the time. This suggested that the threat was not from without, i.e. Communists or crypto-Communist invaders from Mars, but rather from within. White men had constructed it themselves as a result of discrepancies in white masculinity as an authoritative identity that ultimately lead, in those two books at least, to self-destruction.

However, the white man did survive the Cold War, though not quite sure how or what his identity now means. That is the conclusion, or rather the beginning conceptual point, of Don DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997), a novel that looks back at that period of certainty and confusion. The attempt to reestablish meaning today is embodied by the book's white male protagonist in his search for the roots of the fiction his life seems to have become, especially as it relates to a fictional game-winning baseball. The game, famous in collective American memory, takes place the day the USSR successfully tests its second atomic bomb, an early date in the history of the escalating east-west conflict. The story of the ball, representing a "game" of Self/Other opposition, and the story of the "serious" Cold War run parallel. Which narrative will serve to repress the other becomes a major element of the novel's suspense. At the same time a series of other alternative potential narrative structures arise in a general battle over signification. Behind those narratives are specific people fighting of power and position. The baseball fan's difficulties with the ball's origin represents his own complications with the sense of identity he had as a youth and how this structure of conflict reconstituted his identity. In the end, the authenticity of the ball as the game ball is verified, while at the same time DeLillo demonstrates how its meaning has grown over time as U.S. society has shifted in order to account for its contestation.

Subverting past and present borders of difference

The historical discussion brings the focus of this study in the next chapter to one of the great historical legacies of contestation: borders. Though borders are not the central issue in postcolonialism, they are one of the main metaphorical axes around which postcolonial theory revolves. Both material boundaries created by colonial powers and the boundaries formed by colonialist theory about race and ethnicity (often the very same boundaries), are treated at great length in postcolonial writing. For instance, the

American-Mexican border forms a major trope in many works by Chicana/o writers. There are also any number of essays about transcending the "borders" of "traditional" national literatures to relocate literature theory in a hybrid space. "Transgression", "crossing-over", "(re-)location", and numerous other "borderline" terms describe the postcolonial fascination with physical and mental geography and the need it sees to transcend colonialist borders.

In the United States, postcolonial theory treats at length two of its most essential borders and their continued ramifications: the Mason-Dixon Line between the "slave" and "free" states and the border between the United States and Mexico. Though the legal, social, and material effects of the factual borders has changed with time, figuratively they have become metonymic for divisions within American society today between "white" and "black" and "brown". There is no end to the works by people of color that foreground these borders of difference and the friction and cultural production that occur on them, whether in the poetry-prose of Gloria Anzaldúa, Galarza's autobiographical *Barrio Boy* (1971), Spike Lee's film *Do the Right Thing* (1989), or the novel *Flight to Canada* by Ishmael Reed (1976). The authors of these works routinely portray actions which range from violent border destruction to acts of border subversion and gradual steps of understanding (not necessarily mutual understanding but rather textual understanding of constructions of American identity).

These concerns have not gone unnoticed by white men who also write about borders in their work. The narrative conflict that manifested itself in the Cold War is also reflected in a renewed interest in deconstructing borders. The authors represent both conflicted spaces and the attempted repression of that conflict through their reinforcement. Thomas Pynchon's historical novel *Mason & Dixon* (1997) looks at the establishment of the eponymous line by two white male surveyors amid diverse factions in pre-Revolutionary America. Throughout the novel, the author demonstrates the line's ambivalence. This subverts its role of making the territory – both within the existing colonies and the frontier into which it later expanded – knowable and definable. The novel asks what forces lay at the root of creating a space for "black" as subhuman and outside of the whiteness which constituted the new community of Man in the America to come. At the same time, Pynchon subtly lays the groundwork for the powerful historical ramifications the reader knows this demarcation was to have then and today.

T. Coraghessan Boyle takes a different stance on borders but at the same time directs his gaze at both their ambivalence and continued power. Located in the present, his novel, *Tortilla Curtain* (1998) looks at the division between white and "brown" within and without the United States. It satirically depicts the struggle of a middle-class white liberal neighborhood in southern California to protect itself against an imagined flood of illegal aliens made flesh by a Mexican couple squatting in a nearby canyon. The story's tension is the complicitous role played by the protagonist, a "tree-hugging" white male writer who, despite all his good intentions, is unable or unwilling to examine his own self-definition and the forces that enable that definition. He perpetuates the problem he tries to solve with the community's wall, a limit to his definition of Self which constantly demands to be and is transgressed.

Reverse-passing

This situation of border complications and identity conflict is followed in the next chapter by an examination of the desire in many works by white men to seek absolution from white masculinity by assuming alterity. Narrative structures based on this, perhaps most familiar from *Dances With Wolves* (1990), will be discussed here using the term "reverse-passing". Related to other terms such as "White Negro",[24] "post-white",[25] and "going native", it is a hugely popular means for "solving" racial and gender problems by casting them as white middle-class guilt that needs to be overcome. Passing was traditionally an African American phrase that denoted people considered "black" by convention who had so much white ancestry that they were light-skinned enough to pass socially for white. Reverse-passing goes in the opposite direction, featuring white men who either discover a non-white ancestry or perform signs of non-whiteness, both leading to his absorption in non-white Otherness. Reverse-passing seduces because it provides white men with an easy solution, a "racial suicide" as Fox proposes, that allows them to perpetuate their genes while absolving them of the guilt of their genetic ancestors. It also represents an easy alternative for identification, a non-white cover. One is struck in this discussion by how durable the cult of blood and the transgression of its "purity" through interracial mixing still is today even in supposedly progressive literature.

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[24] Norman Mailer, "The White Negro (Superficial Reflections on the Hipster)", *Dissent* 4.3 (1957): 276-293.

[25] Robert Elliot Fox, "On Becoming Post-White", ed. Ishmael Reed, *Multiamerica: Essays on Cultural Wars and Cultural Peace* (New York: Penguin, 1997): 6-17.

This represents a change from the classic narrative of passing for white by racial Others who lose their heritage and live in constant danger of discovery. Reverse-passing narratives by white men are about becoming Other, marrying in, gaining a heritage, an "ethnicity", and the security of finding their "true selves".

A highly acclaimed example of reverse-passing in literature is Wally Lamb's *I Know this Much is True* (1998). It received awards and topped best-seller lists, not least because it was a featured title in the Oprah Book Club. Told by a first-person narrator with a schizophrenic twin brother, the book branches out to cover all manner of social, racial, ethnic, and gender divisions. After 900 pages, the narrator finally learns to accept his mother and thus his Sicilian Catholic origins and discovers the identity of his father, a half Native American. The latter development reconciles him with an unknown cousin, offers him new spirituality, and makes him rich from the casino "his" tribe owns. The assertion is that the mere fact of genetic relation to an Other suddenly grants one Otherness. It is the familiar model in which ancestry determines race, which determines culture, which determines ethnicity, which determines identity. The only difference is that mixing blood is now good instead of bad because increasingly "mixed" people will set things right by somehow automatically erasing codes of difference.

Jay McInerney's novel *The Last of the Savages* (1996) provides a more complex look at this phenomenon. It foregrounds the problem of passing as loss while critiquing reverse-passing as potentially egoistic. Beginning appropriately in the 1960s, the protagonist tells of his transformation from the secretly gay son of Catholic Irish working-class parents to a WASP lawyer and father of two daughters. The main story, however, addresses his best friend from school, the last member of an old Southern family and an anti-establishment promoter of blues music as protest. The novel lacks some fluidity, but it complicates in a much shorter space what Lamb simplifies over the length of a very thick book. It ends with oscillating levels of satisfaction with the concluding situations and some genuine concern about the confusion of the signs of identity with the signs of success and privilege in America.

The postmodern satirical apocalypse

This concern which McInerney only begins to explore is pursued further in the final chapter. Despite the work of postmodern and postcolonial theory, border-crossing, passing, and reverse-passing, the conflicts they represent still stem from the socially

normative centrality of white masculinity. The suspicion arises over what structures could be perpetuating the privileging and conceptual borders of that identity. Many people may happily await the "coming together" of white and non-white through passing and reverse-passing, but society in the United States continues to be plagued by differences in power and wealth largely determined by ethnic and gender identity. Identity may have been revealed as constructed and manipulated, but it still holds sway.

This complexity is at the root of a postmodern satirical apocalypse in the novels looked at in the final chapter. Against the apocalyptic background of the Cold War and the ferocity of the many racial and gender conflicts it informed emerged the expectation that they would reveal the fallacy of old structures of association and privilege in order to dismantle them in favor of new redemptive ones. However, that never happened, certainly not in the definitive way in which an apocalypse might be expected. This has led, this study posits, to a cynicism expressed as satire in the sense of Hayden White, "a diredemption, a drama dominated by the apprehension that man is ultimately a captive of the world rather than its master, and by the recognition that, in the final analysis, human consciousness and will are always inadequate to the task of overcoming definitively the dark force of death, which is man's unremitting enemy."[26] White bases his notion of satire on Frye's[27] socially restorative concept but pursues it to a form that satire has taken in postmodernity- that which Weisenburger has characterized as "degenerative".[28] This satire does not critique deviation from expected social codes but rather the validity of the very codes themselves.

The expectation and its "diredemptive" non-fulfillment have created a schizophrenia that appears in the form of postmodern satirical apocalypse. Drawing on a tradition recognizable in earlier works from the Beats, Vonnegut, and Kesey, today films like *Falling Down* (1993) or *American Beauty* (1999) portray a mental sickness associated with white masculinity as an identity. In terms of "sickness", at least, is how Bret Easton Ellis views the country's society. His books, linked in a fictional universe by common characters, portray affluent people dependent on depravity in order to withstand the pressure of embodying status and maintain their elite position. The most startling title of his, *American Psycho* (1991), is told by a wealthy white man, one of the "beautiful"

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[26] Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1973): 9.
[27] Northrop Frye, *The Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1957).

people, secretly murdering the entire spectrum of subalterns: women, a gay, a beggar, a Middle Eastern taxi driver. The horrifying details of the murders are interspersed with descriptions of the objects of his wealth, his near-collapses, the feeling of tremendous powerlessness and his inability "to fit in". Ellis expresses the fear that the forces behind this situation will continue to perpetuate it. In the end, nothing has changed, the narrator is not caught and the novel denies an exit from its world.

Far less unpleasant but still ultimately dismaying is the world described by Tom Wolfe in *The Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987). The fiction of the two titles is linked through metafictional play in Ellis's later novel, but they are also linked conceptually. They both portray the public manipulation and destruction of a specific white man in order to reestablish social order, thus reifying a general phantasm of white masculinity as a normative identity. As a result, the conflicts in the novel do not end but are shown to be perpetuated beyond the novel's conclusion. Ellis picks up that threat, post-*Bonfire* as it were, to more deeply explore the mechanisms which create and maintain the value of signs and the identities expressed by those signs, finding, however, much like Wolfe, no redemption except the transcendence of the fiction in which the figures live.

The seven novels cited above as the main objects of study prove useful as exemplary works in a postcolonial and postmodern discussion of the change of the signification of white masculinity in the minds of white men. They represent multiple approaches to this study's main issue, the exposure of white masculinity as a contested identity and how that contestation obscures the forces that solidify it. The widespread myth that the place of the white man in American society was once more easily defined is just that, a myth. What is true is that there is just as much at stake in that construct today as there has ever been. If there has been a change brought about by the tension of the Cold War, it is that focus has turned more toward the contestation of the construction of white masculinity in America, a postmodern development which seeks to unearth the ambivalence master narratives elide. A great deal of postcolonial discourse also revolves around definitions and redefinitions of white masculinity, indeed *must* include it in discussions of postcolonial space and time. These contemporary interactions make this an ideal time to explore the perception white men have of their own role in that space.

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[28] Steven Weisenburger, *Fables of Subversion: Satire and the American Novel 1930-1980* (Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1995).

1. The ends of the white man as we know them

> We must secure the existence of our race and a future for white children.
> - David Lane, "14 Words"[1]

> White Male as a Minority Law: This will level the playing field where the white male is constantly being discriminated against...
> - Louis Davis, platform of failed campaign in 2004 for governor of West Virginia[2]

Are white men threatened? A threat does lurk in these words, multi-edged and multi-sided. When declared white supremacists like Lane, or more conventional politicians like Davis, speak of "threat", it is embedded in a fear of now. No small amount of data refutes their claims: White men are not an underprivileged minority in the United States. Whites still compose around 75 percent of the population,[3] and white men earn higher-than-average incomes and occupy nearly all elected offices and corporate boardroom seats.[4] The "threat" of encroachment is not new either, being one of the oldest in societies grounded in colonial encounters like the United States. And yet, here it appears again, in "backlash" language that appropriates post-Civil Rights objects today's listeners recognize, such as Davis's distorted anti-discrimination rhetoric.

The following chapters are not for or about white supremacists. However, they are about the way literature by white men today writes the threat to white masculinity as a contemporary narrative. The analysis of the selected novels argues that this narrative of threat to white men stems from new forms of uncertainty about the definition of "white male" as an identity, about identity categories in general, and about the social ramifications of that categorization. This narrative in turn informs the imagination of the American community and serves to regulate conflicts within that community. Thus, this study ultimately addresses the way in which the narrative construction of threat and its potential for destabilization in turn serve to stabilize white male identity and the society which privileges it.

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[1] Quoted in: Betty A Dobratz and Staphanie L. Shanks-Meile, *"White Power, White Pride!": The white separatist movement in the United States* (New York: Twayne, 1996) *passim.*

[2] "New Laws", Louis Davis for Governor of West Virginia, 11 Aug. 2003 <http://www.loudavisforwvgov.com/new_laws.html/>.

[3] United States Census Service, "Quick Facts", 24 Aug. 2004 <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/00000.html>.

[4] United States Census Service, "Table PINC-11: Income Distribution to $250,000 or More: 2002", 24 Aug. 2004<http://ferret.bls.census.gov/macro/032003/perinc/new11_000.htm>.

This discussion, therefore, requires an understanding of the discursive period in which that identity exists, the “now”, as well as its contestation and the very notion of identity. "Whiteness" and "masculinity" have not always borne the same meaning, nor has the connection between them. Analogously, the transgression of these categories and their interrelation has also changed over time. However, they have always been attended by the fear of that transgression, the threat to their categorical borders. The discussion of the literature focused on in this study relocates that fear to the borders themselves. By exuding and insisting on their own fixity, these borders of difference elide the contestation that produced them. In this way they encode contestation as transgression, evoking the feeling of threat, the fear and violence that transgression and its resistance entail.

Reconstructing the contingencies of the contemporary counters the permanence of the category "white male" and the language Babb criticized in "the insulting conclusions 'White people are like...' or 'White people do...'".[5] It means discarding just those formulations in favor or presenting a more historical view of social and cultural relations. Such a strategy situates subjects in a moment with no pretense that this moment, though it bears a genealogical relation to the past, is by any means expressive of an eternal, timeless verity. It offers a way to portray historical contingencies, as this study does by locating itself against the background of the Cold War. It also makes clear the extent to which fields of theory such as postmodernism and postcolonialism function within the same contemporary space.

The discussion of "white male" identity today, in terms of hollowed-out signifiers, challenges to master narratives, hybridity, and performance, uses a language familiar to both postmodernism and postcolonialism. They are affected by the same social and discursive problems. Postmodernism and postcolonialism express, as "post-" terms, both a departure from their antecedent modernism and colonialism and the inability to conceive themselves without them. Correspondingly, they assess a contradictory era of both radical categorical instability and conservative categorical reinforcement, the major theme *White Men Write Now* outlines in literature by white men about white masculinity.

Therefore, this chapter is constructed in three parts to firmly ground the discussion of white masculinity in critical contemporary literature by white men in its discursive and historical contexts. The first part will begin considerations about the

identity "white male" with a focus on the definition(s) of whiteness within in the United States as a postcolonial space. The result is a provisional concept of "whiteness" as multiple "whitenesses" which form a constantly shifting normative American identity. The very defining act demonstrates its own complications, a feature that is used here to discuss the contestation that is at the heart of definitions of whiteness in America. This chapter's second part then looks at the way in which whiteness and masculinity interact to transform that contestation into seemingly fixed borders of identity. This appearance of fixity works to repress other structures of identity while at the same time absorbing them so that their representation takes place within a space of white masculinity. The focus shifts from the "white male" as a single cultural concept to the "white male" as a socially stabilizing identity which defines a field of competing and often incommensurate meanings.

Today we commonly discuss the radically contested nature of conceptual borders, simultaneously deconstructed even as they are reinforced. If so, this conflict is again a reflection of the times in which that discussion is taking place. Therefore, the third part of this chapter returns to the ever-repeating theme of threat to show what is "new" in the contestation of "white male" identity and its borders. This contestation is looked at within the context of the "revelatory" language of America's self-image. The nation's invented tradition, to use Hobsbawm's concept,[6] of a civilizing mission went hand-in-hand with both the assimilation of some people and confrontation with others.

This meant a constant threat from "outside" at the core of a process which simultaneously exposed and repressed the contestation of white masculinity. *White Men Write Now* argues that the process culminated in its most recent manifestation in the rhetoric of Cold War apocalypse. It is a theme that will be extensively developed in chapter 2 and pursued throughout the rest of the study, the point of this chapter being to prepare the way for that discussion. As authors of their times, the white men in the following chapters critically transgress borders of white masculinity and question the narratives from which that identity draws its power.

1.1. Postcolonial states of whiteness

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[5] Valerie Babb, *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature and Culture*, (New York: New York UP, 1998): 2.
[6] Eric Hobsbawm, ed, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983).

Speaking of white masculinity in the United States unavoidably means engaging the discussion of identity as both a set of social signs and the process of constructing those signs in an imagined community. Contemporary theorists of "whiteness studies" who will be discussed below frequently begin their deliberations recognizing the "elusive" nature of whiteness as an identity. They tend to construct that elusiveness as part of a perfidious strategy that allows the normative power of white identity in American society to remain unchallenged. It is a construction used by those who define whiteness in terms of its psychic symbolic functions as well as those who define it in terms of its material social functions.

The following will instead employ a postcolonial perspective to examine this elusiveness for the way in which whiteness has been both a central identity and part of the process for constructing identity in the United States. It should demonstrate not that whiteness bears an inherent elusiveness but that the contestation of American identity has led to a multi-faceted, performative whiteness as a site of social inclusion and exclusion. Whiteness is elusive because it is not one thing but rather lies at the base for generating various forms of Americanness. Therefore, this section begins with a brief discussion of the postcolonial in the United States, particularly as it pertains to literary projects of constructing identity in terms of whiteness and white masculinity. It then looks at leading definitions of whiteness in an attempt to account for the normative power of whiteness. Finally, it posits that this power is attached more to the imperial and assimilatory success of the United States than to essential aspects of whiteness as white. This section prepares the way for the next which shows how the intersection of whiteness with masculinity has increased both the complexity of identity in America and, inversely, the discursive power of the conceptual borders of white masculinity which repress that complexity.

Toni Morrison writes famously, "[F]or the most part, the literature of the United States has taken as its concern the architecture of a new white man."[7] Her thought about literature in particular sheds light on the general issue of the construction of the imagined community of the United States of America. According to Anderson's model, modern, industrialized mass-societies imagine community through the dissemination of national literatures over mass media. If that is so, then the literary project of constructing a new white man has a strong bearing on projects of constructing the American nation. Postcolonial theory, in turn, offers a look at the connection of these constructions in

[7] Morrison 14-15

terms of both the emergence of the nation from a colonial context and its growth as an imperial power.

Ashcroft *et al.* in *The Empire Writes Back* represent an early call for the postcolonial analysis of American literature. They write, "The literature of the USA should also be placed in [the postcolonial] category. ... [I]ts relationship with the metropolitan centre as it evolved over the last two centuries has been paradigmatic for post-colonial literatures everywhere."[8] Lawrence Buell shortly after that wrote his much-discussed essay that looked at the early literature of the United States in postcolonial terms of the post-independence construction of identity. He writes, "To transpose from the colonial to the postcolonial stage of the first half of the American nineteenth century, we need only substitute cultural authority for political/military authority as the object of resistance."[9] The resistance he refers to he finds in the body of works by the likes of Whitman, Emerson, and Melville which Frederick Mathiessen canonized as the "American Renaissance".[10] This literature involves precisely what Morrison said, the architecture of a new people, a new white man.

Emerson was noted for linking literature with a dawning era that would accompany the rise of a new people. In "The American Scholar" he announced, "I read with joy some of the auspicious signs of the coming days, as they glimmer already through poetry and art, through philosophy and science, through church and state". In that new age, he concluded, "A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men."[11] That type of "men" Emerson described, rid of the civilized conventions of the "old world" to be in direct connection to the divine, is the figure Richard Lewis' terms the "American Adam". The American Adam is "a figure of heroic innocence and vast potentialities, poised at the start of a new history", modeled after "Adam before the Fall".[12]

This "newness" as rebirth free of the vices of old is actually an old tradition associated with America. John Winthrop, the Puritan leader, exhorted his followers to the New World to build a City on the Hill. The biblical reference inferred that their

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[8] Ashcroft *et al*. 2.
[9] Buell 415.
[10] F.O. Matthiessen, *American Renaissance: Art and Expression in the Age of Emerson and Whitman* (New York: Oxford UP, 1941).
[11] Ralph Waldo Emerson, "The American Scholar" 1837, 1849, ed. Paul Lauter, *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, 3rd ed., vol. 1 (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1998): 1620, 1621.
[12] R.W.B. Lewis, *American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1966): 1, 5.

endeavor was to provide an example for regenerating the innocence of Eden and direct connection with the divine. Thus, he promised them "[T]he Lord will be our God, and delight to dwell among us."[13] In fact, Lois Zamora relates that this newness was a widespread phenomenon that accompanied all the European powers in their colonial mission in the Americas, intertwining religious teleology and the emergence of modernism.[14] The new European- and largely English-descended "Americans" in the United States originally conceived their newness, their American exceptionalism, around these terms of a religious and civilizing mission invigorated through the contact with nature. Embodying the "new" nation were the subjects of the national literature, white men.

That said, the notion of treating the United States with postcolonial theory has been roundly criticized by many. Anne McClintock even refers to the suggestion as "a monumental affront".[15] Not only did the colonizing peoples never leave North America, but the United States became an imperial power in its own right. Amy Kaplan objects that Buell "not only overlooks the history of American imperialism, but in a sense colonizes postcolonial theory by implicitly positing the United States as the original postcolonial nation."[16] She also objects, like Carolyn Porter, to the exceptionalist centralizing myth, what Porter calls "an idealized cultural nationalism now set in relief by its own failures."[17] It would be naive to equate the people who sought independence from Britain in the thirteen colonies with native peoples who fought for independence from European powers in the twentieth century era of decolonization, and it is not the intention of this study to recenter American studies around whiteness. Instead, it is important to see the way in which whiteness and white masculinity in America have been instrumentalized as centering features of national identity, especially in a context of contact with colonial Others, both before and after independence.

Returning to Buell, most criticism of him has been very unfair in exactly this respect. He actually distances himself from that project of centralizing myth construction,

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[13] John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity", 1630, ed. Paul Lauter, *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, 3rd ed., vol. 1, (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1998): 233.
[14] Lois Zamora, *Writing the Apocalypse: Historical Vision in Contemporary U.S. and Latin American Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990).
[15] McClintock 13.
[16] Amy Kaplan, "'Left Alone with America': The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture", ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease, *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke UP, 1993): 21.
[17] Carolyn Porter, "What We Know That We Don't Know: Remapping American Literary Studies", *American Literary History* 6.3 (1994): 470.

referring to it as the "so-called Renaissance".[18] Though Porter calls his essay "problematic",[19] she writes in defense of Buell's intention to introduce postcolonial theory to the early literature of the republic precisely to oppose "Americanist centripetalism".[20] This meant reading the literary developments of nineteenth century America in a context of dialogue with Europe and not as a home-grown phenomenon.

Buell also acknowledges, even emphasizes, that in his approach, one may suspect "the possible hypocrisy of an exercise in imagining America of the expansionist years as a postcolonial rather than proto-imperial power."[21] In conclusion, he even calls for a look at the "fundamental question as to the link between American postcolonialism and American imperialism".[22] That is precisely the view Peter Hulme represents when arguing for "Including America", though he shares Kaplan's suspicion of Buell.[23] Hulme writes, "[A] country can be postcolonial and colonizing at the same time. Such small complexities should not be beyond us, even as we recognize that they need more investigation than they have received thus far."[24]

It will be demonstrated below that whiteness played a major role in that link between "postcolonial America" and "imperial America". A postcolonial approach, in turn, helps explore the link between whiteness as an identity in centralizing American myths of newness and approaches such as Kaplan's, Hulme's, Porter's, *and* Buell's which all seek to oppose that centrality, if by differing methods. Finally, one must bear in mind Singh and Schmidt's emphasis on the importance of concepts shared by postcolonial theory and U.S. ethnic studies, "especially with reference to people of color". Looking at the construction of whiteness as part of an exceptionalist national myth enriches that reference. This does not cast white alongside other minorities as the platform of Lou Davis would. Instead, it seeks to understand how "color" is informed by the interaction of whiteness with that national myth, how that "color" informs social hierarchies in the United States, and how whiteness currently works to subvert the decentering work of those who would expose those "failures" of "an idealized cultural nationalism".

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[18] Buell 411.
[19] Porter 470.
[20] Buell 415.
[21] Buell 411.
[22] Buell 435.
[23] Peter Hulme, "Including America", *ARIEL: A Review of International English Literature* 26.1 (1995): 119.
[24] Hulme 122.

Emerson does not discuss whiteness in his "American Scholar". Like other Transcendentalists, he spoke against slavery and all racial hierarchies which opposed his egalitarian vision. However, it hardly bears noting that he was neither the only nor the main opinion-leader in his day. National myths that shared a concept of Adamic renewal unspecific to Transcendentalism but generally associated with "America", on the other hand, were widespread. This led to a cultural process of constructing a centered, inclusive, collective identity, inclusive for – at first Anglo – Europeans and their descendants who saw their collectivity in mythic concepts of American renewal.

As a result, whiteness as a marker of that Adamic national identity drew on mythic structures that preexisted the United States but grew in importance as the United States became a conquering power in its own right. This represents the inverse corollary of the process Said first outlined in *Orientalism* with respect to European imperialism.[25] *Orientalism*, that founding work of postcolonial theory, sought to "show that European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self."[26] "Orientalism" (and colonial discourse in general, as postcolonial theory today would say) rendered colonial subjects an exotic Other, an object to be conquered but which cannot be absorbed. The inverse of this structure of knowledge in turn became the basis for national identities in the "West".

Within such a structure of knowledge, white masculinity in the United States takes on a strongly centralizing "symbolic textuality" at the root of the culture of the imagined community. "Symbolic textuality", Homi Bhabha writes, gives "the alienating everyday an aura of selfhood, a promise of pleasure".[27] It provides something familiar and socially organizing, even for those who are designated as non-white. The important work of Bhabha has been to more rigorously apply postmodern theory and deconstruction to national symbolic textuality constructed as part of a broad colonizing project. In his view:

> ... the encounters and negotiation of differential meanings and values within 'colonial' textuality, its governmental discourses and cultural practices, have anticipated, *avant le lettre*, many of the problematics of signification and judgement that have become current in contemporary theory – aporia, ambivalence, indeterminacy, the question of

[25] Apologies are made to readers of *Orientalism* who will note that, for reasons of economy, this is a great simplification and paraphrasing of Said's argument in this and other works. Edward Said, *Orientalism*, (1978; New York: Vintage, 1994).
[26] *Orientalism* 3.
[27] Homi K. Bhabha, "Postcolonial Criticism", ed. Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn, *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Studies* (New York: MLA, 1992): 438.

> discursive closure, the threat to agency, the status of intentionality, the challenge to 'totalizing' concepts, to name but a few.[28]

Appropriately, this essay, "Postcolonial Criticism" was renamed "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern" as a chapter in his *Location of Culture*. Dislocating, say, a mythic grand narrative of the democratizing project of the United States demands a critical assessment of the terms of identity as it informed definitions of citizenship and enfranchisement within that democracy. It requires the examination of texts of race, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender these terms are based on, the structure of *différance* through which whiteness, masculinity, and the conglomeration of white male are constructed. Finally, it means looking at the powers behind the relational field in which these identities are applied.

Is, then, the "symbolic textuality" of the identity "white male" instantly readable? The answer given here is no, yes, and ultimately no. No, white and masculine are neither identical nor do they signify the same thing all the time but rather are, as the various theorists of whiteness point out, elusive. Yes, that elusiveness can itself be identified as a consistent feature of their signifying work as markers of identity. Despite that, in the end, no, that is insufficient as a criterion. Such ambivalence can be found in the structure of all signs, ever simultaneously in-/ and exclusive, containing a presence and absence of meaning and usually unexamined by those very discourses which rely so much upon them. The theorists below who treat whiteness demonstrate this particularly well. Work by other theorists who discuss the intersection of race with gender makes even more apparent how problematic it is to claim an instant readability for the symbolic textuality of white masculinity. Instead, they point to a more situative and performative field of discourse in which that identity operates.

One of the main thrusts of the field of "whiteness studies"[29] lies in conceiving white as a "marked" category. This assumes that whiteness has until now been discursively existent only through its absence. A founding work for this school of thought, Richard Dyer's well-known essay "White", explores the characterization of

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[28] Bhabha, "Postcolonial Criticism" 440. Appropriately, this essay was retitled "The Postcolonial and the Postmodern" in *Location of Culture*.

[29] For this study, "whiteness studies" will remain in quotation marks in order to signify its complications. Though the term has gotten some currency of late, it still does not designate any consistent field of study or even of contestation over what its object is. In a way, it feels a little too politically correct, an attempt to act as if one of the last bastions of hierarchization has been toppled academically by recognizing "white" as a discreet group, a minority identity to be delineated and contained alongside others like "African American" or "Chicana/o". The problem with this kind of

white in terms of a color which is at the same time invisible. He observes, "The colourless multi-colouredness of whiteness secures white power by making it hard, especially for white people and their media to 'see' whiteness."[30] A film theorist, Dyer presents several examples of movies in which the use of light and dark reinforces the whiteness of protagonists and the darkness of non-white Others whom they encounter. The same chromatic structuration is pursued at a more general level by Eric Lott who, based on Dyer, points out how the shadowy and dark spaces of *film noir* movies were as a rule occupied by a range of non-whites, whereas light spaces featured the white main characters.[31]

That whiteness needs foils to have any definition is also the core of Morrison's thesis in *Playing in the Dark* when she speaks of the architecture of the new white man in terms of an "Africanist presence"[32] in American literature. That presence is a "sometimes allegorical, sometimes metaphorical" stereotyped Otherness against which a white male subject can define himself. Her statement was actually predated by several decades in a satirical essay by the African American satirist George Schuyler who made the claim in scathing language that it was blacks who first gave whites their whiteness. He wrote, "It is fairly well established, I think, that our presence in the Great Republic has been of incalculable psychological value to the masses of white citizens. Descendants of convicts, serfs, and half-wits, with the rest have been buoyed up and greatly exalted by being constantly assured of their superiority to all other races and their equality with each other."[33]

All of these views reflect the same constellation in which white only becomes present in the face of non-whiteness. It remains otherwise absent, takes on an elusive character as, to borrow the language of Wallace Stevens, the "nothing that is".[34] Dyer and Lott employ chromatic references to make this point, whereas Morrison and Schuyler draw on the general appearance of non-whites, specifically blacks. Already this contrast provides a clue to the elusiveness of whiteness as a marker of identity. At the same, their consistent use of contrasts gets to the root of the representation of racial

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"equality" is that it reinforces essentialist categorizations and greatly elides the power relations which produce the social inequality of white, black, etc. and their categorizing power in the first place.

[30] Dyer 143.

[31] Eric Lott, "The Whiteness of Film Noir", Hill, *Whiteness*: 81-101.

[32] Morrison 17.

[33] George Schuyler, "Our Greatest Gift to America", ed. V.F. Calverton, *Anthology of American Negro Literature*, (1927; New York: Random House, 1929): 410-11.

purity that remains common in American discourse of identity. Only those persons can be defined as white who have no non-white ancestry and are thus devoid of "color", a view which still largely determines the legal definitions of white in the United States.[35]

In "The Unexamined",[36] Ross Chambers views whiteness in terms of an eliding blank which functions insidiously through erasure. He censures then that as a result, "Identity politics is alien to white people (I'm obviously not talking about white women or white gay men) because whiteness is not a classificatory identity but just the unexamined norm against which such identities are defined, compared, examined."[37] To reach this conclusion, Chambers constructs whiteness in Freudian terms of the *un/heimlich*, the unexamined opposite of the structuration of the Other as a terrifying double of the Self. The Other becomes both knowable and unknowable as alien.[38]

The non-white Other comes to embody phantasms and fears the Self represses and thus makes alien, ultimately equating the repressed alien Self with the Other. Chambers does not use the term "fetish", but in his model, one can see how whiteness functions as a fetish of blankness intended to repress the traumatic discovery of Otherness through the sign of a white Self. *White Men Write Now* pursues this *unheimlich* structuration and the white fetish at greater length in chapter 3 (section 3.3.1. "The home association and the *unheimlich*") as it applies to the analysis of a representation of whiteness. The splitting of the Other as a repressive act, in Chambers's view, leaves the white Self "undivided" and unexamined, which is why whiteness as a function of identity politics appears invisible to those who bear the feature of whiteness.

Conclusive as such an analysis is to understand the usage of whiteness in certain representational forms, it runs the risk of being read as absolutist and lacking an historical dimension. One must bear in mind not to confuse, as it were, the *blanc* with the blank, implicitly positing that whiteness functions in this way because it is white. Any color, or for that matter any mark of identity at all, when applied as a universal sign of Self, takes on the totalizing characteristic of emptiness. He even acknowledges how whiteness shares this feature with unmarked categories in "all the big binaries"[39] as the

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[34] Wallace Stevens, "The Snow Man", 1923, *The Academy of American Poets*, 14 Aug. 2003 <http://www.poets.org/poems/poems.cfm?prmID=1723>.
[35] For more on the "one-drop rule" see chapter 4 about "reverse-passing".
[36] Ross Chambers, "The Unexamined", Hill, *Whiteness*: 187-202.
[37] Chambers 196.
[38] Chambers 193-6.
[39] Chambers 189.

"normal" against which only those objects not bearing that marking first define its existence with the threat of confusion and impurity.

However, there is no sense of the constant change and redefinition of the "big binaries". The essay speaks of the necessity to consider the historical dimensions that bring white into contact with its Others,[40] but the simple present tense of the article gives its structure of whiteness a feeling of axiomatic eternity, much as one today learns that "the earth revolves around the sun", a phenomenon that has always been and always will be. Given this, whiteness would have always existed in the same fashion as a category of centralized social definition with respect to Others since its blankness seems so obvious. As a result, his construction of whiteness itself renders invisible the social constellations at the root of its institutionalization and centralizing power.

The emergence of "white" as a racial signifier doubtlessly strongly affected the chromatic and chiaroscuric way in which people designated as white have been visually and textually portrayed, as Dyer demonstrates quite well. However, studies have shown that racialized whiteness has emerged only recently in history (see below) and continues to change. Americans of a certain age can recall a time not long ago when packages of Crayola crayons included a reddish peach color called "skin", implicitly representing "white" skin while at the same time not being white. It shows that the power of whiteness as an identity goes beyond simple, visible features of color. Also, the fact that Crayola, after many protests, no longer sells "skin" but rather a whole "Multicultural Pack" containing the hues "black", "sepia", "peach", "apricot", "white", "tan", "mahogany" and "burnt sienna" indicates something of the larger, ever-changing field of social discourse in which whiteness is constructed. As a final point, identity politics is patently not alien to white supremacists and other milder racists, as the would-be West Virginian governor's platform indicates. Nor is it alien to countless other whites, the author of this study and Ross Chambers included, who are well aware of identity politics and consider it in terms of their own examined social identity.

Babb pulls whiteness in American discourse out of this dead-end of chromatic metaphor in her thoughtful *Whiteness Visible* (notwithstanding the punning title). After much deliberation in her opening chapter "Toward a Philosophy of Whiteness", she creates a working model of whiteness as an identity rather than a visual component in the structuration of Self and Other. For this she makes an important differentiation between

[40] Chambers 194.

the physical feature of light skin and "whiteness". Whiteness in this context is "a system of privileges accorded to those with white skin."[41] She concludes that whiteness is "larger than having the physical attribute of white skin; it is the ideology that was created around that attribute."[42]

Babb also consistently emphasizes the American context of her discussion of whiteness. Her model of whiteness casts it in a socially psychic space, something imbedded in culture as the symbolic relation to the material. "White" is not eternal, nor is it universally the same everywhere. It is interwoven with nationalist and racial discourse in countless countries with colonial pasts, be it the UK, Brazil, or Zimbabwe, each with their own contingencies. It is Babb's view, and that of *White Men Write Now*, that the focus on whiteness should be on the very specific attachment of whiteness to other normalizing characteristics in texts of nationhood and social discourse. In this case, it is within the space of the United States.

The only difficulty her thoughts on whiteness cause is one of fixity. She acknowledges the work of historians of whiteness who would demonstrate its evolution. At the same time her treatment of whiteness allows it to be misunderstood as a single thing with a clearly determined lineage and not as the subject of constant situative reformulation. Babb quotes Frankenberg's famous *White Women, Race Matters* which posits whiteness as a "location" and a "standpoint"[43]. However, as a whole, all of Frankenberg's interviews with white women bear one important element: Even as the sociologist speaks of whiteness as "a location" in singular form, her study shows whiteness to refer to locations of whiteness. In her later *Displacing Whiteness*, she pluralized it as "whitenesses", a concept she briefly sketches as "ensembles of local phenomena".[44]

"Whitenesses", is expanded in this chapter to refer not only to "ensembles of local phenomena" but their continual temporal shifting. Whitenesses are a plurality of constantly reformulated race-based systems of identity expressed and represented in ways that depend on numerous other factors in a subject's position, i.e. poor, rich, lesbian, heterosexual, old, young, etc. Whitenesses are also, in a broader sense than Frankenburg's definition, the varying forms with which whiteness refers to this plurality

[41] Babb 9.
[42] Babb 44.
[43] Babb 11, on Frankenburg 1.

in the many countries in which whiteness informs national identities. While there is little doubt that "whiteness" brings certain material and analogously representational privileges with it, what they are at any specific moment is contingent upon the situation in which forms of whiteness, whitenesses, are performed. Past Jim Crow laws were attempts to fix those privileges with a singular form of whiteness, Lou Davis's demand for a law protecting the "white male minority" is an attempt to fix them, and the conceptual creation of a monolithic "whiteness" reinforces the feeling of their fixity unless one bears the plurality of whitenesses in mind. Whiteness is not a single system of practices.

Homi Bhabha provides a convincing model of two perceptions of culture tending toward either the more fixed or the more contested. He does this in several of his essays but probably most succinctly when he characterizes these two in terms of "cultural diversity" and "cultural difference". "Cultural diversity," he writes, "is an epistemological object – culture as an object of empirical knowledge – whereas cultural difference is the process of the *enunciation* of culture as 'knowledge*able*', authoritative, adequate to the construction of systems of cultural identification." He clarifies, "[C]ultural difference is a process of signification through which statements *of* culture or *on* culture differentiate, discriminate, and authorize the production of fields of force, reference, applicability, and capacity."[45]

Important in Bhabha's view of a culture is its hybridity, the multiplicity of "systems" and "fields of force" it always already consists of which make its expressions enunciative and performative. Bhabha would then add that beyond that concept of a culture contested from within is the constant contact between cultures. The hybrid fields which determine the expression of whiteness are therefore not limited to how white people may practice whiteness. They also include the way in which whitenesses are engaged, even practiced, by people of color in the United States (as Schuyler opined) and constructions of Americanness both internally and externally with which whiteness interacts.

More than anything else, what has made whiteness "invisible" to most white people is not its inherent blankness or the psychologically repressive function of "white" as a fetish. The success of the United States as a conquering power and its related racist policies in the past have created a space in which most of the people are white

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[44] Ruth Frankenberg, introduction, *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, ed. Ruth Frankenburg (Durham, NC: Duke UP 1997): 1.
[45] Bhabha, "Commitment" 34.

(remember, about 75 percent). This has as much to do with the fact that most people are of predominantly European descent as with the assimilatory role whiteness played in giving those people a sense of a shared identity. As a result, today these white people have little conscious experience with phenomena through which cultural difference in Bhabha's sense becomes visible.

White people live in mostly white neighborhoods, have mostly white friends, send their children to mostly white schools, watch movies starring either white people or people of color in non-confrontational roles, and vote for white politicians or those non-whites who alienate them the least. White identity becomes so pervasive as to be invisible because it is assumed. Frankenburg's work supports that and offers an explanation for the importance of the Africanist and other forms of non-white presence by demonstrating that white people are generally latently aware of their whiteness. They only become conscious of it at certain enunciative moments of contact with Others. In the absence of such moments, whiteness and whitenesses disappear. This allows many white people to profess they are not racist while drawing on the advantages of white identity, the avoidance of disturbing contacts with non-white Others being one of them.

1.2. Framing contested whiteness with the borders of white masculinity

By the same token, and also with reference to Frankenburg, whitenesses and their shifting enunciation become even more complex when one considers them in conjunction with gender and attached notions of sexuality. Chambers "obviously" excludes white women and white male gays from the pool of the unmarked whites he describes. He therefore "obviously" defines the normative unmarked white in the United States as really male heterosexual. If the sheer mass of literature on the subject is any gauge,[46] race and ethnicity today strongly interact with roles of gender and gendered sexuality. It would be hopelessly naive to speak of simple "whites" without further identifying qualifiers. This not only increases the spectrum of whitenesses that opposes monolithic concepts of whiteness but also asks how the socially centralizing power of whiteness is currently served by its interaction with masculinity.

[46] What is meant here is everything from fiction such as the novels of Toni Morrison and even Ishmael Reed to increasingly non-fictive works such as the mixed forms produced by Gloria Anzaldua to the large number of academic studies which explore such topics as "double-discrimination" and patriarchy in various ethnic groups.

This section examines that centralizing power in terms of borders. First, after a discussion of identity borders, it will explore the sad fact that the fluidity of a male signifier coupled with that of a white signifier has not increased the visible fluidity of the conceptual borders of white masculinity. Indeed, this coupling is commonly seen as reducing it for white men and their Others. The discussion then turns to various alternative structures of identification in the America to examine how they potentially conflict with the social borders of white masculinity. In anticipation of the next section, this section then concludes by examining the way in which whiteness and white masculinity have defused the conflicts of those alternative structures through its centralizing power. Corresponding to the increase of potential material privileges of whites as they also identify as male is the increase of potential difference within the group of white males. The borders of white masculinity have expanded to subsume alternative forms of identity and perform them within a field of normative white masculinity.

Where do these borders emerge? What dictates when identity is performed or privileged? If the performance of identity appears at moments of contact, then the privileging of that identity begins at its borders. More specifically, it is the limits of the definition of an object which determine that object's relation to other objects. With respect to race and ethnic identity, the definition of identities is as important for what it includes as what it excludes, and it is this work that becomes essential when discussing for what a racial or ethnic category stands. If whiteness as a social identity is not simply the presence of the color white or the absence of other colors, one must ask not only what is being delineated by whiteness but how. Borders form an important part of this study, most explicitly in chapter 3, "Insider art". These borders are geographical as well as conceptual, playing the key role in determining race relations in what Pratt terms "contact zones". These she defines as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power".[47] In chapter 3, a detailed concept of borders is worked out which conceives rewriting borders as a deconstructive project. Borders represent the space where discursive *différance* emerges, as a sign that denotes categorical limits of signification.

It has already been said that whiteness is both a sign and a process for creating a sign, and the same can be said for the borders of whiteness. Whiteness and whitenesses

[47] Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone", *MLA Profession* 91 (1991). 34.

would not exist without borders of whiteness which indicate what whiteness is not. At the same time, these contact zone borders provide a means to understand the existence of whitenesses. Contact zones represent spaces of conflict between various kinds of historical master narratives, whether of civilization, religious, biological, or cultural difference. These conflicts succeed each other, and yet they remain present, coexisting as a discursive sediment upon which whiteness rests. The contact zones between white and non-white in North America that accompanied United States expansion and growth have thus been great motors for the literature and thinking which has produced normative whitenesses juxtaposed with white Otherness. These contacts have resulted in strata of characteristics that at one time or another have been important for defining American identity in terms of whitenesses. Together these characteristics constitute a totality of speakable and unspeakable forms of whiteness in America. The limits of that totality, where the (un-)speakability of whitenesses begins, are the borders, layered like whiteness itself.

As a race category, always coupled with patrolling the borders of whiteness has been patrolling the borders of gender. It is here that masculinity takes on its major role in fixing the limits of (un-)speakable whiteness. One of the earliest works to examine the intersection of race with gender roles was Hernton's *Sex and Racism*.[48] It predates deconstructionist concerns and queer theory but nonetheless provides an important starting point from which to engage heterosexual gender roles as historically determining racial borders of difference. He sees racial difference arising through the contact between black and white in the context of slavery. The definition of this contact zone depended on the separation of black and white in terms of slave and master.

Much of Hernton's discussion revolves around what he terms the "cult of sacred white womanhood".[49] A collaboration between plantation-owning white men and women, Hernton relates that it constructed the role of white women as wives who were the untouchable object of their society. This "true" white womanhood was intended to both give white men an object of aspiration and to alleviate guilt over their desire for the black women under their dominion. In such a constellation, white women could be carefully separated from their black gendered others, regulating both white and black women through different means. White women were constructed as "untouchable"

[48] Calvin C. Hernton, *Sex and Racism* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1965).
[49] Hernton 23 and following

asexual objects kept in the house and black women as inherently "touchable" sexualized objects kept in the fields.

Analogously, black women and men could also be regulated through different means. "Black" was given a strong association with "primitive" unrepressed sexuality. In this scenario, animal, sexual black men desired white women as objects of civilized aspiration, and thus they needed to be "tamed" in terms of the "male-male" violence of beating, humiliation, and emasculation. Black women, however, also entirely sexualized, engendered white male desire and deserved, indeed needed, to be "tamed" through rape. The structure Hernton sketches emanates from a normative heterosexual white male as master, both physically and discursively. This heterosexual white male is defined above all through acts of violence which serve to clarify the limits of his identity. A sociologist, in his fieldwork he identified several modern (mid-1960s) variations of this cross-border racial and gender identification which he traced back genealogically to this origin. As such, he anticipated the work of Frankenburg who discovered similar forms of Self-Other identification at moments when white women came into contact with their racially and gendered Others.

Robert Connell, on the other hand, examines in his *Masculinities* the way in which the contact with racial Others solidified the borders of gender difference and informed current forms of masculinity. To reconstruct his argumentation, it is important first to recognize that he structures masculinity as an identity much in the way Babb does whiteness. He distinguishes between those who bear the signs of that identity and the system of practices based around the discourse in which those signs are incorporated. Connell posits, "Gender is a way in which social practice is ordered. In gender processes, the everyday conduct of life is organized in relation to a reproductive arena, defined by the bodily structures and processes of human reproduction."[50]

That said, he speaks of plural "masculinities", much as *White Men Write Now* does of whitenesses, as part of "conflicting forms of knowledge about gender [which] betray the presence of different practices of addressing gender."[51] At issue for him are both what these forms of knowledge are, how they came to be, and why certain masculinities are favored today. He traces this development back to origins of European modernity at around 1500 when "man" in patriarchal societies became associated with that era's emergence of rationalism, a new emphasis on individualism, and the growth of

[50] Connell 71.

European empires. He writes, "With masculinity defined as a character structure marked by rationality, and Western civilization defined as a bearer of reason to a benighted world, a cultural link between the legitimation of patriarchy and the legitimation of empire was formed."[52]

Connell's is an important insight, for it demonstrates that multiple discursive levels interact simultaneously. Theories of civilization, race, culture, and gender interact, and in the context of colonial contact they take static forms in the identity of (European) "man". The emergence of that concept of "man" is thus profoundly influenced by the contact with European (non-white) Others, the dawning of a new picture of a much larger world. The contact between parties leaves a remnant of that contact, a conceptual end of oneself, the hyphen between "Self-Other". This conceptual border marks the beginning and end of difference and of (un-)speakable forms of the Self. Connell's construction shifts the focus to the cultural formation of that difference. What concepts from a culturally shared symbolic world inform the representation of that difference? What relationships of power determine the exact forms those concepts take in their representation? Bhabha describes cultural difference as enunciative, but the question remains as to what factors determine that enunciation, and what alternative structures of identity are left unenunciated.

It is exactly these questions which are at the core of the work by a group of materialist Marxist and post-Marxist critics who have addressed white masculinity. They focus on "white male" (heterosexual, etc.) identity in terms of the normative place it has in class and labor conflicts in the United States. Noel Ignatiev and the rest of the Race Traitor group view whiteness as a conspiratorial force used to elide class discrepancy in the United States. Whiteness establishes a "false" border which allies poor and wealthy white men together against their Others, often relying on the poor whites as "muscle" for keeping the Others oppressed. Thus, in their view, it is a means for obscuring the "true" border of economic class. The Race Traitors preach the "Huckleberry Finn moment" in which whites, who are otherwise blind to identity, suddenly discover it and at the same time discover their common cause with their heretofore racial/ethnic others.[53] Their

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[51] Connell 5.
[52] Connell 186.
[53] John Garvey and Noel Ignatiev, "Toward a New Abolitionism: A *Race Traitor* Manifesto", Hill *Whiteness*: 349.

construction of racial identity is based on a theory of the class origins of race, a case made in various histories of the concept of whiteness in America (see next section).

The same theorizing of race forms the critical basis for one camp in the relatively new field of "white trash" study. This looks at underprivileged white Americans who bear this label as an indication of "failed" white. Since "white" as privilege should translate to upper-class, poor whites have failed to live up to that standard and are thus "trash". Newitz and Wray write, "Unlike unmarked hegemonic forms of whiteness, the category of white trash is marked as white from the outset. But in addition to being racially marked, it is simultaneously marked as trash, as something that must be discarded, expelled, and disposed of in order for the whiteness to achieve and maintain social dominance."[54]

Though white trash complicates the model of "white" as a privileged norm, it is ambivalent for theorists who idealize it as an essentially heroic component of class conflict because it cannot be readily idealized. "White trash" often includes people who would be equally or more likely to join the Ku Klux Klan than a labor union (though there are many who belong to both). These two theorists conclude that they are unsure whether the new interest in white trash represents a conservative backlash against multiculturalism or the first wave of white achieving a multicultural identity.[55]

Similar contradictions have led the Race Traitor group to analyze with less equivocation Kansas City bomber Timothy McVeigh and the boys behind the Columbine High School massacre as victims of the system in which they lived. Their white masculinity, the thinking goes, blinded them to the dehumanizing forces of familiar Marxist complaints: capital, class, commodification, and popular culture.[56] Such phenomena, however, far from being so clear cut, have lent themselves just as easily to both conservative and leftist critiques of media images, guns in American society, the loss of morals, and the rest of the items on their respective agendas. That is not to say that the multitude of analyses makes the Race Traitor view false. However, it arouses the suspicion that the spectacular horror of these events is merely being instrumentally

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[54] Annalee Newitz and Matthew Wray, "What is 'White Trash'? Stereotypes and Economic Conditions of Poor White Trash in the United States", Hill, *Whiteness*: 169.
[55] Newitz and Wray 173.
[56] See John Garvey, "The Life and Death of Timothy McVeigh", *Race Traitor: Journal of the New Abolitionism* 15 (2001), 17 Aug. 2003 <http://www.racetraitor.org/lifeanddeath.html> and the on-line "rant" by Joel Olson, "The Massacre at Littleton" 27 April 1999, 17 Aug. 2003 <http://www.racetraitor.org/massacre.html>.

invoked like "September 11th" as a vehicle to draw conclusions more easily accepted in the emotional atmosphere they evoke.

A far greater problem in this materialist kind of analysis lies in the continued objectification of people who have had to bear reversals because of labels of racial, ethnic, and gender difference. Long "without a voice", they are again robbed of the ability to speak from their own subject position, because it has theoretically been predetermined for them. For this reason, for example, Ralph Ellison provides such a scathing critique of the Communist Party in his *Invisible Man* in which the anonymous narrator is hired as a talking puppet. He is valuable to the party's cause by virtue of his black skin which serves as an instantly readable marker of labor exploitation.

Labor critique and the Communist Party (or parties) are not identical, but the tendency to over-represent figures according to class and labor status is common to both. Young writes, "Here the problem rests on the fact that for orthodox Marxism, there can be only one 'other', that of the working class, into which all other oppressed groups, so called 'minorities', must in the last instance be subsumed."[57] It is also a form of critique which, in reconstructing "true" borders of class, does not recognize in-betweenness, "third-spaces", hybridity, or multiple subject positions. Culture is again cast as consisting of an instantly readable "symbolic textuality" and as such opposes the enunciative potential of a plurality of representative forms.

The response from such camps is that Bhabha, Spivak, and others who advocate the power of identity performativity to subvert hierarchies are ignoring the real material source of the construction of identity. A section of the recent popular leftist attack on contemporary culture, *Empire*, attempts to put an end to postcolonial theory by specifically criticizing Bhabha. Accusing him of opposing old forms of domination with his hybridity theories, Hardt and Negri criticize his collusion with postmodern theory in a, "united attack on the dialectics of modern sovereignty and the proposition of liberation as a politics of difference".[58] Essentially, they find his work based on an illusory structure of power, unlike their own worldview of diffuse global capitalism ("Empire") versus the "multitude". Aside from the fact that Bhabha is not all of postcolonial theory and that he is extremely simplified in their book, such a critique is based on a logic which precludes all other structures of knowledge as illusory, only "symptoms of the epochal shift we are

[57] Robert J.C. Young, *White Mythologies: Writing History and the West* (London: Routledge, 1990): 4.
[58] Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000): 145.

undergoing".[59] That said, it is not the intention to disprove Hardt and Negri in this space but rather to point out the field of highly contested knowledge which informs contemporary constructions of identity.

It is along these lines that many factions can be identified within minority movements in the United States. There is no end to the debate among Chicana/o and African American groups about whether or not they must bear the class identity of poor and working-class as an essential part of their ethnic/racial identities. Individual material advancement is often decried by some factions while others hold such successful people up as role models. One need only consider the debate over how to "view" Colin Powell, whether as a success of assimilation, a black sell-out, or not really African American because his parents immigrated from Jamaica. Individual "dropping out" in the counter-culture sense or the "right to exit"[60] are similarly complicated. They are also tainted with the idea of betrayal, and do not guarantee a new community with "drop-outs" from other groups.

Conversely, as Roediger and others have pointed out, in incipient labor movements in the United States, there was considerable deliberation over whether unions were supposed to be inclusive of all people. In early days they were not, often explicitly excluding various non-white groups.[61] Whether or not one can pin that down to a conspiratorial move by capitalists to divide the labor movement is largely a matter of point of view. The interaction of the two markers of identity, class and race, is at least as complex as that of gender and race. The fact is, however, that individual class mobility does exist in the United States, for all people, but that mobility differs depending on identity. Upward mobility to the top echelons of power as well as egressive mobility outside "the system" is limited *de facto* to a certain type and number of people, white men. Only "insiders" can make it to the top or can exit. The rest are stopped at national internal borders of identity.

Economic and social class strongly determine forms of white masculinity, but as in the case of Frankenberg's conclusions with white women, white masculinity still varies considerably independent of class. It is linked with many other axes of identity such as religion, region of European origin, education, regional origin in the United States, and

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[59] Hardt and Negri 145.
[60] Homi Bhabha, "On Cultural Choice", Ed. Garber, Marjorie Beatrice Hanssen, and Rebecca L. Walkowitz, *The Turn to Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 2000): 182.

so on. These create a plethora of further identity borders within and without white masculinity. This is best illustrated by the example of white supremacists in America. White supremacy, despite its singular form, is not one thing, but rather is applied unevenly to about 550 groups[62] that can be charted along at least six different lines: the Ku Klux Klan, neo-Nazis, Skinheads, Christian Identity,[63] neo-Confederacy, and militias. They often share literature and ideas and occasionally come together to cooperate on specific projects, there are, however, huge personal and ideological differences.[64] The large number of groups does not reflect a huge groundswell. Instead it shows that there is considerable splintering along a number of different lines that largely reflects the incongruities of whiteness as a defining category.

We can say that whiteness in these circles is strongly characterized by virile male heterosexuality. Abby Ferber writes of white supremacist discourse, "the regulation of heterosexual and intraracial sexuality produces culturally intelligible, racialized, and gendered identities, while at the same time relegating homosexuals, Jews, and mixed-race people to the realm of the unlivable."[65] Forms of representation, however, range from wounded and emasculated white men to hugely powerful white male bodies, depending on the context in which they are portrayed.

Negating theories of class, white supremacist racism is limited to neither the lower or working class where it is commonly depicted, nor is it more widespread there. Jessie Daniels refers to studies which indicate that, broadly speaking, the same levels of education and economic wealth are represented in white supremacist groups as in whites in the society at large.[66] To these markers of white supremacist identity are also added identity within and without Christianity. The anti-Catholicism of the Ku Klux Klan and many other white supremacist groups in the United States has old roots. In colonial

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[61] David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991).

[62] Southern Poverty Law Center estimate for 2003. "Active U.S. Hate Groups 2003", *Intelligence Report*, Southern Poverty Law Center, 25 July 2004 <http://www.splcenter.org/intel/map/hate.jsp/>.

[63] This perhaps less familiar designation refers to followers of the belief that emerged in 19th-century England that the Anglo-Saxons are the true lost tribe of Israel, intended to do God's work and therefore fulfilling their destiny by establishing a world empire. Jews, originally seen as brothers, came to be regarded as imposter Israelites. See Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement* (Chapel Hill, NC: U of North Carolina P, 1997).

[64] Dobratz and Shanks-Meile refer to first four groups, whereas the Southern Poverty Law Center refers to the five, bar militia, listed above. Other sources will occasionally refer to the militia groups that received such publicity in the mid-1990s.

[65] Abby L Ferber, *White Man Falling: Race, Gender, and White Supremacy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998): 22-23.

years, Puritans and other Protestants brought with them claims of an anti-Catholic Christianizing mission. This also provides a deeply imbedded space of difference in the invented tradition of the American imagined community. John F. Kennedy is still the only Roman Catholic ever elected president, a fact which did not go unnoticed in white supremacist circles and in the country at large. In this same respect, Jews are urgently excluded by the supremacists, though in the main, as Brodkin discusses, they have become assimilated as "white" in recent decades. White supremacists are also constantly split along issues of national origin as a means of verifying racial heritage. Some prefer an entirely northern European grouping, while others see whiteness more expansively.

The varying constellations of national origin to which supremacists look as the "true" origin of "white" are functions of the general delineation, and constant re-delineation, of what is considered white in American society. This shifting delineation more than anything else belies the simple definition of "white" as an essentially agreed-upon identity as Anglo, and it complicates monocausal theories for the production of whiteness. The U.S. Census counts eastern Russians, Arabs, north Africans, and European-descended Hispanics all as white,[67] unthinkable for the white supremacists.

White supremacists are certainly not the only perspective from which to consider whiteness, but they represent precisely the nodes at which the defining, i.e. inclusionary and exclusionary work, of the borders of whiteness occurs. Though the numbers of declared white supremacists in the United States do not by any means compose the majority of its population,[68] they are quite occupied *with composing the majority*, constructing it as a defined community. That community accordingly gets smaller and more minor with each successive qualification, creating that illusion of threat to the white male cowering behind borders which must be fortified against further encroachment.

Most importantly, Chambers, the Race Traitors, Ferber, and the other theorists quoted above are fairly unified in agreeing with the contention of Daniels. She argues that in the United States "all whites benefit from white supremacy, and some whites benefit more than others, and that the presence of extremist groups works to sustain white supremacy as an ideological justification for institutionalized privilege. To the

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[66] Jessie Daniels, *White Lies: Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality in White Supremacist Discourse* (New York: Routledge, 1997): 5.

[67] See Office of Management and Budget, "Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity" 30 Oct. 1997, 14 July 2003 <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/fedreg/ombdir15.html>.

extent that they confirm the social order as it exists, that is, they affirm institutional white supremacy."[69] They not only affirm institutional white supremacy, but offer a basis upon which to conceive of the borders of whiteness, and white masculinity, as threatened and receding even as it expands and absorbs. A central component of the American imagined community has been the contestation of the limits and validity of white masculinity, especially in connection with the experience of the United States as its history has unfolded.

At the same time, as definitions of what qualifies as white became more complex, the borders of white masculinity as the sign of ideological systems of privileging hardened into place to encompass a space for the internal contestation of American identity. As a result of the interaction of whitenesses, the consciousness of whiteness as a marker of difference has receded among those who are white, surrounded as they are by other whites in a great field of diversity. Whiteness became the same as "American" and therefore no longer identified as distinct. The borders seemed to have disappeared. They are only recalled from the discursive sediment at moments of contact with non-white Others or, as between Jewish Americans and white supremacists, with white-internal Others.

These same concerns reappear in the project of looking at contemporary literature by white men. The problem of how to limit such a project reveals exactly those places where difference is enunciated. Probably none of the writers discussed in the following chapters would identify themselves as "white men" in order to claim a critical subject position. Since such identification would suggest the author is a white supremacist or reactionary, it is no surprise. In light of the "invisibility" of whiteness, it is no surprise, either. However, in the spirit of the colorless marking, these men claim no other identity and are assumed by default to be white. They are, and, as a group, they also demonstrate whitenesses, the ragged edges of the borders of whiteness, opening it by their simultaneous occupation of the signifier white.

Don DeLillo has commented on rare occasions about his Italian Catholic roots and in *Underworld* about the specific experience that ethnicity affords in the United States. However, he does not write consciously as an Italian American about themes

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[68] The SPLC estimates about a quarter of a million members or associates or recipients of the literature of white supremacist groups, about a tenth of a percent of the total population of the United States.
[69] Daniels 22.

intended to define that ethnicity.[70] In interviews, T. Coraghessan Boyle has discussed his poor, working-class Irish American background in similar terms. Nevertheless, he makes no claims to a distinct subject position. For example, when asked if there was an Irish influences in the collection *If the River was Whiskey*, which was largely written during a stay in Ireland, he said, "No. Well, in that the mad, language-obsessed part of me probably derives from my Irish ancestry, sure. But the stories are quintessentially American stories."[71]

Continuing this classificatory exercise, Bret Easton Ellis comes from a background of extremely wealthy WASPs, the white Anglo-Saxon Protestant profile largely viewed as the most normed of the norm and privileged of the privileged in America. Against that background, questions about his sexuality suddenly come more strongly to bear. He is often asked about it and has been quoted describing himself as gay, bisexual, and heterosexual. When confronted with this in one interview, he explained, "I definitely don't identify as gay. But I wouldn't identify myself with straight either ... I'm whatever you want me to be."[72] The fact that these traits are important enough to discuss with reference to the writers indicates how strongly they are embedded in discourses of American identity, their interaction with white masculinity, and the literature produced as a function of it.

That fact also indicates the complications of discussing these men as a group of "white men" about whom conclusions can be drawn based on a shared identity of white masculinity. For these reasons, outside of the general, non-claimed category of white male, no effort was made to further narrow the criteria for selection to accommodate those other markings of the "norm". Such a process would only duplicate the essentialism of the white supremacists. On the other hand, loosely applying "white man" with little more particularity than that which with it is commonly applied is a conscious strategy. It is intended to demonstrate both the indistinctness of the external boundaries of the category and the disputed field of white masculinity within it. These writers are by no means meant to appear as representative of white men as a group or exhaust the possibilities of discussing white masculinity in literature by white men. Rather, their

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[70] This is evidenced by his writing itself but also by statements the author has made. Some early short stories of his cast Italian Americans in the central roles, but he generally does not focus on aspects of that identity as providing a specific "experience".

[71] Elizabeth Adams, "An Interview with T. Coraghessan Boyle", *Chicago Review* 37.2-3 (1991): 60.

[72] Randy Shulman, "The Attractions of Bret Easton Ellis", *Metro Weekly* 10 Oct. 2002, 15 September 2003 <http://www.metroweekly.com/feature/ak?=126>.

selection and organization paints a particular picture of the issues of erasure and reinscription surrounding the identity category "white man" today, a sketch of contemporary white masculinity (see next section).

As can be seen in the example of slavery, the contact relationship is asymmetrical in power. It produces an identity border that corresponds to those material borders which delineate geographical space, divide resources, and legally define social inclusion. The asymmetry of the relationship means that the border's location and form is largely determined by one of the parties. As a result, that dominant party has more "space", conceptual and otherwise, with which to define itself. Therefore, it is the party which ends up with a larger concept of Self as normative because the principles which legitimize that party's identity are less challenged. The insights of materialist concepts of white masculinity then bear witness that definitions of shared identity serve to stabilize and regulate relationships within that space. Agamben suggests that such definitions always implicitly involve the "Other", including that which is excluded, by defining it as the threat of encroachment if the internal system of relationships is not maintained.[73]

However, this model is a static one. It does not discuss the way in which such borders are always shifting. They expand and contract, requiring constant inward redefinition of the imagined community. In the case of America, the geographical borders and the power of the United States have expanded even as have concepts of white masculinity and the rights of membership to the nation. Thus, the Bhabha-esque "third space" between America and its Others and between white men and their Others within and without the United States has constantly shifted. More precisely, the third space has constantly been absorbed and relocated. As a result, white masculinity has expanded beyond whatever borders it once had to include a much larger population base, re-determining the field in which whiteness and masculinity exist and are contested. White masculinity has won a surplus of hybridity. The identity and its definitions increase in complexity and incommensurability. White masculinity obscures its own contradictions by reinforcing itself as a defining national project.

Its surplus of hybridity, for instance, makes "white" both a "race" and an "ethnicity". It is a race as biological category above all with reference to black. The recent creation of an "ethno-racial pentagon"[74] in America further includes yellow, red,

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[73] Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (1995; Stanford, CA: Stanford UP 1998). See specifically chapter 1 which discusses the inclusion of exclusion.
[74] David Hollinger, *Postethnic America: Beyond Multiculturalism* (New York: Harper-Basic, 1995):23.

and brown representing the illusion of a five-way symmetry. The five "unequally inhabited sides"[75] largely obscures the fact that most of what has determined "white" as a race has been the result of discourse about "black". White is an ethnicity as a folk culture category primarily with respect to Chicanos, Asian Americans, and Native Americans as national groups outside whiteness. However, it is also an "ethnicity" with respect to Jewish Americans, Italian Americans, and other southern and eastern Europeans within white. Feminism, a major contemporary force for conceiving culture as a hybrid space, for all its work creating pan-national female agency, has often had to surrender to cultural diversity as cultural fixity and focus on culturally-specific gender relationships. Thus, feminism has often unwillingly reinforced external borders of race and ethnicity by focusing on "internal" forces of gender conflict which rely on those borders to give that conflict definition. To their frustration, feminists must regularly fend off the criticism of being part of a white, middle-class project, even if those feminists are neither white nor middle-class. The same has been the case for lesbian and gay activists for similar reasons.

All of this increases the visible surplus hybridity of whiteness in the United States. At the same time, this expansive, absorptive force of whiteness has meant encroaching on the "third space" of those excluded by white masculinity, impoverishing their ability to traverse in-between. Despite the constant shifting of borders and the improvement of material opportunities for various non-white and non-male constellations, people remain within those constellations and limited ranges of potential. African Americans stay black, Mexican Americans stay Chicana/o, and women stay doubly laden with gender and racial/ethnic identity. This comes despite all the hybrid, synchretic forms these people have produced as expressions of a DuBois "double-consciousness" or of complex multiple-consciousnesses, the experience of identifying oneself as American but also multiple layers of Other.

Even as these Others produce such forms, the forms, too, are absorbed and commodified by this hybrid white space. They reappear in the music, clothing, speech, food, and even concepts of sexuality with which white men surround themselves, usually as signs of social non-conformity and egression.[76] Cultural choice, which Bhabha strongly promotes, "the freedom to choose a cultural affiliation, the right to be free to constitute or preserve a culture, or indeed to oppose it by exercising the moral 'right of

[75] Hollinger 28.
[76] This theme will be further developed as "adoptive reverse-passing" chapter 4.

exit"'[77] is only theoretically free to all. This kind of internal variety and contestation within whiteness and white masculinity, particularly as it has been equated to diversity within America, has led to the tendency of whiteness toward the invisible and borders of white masculinity toward the seemingly secure.

1.3. (In-)secure borders: The new beginning(s) and end(s) of white masculinity

Discussing white masculinity as a seemingly secure discursive category simply cannot be done in the general terms of an historical vacuum. As has already been indicated, whiteness in the United States and its relation to masculinity and other signifiers of identity has been contingent upon the specific history of the nation and the social pressures the nation has experienced in its past. Connell writes, "Masculinities are, in a word, historical".[78] By the same token, understanding some of the forces that inform whiteness and its study today helps remove the sense of immobile eternity implied by formulations like "whiteness is..." and also provides an understanding of where that sense of eternity comes from.

The great power of the unmarked or normative sign of identity is the sign's ability to exude a permanence which represses the fact that the identity is the fluid product of cultural discourse at a particular time. The following will not be an exhaustive history of whiteness. That is more the provenance of historians and has already been done quite well by others. Instead, the intention is to identify specific historical paradigms which have converged in an invented tradition to form the discursive "sediment" of the conceptual borders of whiteness, especially as it intersects with masculinity. This should provide an overview of the layered context against which the white men in this study write about white masculinity.

Following the logic of Self construction through the contact and conflict with Others, the focus will be on moments of threat and crisis for America and the conceptual borders of white masculinity. These moments are characterized, on the one hand, by familiar historical developments of politics, social movement, and expansion. On the other hand they are reinforced by concurrent philosophical movements. These movements influenced not just the development of concepts of whiteness *per se* but rather the construction and critique of knowledge itself.

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[77] Bhabha, "Cultural Choice" 182.
[78] Connell 185.

At the cutting edge of its nationhood, Morrison's "new white man" as an American project has long been deeply imbedded in the mythic American mission of newness. The white male as a figure of white masculinity has become part of the nation's revelatory narrative of civilizing progress. Critique of American white masculinity has thus also been coupled with critique of this tradition. Therefore, this section consists of two major parts with respect to the interaction of events and their conceptualization. The first part is a sketch of those historical moments that provided discursive paradigms of white masculinity in America. Viewing the "new white man" as a centralizing national project that has always already been contested demonstrates the borders of white masculinity as constantly in flux and in crisis.

This section's second part looks at the most recent crisis for white masculinity, the Cold War. The crisis bore not only an eschatological narrative of a final battle between democratizing civilization and its constructed nemesis in communism, but also contained at its chronological middle an internal conflict between white masculinity and "the rest". That conflict first made visible for many white men the uncertainty of white masculinity as a socially stabilizing identity. The specific forms of this conflict and uncertainty are what frame the "new" of the contemporary "new white man", the conceptual borders of white masculinity, and the supposed threats to white men.

Once upon a time, we are told, there was no whiteness and no masculinity, not in the forms in which we know them today. In the past, there had been structures of social inclusion and exclusion, without which Agamben, for example, could never have traced his theories back to the Greeks. There had also been patriarchal societies. However, whiteness and masculinity as sets of practices which maintain social order and the traits associated with both are recent developments. Opposed to the gross fallacies and legitimation for violence built into the supremacists mythologies of the "white" or "Aryan" race, the history of whiteness and masculinity have gone through a recent refiguration. These contemporary narratives look at the "history of an idea", to use the language of Thomas Gossett.[79] They trace the evolution of race identity, its interaction with gender roles, and their incorporation within texts of national identity. Gossett presented one of the first such works for race. It was a sounding knell that stepped outside the discourse of heroic narratives of races to examine the frame in which races themselves as identities were constructed through time.

He was perhaps the first to make the key observation that race theory, though it and the prejudice based on it bore some antecedents, did not firmly implant itself in European consciousness until the era of colonization. He writes, "Even though race theories had not then secured wide acceptance or even sophisticated formulation, the first contacts of the Spanish with the Indians in the Americas can now be recognized as the beginning of a struggle between conceptions of the nature of primitive peoples which has not yet been wholly settled."[80] Specifically for English settlement of what later became the United States, he observes, "Although in the seventeenth century race theories had not as yet developed any strong scientific or theological rationale, the contact of the English with Indians, and soon afterward with Negroes, in the New World led to the formation of institutions and relationships which were later justified by appeals to race theories."[81]

Several years later, Edward Said made a similar case for identity construction in his *Orientalism* at a more abstract level with regard to the construction of the exotic Orient "as a dynamic exchange between individual authors and the large political concerns shaped by the three great empires – British, French, American – in whose intellectual and imaginative territory the writing was produced."[82] *Orientalism* has in the meantime become a cornerstone postulate for all postcolonial theory to follow. Though it does not address the construction of whiteness *per se*, it describes how such a process designed colonized people as exploitable, displaceable, despicable, or negligible, as suited the needs of the colonizing people. Most of all, such a construction defined them as definable and definably separate from European selves. Those residual, non-separated selves, is then that which, in the United States, has become white. It has become white only in this context of colonial encounter.

Sollors makes the claim that in literature "interracial themes have been present in writing from antiquity".[83] However, the extensive chronology of such literature he provides lists only six entries in all of history, western history, before 1500 and four between then and 1600 when European colonization and imperialism began to grow exponentially. After that, each century brought hundreds of examples, again in the

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[79] Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist UP, 1963).
[80] Gossett 16.
[81] Gossett 17.
[82] Said 15.

west.[84] His own list contradicts him. It shows that the emergence and dramatic increase of the concern with marking and maintaining racial difference is directly linked with the course of colonial history. That concern represents part of the project to define colonizing nations as superior while clarifying the boundaries of those nations.

This locates the emergence of whiteness firmly in colonial history. Connell's observations above also locate the emergence of modern masculinity in the same period. That, however, does not get to the bottom of the discursive sediment at the base of white masculinity. It only shows us where to look. The first paradigmatic layering of whiteness was one of allegorical marking. The imaginative structure of racism began, as described above in the case of the Puritans, with early attempts to "read" colonial Others in the Americas in biblical and teleological terms. They were thought to be either lost tribes of Israel (the Indians), the sons of Ham (blacks), or figures who embodied the savage and the devil (both). The Europeans themselves, as discussed, were the bringers of newness to the New World, not only civilization but also Christianity, a newness that was constantly threatened by those benighted peoples Europeans encountered. To this, Theodore Allen informs us, the English specifically brought to the Americas proto-racist formulations that they had already developed through the conquest of Ireland. Chief among them was the equation of racial superiority with Protestantism, a construction that later informed the integration of other white groups.

JanMohammed contributes the notion of the Manichean allegory to the understanding of this period. This alludes to a religious conceptualization that predated Christianity of a dual universe of essential opposites. In it, the use of white versus non-white, and most extremely black, formed the basis for a dichotomy which absorbed positive characteristics of the universe – light, intelligence, morality, civilization – in whiteness. According to him, this schematic created in the colonizer a "surplus morality", which develops through the process of claiming ever more morality to mask the "nagging contradiction between the theoretical justification of exploitation and the barbarity of its actual practice."[85] One may debate about the extent to which Europeans consciously drew on this structure, since it was, after all, "pagan". The fact remains that in earliest colonial times Europeans, speaking in the broadest Foucaultian terms, took outward

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[83] Werner Sollors, *neither black nor white yet both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literatures* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997): 8.
[84] Sollors, *neither black* appendix.
[85] JanMohammed 84.

signs to have inner meanings. "Good" was merged allegorically with "white", whereas all things "evil" were signified by black, darkness, or degrees of impurity expressed by non-white.

This allegorical paradigm was succeeded, as Gossett indicates,[86] by the emergence of rationalism and Enlightenment thinking and science. This development did not so much displace that pre-existing conceptual structure of racial identity as add a new layer to it. In particular, rationalism brought a disdain for ambiguity, a new interest in biological theories of categorization, and faith in the progress of civilization. Leading minds of the period added theories and distinctions through which to focus disputes over the nature of non-whites and whites. Rationalism not only determined the structures upon which clear borders between white and colored were based but also became part of the representation of white superiority as the race which embodied a new newness, civilization as rational thought. The same was the case for masculinity at this time. Connell relates that this era also brought forth thinking which clearly delineated gender and gender roles. In patriarchal European societies, that delineation went hand in hand with the definition of men as essentially rational individuals.[87]

Warren Montag describes the way in which the Enlightenment project of defining the universal rights of man as centered on the question "[I]sn't it first necessary to determine what a "man' is".[88] As such, the project was also about who should be entitled to those rights in a civilized society. It was a debate among men in colonizing nations designed to exclude the rest from the definition of "civilized". Excluded were colonized peoples, who by definition were uncultivated and therefore unfit for civilized society, and the masculine-opposite women. The notion of the universal rights of man formed the basis for a whole legal structure based on race and gender identity and the extensive legal text intended to define them both. That legacy is still subtly contained in the legal structures of many western countries, including the United States, which pioneered written legal culture based on Enlightenment universals. This development served to codify already existing social hierarchies based on racial and gender difference.[89]

David Roediger relates that in earlier colonial times in the Americas, racial mixing was widespread among black slaves and white indentured servants. However, separation

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[86] Gossett 23 and following.
[87] Connell 186.
[88] Warren Montag, "The Universalization of Whiteness: Racism and Enlightenment", Hill, *Whiteness*: 287.

increased[90] as the textual legal regime of race grew apace with universalist claims to freedom that implicitly only applied to whites. This led to, for example, the widespread social use of the word "nigger" to mean black, slave, and the abject, uncivilized Other. As a labor historian, Roediger views this legal regime as part of a superstructure which stratified class even as it delineated race "[W]orking class formation and the systematic development of a sense of whiteness went hand in hand for the U.S. white working class."[91] The development of an industrial working class, of course, came later than the period of Enlightenment in which the universal rights of man were textualized, but Roediger begins his elucidations on the origins of race-based class separation with it. He provides a very good example for how the Enlightenment-inspired legal regime interacted with earlier colonial allegories to inform the later development of American social structures.

To white masculinity as religious allegory and rational definition comes another paradigm in its evolution: evolution. The production of scientific discourse which institutionalized the superiority and inferiority of races and genders followed the same logic of progress at the root of more savory modern products such as constitutions and human rights. As already mentioned, Gossett outlines in detail the way in which scientific explanations of biology first emerged as the teleological understanding of race began to fade and took their place in the apparatus of colonial social control. However, these biological theories also did not supplant preceding racial configurations but rather took over major markers of identity those predecessors had already used – skin color, progress, etc. – and added new ones.

Said describes the emergence of anthropology as a science designed to classify certain cultures as essentially primitive.[92] McClintock, in turn, provides a look at colonial attempts to classify certain races in the "family of man" as essentially located along the evolutionary scale based on observable characteristics.[93] White Europeans were, in the logic of such a system, at the top of this scale, the newest thing in evolution. Again the main product of this project was the legitimation for maintaining difference, the separation of the colonizing subject from the colonized object and the internal regulation

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[89] Ian Haney-López, *White By Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (New York: New York UP, 1996).
[90] Roediger 32
[91] Roediger 8.
[92] Edward Said, "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors", *Critical Inquiry* 15.2 (1989): 205-225.
[93] McClintock *passim*, especially chapter 1 "The Lay of the Land: Genealogies of Imperialism".

of social hierarchies. For the same reason, Young indicates, Victorian England produced no small amount of debate over whether racial interbreeding was physically degenerative or, as between polygenic or incompatible species, impossible, yielded only infertile offspring.[94] Legal regimes grew out of this which classified degrees of mixed ancestry and the rights of citizenship to which people were entitled.

In the United States, particularly in the south with its legacy of slavery, racial border-policing based on pseudo-scientific evolutionary theories became a highly developed field. The threat of the Other particularly revolved around fear of biological degeneration, which in turn brought with it other threats to civilization, democracy, and Christianity. Legal border policing did not stop with Emancipation but rather developed further in the days of segregation. They ultimately legally excluded from "white", even to this day, people with any non-white ancestry.[95]

In the development of evolution as a basis for racial identity, Cathy Boeckman relates how the instruments used to identify mixed ancestry also grew more and more elaborate. They spanned a spectrum including the simple comparison of skin color, tiny visual signs such as darker fingernail roots, and the concept of "character". She writes that character, as a scientific term in the 19th century, "referred to a quantifiable set of inherited behaviors and tendencies that were almost always racial."[96] During this period, it lay at the center of racial discourse as the object of study and thus of contestation over exactly where the racial color line should be drawn.

Significantly, McClintock points out that the "Families of Man" that scientists delineated in the 19th century, as the name indicates, excluded women. The female body, McClintock asserts throughout her work, became the space for imagining the colonial as an object requiring "masculine" domination and exploitation. One could trace along similar lines Hernton's narration of the emergence of the cult of white womanhood from the culture of slavery. The fantasy of the white woman as the embodiment of civilization and the black woman as the embodiment of the savage was not merely poetic. This figure also generated a large body of work designed to support it. Sander Gilman relates

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[94] Young, *Desire* chapter 4 "Sex and Inequality: The social construction of race". Infertility is specifically discussed on p. 102.

[95] See the guidelines for the aggregation of census data for the 2000 Census given by the Office of Management and Budget, "OMB Bulletin 00-22" 9 March 2000, 14 July 2003 <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/bulletins/b00-02.html>. They stipulate that "Responses that combine one minority race and white are allocated to the minority race".

[96] Cathy Boeckmann, *A Question of Character: Scientific Racism and the Genres of American Fiction 1892-1912* (Tuscaloosa, AL: U of Alabama P, 2000): 3.

several influential studies in the 19th century, by European men, that compared stereotypical characteristics of African women, particularly bottoms, to those of lower class white women, especially prostitutes. These features explained the low status of both as primitive, prone to uncurbed sexuality, and incapable of higher thoughts. This condition was compared to the higher status for fine-featured, upper-class white women as the completely "natural" result of evolution.[97]

Movements to redefine white masculinity in this time oscillated correspondingly between the highly evolved figure of thought and reason and the nature-based, conquering frontiersman. Connell writes, "The striking thing about these movements was not their success, always limited, but the persistence with which ideologists of patriarchy struggled to control and later direct the reproduction of masculinity."[98] He sees, therefore, a huge investment in the creation of multiple co-existent masculinities to accommodate for various theories and contradictions in order to retain representative superiority. The observation bears a remarkable similarity to Said's about Orientalism which, "depends for its strategy on this flexible *positional* superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand."[99] Both writers thus see a field of relational potentials as necessary for hierarchical stratification. White masculinity, as has been demonstrated, had by now become multiple things in order to accommodate multiple discourses while at the same time maintaining the social privilege and the centrality of white men.

The immigration history of the United States demonstrates how complex whiteness became. In a similar vein as Allen, Ignatiev developed a narration of the Irish becoming white. His view is that whiteness was dangled to which one could aspire. Yet the legacy of English-Irish antagonism led to their exclusion and depiction as brutes for most of American history. Whiteness included the Irish by separating them from people of color but at the same time turned their social exclusion into a marker of white-internal distinction. Similarly, other histories of the "whiting" of further immigrant groups such as Jews and Italians in America show the same complexities of American whiteness.[100] The

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[97] Sander Gilman, "Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature", ed. Gates *"Race", Writing* 204-242.
[98] Connell 195.
[99] Said 7.
[100] See Brodkin on Jews, Richards on Italians, and Ignatiev on Irish. See also the collection of essays edited by Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno, *Are Italians White? How Race is Made in America* (New York: Routledge, 2003). All of these stories are told again in a conglomerate in Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge,

assimilation of peoples permitted to the United States by the National Origins Act served to reinforce whiteness as a national embodiment, something to endeavor to attain. Over and over again, one encounters in these books a whiteness which embodies various facets of America as a harbinger of the new in the world. Whiteness became the key to integration in the United States. Immigrants at first excluded by constructions of whiteness finally changed its definition to be included by increasing the plurality of whitenesses. At the same time, they reinforced the American image of the land of promise and equality, the land of renewal.

This inclusion in turn hardened the borders of exclusion between whiteness and forms of non-whiteness. Legal segregation between black and white grew and remained on into the 1960s. Segregation focused racial debate up to that time, eclipsing other issues of identity and alternative structures of identity articulation across the broader American society. Even as that regime hardened into place where it was practiced, more and more European immigrant groups were assimilated. Roediger describes how they allied themselves at this time with Anglo-Protestants under the identity "white" to share their institutional advantages. In effect, it signaled the final solidification of the "pentagon of color": white, black, red, yellow, and brown, a broad categorization which still has a hold on public racial discourse in the United States.

That brings the historical discursive layering of white masculinity into the present. The previous paragraph offers a clue about a recent paradigmatic change. Race-based identity borders solidified by the absorption into "white" in the early 1950s as legal segregation reached its height, but exactly this legal structure was soon to be dismantled. In that period, American culture was characterized by both a very strong move toward general conformity and institutional solidification and an increasingly vocal opposition to that growing rigidity. That most recent shift is at the core of the "now" in *White Men Write Now,* the newest threat and threat to the newness of white masculinity that emerged in the Cold War, particularly as it has been expressed towards its end and after.

During the 1950s and the 1960s in the Cold War and after World War II, a dominant ethos in America was its self-narration in a revelatory moment of civilization. Having defeated the anti-democratic powers of fascism, the nation was in a declared struggle against communism. This theme will be developed in the next chapter. The chapter's thrust is that other tensions such as anti-colonialism worldwide, anti-

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MA: Harvard UP, 1998). See also chapter 4 on "reverse-passing" for narratives of felt difference within

segregation in the United States, feminism, sexual liberation, and an American egressive tradition of general non-conformity that saw its ancestry in Transcendentalism were all pressured to subordinate themselves to this nationally defining cause. Contestation of norms, especially the central authority of white masculinity, was reflexively defined as opposition, transgression of seemingly fixed borders of identity that threatened to shatter the whole nation and foil its civilizing mission. This pressure resulted in the resurgence of these movements with a new militancy in the late 1960s. The very pressure to repress them through institutional rigidity and cliché representations of normalcy gave them a correlatively greater power as opposition.

Notably, for example, Hernton's book about sex and racism appeared in 1965, an attempt to break the taboo of racial segregation by exploring the sexual perversity it informed. His work anticipated the even more radical call by Black Panther Eldridge Cleaver to rape white women as a means of protest in *Soul on Ice* a few years later. Gossett's history of race appeared in 1963 also as a specific response to segregation that sought to historicize and thereby deconstruct the emergence its roots in the language of race. It has even been credited with leading to the widespread use of the very term "racism". Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, the book some consider the sounding shot of contemporary American feminism, came out the same year. It sought to explore and demystify idealized constructions of female identity as an object of American social discourse and the problems femininity and women bearing that identity had encountered as a result.

Along with these social challenges came philosophical challenges that brought new questions to bear on the process through which categories of race and gender attain discursive fixity and what social contexts lay at the root of their construction. Postmodernism emerged as a culturally critical set of theories. On the one hand, it emphasized the constructed and manipulated nature, often the artifice, of the signs of knowledge and their purported categorical borders. On the other hand, postmodernism itself was informed by the pressures of the era in which it arose. Lyotard, for example, did not set out to create a new philosophical "-ism" with his *Postmodern Condition* but rather to provide a report on that "condition" at the time at which he wrote. Similarly, Baudrillard's model of simulacra from the early 1970s did not treat nationally constructed social phantasms and their maintenance as an eternal phenomenon. Instead he saw them

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whiteness and the way in which this difference functions to solidify the outward borders of whiteness.

as a feature of contemporary capitalist societies, depicting, for example, Watergate as a simulacrum of public checks on political power.

Deconstruction, which emerged to explore the formation of texts and meaning through them as a social process, shared that postmodern skepticism of the appearance of fixity of signs of identity upon which social power structures – in America and elsewhere – rested. Young posits, "If one had to answer, therefore, the general question of what is deconstruction a deconstruction of, the answer would be, of the concept, the authority, and assumed primacy of 'the West'."[101] These philosophical developments did not directly inform the thinking of Gossett and Friedan or the literature of, say, Ishmael Reed and Thomas Pynchon who are commonly called postmodern. Instead they all reflected the same conceptual concerns at a theoretical level with, in the translated words of Foucault, the order of things,[102] the cultural textual encoding of things and the structures that inform that encoding. "Whiteness studies" theorists, from Roediger to Babb, are also driven by these concerns. They attempt to retrace the route through which whiteness emerged as a signifier of privilege, especially given the vagueness, abstract nature, and *blanc*-ness of white. Spivak, Bhabha, Young, and countless other producers of postcolonial theory have also been profoundly affected by the philosophical work of Foucault in their analyses of the discursive development of identities.

It is not merely interesting but quite important that key recent works that launched the deconstructive critique of the connection between whiteness, gender, sexuality, and identity in the United States came from white male Others. This represents a significant reversal of the gaze from the purported defining center, what Pratt terms "autoethography": "instances in which colonized subjects undertake to represent themselves in ways that *engage with* the colonizer's own terms."[103] The autoethnographic view challenges the notion of a privileged center with a new body of privileged information from what had previously conceived as a peripheral position. As bell hooks puts it so nicely, "Although there has never been any official body of black people in the United States who have gathered as anthropologists and/or ethnographers whose central critical project is the study of whiteness, black folks have, from slavery on, shared with one another in conversations 'special' knowledge of whiteness gleaned from close

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[101] Young, *White Mythologies* 19.
[102] Taken, of course, from the book which also appeared at the time, 1966 in French and 1970 in English.

scrutiny of white people."[104] The rise of "whiteness studies" reflects a tentative acceptance of that "special knowledge". That special knowledge has entailed, more than anything else, the construction of that identity as a socially stabilizing institution and seeks to ask probing questions about the general structures of power in United States society.

This way of examining whiteness and white masculinity contradicts a model in which they had always been stable and unchanged and that now, all of a sudden, they are cast in uncertainty. The developments discussed above represent a new awareness that these categories are relatively recent phenomena and have been the subject of contestation throughout their existence. The difference is that now we see it. This shift in conceiving difference and contestation took on a radical urgency against the threat of potential Cold War-era nuclear extinction. The concern moved away from who in the east-west conflict was "right" and toward that hyphen between "east" and "west". What narratives led to the creation of this bipolar perception of the world, what other narratives did it serve to suppress, and how did it regulate societies internally and globally? Uncertainty and ambivalence have since become defining features of cultural theory and critique.

The trend has continued, particularly in light of the end of the conflict which, thankfully, did not come with a definitive apocalyptic firestorm but rather the more prosaic Soviet military and economic exhaustion. These conceptual and social developments in the United States remained as the legacy of the Cold War. They have also continued because the apocalyptic exploding of the borders of difference they once heralded when they were called revolutionary has not happened. In fact, they have largely only confirmed racial, ethnic, and gender identity difference as the agenda of American politics and culture. Years later, the 2000 census, the legal arbiter of racial and ethnic identity, now acknowledges this ambivalence of such identities: "The categories represent a social-political construct designed for collecting data on the race and ethnicity of broad population groups in this country and are not anthropologically or scientifically based."[105]

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[103] Mary Louise Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London: Routledge, 1992): 7.

[104] bell hooks, "Representing Whiteness in the Black Imagination", ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler, *Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 1992): 338.

[105] Census "Revisions", subsection A "Background" under "Supplementary Information".

Identity categories may be constructed, but they still require aggregation and assessment because much legal language continues to rely on them. Most of America is also still interested in these data for a variety of reasons. Whiteness and masculinity remain, though now more visibly disrupted or "examined", to use Chambers's language. Even though the borders of white masculinity are shown to have been always already contested, contestation both from without and within end up re-centering that identity as a subject of national agenda. Rebecca Aanerud asserts that, "[I]nsecurity about what it means to be white is a distinctly post-civil rights phenomenon. Race anxiety is not a new topic for white authors of American fiction; however, the traditional focus has been on loss of supremacy as a result of miscegenation rather than the white characters' personal doubts about their own whiteness."[106] Liam Kennedy also speaks of changes wrought by that era which have "led to a growing recognition of whiteness as a social category and more particularly of white male selfhood as a fragile and besieged identity."[107] That anxiety, however, is coupled with a correlative anxiety about forces that not only have advanced white masculinity to the center of social signification in the 20th century, but keep it in place, solidifying it as an object of social critique and stabilization to this day.

Ruth Frankenberg bemoans the "continued failure to displace the 'unmarked marker'" of whiteness but at the same time sees this as a reason to continue intellectual work "given the risk that [it] might contribute to recentering rather than decentering it."[108] "Whiteness studies" thus perversely reoccupies a central place in social critiques of race that would seek to deconstruct or otherwise dislocate its privileging centrality. The attempt by the Race Traitors to dislocate whiteness by relocating social conflict along class lines and subordinate race as a central component of materialist concerns really only reproduces the same strategy as the institutional conformity of the Cold War. Young anticipated this with the observation referred to above about "orthodox Marxism" having "only one 'other'".[109] The work of the Race Traitors even reinforces the privileging focus on whiteness to subsume those other Others.

To this must, of course, be added the work by reactionaries, conservatives, and simply uncritical people from the field of the 70-odd percent of the population that is

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[106] Rebecca Aanerud, "Fictions of Whiteness: Speaking the Names of Whiteness in U.S. Literature", Frankenberg, *Displacing Whiteness*, 59.
[107] Liam Kennedy, "Alien Nation: White Male Paranoia and Imperial Culture in the United States", *The Journal of American Studies*, 30.1 (1996): 87.
[108] Frankenberg, intro. *Displacing Whiteness* 1.
[109] Young, *White Mythologies* 4.

considered white. Of those groups, the radical statements from the first, the muddled perceptions and aggressive policies of the second, and the complacency of the third work together to maintain "whiteness" as a social status quo in America. Uncovering the historical contingency of race as a colonial product and its connections to gender, sexuality, and other markers of social identity today is really only a first step toward opening it up as a subject of social interaction. Calling to displace whiteness does not mean it is. Such calls even invite misinterpretation and provide people like Lane and Davis with rhetorical ammunition for the case of the threat.

The situation is not without its ironies. Much as Don Quixote tilts against windmills, we are constantly bound in our own discursive structures. We misrepresent exactly those things we battle in order to legitimize the battles. Whether externalized in the project of geographic national borders or internalized under the potentially subversive sign of racial passing, the borders of whiteness and masculinity generate texts of what is viewed to be at stake in America. The urgency and horror of contesting identity borders represent a powerful social crisis which oscillates between apocalyptic narratives of the destruction of social institutions and satirical narratives of tilting against those social windmills. The aporias of the limits of identity give room to critique institutions which inform the textualization of identity. Those same aporias also cast doubt on those critiques which are themselves bound by the same texts. This leaves open the unpleasant possibility that contingent, naked force – motivated by greed, perhaps, or fear – will continue to inform identity and perpetuate the illusion of fixed identity borders by repressing their contingency.

Therefore, the next chapters will attempt to open up the complex of white masculinity as expressed in literature by writers bearing that identity. The intention is not to relocate that identity as the essential center of postcolonial deconstruction or the essential opposite of, say, a multicultural society. Instead *White Men Write Now* looks at white masculinity in terms of an accumulation of rhetorical and conceptual structures which inform American identity and privilege certain people within the imagined community. Probing contemporary forms of whiteness and white masculinity as historically contingent gives them tangibility. It marks what was previously blank by exposing the socially discursive borders of identity. More importantly than merely probing that history is to be as aware as possible of the means with which that history is probed, how the past is formulated through contemporary discourses about identity and

about discourse itself. Once the historical narrative in which white masculinity arose loses its sense of immutability, the identity loses that feel of eternity. At last there would be space for that which Morrison occluded in her statement about the architecture of a "new white man" being the project of United States literature only "for the most part".

The institutional and academic challenge for some years now has been to think American literature beyond the "new white man". It has been to include material outside of "the most part" and expand the symbolic textuality of America beyond a handful of well-worn myths. The following chapters will tell the story of white men writing now. The story is about the paradigmatic effect of Cold War pressure, the latest threat of the new, which inadvertently opened up the history of the nation to the deconstruction and contestation of the conceptual borders of white masculinity. It also tells of how this contestation is opposed through aporic perpetuation. Such contestation relies for its very energy on myths of borders of racial, ethnic, and gendered difference that in turn are part of a national project. Far from being the end of the world as we know it, it is the world as we know it.

2. White men's Cold War: *Underworld* and the rest of the stories

> History, the *mother* of truth! – the idea is staggering.
> - Jorge Luis Borges, "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*"

2.1. Creating now through then

Contemporary white male writers in the United States who write critically about identities of white masculinity are most defined by the realization that their narratives are only some among many. This realization has come only recently, emerging during the Cold War and spreading in the public imagination on a broad scale in the second half of the twentieth century. All throughout, the period was marked by conflicts over the definition of American values and identity. If anything, the narrative of the period can be characterized as one of competing and incommensurate narratives. These include East vs. West, the emergence of "second-wave" feminism, the renewed drive for black enfranchisement, egressive Beat and hipster counterculture, the political radicalization of Native Americans, the consolidation of Chicana/o and Brown Power identities, and the emergence of Gay Pride as a public force.

These narratives themselves were, in turn, internally hotly contested by various opinion leaders and factions within movements. For example, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, the Black Panthers, the Nation of Islam, and the NAACP were formed at different times by different people who have battled and, in new forms, still battle over the power to define and lead an African American movement. Postmodernism and postcolonialism share a main concern with this kind of struggle over narrative power, especially as it determines forms of social power such as political representation, wealth, and civil participation. As discussed in chapter 1 (section 1.1. "Postcolonial states of whiteness"), Bhabha contends that postcolonial textual conflicts anticipated general contemporary theoretical concerns in postmodernism and deconstruction. His thesis takes on a particular relevance when one considers opposition in the United States during the Cold War era as largely stemming from opposition to the Cold War itself as a master narrative and from its destabilization by colonial and postcolonial subjects. *Underworld* by Don DeLillo, one narrative of the Cold War era, demonstrates this quite well, especially when considered against other recent novels which cover the same period.

The Cold War is not a simple subject. "Cold War" as short-hand here indicates the period from around 1950 to around 1990. Historiographically, this includes the "classic" period, beginning with conflicts over the post-World War II world and the arms race[1] between the Soviet Union and the United States and ending with their rapprochement in the mid-1960s. It also includes the succeeding phases of proxy wars and coups, continued weapons stockpiling, and the renewed antagonism of the Reagan presidency. The period ends with the dissolution of the USSR and the Warsaw Pact in the early 1990s. The vague uncertainty of these framing dates indicates the difficulty of creating a single narrative of the Cold War. "Cold War" does not designate a uniform ethos or sensibility either. It refers to a constant flux informed by the unfolding global conflict and its contestation as a master narrative.

There were also significant differences in the public discourse of the identity of the United States at the beginning and end of the conflict. The writers in this study view the turmoil of the late 1960s as a major watershed which determined that difference. The Cold War as a construction mapped out contestation of American values and identity along a dichotomy of East versus West as shorthand for communist versus capitalist. Depending on which side one took in the conflict, each represented a range of qualities opposed to the other, such as democratic versus totalitarian, individual liberty versus conformity, and future prosperity versus inevitable decay. In the United States, initial public opinion largely turned on that axis, but as time wore on, pressure grew to find alternatives to the conflict itself.

In particular, criticism mounted from increasingly vocal minority groups that the Cold War was constructed by white men in order to justify the perpetuation of structures that maintained their power. One of the earliest such critiques was voiced by Langston Hughes through his literary alter-ego Jesse B. Simple in various essays about communism and the atomic bomb. At one point, Simple theorizes that the white people "wait until the war is all over in Europe to try them [bombs] out on colored folks. Japs is colored."[2] At another he complains "How come you don't have any Negroes on your Un-

[1] The first public use of the term seems to have been in Oct. 24, 1948 in a Senate committee with reference to the increasing antagonism between the USSR and the other allies over the rebuilding of post-war Germany and the general establishment of a post-war global order. From Gorton Carruth, *What Happened When: A Chronology of Life and Events in America* (New York: Perennial, 1989): 318.
[2] Langston Hughes, "Serious Talk About the Atom-Bomb", 1950, ed. Akiba Sullivan Harper, *The Return of Simple* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1994): 113.

American Committee?"[3] The construction of a great conflict with the Soviet Union which required that Americans close ranks and ignore their quarrels served to maintain existing power structures by making their contestation tantamount to treason. The fact that white men profited most from those structures was presented alternatively in familiar racist and sexist terms of superiority and, to quote Dyer, "a case of historical accident, rather than a characteristic cultural/historical construction."[4] Wealth and power were offered to the rest if they conformed, but that meant conforming to systems of politics, economics, identity concepts, and stereotypes with built-in hindrances for non-whites and non-males.

In the same way, white men also initially occupied the center of nearly all forms of popular cultural representation, be they literature, film, or television. They embodied the America that, when called upon, would defend itself against the communist threat. Even in the case of critical works such as *Rebel Without a Cause*, they remained in the center of the gaze as the troubled victims of "the system". Norman Mailer's often quoted deliberations on the "White Negro" heroically describe the drop-out, egressive Hipster who escapes conformity by appropriating the attitudes of an idealized, fetishized, primitivistic, non-conformed black who "had stayed alive and begun to grow by following the need of his body where he could".[5]

The hipster hero, however, is a white man. Mailer writes, "[I]t is no accident that the source of Hip is the Negro for he has been living on the margin between totalitarianism and democracy for two centuries."[6] His prescription does not so much enfranchise African Americans as heal white male (his) feelings of impotence within a state oppressed under the cloud of the instant death of the bomb. He is so absorbed by his own concerns that the piece functions egotistically, anthologized in the aptly titled *Advertisements for Myself*[7] as a tract about his longing for Otherness in a society of which he is a leading member even as he opposes it. His contemporary Ned Polsky recognized this, criticizing, "Even in the world of the hipster the Negro remains essentially what Ralph Ellison called him – an invisible man."[8]

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[3] Langston Hughes, "When a Man Sees Red", 1950, ed. Akiba Sullivan Harper, *The Return of Simple* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1994): 85.
[4] Dyer 143.
[5] Mailer 279.
[6] Mailer 278.
[7] Norman Mailer, *Advertisements for Myself* (New York: Putnam, 1959).
[8] Polsky's critique originally appeared in the following issue of *Dissent*. Here it is quoted from Mailer, *Advertisements*: 299.

The construction of the Cold War sublimated and thus elided, many other pressing issues that had been deferred to some extent by World War II, such as decolonization, institutionalized racism, and sexual inequality. As explained above, the construction of communism as America's ideological Other provided a constant justification their further deferral. Any conflict within the United States for say, civil rights, became equated with treason as weakening the country and helping "them". On the opposite extreme, there were indeed – all hysterics of McCarthyism aside – many attempts to theorize and organize these causes as parts of a radical leftist movement. In such a system of signification, people represented by such causes, like the Vietnamese, blacks, or women, continued to function as objects of representation, national Others of white men. Sublimating attempts by such subalterns to "speak", to use Spivak's language and recall her dilemma,[9] was justified by the construction of the Cold War as a bipolar conflict and became its result, the reduction of all those voices to one.

With respect to the conservative elements in America, this led to such phenomena as the FBI labeling Martin Luther King, Jr. a communist. Similarly, Hans Sebald's *Momism* linked feminism to a weakening of males which causes them to seek strength in movements like communism.[10] In it he blames "incomplete" feminism for giving women expectations of equality that society did not fulfill. This creates legions of frustrated "moms" who try to live vicariously through their children, especially their sons. Pressure on sons to realize moms' dreams, he argues, makes them weak and increasingly dependent on their moms. They thus seek substitute moms in ego-subsuming ideologies like communism. Considering himself thus a better feminist, he even dedicated his book to Betty Friedan. Internationally, the same kind of constellations appeared. The United States supported the continued colonization of regions such as the Congo and Vietnam out of fear that they would fall to the communists. Like the Soviet Union, it also employed proxy imperialism, holding sway over strategically important countries through regimes it helped install and maintain.

The formation of the militant group, the Weathermen, in 1969 provides a revealing moment in the changing definition of opposition. One can characterize them as following Mailer's call for the White Negro. They based their organization and movement largely on the Black Panthers, describing themselves originally as white Black Panthers,

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[9] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak", ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman, *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory, A Reader* (New York: Columbia UP, 1994): 66-100.
[10] Sebald, chapters 1 and 2, *passim.*

copying their methods, and appropriating their "black" language and music. By defining themselves as anti-racist (and anti- many other things), the Weathermen insisted on their group being composed entirely of whites. In their view, African Americans had their own problems to confront. The Weathermen bitterly argued over whether these specific problems stem from blacks being a colonized nation or superexploited proletarians. This debate, itself, demonstrates the degree to which blackness as an identity had become an object for ideological definition.[11] Concluding these were "black problems", the Weathermen segregated themselves, acknowledging that allied groups were fighting for causes that were incommensurate in places.

The Black Panthers, like other radicalized racial/ethnic and feminist/gender movements of the period, also promoted this kind of identity-based separation. They all opposed forms of inclusion that seemed to ignore specific problems of racism and gendering. The unfortunate result was the continued privileging of white male identity and the maintenance of identity borders. Split over identity, the Weathermen group eventually analyzed itself out of existence. It first renamed itself "Weatherpeople" to reflect its anti-sexist stance, then "Weather Underground" to reflect its anti-establishment stance, then "Prairie Fire Organizing Committee" to reflect its stance as a generator of ideology. Each change represented a dispute over the definition of its cause and the attendant identity of its members. Thus, disaffected members left in stages as the group outgrew its liminoid revolutionary moment.

From the radical extremes, the (white male) mainstream also began to focus more and more on debates over ethnic and gender dimensions of national identity and what new state structures might be necessary to reflect them. The end of the Cold War meant the end of communism as America's global ideological Other. It left a legacy of the radicalized and increasingly fractious discourses of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality usually summed up under the heading of "identity politics". One of the most contentious questions since then has, therefore, been what "lessons" the Cold War has for the way in which American identities and identity politics interact with more recent domestic and international challenges. The shape of those lessons and challenges, both informed by the Cold War era, depends on what picture is drawn of the period. Is the Cold War cast as a grand narrative of triumph, loss, or contestation? Is the centrality of the construction of the global bipolar conflict uncritically left standing, or is it subverted in order to make

[11] Ron Jacobs, *The Way the Wind Blew: A History of the Weather Underground* (London: Verso, 1997).

room for other voices? Answers depend largely on the identity of the teller of the story and the way in which the teller perceives that identity as central, peripheral, stable, or disrupted within that narrative.

Staggering indeed- the notion, the sentence, the citation from Borges that opens this chapter. The comment refers to Menard's "brilliant" identical rewriting of *Don Quixote* in Borges' short story. It recalls a sentence originally from the passage in Cervantes's novel in which the first-person "narrator" questions the validity of the manuscript his narration is supposedly based on. In addition to the six authors implied here, four of them fictional,[12] the quotation in this space also refers to at least three more authors, the fictional translator of the Moor's manuscript in the novel, Andrew Hurley, the English translator of the edition of Borges' stories the quotation is lifted from, and this author who placed it as the chapter's epigram. The multiplicity of authors placed alongside a statement about truth's relation to history highlights the problem of authority of historical narrative as explanation and justification for the discourses of the time in which that narrative is constructed.

Many contemporary works, especially the postmodern, focuses on exactly this complex. They contain, as Hutcheon terms it "historiographic metafiction", fiction about fictional representation to "denaturalize both realism's transparency and modernism's reflexive response, while retaining ... the historically attested power of both."[13] Rather than viewing this "de-doxification" as useless for politics, she makes the case that it be viewed as politically expedient. It can, at least in the space of literary work, break down the borders around power centers on which dominant discourses or ideologies were previously constructed. Breaking down those borders enables not the mere construction of new ones but rather a hybrid space in which conflicting discourses can exist simultaneously, constantly reforming themselves through their interaction.

Analysis of work by white men who write about contemporary questions of race, ethnicity, and gender is doubly revealing when applied to narratives that are themselves specifically about the past. They are not only written from the point of view of a contemporary metadiscourse but also seek to retrace the historical and cultural emergence of that metadiscourse. Such works endeavor paradoxically to fictionally

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[12] For those counting: Borges, the fictional narrator of Menard's story, Menard, Cervantes, the novel's fictional first-person narrator and Cid Hamet Ben Engeli, the Moorish, thus supposedly unreliable, source.

[13] Hutcheon, Linda, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (New York: Routledge 1989): 34.

construct a master narrative about the end of a single master narrative. In his "DissemiNation", Bhabha develops a postcolonial potential for his description of a nation's two times, an historical "pedagogical" past that gives clues to its collective identity and its "fate", and a "performative" present, in which people live and act as individuals. Members of a nation, its people who identify themselves with its national collective, live in both times. Thus, Bhabha concludes, "The liminality of the people - their double-inscription as pedagogical objects and performative subjects - demands a 'time' of narrative that is disavowed in the discourse of historicism where narrative is only the agency of the event, or the medium of a naturalistic continuity of Community or Tradition."[14]

Agamben points out, as discussed here in chapter 1, that a nation always has its excluded people imbedded in its own text. These Others are included insofar as they determine the borders of national identity by embodying what it is not. Such included Others are explicitly excluded or dispossessed by the pedagogic past, by the master historical narrative. Therefore, they might be more immune to the disavowal of the liminal "time" of the national narrative. That would certainly be more the case if there were not material social structures which constantly enforce and reinforce this historical narrative. Not subscribing to Althusser's notion of the all-powerful Ideological State Apparatus, one must still consider what material power structures a) brought about this exclusion in the past and b) inscribe and disseminate this exclusion in an historical narrative which justifies national identity.

It is Bhabha's aspiration, on the other hand, that included Others make liminality the "time" of a new narrative. He suggests they might either politically and intellectually reconfigure their subject position as privileged or simply occupy the nation's physical and conceptual borders. Such projects debase the monocentric authority of a single narrative. Their success lies in casting all members of a nation – privileged, underprivileged, and excluded – in a liminoid space of incommensurate narratives. This incommensurability resists attempts to determine the validity of these narratives because they lack a common basis for comparison. In other words, it allows for a redefinition of nationality as something in a permanent state of redefinition, inherently contested by competing pasts. Identity becomes performative, depending at any one moment on the context in which

[14] Homi K. Bhabha, "DissemiNation", ed. Homi K, Bhabha, *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990): 302.

the contestation occurs, on the social power relationships at the time, and the part(s) of the past in question.

2.2. Wasted narratives and identities in *Underworld*

Don DeLillo's *Underworld* portrays "white male" as an identity category with both secure and insecure borders. They are secure by force for the moment and in a specific form and in this light insecure as permanent and permanently valid. That (in-)security oscillation occurs at several levels. The novel constantly resists the imposition of a master narrative of the Cold War and thus the privileging of any one identity as the subject of that narrative. At the same time, it describes the many forces at work that stabilized white male identity as privileged. Within this dialectic, white masculinity itself, its meaning, the in-/exclusivity of its borders, and assumptions about its authority are slowly transformed. This occurs within the novel's metanarrative, the presentation of a cast of numerous characters who function to construct their own narratives (sometimes multiple ones).

Tensions of commensurability and contestation appear primarily at the level of the associative connections of competing texts. DeLillo constructs vast, complexly interacting narratives using interrelated tropes that include waste, consumerism, art, and war. The novel's progress presents an archeology, to use Foucault's pre-genealogy term, exhuming figures and narratives relegated by contestation to the "underworld" of collective repression. In the end, it exposes both the history's "winners" and its "losers", those left otherwise in the dark margins. Identity is presented as a function of historical events and public historiography, an active palimpsest in which the erasure of other representations and the reinscription of one's own are ongoing and never total.

DeLillo's is not the only novel set in the Cold War, nor is it the only historical novel of the period. As an historical novel, it stands alongside titles such as the triumphal neo-conservative *Passport* by Bruce Herschensohn (2003) and even, with some allowances, Winston Groom's satire *Forrest Gump* (1986) – one allowance being that it appeared before the end of the Cold War, another being that the film of 1991 is far-better known. That is not to mention contemporary books by white men that use varying collections of the events from the period as backdrops for the novelist's treatments of their themes. These include Philip Roth's *I Married a Communist* (1997) and T. Coraghessan Boyle's novel of hippie-dom *Drop City* (2003). Chapter 4 in this work

treats at length two such novels, *I Know This Much is True* by Wally Lamb (1998) and *The Last of the Savages* by Jay McInerney (1996), both informed by domestic pressures on identity the "sixties" protest era brought forth.

The Cold War itself was not without literature. It inspired everything from the wretched and trite to masterpieces of the twentieth century such as Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) and Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo-Jumbo* (1968). The latter work emphasizes one last point in the array of Cold War literature briefly sketched here. In addition to the examples listed here by white men, the period, both during and after, produced countless works by women, gays, and all forms of non-whites. They contested the overarching narratives at the time and the power white masculinity wielded in those narratives. This work questioned the very notion of the Cold War and its motives.

Underworld is not the only story of the Cold War, but its structure makes this very fact manifest. The novel's end leaves a space where these other narratives can perhaps join as part of a larger whole of a national story of contestation. As its title indicates, it also portrays the process by which this contestation has produced the sublimation of many of these narratives. When Hayden White develops his four types of historical "emplotment" based on Northrop Frye's taxonomy of literature, he draws attention to the critique of Frye of oversimplifying literature. At the same time, White justifies such categorizations for histories because, he believes, they are not literary works but rather a "restricted art form".[15] DeLillo produces a conflict of presumably restricted art forms, from waste management to the collection of secret dossiers. Also part of the conflict are art forms traditionally seen as less restricted, that which is usually considered "art" such as painting, sculpture, and film.

Taken all together, these art forms and their (un-)restrictions greatly complicate White's divisions. They create a busy work of historiographic metafiction that oscillates between satire, tragedy, romance, and comedy, and finally emerges with a highly complex form of "peace". This peace is at once hopeful, even desperate, yet provides no actual closure, no final emplotment. Nonetheless, it does provide a conclusion, the sense, as Kermode would put it, of an ending.[16] The novel does not reveal a hidden structure to history as manifested by a series of events but rather as the encoding of those events and

[15] White 8 (see esp. footnote 6 with reference to Frye).
[16] Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the theory of fiction* (New York: Oxford UP, 1967). More on this work and its implications in chapter 5.

their associative interlinkage. It concludes with both one story about many stories and with one of those many stories, that of a specific white man, written larger than the rest.

As regards content, the novel's Cold War narration begins with a famous baseball game in 1951 and ends in a vague time after the death of a nun, Sister Edgar, in the mid-1990s. That is the most that can be said without entering into the specific complications of its structure. The first complication is that DeLillo constantly undermines conventions for the historical novel. Much as McHale describes postmodern play with history, DeLillo makes particular use of apocryphal history and historical fantasy to revise the content of the Cold War and transform the notion of its historical narration.[17] In a Hutcheon-esque form of historiographic metafiction, DeLillo also presents and simultaneously places under erasure the notion of a protagonist who functions in the narrative to tie in all the elements of the plot and is swept into the course of the greater events around him. Unlike those central figures of classic historical novels such as Pierre of *War and Peace* and Waverley of *Waverley*, the absorption of Nick Shay into the course of history is far more uncertain. His role as a central tie-in is also profoundly unstable. In the end, national identity as a function of national narrative becomes a constructed space with ragged edges, maintained by a variety of forces within a highly contested field.

Foucault writes of the concept of origin in history, "The origin lies at a place of inevitable loss, the point where the truth of things corresponded to a truthful discourse, the site of a fleeting articulation that discourse has obscured and finally lost."[18] The apocryphal elements in *Underworld* to a large extent represent those lost elements, as a stand-in for the production of their loss. In the same way, Nick Shay acts as a stand-in for the many lost narratives in the novel, the lost connections of the novel's many objects. There lies also the origin of the novel's portrayal of contemporary whiteness and masculinity. They are constructions, yes, but effective constructions which stand in for the repression of other potential narrative structures of national identity. The Cold War text thus becomes closely linked to the person of Nick and to the identity "white male", just as the deconstruction of the one opens the possibility of deconstructing the other.

Though the novel's apocryphal work is important, the most apparent means by which DeLillo consistently frustrates a traditional historical narrativity is his non-linear

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[17] Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (New York: Methuen, 1987): 90 and after.
[18] Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", 1977, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon, ed. Paul Rabinow, *The Foucault Reader* (New York: Pantheon, 1984): 79.

narration. This confuses attempts by the reader to draw causal links between the events in the many sections. It also enables a vast new arena of causal links that go beyond a simple event horizon into the area of text and discursive manipulation. In the prologue "The Triumph of Death", the novel begins with a legendary Dodgers-Giants playoff game, the same day the Soviet Union explodes its second atomic bomb. FBI director J. Edgar Hoover who is, apocryphally at the game, receives the news, noting the date, "October 3, 1951. He registers the date. He stamps the date."(23) However, the first chapter after that depicts Nick Shay in 1991 visiting the huge art project "Long Tall Sally" run by his old friend and one-time lover Klara Sax repainting obsolete B-52's in the New Mexico desert. The novel then gradually moves backwards, though non-linearly, constantly jumping around to different times and characters in various episodes.

That kind of jumping reaches its peak in Part 5, "Better Things for Better Living Through Chemistry" subtitled "Selected Fragments Public and Private in the 1950s and 1960s". It presents time in a complete jumble, yet constantly returns to the comic routines of Lenny Bruce during the Cuban Missile Crisis and to phases in the development of Nick. Both are told in chronological order, an exception to the otherwise reverse-order in which Nick's life is recounted. Even so, these two threads are told at different paces and take place at different times. This part is so confusing that John Duvall even appends his companion guide to the novel with a section devoted just to the description of its events.[19]

The main narrative of the novel, which proceeds in chronological order, follows the first few hours of the winning homerun baseball after the novel-opening game. The novel as a whole retraces, or rather offers, associative and material connections to the novel's many narratives between that earliest baseball moment and the death of Sister Edgar in the epilogue. These narratives, such as the life of Nick Shay, contain lost elements, forgotten or mis-remembered events, which only come to light as the novel progresses. Duvall writes, "[S]ince so many things are plotted in reverse chronological order, the things we don't know about characters create plot tensions that simply would disappear if one were to retell the story by reconstructing a conventional timeframe."[20] The revelation of the baseball narrative, on the other hand, comes at the end, signaled

[19] John Duvall, *Don DeLillo's* Underworld: *A Reader's Guide* (New York: Continuum, 2002). Appendix "A Synopsis of Part 5", p. 86-92. The confusion extends into Duvall's own summary where he, probably accidentally, left out the headings for chapters 4 and 7 in this part, rendering the triptych structure of the chapters less visible. For more on this structure, see below.

early on by baseball collector Marvin Lundy as the one missing piece of information that would verify the ball's complete lineage of ownership (181).

For clarification, "narrative" is used here to generally refer to the textually constructed linkage of events toward a conclusion. "Narrativity" then refers to the process by which these events are created so as to offer linkages to other events, the latter being the action and the former the result. Critical to both is the assemblage of events. In her book, *Critical Events*, Veena Das discusses the hypermodality of "critical events", bringing about historical actions that go far beyond the potential in the context in which the events occur, ruptures that initiate discourses which did not exist before.[21] Though employing this model to talk of a myth of origins of modern India beginning with its traumatic partition, she also used it in an argument against the identity of a society as a permanent organic whole. It points to the general instability of the results of events and the difficulty of weaving them into a monocausal narrative fabric.

Foucault anticipates this reasoning of Das's with a more nuanced and philosophically grounded notion of events and their connection with his concept of genealogy. He does not trace the origins of events as they are placed together in a narrative continuity but rather in terms of their unique characteristics and what he terms the "entry of the masked Other".[22] Even though a critical event may bear the characteristic of a hypermodal radical break, there can be found in it a process by which the past before it suddenly becomes "the past", becomes submerged in new discursive registers of signification and meaning. The episodes in *Underworld* resist a simple narrative and take on hypermodality as they are placed together apparently without meaning. However, this complex narrativity actually lays bare genealogies, not of events but rather of cultural historical moments.

This consideration forms the basis of the final point about the treatment of history in *Underworld* that bears mentioning by way of introduction to the novel. The novel frustrates the construction and maintenance of a traditional historical narrative of the period by not portraying great political and social events. This stands in contrast to *Passport*, a triumphalist historical novel, what White would categorize as a "romantic" emplotment of history, and one with a pointedly political agenda. It was wildly praised by

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[20] Duvall, *Reader's Guide* 25.
[21] Veena Das, *Critical Events. An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India* (Delhi: Oxford UP, 1995): 5-7.
[22] Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" 88.

conservative opinion leaders from Ann Coulter to Rush Limbaugh. Talk show host Dennis Prager even lauded it as "an American *War and Peace*", and former Secretary of Education William J. Bennett stated, "Herschensohn has done a favor to history and fiction with *Passport*"[23] (excerpts from book jacket). The novel places its characters in or near great events of the Cold War, which ultimately strongly warp the novel's portrayal of the period simply through the selection of great events. For example, it devotes the long chapter "1974 The August Stairway" to the resignation of President Richard Nixon, represented in tragic tones as seen through the eyes of a Nixon staffer. It spends only six scattered pages on the many protest movements, represented as filthy, misguided teenagers opposed to Vietnam.

Aside from political objections, such a portrayal strongly embeds these events in a linear causal narrative that evades contestation within the novel itself. More problematically, Herschensohn opens the book on p. 3-4 with a recollection of 1960 when his story begins with observations of "back then" such as "Zimbabwe was called Rhodesia", "Beijing was called Peking", "African Americans were called Negroes", "gays were called homosexuals", and "sexual harassment was called flirting". However, he provides no depiction of how those changes came about and what they mean. He presents some events in a monocausal narrative of "freedom versus tyranny" and simply ignores countless others and their causes. This elides them in a narrative of great events that can barely even be regarded as "critical", for their outcome appears to have been clear from the start.

Underworld approaches this problem by subverting event hierarchizations. It is constructed of daily, apparently random, episodes with a wide spectrum of people. In these scenes, the great critical events occur as mere background noise. Many classic historical novels have begun this way, with talk of distant events and forebodings of things to come. One may recall the opening chapter of *War and Peace* in which, at the opening party scene, a few of the men chat in a corner about Napoleon's recent victories. Slowly in Tolstoy's novel, the critical events take more shape, and at some point the characters get sucked into the middle of that cataclysm that is the subject of the novel. In the case of *Underworld*, the great climax of global thermonuclear war, that all-

[23] These excerpts come from the book jacket. One may read this praise with some suspicion, however, as Coulter's future-tense review "*Passport* will surely be enlightening" indicates she had not read it. Bruce Herschensohn, *Passport: An Epic Novel of the Cold War* (New York: ibooks 2003).

encompassing apocalypse which captured imaginations throughout the period, never actually happened.

"But the bombs were not released," Klara Sax reminds us when speaking of her art project (76). From the outset, the novel is informed by the peripeteia in which an anticipated end to the narration of the Cold War never came about. Kermode places such a peripeteia at the core of the modern novel, forcing protagonists to reconcile the expected outcomes with their actual experience. Such a view may require too rigid a view of peripeteia and of the novel, but it offers the beginning from which to look at the treatment of the very event-ness of the *Underworld*'s many non-events.

DeLillo takes this consideration to a radical extreme, however, by asking what really did happen. He conspicuously avoids major historical events except as they are mediated over a distance to the characters living in the era in which they occur. The assassination of Kennedy is viewed as a video art installation in the 1970s in Part 4, Chapter 5 "Cocksucker Blues". The Vietnam War appears only twice, briefly. Once it is a two-page flashback of Nick's brother Matt examining photos of combat zones while serving in army intelligence at a secluded outpost (461-463). The other time, it is brought to us as an episode in the bomber "Long Tall Sally", the later inspiration of the title of Klara's project, miles above and completely removed from its destruction.

The launch of Sputnik, which terrified Americans at the time, exists only as it is compensated for by fetishist consumerism in a 1950s satire "Oct. 8, 1957" of Part 5, Chapter 2. The two protest scenes, also in Part 5, are mediated through rhetoric: a black speaker on the subject of civil rights in "August 14, 1964" and a radio station blaring out student slogans in "October 18, 1967", both giving form to chaotic events as they unfold. The Cuban Missile Crisis throughout Part 5 is delivered to the reader as the backdrop of Lenny Bruce's comedy with the repeated cry, "We're all gonna die!" Finally, the fall of the Soviet Union only appears in the eccentric prediction by baseball collector Marvin Lundy, who claims that Gorbachev's birthmark portends its breakup, "Marvin saw the first sign of the total collapse of the Soviet system. Stamped on the man's head. The map of Latvia."(173).

The interpolation of the baseball game with the beginning of the Cold War arms race is typical for the treatment of major events by almost, but not quite, leaving them out. This strategy has a two-fold result. First, it subverts received popular political and military histories of the period like Herschensohn's by questioning their validity as

justification for the perpetuation of certain power structures. Second, it belies any attempted repression of these events. For example, Duvall attributes to the ballgame "an aesthetic ideology that masks troubling political realities."[24] His statement treated a preprinted version of the prologue published as the novella "Pafko at the Wall",[25] but DeLillo's rewriting for the novel reinforces Duvall's thesis. It switches around even more between the crowd's excitement at the conclusion, Hoover's fascination with a gruesome painting "The Triumph of Death" in *Life*, and Cotter Manx, a black boy who caught the winning ball and is chased by a white man who wants the ball for himself. The increased interspersion of these scenes emphasizes the game's covering another "social reality", a battle over the game's objects of iconography.

The novel reproduces what appears almost an insidious scheme to bury these events, to instead turn to popular games, art, consumerism, and technology and relegate the traumata of the entry of the masked Other to the underworld. The management of the signification of these events in a narrative of the period becomes the novel's key tension. In this context, waste management, the retaining of objects and proper burial of rejected material, gets a starring role in the novel. It becomes one of the book's leading tropes, part of the chain of associated concepts in the novel that constantly restate themselves in varying forms. It is both the process by which signification is managed, and it is the object of that management, the definition and the repression of the abject.

Given the importance of waste management for *Underworld*, Nick Shay, a waste manager, might easily be considered the central figure of the novel. However, it is not an easy novel, and his centrality is neither obvious nor uncontestable. As already mentioned, there are several (un-)restricted artists who also engage in forms of "waste management" as representation. From this interaction emerges not only a battle of representation as waste management but of identity poesis, the textual construction of oneself in societal terms. The permanently incomplete palimpsest and the specific objects of this poesis interact to determine the visible representation of this construction. Identities thus carry both visible constructed components as well as invisible components, those which are constantly elided in order to make the visible components readable.

The variations of objects at one's disposal for such a construction determines one's subject position and the security with which the subject can view those visible and

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[24] John Duvall, "Baseball as Aesthetic Ideology: Cold War History, Race, and DeLillo's 'Pafko at the Wall'", *Modern Fiction Studies* 41.2 (1995): 285-313.
[25] *Harper's Magazine* October 1992: 35-70.

invisible components. Nick Shay, with the privileged identity of white masculinity, has at his command a seemingly limitless array of objects from around the world which form the waste he manages. Graffiti artist Ismael Muñoz, on the other hand, uses garbage he finds in the ruins of his neighborhood to construct his world and that of the children in the dilapidated part of the Bronx where Nick grew up. Conceptually, there are these numerous links between the two men as between all the characters in the novel, and yet their worlds differ radically, as do their pursuits and their very lives. These differences lay bare at the novel's end, both equally valid and with equally strong pulls on the tension of the novel as a whole. The following three sections then will follow this argument in greater detail. The first will focus on Nick's centrality. The second compares contesting forms of waste management, information management, and art. The third looks at the Cold War as a process of both the revelation and the repression of this contestation that defines borders of national identity in general and of white male identity in America in particular.

2.2.1. "The mystery of loss" / "Everything is vaguely – *what* – fictitious": Nick Shay and the center

If *Underworld* someday becomes part of a standard literary canon, probably one of the most widely considered questions next to what it is really about will be who it is really about. It is tempting to place Nick Shay as the central character of the novel because so much of it is connected to him. However, the novel incorporates large amounts of material that is only distantly connected to him or not at all. He only forms one possible organizing principle. It is in his double nature as a certain and uncertain center that his identity as a white man becomes most interesting with respect to its privileging role in the novel. For this reason, it is important to first closely examine his appearance in the text and how that appearance suggests his centrality. Then, this textualization of Nick will be compared to his thematic connections to the novel, in particular to waste and its management. The fluctuation of (un-)certainty surrounding his centrality also casts doubt on the essential centrality of these themes, even though they form such crucial cornerstones for the novel's conceptual organization. That doubt reflects similar problems with his role as a white man, crucial to the novel and yet placed under constant erasure as the only possible source for understanding it.

Toni Morrison's relates, "As a writer reading, I came to realize the obvious: the subject of the dream is the dreamer."[26] From this starting point, she analyzed several novels by white men to challenge the privileging of the white male as a transcendent narrator. She pointed out that the very existence of the central characters in their work is defined by an "Africanist presence", that is the presence of – specifically African but generally non-white – Others. The presence of Nick in *Underworld* as a white man is similarly determined by the presence of his Others, but his privileging as its subject and the security of the knowledge of his white masculinity form a major unspoken, but always manifest tension of the novel.

In his review of the novel, Tom LeClair simply declares Nick to be the novel's main character.[27] Nick has the most connections to the book's many narratives, and he is the only character who at times narrates episodes from the first person perspective. Joseph Walker, however, contests the designation of Nick as the main character, writing, "If Nick Shay is the main character, it is because he appears on more pages than anyone else, not because any aspect of the novel's thematic structure demands it."[28] Duvall disagrees, pointing out, "*Underworld* records Nick Shay's modernist search for lost time."[29] That language only implies that Nick is the central character, but he later concludes, "There are many other stories in *Underworld*, but for the most part they revolve around the couple [Nick and Klara Sax] involved in the affair."[30]

"For the most part" reveals, as it does with Morrison, that there are narratives which cannot be so easily synthesized into this grand narrative. Their very presence both defines the limits of its power as an organizing principle and offers other potential points of origin. However, let us return to Walker's point. Aside from the fact that much of the novel's thematic structure does revolve around Nick, his occupation of the most pages demonstrates an arbitrary act of force. He is constantly iterated as a nexus of the novel's content, even though he is not the novel's only white male, he is not cast as having had a "typical" Cold War experience, and the novel is not explicitly "about" him. Nick's story is forced upon the reader. He is the waste manager. In the end he even manages the use of leftover Soviet warheads to destroy other waste underground at the Kazakhstan test site

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[26] Morrison 17.
[27] Tom LeClair, "An Underhistory of Mid-Century America", *Atlantic Monthly* October 1997, 11 March 2002 <http://www.theatlantic.com/issues/97oct/delillo.htm>.
[28] Joseph S. Walker, "Criminality, the Real, and the Story of America: The Case of Don DeLillo", *Centennial Review* 43.3 (1999): 455.
[29] Duvall, *Reader's Guide*. 25.

where the Soviets exploded that bomb on October 3, 1951 and launched Sputnik. He also owns the baseball from the game that opened the book.

Most importantly, however, the novel constantly foregrounds his uncertainty, despite his apparent mastery of the icons of waste and the baseball. It contests his place in the history he lives through, his role in the novel's many narrative planes, and thus his role as a narrative authority. It is this which draws him, ironically, back to the center of the novel. His connection with the baseball demonstrates this. He was a fan of the Dodgers, the team that lost the game, so his search for the ball is at one level a search for a connection to a past that was both destroyed and created by the Cold War. "It's about the mystery of bad luck, the mystery of loss," he explains of the ball (97). It reminds him of a "real" identity he once thought he had, as a fan of his team from the Bronx, certain of who, what, and where he is.

At the same time, the ball reminds him of the fiction of which it is a part, of the fiction of the national memory associated with it, and how it represents the repression of other narratives. It is why, shortly before he explains the feeling of loss in the novel, he tells Klara when he meets her at her exhibit, "Sometimes I think everything I've done since those years, everything around me in fact, I don't know if you feel this way but everything is vaguely – *what* – fictitious." (73). When asked by Martin Lundy why he wants the ball, he explains "I don't know exactly why I want to buy the ball."(191). Having the ball does not restore certainty. It recalls his antagonism, his uncertainty. There is nothing he wants more than that:

> I long for the days of disorder. I want them back, the days when I was alive on the earth, rippling in the quick of my skin, heedless and real. I was dumb-muscled and angry and real. This is what I long for, the breach of peace, the days of disarray when I walked real streets and did things slap-bang and felt angry and ready all the time, a danger to others and a distant mystery to myself. (810)

It reminds him of the subsequent fiction of which he has become a part since then, of, chiastically, the *loss of mystery*.

It also reminds him of the vicissitudes that formed that mystery-repressing fiction, the arbitrary forces that centered him in his world. He was able to purchase the ball for $34,500, a financial power he exerts over objects of meaning. The ball also costs thousands of times more valuable than the many thousands of balls he must have seen disposed because this ball played a central role in a great narrative of the nation. These

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[30] Duvall, *Reader's Guide*. 28.

are just two of the many arbitrary forces in the novel which serve to obscure the contestation of representation and solidify his authority.

The text of *Underworld* is replete with moments of that contestation and its repression. The opening section with the baseball game is a case in point. It does not feature him at all, focusing instead on Cotter Martin, the black boy at the game who catches the ball. Based on the clues, one could make a case that Nick is briefly present, unnamed in an oblique reference, "There's a sixteen-year-old in the Bronx who takes his radio up to the roof of his building so he can listen alone, a Dodger fan slouched in the gloaming..." (32). The figure also appears in the same way in the "Pafko at the wall" preprint.[31] Later in the book Nick describes hearing the game this way, and the unusual fact that he listened to the Giants station for the account of the game, as the boy referred to here does, further suggests the connection between the two. Nonetheless, Cotter is the focus of the opening sequence, Nick's presence significant only for its obscurity. That said, he did take part in the opening like all the other people named in it. He absorbs it to make it part of his character, and when *Underworld*'s retrograde narration catches up to him as the sixteen-year-old on p. 678, he is depicted the day after the game, stunned by his team's last-minute loss.

The novel also contests Nick's centrality by frequently closely following the streams of consciousness of not only Cotter in the first section but several other figures. These include Klara Sax, her first husband Albert Bronzini, "Richard" the Texas Highway Killer, an unnamed rapist, J. Edgar Hoover, "Long Tall Sally" crewman, the once-owner of the ball Chuckie Wainwright, Ismael Muñoz, and Nick's brother Matt. This represents a different kind of attempt to claim the subject authority of the novel. Though Nick occupies more pages than any other character, he does not occupy a majority of them, even though one could conceivably link the passages in which he does not appear to him.

What indicates the contestation of Nick most of all is his role as a first-person narrator. After the opening game prologue, the novel opens with a strong first-person narration, that of Nick Shay. Its language recalls somewhat DeLillo's well-known *White Noise* protagonist Jack Gladney, a middle-aged white man at the top of his profession who is plagued by the many details of his job and his domestic life and the fictional world these construct as a whole. Nick remains solidly the first-person narrator through the end

[31] For the record, the only difference is that instead of "gloaming", DeLillo writes "gloom". "Pafko" (49).

of that part. It is then followed by the first interlude with Cotter's father, Manx Martin, who steals the ball to sell it. When the novel returns after that to its retrograde thread, the narration has switched to the second-person "you". Watching a videotape of a shooting by the Texas Highway Killer, this "you" might be Nick's brother Matt, suggested by the name of his wife, Janet, just like "your wife" on p. 158. This first-second-third-person shifting goes on throughout the novel, first occurring at the very beginning with the sentence, "He speaks your language, American, and there's a shine in his eye that's always hopeful" (11). "He" is Cotter, to whom the narration immediately shifts in the third-person.

After Part 1, Nick does not reappear until Part 2, Chapter 4 which primarily features Marvin Lundy. He does not appear until the end and only as a voice on the telephone asking about the baseball. The following chapter features Nick again, in his native Bronx with his mother and brother. This time he is in the third-person until the narrative suddenly switches briefly to the first-person on p. 209. On p. 252-3, he appears briefly in the third-person. In Part 3, Chapters 1 and 3 he again appears in the first-person. When Nick next resurfaces in the novel in Staatsburg reform school for the shooting in which he was involved, the narration in the section "November 3, 1952" (Part 5, Chapter 1) begins in the second-person from his point of view then switches to the first. The next section in reform school is entirely "you". In the two sections in Part 5 in which he is living a beatnik existence on the road with his girlfriend Amy, the narration is told from the first-person plural "we". Amy is named in this "we", while Nick's identity as narrator is not revealed until one assembles the clues the novel offers. Part 6 portrays him exclusively in the third-person.

This kind of mapping is not a mere exercise in examining the novel's mechanics. It highlights the textual background against which one must look at the novel's use of language to express contestation and how this language textualizes the conflicts of national discourse and narrative of the Cold War era. Nick's fluid identity as the novel's narrator and privileged subject parallels the novel's central theme of questioning the authority of the Cold War as the era's central narrative and organizing principle. The same contestation of Nick Shay's "first-person-ness" reemerges in his contestation as a representative figure of the historical period in the novel as a white man and as bearer of the identity "white male".

Looked at in the reverse order in which the passages with Nick appear in the novel, one can follow the development of Nick to a first-person narrator. This parallels the development of his career as a waste manager and its role in the construction of his "fiction" and the repressive work encoded in a loss of mystery. Tim Engles makes the case in his essay on *White Noise* that that novel reveals, whether by design or not, the way in which individuality is constructed as an illusion of middle-class whites. That assertion may be rather broad, but the "emergence" of the first-person narrative of Nick from the beginning of *Underworld*, or rather its submergence as the novel progresses into a third-person in which all characters appear equally privileged, can be seen as laying this process of individualization bare. Leaving out, for now, the epilogue in which middle-aged Nick reappears in the first-person, one can read this backwards from the novel's end in the Bronx.

In this reverse order, the change in his status as narrator begins in reform school. He is there after shooting "George the waiter". That may or may not have been an accident (780-1), but it remains a convoluted event without a readily applicable meaning, part of the "days of disorder". The first reform school scene (both in the novel and chronologically in Nick's life), "November 3, 1952" (Part 5, Chapter 1), opens in the second-person. It switches then to the first with the sentence "I sensed the river was out there somewhere, a briskness in the wind, and I took deep breaths because I was upstate and it was supposed to be healthy there." (510).

The scene suggests that the switch to the "I" comes from becoming embedded in the discourse of the correctional institution into which he is placed. Taking deep breaths because he is told it is healthy shows an internalization of its codes. He explains, "When I entered correction I wanted things to make sense." and that "The minute I entered correction I was a convert to the system." (502). This stands in contrast to members of a black gang called the Alhambras doing "nigger time", "raised on the felony alphabet". He plays basketball with them, but his role in corrections is so different that, "When three kids went out the gate in the rear of a bakery truck, fifteen-year-olds, junior Alley Boys as the Alhambras were sometimes called, I thought it was a tremendous, what, a dereliction, a collapse ..." (503).

This thought is further developed by the next corrections scene "July 12, 1953". It begins with a long second-person reflection of Nick shooting George and then switches to the first-person as he sits in a psychiatrist's chair telling her about it. She

constantly impresses on him that "You have a history ... that you are responsible to" (512). He doubts this but does consider it. On the other hand, the Alhambras/Alley Boys, as a group and not as individuals, speak to her with a sense of their group fate: "They were at war with society and what's the point of pretending otherwise." (510). Further, "They told her they'd get released and go back to the street, which was another department of the penal system and vice versa, and they'd go back and do what they'd always done, they told her. They'd deal, steal, get the edge, carry the piece and pursue the conduct of war." (511). Already these boys have become anonymous, relegated to a collective name, an uncertain one at that, and to society's underworld.

The "underworld" of crime is an association with the title that forms the basis of Walker's analysis of a "new and direct encounter with the real" which challenges social fictions.[32] Nick's black prison mates become part of the social underworld, while he merges with society to become a first-person self. It represents a visible act of narrative force, constantly bringing the novel's gaze to Nick's subject position and away from the other boys, robbing them of individuality. Nick never reveals any of their names. Only once does an Alley Boy speak in Nick's narration. The anonymous remark comes when the correctional institute installs a miniature golf course: "That's a Disney picture, man ... And we're the dwarfs that supposed to be in it." (510). The unnamed individual expresses the cynical self-awareness of a mechanism that seeks to dwarf him. It relegates him to "them", to the margins of the nation as a mass of little people surrounding the main characters. They become "them" as Nick becomes "I".

Decisive in his process of becoming is the scene "January 11, 1955" about the part of his life spent in a Jesuit school in Minnesota and the priest headmaster named only "Father". Nick's own father vanished under unclear circumstances, so this "Father" offers a strong association with this loss and with a form of compensatory recovery. It is Father who teaches him the names of things, beginning with his shoe and its parts, "cuff", "counter", "quarter", "welt", "vamp", "eyelet", "aglet", "grommet", and "last", exhorting Nick after each word to "say it" (541-2). Father explains "How everyday things lie hidden. Because we don't know what they're called." (541) and that "This is the only way in the world you can escape the things that made you." (543).

This provides Nick with a mastery of the words that construct the knowledge of the objects of his world. At the same, he is constructed as part of the process of that

[32] Walker 442.

textualization, as a wielder of its power. He "escapes" the things that made him by becoming part of the making, something represented by his increasingly firm "I" as the position from which the novel's narrative projects. His further career, attempting to set up an alternative school, working as a corporate speech writer, and then joining Whiz Co. as a waste manager, represents steps toward accumulating this power. He works for three different institutions which solidify the signification of value that go far beyond Althusser's ISA. His "I" becomes solidly associated with the social fiction of which he has become a part.

The end result is the Nick at the beginning of the novel. After he is introduced as a strong first-person narrator, his resurfacing as a third-person in the next section seems mysterious until the narrative briefly slips back into the first person on p. 209. It then makes sense as indicating the novel's deconstructive archeology of the process he once underwent to become the centralizing Nick Shay. In the chapter in question, he is visiting his old home in the Bronx. He, his brother, and their mother are reliving some of their past tensions and concerns, alluding to some of the matter to come, while Nick tries to persuade his mother to move to Phoenix with him. The scenes in the chapter shift to different points of view in the third-person but end finally with Nick taking a taxi to his hotel listening to his cabbie talk about drivers being murdered. Suddenly, in the middle of this description, the sentence appears, "I live a quiet life in an unassuming house in a suburb of Phoenix." (209) Jarringly, it presents a location in full contrast to the Bronx the scene in which it takes place. It also locates Nick in the life in which he currently lives, quite distant from the place of his youth and third-person role. In addition, the first-person perspective indicates the place with which that first person and Nick the narrator identify themselves. Finally, the terms "quiet life", "unassuming house", and "suburb" provide keys to the fiction in which that first-person lives. These are the "everyday things" he wishes to make manifest, the insistence on a particular construction of identity.

This strong contrast to Jack Gladney, represents a further development on the part of DeLillo. Gladney goes through his life somewhat puzzled by the incoherence of it all, and Nick does so to some extent as well. However, the content of the novel beyond Nick provides a remove from which to look at the world in which he lives as somewhat more coherent. It is this world that has inscribed a secure fiction of identity, a process of *différance* of Nick in which he is also complicit. The novel's deconstructive archeology

reflects the period which produced the first-person Nick and provides a certain place from which to contest that making. The very contestation of his role as first-person narrator and main character resituates him in the novel's center but now against this background of contestation. His contested identity becomes one of *Underworld*'s constants, part of the way the novel questions the authority of the Cold War narrative as the era's central figure. It lays open the consideration of the conflict as a construction that serves to repress other forms of conflict and embodies that with a white man who is both subject and object of the nation and its narration.

2.2.2. Power politics, power play, power art

Whether or not the Cold War was a white man's invention depends ultimately on how one constructs it. Although Nick's profession is waste management and DeLillo spends much time on the trope of waste in the novel, it stands as only one form of construction, even though it dominates the novel in most ways. Its conceptual linkage to other forms of construction – information management, art, technology, advertisement, and consumerism – becomes crucial to the novel as they lay bare alternatives to Nick, the Cold War, and waste. In their own way, they perform a kind of burying, an obscuring of each other. They are deeply interconnected and interact in what appears to be a whole system, the logic of which favors waste in the novel. Thus, DeLillo can portray a world of competing systems of representation and also further explore themes of consumption, repetition, and simulation familiar from his previous novels and from many other postmodern works.

DeLillo himself objects to the label "postmodern". Instead, he prefers to think of *Underworld* as "the last modernist gasp".[33] Nevertheless, it constantly undermines any modernist attempt to reconstruct a shattered past because it offers so many possible aesthetic, thematic, and plot connections that reconstruction becomes a mere game, or better a power play. When Duvall writes of the novel recording Nick's search for time, his observation does not imply that this search was a success or that the novel did not record anything else. Instead of re-presenting a master narrative of the Cold War, DeLillo portrays competing narratives being constructed, acted out, and contested.

This occurs in several arenas in *Underworld*, but here the focus will be on some of the main ones relevant to the discussion of white masculinity: waste, politics as

information management, art, and commodification. The manipulations of these arenas are well illustrated by the ways in which tropes of darkness and blackness represent the repressed, invisible underworld delineates the manifest and white that merges metaphorically with Nick's whiteness and the tension of his own in-/visibility. How these arenas of play are commodified and consumed in the space of the novel strongly informs its organization around Nick and his role as a waste manager. He receives their social "excrement" and then packages it, represses it, such that the visible remains take on the characteristic of fetish, covering over the repressed traumas of contestation by Others, and stabilizing the construction of his identity.

In the political arena, J. Edgar Hoover leads the fight in *Underworld* to create the narrative of the Cold War against communism as a way of maintaining his own political power and the power of white masculinity as an identity. The historical Hoover headed the FBI from 1924 until his death in 1972, but like much other factual information in the novel, these details of his life are not told but rather some knowledge is assumed of the reader. Otherwise it becomes difficult to de-doxify the character, to play with the expectations associated with the historical figure. Also untold is his role in initiating the Red Scare with his statement in 1950 that in the United States the Communist Party had 55,000 members and another 500,000 sympathizers. The novel creates a fictional Hoover, referred to as the "Director" and sometimes as "Edgar". This Hoover, much like his historical counterpart, is obsessed with collecting information on everybody and re-presenting it in order to control individuals and society. For this reason, Parrish calls Hoover the "director" of a particular postmodern narrative. Parrish demonstrates how his role mirrors that of DeLillo himself, an artist competing with the creations of other artists in the novel.[34]

DeLillo supplies us with an inner dialogue of "Edgar's" at the Giants-Dodgers game (which the historical Hoover did not attend). It closely connects his role as the Director with the role of the Cold War as a centralizing narrative. Having just received the news of the Soviet atomic bomb test, Hoover reflects on truth and narration:

> There is the secret of the bomb and there are the secrets that the bomb inspires, things even the Director cannot guess – a man whose own sequestered heart holds every festering secret in the Western world – because these plots are only now evolving. This is what he knows, that the genius of the bomb is printed not only in its physics of

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[33] Quoted in Philip Nel, "'A Small Incisive Shock': Modern Forms, Postmodern Politics, and the Role of the Avant-Garde in Underworld", *Modern Fiction Studies* 45.3 (1999): 737.
[34] Timothy L Parrish, "From Hoover's FBI to Eisenstein's Unterwelt: DeLillo Directs the Postmodern Novel", *Modern Fiction Studies* 45.3 (1999): 696-723.

> particles and rays but in the occasion it creates for new secrets. For every atmospheric blast, every glimpse we get of the bared force of nature, that weird peeled eyeball exploding over the desert – for every one of these he reckons a hundred plots go underground, to spawn and skein. (51).

More than anything else, Hoover wants to control the way information is known and unknown. For example, he is determined to release the news of the test explosion first so that "People will understand that we've maintained control of the news if not of the bomb." (28).

This is further revealed by his reappearance in two segments of the collage Part 5 that treat the Black and White Ball Klara Sax attends, where the two are photographed together without knowing it (574). In these two scenes ("November 28, 1966" and "November 29, 1966"), DeLillo provides more interior monologues in which Hoover dwells on a variety of topics but most intensely on his secret dossiers as "an essential device" (559). Hoover knows, "The file was everything, the life nothing. And this was the essence of Edgar's revenge. He rearranged the lives of his enemies, their conversations, their relationships, their very memories, and he made these people answerable to the details of his creation." (559). This occupation with the secret rearrangement of lives as a form of publicly directing and destroying them is transferred to his own chastity as a means of repressing his secret homosexuality. "It begins in the inmost person," he explains to his assistant Clyde Tolson, for whom the fictional Hoover bears a repressed desire, "Once you yield to random sexual urges, you want to see everything come loose. You mistake your own looseness for some political concept, whereas in truth." (564). The thought he leaves unfinished because "Some thoughts have to remain unspoken, even unfinished in one's own mind." (564).

This establishes a doubling of constructing sexual urges as taboo with social control, a confusion well documented by theorists such as Foucault, Butler, and Sedgwick. The deviation from a sexual norm becomes the deviation from a social and political norm that the Director cannot tolerate. He seeks the company of icons like Frank Sinatra and Jackie Gleason as a means to bolster his sense of the rightness of heterosexual masculinity. Hoover is a "self-perfected American" (29) who "admires the rough assurance of these men ... They have a size to them, a natural stamina that mocks his own bible-school indoctrination." (29).

The terms he associates with these men conjure up images of powerful heterosexual masculinity: "knockabout boy", "gusty egos", "appetites", and "pussy bandits". For Hoover, "American" becomes inextricably attached to these kinds of

associations, and DeLillo portrays the Director driven to maintain them against incursions. These incursions are neatly listed by Hoover when mask artist Tanya Berenger comes with her black masks to prepare him for the Ball: "She was in the files in a fairly big way. She'd been accused at various times of being a lesbian, a socialist, a communist, a dope addict, a divorcee, a Jew, a Catholic, a Negro, an immigrant and an unwed mother. ... Just about everything Edgar distrusted and feared. But she did exquisite masks" (561).

Alternative methods of construction stand in direct contrast to the Director's construction of a particular public America through the manipulation of secrets. Here, the novel's many artists come, as it were, into play. The first who bears discussing is Lenny Bruce because he forms the basis for his comedy routines with the very objects of taboo Hoover fears the most. He conducts a form of archeology by bringing Hoover's secrets to light, unearthing all the profanity, sexual fears, conflicting ethnicities, and political subversions Hoover so tries to ban through his construction of the great conflict. In another foil to the Director, the comedian also employs taboo manipulation to keep control of his audience. When people get up to leave, he libels with accusations such as "Josef Mengele's head nurse" (583). The novel explains, "Those were the terms of Lenny's act. If you didn't like the bits he did, you were a mass murderer. Or you were the Polio Mother of the year 1952 or the subject of a brief improvised bit, which he now performed." (583).

It is in the terms of this opposition that he functions as the medium for transmitting the Cuban Missile Crisis. Not only does his mediation subvert the notion of the crisis as a critical event, but it also reveals the underworld that the crisis obscures. "We're all gonna die!" he screams repeatedly as a voice of apocalypse, and then proceeds with his revelation. One of the many things he "reveals" is the notion of the bomb as a "white bomb, dig." (547). The Langston Hughes sketch mentioned above made the same allegation, a sentiment which informs Ishmael Reed's *Mumbo Jumbo* and his *Terribles* novels just as it does Philip Roth's much later *I Married a Communist*. At an act in San Francisco in front of a Beat-echoing subculture (Part 5, Chapter 3, "October 24, 1962), Bruce challenges:

> "But maybe some of us are more powerless than others. It's a white bomb, dig." And his voice changes here, goes redneck and drawly. "It's our bomb. Moscow and Washington. Think about it, man. White people control this bomb."
> The idea delights him.
> "You look down at Watts. You look up at Harlem. And you say, Fuck with our chicks, man, we drop the bomb. Better end the world than mix the races."

> He goes into a bopster's finger-snapping slouch.
> "Because we'd rather kill everybody than share our women."
> Then the lights went out. Just like that. (547-8)

The implication is not only that it is a white bomb but also a white man's bomb. It is at his disposal to prevent sharing the control over white women, explicitly with black men. When the stage is plunged into darkness at the end of the act – DeLillo carries the passage on half a page longer with descriptions of a play of light and dark in which Lenny finally disappears – it restores the bomb's repression of the narrative of racial control he just revealed.

The content of Lenny Bruce's comedy represents one level at which to contrast him with Hoover. The other contrast, however, is his medium. He is a comedian. It is an important distinction, one which DeLillo refers to a few pages previously when contrasting him with the beatniks listening. For them "The bomb was their handiest reference to the moral squalor of America, the guilty place of smokestacks and robot corporations, Time-magazined and J Edgar Hoovered." (545). In contrast, "Lenny was showbiz, he was suited and groomed and cool and corrupt, the mortician-comic, and the bomb was part of a scary ad campaign that had gotten out of hand." (546). He would rather play with the constructions of the bomb as a source of meaning than rhetorically employ the bomb to construct meaning. It is a direct attack at Hoover's kind of information management. It is then with a sense of victory that Hoover recalls in his own scene that the comedian has recently died of a morphine overdose, duly noted in his dossier: "An 8x10 police photo of the bloated body – the picture could have been titled *The Triumph of Death* – was in the Director's personal file." (574).

In terms of "occupying the most pages", Klara Sax plays a much larger role in *Underworld* than Hoover and Bruce together. The latter are both portrayed in terms of their art of constructing the Cold War, while Klara is portrayed as an artist in name as well as in action. She is very concerned with recovering the many objects of the era that it has left behind as waste. In this respect, her relationship with Nick mirrors the relationship these two have. Like Lenny Bruce and his exposure of the taboos Hoover represses, Klara exposes the kind of waste Nick manages. She explains to a French documentary film crew that she is called the "Bag Lady" for her work with "castoffs" in which she paints "aerosol cans and sardine tins and shampoo caps and mattresses" (70). It is a work of recovering in two senses, removing the quotidian from its common

association as repressed detritus and re-covering it, placing it repainted back in the public eye.

The opening sequence presents her at the pinnacle of her career, heading the "Long Tall Sally" project of colorfully repainting a fleet of mothballed B-52s in the desert. She explains her intention on pp. 76-7 with a recounting of the thought of nuclear annihilation that the planes carried with them. It was a thought that exceeded the humanly imaginable and was therefore repressed. The repression of horror, she points out, becomes intertwined with the repression of unnamable "merde". That association is doubled by the fact that the leftover planes and their bombs now only remain as "shit because it's garbage, it's waste material" (77). She now recovers the planes and their fear and makes them manifest while at the same time placing a human touch on these endlessly repeated airplanes "to find an element of felt life". (77). For this reason, she named her project after the nosecone art which depicts a pinup girl christened "Long Tall Sally", representing aspirations of the men who flew the plane. This suggests the other act of force which gives Klara so many pages in the novel to occupy. She stands in for the art of the whole novel. This art creates a space in which to examine human elements behind the Cold War waste and narratives as well as the ways in which they obscure each other.

The final point to be made about Klara is to refer to her female gender. If one reads *Underworld* in terms of the construction of a first-person white male subject in Nick, Klara's role as a counterweight becomes crucial. While the construction of white masculinity in the novel can be seen as a process of repression in order to invest a specific fiction with veracity, one method for deconstructing that identity is to salvage the repressed. While Nick works as a waste manager, Klara works as a waste redeemer. The two are linked together in the novel's narration by their affair. The affair was part of Klara's reemergence from her housewife role and of her renewed interest in art that had been repressed in her for many years by her submission to that role. She brings into the novel an element of gender deconstruction that employs waste. Even as the identity of Nick Shay appears solidified in the first-person at the beginning, this waste serves as a constant reminder of the basis upon which his identity rests.

DeLillo has been accused in the past of including women in his novels as marginal figures at best and as only sexual beings at worst.[35] *Underworld* presents a far more central woman figure who actually poses a direct threat to the centrality of a male figure and asks with what authority he claims the center. It is not, for example, clear if the affair between Nick and Klara is what launched Klara's new art career. It may have been launched by the death of the mother-in-law to whom she had been tending which released her from that duty and gave her the opportunity to paint again. She may have also had the affair as a result of the sense of change that death brought about in her household. In the end, Nick owns the ball, but Klara, by her presence and her actions in the novel, asks why that ball is so much more important a memento, more important than a whole fleet of B-52s or a shampoo cap.

2.2.3. "Bomb your lawn with Nitrotex": Consumerism, fear, and repression

Why indeed? In another of the novel's great conceptual movements, DeLillo explores consumerism and how its symbolic valuation of things connects to art and the Cold War. He presents this in the novel in such a way that the white masculinity of Nick as an embodiment of the nation becomes just as much a product of this kind of consumerist symbolic value as of the construction of the East-West conflict and the nation's history. The role of consumerism in this respect is best illustrated in two scenes, one in a "typical" home in the 1950s, and one in an advertising agency. By themselves quite satirical scenes, they do not function properly within DeLillo's archeology of the period without conflicting elements that expose what they obscure, the most immediate being the hidden history of the baseball. Taken as a whole, they demonstrate a major dynamic in the novel. This dynamic determines not the existence of whiteness or masculinity, but rather the way in which they become situated in a place of material privilege as normative- a privilege they retain despite conflict surrounding them.

As indicated above with the quotation marks, one cannot speak of a "typical" home without qualifying it. Eric Deming's childhood home appears in what Molly

[35] See, for a summary of these voices, Philip Nel, "*Amazons* in the *Underworld*: Gender, the Body, and Power in the Novels of Don DeLillo", *Critique* 42.4 (2001): 416-436. Exhibit A in Nel's discussion is the obscure novel *Amazons*, which DeLillo is suspected of having written under the pseudonym Cleo Birdwell. It claims to be the autobiographical, largely sexual, adventures of a woman hockey player and includes a sex scene with sports journalist Murray Siskind, a character who reappears in the later *White Noise* as an ex-sports journalist turned American studies professor.

Wallace refers to as the "Sputnik" section[36] (Part 5, Chapter 2, "October 8, 1957"). It appears the bear trappings "typical" of the era, and yet that claim of the typical is contested even before the chapter begins. One hundred pages previous, Eric and Matt Shay sit together at lunch at a bomb development complex. Eric reminisces, "The placid nineteen-fifties. Everybody dressed and spoke the same way. It was all kitchens and cars and TV sets. Where's the Pepsodent, mom? We were there, so we know don't we." (410) Matt questions, even denies that this recollection of the "typical" markers of the era: "You know. I don't know." When Eric insists, "You were there. We were both there." Matt denies more firmly, "You were there. I was somewhere else." He was. The Bronx chapters in Part 6 differ widely from the Sputnik chapter, but fiction has emerged since the 1950s that Eric's recollection of the period is the "correct" one.

Looked at in greater detail, one begins to see why. To begin with, Eric, his mother, and his father are deeply imbedded in a world of brand names and mass-produced culture. As Wallace points out, their very names, "Eric", "Erica", and "Rick" have the ring of the mass-produced brand name.[37] Rick is not simply polishing the car, he is "simonizing their two-tone Ford Fairlane convertible" (515). Erica, whose point of view is described most for the reader, is practically obsessed with her brand-names and the names for new products. The scene begins with her meditations on the proper way to mould Jell-O. She cools it, not in her refrigerator, but in the Kelvinator (514). On p. 516, she dwells on the term "crisper" and the proper use of a crisper, its proper name, and the pleasure it gives her to say, "The carrots are in the crisper, Rick." (516). Crisper becomes one of a whole list of terms Erica enjoys using, not because they are precise but because they express "all the things around her" (520). These terms include "breezeway", "car pools", "bridge parties", and "stacking chairs", brand names themselves as a metonymical expression of middle-class kitsch. Even the sexual fantasies of Eric are expressions of this kind of materialist culture. He secretly masturbates in his room to a picture of Jayne Mansfield, a friend of Klara's, describes earlier in the novel as "fake Marilyn ... a packaged look" (474). Particularly obsessed with Mansfield's large breasts, they reminded him distinctly of the "bumper bullets on a Cadillac". (517).

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[36] That is with reference to the advance publication of this section under the title "Sputnik" in the *New Yorker*. Molly Wallace, "'Venerated Emblems': DeLillo's *Underworld* and the History-Commodity", *Critique* 42.4 (2001): 369.

[37] Wallace 372.

The connection of Cadillac bumper bullets to Eric's erotic world represents a sinister side to the otherwise humorous shallow world of the Demings. The weapon and bomb association of the bumper bullets recalls Matt's observation "All technology refers to the bomb" (467). Eric likes to masturbate into a condom "because it had a sleek metallic shimmer, like his favorite weapons system, the Honest John." (514). Coupling Eric's erotic fantasies with weaponry in this scene of consumer products closely associates these two kinds of technological production, the one portrayed as the alter-ego of the other. DeLillo offers glimpses at this underworld of the Demings, interjecting phrases such as "Avoid contact with eyes, open cuts or running sores." (514). These generic product warnings are as familiar as the brand name objects the Demings use. Their regular appearance functions as an unpleasantly familiar warning of the society as mass product in which this family lives. "If swallowed, induce vomiting at once" (515) stands in for a repressed fear of the horrors these mass products and the culture they inform bring with them. Even as consumerism represses alternatives to the world in which the Demings live, it represses its very deadly potential.

The greatest expression of this potential is the notion of this as the "Sputnik section". Historically, the Sputnik satellite was successfully launched four days earlier, and the chapter concludes with Rick and Eric driving out at night to see "the baby moon" (518). Because of the satellite, Erica's day "had felt shadowed and ominous from the time she opened her eyes and stared at the mikado yellow walls with patina green fleecing." (518). She wonders, "Were there other surprises coming, things we haven't been told about [the Russians]? Did they have crispers and breezeways?" (518-9). Wallace and others speak of a consumerist fetish which masks the realities of the world conflict in which they live. However, this masking acts as a double-masking. By repressing "Sputnik" as the embodiment of all to fear in a modern, industrialized world, the consumerist world reinscribes the prominence of that satellite as that great fear and in effect suppresses alternatives to it. When Eric recollects that back then "Everybody dressed and spoke the same way", he is mis-inclusive. Everybody did not, but the pull of the objects of his world with their simultaneous sense of extreme security and extreme peril have given him this impression. They have insinuated a narrative of "back then" that as a result has to this day largely been accepted as normative, as "fifties".

The concluding section of that chapter sheds more light on the creation of symbolic consumerist value and its interweaving with annihilative technology and the

Cold War. "December 19, 1961" takes place in the New York office of Charles Wainwright, an advertising executive. On one level, this section picks up the narrative of the ball which he owns and wants to give to his estranged son in a somewhat desperate gesture to reestablish a bond with him. At another level, it serves to close out the chapter which began under the sign of constructed consumerist value and the narrative of conformity attached to it.

Here we see men at work creating and manipulating the consumerist tropes that structure the Deming world. They work in a setting of general moral ambivalence, where the men of the company prey sexually on the women and Wainwright drinks his way through the day. How that interacts with their work is signaled when Wainwright quotes a Lenny Bruce LP (528). More important than the joke is the fact that he can so readily quote such a source. He is familiar with the world Bruce exposes in his comedy, and he is regularly regaled with similarly rude jokes from other men. This may stem from DeLillo's own experience at his first job as an advertising copywriter with coworkers "like a combination of Jerry Lewis, Lenny Bruce, and Noel Coward".[38] Awash as it is in such irreverence, the ad agency in the novel is very much at work repressing it in the sphere of mass media.

Wainwright dwells on one campaign for a lawn fertilizer that he stopped because of its possible offense. "Bomb your lawn with Nitrotex" (528) would have taken as its speaker George Metesky, the historical figure known as the Mad Bomber who once planted bombs at various New York landmarks. Wainwright finds it indicative, "Every third campaign featured some kind of play on weapons." (529). He, himself, once devised such a campaign which nearly killed the agency. He devised a concept for an oil company of a race between two cars in which one is fueled by the client's product. The staged race took place in the Jornada del Muerto, site of the first atomic test shot, and the winner was the one which first arrived at the exact spot where the bomb went off. He imagined, "White car versus black car. Clear implication. U.S. versus U.S.S.R. ... A voice-over done by a pompous announcer with a cold war tone." (529-30).

His error, however, in constructing this drama based on the Cold War narrative lies on his assumption of its "clear implication", much like Eric's assumptions of everyone. The complaints Wainwright anticipates from the Soviet embassy do not come. Instead, they hear from the NAACP, the Urban League, and the Congress of Racial

Equality because a white car beat a black car. Wainright muses, "Lesson. Don't mix your metaphors." (530). The problem, however, is not a simple mixing of metaphors but rather forgetting that they are already mixed, or rather unclear. Young writes, "[M]any others are also oppressed: particularly women, black people, and all the other so-called ethnic and minority groups. Any single individual may belong to several of these, but the forms of oppression, as of resistance or change, may not only overlap but may also differ or even conflict."[39] It is this feature which constantly subverts the notion of totalizing conflicts, especially the Hegelian slave/master model with which Young grapples. This makes not only forms of totalizing resistance conflict. It also more or less impossible for an advertiser to retain total control over their creations and prevent metaphors from being mixed, particularly when they are intended to be as overwhelmingly bipolar as white and black. At the same time, the scene represents an intention by such an agency to do just this, to retain control of the language of advertising and, in this case, maintain the Cold War East-West conflict as the focus for consumers.

These two sections together form an interesting interchange at this level of consumerist desire. Their ability to suppress other contesting narratives is present in the denial of the sameness "everyone", and more strongly present in the problem with Wainwright's campaign. This repressive power is illustrated by the positioning of these sections on before and after a third section of protest, surrounding it to defuse its imaginative pull. The third, in-between, section offers a glimpse at lost narratives this world of consumerism would repress. Set on August 14, 1964, it describes a demonstration against bus segregation at a station in Jackson, Mississippi. Full of pathos and violence, the scene is constantly accompanied by the words of a speaker exhorting the protestors to not give up, to fight for the existence of their cause: "It's all a question of mind over matter. They don't mind and we don't matter." (525). He remonstrates against the strategy of running (521) or developing a will to die (522). The key is his constant repetition of "What I'm saying", the claim of a right to speak and be heard. Meanwhile, local whites sit on their porches, watching the events like spectators. At the same time, the demonstrators are attacked by policemen with truncheons and tear gas, and the scene culminates in the violent suppression of the protest.

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[38] David Remnick, "Exile on Main Street: Don DeLillo's undisclosed underworld", *The New Yorker* 15 Sept. 1997: 46.
[39] Young, *White Mythologies* 5.

All of Part 5 is composed of such repressive triptych chapters, two ends with related content which end up sandwiching and obscuring their in-between. In this case, as in the others, the in-between struggles for a right to exist only to be beaten down at the end. At the same time, this section represents one of the movements that was to lead to the great internal conflicts of the country, precisely for having been violently elided for so long. This is then linked to the whole of the Underworld of repressed narratives and conflicts. It is a particularly powerful example such a repression, and through the presence of Rosie Martin, sister of Cotter Martin it is linked to the great arc of the missing narrative of the ball.

Rosie's makes the only appearance of someone linked to Cotter outside the prologue and the sections with his father Manx. Thus, it is a significant reappearance at a moment when the novel's consumerism is on the verge of submerging the story of her and her family. It connects at the many levels of the hidden history of the ball in the novel. As already mentioned above, these sections involving the theft of the ball by Manx and his sale of it to Charles Wainwright, appear between larger movements of the novel. More specifically, the three sections come between intervals of two each of the major parts. Thus, they, too, appear as the center parts of repressive triptychs which take the larger parts of the novel as their ends.

What makes these "Manx" sections particularly interesting for a discussion of the construction of white masculinity is their involvement of black people. Glaringly present in this notion of repressed history is the blackness that surrounds these sections, visually, jarringly announced by their separation from the rest of the novel by entirely black pages. The large, "non-Manx" parts, on the other hand, are separated by dividing pages, only the bottom third of which is black, signaling only a partial repression of the narratives in these parts. The entirely black pages not only signal the hidden nature of the ball's story but also link it tightly to the blackness of the people who control it during this part. One could invert the view of the black pages and refer to the rest of the novel as the hidden part, but the slim size of these sections of the history of the ball resists this inversion. This representing another act of textual force, tending to envelop the secret narrative in blackness by the sheer size of the rest.

That effect is reinforced by a final observation of the book as a physical object in which the black and partially black pages become visible at the edge of the book even when it is closed. The result of the three sections shrouded in black and the other parts

divided by less black when one looks at the book on the side is a gigantic Universal Pricing Code (UPC) symbol, the product code of black lines. It is not a coincidence. DeLillo signals an important association with the UPC and with the underworld of hell just a few pages before the first such interlude. Nick and his wife Marian are reading in bed, and Marian discovers an article predicting the apocalypse with reference to the UPC symbol as satanic. She says "The mark of the beast. Did you see that? It's on the universal product code. Every product." Nick responds, "That's right. Every box of Jell-O they put through the scanner." (127).

Since their inception, these product codes have been the subject of suspicion by conspiracy theorists and the otherwise hysterical who point to the three pairs of long thin lines in every UPC symbol as the mark of the beast, believing that each pair of thin lines stands for "6", giving together "666".[40] Erroneous as the belief may be, the hidden history of the ball is placed between just these lines, in the feared space of secret evil within a common product bar code. DeLillo discusses his network of conceptual association in his interview with Jonathan Bing. He explains that in his work on the novel, he recalled that Pluto is not only the god of the dead and the underworld but the namesake of plutonium, and Bing adds that Pluto is also the god of money.[41] These connections become tightly bound through the author's art of physically relegating the hidden to the black and to thin in-between spaces of a product code associated with the devil, the dead, and the underworld. Lesson: Metaphors mix themselves.

Against this conceptual background, the novel takes on a deeper dimension of supporting the themes that Cotter and then Manx confront in these three parts. The two seeping events of the baseball game and the Soviet bomb interact much as the consumer fetishism and war motifs in the Sputnik and the Wainwright chapters do. Their fascination effectively obscures numerous other narratives. Even as Cotter comes home at the beginning of the first Manx interlude, the discussion at the table is about the bomb

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[40] In addition to the article Marian quotes, any number of web sites also distribute this knowledge. In 2001, the Russian Orthodox Church even had to officially dispel this belief among worshippers who feared the presence of Satan in their new tax return bar codes. See Andrei Zolotov, "Russian Church Reassures Members Who Fear Codes Signify 'The Beast'", *Christianity Today* 9 March 2001, 3 March 2004 <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2001/110/55.0.html>. This belief is based on two errors. First, these three groups of thin lines simply denote divisions in the UPC field, framing the symbol effectively in two halves. Second, two thin lines do denote a "6" in the regular code but only on the right half, whereas on the left it is denoted by a small space, one thin line, a small gap, and one thick line. This information comes from Russ Adams, "Bar Code 1", Adams Communications n. D., 3 March 2004 <http://www.adams1.com/pub/russadam/upccode.html>.

[41] Bing, Jonathan. "The Ascendance of Don DeLillo". *Publisher's Weekly* 11 Aug. 1997. 17 March 2003 <http://www.publishersweekly.com/article/CA164963.html?text=delillo>.

test and the preacher on the street announcing the approach of Armageddon. Cotter then proceeds to do his history work and dwells on the past when "They made history by the minute in those days. Every sentence there's another war or tremendous downfall." (141). What he does not realize is both the condensation of the historical period he is studying and the way in which it has been condensed into a specific narrative of civilization. Unconsciously, it does work into his perception, however, as expressed in thoughts such as, "The downfall of empire and the emergence of detergents" and "War and treaties, eat your Wheaties". (141). History has become a mass commodity in the novel long before the Deming family is shown clinging to mass commodities as a form of securing their narrative of themselves.

Nevertheless, Cotter still believes in what he is studying, whereas Manx, his father, has no such illusions. He has constructed a world for himself in which only commerce rules. He does not see the ball in his son's passionate way as the memento of a great game but as something to sell, and so he steals it and runs off into the night. The hidden history sections follow him. At first, he passes the preacher who is still preaching of the coming atomic war and that "only the insects will survive." (352). The preacher also claims that the bomb shelters being built are intended only for white people (353), a paranoid version of Lenny Bruce's theory of the white bomb. This scene evokes even more paranoia when the preacher proceeds to expound upon the secret codes in a one-dollar bill, particularly the pyramid which is often used as a Masonic sign. This he considers evidence of a great white conspiracy.

Manx, however, is only partially interested in the exhortations of the preacher. At a bar later, he makes it clear that he follows neither baseball nor the big political events, even though two of his sons are fighting in Korea. His disaffection does not stem from ignorance or his career as a petty thief. Instead, its source is hinted at by his sudden recollection, "What was that riot in forty-three?" (356). He asks this to his friend Antoine who answers that at that time was in the army where "We had our own riot," meaning World War II. It is only a brief mention of a major riot, the Harlem riot of August 1-2, 1943, part of a whole summer of riots that year resulting from minority tension. The riots began with the Zoot Suit Riot of early June between whites and Chicanos in Los Angeles and peaked, in terms of deaths and arrests, in the Detroit riot at the end of June between black and white workers. The public reception of the riots was strongly informed by the patriotism of the war effort intertwined with large doses of racism. As a result, the

minorities involved were routinely accused of being anti-American or infiltrated by anti-American elements.[42]

Treated as anti-American in 1943, by 1951 in the novel, these riots, in which a few people died, thousands were injured and arrested, and millions of dollars worth of property were destroyed,[43] have been all but forgotten, repressed by the narrative of the great war. Only Manx bears some memory of the time, and he occupies the abject role of a petty thief. Abject as he is, he is aware of that position and uses it to his advantage when selling the ball to Wainwright. He decides on selling the ball to a white man waiting to buy tickets for the first World Series game the next day because he would be more likely to believe him whereas black men would see him as a hustler. He strategically approaches a white man with a son, the notion being that a man will more likely buy the ball to impress his boy. Thus, Manx employs a discreet knowledge of whites and men in order to make himself more believable and give the ball a greater authenticity. That is exactly why Wainright buys the ball and is later so disappointed that his son Chuckie never shares his worship of the game and its traditions.

The ball, meanwhile, appreciates in value until it is sold to Nick for a thousand times what Manx sold it for. It has become a greatly desired piece of memorabilia, much more so than any other baseball, the ultimate souvenir. It is the one essential object from the lost history, from the place between the lines of the Underworld as the object of their suppression. Thus, it is naturally attractive to the waste manager Nick, whose white masculinity is deconstructed through the course of the novel. It is Big Sims, his black colleague at the waste management company, who represents the unease of the connection of race and the ball for Nick. He makes a sinister accusation of race associated with the ball, an accusation largely borne out through the course of the hidden history. The man who "lost" the homerun, pitcher Ralph Branca, only became famous because he was white. "Because the whole thing is white. Because you can survive and endure and prosper if they let you. But you have to be white before they let you." (98). He then compares Branca to a black pitcher, Donnie Moore, who also lost a home run in a crucial game and ended up committing suicide. Later in the novel, Sims brings in another note of paranoia about the hiding of blacks. He suggests that there may be more

[42] An excellent recent account of the riot and its multiple contexts can be found in Nat Brandt, *Harlem at War: The Black Experience in WWII* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 1996).

black people in America than the census claims, "We don't know. Because the number is too dangerous." (336).

Nick disagrees. In the case of Moore, he says, no one can remember Moore's pitch, and therefore it cannot have been as important. In the case of the census, he refutes, "We don't believe there are secret forces undermining our lives." (335). He reflects early on, "I'd known Sims and Glassic a long time and Glassic ... was the guy I talked to when I talked about something. I talked to Big Sims but maybe I talked to Glassic more readily because he did not challenge me with his own experience, he did not narrow his eyes as Sims did and fix me in his gaze." (95). What Nick regards as paranoia in Sims makes more sense with regard to Manx's recollection of the forgotten Harlem riots, a challenging experience that disrupts Nick's self-narration. The number of African Americans may or may not be incorrect, but it is known that the riots of 1943 are practically forgotten.

The black representation of interruption is expressed at the very beginning with the game Cotter attends. The game is cast as a great unifier, something which transcends racial boundaries, uniting men and boys through "the genderness of what they share" (19). Cotter's ease with the white man Bill Waterson would seem to confirm this. As the great home run is hit, and all in the crowd, indeed throughout the whole country, seem united in the moment, Cotter ends up struggling with this same Bill Waterson over the ownership of the ball. Duvall points out how the struggle immediately takes on racial tones,[44] with Waterson assuming his right to own the ball. He pursues Cotter and attempts to coerce him into giving up the ball with a combination of promises and threats. Cotter is only safe from his pursuer when he enters Harlem, and Bill suddenly feels outnumbered. (57). Cotter's victory, however, is quickly reversed, when his father sells the ball to a white man. The white man can take control of the ball through the power of his money and by the fact that he is, in fact, white, a commodity which gives him a certain value as a potential customer for the ball's sale. Nick is really only following in the footsteps of Charles Wainwright, Sr. He is a white man with the control of the means of the construction of his white masculinity, as a waste manager in charge of burying all which is not easily commodified and retaining the valuable remainder.

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[43] Brandt quotes a *New York Times* article from the time which reports a city representative's statement that the Harlem riots ended with six people killed, seven hundred injured and six hundred arrested. Property damages reached $5 million (Brandt 207).

[44] Duvall 1995 and 2002.

What emerges through *Underworld* is an imaginative set of associations. Their architecture does not so much explain the language of identity and its discursive time as offer a space for revealing significatory power and its correspondence to other forms of power. The potential for permanent reconstruction within this network of associations demonstrates how they can interact to produce the hierarchies within it. Like past novels of DeLillo's, *Underworld* is the subject of numerous essays that consistently take the line of reading it in postmodern terms of a critique of the cultural logic of late capitalism, simulacra, and everything woefully dispiriting that has to do with its mass culture. Duvall, while still discussing that view, is one of the few to look at this novel more broadly. That makes sense, for *Underworld* is far too complex a book to be "explained" in such a simple fashion.

As the discussion above about commodification demonstrates, there are moments in which the novel lends itself, as Duvall suggests, to Benjamin's critique about the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction. Amid the decay of "aura" through mass-production, Nick's great efforts to recover the ball can be seen as an attempt to reduce the spatiality between his fiction and the moment the ball represents.[45] The title of the epilogue, "Das Kapital", of course, suggests this as well, as does its opening sentiment, "Capital burns off the nuance in a culture" (785). However, there is a mass of material which contradicts the privileging and the centralization of this discussion and of its all-encompassing claim. The novel provides alternatives like the various forms of art and, most of all, the recovery of the characters in the story from the powers that informed that story, not mass-produced identities, but individual people.

At the same time, the section above, which treats the emergence of "I, Nick", demonstrates how difficult that recovery is. Because of the novel's narrative forces and the force of it's network of associations, the fullest "individual" recovered is Nick Shay, the white man whose occupation is the management of waste. DeLillo presents a reverse narrative that ends with a great conflict around the privileging of this white man's subject-hood while leaving him at a normative center of American identity as its contested embodiment. The difference between the white men like Sinatra or Gleason at the novel's beginning and that white man Nick Shay of the epilogue would lie in the deconstructive act. His white masculinity is disrupted as an *a priori* category.

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[45] Walter Benjamin, *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* (1936; Frankfurt a.M.: Suhrkamp, 1977).

The archeology of his fiction is then strongly imbedded in recent conflicts over power, wealth, and representation as well as in various forms of theorizing the construction of knowledge. This archeology is exemplified in an art that is not simply play, just as the baseball game is not merely a game with no meaning beyond its frame. Instead, like the association of fans with their team, this art takes on the materiality of a matter of life and death. Similarly, Hoover can be portrayed as an "artist", but he also possesses the power of the state and thus can enforce his "art" with the creation and destruction of careers, lives, and national movements. This gives his creations a powerful materiality, a reality that disguises the fictional nature of its construction. That becomes the master narrative of the era's history. The objects that history leaves in its wake, whether waste or white masculinity, become its legacy.

3. Insider art: Borders in *Mason & Dixon* / *The Tortilla Curtain*

> I forced the last stone into its position; I plastered it up. Against the new masonry I re-erected the old rampart of bones. For half a century no mortal has disturbed them. *In pace requiescat!*
>
> - Edgar Allan Poe, "The Cask of Amontillado"[1]

3.1. Internal separation and external wholeness

Borders are inherited from history, exuding a continuity of both wholeness and division. The contemporary opening of historical narrative to multiple perspectives and its literary treatment in historiographic metafiction have promoted borders as a key signifier. They represent a space of supposed closure now opened for the examination of competing incommensurate narratives and potential narratives of national identity. By the same token, in the spirit of this study, they also represent the difficulties of such an opening. What gives them such a strong valence, especially in their own critical treatment? Considering their role in determining national identity, geographic borders in the United States are therefore an essential part of the construction of the American white male as an identity category. The two works which are highlighted in this chapter, Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* (1997) and T. Coraghessan Boyle's *The Tortilla Curtain* (1998), examine in depth the way in which both the institution and contestation of national borders de-/recenter white masculinity as the subject of that nation.

Just as minority voices subverted the certainty and validity of American master narratives such as the Cold War, it has also been they, especially Chicana/os, who have drawn the most attention to the border trope. That people of Mexican origin should so strongly inform the thinking of borders in the United States seems to make sense, coming from regions, Mexico and the southwest of the United States, so strongly affected by borders. That being the case, one must ask why "border literature" does not come as heavily from that other neighboring country with a far longer border: Canada. The answer must lie in the self-perception of the United States and Canada as, roughly, "the same" ethnically and economically, whereas Mexico is cast as different, or, to use the language of immigration, "alien".

Chicana/o literature largely confirms this, employing difference at the same time as a means with which to critique the American self-perception of identity as essentially

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[1] Edgar Allan Poe, "The Cask of Amontillado", 1846, *The Tell-Tale Heart and Other Writitngs by Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Bantam, 1982): 24.

based on an axis of white masculinity. One of the earliest such works, Ernesto Galarza's *Barrio Boy*, for example, portrays the author as an immigrant Mexican boy on the peripheries of the modern United States. He uses this perspective to dissect that nation and its cultural characteristics in a process of acculturation and growing awareness of belonging to an ethnicity marginalized in that country as low-wage workers.[2] In opposition to Galarza's narrative of developing a sense of wholeness after a trauma of separation from origins stands the widely celebrated work of Gloria Anzaldúa. Her *Borderlands/*La Frontera portrays a Chicana self profoundly divided along numerous borders including nationality, language, gender, and sexuality, irreconcilable yet constantly shifting within her to generate new meaning.[3]

Different as they are from each other, both works represent, among other things, calls from the national peripheries, from people incorporated within the society as its outsiders. They call to its insiders to question the validity of the structures that define social inclusion and to destabilize the authority of the predominantly white males who maintain them and profit from them. They also highlight the conflict at the borders of white male identity as one of its defining features. It comes as no surprise that contemporary white male writers like those in this chapter who address borders do not demonstrate newfound boldness in inhabiting borderlands like the Chicana/o writers. Instead they express a deep-seated unease toward these borders as they unpack them, exposing the historical, social, and mythological uncertainty of the nation its borders delineate. This in turn exposes the contingency, the conflicts, and stakes of these conflicts that these borders were supposed to seal up.

Borders delineate difference, defining where things end and begin, joining the disparate within systems of order, thus simultaneously creating division and wholeness. Though Foucault's *Order of Things* explains that Western worldviews have developed a greater complexity since the Enlightenment, the era still profoundly informs thinking, and especially its grids remain a legacy. The grid remains a legacy both in its positivist promise of conceiving difference as fundamentally definable, and in actual grids, from the periodic table of elements to the world political map of nation states with thick outer borders and thin inner ones for provinces, *departements*, *Länder* or states, the more historically recent the straighter.

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[2] Ernesto Galarza, *Barrio Boy. The Story of a Boy's Acculturation* (Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 1971).
[3] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands /* La Frontera*: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute, 1987).

In the case of nation states, borders play a crucial role in defining where the foreign begins and therefore in containing forms of the Other within a collective Self. This kind of exclusive inclusion reconciles difference by ordering apparently incompatible systems in one entirely compatible system, i.e. "agreed-upon" yet arbitrary borders recognized by both sides by treaty, usually forced on one side or on both sides from an outside party. In this way, borders define the Self, but also contain not just the Other within the Self, but different Others and shades of Otherness by creating spaces for them. It becomes an elaborate form of Poe's Montresor containing Fortunado within his house as a way of containing the insult he perceives from Fortunado, avenging the insult of the Other by internalizing it forever. For all the dark nooks in his cellar one may wonder how many other insults might thus be contained.

The delineation of difference into an ordered system takes place for national or collective borders at a profound level. Agamben speaks in his *Homo Sacer* of the walls of the *polis* separating ordered *bios* life from "naked" *zoös*, life that is unordered and thus subject to ordering. This concept, still inherent in modern thinking of borders, places a collective Self and its members in the role of the order giver, and the Other, Oth*ers* actually, stripped of order, in that of chaos and uncertainty. To define and express this order, a society wrapped in a border develops a language which cloaks the society and its limits in a system of signs that appears to exude this order, a system best described by Lotman as a "semiosphere".[4] More than just encoding borders and other social institutions in words, a semiosphere narrativizes them by providing a language for telling their story and justifying their existence. It turns the contingent efficacious.

The border itself is an arbitrary act, with no other reason and justification than the specific situation, the context of power and embattled forces, in which it arose. However, the need for the border to give order leads to a need to explain the border as part of this order, an order finite and eternal, rather than as a chaotic instance. Thus, a border is actually not one thing but two. It is the violent, arbitrary act, the sealing off of supposed disorder by force, and it is the act's symbolic covering in a narrative text. The text creates a layer of taboo which forbids that the border be removed, transgressed, or even questioned. The border is both Montresor's new masonry, the violent act of sealing in the bound Fortunado, and the old bones of Montresor's ancestors which ensure that no mortal disturbs them.

Both external and internal borders provide a society with a sense of ordered wholeness because although they divide, their symbolic "old bones" layer exudes a sense of a single system of signs that provides a narrative to explain them and their immutability. The symbolic layer gives the impression of encompassing both sides of difference, of taking into account the disputes of competing systems of order. Yet in echoing the arbitrary act, that layer itself represents an act of force, imposing its ordering of systems of signification. The symbolic layer does not provide a resolution which would dissolve division. Instead, it perpetuates the perception of conflicts from which the border arose, establishing their existence as essential core conflicts, textualizing and at the same time limiting those conflicts within a specific semiosphere which would explain and justify the border. This in turn increases the materiality and efficacy of the border.

Such a process constantly recalls and reinscribes difference and therefore Self, demanding further acts of defining and isolating the Other and thus the Self based on this difference: old bones demanding the enactment of new masonry which must be re-covered by old bones. As already described in chapter 2, Bhabha's two times of nationhood, the past pedagogic and the present performative,[5] each informing the other, reflect this same dialectic process with respect to a nation's relationship to its history. Reading borders with the same language as the product of such a national temporal dialectic, the symbolic "old bones" as taboo represent exactly that pedagogic past element that leads to performative acts of creating, reinforcing, and modifying the new masonry etc., to create a sense of ordered national wholeness.

It is only a sense of wholeness. The conflicts a border seeks to settle remain, if nothing else, as the memory of the conflict the border represents. A critical literary treatment of borders like Anzaldúa's or Galarza's seeks to peel away symbolic narrative layers to expose arbitrary acts of border construction and the forces behind it. Of course, that means moving the bones, breaking national taboos, unsettling a nation's foundational signs, if not its ideals. They do not attack lofty founding ideals in the United States such as liberty and equality but rather deconstruct their manipulation as signifiers, terms that justified wars and legislation which instituted and fortified borders, cloaking their truncation of liberties through the designation of groups of people within the nation as different and thus unequal. It is therefore not coincidental, but indeed inconceivable

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[4] Yuri Lotman, "Semiotic Space", Lotman, *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, trans. Ann Shukman (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990): 123-170.

[5] For more, refer back to the end of chapter 2, section 2.1. of this study, "Creating now through then".

otherwise, that the two borders most essential to the national narrative(s) of the United States and most widely treated by theorists and writers complexly intertwine discourses about those very founding ideals and concepts of citizenship. The U.S.-Mexican border and the Mason-Dixon Line weave through nearly every aspect of national debate, whether regional separation, ethnic and racial identity, equitable civil and human rights, or access to power and privilege. They not only strongly inform these contemporary debates but also the national historical narrative of westward expansion. Their histories also intersect, each having reinforced the symbolic importance of the other in the mid-19th century.

The term "Manifest Destiny", which neatly encompasses Bhabha's performative national time informed by a pedagogic past to justify the expansion of the United States in North America, made its first documented appearance in 1845 in a plea to annex Texas as American *Lebensraum* "for the free development of our yearly multiplying millions".[6] This the United States did that year, provoking the war with Mexico in 1846 – the same year, incidentally, in which "Cask of Amontillado" first appeared. This ended a long period of territorial conflict between Mexico and squatting settlers from the United States in its territory, the "multiplying millions" that Mexico considered a mob threatening its territorial integrity and resources. The frontiersman Kit Carson, for example, tells in his autobiography of repeated subterfuges he used to get around suspicious Mexican authorities. In one instance his party traveled far north of Taos, New Mexico, before traveling west to the beaver grounds to avoid Mexican bans on American trapping,[7] and another time he was denied admission to Los Angeles because the governor was trying to limit American activity.[8] More to the point, and amusing in light of today's anti-immigrant efforts against Mexicans in the United States, is a statement in 1846 by the Mexican governor of California: "We find ourselves threatened by hordes of

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[6] Carruth 131.

[7] Ed. and intro. Milo Milton Quaife, *Kit Carson's Autobiography*. (1935; Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1966): 9.

[8] *Carson* 17-18. Carson's autobiography, like Pierre Menard's *Quixote*, is actually another work of multiple authors and questionable authority. Illiterate, Carson had his narrative transcribed by a friend, Jesse B. Turley who also translated Carson's frontier patois into presentable English. This version was again reworked by editor Milo Milton Quaife for the 1935 edition who "has deemed it undesirable to reproduce the precise locutions of his aid and interpreter; and wholly logical to complete the process, begun by the latter, of transmuting the ideas expressed by Carson into simple, grammatical English" (p. xxvii in "Historical Introduction"). Like Don Quixote, Carson was partly motivated to provide his own account to protect his "true" story against the many popular stories about him already circulating in his lifetime. In his narrative, he even discovers a book with fictitious exploits of his in the remains at a site

Yankee immigrants who have already begun to flock into our country, and whose progress we cannot arrest."[9]

The war ended happily for the United States in 1848. It got Mexico's northern provinces – later divided up into territories by Enlightenment-style straight lines – in the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo, signed by a provisional Mexican government to replace the government smashed by the United States. It established the basis for the border between the two countries today, largely disenfranchising those Mexicans who remained, turning the "hordes of Yankee immigrants" into "citizens", and the people south of the new border in what was left of Mexico into "alien" hordes, the included Others who represented chaos and disorder in American discourse.

The settler conflict only partially informed the war with Mexico. Several representatives of slave states also voiced their favor for the war because they eyed the west, most of it south of the Mason-Dixon parallel, as a space for extending slavery and tipping legislative majorities in their favor or at least into "balance" against the free states.[10] The Compromise of 1850, which fixed a new border for slavery and provided for the Fugitive Slave Law, was a direct result of that war when the new territories won from it provoked the question of how to treat slavery there.

When Southern opinion leaders invoked the Mason-Dixon Line, they were invoking a fiction about a fiction. It recalled an artificial straight line drawn before the country was founded that, though it divided the free colony Pennsylvania from the slave colony Maryland, was merely intended to solve the territorial dispute of those two colonies and had nothing to do with establishing a hard and fast rule for dividing free and slave states. The line itself remained insignificant after its creation until it was reinvented as a cause in a debate in the early 1820s with regard to the recently purchased Louisiana Territory, a debate similar to that of the 1840s over Texas and the other former Mexican lands. That debate ended in the Missouri Compromise which first turned the "Mason-

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where settlers were massacred and listens stonily to a companion read it (p. 135). Carson, incidentally, was later the neighbor of the grandson of a Pierre Menard from Illinois (footnote, p. 130).

[9] Quoted in Thompson and West, *Historical Atlas Map of Santa Clara County, California* (1876, San Jose, CA: Smith & McKay Printing Co., 1973): 10 ½.

[10] Of some debate is whether this formed the motivation of the South as a bloc for the war and whether this was the main reason the United States moved to annex Texas. David Pletcher already rules the debate dead in his somewhat older history, *The Diplomacy of Annexation: Texas, Oregon, and the Mexican War* (Columbia, MO: U of Missouri P, 1976) and explains this conspiracy-type thesis was no longer widely accepted by then (p. 606). What can be said without qualification is that slavery questions informed practically every public debate in the United States before the Civil War, particularly those regarding new territories.

Dixon line" as a name for the factual historical geographic marking into a figurative name for the border between slave and free states, which was henceforth the southern border of Missouri.

Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*, rivaling *Underworld* in length and complexity,[11] peels back the eponymous border in a postmodern historical novel about its creation. Not only does the novel demonstrate the border's artificiality in a critique of Enlightenment as many critics have pointed out, but it also exposes forces, real and imaginative, subsumed in its construction. At the core of his book, it provides a narrative of how the line's creation also meant the creation of national, white, and male identity. Even as he does this, Pynchon, as is typical for him, attempts to point to perhaps secret undercurrents of power struggle that necessitate and contest the line and the identities of the people: Mason, Dixon, and the many other historical and fictional characters involved in this act of creative hegemony.

Boyle's *Tortilla Curtain*, a somewhat briefer social satire, shows the Mexican-Anglo division not as merely external in the form of the Guadalupe-Hidalgo border but also as internal. It is the division of social inclusion and exclusion, transferred to the edges of an exclusive housing community in the Los Angeles area. Within the confines of the community, the book's white male protagonist is free to be liberal and nature-loving, but its borders stop the encroachment by migrant Mexicans who come in search of work and are perceived as a potential criminal threat.

3.2. Mason and Dixon: white men on the line

Readers of Pynchon know the characteristic insecurity his novels radiate after he peels away layers of signification and perceived meaning and explores the possibility of secret forces at work beneath. *Mason & Dixon* bears this in common with the rest of his novels. It contains a wealth of historical detail which betrays extensive research into the novel's subjects. This detail verges at times on the obscure and barely known, constantly begging the question of how much of the novel is "real" and how much a part of the novel's fiction, in fact dissolving that distinction to make the real simply that- part of the fiction. This is also reflected in Pynchon's characteristic wordplay which figures the novel's objects as they exist within a linguistic code such that his very protagonists are clearly

[11] Douglas Keesey notes that length and complexity are the first features most reviewers of *Mason & Dixon* have commented upon. Apologies are made that this discussion is no different. In Keesey, Douglas. "*Mason & Dixon* on the Line: A Reception Study". *Pynchon Notes*. 1995-1996; 36-39. 166.

cast as discursive elements rather than individuals. The result is a Poe-like unease as Pynchon's play interacts with the fear of sinister conspiratorial forces which may lurk behind the discourses that are the objects of his play.

At the level of plot *Mason & Dixon* follows the astronomer/surveyor team Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon in the mid-1760s. They go about settling the land dispute between the colonies Pennsylvania and Maryland by literally carving into the land the line that bears the men's names. The narrative of the line is sandwiched in "America", the middle third of the book between an extended prologue "Latitudes and Departures", where the men meet to monitor a transit of Venus, and the epilogue "Last Transit", after U.S. independence when the men part for the last time. Indeed, at one point, the innkeeper Mr. Knockwood refers to their time in America as a sandwich between transits of Venus (366).

Already this choice of novel structure points to larger questions about the position of the border narrative. Pynchon makes a statement about the border by privileging it with this centrality. Instead of a thin, limiting, permanent line crushed between two great things, the border becomes a broad, open in-between space under construction in the book, one of seemingly unlimited possibilities. It delineates between a past of the positivist era of British scientific progress and an uncertain future of the young republic United States and a Britain halted in its expansion. The creation of the line, then, becomes the historical novel's "war", its conflict, that historical conflagration so central to an historical novel that leaves the resulting world forever different from the one before. However, to understand what parties were in conflict and what was at stake, the border itself, the Mason-Dixon Line, and its double nature of violent act and symbolic layer, must be understood in several discursive contexts about borders that constantly inform each other. It functions simultaneously in the context of an Enlightenment legacy, a contact zone, and a temporal conjunction for the future of the yet-to-be-born United States of America.

From the outset, the novel represents the border, the Line, as an Enlightenment Age product straight line which subordinates all other modes of order. The project of cutting an actual straight line in the landscape to physically represent an imagined division established in England, though represented as rational, appears increasingly pointless, if not indeed hysterical. By virtue of its straightness, its apparent scientific and thus objective rationale, the line is employed by the British crown to claim resolution to a

land claim dispute and thus reclaim unity where there used to be conflict. The very fact of its straightness also acts as a form of authority, scientific authority made synonymous with royal authority (the men were commissioned by representatives of the king). It is an authority both to settle the territorial dispute and to justify England's colonial project as a "civilizing" power in the North American wilderness.

The Reverend Wicks Cherrycoke, the novel's problematic narrator (see below) sums up, at the beginning of his story:

> ... what we were doing out in that Country together was brave, scientifick beyond my understanding, and ultimately meaningless,- we were putting a line straight through the heart of the Wilderness, eight yards wide and due west, in order to separate two Proprietorships, granted when the World was yet feudal and but eight years later to be nullified by the War for Independence. (8).[12]

And yet the work was not entirely nullified, as the line still exists. It exists to this day as the geographic fact of the border between Pennsylvania and Maryland and reborn figuratively as that "Mason-Dixon Line" which divides north from south. All that was nullified was its original purpose of settling the "feudal" land claim, not its use in claiming hegemonic authority. The reader knows that this line later came to symbolize the division between free and slave states, between claims of northern and southern culture and between differing concepts of humanity. The Mason-Dixon Line then both divided the country along these lines and unified it in the belief that this division was acceptable and maintainable.

Of the scant scholarship done on this novel up to now, most of it focuses on its Enlightenment critique. David Cowart, for example, writes, "[T]he Mason-Dixon Line becomes a powerful symbol of rationalism's putting its mark on a land once consecrated to multiple perspectives."[13] He and Elizabeth Hinds both point to several characters who criticize the line and offer alternative models.[14] The Chinese Captain Zhang frequently objects to the straight line through the forest and instead touts *feng shui* and its adherence to given natural forms. He says, "[The straight line] acts as a conduit for what we call *Sha*, or, as they say in Spanish California, Bad Energy." (542). He elucidates, "Ev'rywhere else on earth, Boundaries follow Nature,- coast-lines, ridge-tops, river-banks,- so honoring the Dragon or *Shan* within, from which Land-Scape ever takes its

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[12] The peculiar spellings, capitalizations, and punctuation appear in this way. Great pains were taken to reproduce them. For more on this phenomenon see below, section 3.2.1. on language games.

[13] David Cowart, "The Luddite Vision: Mason & Dixon", *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 71.2 (1999): 344.

form. To mark a right Line upon the Earth is to inflict upon the Dragon's very Flesh, a sword-slash, a long, perfect scar, impossible for any who live out here the year 'round to see as other than hateful Assault. How can it pass unanswered?" (542). At another point in the book Captain Zhang objects with an argument more akin to postcolonial critiques of colonial demarcations: "Nothing will produce Bad History more directly nor brutally, than drawing a Line, in particular a Right Line, the very Shape of Contempt, through the midst of a People, - to create thus a Distinction betwixt 'em, - 'tis the first stroke.- All else will follow as if predestin'd, unto War and Devastation." (615).

Another party who object are the Native Americans the surveying party meets. They are surprised to find the distant English dividing up the land and anxious about the line's destructive potential, fearing, as Mason observes, "this great invisible Thing that comes crawling Straight over their Lands, devouring all in its Path" (678). Ultimately, the westward progress on the line stops because it runs up against a warpath, a route that is inviolable in the eyes of the locals. Not only do they object to the line crossing the warpath, but two tribes are about to battle each other on it, as though the visto, the line the party is cutting through the forest, has brought Bad Energy to the warpath. Pynchon writes, "Never in memory, they are assured by their Mohawk Escort, have Iroquois and Catawba each wish'd so passionately the other's Destruction." (676). Far earlier in the novel, Cherrycoke had also predicted this through philosophical elucidation. In his view, the holiness of war as blood sacrament between "primitive" Indians meant that transgressing a warpath this way would be tantamount to a sacrilege and lead to exactly this kind of trouble (385-386). Needless to say, his conclusion, "We must either change our notions of the Sacred, or come to terms with these Nations,- and sooner rather than later." (386) remains unheeded.

His conclusion remains unheeded except in terms of asymmetric power. The project of establishing the line through the "wilderness" of the pre-United-States creates a contact zone in the text for a number of encounters between different cultures, peoples, individuals, and forms of order they stand for. Mary Louise Pratt, who coined the term "contact zone", defines it as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world

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[14] Cowart, also Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds, "Sari, Sorry, and the Vortex of History: Calendar Reform, Anachronism, and Language Change in Mason & Dixon", *American Literary History* 12.1-2 (2000): 187-215.

today."[15] The border line, provides this social space, and Pynchon, writing in its "aftermaths", recreates it fictionally. He does not simply systematically reconstruct a master narrative but rather presents a more fantastic work. The contact zone draws out quirky rhizomatic narratives like unleashing previously unrealized potentials. These narratives constantly undermine the idea of a grand narrative and deconstruct discourses received from the period.

The result is a constant switching of hypodiegetical worlds that emphasizes different ontologies touched by the line and linked by the narrative of it. For example, Knockwood's offhanded "sandwich" quip elicits a violent attack by his French chef "Sond-weech-uh! Sond-weech-uh! ... To the Sacrament of the Eating, it is ever the grand Insult!" (366) After some conflict over this attack, the chef then tells the guests in the next chapter the story of how he got there, pursued by an amorous invisible mechanical duck which still orbits and protects him. As McHale prescribes for the postmodern "Chinese box" narrative,[16] this digression never quite comes back to the main narrative. Further chapters deal with the cook, his love life and the duck who have established themselves from a digression into the main narrative. In the contact zone, Mason and Dixon not only encounter Captain Zhang and various Indians, but they also smoke hemp with George Washington (Ch. 28), bet on a race between a lumberjack and a were-beaver (621-2), discover a field of giant vegetables (656-7), and talk frequently with the existentially troubled mechanical duck (*passim*).

When one views the line as a contact zone, certain elements of the novel come into focus for their critique of the Enlightenment project as one of colonial hegemony. The contact zone in an America of "multiple perspectives" of incommensurate and unstable cultures results in these strange episodes. The individuals the two surveyors meet are not historical reproductions, nor do they represent their cultures. Instead they metonymically represent views of these cultures within later concepts of American nationality. As readers, we are well aware that Captain Zhang, for example, is not really a Chinese person. He is a figure in the novel who employs a combination of old Chinese (*feng shui*) and clearly contemporary (Californian "Bad Energy") references to question the certainty of the line project and by extrapolation both the Self-definition of the United States and the categorization of Chinese within it.

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[15] Pratt, "Contact Zone" 34.
[16] McHale, Chapter 8, "Chines Box Worlds", 112-129.

The mechanical duck does not represent any "people" at all but rather, like the other mechanical wonders in the book, serves as a figure of cyborg uncertainty and horror, of the potential for technology to replace reality in the scientific world emerging from the Enlightenment. The strange toy has a special affinity to the line, as Dixon observes with trepidation, "Mightn't it, rather, be nourishing for her? helping to increase her Powers,- even...uncommonly so?" (666). The duck is supposed to be the historical mechanical toy from the legendary automaton maker Jacques de Vaucanson that, "drank, ate, splashed about in water and then digested its food."[17] Transformed fictionally into a being with desires by Vaucanson's fictional addition of sexual organs, the duck constantly seeks a companion, becoming a reality-encompassing representation which "foreshadows" both *Frankenstein* and Baudrillard's critique of the simulacra. That the duck finds in the straight line, if not a sexual attraction, at least a space which ultimately directs the energies of its search for sexual companionship transfers the grotesque horror of the cyborg to that line as a contact zone.

Thus, the narrative of the line as an exposed contact zone brings forth a Bakhtin-like association with the carnevalesque. It is a place in which the grotesque emerges to mix with, parody, and oppose that which would repress it. In such a context, the representations of repressive power, the straight line and the mechanical duck which embodies the same enlightenment values the line's straightness represent, become briefly exposed for their own grotesqueness. It is the horror the line represents through its imposition and manipulation of order and the repression of alternatives to that order.

The border also divides and joins America's past with the future United States. Pynchon includes the implicit knowledge the reader has of the role the line was to play long after it was made by eliding it from the story. After all, how could Mason and Dixon know that it would be central to the future slavery debate in a country that did not yet exist? However, the novel obliquely refers to it in many places, such as the frequent appearance of slavery and Zhang's prediction of future war. The slavery debate, the Civil War and the prominent place of the Mason-Dixon Line in it become inevitable through the course of the novel. The pre-Revolutionary discussion of the rights of men rubs up against the work of the line distinguishing regions with differing views of the definition

[17] Constance King, *Metal Toys & Automata* (Secaucus, NJ: Quintet, 1989): 16. The duck, now legendary, no longer exists. None of Vaucanson's work has survived, except in descriptions and other toys inspired by it. Disappointed with their faddishness, he sold his toys in the 1740s to pursue more scientific projects.

of "men". That is not to mention women, whose rights are indeed not mentioned except on coy occasions like Mrs. Eggslap's anachronistic country-western complaint "Sometimes 'tis hard, to be a Woman" (621). The line's role as a separator and unifier continued after the independence of the United States. Russ Castronovo points out that leading up to the Civil War, the line became the nation's chief marker of identity. It both figuratively divided the slave and free states (there were many free states below the parallel the two surveyors measured despite its use as a slogan) and united the country around the issue of whether the exterior marker of skin color and other supposed racial markers sufficed to determine interior qualities of humanity, citizenship, and constitutional rights. He writes, "Borders need not be sites of division; rather, as the sutures of national cohesion, they can offer an imaginative topos for the articulation of 'transcendent' ideals of racial supremacy and political unity."[18]

The border narrative in the novel joins more than the two times of America's past and its pre-Civil-War future. It actually runs in four major time planes: pre-independence in North America when the line was drawn, shortly after independence when Cherrycoke tells his story, the mid-19th century when the Mason-Dixon line became the focus of national debate that led to war, and the present in which the reader reads the novel and in which the novel was written (and as time wears on, this "present" will diverge into two times as well). The various other narratives, the frequent ontological switch of "Chinese Box worlds", bring in a further plethora of other times of characters and peoples, their pasts and their measurements of time.

The novel makes endless references to time. Dixon is given a perpetual motion watch by his mentor Emerson (Chapter 32). It is later swallowed by a man from the impossible-to-measure Tangent Point where the borders of Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Delaware paradoxically should by definition come together, but by definition do not (Chapter 33). The watch is also used to make the first of many references to the battle going on between Astronomer Royal Nevil Maskelyne and watchmaker John Harrison about the best method for measuring latitude.[19] Characters debate the form of time's

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[18] Russ Castronovo, "Compromised Narratives along the Border: The Mason-Dixon Line, Resistance, and Hegemony", ed. Scott Michaelsen and David E. Johnson, *Border Theory: The Limits of Cultural Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota P, 1997): 202.

[19] A detailed account of the conflict can be found in Dava Sobel and William J.H. Andrews, *The Illustrated Longitude*, New York: Walker, 1998. Maskelyne, also Mason's nemesis in the novel, comes out as the villain in this book, the story of Harrison's work. Maskelyne is eager to collect the huge reward offered by King George III for a practical and useful method of longitude measurement and constantly uses his influence to change the rules of this competition to suit astronomers. Pynchon

causal links in history either as a helix chaining in something larger or as a linear surveyor's chain (417-18). Pynchon frequently uses conjunctive sentences of what could have happened contrasted with parallel declaratives of what "actually" happened in the same space of time in the story. Emerson's remarks "Time is the Space that may not be seen" which Cherrycoke explains to mean "[W]e are blind to time,- for we could not bear to contemplate what lies at its heart." (326).

The line project becomes as much a bitter war of geography and culture as of time and whose time, whose measurements and historical causalities, will dominate. The violent act of placing the Enlightenment straight line through the wilderness of North America creates a contact Zone of real and fictional potential times for the future United States even as it closes them off, seals them with the authority of its straightness and the power that drives it. It wipes out the giant vegetables and vestiges of previous fanciful civilizations as the earth becomes mapped and known. It leads to the decimation of the native population with its "bad energy", its very straightness, the authority of its scientific appearance that gave it a sense of the finite. It creates a new time and with it a narrative of national division and unity over that division that later almost destroys that nation and perhaps still could.

Summing up to now, the way in which Pynchon peels away the border's symbolic role as the Civil War's figurative dividing line exposes the violent act of cutting the line through America's wilderness before the United States was founded. He first demonstrates the rationalizing Enlightenment project as one that bears little connection to the landscape itself but is rather the product of theoretical projections by the English colonizing power. The line is supposed to settle territorial disputes between English colonies and by virtue of its straightness demonstrate the English cultural superiority and thus lend it authority, despite the criticisms that abound in the novel. These criticisms appear in the contact zone the border and its narrative provide, giving rise to a range of previously unrealized potential variations of narratives. These serve to complicate the line's division and conjunction of narrative time planes, questioning assumptions about the role of the line in history and of that history as a determiner of national identity.

All that said, the following sections pursue these themes more closely in the novel's text. As a work of literature, the conflicts of geography, culture, history, and time that determine nationality are represented in *Mason & Dixon* as a conflict of linguistic

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presents him in Chapter 74 as a creature of his environment, a weak dandy forced to prove Harrison

signification. The conflict ultimately points to uncertainty at the heart of the novel and to potential conspiracies to manipulate signification to cover up that uncertainty. The matrix of manipulations by Founding Fathers, Masons (the subject of much associative wordplay with the surveyor, just as Poe plays with the term in "Cask"), Jesuits, the French, the Swedes, and the even more shadowy "Commissioners" in the end gives rise to an emerging multifaceted, yet seemingly complete, form of imagined national selfhood. The novel then finally textualizes this imagined selfhood as a construction which gives rise to not only the American Revolution but also to the nation's internal disagreements over which people were incorporated in the nation and how. These disagreements lead to the Civil War and continued conflicts over civil rights, national identity, and access to the privileges of citizenship that have descended down to today.

As a narrative of the construction and delineation of national identity, it follows two white men, commanded by other white men, on a mission that leads to the creation of a new nation. That nation, recalling Morrison, has as its project the construction of a "new white man". The establishment and enforcement of the border that will ultimately focus discussions of identity around this project has the effect of, as Castronovo points out, establishing a sense of hegemony with the ability "to annex and even win the consent of its opponents."[20] *Mason & Dixon* creates an 800-odd page space that reveals at least a small glimpse of how the line's construction works. However, in the sense of Castronovo's dialectic of opposition which reinforces that with which it contends, the novel reinscribes even as it erases the white male border of America.

3.2.1. Language games with signs of a narrative past

The symbolic layer of a border acts as source of signification that belies the conflict of signification preceding it. This section looks at the way in which Pynchon works at a semiotic level to subvert received notions of the Mason-Dixon Line, the authority of the scientific rationalism that generated it, and the nation state that inherited it. Don DeLillo once opined, "For me the crux of the whole matter is language, and the language a writer eventually develops."[21] Linguistic play such as paranomasia, anachronisms, simple punning, language confusion, and playful naming is rife in the work of Pynchon. One only need recall the name Oedipa Maas in *Crying of Lot 49*, the voyage to the German

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wrong by "them" who pay him and his need to stay in the king's grace.
[20] Castronovo 213.
[21] Remnick 47.

spa Bad Karma in *Gravity's Rainbow*, or the endless associations with "V" in *V.* as initial, character, and representation of the vortex. This kind of intricate play he shares in common with other postmodern writers. It unlocks linguistic certainty by attaching sudden and unexpected associations to words in a dedoxifying project to subvert or at least question the forces behind that certainty. First, then, his wordplay will be looked at in its most visible form, the erratic, pre-standardized "englishes". Then its anachronistic wordplay will be examined more closely. It confounds any pretense of reproducing the "authentic" language of the time. This anachronism play, especially with the trope of the line, opens a space of indefinite (both unlimited and unidentifiable) new meaning.

English, Elizabeth Hinds states, was in the process of becoming standardized in the 1760s. Like time and geographic measurement, the very language became the subject of rationalization and correction with the appearance of Johnson's dictionary in 1755.[22] The language Pynchon employs in the novel reflects instead a period of instability out of which standardization grew. It includes old spellings and other rules common at the time. Spellings like "scientifick", "musick", "phiz" (face), "ev'ryone", "joak" and "land-scape" remind one of today's "ye olde shoppes" that offer a deliberate simulacrum of the antique. Pynchon not only laces speech but also description with it, both description by and of the narrator Cherrycoke, constantly emphasizing the simulation rather than the reproduction of the time. Whereas a reproduction makes some claim to being true, emphasizing simulation foregrounds its artifice and the artificial nature of any attempt to "reproduce" a time in which one does not live.

Language rules in the novel also constantly change or seem to not exist. Capitalization, for example, beyond proper nouns and adjectives, is best describes as idiosyncratic, emphasizing certain important nouns but with no real consistency. Though this mimics the style of many texts at the time, today it feels like reading the playfully boldfaced dialogues in *Mad* magazine, parodying the importance these style elements supposedly ascribe. Pynchon also makes use of numerous antiquated words and references whose meanings are all but forgotten today and either must be looked up or ignored. The "sandwich" episode also portrays language in an embryonic phase when the foppish Mr. Dimdown responds to the Frenchman, "Lord Sandwich is as much respected for his nobility as admired for his Ingenuity, in creating the great modern Advance in Diet which bears his name" (367).

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[22] Hinds 189-192.

Characters also speak incorrectly like the low-class Dixon and engage in code-switching, reflecting their own cultural in-betweenness. Such a feature is usually ascribed to creole languages and those who speak creoles. Here it is relocated fictionally to people from the "center" who supposedly speak the "high" dialect or "acrolect", to use the language of the antiquated but still often quoted model of the construction of language in colonial contexts.[23] This questions the claim of "centeredness" and of the cultural certainty of the colonizers. It also questions the notion of the "acrolect" as an originary source of language, as an *a priori* language spoken by a people which is first corrupted by colonized peoples. A perfect example of this is the hemp-smoking episode with George Washington, who frequently switches to codes more commonly associated with African Americans today. When he offers the surveyors "an excellent Punch, the invention of my Man Gershom" (276), he is the aristocrat referring to his butler. But when he calls out stoned, "Gershom! Where be you at, my man!" (278), the Founding Father parrots a hackneyed stereotype of contemporary black ghetto slang that simultaneously creates a space for "my man" between servitude and equality. The alternating codes are even further denoted by the change of capitalization for "my man".

These interactions of spelling, word usage, erratic grammar, and code switching produce various forms of "englishes" in the novel. Ashcroft *et al* make use of the small "e" english to designate variations from the standard English that arise in colonial spheres and question the authority of English as a system of signification. The language of the text parallels the many instances of colonizers adopting ways of colonized people in the novel, even as they claim continuity with European roots. Cherrycoke, for example, refers to phenomena such as the cakewalk when expounding on "decadent" Virginians who "dance the steps their African Slaves teach them" while adopting a pretense of aristocracy (275). Usually used to describe the language of the colonial subjects, *Mason & Dixon* demonstrates that "englishes" can be just as easily applied to the language of the colonizers themselves. This destabilizes the sense of a singular, originary linguistic code and thus textually parallels the destabilization of the sense of American nationhood as stemming from a single European origin.

Not only does Pynchon supply his narrative with language in little or no use today, but he also playfully conglomerates it with anachronistic language in little or no use in the 1760s. Washington's "black" talk is only one example of speech the reader

[23] See, for example, Suzanne Romaine, *Pidgin & Creole Languages*, London: Longman, 1988: 177. She

recognizes as contemporary. The anachronism stems not from the words, which were certainly in use then, but from their innocent use in the narrative that triggers an entirely different association for the contemporary reader. Some anachronistic play is simply risqué, such as the French cook's titillation when the German Luise describes having "eaten beaver" (383). Other play connects themes of nationality in an intricate way.

Chapter 26, which begins the central "America" section of the book, offers an elaborate example. It contains the deliberations of Cherrycoke with his listeners on the changes music is undergoing as a result of the new republic searching for an identity. Young Ethelmer says that in revolutionary times, the music of the commoners then would posthumously become the hymns of later days, "the Negroe Musick, the flatted Fifths, the focal *portamenti*,- 'tis there sings your Revolution." He continues in a Whitmanesque tone that the new music will come from "the Rock of the Oceans, the Roll of the Drums in the Night". Another listener, DePugh responds to this proclamation of rock 'n' roll far *avant le lettre* with the cry for "Surf music!" (all quotes 264). The passage ends with Ethelmer wrapping a scarf around his head to imitate a Gypsy, though it is remarked that he looks more like a pirate, indicating that in fact he has donned the head garb of hippies who turned to rock 'n' roll as revolutionary music.

Cherrycoke, himself, evokes another key anachronistic wordplay. His name may even pass under the reader's eye without notice at first glance. The exact reason a "Cherry Coke" narrates the story disappears in the vortex of Pynchon's own web of association. It conjures up a powerful brand name, Coke, and the flavor variation once popular at diners and soda fountains in the 1950s. Cherry Coke was introduced as an actual brand in the United States thirty years hence in the 1980s in the middle of the same wave of popular '50’s nostalgia that produced *Back to the Future*, scores of retro-diners and revivals of rockabilly and doo-wop music. It was marketed as an object of that period, recapturing the decade's supposed "innocence" when Cherry Coke was a consumer fetish, a fad. As this study's previous chapter shows with other objects of consumption at the time, this fad elided greater worry and concern at the time, both in the '50’s and in the '80’s when it was revived. Thus, the Cherry Coke is an unreliable sign of the past, representing a past that existed only in the manipulations of corporate advertising.

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also, even then presents objections to this model which suggests that deviant forms or "basilects"

Cherrycoke's reliability is constantly questioned by his listeners, especially when he reproduces internal dialogues or relates moments of encounters with the fantastic. As readers, we constantly ask whether he is even telling the story, especially in digressive episodes about the novel's various characters or when his character is talked about in his narrative in the third person. His very "Reverend" title and religious authority are questionable from the very beginning when he speaks of "perfecting a *parsonical Disguise*" (8). In the same paragraph he also calls himself an "untrustworthy Remembrancer". Cherrycoke is also a freeloader, having been staying at his sister's home for months after Mason's funeral (for which he arrived too late), and telling stories to justify his stay. He becomes a cheap version of Sheherazade, his name oddly echoing hers and her own survival through story-telling. It also recalls the similarly manipulative narrator of Barthe's *The Sot-Weed Factor,* Ebenezer Cooke, one of *Mason & Dixon*'s main fictional intertexts.

T. Coraghessan Boyle writes, "If the traditional historical novel attempts to replicate a way of life, speech and costume, the post-modernist version seeks only to be just that, a version. As the Reverend Cherrycoke points out, history needs 'to be tended lovingly and honorably by fabulists and counterfeiters, Ballad-Mongers and Cranks of ev'ry Radius,' and Mr. Pynchon is more than willing to audition for the role."[24] The Cherrycoke brand name signals that this narrative is only one brand of the story, equated by its fabulist Ballad-Monger with America but at the same time a construction. It is a consumer fetish at that, feeding off the desire of its consumers for comforting signs but never quite satisfying their needs and thus perpetuating the longing for it.

Of all words and ideas Pynchon plays with, no language captures the main themes of uncertainty and secret connections more than that of the line itself. Specifically, Cherrycoke constantly speaks of the story of Mason and Dixon "upon the line". "Upon the line" brings up multiple associations in addition to the work with the border. First, in current slang, "on the line" means "at risk", as in an object or money bet in a gamble. Secondly, it implies a seriousness in negotiations; much as one "talks turkey" or "gets down to brass tacks", one can "put it on the line". Finally, with a small elision, "on the line" becomes "on line", ergo connected to a larger network, specifically the World Wide Web. In this context, the Line as a contact zone becomes a *limen,* putting the people on it in a state of liminality. As Turner writes in *The Ritual Process,* such people are "...

neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonies."[25] To emphasize this sense of the threshold, this betweenness, the narrative on the line is "sandwiched" between others, and the very word is volatile, launching attacks, counter-attacks, digressions, and whole plot movements.

The line becomes akin to what Gerald Vizenor would call a trickster-like "comic holotrope",[26] a cultural artifact that is both the subject of a play on meaning through signification and its cause. The nation is profoundly "on the line" in the novel, at risk, open to uncertainty now that the fixity of its signifiers is disrupted by wordplay and contending points of view. The line produces the conflict with the "wilderness", creating the risk it embodies through its straightness as an opposition to disorder, and yet through the play with the line and with words, the flip-side of that risk is potential. Being in a contact zone draws together countless tangents of existing and potential cultural discourses, strangely connecting them "on line".

To further confuse the notion of the line as a giver of order, one must keep in mind other associations with the term "line" which all are borne out and complicated in the novel. The term "linear" has already appeared in this chapter on *Mason & Dixon* with respect to notions of origin and direct historical descent. In the complication of the border's history and that of the nation defined by it, the notion of linearity as lending order to the past is cast in grave doubt. At the same time, the construction and enforcement of this border give the nation a sense of a linear history. It is a history ever informed by both the figurative Mason-Dixon Line and by the pursuit of the kind of order clearly marked, and ideally straight, borders are meant to exemplify.

A "line" is also another word for a profession or occupation. The line in the novel is not only Mason and Dixon's profession, but it also becomes that of the nation for which it will become central. Wordplay, exemplified by "on the line", "on line", and simply "line", offers associative connections between these cultural discourses and the ontological worlds from which they emanate. The connections seem to offer glimpses at otherwise invisible manipulative forces ordering them hierarchically in language to a

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[24] T. Coraghessan Boyle, "The Great Divide". Rev. of *Mason & Dixon*. *The New York Times Book Review* 18 May 1997: 9.
[25] Turner 95.
[26] Gerald Vizenor, "Trickster Discourse: Comic Holotropes and Language Games", ed. Vizenor, *Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literatures* (Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1989): 187-211.

specific end, driving the line ever onward. At the heart of the uncertainty lies the greatest uncertainty of all: given the growth of the line there may indeed be an order of things. But whose?

3.2.2. Uncertainty, conspiracy, or not

Pynchon's occupation with uncertainty in science and linguistic coding always seems to run up against conspiratorial forces, as though he fears discovering the ghost in the machine. Poirier once observed that Pynchon shows how, "In particular, science directs our perceptions and feelings whether we know it or not, even while, as literary people, we may like to imagine that it is literature that most effectively conditions how we feel."[27] However, Pynchon does not produce science when it appears in his stories. He produces literature about science. He presents its terms, cultural contexts, and psychological effects, demonstrating that it is not science that directs our perceptions but rather its social encoding through public discourses about it.

The problem with the Mason-Dixon Line, for example, is not *per se* its straightness based on precise scientific measurements. It is the role that straightness played as an aesthetic meant to represent a rational thinking beyond nature and by extrapolation a heightened civilization. Pynchon, as Cowart points out, demands scientific rigor from his readers largely in order to recognize where "science" becomes a public manipulation. Cowart writes, "[I]n one novel after another, Pynchon has devoted his formidable powers of subversion and satire to exposing the false premises behind the technocratic syllogism."[28] Pynchon's wordplay, among other techniques, submits that despite its objective aspirations, science represents a constant battle of signification, subject to the same social ontological influences that determine words and other signs for everything else in a society. Therefore, the verbal uncertainty in *Mason & Dixon* mirrors cultural and scientific uncertainty, leaving signification and meaning entirely subjective.

This space of indeterminacy asks how things are determined for a society and what or who is at the source of it. Pynchon, throughout all of his novels, suggests that those who produce meaning must dwell in the same shadowy space as its production, beyond recognition and thus safe from attack. In *Rainbow* it was "Them"; in *Crying* it was whoever will bid for the stamps in Lot 49 when the book ends. Unlike, say, Ishmael

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[27] Richard Poirier, "The Importance of Thomas Pynchon", ed. Harold Bloom, *Thomas Pynchon* (New York: Chelsea House, 1986): 53.
[28] Cowart 341.

Reed, who names names and describes secret meetings in fictional continuations of ancient conflicting parties like the Atonists and Jes' Grew in *Mumbo Jumbo*, Pynchon's manipulators remain vague, as indeterminate as the meanings they manipulate. His novels do offer evidence that they exist, pointing to networks of powerful, often unnamed, people in politics, industry and elsewhere who appear to profit from systems they have created by forcing certainty upon signification.

His texts contain clues in the form of people associated with the manipulation of signs, but they stop just short of definitely fingering these people. In this way, the associations can continue to exist as potential rather than as fixed meaning that may be further instrumentalized and manipulated. The clues are verbal associations, the wordplay, its uncertainty, and its coincidental connections. Freud writes of the paranoid that they cannot perceive anything in other people as indifferent and "take up minute signals that these other, unknown, people give them, and employ them in their 'delusions of reference'."[29] In this, the border project functions as the associative space in which to map delusions of reference within the novel and within the nation's text of identity. Just as it connects the various times of the novel, it associatively connects persons in it with conspiratorial groups and secret machinations of power through signification. The border also connects them to later received notions of nationality.

The narrative abounds with fear of conspiracies by the French and the Swedes, groups the surveyors regard as foreign. They conspiracies thus become part of the civilizing mission of the line by representing competing systems of order it opposes. The novel particularly focuses on Jesuits as a lurking menace. Any device more complex than British science can explain is automatically assumed to be Jesuit. Fears of Jesuit plots and spies abound. The lengthiest inserted "Chinese Box" narrative involves the kidnapping of Eliza Fields from Conestoga to a massive Jesuit complex in Montreal. There, formerly wonton women, now nuns, go about remaking her as a nun spy disguised as a vamp. She is then saved, or re-kidnapped, by Captain Zhang (who may or may not really be Chinese).

The story is first told by Cherrycoke in chapter 53 who confirms this by interrupting himself on page 519 to say he was unsure of the melody of a song as he was "not present in the usual sense". It then ends in chapter 54 as the most recent installment

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[29] Sigmund Freud, "Über einige neurotische mechanismen bei Eifersucht, Paranoia und Homosexualität", 1922, Intro. Clemens de Boor *Schriften zur Krankheitslehre der Psychoanalyse* (Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer, 1991): 256. Translation is my own.

of the racy *Ghastly Fop* series secretly read by 'Thelmer and his cousin Brae in 'Thelmer's bedroom during pauses in Cherrycoke's story. Fields and Zhang finally join with the party on the line to become part of the main narrative, a troubling insertion further complicating the already unstable frame of the novel.

Cherrycoke suspects a carriage to be an invention of the Jesuits because "the inside is quite noticeably larger than the outside" (354) and thus conflicts with scientific logic. Similarly, the Jesuit captivity narrative conflicts with the narrative logic of the novel and parallels a general conflict of narration and its power. The same can be said of the line itself, much larger on the inside. When deconstructed in the novel and against the context of American history, it provides a far more expanded narrative than the thinness of the theoretical line on the map allows for. The border becomes a function of this paranoia, a force against those various competing conspiracies. It walls them in to enforce a system of meaning in which they continue to exist as competing systems of order and thereby give definition to those who constructed the line.

After all, in the end, it is Cherrycoke who tells the story. In the end, the power of forming the United States is wielded by the Founding Fathers, both as symbols and creators of symbolism, and not by the French, Swedes, or Jesuits. Presented in "sidesplitting cameos" (Boyle), the roles of Franklin, Washington, and Jefferson seem of little consequence to the novel. But these cameos are far more important for what they leave out than what they portray. It belongs to the assumed knowledge of the reader that these men each become national icons, worshipped in a godlike fashion, their faces adorning money and carved into mountains, their names given to cities and the descendents of slaves,[30] their homes now national shrines. Each is also associated in the novel with one or more intertexts as familiar to Americans as the Pledge of Allegiance and at least as sacred. The absence of these intertexts marked by the tongue-in-cheek anticipation of them and the symbolic power that later adorns the men leaves a lacuna, a gap, left consciously in this case. The lacunae are not only the source of the sidesplitting humor but also highlight the role these texts later played in making the Founding Fathers the Founding Fathers.

[30] This naming became so common that people in the United States today with the last name "Washington" are immediately assumed to be African American. The irony of this was utilized, for example, by African American comedian Richard Pryor whose comic invention "Supernigger" has the civilian alter-ego of a newspaper office janitor named Clark Washington.

This association with founding national texts indicates the profound role the men played not just as objects but as subjects of national discourse, at the root of its creation. Indeed, mixed with the humor in their scenes there are long discussions of the border project, caused, logically, by the presence of the surveyors. It turns out that each man is extremely interested in and closely associated with the project and its science in one way or another. It also becomes clear that they are each intricately associated with shadowy groups behind the most central conspiratorial manipulations of meaning. The foreign plots distract from the manipulation going on at the heart of defining the nation-to-be while at the same time being portrayed as the *raison d'etre* for that definition

Benjamin Franklin's example is the most elaborate and will be treated in detail here. The second chapter of "America" introduces the surveyors to Franklin, whose person disappoints them. Rather than pursuing science and business, he pursues drink and the young ladies, Molly and Dolly, "Students of the Electrickal Arts, whom I am pleas'd from time to time to examine, in the Sub-ject, ye-e-s..." (271). His pithy advice *á la* Poor Richard, far from profound, borders on the trivial such as, "Strangers, heed my wise advice,- Never pay the Retail Price." (267). We see Franklin more as a showman hungering for a public. He makes frequent appearances at Philadelphia coffee houses, flocked to like happenings. There he offers scientific and artistic demonstrations that are more spectacle, once even dressed as Death when demonstrating the conductive properties of lightning. At every appearance in the book he also wears a different color of spectacles like a pop star, radiating what Boyle calls "the undying cool of sunglasses."

Mason remarks perplexed, "By Reputation, he is a man entirely at ease with the inner structures of Time itself. Yet, here he seems strangely..." and Dixon interjects, "Unfoahcused, as we Lensmen say...?" (271-2). That stands in stark contrast to the man of industry, moderation, and modesty he portrays himself as in the autobiography that did much to cement his legend and legacy. As the novel is always coming back to the line, Franklin in this light also resembles it. Through a text, his autobiography, he becomes a figure of discipline and order, in a linear history of self-improvement. This history disguises the "unfoahcused" man of the novel, whose very "unfoahcused" nature leads him to seek the order he later comes to represent.

The autobiography and his almanac, two intertexts in this chapter, both bear witness to his own ability to create his public image. The autobiography describes his desire to learn rhetoric and debating techniques as a means of manipulating textual

meaning in order to gain advantage. There he even comments slyly on reason as manipulation, "So convenient a thing it is to be a *reasonable creature*, since it enables one to find or make a reason for every thing one has a mind to do."[31] He has quite a scientific understanding, that is to say an understanding of science as discourse and as an instrument of power.

The Founding Father's appearance in *Mason & Dixon* also reveals that he is a member of the Royal Society, the same group that refuses Mason as a member but recommends him and Dixon for the project. Franklin is very familiar with the men and their task, recognizing them instantly in the apothecary where they first meet. He also took part in discussions at the Royal Society about the men in their earlier observation of the transit of Venus and other adventures. This makes him an intimate insider in the very center of British scientific power, one of its elites. It is from this center that emanate both the authority of the Mason-Dixon Line and the definition of the limits of scientific order that must then be extended into the North American wilderness. The Royal Society itself becomes one of the shadowy manipulative forces in the novel. It dictates scientific discourse for reasons of power, as the conflict over Harrison's watch indicates. In chapter 43, Mason even deduces that he was recommended for the job in America solely to get him out of the way so that Maskelyne can ascend to the position of Astronomer Royal that Mason feels he deserves (438).

His role in manipulating scientific thinking is well demonstrated when he describes what he think is a Sino-Jesuit machinery for conveying information instantly. It is a Jesuit "telegraph" of balloons and mirrors, a form of World Wide Web referred to at other places in the novel as well. This he knows through "encrypted reports that find their ways to the desks of highly-plac'd men whose daily task it is, to make sure they know everything,- appropriate to their places,- that must be known." (287). The statement implicates Franklin as one of those highly-plac'd men, close to them, or at least part of a group that generates this story. This group is obsessed with the Chinese and the Jesuits, obsessed with constructing them in the image of a foreign enemy.

That fear is radiated throughout the book, indicating that this group's activities have successfully instilled paranoia about the Chinese and Jesuits as foreigners trying to take over, "a small army of Dark Engineers who could run the World" (288). Together, they represent, as Franklin describes it, the extreme discipline and perfect timing of the

[31] Benjamin Franklin, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* (1868; Mineola, NY: Dover, 1996): 27.

Jesuits and the Void, the Asian Mystery. Therefore, within the construction of Anglo American identity with which Franklin is closely involved, the Jesuits and Chinese come to represent a cooperation between an over-ordered order and the total chaos of the void, both extremely Other. Establishing and enforcing a border by slashing it across what is perceived as the wilderness is therefore a powerful act against these Others, manifesting the order of the colonizing English in a space they define as chaotic.

The mastery of space is in turn connected to Franklin's more personal obsession with time. He brings it up frequently and conspiratorially. In fact, he prefaces his description of the Jesuit telegraph by saying, "I see our greatest problem as Time" (287). One is constantly reminded in the novel of the connection between the division of the world into degrees of longitude in accordance with a 24-hour clock. Franklin's almanac is filled with statements about time, and his autobiography is often a testimonial to the industrious use of time. He reminds his reader that time is money, that it is easily wasted, and that filling one's day with well-disciplined activity leads to greater achievement. In the novel, however, as the telegraph description demonstrates, he is portrayed with a desire to counter the apparent Jesuit mastery of time.

He does, in the end, defeat their supposed speed and temporal discipline by mastering the rhetoric of time and creating a public image as someone "entirely at ease with the inner structures of Time itself", an image which has survived to today. He is also to become one of an elite that founded a new nation grounded in a rhetoric of reason so powerful that it has fundamentally rerouted cognition worldwide ever since. As historical figures and creators of that history, the Founding Fathers countered Jesuit "time" with their own. The speedy transmission of information by the phantom Jesuit telegraph is no match for the associative transmission of information by historical rhetoric. In his "Almanack", he once wrote, "If you would not be forgotten / As soon as you are dead and rotten, / Either write things worth reading / Or do things worth writing,"[32] both of which suggestions he took very much to heart. He defeated alacrity and mortality with historical eternity which Pynchon shows to be really only a "delusion of reference" Franklin has created for the delusion of others.

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[32] Benjamin Franklin (Poor Richard), *Almanack*, 1738 edition. Invaluable for this quote was the website State Department Bureau of International Information Programs (USINFO), "Poor Richard, 1738: Preface and Maxims", 20 Sept. 2004 <http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/facts/loa/bf1738.htm>. The fact that the State Department has seen fit to place this and the other editions of the almanac's prefaces and pithy sayings demonstrates how central the writing of Benjamin Franklin is to American myth-making.

Washington and Jefferson, to sketch them briefly, are also closely associated with themes of signification. Washington, a part-time surveyor himself and a Mason, shows a strong interest in real estate. That this interest refers to the countless pieces of real estate in the United States that now bear his name is signaled by his particular interest in a piece of land "out past the South Mountain" (276). That parcel, north of the mountain from Washington's perspective in Virginia, is, like the mountain, located in Washington County, Maryland. A reader usually will not recognize the oblique reference, especially in light of the mountain's northern proximity to the better known city bearing his name. This shows how deeply ingrained and subtly ubiquitous the name Washington is as a sign of authority, power, and national myth. It comes as no surprise, for example, that after a bitter border dispute with Canada over the Oregon Territory, the northern part of the territory that by agreement in 1846 went to the United States became the state of Washington.

With Franklin connected to the text of historical time and Washington to the textuality of space, Thomas Jefferson, in the smallest cameo of all, provides a link between textual national discourse and the border as text of the national space. Jefferson's short scene begins by recalling the association with the text for which he is best known when he cribs Dixon's drunken toast to "the pursuit of Happiness" (395). In response to the toast, a "tall, red-headed youth at the next table" concurs, "And ain't it oh so true...You don't mind if I use the Phrase sometime? ... Has someone a pencil?" (395). Then the associative focus shifts as he expresses interest in the Mason and Dixon project. It is explained that he takes a "relative" interest in "West lines" as his father had marked part of the border between Virginia and North Carolina. He tells of his father's predecessor for that project, William Byrd, whose journal he feels tell a cautionary tail against "joint ventures" in which half the commissioners live north of the other half. Byrd's notes, filled with references to the degeneracy of South Carolinians, "somehow owing to the difference in latitude", indicate that such border-drawing work may encourage the northerners to consider the southerners more savage. Jefferson posits, '"Twould not surprise me if Pennsylvanians were to entertain similar opinions of their own Neighbors to the South, including Virginia. This land of Sensual Beasts." (396).

Jefferson disappears at this point. The associations between the Declaration of Independence and the drawing of the Mason-Dixon Line are not linked theoretically in this scene. However, the simple fact that they come so close together in one scene

through the person of Jefferson ends up providing that link. Jefferson himself becomes a border figure. He conjoins these two different discourses through his personal association with them. Thus are brought together the Enlightenment text of national sovereignty, represented by the Declaration of Independence in one of its most self-empowering passages, with the Enlightenment project of drawing borders and the role it plays in defining national identity as secure and civilized.

That brings the paranoid search for "them" to the Commissioners, who may be the power behind the Founding Fathers or may be the Fathers themselves. Jefferson's mention of commissioners with a small "c" associates him and his discussion with the Commissioners, who follow the project of the line like phantoms. Franklin knows the Commissioners as well, his first words to the surveyors being a warning to Dixon against buying Laudanum, "The Commissioners know all too well about Daffy's Elixir." (267). The paranoid would ask why Franklin, who has not even introduced himself and never met these men before, would mention the Commissioners from the outset. Though the least is known about these men, they influence the project most. By extrapolation they have the power to influence the novel's and the nation's discourse the most.

The Commissioners represent the colonial Proprietors (the Penns, who own the Pennsylvania charter, and the Calverts, who own the Maryland charter), the Crown, property developers, and other powerful, unnamed interests. They have suddenly deemed it necessary that the border dispute finally be settled after 80 years. Many people even ask why, after 80 years, there is now such a strong move to settle it, but Mason and Dixon have no explanation. The surveyors receive orders without explanation as well, such as the one that pulls them from the West Line to complete the North Line that creates the borders of Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Delaware.

The Commissioners' identities are as opaque as their motives. Pynchon affords the readers only one single glimpse at these figures. In Philadelphia, filled with coffee houses, each with its own back room where secret meetings are held and proto-revolutionary conspiracies are hatched, Mason discovers "a Back Room's back room" (290). There he stumbles on the Commissioners meeting in absolute darkness. Later he wonders "What did he interrupt them at, then, in the lampless chamber, what Gathering he wasn't supposed to know about? And why couldn't he remember more clearly what had happen'd to *him* after he went into the Room? Was his Brain, in Mercy, withholding the memory?" (291). This chilling moment suggests some real and horrible activity deep

beneath the surface of America, rooted in its unconscious, the trauma of which is sublimated to emerge later in symbolic forms and associations. Chapter 33 offers another look, not at the Commissioners but at their activity. Mason and Dixon winter at an inn with the Commissioners and witness their discussions of both property speculation and American independence. The activity, as played out in the novel, revolves, as always, around the mastery of time, geography, and their discourse as history and map, the creation of a known "America" to use and manipulate.

3.2.3. "It was all about something else": the outline of a nation

During a trivial discussion of Conestoga cigars and the origin of the word "stogie" Pynchon suddenly interrupts:

> Does Britannia, when she sleeps, dream? Is America her dream? – in which all that cannot pass in the metropolitan Wakefulness is allow'd Expression away in the restless Slumber of these Provinces, and on West-ward, wherever 'tis not yet mapp'd, nor written down, nor ever, by the majority of Mankind, seen,- serving as a very Rubbish-Tip for subjunctive Hopes, for all that *may yet be true*,- Earthly Paradise, Fountains of Youth, Realms of Prester John, Christ's Kingdom, ever behind the sunset, safe till the next Territory to the West be seen and recorded, measur'd and tied in, back into the Net-Work of Points already known, that slowly triangulates its Way into the Continent, changing all from subjunctive to declarative, reducing Possibilities to Simplicities that serve the ends of governments,- winning away from the realm of the Sacred, its Borderlands one by one, and assuming them unto the bare mortal World that is our home, and our Despair. (345)

The aside sums up like no other passage the novel's major themes and complicates them, turning a speculative question into a despairing declaration. Note the period instead of the question mark at the end. It presents the dawning of a known America, known through a discourse of reason motivated by selfish needs. At the same time, in the first half, it portrays an America of European projections, as a dream of Britannia, a land of British potentials and subjunctives. Thus, even later transcendentalist opposition to the scientific measuring of the land and a desire for self-discovery outside of civilization's confines at its edges remains a European-rooted project at the edge of a society seen as descended from Europe.

The dream and its mapping elide a land already dreamed and mapped by its natives and becoming increasingly so to the slaves imported. "America" the term, the narrative discourse beginning with Columbus, is not their dream, nor is it becoming known in order to serve their ends. The novel and narrative of the line do not elide Native Americans and African slaves, for they certainly do appear. However, their presence, like their objection, is barely registered in the narration, always floating

phantom-like in the background. *Mason & Dixon* portrays the project of drawing this border and physically cutting it across the land as outlining a nation to come, focusing upon itself the minds of the people whose discourse generated it and those of the Others upon whom the border is enforced.

Said's notion of a manifest and latent Orientalism was further developed and fused by Bhabha to describe an ambivalent colonial consciousness. With the same logic, the novel demonstrates how a scientifically revealed America opposed to a latent one of dreams and desires creates a space in which "America" exists as a project of Europeans, specifically British men who were to found the United States. Women, Native Americans, and African slaves are in this way removed from the nation's cultural discourse as participants and reinserted as objects of it. Thus, Castronovo was fully correct in describing the Mason-Dixon Line as far more unifying than dividing.

The project, as the book describes Dixon barely not noticing on page 398, is "all about something else, not Calverts, Jesuits, Penns or Chinese". It is about "something else", creating an epistemology of national Self and of Other, marginalized elements, the something that is else. It is about creating "blacks" as slaves, dispossessing "Indians" as savages, maintaining "female" as subaltern. They are all deviations from Anglo-Saxon Protestant males, their dreams and their science. Thus, in Pynchon's narrative, the Commission's Line ensures the perpetuation of already existing forms of colonial hegemony and exploitation, even in the post-independence United States. This perpetuation is for the continued benefit of the wealthy and powerful and the comfort and protection of those white men with the full rights of citizenship.

Dixon does not see the something else at the middle of the book, though he had been waiting, on his way back from that side trip to Virginia where he met Jefferson, "for some kind of sense to be made of what has otherwise been a pointless Trip." (397). Instead he whistles a tune that ends, "Continental Ladies / Are Riddle enough for me...", and the narrative continues, "In all Virginia, tho' Slaves pass'd before his Sight, he saw none. *That* was what had not occurred." (398). After the Line project is aborted due to Indians, the men are measuring other borders in the swamps of the Delaware peninsula when "*That*" finally does occur to him:

> Slaves. Ev'ry day at the Cape, we lived with slavery in our faces,- more of it at St. Helena,- and now here we are again, in another Colony, this time having drawn them a Line between their Slave-Keepers, and their Wage-Payers, as if doom'd to re-encounter thro' the World this public Secret, this shameful core.... Pretending it to be ever somewhere else, with the Turks, the Russians, the Companies, down there, down where it smells like warm Brine and Gunpowder fumes, they're murdering and

> dispossessing thousands untallied, the innocent of the World, passing daily into the Hands of the Slave-owners and Torturers, but oh, never in Holland, nor in England, that Garden of Fools...? (692).

Dixon then emerges as an anti-slave activist, accosting a slave driver in the very next chapter and disbursing the slaves.

The moment of revelation links up the other passage on 398 and many other observations of slavery in America with the long prelude Pynchon offers in the novel in which the two men travel to South Africa and St. Helena for astronomical observations. There they also meet with slavery. In fact, in South Africa, the Vroom family they visit sexually arouses Mason with the Vroom daughters in order to mate him with their slave as a substitute object of desire because "The baby, being fairer than its mother, will fetch more upon the Market,-" (65). Later, when considering the job in America, Mason says he considers Americans to be English, for the colonies are "but a Patch of England", but Dixon disagrees heartily. "No more than the Cape Dutch are Dutch...? 'Tis said these people keep Slaves, as did our late Hosts,- that they are likewise inclin'd to kill the People already living where they wish to settle." (248).

Along with slavery then is coupled the extermination of native populations, which is also observed many times. For example, they receive news of a massacre of Indians at Conestoga, and Mason finds it " peculiar, that the first mortal acts of Savagery in America after their Arrival should have been committed by Whites against Indians." (306). Here, too, they do not grasp their own implication in this: "They saw white Brutality enough, at the Cape of Good Hope. They can no better understand it now, than then. Something is eluding them. Whites in both places are become the very Savages of their own worst Dreams, far out of Measure to any Provocation." (307). Franklin offers to explain the phenomenon in South Africa as a result of the rapid seasonal reversal of positive and negative electrical charges. It is an almost ludicrous, if not deeply cynical attempt to use specious scientific "knowledge" to disguise the violence by colonizers that stems from projections of savagery upon the colonized. Mason insightfully responds, "Then what's America's excuse?" (307).

Significantly, though Pynchon makes much of the semiotic associations of significant thematic features such as the "line", the figuration of "white" and "black" appears hardly at all. Its two appearances make it so much more significant. Both times Pynchon employs a space of blackness, a dark room, which becomes a place of repression. The first time is on page 64 when the slave in South Africa slips in Mason's

bed at the behest of her master and reveals the importance of skin in slavery and colonial desire. This is despite the fact that in the dark room he cannot see but can only hear and feel her. The second time occurs in the dark of the Philadelphia back room's back room, where Mason discovers the pale faces of the Commissioners. At first they appear to him as effigies until he realizes that they are indeed the men who have hired him and indeed "*expect him*" (291).

The darkness in Mason's two encounters closely connects his inability to remember what happened with the Commissioners to the invisibility of the slave in the other dark room. It links his inability to fathom the deeper meaning the meeting with the Commissioners has for the continent and "*That*" which eludes him and Dixon. Mason also deduces after Dixon's epiphany that they are not slaves in this scheme but rather hirelings. They are thus implicated – as paid men, scientists, and willing British subjects – as instruments of colonial domination, ultimately part of the Commission and what it commits. "Commission", after all, has two meanings, the first a group, the second a deed, infliction, or perpetration, as in the commission of a crime. The Commission is nothing other than a collective act, something in which these two white males take part as members of that collective.

Mason discovers and immediately sublimates what Dixon cannot ignore. The discovery of the Commission recalls cartoonist Walt Kelly's parody of the often heard war claim: "We have met the enemy, and he is us."[33] That conclusion lies there to be drawn by readers of *Mason & Dixon* as well, associated in varying degrees with "us". The novel ultimately reinscribes the world created by the line and the identities of the people in it. It is constructed in a context of the discourses of identity and significatory privilege as they are delineated along an axis of white male in America and a contemporary awareness, whether postmodern, postcolonial, or otherwise. This is an awareness profoundly informed by the Enlightenment which the border and its straightness embody. Without these things, it makes little sense.

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[33] The title of his final collection of "Pogo" comic strips in 1973 came from an observation Kelly wrote in the introduction of a 1953 collection. Originally a description of his view of the function of satire, he frequently used the sentence as a statement of ecological protest, most famously for an Earth Day poster in 1971. The original quote was the somewhat longer, "There is no need to sally forth, for it remains true that those things which make us human are, curiously enough, always close at hand. Resolve, then, that on this very ground, with small flags waving and tiny blasts of tiny trumpets, we shall meet the enemy, and not only may he be ours, he may be us." Marilyn K. White, "We have met the enemy...and he is us", I Go Pogo, 17 March 2003 <http://www.igopogo.com/we_have_met.htm>.

3.3. Behind *The Tortilla Curtain*

In his novel *The Tortilla Curtain*, T. Coraghessan Boyle foregrounds the same opposition Pynchon saw in Britannia's dream. Here the imagined transcendentalist natural America is set against its hegemonic civilization, eliding others who do not fit into that opposition. Boyle contrasts that, however, with alternating chapters from a "Mexican" point of view, two illegal aliens who live in a canyon next to a white Los Angeles housing development and defy this elision through their mere presence. The alternating chapters mirror the novel's desperate material struggle between the people in it, a struggle embodied in the trope of the home with its notion of security and its corollary in the Freudian *unheimlich*. In this struggle, white Americans seem to have all the advantages, including the power to dictate their border and a system of signification that justifies it. The white elision then, rather then a simple forgetting or negation of the Mexican Other, becomes part of a more elaborate process of repression of that non-home Other as *unheimlich*. That repression leads to violent confrontation to contain that troubling Other, replicating a long, even traditional, history of violence between the United States and Mexico.

The presence of the Mexicans troubles the white male liberal protagonist, Delaney, not only because he fears they may be encroaching on his home, but because of the aggressive feelings of hate and dread this fear incurs. These feelings cast grave doubts on his smug liberal self-definition. Because of this perceived encroachment, he and the other (white) members in his community feel increasingly compelled to enforce and fortify the border of their settlement while simultaneously professing their liberal credentials. Like Pynchon's Mason-Dixon Line, the border that is the edge of the housing settlement Arroyo Blanco (a telling name – see below) establishes a contact zone between the peoples it is intended to divide. It also defines for Delaney the edge of the liberal in the United States, the point at which freedom ends in order to maintain a sense of internal freedom for those on the inside. As an internal replication of the US-Mexico border, the housing development's border functions as a microcosm of that larger international border. At the same time, it is the embodiment of discursively internalized signification systems of national identity that justify that border's existence.

Above all things, *The Tortilla Curtain* foregrounds contact and conflict. Its action is launched at the beginning by contact, or rather a collision. When Delaney hits Cándido with his car, the name of his Mexican counterpart immediately conjures up an

association with *Candide*. Very much like Voltaire's satirical naif picaro, Cándido's very presence thoroughly confounds Delaney's notions of civilization, colliding with it and generating the satire of it. Geraldine Stoneham writes somewhat incorrectly that "Delaney's first contact with Cándido is to run him over on the road".[34] Boyle makes a point of highlighting Delaney's perception of the contact as a collision, not a running-over: "an accident in a world of accidents, a collision of opposing forces" (3). Delaney hitting Cándido with his car immediately portrays the asymmetrical relations between the two characters. Though the forces colliding may have been opposing, they were certainly not equal, for in such a collision, the person in the car is in far greater safety.

The collision echoes throughout the book as one long clash for everyone involved. The opposing forces that clash create a number of apparent dualities in the novel, doublings not just of characters but also of concepts, and even doublings of those doublings. Most apparent is the duality of the United States and Mexico, each defining itself through the identification with the other as Other. Delaney's profession as a naturalist and Cándido living in the wilderness also highlights the duality of civilization and nature that informs the novel's symbolic landscape and the symbolic layer of the literal border fortification Delaney helps create. Unlike the historical narrative in Pynchon's novel, a border is not being drawn as part of a whole process of national invention at the birth of the United States. Instead a border is established in the present as a function of long-existing policy of land settlement. Thus, it is not so much a closing off of potential narratives as the perpetuation of a long-running narrative of closure.

Derrida characterizes a border as an "invagination", "through which the trait of ... the borderline splits while remaining the same and traverses yet also bounds the corpus."[35] The corpus he is referring to is the discursive text through which the border runs. The invagination he envisions leaves a pocket or inward fold of text, obscuring layers of text that would give clues to the process of contact and conflict that created it. It also obscures the production of laws that prevent encroachment and contamination. In the fictional text of *The Tortilla Curtain*, the process of border construction in the

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[34] Geraldine Stoneham, "'It's a Free Country': Visions of Hybridity in the Metropolis", ed. Ashok Bery and Patricia Murray, *Comparing Postcolonial Literatures* (London: Macmillan, 2000): 92.

[35] Jacques Derrida, "Le Loi du genre/The Law of Genre", *Glyph* 7 (1980): 217. Though his text specifically addresses literary genres, he feels it applies to the laws for limiting anything. He writes on p. 204: "But at the same time, I take the liberty to think that, while limiting myself thus, I exclude nothing, at least in principle and *de jure*."

novel's contact zone is used to unfold and offer glimpses at that otherwise hidden national text even as the border is being built to refold that text.

It is comparable to the "borderization" work of Mexican performance artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña. He relocates the production of discourse from different sides of a border to the border itself. Such an exercise, he writes, "means to speak from the crevasse."[36] The border becomes a discursive junction, a place "to smuggle dangerous poetry and utopian visions from one culture to another."[37] This strategy utilizes the hidden discursive fold to subvert anti-contamination laws. These same structures appear in *The Tortilla Curtain*. At the same time, Boyle asks what forces conspire to repress that kind of activity.

Cándido and his wife, América, live, literally, in a crevasse, at the bottom of Topanga Canyon at the edge of the Anglo settlement Arroyo Blanco Estates. "Arroyo Blanco" is a pretty glaringly significant name, meaning "white stream", specifically a seasonal stream usually dried out outside the rainy season. The "whiteness" of the stream signals the exclusive nature of the housing development that identifies itself geographically with that stream. It also bears associations with a "white mainstream". However, as a dried stream, it is also a crevasse, and it is at the bottom of the crevasse where the two Mexicans live. As a crevasse, it is closely associated with the "invaginational" (see below, next section) and with the discourse of repression the location near and in it reveals. In another of the book's doublings, while Cándido and América are associated with the crevasse, Delaney, too is associated with the border line through his very name and its echo of "delineation". He constantly battles his own ambivalence, as liberal and yet reactionary, unaware of how these opposite impulses determine each other. His unawareness means he is unable to stop his own movement from a kind liberal who opposes the wall to a fervent reactionary who defends it at all costs. Through the contact with the Others in the canyon, he glimpses but refuses to read and thus further represses the invaginated text his name would signify, that of "de line".

The line in Delaney's name, as mentioned above, joins the liberal and reactionary, just as the border around Arroyo Blanco does. Whereas an internal border like the Mason-Dixon line provides a sense of wholeness by focusing debates around it, an external border complements that interior wholeness by limiting the figures of that

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[36] Guillermo Gómez-Peña, "The Border is... (a Manifesto)", Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Warrior for Gringostroika* (St. Paul, MN: Greywolf Press, 1993): 44.
[37] Gómez-Peña 43.

debate. It determines the people to be included in this discourse as well as the field of signification, the semiosphere, in which this discourse is to take place. One can only occupy a position such as "liberal" or "conservative" within that field as a member of the society the borders delineate.

That does much to explain why the very term "liberal" denotes a whole array of meanings depending on the country and the political discourse where it is used, from the right-wing in Australia to the centrist in Germany and Canada to the left-leaning in the United States. The term does not carry all these meanings because "liberal" represents a discreet category at one point on a universal political spectrum, varying from country to country according to where each is located in that spectrum. Instead, "Liberal" evolved internally within each country's specific political discourse until it is now associated with divergent and even opposing political policies. Thus, Australia's pro-business, xenophobic Liberal Party bears little similarity to the social-democratic and inclusively inclined "liberal" wing of America's Democratic Party. The evolution of what Americans commonly call liberal stems from the country's specific history: the absorption of part of the Socialist platform by urban Democrats early in the twentieth century, that party's courting of minorities later in the century, and an environmentalism strongly influenced by transcendentalism's romantic relationship to nature.

Delaney Moosbacher and his politics are decidedly "liberal" in this field. His views require a relatively high level of cultural homogeneity to exist and make sense. He can only be a liberal within his own community. This fact is invisible to him because within the shelter of the community, his values appear universal. In his community, most of the residents consider themselves liberal as well. The character Jack Cherrystone best sums up their views. On the subject of gating the community, he tells the other members of the homeowners association, "I'm as liberal as anybody in this room ... I'd like to open my arms to everybody in the world, no matter how poor they are or what country they come from". After that prolepsis, he adds, "I say that gate is as necessary, as vital, essential and un-do-withoutable as the roofs over our heads and the dead bolts on our doors." (44).

In fact, Delaney and the other residents avidly avoid contact with the Others outside the housing development, seeking instead people like themselves, as the relationship to his wife suggests: "He and Kyra had a lot in common, not only temperamentally, but in terms of their beliefs and ideals too – that was what had

attracted them to each other in the first place." (34). Among those beliefs and ideals they shared are the classic icons of liberal America: "Their memberships included the Sierra Club, Save the Children, the National Wildlife Federation and the Democratic Party ... In religious matters, they were agnostic." (34). The action in the novel revolves around securing this space against those outside (Mexican) intruders. They unsettle not only Delaney's wealth and social position but also the complacent self-righteousness of his liberal political identity. The border requires his becoming increasingly reactionary toward representatives of the external in order to preserve his internal liberalism.

His external reactionary repression for the sake of internal liberal preservation replicates the long-running narrative of United States-Mexico relations. Delaney and the rest live on land that once did constitute Mexico's northern territory, but Boyle's novel foregrounds not so much the national claims to this land as it does the economic and psychic results of its settlement by the United States and its citizens. The border around Arroyo Blanco replicates the U.S.-Mexico border, the "tortilla curtain", by providing its insiders, those who created and defend it, with a space from which they can exclude and exploit its outsiders as they see fit. Within that space, the residents on the inside are free to develop and contest their group identity and enjoy the material fruits of secure borders.

The gate and walls around Arroyo Blanco were ostensibly erected to stop inner city Los Angeles criminals from encroaching, and robberies do occur in the novel. Delaney's car, for example, is stolen. However, the criminal element is always made synonymous with Mexicans. When Delaney replaces the stolen white Acura with an identical new one to erase the memory of its theft, his dealer assures him it was a professional job engineered by Mexicans, Mexicans who represent the law no less: "probably some judge or police chief down in Baja is driving [your car] right now." (145). When Delaney reports his car stolen to his wife, he says "they" stole it (125). "They" are that Other he fears so much which increasingly becomes synonymous with Mexican through the course of his contact with them. At the same time, Boyle portrays Mexicans, like Cándido himself, driven by desperation to steal because they are barred from legitimate access to the means of earning a living by the border which makes them "illegal". The border criminalizes the Mexicans and makes them criminals as well, driving them to violate the borders and the dictated order of things.

Broad public issues in America frequently occur in the background of the novel to reinforce the allegorical nature of this story. For example, when Delaney first collides with Cándido, Boyle describes Delaney's car radio "nattering on about import quotas and American jobs." (4). Jack Jardine, president of the Arroyo Blanco Estates Property Owners' Association, draws the connection between Mexican immigration and securing the borders of Arroyo Blanco. He refers to national sovereignty, saying, "The ones coming in through the Tortilla Curtain down there, those are the ones that are killing us." (101). Securing borders means keeping out not immigrants in general, but the Mexicans, since their presence is illegal, as Jardine points out.

This indicates a deep-seated epistemology of the Mexican as the illegal and as the non-American by definition. It goes to the root of the Othering of the Mexican in the United States as a justification for their continued exclusion and for the inclusion of that which is not Mexican or once was but is now assimilated because it was advantageous. Delaney finds himself within this discourse, wanting to be liberal but reacting against a perceived outside threat in order to stay liberal. He is disturbed by his own ambivalence which mirrors the general ambivalence of the big southern border, a border that includes the Mexican within the United States as the specifically excluded.

The following, therefore, will look at *The Tortilla Curtain*'s portrayal of the opposition of the secure sense of home and chaotic wilderness and how it interacts with the identity of the novel's white male protagonist. This interaction both destabilizes divisions of identity but in so doing reinforces them. Boyle places Delaney's interior conflicts and dread within a structure of the Freudian *unheimlich*, that which is feared as, in a sense, the anti-home, or Bhabha's literal "unhomely".[38] Parallel to the home in the novel, civilization is also threatened by that which is outside it, nature and wilderness. The threat actually stems from conflicting views of nature, essential for understanding Delaney and how the liberal-reactionary conflict in the text confirms his white male identity. The *unheimlich* Other and the civilization/nature conflict drive a spiral of

[38] This paper will primarily use the original German Freudian term *unheimlich* rather than its common translation as "uncanny" because it contains within it the notion of the home, essential to Freud's discussion. Though the ramifications of the "uncanny" as the opposite of the astute "canny" are in themselves intriguing, Freud's *unheimlich* link to the home is useful in this study for obvious reasons. Bhabha's "unhomely" best captures the original meaning, but as it is itself a word not used in English, it feels awkward to substitute one non-English word with another, and thus this study will keep to the original. For Bhabha see "Articulating the archaic: cultural difference and colonial nonsense", Chapter 7 of *Location.*

violence in the novel to its conclusion with the ambivalent possible survival, just barely, of Delaney the white male, "de line" of the white male.

3.3.1. The home association and the *unheimlich*

The Tortilla Curtain does not belong in the horrific or fantastic genres associated with Freud's *unheimlich* as it refers to Hoffmann's *Sandmann*. However, *The Tortilla Curtain* derives a primary motivation for all the characters from their psychic relationships with their homes and phantasms the home is supposed to repress that then reappear embodied in threatening Others. The mental images the characters conjure, especially those of Delaney and Cándido to whom Boyle provides the most access, quickly take on dimensions of the *unheimlich* supernatural, satanic, and horrific. At times of stress, these phantasms break through the barrier of repression to determine their actions.

Freud, in his initial considerations of the term *unheimlich*, begins by examining the German word *heimlich*, which comes from *Heim* (home) and means domestic, homey, and secure in the sense of "feeling at home". In modern German these meanings are generally separated from that term and more or less grouped together under *heimisch*. *Heimlich*, however, also meant and still means clandestine and secret. The *unheimlich*, then, opposes this, threatening the sense of security as "everything that should remain secret and hidden yet has emerged."[39] Therefore, Freud deduces, the uncanny, un-homely *unheimlich* is a kind of familiar or at-home, containing within it the security of the home simultaneously and profoundly disrupted. The *unheimlich* is "nothing new or foreign but rather something familiar to the emotional landscape since time immemorial which has become alienated through the process of repression."[40] As a result, one of the most common tropes of the *unheimlich* is a doubling in which the repressed Self reappears as the Other recalling that repression.

Boyle composes his narration around a comparable structure as an aesthetic version of Chambers's elucidation on the specific function of the interaction of whiteness and the Other. Chambers writes "Whiteness - like other 'blank' categories - is the denial of its own dividedness through the production of its other(s) as examinable, because they

[39] Sigmund Freud, "Das Unheimliche", 1919, ed. Thure von Uexküll and Ilse Grubrich-Simitis, *Psychologische Schriften*, Studienausgabe vol. 4 (Frankfurt: Fischer, 1994): 249. Translations from this text are my own.
[40] Freud 264.

are split."[41] Engagement with the *unheimlich* then often means conflict with that Other in an attempted renewed repression, the reestablishment of the security of the home. Poe, whose stories in German translations routinely appear in collections with *unheimlich* in the title, presented a classic narrative of *unheimlich* repression in "Cask". Montresor walls into his home with new masonry the perceived insult to himself, the insult being the good fortune of the Mason Fortunato that the Montresors once had. The border, the wall, plays a powerful role in the *unheimlich* as the instrument of this repression. The repression is the wall's *unheimlich* double structure as the masonry which physically represses the Other and the old bones which psychologically *repress the repression* by their apparent uniformity with the rest of the catacomb walls covered with old bones. The bones are at once both literally familiar and grotesque.

As will be explained below, Boyle follows this to an extreme in which each culture in the "clash of civilizations" in his novel represents the *unheimlich* for the other. Elements of internal disorder are repressed and then projected outwardly on external Others, driving forward the acts of violent dialectic conflict. Beginning with an *unheimlich* encounter between Delaney and Cándido, the novel quickly develops an allegorical set of associations of home, settlement, and unmarked whiteness opposed to the border as the un-home, unsettled and vague. That un-home becomes embodied by two supporting figures, a vagrant and a youth in the housing development, who represent the threat these men fear and drive their conflict forward.

Boyle reproduces the tropes and the dialectic of the *heimlich* and the *unheimlich*, focusing much of the force of his narrative on the drive to secure the home by securing its borders. Delaney and his double Cándido exert a huge amount of energy making and defending their homes. That energy becomes increasingly maniacal as each man is made more synonymous with the other's imagined Other. Boyle doubles their characters as well. More than home defenders, they are ironically also well known in their respective communities for foraying outside that home for material and spiritual gains.

Cándido has traveled to the United States several times, for example earning money to build a home for his aunt. This he does then not only for the money but for the recognition at home as a hero. Delaney hikes into the wilderness beyond his housing settlement to seek a close spiritual connection to "nature" (see below). It is also part of his job, writing a monthly column for the naturalist magazine *Wide Open Spaces*. The

[41] Chambers, 196.

action between the two men is thus driven by colliding interests of "home" as well as the ability to leave their homes. Not only do they compete for the same resources of space, but each also corresponds – is made to correspond – to the other's secret *heimlich* Self and *unheimlich* Other as the figures they meet outside the home.

However, this is not a simple clash of equal and opposite forces of the *unheimlich*. The asymmetrical power relations of the two men are essential to the novel's social critique and the privileging of the white in American society. The clash represents what Clifford describes as "discrepant cosmopolitanisms".[42] It shows the different circumstances of travel in which the two men find themselves. These circumstances characterize their knowledge of, and ability to negotiate with, each other. Delaney can rely on the predominately white homeowners association at Arroyo Blanco for the security of the home and the *heimlich*, whereas Cándido has precious little: his own drive, some loose associations with various people, and his young wife América. Delaney protects his settled home behind a wall and a powerful community, while Cándido is alone, trying to make a home for his wife in the canyon as a base for saving enough money to rent an apartment from which they can search for proper jobs. They both fear the loss of difference between themselves, the indefinite and the vague. However, Delaney (de line) is a member of his community and consumer of its mass culture and thus has "better control of the marking pen"[43] and is in a position to impose and enforce definition and thus repress the Mexican.[44] Their very first contact unleashes *unheimlich* phantasms that each uses to cloak the other as Other. It launches an asymmetrical power struggle of repression, home, and setting borders.

Delaney wants to be liberal. Yet he finds his hatred and dread of Cándido, whose name he never finds out in the novel, and all things Mexican constantly slipping into consciousness, despite his attempts to repress it. He is haunted by fetishized visions of the stereotyped Other. As discussed above, Bhabha writes in "The Other Question" of

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[42] Clifford, James. "Travelling Cultures". Clifford. *Routes, Travel, and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1997: 36. For more on the two men as travelers, see next section.

[43] Stoneham 91.

[44] Bergland draws a similar conclusion for the creation of the Indian as spectral or haunting in order to create American identity in Renée Bergland, *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects*, Hanover, NH: UP of New England, 2000. Rather than looking at whiteness as a repressive trope like Chambers, she looks specifically at Indians as figures of repression "because they are the most consistently spectralized Americans". (19). She writes inclusively, "Of course, ghostly Native Americans are allied to the ghostly African Americans, women, resident aliens, and poor people who haunted the nineteenth-century American national imagination along with them." (16).

the stereotype as a fetish in which characteristics of difference are replaced by "metonymies of presence" which repress difference even as they make it manifest. The novel's white man routinely succumbs (succumbing: he wants to be liberal) to this process of stereotyping.

Stereotyping begins the moment he finds Cándido lying in the canyon after their collision. His gaze, at the man's wounds, then at his torn clothes and torn grocery bag, ends fixed on Cándido's genitals. He mentally displaces them with that most basic object of Mexican stereotype, tortillas: "a plastic package, through which Delaney could make out a stack of *tortillas* (*Como Hechas a Mano*), clung to the man's crotch as if fastened there." (7). Delaney unwillingly mentally castrates Cándido with a literal tortilla curtain. Though Delaney acts apparently "instinctively", the object of stereotype he uses to replace Cándido's phallus is not his own invention. It is actually a mass product made to radiate authenticity and self-fabrication, for the Spanish label reads "just like hand-made" (just like home-made). He wants to be liberal, but he can only be so within his specific discursive context, within the mass society which includes him as a member and locates him as liberal.

Anderson asserts that mass-produced culture creates and maintains "imagined community" for a mass society by producing objects for a great many people which define the world with a symbolic textuality that feels natural and authentic. Delaney's fetishization of Cándido with a mass-produced tortilla, the home-made claim gaining even more "authenticity" by being in Spanish, is a product of the American national text that saturates the environment of the residents of Arroyo Blanco. The "tortilla curtain", both the figurative phrase and literal phenomenon, takes on the same role as the radio's nattering or Jack Jardine quoting immigration statistics. Similarly, at the meeting of the homeowners association, the residents vote to erect a gate after the impassioned speech by Jack Cherrystone. He is "... a little man, barely five and a half feet tall, but he had the world's biggest voice. He made his living in Hollywood, doing movie trailers, his voice rumbling across America like a fleet of trucks, portentous, fruity, hysterical." (43).

Cherrystone's Hollywood voice of fabricated American authority gives his argument force, swaying the other members of the community to his side. That stands in contrast to one of the few dissenting voices, Rudy Hernandez, on whose side Delaney does not want to be. He considers Hernandez "a crank ... who liked to hear himself talk and would argue any side of an issue till everyone in the room was ready to rise up and

throttle him." (41). Hernandez, with his Spanish name, is cast out. His arguments are described as vapid, but Cherrystone's are as well. Still, the people listen to Cherrystone, whereas Hernandez, without an audience, really is talking to hear himself talk, since no one else listened. His words also do not appear in the text, but rather he is "throttled" by Delaney's description of him. Delaney wants to be liberal, but he certainly does not want to be identified with this man, perhaps a Mexican as well. Though Delaney privately opposes the gate, he prefers to be part of the majority subsumed in the Hollywood voice that gives him his identity and makes him liberal. Elements that disrupt the community and his identity as liberal must be and are repressed.

The home, and *heim*, association of the novel finds its strongest agent in the Homeowners Association at Arroyo Blanco. In his much-read *City of Quartz*, Mike Davis provides a lengthy attack against the institution of the homeowners association in the Los Angeles area as a physical manifestation of white America and its power. The homeowners association provides, in his words, the essential infrastructure of the "white-supremacist genealogy"[45] of the slow-growth movement that has led to the explosion of residential tracts in that region. As a form of shadow government neither politically accountable nor legally recognized as pressure groups, homeowners associations have exerted great political influence at the state and local level since their inception in the early 20th century.

The first homeowners associations in Los Angeles maintained deed restrictions specifically designed to exclude, at first blacks, then Asians and Mexicans. The result was that "95 per cent of the city's housing stock in the 1920s was effectively put off limits to Blacks and Asians."[46] To this day, though specifically racist stipulations have disappeared, the extensive economic restrictions their charters include still effectively exclude most blacks and Mexicans. Gated communities, Davis writes, were the logical next step in this development, physically representing the exclusion for which homeowners associations strive. This said, one critique must be leveled at Davis' portrait. One notes that Asians have become more or less accepted in residential neighborhoods in Los Angeles and elsewhere in the U.S., which is not to deny that xenophobia may still be leveled at them. Significantly, Davis and Boyle both leave Asians out, as they complicate the white-nonwhite class struggle symmetry of both their narratives.

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[45] Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the future in Los Angeles* (1990; London: Vintage, 1992): 160.
[46] Mike Davis 161.

That critique aside, Davis's concerns are important for their reappearance in Boyle's novel, textualized in the *heimlich/unheimlich* iconographic world of Delaney and the other residents of the white mainstream Arroyo Blanco. The white residents are surrounded by reminders of the palimpsestic cultural context of their settlement which places the Mexican under erasure but leaves traces to recall its repression. There are the Spanish names such as Arroyo Blanco and Piñon Drive, names either adopted or invented by the property developers a few years before. The very ordinances require that houses look like adobe missions. Wistful names and mission-style homes function as fetishes, replacing the palimpsestic erasure with a romanticized past. Objects which conflict with that past, like present-day Mexicans, must be erased to keep it romantic.

As a physical reconstruction of the Chambers thesis, a constant reminder of the repression of the Mexican Other, everything in Arroyo Blanco is covered with white. Houses are "painted in one of three prescribed shades of white" (30). The car Delaney sits in when he collides with Cándido is white. The new one he buys to replace the one "they" steal, is identically white, "exact model, color, everything." (147). The exclusionary wall built around the settlement is, predictably, white. Whiteness becomes the manifestation of repression, that which elides and erases. The white homeowners association functions as a body for maintaining the whiteness of the settlement and its community both internally and as a part of the United States. The white wall manifests the exclusionary border and the desire to maintain it, both for material and mental well-being. It physically surrounds the settlement with whiteness and excludes the non-white.

The wall in turn is doubled by the crevasse, the canyon next to the housing settlement where Cándido and América live. Whereas the wall represents the outward manifestation of the certainty of the home, the canyon is a place of inwardness and uncertainty, a hole rather than a whole. It is the deep, dark recesses of the un-home, a place where people are not supposed to live. Yet it is the only place Cándido and América can live while they seek a more permanent home. In the sense of the Derridean "invagination", the two live at the bottom of that hidden fold of text, disturbing the homeowners through their presence. Delaney hates the people living in the canyon out of liberal self-righteousness: they ruin the environment. He considers "God, how he hated that sort of thing – the litter alone was enough to set him off." (11).

Instead of leaving it pristine for the locals to enjoy as "nature", the illegals contest the space as a place to live. This undermines the certainty of its signification as legally

designated wild zone at the edge of the housing development. Their presence actually makes the area more wild, for it is more lawless, uncertain, vague, and terrifying. It must be said that Cándido feels by no means secure there either. His stay is supposed to be temporary as he, and he fears the canyon and its status on the edge of civilization just as much as the whites. The difference is that he is forced to inhabit it.

Whether or not it was Boyle's intention, the canyon offers a web of association that links the dread of the vague with the vaginal. Freud believes that the desire for the home echoes the desire to return to the safety of the womb. However, as the *unheimlich* represents the Self and its desires alienated through repression, the entrance to that womb, the vagina, is often regarded, he writes, by neurotic men as *unheimlich*.[47] For Delaney, the *unheimlich* lives in the canyon. It is a physical invagination of the land. It is also an invagination of the text of repression of the Other through the designation of the land as "wild" yet free of people whose presence makes the wilderness more wild by contesting the space. Cándido's name echoes not only Voltaire's protagonist but also the vaginal yeast infection candidas. He does, after all, infect Delaney's *unheimlich* invagination. To further make the case of the association of the female with the canyon, it is also closely linked to Cándido's wife, América. He expects her to inhabit it for him and tending to their home there. Only when he is injured does she venture out to work.

Her journey out, however, lures into the canyon none other than the brutal man Cándido believes some Mexicans are: the *vago*. Boyle employs the *vago* amid this association of the vague with the vaginal in a way that does not suggest strategic wordplay with their common lexicographic origin. However, their proximity in the novel provides an analytic potential that deepens the link between the sexual, the unknown, and the horrific *unheimlich*. A *vago* is literally a bum and etymologically related to vagrant and vagabond. It comes from the Latin root *vagus* for wandering and vague, which is ultimately related through *vac-* to vagina to connote emptiness as a lack of presence. América's breaking Cándido's rules of the home opens it to the horrors of the vague, the uncertain. The *vago* seems truly despicable, eager, just as Cándido fears, to take advantage of his wife. His rape of América strengthens the link between the vague and the vaginal, ending the first section of the book, "Arroyo Blanco" with the unnerving scene of "his dirty fingers inside her as if they belonged there." (142).

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[47] Freud, 267.

The *vago* constantly evades unaccountability, subverting both white American and Mexican authority, traversing between their worlds as it suits him. He proves the *unheimlich* opposite of the domestic, wander about the canyon with his silent Indian companion. When Delaney confronts him there, the *vago* claims to be hiking, which Delaney cannot disprove. Later the *vago* emerges from the canyon to encounter Delaney's wife, Kyra, trying to sell a large house. She shoos him back into the canyon with intimations that her husband is nearby and discovers the next day "pinche puta" spray-painted on the house. He may or may not be responsible for it but is immediately suspected. The *vago* grows increasingly important for Delaney's fantasies of dread and hate toward Mexicans. Delaney associates him with Cándido and believes the *vago* also camps in the canyon. When Cándido accidentally begins a brush fire, Delaney tells the police the *vago* set it (286-7). When spray-painted messages deface the white wall, Delaney and the others are again sure that the *vago* is behind it.

That graffiti is itself vague. Boyle slyly never says clearly what it says. He only writes of Delaney listening to Jack Jardine observe, "It almost looks like the writing on the stelae outside the Mayan temples – look at this – but then this looks like a Z, and that's got to be an S with a line through it, no?" (316). With his description of the graffiti, Boyle conjures up the *unheimlich* yet again by slyly taking part in an inside joke from the music world. He is almost certainly obliquely referring to the symbol on the unnamed fourth Led Zeppelin album from 1971 that gave it its nickname "ZoSo".[48] The description exactly matches, as the first part appears to be a Z. Its bottom leg swoops below the rest and ends in an indecipherable sign, and the middle S-like thing has a line through it that terminates in large points in the center of smaller O's that flank it. As the album cover lacks a title and little other text but four symbols, people have long speculated about their meaning, especially the "ZoSo", which spawned a widespread legend of links to Satanism.[49] It means nothing specific, but as a result of its myth and mystery and the enduring popularity of the band, the sign has ever since been a wildly popular object of graffiti among – especially white male – youths and disconcerted those not in the know.

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[48] In a direct e-mail exchange, Boyle would not confirm or deny this. He wrote, "Do not fret over the graffiti".

[49] This information comes from *The Making of Led Zeppelin's IV* (Burlington, Ontario: Collector's Guide Publishing, 1999). The inspiration for guitarist Jimmy Page, who conceived it, does appear to have been his dabbling in the occult at the time, as well as his dabbling in drugs. However, it represents

In this way Boyle provides a wonderful case of a nonsensical sign mistaken for Satanic. It is also mistaken for Mexican because of the fear the uncertainty of the sign evokes. As will be shown, the fear of the indecipherable, chaotic, and Mexican that this sign comes to represent also lies in an *unheimlich* construction. The issue is not that the white men gazing at the sign on the wall demonstrate a palpable ignorance of Mayan stelae and Led Zeppelin lore. It is that they deceive themselves by not realizing or even suspecting that the writer on the wall, violating it and its whitening function with a juvenile adulation of rock music, is Jack, Jr.

Jack, Jr., the third Jack in the novel after his father and Jack Cherrystone, is himself of vague identity. He develops in the book to double for the *vago* among the whites as an agent of the *unheimlich*. Both figures come to take on a double *unheimlich* character. Internally, they embody the fears of the cultures they come from, violating their own laws of decency, and externally they represent the elements of horror their Others project on the cultures from which these *unheimlich* figures come. Just as Delaney confuses the *vago* with Cándido, Cándido confuses Jack, Jr. with Delaney. Cándido imagines him Delaney's "gangling, tall, awkward *pendejo* of a son", linking them as "red-haired devils" (121). Like the *vago*, Jack, Jr. evades accountability, though as the son of the wealthy and influential. He takes pleasure in violating the homes of the perceived Others, ripping up Cándido's camp in Chapter 4 and leaving behind the spray-painted message "BEANERS DIE" (62). Like the *vago*, Jack, Jr. also violates his own home with his spray-painting. His acts, however, only drive his community to more actively hunt the Mexican. Delaney fears Jack, Jr. greatly for speaking out the repressed hatred of Mexicans in his own mind. He also fears that his stepson, Jordan (another "J") will turn out the same. Nonetheless, he does not consider the young man outcast.

Instead, by the end of the novel, Delaney has become so obsessed with securing his home from the Mexican threat that he takes great labors to catch the *vago* on film in the act of spray-painting. The first photo Delaney gets, however, depicts Cándido in a desperate act of stealing from the settlement:

> The face that stared back to him, as startled and harshly fixed on the light as any opossum's face, was human, was Mexican, but it wasn't the face he expected. He'd expected the jaw of the graffiti artist with the bad dentures, the trespasser, the firebug, caught at last, proof positive, but this was a face *come back to haut him from his dreams*, and how could he ever forget that silver-flecked mustache, the crushed cheekbone and the blood on a twenty-dollar bill? (320 italics added).

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no known standardized Satanic sign. Embarrassed by the controversy, Page today avoids questions on the subject.

When he finally does capture a photo of the graffiti artist, Jack, Jr., Delaney is already stuck in an episode of hunting down and arresting Cándido with his gun. The photo only "almost stopped him. Almost." (346). Instead, he "dropped the negatives on the contact sheet and balled the whole thing up in a wad and buried it deep in the trash. That Mexican was guilty, sure he was, guilty of so much more than this." (346). Repressing the knowledge of Jack, Jr.'s violations, he uses the weapon Jack Sr. induced him to buy to hunt the Mexican. In doubling the *vago* with Jack, Jr. the novel demonstrates the border's repression as a double act. It is an internal psychological repression of the *heimlich* element of disorder Jack Jr. represents and an external physical act, the actual engagement with the *unheimlich* Other upon whom this disorder has been transferred.

Doubling Jack, Jr. and the *vago* in this way powerfully brings the focuses the novel's conflicts on the way in which ambivalence and uncertainty are made safe by the establishment of a community that can exercise power under the sign of whiteness. Though Jack, Jr. and the *vago* are doubled and confused, they are nonetheless different in a crucial manner that demonstrates the functioning of the gated community and home association. Unlike the *vago*, Jack, Jr. does have a name, albeit the same as several other characters. More importantly, the *vago*, as the name indicates, is a vagrant, a person without a location and center. Jack, Jr. has a home in Arroyo Blanco. His membership in the white home association protects him by lending him an identity in the community and gives him the excuse, even privilege, to lash out against the Mexicans in the canyon.

His association with the home sphere of the settlement makes his association with the *vago* of the canyon so *unheimlich*. Delaney wants to be liberal. To be a part of the imaginary community that makes him liberal, he must associate himself with Jack, Jr. as a co-member. He requires Jack, Jr.'s presence as the reactionary against which he smugly defines himself. However, to maintain his secure sense of community, he represses the *unheimlich* that Jack, Jr. embodies by displacing it. He projects it on the Other and creating a surplus of the *unheimlich* outside the settlement that must be protected against. Haunted by visions of the horrific beyond the security of the community that makes him liberal, Delaney becomes obsessed with securing "The borders. Delaney took an involuntary step backwards, all those dark disordered faces rising up from the street corners and freeway onramps to mob his brain, all of them crying out their human wants through mouths full of rotten teeth." (101).

3.3.2. Preserving nature

Delaney wants to be liberal. Cándido wants to be a provider. Both venture from their homes as a function of their desires, traversing borders into the wilderness of the outside. They leave the community that gives them a sense of Self to foray into nature that they cloak in their own desires and associations of freedom and hostility. The border represents the limits of Self in both directions, both the Self of the settled community they leave behind and a Self they discover in the un-home of "nature". Nature, as a space of the *unheimlich*, liberates one from prescribed social confines but in doing so contains within it one's fear of uncertainty. As will be explained below, Boyle presents conflicting experiences with nature, one akin to American transcendentalism and one akin to the more hostile naturalism. In Delaney's case, it creates the satire of the educated, liberal, observant man who turns out ignorant, reactionary and unseeing. Cándido brings a narrative balance as an equally satirical figure, the romantic hero of a self-made man battling nature to provide for his wife, a man who turns out to be largely inept and disaster-prone.

Delaney expects the experience he seeks in "nature" to fulfill his own transcendentalist fantasies. However, he is constantly confronted with a different nature in the novel that disrupts his worldview by sharing the signifier "nature" with the harsh nature of survival in which Cándido finds himself. Here we see a desperate struggle to live in the canyon, one aggravated and negated by De Line. It is the one which catches fire, causes floods, traps pets to eat them, fights, steals, destroys. The contrast complicates nature, casting its romantic idealizations as ambivalent and vague.

The contrast also does the same for nature's opposite: civilization and Delaney's society that determines nature in this way. It especially complicates, as Stoneham points out, American concepts of freedom and an open society. Though the novel deconstructs white masculinity as a social construct instead of a natural category, it demonstrates the powerful psychological and material forces behind that construction without claiming to provide a prescription for them. In the end, Boyle presents what appears to be a naturalist apocalypse. It is at the same time a false purgative that provides no resolution to the novel's conflicts but rather a detailed portrayal of their structure and fragility. It makes a plea for more selfless kindness but offers little hope in light of these conflicts.

"Nature never became a toy to a wise spirit," Emerson cautions. In the same essay, "Nature", he describes becoming the transparent eyeball in nature in which "all

mean egotism vanishes." Delaney's problem seems to lie in the mean egotism, which does anything but vanish in nature. Emerson's "nature" is "all which Philosophy distinguishes as the NOT ME". Determining the "not me" of nature, however, requires the strongly subjective determining of "me" and "my" limits of disassociation. Nature, the Other of "me" incorporated for Emerson the material, the physical and that which is exterior to the civilized Self of spirit. Delaney seems to live very much by this code, pursuing moments of "transparent eyeball-dom" that dissolve this division and return the sojourner to his life in civilization with a greater sense of Self. "Mean egotism" may vanish in rare moments of visiting nature, but the task remains an egotistical one of Self-discovery and the sojourn in nature a mere visit.

Delaney does not even experience much more than contentment. The first column of his we are given to read shows that he finds exactly what he expects: manzanita, scorpions, coyote howls, all neatly metaphoric and non-threatening, leaving him "content". (79). His contentment leaves his columns, well-composed though they may be, sounding more like catalogue texts than deep experiences. Nature is a toy. This is not to stamp him a bad transcendentalist, but rather to point out the Self-constructing function of nature for Delaney. He tends to use it, like Emerson in weaker moments, as an affirmation of values, just as he regards the coyote howls as background music, instead of fearing them as a threat to those values. He wants to be liberal. He is content.

The novel explains that Delaney pretentiously nods to the writing of Annie Dillard with the name of his column, "Pilgrim at Topanga Creek" (32). Dillard, however, wrote more provocative texts because she described the fears and threats nature presented her own Christian theology in *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek.* One need not share her religious premise to be shaken from a naive view of benevolent nature by her description of praying mantises eating each other in a jar as part of the fearsome process of what she called the Universal Chomp.[50] Delaney reflects hardly at all about a similar episode of one scorpion eating another in a jar, explaining in airily sentimental tones, "the scorpion is beautiful in his way." (78).

In this column, he writes of going to the canyon to spend a night to "savor not only the fixed joys and certitudes of Nature but the contingencies too." (78). However, the contingencies never disrupt his certitudes. Any fear he may have is not expressed but rather explained away as natural and therefore simply good. He writes of howling

[50] Dillard, Annie. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. (1974; New York: Harper & Row, 1990): 55-56.

coyotes that they are "singing for my benefit alone" to which he falls asleep with the assurance, "All the world knows I'm content." (79). His contentment, however, stems from the circumstances under which he travels in nature. He is a "pilgrim" who as such chooses to leave his position of security for brief spiritual excursions. That contentment comes undone after the collision with another traveler whose travel is less voluntary, informed by a desperation that glaringly exposes the contingent nature of Delaney's self-assured security. The coyotes may be howling, but not for Delaney's benefit. They are harbingers of the Universal Chomp Delaney does not realize he is a part of.

Delaney lives from an inheritance. Boyle writes, "his parents had left him enough money so he didn't have any worries there." (154). Other financial needs are taken care of by his wife, Kyra. By his schedule we see that he is outside a maximum of two hours a day, spending the rest of his time either doing household chores or sitting in his study four hours a day, "his fingers grazing lightly over the keyboard," (32) working on his monthly column of around 1000 words. One cannot help but be amazed at the amount of time it takes for this dilettante "work". In his home, he lives "in the womb of language" (32) for his writing away from the actual nature that is the object of his observation. Nestled in his *heimlich* world, he profits from and is unaware of – indeed represses – the harsh human struggle that allows him to live how he does and how his identity reflects it. He lives in a community filled, as Stoneham points out[51], with names of white northern European origins in a pact of communal identification to secure a common sense of home. That home is so stable that he can identify and seek the un-home of nature beyond its limits, unaware of what horrors also lurk there. He is unaware because he expects a well-defined nature as counterpart to the well-defined civilization, repressing the inherent contingency of that definition.

For this reason, Delaney and his readers are characterized as not only naturalists but "die-hard preservationists" (265). Preserving nature implies not only containing the space of a preserve but also containing the "wilderness" of nature, regulating it according to a strongly subjective view of what that nature is. In particular, it means keeping any trace of humans out. Boyle opines, "[N]ature writers are generally very liberal, even radically liberal on all issues except one – the issue of immigration, on which they are more reactionary than anyone."[52]

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[51] Stoneham 90.
[52] Quoted from "Resources", The Official TC Boyle Homepage, March 8, 2003 <http://www.tcboyle.com/public_htm/tortilla.html>.

That is not to say that all naturalists suffer from Delaney's specific fear of the sign of humans as revealing the contingency of his own home. However, employing Delaney allegorically points out the ambivalence of liberal naturalism. Delaney, like many in his community, has moved to this spot for the preserve. He says, "The whole point of this place is to be close to nature, that's why we bought in here, that's why we picked the last house on the cul-de-sac–" (220). Kyra rebuts, "we bought in here because it was a deal," pointing out the very material nature of their move. Delaney seeks the spiritual joys of living at the edge of nature, unaware of how artificial and contested that edge is. He represses the knowledge of the material struggle that brought him where he is, even the daily work of the wife of this liberal man, from morning until evening, right under his nose.

For this reason, the coyote, a familiar trickster and a wild animal that subverts borders, acts as a key trope and motor in the novel. Delaney very quickly associates Cándido with the coyotes who encroach on his backyard to eat his dogs. Like the coyotes, Cándido living in the wild canyon represents for Delaney that wild struggle and Universal Chomp he wants to forget. Thus, work on his column is constantly interrupted by thoughts of "*His* Mexican. The man he had to forget all over again." (109).

By the end of the novel, Cándido even mimics the desperation of the coyotes by eating the Moosbacher cat and stealing dog food. The coyote also disturbs Cándido. He and América are cheated at the U.S.-Mexican border by a *coyote* who was supposed to lead them across. Cándido and Delaney both connect the *vago* with the coyote and his ability to pass in and out of secure areas. The conversation between Delaney and Kyra about why they moved there revolves around the coyotes and Kyra's support for walling in the community to keep them out. Enraged at Delaney, Kyra thinks, "he was the one, he was guilty, he was the big protector of the coyotes and the snakes and the weasels and tarantulas and whatever in Christ's name else was out there." (220).

Much in the novel depends on Delaney's changing view of the coyote. In his first column, he hails it as "the survivor, the Trickster, the four-legged wonder" (79). By the middle of the novel, he writes a column specifically about them, filled with anxieties about "the coyote's way", for they are "cunning, versatile, hungry and unstoppable". (215). At the core of the piece, he expresses concern about the Animal Control Department trapping coyotes, a solution revolting "to one who wishes fervently to live in harmony with the natural world" (212). Then he reflects, "and yet, increasingly, this

author has begun to feel that some sort of control must be applied, if we continue to insist on encroaching on the coyote's territory with our relentless urban and suburban development." (212). The control he advocates is to not leave out food, vulnerable pets, or water that encourage the coyotes to come into contact with people.

The column generates the largest protest he has ever had from his readers who believe he is advocating control of the coyote population. He thinks, "Certainly, it wasn't the coyotes that were to blame, it was us – hadn't he made that clear?" (265). The lack of clarity stems from Delaney conjuring up fearsome images instead of the adulation of the first column. He may not call for culling coyotes, but he exposes the disharmony in which humans and coyotes live, demonstrating the fearsome conflict inherent in disordered nature, especially when populations compete with each other for territory.

The fearsome conflict and inherent competition in nature provide tropes more familiar to naturalism that oppose the benign transcendentalist vision. Theorists hotly contest the limits and content of literary naturalism. Walcutt's influential treatment of literary naturalism actually saw it emerging from transcendentalism, a "stream" that focused increasingly on the material and scientific and diverged from the other stream that focused on social radicalism and the spiritual.[53] Ahnebrink places it directly in the context of European literary naturalism, pointing to the influence of European sources, especially Zola and his founding treatise on the experimental novel.[54] Michaels, on the other hand, describes it emerging as part of a general discourse of scientific processes within an emerging capitalist economy.[55]

Against this background, literary naturalism in the specific context of America did not so much emerge from transcendentalism as critically respond to it, specifically the position the individual Self within nature. Speaking, then, in the most general terms, Emerson presents a task of individuals visiting nature to emerge with an expanded sense of Self and its place in the universe. In contrast, time and again naturalist works feature individuals grappling with their environments, applying their ideals only to see them and their Selves crushed by the unfeeling enormity of nature and its laws. One does not subsume the universe like Whitman; one is obliterated by it. Crane best encapsulates the critique of transcendentalism in his famous quote from "The Open Boat" (1894): "When

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[53] Charles Child Walcutt, *American Literary Naturalism: A Divided Stream* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1956).
[54] Lars Ahnebrink, *The Beginning of Naturalism in American Fiction* (Upsala: Lundequistska, 1950).

it occurs to a man that nature does not regard him as important, and that she feels she would not maim the universe by disposing of him, he at first wishes to throw bricks at the temple, and he hates deeply the fact that there are no bricks and no temples."

Crane's insight describes perfectly Delaney's dilemma. Despite his agnosticism, his "Pilgrim" column conjures up religious and spiritual associations. He even writes, "I'm a pilgrim, that's all, a seer, a worshipper at the shrine." (76). He invokes the same language of the house of worship that Crane refutes. At the conclusion of *The Tortilla Curtain*, he also finds the principles and view of nature that formed his certainty not so much destroyed as never having permanently existed. There is no shrine, there is no limit to nature, and he hates the fact. This hate he transfers principally to Cándido, whose encroachment of the border of the community represents that nature which does not regard him as important.

However, nature does not regard the Mexicans as important either. The struggle of Cándido and América to survive and find a more stable home frequently calls to mind the pessimistic works of naturalist writers, slowly destroying their hopes and dreams. América clings to the images of the popular Mexican dime novels with their Alger-esque narratives, "picture romances about *El Norte* and how poor village girls and boys made their fortunes and kissed each other passionately in the gleaming kitchens of their gleaming *gringo* houses." (178). Filled with memories of his heroic past, Cándido is now determined to stay in America with América to pursue the American dream.

They become subject to the nature in which they live that exposes them to fire, flood, and the "natural" *vago* of animal instincts. They also must battle "natural" forces of base competition which exclude them from the white community and cause them to live outside: outside the protective border and outdoors, exposed to all these dangers. Cándido and América try to live, as Davis describes Salvadoran illegal immigrants he meets camping outside Los Angeles, "like hobo heroes out of a Jack London novel".[56] Instead they become nature's fools. Ironically, as stories like "An Unparalleled Invasion" indicate, the naturalism of Davis's socialist idol Jack London became fierce racism when it came to competition between peoples. In that story, London advocates the mass-extermination of the Chinese through biological weapons.

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[55] Walter Ben Michaels, *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1987).
[56] Mike Davis 12.

"The correspondent wondered ingenuously how in the name of all that was sane could there be people who thought it amusing to row a boat. It was not an amusement; it was a diabolical punishment," Crane writes in "The Open Boat". Again, the difference between Delaney's and Cándido's "nature" lies in the vicissitudes that bring them to the canyon. Delaney positively brags, "my fare is humble" (78). He is overjoyed to spend a night sleeping on the ground. Cándido regards the same situation as humiliating, a diabolical punishment. Clifford pleas in "Traveling Cultures" for a comparison that explores the motivation for travel and the very difference in experience the two men have: "The project of comparison would have to grapple with the evident fact that travelers move about under strong cultural, political, and economic compulsions and that certain travelers are materially privileged, others oppressed."[57] The travel of a pilgrim differs from that of an economic migrant. Their contact causes disruptions for both the people and their systems of signification. For both men, this requires the repression of that disruption in order restore certainty and safety. For Delaney in particular this means the reinforcement of the border of the community of Arroyo Blanco with a wall around it and armed attack on the Mexican.

3.3.3. Fragile succor and kindness

The great promoter of the white wall, the white collar criminal Dominick Flood under house arrest, quips to Delaney a subtly disturbing observation about uncertainty and nature: "To me, there's nothing more important than the environment – hey, where would we be without it, floating in space?" (187). In a moment of wordplay, Boyle concludes his book when the white wall called for by the white community's Flood meets a huge black flood from the natural crevasse. The artificial Arroyo Blanco is no match against this powerful black flood.

Annie Dillard, among others, is noted for designating streams of water as symbolizing never-spent life. When benign, even usually dry, streams become raging floods, the life force becomes ferociously ambivalent. At the moment of the novel's climax, Delaney confronts Cándido with his gun, but both are swept away by the black flood that also destroys much of Arroyo Blanco. It "hammered the walls flat and twisted the roofs from the houses" (353). Delaney, swept away, "was drawn so much closer to that cold black working heart of the world than he'd ever dreamed possible." (352). That

[57] Clifford 37.

heart of darkness reveals in a sublime moment the uncontrolled and uncertain nature of nature, the horror of struggle and survival. It shows him his own smallness in that whole scheme he had always so successfully repressed as *unheimlich*, living within the confines of the white community.

In all this, Boyle styles Cándido the savior of the final scene. Even though the Mexicans' baby, Succoro, their succor and hope for the future, is lost in the flood, Cándido, remains, as his name implies, faithful, tending to the naif of his Voltaire namesake. As such, he sees "the white face surge up out of the black swirl of the current and the white hand grasping at the tiles" and takes hold of it (355). That final gesture, much disputed in Boyle online chat, is highly problematic. Boyle provides the homiletic explanation, "The final gesture of the book, I think, shows that we are one species and we do have to understand and appreciate that fact despite ethnic and national differences."[58] The book describes occasional small acts of selfless kindness, especially by whites toward Cándido, which offer a view of something opposed to Delaney's encounter with the cold, black working heart. However, they are rare and undependable. They happen spontaneously between individuals, just as chaotic and disorganized as the wilderness of nature Delaney and Cándido work so fervently to repress.

The perpetuation of borders, especially as the sign of the limit of nature at the edge of civilization, therefore, seems to repress not only the viciousness of nature but also, ironically, limits acts of selfless kindness that would counteract that viciousness. Borders strengthen the sense of Self and the sense of community which designates those whom one should aid and whom not. Arroyo Blanco houses the white community whose members, associating themselves with whiteness and thereby agree to a contract of mutual aid and protection, which they do provide each other in countless ways as a society and as individuals. This occurs at the exclusion of the non-white, in this case specifically the Mexican, which through repressive displacement comes to embody all the chaos the white community fears.

Delaney wants to be liberal, but "his" *unheimlich* Mexican reminds him how fragile that designation is and what kind of military and economic struggle it depends upon. Therefore, he feels impelled to perpetuate the horrors on the Mexican immigrant to preserve his own liberal self-image. It presents a different kind of paradox than that around which this study centers, the two are linked. The white male liberal as it is cast in

[58] Boyle homepage, reader's guide.

American discourse is taken apart and critiqued in the novel as a founding principle of the American master narrative. The novel employs devices which expose the fallacy of a liberalness that forces Delaney to work to cover up that exposure. Like Pynchon's delineator Mason, Delaney must constantly repress and defer the fact that he is part of the white Commission, a member of the Homeowners Association. Boyle demonstrates that the acts of selflessness he calls for become precious and rare when the bordered white male Self is at stake. Borders encompass and give an historicized order to the white male Self and his included forms of Otherness. To transgress them is to proceed into the realm of the Self's doubled Other, the *unheimlich*, and all the horrors it contains.

4. Deceptive subversions: Passing, reverse-passing, and the appearance of transformation for Wally Lamb and Jay McInerney

> Marcus was the only person who ever referred to me as a "nigga." Every time he applied the word to me I relished the sound of it, as I might savor an exotic delicacy. This word, more than any other cultural term of practice, continued to separate me from my neighbors back home.
>
> - Dalton Conley, *Honky*[1]

4.1. For getting people passed

To cross a border is to pass through it, to be transformed from one kind of stranger into another at the same moment as the space the border delineates is transformed from one person's homeland to another. Narratives of racial "passing" present a confrontation with the signs of borders that are not to be passed, limits that are not to be unlimited. Passing would subvert those limits. "Reverse-passing", the subject of this chapter, also refers to people who "pass" through racial and identity limitations but in the Other direction: out of what is configured as a privileged space.

The racial and more generally identity-based subterfuge contained in the term "passing" was originally an African American experience. That is to say it is an experience shared by descendents of people imported from Africa as slaves, as well as a broader American, mostly white, experience of negotiations with blacks in America, Toni Morrison's "Africanist presence". Passing was done by people considered black by convention but because of some degree of white ancestry were born so light-skinned and otherwise "white"-looking that they publicly pretended to be white, *passed for* white. As an actual act and as a literary representation, it held a particularly powerful grip on both black and white imaginations around the beginning of the 20th century.

Lines are not easily drawn between passing and the more widespread fixation on mulatto figures in general or that of simple miscegenation. Most narratives which are discussed in terms of the one also involve elements of the other two. Narratives of both miscegenation and mulatto figures also all contain within them deliberations over whether the partners or products of an interracial union can fit in, i.e. pass, anywhere. By the same token, narratives of passing are always already enabled by mulattos who resulted from racial mixing. All three phenomena address the same complex of issues surrounding racial purity and the conventions that (un-)authorize their mixing. However,

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[1] Dalton Conley, *Honky* (Berkeley: U of California P, 2000): 123.

passing, as the term indicates, pays stronger attention to race-based social division, the institutionalized regulations which construct separate racial and ethnic identities and prohibit one's passing from one to another. They question the criteria that authorize racial constructions, subverting the notion of definable racial purity, of "race" itself as a classifying tool, and therefore its role as a basis for social division and social belonging. They also provided a neat device through which to embody the in-between identity of African Americans, thoroughly imbued with an identity as American yet prohibited from being a part of the society to which they are acculturated.

Passing passed out of fashion decades ago as a motor in African American plots, though it and the motif of mix-raced people still enjoy much general popularity as indicated by say, Philip Roth's *The Human Stain* (2000). "Blackness", however, is now no longer the terrible secret it was represented as a century ago. It no longer requires passing to keep it hidden. Indeed, this change formed the tragic irony of Roth's novel in which the ex-colored professor's secret exists as a relic of earlier stronger prejudice but has become such a part of his identity that he cannot easily relinquish it. As minority movements have developed, blackness and various other forms of non-whiteness have become objects of manifest, visible demonstration and performance of difference. In such a context, many white male writers demonstrate a longing to also perform some form of difference, just as Dalton Conley in this chapter's epigram does. It should come as no surprise that so many turn to the long moribund schemata of passing. However, aside from Roth's thoughtful revisiting of the traditional form, passing today most visibly reappears as what this chapter terms "reverse-passing".

In narratives of reverse-passing, white male protagonists discover and revive a non-white heritage or are adopted into a non-white community. This enables the authors to demonstrate difference while appearing to reconcile it by giving their protagonists the authority to perform the exoticism of the Others by essentially becoming them. Just as classic narratives of passing foreground gender roles and their interaction with racial discourses, these new reverse-passing narratives also portray race in a matrix with gender and, common for today, sexuality. Below, this chapter discusses in more detail passing's origins and reinvention as reverse-passing and provides a preliminary sketch of literary reverse-passing. Then it explores reverse-passing more deeply in *I Know This Much is True* by Wally Lamb (1998) and *The Last of the Savages* by Jay McInerney (1996). These novels provide ideal examples of white male protagonists becoming less

white and moving away from received forms of masculinity, finally turning Other. They demonstrate how reverse-passing actually confirms essentialist models of blood-linked, monocultural identity, despite attempts to transgress and transform identity categories. The first novel glaringly avoids this problem, while the second makes it visible by running aground upon it. Both also reprise the theme of contemporary unease with white masculinity as a product of Cold War-informed identity conflict and attempt to dismantle that identity. In the end, they reveal the forces which counteract any subversive potential reverse-passing may have.

4.1.1. The rise of passing

A century ago, the passing phenomenon drove to the heart of race as social privilege in the United States. The first chapter of this study described numerous recent studies which document the colonial-era appearance of racial definitions used to differentiate and privilege peoples and the further evolution of these definitions in the United States that made them appear both scientific and immutable. States, especially southern states, passed legislation well into the 20th century that solidified the "one-drop rule". This rule stipulates that a single black ancestor automatically made a person black because of their "one drop" of African blood.[2] Once used to justify the Jim Crow regime of segregation, such legislation has since repeatedly been upheld by courts and is apparently still broadly accepted long after the end of the Jim Crow laws. For example, there has been little shift in race percentages, despite the Census Bureau's adoption of the policy of self-designation in the 1960s.[3] The "one-drop rule" eliminated the group of mulattos who existed as a third "race" up to the end of the 19th century, firmly cementing the division

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[2] James Davis's detailed study of legal definitions cites a law passed in 1930 in Virginia, for example, as the last of many which considered any black ancestry at all as sufficient to designate a person black. See James Davis, *Who is Black? One Nation's Definition* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1991): 55.

[3] Davis, 158. See also Haney-López on the "one drop" or single ancestor-definition. This definition is currently being supplanted by increasingly vague definitions of race. Regulations for the U.S. Census from 2000 stipulated "Black or African American" as "A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa". Now, it also acknowledges "one-drop" of whiteness, defining "White" as "A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa", the latter two homelands being somewhat contentious. In this vein, in 2000 it allowed for the first time that, "Respondents shall be offered the option of selecting one or more racial designations." See Census "Revisions".

Nonetheless, as already mentioned in chapter 1, in line with "one-drop" logic, the Census was given the guideline for aggregating data that, "Responses that combine one minority race and white are allocated to the minority race." "White" must therefore still be pure. Any self-reported non-whiteness places one in another category. Only under the "ethnic" category "Hispanic or Latino" is there race mixing. It is bracketed out from "regular" whites and blacks to form its own catch-all designation.

between white and non-white by folding mulattos into the category of "black".[4] Davis writes, "As both extralegal practices and governmental machinery were developed to enforce the hundreds of segregation laws, the motivation to pass as white grew."[5] The increasing divisive rigor of Jim Crow laws led growing numbers of those mulattos to give up "blackness" and pass permanently for white. This peaked between 1880 and 1925 at between 2,500 and 12,000 people per year.[6]

Actual passing in society was reflected in a preoccupation with it as a plot device in literature. The peak period of passing saw the publication of the "classics" of the genre such as Chesnutt's *The House Behind the Cedars* (1900), Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) and Larsen's *Passing* (1929). Sollors finds antecedents in earlier works, but as a literary form of African American fiction, he also places the emergence of novels of passing in this period. Passing seems to have appealed far more as a literary plot than as an actual option. He writes, "Whatever the numbers were, it is quite possible that the rate of passing among those who could do so was higher in literature than in real life."[7] The literature of this era established the now familiar themes of passing: the secrecy and loss of ancestry, the role of passer as spy and informant, the betrayal of one's family and "people", the joke pulled on unwitting whites, and the need to survive and reproduce. It also thoroughly examined the criteria of passing for white and their ultimate ambivalence. Most importantly, passing literature reflected African American betweenness. It constantly invoked claims of being and feeling American and having American ambitions while expressing the frustration of rejection despite those claims.

Economic and cultural changes, not least resulting from the Depression and the external preoccupation of World War II, suddenly ended the social and literary fixation with passing. For a long time, it remained a footnote in African American literature. In recent years, however, literature of passing has been the subject of renewed scholarly interest in African American studies, as evidenced by several recent books that re-

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[4] These "one-drop" laws were directed primarily toward blacks. Other minority groups like Native Americans, Asians and Hispanics, though not considered black, have also not been considered white, but the borders between these groups have been patrolled with far less uniform stringency.

[5] James Davis 56.

[6] As Davis points out, reliable estimates for this highly illegal and thus secret act, are understandably hard to find. The high end is almost surely an exaggeration, and the low end is based on the 1940 census, long after the major wave had ended (James Davis 56). Sollors also cites guesses that similarly range from totals of tens to hundreds of thousands during that period. See Sollors, *neither black* 280-284.

[7] Sollors, *neither black* 283.

examine what appeared to have been a closed area. Passing has also become a term regularly seen in other discussions of social border crossing such as Jewish-gentile, Native American-white, male-female drag, and gay-heterosexual. Appropriations of the term "passing" appear in an endless number of recent books and articles. Indeed, it has arguably become the main contemporary term alongside "drag" to describe social identity subversions. It is no coincidence that white male novelists have also recently become drawn to the passing motif to explore their own concerns about social division.

4.1.2. Passing: the word

The renewed scholarly interest in passing probably stems from the recognition of a semiotic representational component of passing at the very root of the meaning(s) of the term. The origins of "passing" as it arose in the African American context are largely the subject of speculation. Juda Bennett suggests that it may have arisen from the "slave pass" issued to confirm a slave's permission to travel or manumission.[8] Others like Sollors believe that runaway slave bills describing light-skinned runaways as able to "pass for white" may have given rise to the term.[9] The specific use of "passing" to denote the practice of performing another race seems to have become frequent by 1900 and was codified by its first widespread published definition in 1926 in Van Vechten's glossary of black slang at the end of *Nigger Heaven*: "i.e. passing for white".[10]

That said, "to pass for", meaning to be accepted as something by bearing certain qualities, as it is used for runaway slaves and in Van Vechten's definition, is a much older idiomatic use of "to pass". The unabridged OED cites its first appearance in the late 16th century in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*: "God made him, and therefore let him pass for a man" (I,ii,56).[11] Crucially, to pass for something is not the same thing as being it, as Shakespeare himself indicates. His heroine Portia uses this formulation to begin mocking her French suitor as a ridiculous conglomeration of macho stereotypes, "every man in no man" (I,ii,60). "Passing for" something means the comparison of an object to a set of categorical criteria, observable qualities that lend it authenticity as belonging to that category. The "for", however, leaves visible a doubt as to the completeness of that

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[8] Juda Bennett, *The Passing Figure: Racial Confusion in Modern American Literature* (New York: Peter Lang, 1996): 10.
[9] Sollors, *neither black* 255.
[10] Carl Van Vechten, *Nigger Heaven* (New York: Knopf, 1926): 286.
[11] "Pass", *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., 1989.

authenticity. It suggests the transfer of that object into a category despite certain omissions or substitutions that falsify that authenticity.

From here, one can begin to draw similarities between this use of "pass (for)" and other uses of "pass". "Pass" stems from the late Latin *passus* for footstep or pace. It is a present perfect participle of *pandere*, to enter into and also expose, explore, and measure, making *passus* a substantive unit of that (giving us, for example, "mile" from *mille passus*). From these origins, for centuries "pass" has born implications of transit and transfer and an accompanying psychic movement into the new. One passes a tree just as one passes an exam, crosses border with a passport, passes away, or endures the Middle Passage, in each case a leap across ontological states. Indeed, "pass" itself is a much-transited word: The OED lists 69 uses and numerous sub-uses for it along 4 major branches, which is to say nothing of countless other words related to it through *pandere*.

The close of the 16th century saw the emergence in Europe of the Enlightenment rationalist mode of conceiving of things, as Foucault describes at great length in part I of his *Order of Things*. Scholars were beginning to sort things into grids with fixed limits and qualities that authorized their ordering into specific spaces. It makes sense that Shakespeare would use the notion of "passing for" something to mock its claims to be placed into a specific categorical space. It is in the same tradition that Derrida today has turned to the "aporia", or non-passage, as a means of re-examining the Enlightenment's work, identifying and deconstructing borders of conceptual categories denoted by signs.

Systems of racial separation in colonies were first established at that time, and their evolution occurred within this larger rationalist conceptual development. Simple laws banning marriage and concubinage with slaves and colonized subjects became more elaborate. Complex systems grew up to define and separate colonizers from their colonized peoples. Passing for white, as the practice emerged, meant not only bearing the qualities that appear to authenticate a person as white but also passing through the borders of a racial grid. Those who would pass *for* white would also pass *into* the white world, be granted passage throughout it and given access to its privileges, its passes. Having access to the centers of power gives one control over the "marking pen", the ability to determine just what passes under a certain sign and what does not as well as the authority to read those signs and judge their efficacy. The descriptive definition of passing as an act of pretending whiteness is thus better understood conceptually as performing signs of dominant identity in order to subvert their limiting capacity. Passers

disturb the authority of the sociosphere that maintains the efficacy of those signs of the authentic and disrupt the notion of the authentic as original, real, and true.

Even without foregrounding the etymological nuances of passing, scholars such as Sollors look to passing as an act which subverts the categories of appearance, the visible, legible signs of being "non-white". Particularly Fabi makes a strong plea against the banishment of passing from curricula, not only because of the gap it leaves in African American literature but because of what it has to contribute to contemporary theory.[12] As the performance of signs of identity, passing addresses core postmodern and postcolonial concerns such as recreating and escaping dominant discourses, hollowed-out signs, ambivalent signifiers, reading bodies, simulacra, and mimicry. Passers join other figures of subversive in-betweenness and hybridity which, for similar reasons, are currently so attractive for literary and cultural studies: tricksters, mulattos, half-breeds, Mimic Men, hermaphrodites and transsexuals, to name but a few.

Whereas people who actually passed a century ago took great pains to keep their ancestry secret, passing in literature "exposes" it like the "confession" of Johnson's anonymous ex-colored man. In fact, as his novel appeared, Johnson relates, many took it to be an actual confession, and no small amount of energy was expended trying to guess who the author was.[13] He even heard one man admit to being that ex-colored protagonist. Sollors also relates the rage from many whites this supposedly real document elicited because of the deceit.[14] Literature of passing exposes this "deceit" to explore the ambivalence of the signs of identity as social control. Novels of passing, therefore, focus more on passing as socially subversive. They have the potential to contest the authority to institute definitions of race through narratives written in a language that constantly questions that language. Literary passers perform stereotypes of the dominant group, mimicking, to refer again to Bhabha, metonymies of presence,[15] but this time of the colonizing people. Further, they infiltrate the center in published works to expose aporias behind the facades of white supremacy. For readers this means a disruption of their assumptions of what authenticates identity, questioning phenotypical criteria as well as how race is connected to American national identity.

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[12] M. Guilia Fabi, *Passing and the Rise of the African American Novel* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2001). She makes this argument in particular in chapter 5, "Tres-passing in African American Literary Criticism": 106-145.
[13] James Weldon Johnson, *Along This Way* (New York: Viking, 1933): 238-39.
[14] Sollors, *neither black* 265-6.
[15] See previous chapter, section 3.3.1.

4.1.3. Dances with Metonymies: reverse-passing

Whereas the new scholarly interest in passing sees its potential to subvert signification systems and the dominant sign of whiteness, the new interest of white male writers in passing tends to reinforce these things through reverse-passing. Reverse-passing responds to the same concerns passing addressed a century ago, especially the anguish of social division and exclusion based on race and ethnicity. However, it looks at passing in reverse. It depicts white men who discover non-white ancestry or consistently perform the perceived rituals of non-white Others. Unlike passers, these men become members of a non-white group not through pretense but by being included as authentic.

Passing is the performance of signs of dominant identity in order to subvert their limiting capacity and gain authority in the sociosphere that institutes the efficacy of those signs. Reverse-passing, on the other hand, is the performance of signs of subaltern identity in order to transform into that Other. Instead of performance as an exercise of the superficiality of social identity categories that subverts their sense of authenticity, reverse-passing is a socially romantic scenario of recovering authenticity, an origin of social unity with "true" social roles to perform. The transformation of the white male into an Other to achieve this authenticity leaves the Other still essentially exotic. The Other remains an object upon which to project longings, a space of constructed authenticity which serves to relieve beset white men of the pressure of being "civilized". That sense of authenticity in turn only confirms the veracity of identity categories and leaves the forces which inform beset American white male subjecthood untouched.

As described above, reverse-passing appears in two forms this study terms "adoptive" and "ancestral" reverse-passing. Two examples from recent films about reverse-passing from white to Native American make the difference clear while showing that their function is really fairly similar. An excellent popular example of adoptive reverse-passing is the 1990 movie *Dances with Wolves*. It features a white man, the Civil War soldier John Dunbar played by Kevin Costner, who feels apart from other soldiers and therefore asks for a transfer to the prairie, the frontier. There he befriends Sioux who upon occasion find him playing with a wolf. Thus named "Dances With Wolves" by them, he becomes a part of their community, performing a series of rituals and other practices, including a bison hunt, to become one of them.

He does not become simply a member of their society but rather is imbued with something authentic, something inescapably Sioux. Thus, he concludes "I'd never really

known who John Dunbar was. Perhaps the name itself had no meaning. But as I heard my Sioux name being called over and over, I knew for the first time who I really was."[16] The film suggests that he had always already had it in him, as indicated by his outsider role among the whites and his apparent harmony with nature for which the wolf stands in metonymically. His Sioux identity is a chosen one, but the rituals and practices of identity with the tribe solidify his authenticity, suggesting a return from the civilization of the United States to his original natural self. The rituals of the Sioux serve as metonymies of their Otherness as people of nature. Their performance authenticates the Otherness of the categories Sioux and Native American. It confirms both the efficacy of such rituals as signs of difference and the authority of those persons who would read those signs as "Indian" as non-white natives in harmony with nature.

Here the category really is "Indian" and not the specific tribe Sioux that adopts Dunbar, nor the politically correct "Native American". It has much more in common with Cooper's projected noble savage Indians than any conception of America's native peoples as groups with different practices and traditions, internal conflicts, and histories. The Indian serves as a proxy for the primitive and natural, more closely attached to the land upon which the United States is imprinted. The story also incorporates another familiar Indian motif, the captivity narrative, coupling Dunbar with a young white woman captured by the Sioux as a girl and raised as one of their own. She becomes his translator and conduit through which he develops his own Indian-ness. As a metonymy of the presence of the primitive, the dance with the wolf, far from subverting, confirms categories of white and Indian and their direct linkage as signs of civilization and primitive (respectively, of course). In this way the primitive Indian is preserved as a space for the white male protagonist, and moviegoers, to escape from the tensions and self-alienation of "civilization", rather like Delaney's nature preserve in the last chapter.

It even gives these white male subjects the opportunity to experience and regret the disappearing "Indian", yet another familiar Indian motif. Native Americans and white Americans are not reconciled through this process. Instead, the noble savage "Indian" disappears as it is absorbed and reenacted by white men through the dance with wolves and the marriage with the captive woman turned native. The conclusion of the film informs us that shortly afterwards, the final group of Sioux surrendered to U.S. authorities, spelling the end of the west's wildness. Costner's character has fled to the

[16] *Dances With Wolves*, screenplay by Michael Blake, dir. Kevin Costner, perf. Kevin Costner, Mary

mountains, ever running from the authorities but free to act out his Indian-ness with his new wife. Far from a hybridization of categories or a deconstruction of their limitations, the category Indian and its civilized opposite white are solidified, even stereotyped to the point of cliché. In this way, the white male in the film can pass from white to Indian and find a new sense of wholeness, an identity with the land he has just conquered.

Adoptive reverse-passing finds its counterpart in ancestral reverse-passing. Ancestral reverse-passing also features a white man as somewhat of an outsider who recovers a long-submerged non-white ancestry. It begins with the idea of essence, i.e. blood, already present in a protagonist. Essence provides a license and imperative to explore that ancestry by also performing rituals and exercises of the repressed Other which authenticate that essence by bringing it to the fore. Ancestral reverse-passing provides the main dynamic in another example from a recent Hollywood Indian film, the 1992 movie *Thunderheart* starring Val Kilmer. It features Kilmer in the role of part-Sioux FBI agent Ray Levoi investigating a murder on a reservation in the South Dakota Badlands. In this narrative of reverse-passing his non-white ancestry is not a secret but rather the reason the FBI sent him to head the case, assuming that he can gain the trust of the locals. That assumption proves initially false, as Levoi is too "by-the-book", but over the course of the film, his investigation turns into one of the impoverished material situation of the Lakota Sioux and, ultimately, his own long-repressed Indian-ness.

Film critic Roger Ebert observes that the film first presents him "unadorned, his hair cut short and neatly combed, his shirt buttoned, his tie in a neat knot."[17] Being "unadorned" signifies the lack of objects of Indian identity and the repression of his non-white ancestry. He is not unadorned but rather thickly adorned as a white square obsessed with the FBI rule book. Much of the film's tension, therefore, hinges on Levoi dismantling the white square exterior to uncover his roots. This gives him the subject position to determine the right and wrong of the case, which involves a scheme by wealthy whites to steal reservation land. Through encounters with "his" people and various changes he goes through with them, his ancestral Indian-ness reemerges to give him the authority of a representative of "his" Sioux people.

The search for his Indian-ness is a subsidiary vehicle for a social realist drama making a statement about miserable socioeconomic conditions for Native Americans in

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McDonald, Graham Greene, and Rodney Grant (MGM/UA, 1990).

[17] See Roger Ebert, "Thunderheart", *Chicago Sun Times* 3 April 1992, 30 June 2003 <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/19920403/REVIEWS/204030305/1023>.

reservations across the country. However, the film ends up confirming the assumption of the FBI, portrayed as woefully ignorant on every other point. It implies that there really is an essential Indian atavism passed on by blood that allows its carrier to understand other Indians at a level otherwise inaccessible to whites. This Indian-ness is not just the dire poverty in which many Native Americans live but also an attachment to the land (the plot is about stealing land) and a world alien to the over-civilized white world from which Kilmer's character came. That is best encapsulated by a scene which marks the beginning of his rapid transformation to Sioux in which an old chief tricks Levoi into trading his watch for a marijuana cigarette, saying he should start to live on "Indian time". Like *Dances With Wolves*, for dramatic reasons this film depends upon the essential difference between "Indian" and white as primitive versus civilized and demands the acceptance of concepts about the basis of that difference that enable its transcendence by a white male subject.

Films are useful for illustrating a point because of their widespread familiarity and the instant access their plots and visual images provide to a topic. These two films in particular rely heavily on visual images of racial and ethnic identity in their story-telling in order to signify tensions between white and non-white (in this case Indian). The objects of identity provide a visual economy that speeds the viewer through the plot without stopping to consider the validity of these objects. Both films bear the lacuna of race/ethnicity existing *a priori*, their signs already understood before the movie and remaining unquestioned throughout. These signs exist for the white male protagonist to adorn himself with to overcome the anxiety of difference and, one whispers, guilt.

Adorning is the key term in this context, for it involves an ornamental clothing or symbolic covering. That covering functions much like the border in the previous chapter does, as a textual confirmation of perceived difference which reinscribes rather than transcends it. Reverse-passing is realized through the confirmation of projections upon the Other. Its function is little different from the minstrelsy of older times in which white performers put on blackface in order to gain the license to misbehave. Bergland illustrates this well in his use of the *unheimlich* for discussing the motif of the ghost in white literature about Native Americans. The ghost, he argues, appears as an *unheimlich* reflection of white anxiety over the "disappearance" of various white male Others, especially Indians, through genocide, repression, or general hierarchization which elides subject positions other than non-white. "Phantasmic descriptions of African Americans,

women, aliens, and the poor point out the strength of the ghost metaphor and its strong association with white American men's anxiety and guilt over their complicity in American hierarchies of race, class, and gender." He focuses on Native Americans because they are "the most consistently spectralized Americans".[18]

The ghost is that *unheimlich* double of the white male. As such, it embodies, insofar as a specter which has no body can embody something, a nexus of projections of what the white male supposedly is not, including invisible. The elided Other becomes identified with the alienated Self, so the process of reconciling the Self requires performing the *unheimlich* difference of the Other. This process then cannot be critical of those metonymic fetishes of Otherness but rather relies on them, confirming their validity and their continued implementation as signs of delineating repression. In the realm of representation, either as film or as literature, adoptive and ancestral reverse-passing take on the same role as wish-fulfillment for a white male subject that allows him to overcome the unease of that *unheimlich* and merge with it. The blood relation of ancestral reverse-passing may increase the imperative to reconcile the Self through performing a specific Otherness, but the exercise is the same. White men becomes "less white" by manifestly adorning themselves with objects that signal categories of Otherness, reinforcing not only of their social currency but their veracity.

Adoptive and ancestral reverse-passing have a genealogy in America. They have precedents in minstrelsy, as mentioned above, and what Sollors terms, appropriately, the "adopted ancestor figure".[19] This figure was a staple in 19th century plays, featuring a noble Indian warrior or chief who at some point elaborately curses the white man. The figure dies in the end, blessing the American nation. His great, ghostly spirit lives on to represent both a guilty conscience and its absolution through this adopted ancestor.

Contemporary forms of reverse-passing carry on this tradition. Mailer's well-known invocation of the White Negro, for example, calls for adoptive reverse-passing, adopting "black" primitive Otherness, not to enfranchise African Americans but to combat white anxieties of being helplessly over-civilized. Like "Indians", the "ghetto" continues to be a vast resource for whites to appropriate objects of hip Otherness. The practice of slumming has a long history. The slang neologism "wigger" or "whigger" is modern manifestation of it, a slur against "white niggers" who adopt stereotypical

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[18] Bergland 19.
[19] Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York: Oxford UP, 1986): 121.

"black" objects associated with the ghetto or hip-hop: slang, gold chains, moves, and music. A similar impulse toward adoptive reverse-passing can also be seen in the ethno-kitsch industry, particularly visible at self-proclaimed "alternative" arts and crafts events which all seem to offer the same fare of dream catchers, moccasins, Native American chants on CD, didgeridoos, Buddha heads, and food from all over the world. Ancestral passing has similarly been booming in recent years, as countless Americans dissect their whiteness and discover repressed non-white ancestry. They then use it to disassociate themselves from being white and claim the authority to exhibit objects of that ancestral identity and reconfirm them as signs of it and its supposed essence.

4.1.4. The reverse-pass in literature

When literary figures pass or reverse-pass, the emphasis on visual representation of signs of identity in film shifts to the words of the text. Textually, this can still mean creating visual mental images but also other forms such as textual expressions of "character", as Boeckmann suggests. Particularly as visible signs disappeared in mulattos through miscegenic dilution, she points out that character became the chief sign of race and ethnicity in early 20th century discourse. The notion of character as a "quantifiable set of inherited behaviors and tendencies that were almost always racial"[20] has now been largely rejected by scientists, and passing as a literary device is now rather *passé* for African American literature. However, visible signs and their correspondence to character continue to be major themes in literary narratives of reverse-passing.

The two novels to be examined below focus very much on the character of their protagonists and the resolution of problems of character through reverse-passing. Reverse-passing here, as in *Dances with Wolves*, becomes an antidote to problems of inner division that drives a feeling of personal impotence in the white male protagonists. It not only resolves their concerns about racial, gender, and sexual difference, but also allows them to recenter themselves amid Others. White men regain a lost signifying authority by assuming those adornments which signify Otherness.

Wally Lamb received much popular adulation for his novel *I Know This Much is True,* including a huge sales boost as an Oprah Winfrey Book Club Selection in June 1998. The novel tells the story of a white man attempting to reconcile various aspects of his life, especially the great strain of his schizophrenic twin brother. The neat resolution

[20] Boeckmann 3.

comes through ancestral and adoptive reverse-passing. McInerney's *The Last of the Savages* presents a more complicated case of passing and reverse-passing at levels of race, gender, and sexuality. It is an ultimately ambivalent narrative that at times shows the borders being passed in a critical light and at other times to relies on their fixity in order to present passing and reverse-passing as solutions to them.

Up to now, the discussion of passing and reverse-passing in this chapter has largely centered on the racial context from which it emerged. As these two novels will indicate, (reverse-)passing also involves aspects of gender and sexuality, in the same way in which recent theorists have also taken to adapting the term beyond its original context. In the end, this chapter will conclude, despite the hybridizing potential of performed identities that is offered by passing across racial and other boundaries, the actual literary practice of reverse-passing, like passing itself, tends to reduce that potential. It confirms the aporia of borders of difference because of its reliance on identity roles as pre-given in order to assuage white male feelings of unease toward projected Others who are both *unheimlich* and authentic.

4.2. Passing across the great schism: *I Know This Much is True*

Wally Lamb's novel is just such a case. When a book begins with a man describing how his schizophrenic twin cuts off his own hand as a sacrifice to God to protest the 1990 Gulf War, it leaves little doubt that it will address separation, internal division, and the tension of reconciliation. The narrator of *I Know This Much is True*, the sane twin Dominick, must do more than overcome the warping influence of being responsible for his brother and the fear that he may also develop schizophrenia. He is also alienated from all the other people in his life: his dead mother, his dead baby daughter, his estranged wife, his unknown father, and his hated stepfather, to cover the major ones.

Four figures emerge in the course of the novel who lead to his healing and the resolution of his tensions with the other figures, his profession, and his psychic well-being. Significantly for this discussion, they are all marked as non-white or not-quite-white. They open up avenues of ancestral and adoptive reverse-passing which allow Dominick to overcome his feeling of separation from the rest of the community and from himself. In performing their Otherness, he heals his divided Self, and his continued healing depends on maintaining access to spaces of well-fortified non-whiteness.

To the not-quite-white are counted Dominick's Sicilian ancestors, his Grandfather and great-aunt, Prosperine "the Monkey". Their Sicilian ethnicity and strict Catholicism make Dominick an outcast in an apparently all-WASP community. As chapter 2 of this study indicated, Don DeLillo's *Underworld* also suggests that Italian Catholic identity, though broadly assimilated in the United States, nevertheless made one less "white" than WASPs.[21] In addition to this ancestry, Dominick also, to use contemporary liberal jargon, gets in touch with his Indian side through the person of Ralph Drinkwater. Ralph is an outcast from his school days who later ends up the chief of the Wequonnoc, an all but vanished Native American tribe, whom Dominick discovers to be his half-cousin. The other non-white healer in the novel is the (India) Indian psychiatrist, Dr. Patel. She sprinkles her psychological diagnoses with Hindu wisdom which offers the key to Dominick's recovery from all his miseries.

These characters bolster Dominick's white male character. They help relieve the socially constructed tensions of his whiteness and masculinity. Examining these non-whites and the reverse-passing used to approach them sheds light on postcolonial concerns of cultural interchange. At the end, the narrator makes much of his hybridity, for example calling himself "Wequonnoc-Italian" (896). However, these identities retain their fixity, both as signifiers and as the essential content these signs denote.

Tellingly, he concludes with truths he has found: "that love grows from the rich loam of forgiveness; that mongrels make good dogs" (897). This hybridity does not suggest, like Bhabha's use of the term, a fluid continuum of enunciative practice which "challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as a homogenizing, unifying force, authenticated by the originary Past, kept alive in the national tradition of the People."[22]. It is more akin to the hybridity Robert Young criticizes for showing "that we are still locked into parts of the ideological network of a culture that we think and presume that we have surpassed."[23]. The use of the non-white characters and reverse-passing to develop non-white "character", therefore, does not provide any resolution of the dichotomies of center and subaltern inherent in the designation of white and non-

[21] For a brief overview of the discussion of Italian whiteness or non-whiteness in America as well as Italian perceptions of race along a North-South divide in Italy see Joe Sciorra, "Italian Americans and Race", Italian Rap, 15 July 2003 <http://www.italianrap.com/italam/italam_race.html>. As mentioned earlier see also Jacobson and Richards as well as Gugliemo and Salerno's collection of essays and on the subject.

[22] Bhabha, "Commitment" 37.

white. Instead, it again employs the subaltern as a resource for healing the anxiety of white male Self-alienation, so that when subalterns speak, it is only through the lens of the first-person white male narrator.[24]

4.2.1. Passing and being not-quite-white

As already discussed in the chapter one, a certain field of research in today's so-called "whiteness studies" focuses on the passage of various peoples into general whiteness. Brodkin, Hollinger, Ignatiev, Jacobson, Richards, Roediger, and many others speak of the pull the identity had on not-quite-white persons in the United States to conform by, as these authors describe it, passing. The passing of these people was not a literary or artistic exercise. It was a social movement based on potential rewards of belonging and having a stake in that elusive American dream. They looked similar to other "whites", and the experience of a few generations in the United States aligned their interests. Thus, their assimilation, though fraught with conflict, was relatively easy compared to that of African Americans and Native Americans.

Mary Demetrick writes in her poem "Blending In" of Italian passing: "Wild-eyed Italians / wild-haired Italians / loud speaking / loud laughing / women and men / fascinate me / I find them hiding / behind Anglo names / like Kennedy, Litz / and Scott / wanting to be discovered / dreading the exposure."[25] The poem indicates that despite passing, members of this not-quite-white group retain a distinct sense of identity which brings both pride and shame. In *I Know This Much is True,* Dominick rails against his ancestry as Catholic Italian, worse yet Sicilian. He finds it a source of embarrassment and exclusion. The repression of it begins with his name which is really Domenico but, he insists, "only on paper" (142). He would like to be seen as a modern-thinking agnostic, as befits someone with his educational and social status. However, he is constantly pulled back to memories of his church by his twin's religious invocations. This Catholicism is imbedded in his Sicilian ancestry and stands for it metonymically.

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[23] Young, *Desire* 27. The debate over hybridity and its (re-)definition among postcolonial scholars and cultural theorists is on-going. Yet, despite, even because of, the many attacks on Bhabha's and others' concepts of hybridity and calls to transcend the word and its weaknesses, it continues to focus minds.

[24] Again confirming Spivak's conclusion that the subalterns cannot speak.

[25] From ed. Nzula Angelina Ciatu, Domenica Dileo and Gabriella Micallef, *Curaggia: Writing by Women of Italian Descent* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1998). Quoted by Andrea Dottolo, "Situating Whiteness in Italian Identity", *Understanding White Subjectivity: Strategies for Building Antiracist Feminist Politics* 2002, 3 September 2004 <http://sitemaker.umich.edu/elutensk/italian-american_identity/>.

These two associations and the people in his life who embody them, his mother, brother, and grandfather, form a need in the narrator to repress them. He passes for a kind of white that erases all signs of not-quite-whiteness, making him a "normal" member of the community. The rediscovery of his Sicilian Italian ancestry comes through his efforts to get his loathed grandfather's memoirs translated, according to his mother's last wishes. He becomes re-acquainted with his grandfather and namesake, Domenico Onofrio Tempesta, a.k.a. "Papa", and his great-aunt, called *la mingia* or "the Monkey" in the memoirs. This gives him a Catholic Sicilian-ness he can adorn himself with as a tortured negative example through which he can find well-being and solace.

The initial embodiment of this identity from his perspective is his schizophrenic twin, Thomas, as signaled at the beginning by his invocation of God to receive his sacrificed hand. Many of Thomas's more insane actions are intertwined with Catholicism. In college, he asks his girlfriend, the sister of Dominick's later wife, to read him *The Lives of the Martyred Saints* as he masturbates (401). Leading up to the book's opening scene we are told Thomas stopped his medication because his girlfriend at the time convinced him that "if his faith was strong enough, he didn't have to rely on medication" (51). He also has a closer relationship with their deceased mother, Conny (Concettina), the bearer of that Catholic Sicilian identity, and acts as her conduit for Dominick. It is she who insisted the boys go to church regularly. She also kept her brutish father in loving memory, insisting her sons pay him regular devotion and making Dominick promise to translate the memoirs "The History of Domenico Onofrio Tempesta, a Great Man from Humble Beginnings" (526).

The special, secret bond between her and Thomas forms in a key scene in Dominick's memory: when their violent stepfather, Ray, comes home to discover Thomas and the mother playing at having a tea party. To Ray's great horror, Conny has dressed Thomas up as a woman, and he reacts brutally, beating wife and stepson, shouting "These are what little girls wear! Are you a little girl?" (761). Dominick was and is jealous of this shared intimacy between his mother and his twin, hating Ray while secretly enjoying of the punishment of the other two. Nevertheless, he feels responsible for Thomas and for his mother as she dies. Dominick is burdened by these figures but cannot absolve himself of them, a tension upon which much of the novel rests. His strategy up to the book's beginning has been to repress these objects of identity in order to repress his anger toward the people who embodied them.

Unwinding these figures from the strands of Catholicism, Sicilian ethnicity, and their impact on his view of gender means engaging with the memoirs of his grandfather, "that troublesome document" (897). Papa's intention "to offer myself as a model for Italian youth to imitate" (527), strongly anchors his text in Dominick's not-quite-white identity. Dominick's childhood recollections of Papa recording his memoirs take up much narration, and his exertions to get the manuscript translated take up much more. This apportionment of narrative space indicates the essential role it played as an exercise in rediscovering Dominick's ancestral not-quite-white identity. After the translation, Dominick begins reading the manuscript and making some sense of it for himself. Lamb includes the entire text in the novel, including interruptions for Dominick's reflections, another generous allotment of pages that highlights its importance.

Beginning in a boastful tone, by the end Papa has related less his achievements and more a conflict with his sister-in-law, Prosperine, whose ugliness stands in sharp contrast to her lovely mythological namesake Proserpina. In order to marry her sister, he agrees to take *la mingia* into his home, but, sure she is a curse and a witch, he tries every means possible to control her or cast her out. When his wife dies, he has to confront her in a daily battle of nerves. A story she tells that ends "I know this much is true" (669)[26] horrifies him with her claim of learning witchcraft, so he practically imprisons her in half of the *casa di due appartamenti* he builds. At last she flees and curses him to misery with a spell by cutting a rabbit in two halves which become whole rabbits. The repetition of division in this narrative is obvious. His process of finding new wholeness will be about finding means to reverse-pass across those divisions, both of ethnicity, and, as the manuscript indicates, gender.

Upon completing the reading, Dominick feels ambivalent. He despises his grandfather more than ever as an example of a paternalistic Sicilian prig, but he also finds them an attempt by "Papa" to face "his failures. Until he had humbled himself" (897). He does not wish to imitate his grandfather but does identify with the man's internal conflicts. Thus, Dominick arrives at the homily, "power, wrongly used, defeats the oppressor as well as the oppressed. More than anyone, it was my maternal grandfather ... who taught me that." (897). This is the lesson drawn by Dominick, the "Italian youth" the manuscript was for. He no longer submerges this ethnicity as shameful. Instead he

[26] According to the author, the title of the novel, also its last sentence, was taken from a song by Spandau Ballet. Its appearance at this point in the book, he claimed, was accidental. This statement made in response to a question at a public reading on 3 Sept. 1999 at the Amerika Haus, Munich.

must be Italian and feel stereotypical Italian paternalism to appreciate Papa's lesson. Absolution comes when he goes to a dying woman named Prosperine he discovers in an asylum. He begs, "Can you forgive me ... Make me whole again?" (889) and "reverses" her spell, using her delirium to make two rabbits appear to turn into one. She dies then, crossing herself in a final Catholic gesture. This puts him at peace with this heritage, a familiar sign of Italian Catholicism that perpetuates that identity for him even as apparently sheds its limitations.

Italian must stay Italian and Catholic Catholic. Otherwise, Dominick lacks the source of his frustration from which he desires to free himself. This lends the novel's plot a certain peace but leaves standing essential categories and metonymic stand-ins like paternalism and genuflection that signify cliché Italian-ness and Catholicism. They remain something immediately understood and accessible through these characteristics. Similarly to the "Indians" and the "Sioux" in *Dances With Wolves*, Sicilian becomes synonymous with Italian. That is important in light of the complex, largely racist, stance other Italians take toward Sicilians, often referring to them as African. Edvige Giunta even speaks of Sicilians who perfect Italian in order to pass.[27] Against these uncritically stereotypical and conservative sources of identity, Dominick can reject their tenets even as he embraces their stability, at no time questioning why they are markers of difference, of not-quite-whiteness. He is merely better reconciled with this aspect of his identity and no longer has to feel the anguish of repressing it.

4.2.2. Ralph Drinkwater the Indian

That said, Lamb then employs a more readily recognizable form of ancestral reverse-passing to heal Dominick's sense of division. It draws on the Native American, or "Indian" as a source of authenticity. That, unlike the Sicilian, becomes a positive identification, serving as a Sollors-like adopted ancestor for a white male subject. It Americanizes the white male by rooting him to the land. This Indian-ness is embodied in the person of Ralph Drinkwater, a figure who slowly manifests like a ghost in the novel to play a dominant role in Dominick's recovered sense of Self.

Lamb constructs an adopted ancestry with the fictional Wequonnoc tribe. He used the place name Wequonnoc in Norwalk, Connecticut, the town which served as the

[27] Edvige Giunta, "Figuring Race", ed. Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno, *Are Italians White? How Race is Made in America* (New York, NY: Routledge 2003): 228.

model for the novel's town of Three Rivers.[28] The tribe is apparently based on the Mohegans who once had settlements there. Like the Mohegans, his Wequonnocs side with the English in the Pequot War of 1638-39 and face a slow demise in subsequent years.[29] Drinkwater plays a "reappearing Indian", essentially working in the reverse but using the same apparatus as Bergland's all-but-vanished "Indian ghost". He provides the route to a symbolic reunion with the repressed Self, offering the white male protagonist a new community to be a member of, a new "we" to claim. As a fictionally constructed community, Dominick can access it through "Indian" markers of identity, especially a mysticism he gains the authority practice which is central to being one of "his" people.

It follows stereotype logic that Indians are always already understood as deeply mystical and thus closer to the rhythms of the earth and nature, unlike over-civilized white men. The novel's denouement of Dominick discovering kinship with Ralph reinscribes the logic that blood relations determine character. It also affirms the belief that sharing "blood" means having a deep connection that heals divisions. It is a classic construction of race, culture, and identity that posits that "race" connects people because it should. Race as an *a priori* category determines their culture and outlook on life because they already genetically contain these things. It gives individuals the authority of a collective identity because by blood they always already are members of it.

Ralph Drinkwater first appears in the novel as a marginal figure but slowly dominates its narration. He quite literally haunts Dominick, and the death of Ralph's fraternal twin sister, Penny Ann, when they were children in school together haunts Dominick even more. It creates an *unheimlich* doubling through a racial Other who is even twinned like Dominick and Thomas. Ralph's incidental reappearance in Dominick's life after many years launches a series of associative memories. He is the bearer of all the book's harsh "realities": the rape and murder of Penny Ann, an absentee father, a mentally unstable mother, ostracism at school, *de facto* adoption by a child pornographer, and menial labor. As the novel's *coup de grace* of white sin, as teenagers Dominick and his friend Leo frame Ralph as a drug dealer rather than share a sentence

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[28] From Connie Martinson, "January-February 2000 Columns", rev. of *I Know This Much is True*, by Wally Lamb, Connie Martinson Talks Books, 7 July 2003 <http://www.conniemartinson.com/CMTB/001.html>.

[29] See the tribe's official site the Mohegan Tribe, Home Page, 12 July 2003 <http://www.mohegan.nsn.us> and for its casino the Mohegan Sun, Home Page, 12 July 2003 <http://www.mohegansun.com>. They confirm many parallels between the Mohegans and the Wequennocs, including the Mohegan employment of a sun motif, surely the inspiration for the

for marijuana possession. Despite the "realism" in Ralph's life, however, he functions in the novel as a specter and a spiritual character.

Ralph's spectral role is signaled in his very first (re-)appearance. A guard speaks of the inflation of titles at Thomas's asylum: "He pointed to a guy approaching with a bucket and mop. I knew him: Ralph Drinkwater. 'Ralphie here used to be a janitor. Now we call him an 'operations engineer.' Right, Ralphie?' Ignoring him, as impassive as ever, Ralph began to mop up my brother's urine." (77). Lurking in the story's margins, he begins to haunt Dominick's psyche. Dominick reflects on Ralph's dream-like quality, "It was weird, come to think of it. I hadn't seen Drinkwater for years and years and then, bam – there he is at Hatch, with a mop and a bucket. It was like one of those crazy guest appearances people make in your dreams..." (104).

Ralph's role as a specter of the psyche becomes allegorized as a specter of the American psyche through his reappearance as an Indian. After having already appeared in some of Dominick's flashbacks as a source of personal disturbance, a "bad kid" from school, he makes an appearance in a memory of Dominick's U.S. history class. There, the teacher, Mr. LoPresto (whose name suggests a magic vanishing act), speaks of the disappearance of Native Americans as a result of America's Manifest Destiny to spread democracy and a Darwinism that dictates the extermination of the primitive by the civilized (205). Ralph challenges the assertion as "bullshit" (206). He refers to himself, "But I'm a full-blooded Wequonoc Indian. So I guess not all of us 'indigenous people' have 'disappeared' like you just said we did." (207). Ralph's inevitable expulsion is followed by the teacher's tart remark, "I guess the Indians have disappeared after all." (207).

Now disappeared, Ralph and the Wequennoc reappear when the tribe gains official recognition and breaks ground for a new casino on their land. In a newspaper story, Dominick sees "Ralph Drinkwater, whooping and hopping around, in full Indian dress." (647). The reappeared disappeared Indian plays a central role in Dominick's process of healing through ancestry and in the allegorical healing of America at the core of the novel. Despite well-meaning politics and the critique of the disappearance motif, it cannot be stressed enough that this is still a narrative of healing Dominick and white male America, not of healing Ralph, the embodiment of racial minority.

Wequennocs "roundness of things" (see below). The casino Wequennoc Moon is also clearly based on the Mohegan Sun facility recently opened near Norwalk.

Long before Ralph the Indian provides Dominick with a spiritual path, he has already provided him with an "exit" from the pressures of being a white male by giving him access to late 1960s counter-culture, specifically marijuana. The summer of 1969, which takes up chapters 16 and 18-24, finds Dominick, Thomas, and Dominick's friend Leo avoiding the Vietnam draft on student deferrals. They work with Ralph for the city, clearing brush at, among other places, the old Wequennoc graveyard. With the exception of Thomas, they spend their days stoned on marijuana Ralph brought and shared. Still, Dominick and Ralph are distant. "Part of what was between us was Ralph's race." (311). Whatever community they may have created that summer, Leo's betrayal of Ralph with Dominick's tacit assent reinstates the gap between the white college boys and the Indian. They go back to school and add another burden to the life of Ralph.

Dominick's real merging with Ralph comes at the end of the book with the attainment of a new spiritual world through the discovery of his Wequennoc ancestry. Ralph has become the "tribal pipe-keeper", an evolution of his role as work gang marijuana-sharer and bears the name "Swift Wolf", using the same metonymy as *Dances with Wolves* to express a nature connection. A leading figure in the tribe, he becomes Dominick's teacher in things Wequennoc and connection the tribe. They meet as acknowledged cousins, and he begins his induction of Dominick by solemnly producing a round stone and saying, "Wequennocs pray to roundness ... Wholeness. The cycles of the moon, the seasons. We thank the Great Creator for the new life it sprang from. The past and the future, cinched together. The roundness of things." (883).

This moment, just shy of the book's end, gives Dominick the key metaphor for a new wholeness. Roundness, however, is by no means unique. Whether it be Black Elk saying "The Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round",[30] the Hindu symbol of the wheel of Karma, or the Disney *Lion King* notion of the "circle of life", the roundness of things has been done to the point of cliché. As Susan Bauer points out, "He ... finds out that his real father is a Wequonnoc Indian, and suddenly becomes a proud possessor of Native American spirituality."[31] Bauer's essay, though a pointedly Christian polemic and not as a literary study, provides a lucid and insightful discussion of "Oprah novels" of suffering and redemption through the

[30] John G. Neihardt, *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux as Told Through John G. Neihardt* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P): 194.

recognition of a spiritual connection which affirms human solidarity. What makes this roundness better than any other roundness? Dominick's ancestral relation to it. Ralph, as both his blood relative and a Wequonnoc, is bearer of that roundness. Dominick reflects at the end of his list of truths on the last page, "the evidence of God exists in the roundness of things." (897), but it is only Ralph's Wequonnoc roundness that connects Dominick, Ralph, America, the Wequonnocs, the Great Creator, and God.

When only Wequennoc roundness provides the wholeness Dominick seeks, and he can only achieve it through discovering his blood relation to the tribe, Lamb touches on a serious concern about both passing and reverse-passing but does not address it. The schematic of blood relations determining ancestry and the claim to tradition suggests that the main determinant of character and outlook continues to be race. Lamb's use of roundness is based on a thesis that can be broken down into a syllogistic circular argument: Wequennoc roundness is better for Dominick because he is Wequennoc; their roundness is better for them because that is what the Wequennocs believe in; Wequennoc is who is born Wequennoc; being Wequennoc compels one to practice Wequennoc ways; Dominick is Wequennoc, so he must practice Wequennoc ways in order to be Wequennoc. For this form of reasoning, one can substitute any race, ethnicity, or group for "Wequennoc" and any object of belief or identity for "roundness". This conservative, essentialist argument hinges on a sense of eternally fixed categories. It also takes on a racist component when those categories stem from blood ancestry.

In the book's epilogue chapter, Dominick relates, "Ralph and I warmed to each other, over time. We had, after all, a shared history, common blood." (894). This view hardly differs from Ray's description of the reigning ethos when Dominick was born which was the reason why his father's identity was kept secret: "He was a colored fella. Well, part colored, I guess. Heinz fifty-seven varieties. But you know how it is. You got some colored blood in you, you're considered colored, no matter what. Least that's the way it was back then. People didn't mix the way they do now." (877). First of all, Dominick's presence means that people really did mix "back then". More importantly, Dominick becoming Wequennoc after discovering his ancestry means "You got some colored blood in you, you're considered colored, no matter what." He has become colored, and "some colored blood" is at the root of it.

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[31] Susan Wise Bauer, "Oprah's Misery Index", rev. of *I Know This Much is True*, by Wally Lamb, *Cristianity Today* 7 December 1998, July 4, 2003 <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/8te/8te070.html>.

From this blood emanates a new shared history and a new, mystical connection to "his people", a connection more profound than any legal designation. When he first goes to Ralph as his cousin, he asks, "So...how do you become a Wequennoc?" (882). Ralph refers to legally notarized genealogy reports, but Dominick waves that away demanding to "find out who the fuck I am" (883). At that point, Ralph begins with the roundness of things. Five hundred years of colonization in the Americas and the mountains of texts which determined race discursively and created the very notion of a fundamental connection between blood and character are repressed, covered over with a fetishistic round stone.

About Ralph and the Wequennoc connection two more points must be made to emphasize the role he plays connecting the white male through adopted ancestry to America. The first point is the elision of his and Dominick's "Heinz fifty-seven varieties" ancestry. Dominick's father was not only Wequennoc but also Creole, Portuguese, African, and Sioux (881). That begs the question of why Dominick does not also claim these ancestries. In the summer of 1969, Ralph even recommends *Soul on Ice* by Eldridge Cleaver, and yet, Dominick embraces roundness and not, say, raping white women as political protest *a lá* Cleaver. Ralph no longer claims that black identity by the end of the book, nor does Dominick join the NAACP, the Sioux Nation, or the Portuguese American Federation. The novel provides no explanation for this. It seems that the racially mixed Wequennocs "color" Dominick sufficiently, just as their roundness supplies him with sufficient non-Catholic spiritualism. He may have hated and "suffered through" (852) *Dances with Wolves*, but Dominick and the novel turn to Indian-ness in the same way, as a proxy for the primitive his white masculinity constructs as its Other. The very fictional character of the Wequennocs only emphasizes how much they are a projection of Indian-ness. It may be based on characteristics of some tribes, maybe even largely the Mohegans, but it is nonetheless a construction that bears distinctive qualities to solve the novel's tensions of troubled white masculinity.

The other point is that Dominick's "post-white" "race" suicide[32] of claiming non-white identity is neither a social suicide nor a class suicide. Ralph reveals that in 1969 he had thought, "He was as good as they were – as smart, if not smarter. But there they were, his big shot 'white' hypocrite relatives, home from college and rubbing his face in how much further you could get in life if you lied about who you were." (880). To the

[32] Fox 8.

contrary, Dominick does not have to sacrifice getting further by manifesting who he "is". He does not lose friends or get cast out from his community. Times have changed, and now people mix, as Ray has pointed out. More correctly, now people admit to mixing, proclaim it like Dominick to heal feelings of guilt, division, and loss. He even gets back his ex-wife and her family through his new sense of balance. Far from giving up financial security, with the Wequonnoc casino, "We 415 members of the Wequonnoc Nation are millionaires." (891). Though Dominick purports not to "give a shit about the money" (882), he gets it anyway. He does not need to make any material or social sacrifice at all in order to attain his "authentic" roundness. Reverse-passing for a fictional Indianness is liberal white male wish-fulfillment, providing sacrifice-free absolution from the *unheimlich* ghosts constructed through the elision of whiteness.

4.2.3. Dr. Patel, the Other Indian

As the third non-white character responsible for Dominick's healing, Dr. Patel allows the novel as a whole and its white male author to adoptively reverse-pass in race and gender. The psychiatrist, with her office on Division Street, aids Dominick in constructing a new wholeness. She is specifically enabled to do this as a woman from India. This happens in three steps. First, from her Otherness is consistently pronounced. In this capacity, she acts as the Other Indian, Other as both a woman and as the other kind of Indian, who provides the white male protagonist with Otherness to incorporate and become whole. Secondly, she acts as the psychiatrist of the whole nation of white American men, as her pronouncements on them suggest. Finally then, her female, Hindu diagnosis of their neuroses coupled with her determinist employment of mythic archetypes give her the authority to supply Dominick with missing parts to construct a universal human psychic wholeness. In its confusion of the term "Indian", the novel destabilizes the signifier to some degree but at the same time reinscribes the category "Indian" whether nature-bound Native American or Hindu from south Asia as the voice of Otherness. In this way, the novel draws on the Indian as a resource for a white male subject to pass into and construct a new community for himself.

Dr. Patel's Other identity is strongly pronounced through uncertainty and stereotypical slippage. The novel employs confusion as a means of actually erasing ambiguity about the identity in which Dr. Patel is to be seen. Her introduction begins as a

dialogue on p. 147-8 between Dominick and a Dr. Sheffer that is characteristic of this strategy. Dominick begins:

> "Have this Dr. Patel guy call up Ehlers so that I can get [Thomas] out of here."
> "Dr. Patel's a woman," she said.
> I closed my eyes. "Okay, fine, whatever," I said. "That's irrelevant."
> "I'm just telling you. She's Indian. Indian Indian, not American Indian."

Far from irrelevant, it is absolutely essential that she is an Indian woman. The first meeting with Dr. Patel highlights her Indian-ness. Dominick describes her as "Middle-aged woman: salt-and-pepper hair rolled into a bun, orange sari underneath her lab coat" (157). The sari peeking out is a stereotypical "slippage, its excess, its difference"[33] which determines her as Indian, all other markers being "neutral", a foil to her almost complete white covering. This visual slippage from white is repeated exactly the same way in their first meeting at her office: "The walls were white and blank. The only nod toward decoration sat on the floor by the window: a cement statue two feet tall – one of those smiling Indian goddesses with the waving arms and the shit-eating grin." (225).

Of course, Dominick is describing Shiva, who, Dr. Patel clarifies, possesses neither sex and both but is commonly referred to as "he". (226). This first meeting then begins with a discussion of the Hindu trinity of Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu. The focus remains on Shiva, who "represents the *reproductive* power of destruction. The power of renovation. Which is why he's here in this room, where we dismantle and rebuild." (226). In fact, Dominick subsequently always refers to Shiva as male, but the renovating healing is certainly done by the woman Dr. Patel. Shiva serves as a proxy for her, a presence of her Indianness who provides the diegetic structure for Dominick's healing and the space of Otherness for him.

The novel's structure makes use of the Shiva motif of destruction and regeneration which is reflected in the book's division into two halves. The first half ends with Dominick's flashbacks of Thomas's first madness in 1969 and Dominick's near destruction when he falls exhausted from a scaffolding and breaks his leg. The second follows him reading the manuscript of his grandfather during his recovery. It is launched by Dr. Patel giving him a miniature Shiva with the "hopes that you will soon be on your feet and dancing past your pain. Do you remember Shiva's message? With destruction comes renovation. Be well." (510-11). Shiva stands on a shelf overlooking him as he reads the manuscript, a fact Dr. Patel points out with delight. Between chapters of the manuscript, he visits her and unburdens himself. In his last visit, he relates, "I looked at

that knee-high statue of hers, standing over by the window: Dr. Patel's smiling, dancing Shiva. And I went over and snatched up that damn thing, grabbed Doc, and waltzed the three of us in circles around her office." (896). The Indian completes his wholeness.

Her role as the psychiatrist for American white masculinity is textualized in chapter 36 when Dominick tells her of his revulsion toward his grandfather's manuscript. Patel reflects as an outsider, "She saw it over and over again in her male patients, she said – it could probably qualify as an *epidemic* among American men: this stubborn reluctance to embrace our wholeness – this stoic denial that we had come from our *mothers* as well as our fathers." (608). She refers to the movie *Die Hard 2*:

> I thought to myself, well, here it is: a cinematic catalog of all the things boys and men are afraid of. All the things they feel they have to shoot at and punch and kill in order to kill off their own sensitivity – deny their X chromosome, if you will. ... And so in the middle of *Die Hard the Second*, I had occasion to look back and see, in the reflected light from the movie screen, the illuminated faces of the audience members. Men and boys, mostly, staring trancelike at the screen. Letting Bruce Willy shoot and punch and kill for them everything that made them afraid. (608-9).

The slippages "*Die Hard the Second*" and "Bruce Willy", two of many of her verbal slippages throughout the novel, reinforce her Otherness just like the Sari and Shiva statue even as she describes the movie as symptomatic of American males. She embodies of what the white men are battling, and thus offers a space into which Dominick's narrative can pass, adoptive reverse-pass to become a female Indian voice pronouncing on American white male anxieties.

She concludes, "But what are our stories if not the mirrors we hold up to our face?" (609). She demands he keep and read the manuscript. As a psychiatrist, she makes much of the use of stories, myths, and the archetypical figures in them to make her points. As authorities of this, she refers specifically to *The Uses of Enchantment* by Bruno Bettelheim, under whom she studied, and *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell. Dominick reads their books under his Shiva statue as part of his recovery, and Lamb even lists them in a bibliography. The authors have been noted for working from a determinist stance, placing specific interpretations on folk tales and myths that in their view are universally transcendent, treating the same complex of problems in the human psyche (Bettelheim) and the world in general (Campbell).

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[33] Homi K. Bhabha "Of Mimicry and Man", Bhabha *Locations*: 86.

Hugely popular with lay readers, the two have been roundly criticized for this universalism and an extreme methodological simplicity.[34] However, spoken by Dr. Patel, the claim to universality that these two white men make is confirmed. Interlaced with her insights on Shiva and femininity told with Indian verbal slippage, these writers pass as Indian and female by having passed through Dr. Patel. The novel also reverse-passes as an Indian woman voice speaking to a white American man to heal him. In this way, the works of these authors function dually. They are proponents of a universal wholeness and the affirmative basis for a new folktale in which the American white everyman is made whole again by an Indian woman Other. Facilitated by the Other Indian, the novel closes in the tone of the hero folktale, the "vision quest" (it is, after all, an Indian thing): "I am not a smart man, particularly, but one day, at long last, I stumbled from the dark woods of my own, and my family's, and my country's past, holding in my hands these truths." (897). The folk of the folktale remains white men, the romantic tale of their longing for the authentic, the "true" identity somehow lost but eminently restorable.

4.3. Passing as Savage: *The Last of the Savages*

Jay McInerney's novel *The Last of the Savages* covers much the same period as Lamb's, from the late 1960s to the mid-1990s. Unlike Lamb's novel, this one does not construct a reconciled white male Self. Instead, its tension hinges on the potential of passing and reverse-passing for liberation from that Self. Ostensibly about Will Savage, a music producer from an old Southern plantation family who seeks liberation in the blues, the race and gender narrative only functions when contrasted with that of its narrator, Patrick Keane, a long-time friend. Patrick's own identity conflicts become the key to unlocking Will's debauches, self-promotion, and mythic representation in the music industry. The producer's legendary lifestyle liberates him only insofar as it obscures his sense of alienation and oppression in a society based on his definition as white.

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[34] See, for example, Jack Zipes, "Use and Abuse of Folk and Fairy Tales with Children", *Breaking the Magic Spell: Radical Theories of Folk and Fairy Tales* (1979; Lexington, KY: UP of Kentucky, 2002): 179-205 for his critique of Bettelheim's insistence on specific Freudian interpretations of stories he finds crucial for child development. Particularly useful is the reprint in the 2002 re-edition. There Zipes introduces his article with a summary of the many criticisms in this vein leveled at Bettelheim. Campbell has broadly been attacked as a poor scientists, applying Jung to loosely assembled myths to map a universal collective unconscious and insisting on the exclusive validity of this approach. Segal complains, "Instead of arguments, Campbell makes assertions." See Robert Segal, "Joseph Campbell's Theory of Myth", ed. Alan Dundes, *Sacred Narrative: Readings in the Theory of Myth* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1984): 265.

Patrick views his own life through a lens of passing- going to prep school to escape his working-class Irish background and attend elite colleges. In the company of blacks through Will's influence, he also tries to reverse-pass. He constantly sees his imitative passing and reverse-passing as a personal weakness, a shameful disguise, especially when compared with the strong personality of Will. Will seeks the blues and black blues musicians as a source of Mailer-esque liberation ("The White Negro" is referred to frequently, including in the novel's epigram). However, Patrick pointedly depicts him as battling Southern tradition and not reverse-passing. He admires Will as "true to himself", but this admiration and "truth" are ambivalent from the beginning. It is this ambivalence more than any other factor that is at the root of Patrick's identity tension and the tension of the novel as a whole. He can never quite eliminate the open question of whether Will may be reverse-passing, egotistically seeking to be less white for the ultimate liberation from his white male Self. This leaves an intriguing blank, the open question of whether admiration for Will merely represents a positive facade that expresses, not a "truth" in the sense of Lamb but the acknowledgement of a wish that it were true, an ambivalent unresolved resolution.

In terms of identity categories, ambivalence does not mean liberation from them, but it is related. Ambivalence as a deconstructive tool indicates a conflict over claims of the socially discursive role of a signifier and its subsequent categorizing power, belying the aporia, the irreconcilabile impasse of those claims. Ambivalence bears a liberating potential insofar as it disrupts borders of discursive categories by recovering conflict over them. It frees signifiers from conceptual rigidity and opens them for a broader range of that something which is else, a "freeplay" of meanings, that, as Derrida and others hope, can be conducted according to a new system of ethics.

Much postcolonial debate about representation, especially for minority discourse in the United States, occurs within the tension over whether the ambivalence of racial and ethnic categorizations bears a liberating potential and whether it is realized. For example, the academic conflict Singh and Schmidt describe between the "postethnicity school" and the "borders school" in the United States finds its division in this space. The "postethnicity" position takes the view that liberating potential does exist and that old rigidities are successively collapsing, leading to greater social equality through a more inclusive social identity.[35] The "borders" academics acknowledge that there may be some

[35] Singh and Schmidt 6.

liberating potential in exploring the ambivalence of such categories but believe material constraints hinder its realization. In a plea for strategic essentialism, they look to "the construction and mobilization of difference", seeing ethnic and racial identities as crucial for empowering groups of people to seek social change.[36]

This debate contains within it a key ambivalence of agency, a chicken-and-egg aporia. Do social structures determine discursive categories or discursive categories determine social structures? This ambivalence lies at the core of *The Last of the Savages*. It avoids a definite solution to the question of whether Will Savage is a liberating and liberated figure or just a self-serving pig too bound like Patrick Keane by their society to change it fundamentally. Returning to this study's central thesis, *The Last of the Savages* makes use of passing and reverse-passing to ask whether these forms of subverting "white male" identity do not actually confirm it and the other identity categories which constitute American society. It explores forces which have lent themselves to the revelation of the constructed nature of white masculinity but also subverted that revelation to stabilize the social normativity of that identity.

The remainder of this chapter will explore this dialectic process in the novel. It will first look at the passing of the narrator, Patrick, and the thematic interaction of sham and shame. The discussion then turns to the reverse-passing of Will and how notions of free will coupled with "real", authentic identity are contrasted with the imprisonment of shame in a sham society. Will's self-reinvention seeks to escape the social control of ambivalent identity categories through this "real". The difficulty of this intention form the basis for the chapter's final section that examines material forces within which this passing and reverse-passing occur. Commerce and politics are shown as the very enablers of passing strategies by providing discursive space for their resistance as the authentic versus the sham. They lead to the revelation of the ambivalence of identities. However, they ultimately repeat the repression of that ambivalence through an equally ambivalent construction of the "real" and thus defuse the socially subversive potential of that revelation.

4.3.1. The Keane shame of passing

Patrick Keane sets the tone for his own character of passing from the very beginning: "The capacity for friendship is God's way of apologizing for our families. At least that's

[36] Singh and Schmidt 7.

one way of explaining my unlikely fellowship with Will Savage." (3). He endeavors from the novel's beginning at a prep school in the early 1960s to remove himself from his original family and adopt a new one. He endeavors to perfect a persona that does not reflect his Irish, working-class, Catholic family. It means passing for WASP, for more white. This effort is doubled by one to cover his homosexuality, to pass as heterosexual, a tension which slowly emerges through the course of the novel and another part of his overall struggle to repress his nature in the face of a dominant culture.

Patrick represents a classic example of Riesman's influential model of "other-directed" people " whose conformity is insured by their tendency to be sensitized to the expectations and preferences of others."[37] He constantly conforms to impulses sent out by people around him, which is why he mimics WASPs at school but also Southerners in the South and blacks at the juke joints he visits with Will. That does not mean his life is without design. It has one: to affect an ideal heterosexual WASP social persona he believes will liberate him from the confining identity he inherited from his family. As such, he expresses himself well aware of the construction of the identity he passes for.

Within this context, he discovers blackness cast as the opposite of this whiteness. He develops a longing for it as liberation from the confines of his grand design. At the same time he rejects it fearfully, afraid it may color his affected persona and that it opposes the structure of white masculinity within which he functions. Will Savage embodies both of Patrick's desires. He is the scion of a Southern dynasty with a pedigree of whiteness, wealth, and position. At the same time, Will is the family rebel, pursuing blackness, black music, black bars, and black women. In this, both men require blackness as a stereotyped space of projected white desires. That blackness ultimately reinforces the concept of its essential difference from the white and leaves untouched the power structures which first determined that stereotype. Patrick may or may not be aware of this ambivalence, but he embodies it. It is an ambivalence that comes to be expressed through a complex repressive structure of shame.

The shame begins with his parents. The passer recalls that on his first day at prep school, "Already, I realize now, I was disowning them in my heart." (13). His rejection of them is a step in his grand project of achieving greater "whiteness". He explains, "That autumn I took on new colors, seeking to transform myself and to erase the green trail of my blood and upbringing." (19). The use of color in this sentence as a marker of identity

alludes to the classic signifier of skin color for race while negating the chiasm this would suggest for green as Irish. He is not visibly green, doesn't "look" Irish, nor is one supposed to believe he has green blood. Greenness rather acts as a metonymy for character, heritage, and background that are supposedly distinctly Irish.

Green refers to the color with which Ireland was so strongly associated that it became a sign of Catholic Irish resistance to Protestant British occupation. His name, Patrick, alludes to St. Patrick, who converted Ireland to Catholicism under the sign of the clover as symbolic of the Trinity and forever associated the island with the color green. The name is deeply intertwined with American associations of the Irish, whether in the nickname "Paddy", its negative association with the "paddy wagon" used by the police to transport arrestees, or the place of "Patrick" in early American humor. Ignatiev writes, "Along with Jim Crow and Jim Dandy, the drunken, belligerent, and foolish Pat and Bridget were stock characters on the early stage."[38]

Greenness is in his very name, a stain constantly representing what he rejects. The traits of greenness are what he wishes to "erase", and yet, whiteness is not merely erasure, as the sentence points out. It is the covering of old with new "colors", some of which he describes in the sentences that follow: "I talked my mother into sending me part of the housekeeping money for clothes, which I slowly acquired from the prep shop in town. Playing soccer, I earned a certain minor jock status." (19). "Colors" becomes shorthand for constructed socially exclusive signs he learns to perform. He is not becoming "mainstream" or "normal" but white. In this way he exposes the creation of racial antagonisms JanMohammed describes:

> Troubled by the nagging contradiction between the theoretical justification of exploitation and the barbarity of its actual practice, it also attempts to mask the contradiction by obsessively portraying the supposed inferiority and barbarity of the racial Other, thereby insisting on the profound moral difference between self and Other.[39]

Mastering the colors of domination for Patrick means accepting the assumed inferiority of his origins- a process which he undergoes consciously and not without reflection on the contingent, constructed nature of the WASP.

This consciousness in Patrick, this stain, is characterized in the novel as "shame". The point here is not to essentialize shame as Catholic and thus inherently part of his

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[37] David Riesman with Nathan Glazer and Ruel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (1950; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1953): 23.
[38] Ignatiev 102.
[39] JanMohammed 84.

identity as Irish but rather focus on the ambivalent function of shame in the categorization of Irish Catholic as subaltern. He regards his background with "a vague sense of shame at its cheap, Sheetrock and Formica stage sets and lack of high dramatic interest." (14-15). Passing when he meets Will, he recalls, "I simultaneously inflated and disparaged the details of my background. I told him my father worked for General Electric – marginally true: he sold their washers and dryers." (15) The shame stems from a feeling of exclusion. He reflects, "Growing up Irish Catholic in the fifties and sixties, it was impossible to not feel slightly déclassé among the Protestants, who seemed to be the real natives of the Republic, and who were still being regaled in their own churches with stories of papist idol worship and voodoo." (16). It is in the same tradition Ignatiev identifies when the xenophobic Native American Party of the 1840s aimed its hostility at the Irish as poor, disorderly, foreign, Catholic, and labor-stealing.[40]

The shame of his origins follows the simultaneous development of Patrick's shame of betraying them. It is a dual structure very familiar for novels of passing. Johnson's ex-colored protagonist, for example, decides to pass after seeing the public burning of a black, explaining, "I knew that it was shame, unbearable shame. Shame at being identified with a people that could with impunity be treated worse than animals."[41] Coupled with that, however, is the other shame: "At other times I feel that I have been a coward, a deserter."[42] For Patrick, this dual shame becomes visible during his first visit home at Christmas. He feels discomfort when his grandmother tells ritual stories of their noble Irish ancestry and when the family gathers to hear polkas on the accordion, and "Mass was another torture" (59). In contrast, he relates, "The next morning, opening presents my parents could barely afford – including the London Fog raincoat I'd requested – I found myself weighed down with shame for all my betrayals and denials." (60).

Betrayal and denial are the counterparts of pretension and dissemblance, in essence the same activity, all part of his sham, a term the narrative frequently employs. "Sham" is linked etymologically and conceptually to shame as an expression of a falsified social facade to mask ulterior motives and the guilt the same society expects one to feel for that artifice and those motives. Patrick can only really resolve this ambivalent sham/e

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[40] Ignatiev 148-9.
[41] James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912; London: The X Press, 1998): 162.
[42] Johnson 178.

with a firm belief in winning and survival, well portrayed in the consideration "I sometimes consoled myself with this notion of our ancient nobility, but I was more interested in joining the winners than in wallowing with the losers." (56).

As a carrier of the novel's social sham/e of race and privilege, he grows acutely aware of forces behind it and their ramifications. One "truth" in the Wally Lamb sense he learns is that he will not always be able to control the efficacy his public identity. Like African American passers, he is never completely safe and always in danger of discovery. Inner impulses and family elements will destabilize it. The period of social upheaval he experiences in the 1960s and 1970s also contests structures that dictate the identity he passes for. His whitening project thus bifurcates, on the one hand to suppress aspects of himself that are counter-establishment and on the other to fortify that establishment against those apparent external attacks to it. This struggle to maintain his sham is pitted against the shame that constantly contests his project. The struggle against "internal" aspects of himself largely revolves around countering his Irishness. The struggle against "external" attacks takes place largely through encounters with blackness, the constructed opposite of whiteness. Blackness embodies a national sham/e by representing the limits of democracy and manipulative, non-democratic social forces. Like other passers, Patrick does not believe in racist myths of white superiority but seeks whiteness as a means of survival and thus has an investment in it.

This motive means he reflexively conforms to his environment, whatever it is. Though he passes for WASP, he attempts to pass for black when blackness seems to be the dominant identity. His first trip to a juke joint with Will demonstrates the double fear blacks strikes in him as a contestation of his sham and the longing he feels to be of them, to reverse-pass. He relates that the bar, "was like standing on the thundering lip of Victoria Falls, teetering above the steamy abyss." (31). The natural and the hellish are conflated as dreaded elements of chaos into which his artificial white facade of civilization is in eminent danger of collapsing. To conform to the new situation, he smokes his first marijuana cigarette: "I inhaled the weedy smoke, perhaps sensing that it might make me feel less out of place, eager for any ritual that would ease my profound discomfort." (31). He reflects, "I've always been a highly self-conscious person, but that night was one of the few times in my life I experienced a warm dissolution into a pool of collective consciousness ... Briefly, I think, I got it. Somehow connected to everything, I felt liberated from the narrow box of my own small existence." (32).

After that moment of *poria*, a Turneresque liminoid communitas in which he feels himself to have transcended the borders of social difference, he begins acting "black". While Will stands at the bar, firmly white but apparently at home, Patrick relates, "I was just the opposite, slapping backs and attempting to reproduce the moves of those around me. A few hours before I'd been sucking up to the plantation owner [Will's father, Cordell] and studying his manners; now I wanted to have soul. Set me down on the street with a one-legged man, Will once said of me, and I'll be limping inside of a block." (33). This chiding exaggeration elides the fact that his is not merely a reflex to imitate *per se*, but rather a survival instinct to mimic those who seem to determine power in a particular situation.

The instinct to reverse-pass fails him here but perpetuates his shame when he goes to Yale and meets his roommate Aaron Greeley:

> Like me he was turned out in the uniform – Weejuns, chinos, button-down shirt – and among his possessions he had toted in his first trip up the stairs were a Jack Kramer tennis racket in its wooden press and a lacrosse stick. Statistically speaking, he was a very conventional Yale roommate, except that he was black, though he did not seem particularly aware of it himself. (100).

He mistakenly responds not to the Yale uniform but to Aaron's blackness: "Trying to casually establish my credentials as a soulful roommate, I spun my 'James Brown, Live at the Apollo' as we unpacked the first day." (101). Aaron asks him to turn it down, and Patrick recalls, "I wondered if James Brown was already passé with his own people. Eventually I understood that Aaron was embarrassed by my blues and soul records; he was afraid that our dormmates might associate him with the music." (102).

The passer has crossed paths with another passer, a black man trying to assimilate, taking on new "colors" to erase his trail of blood and heritage. Aaron is not barely aware of his blackness. He is acutely aware of it, wearing it like a mark of shame. He tries to distract attention from it through this affected attitude but is constantly confronted with it as a social barrier. This crystallizes with the arrival of the third Yale roommate, Dalton Percy, "already plugged into everything worth aspiring to socially" (101). Dalton immediately moves out.

Aaron becomes frustrated in his assimilation and joins a Yale black power group in his third year. Patrick also fumbles at his attempt to join Dalton's circles. He turns down an invitation to one of the patrician's parties out of shame, his nagging awareness of Aaron. "I didn't need to ask Aaron if he'd been invited. And in a momentary flash of lucidity, I wondered if that was *why* I had been invited, to sharpen the point of my

roommate's exclusion." (106). However, like playing James Brown to simulate soul, this gesture of imagined solidarity also fails to transcend the border between himself and the actual black person for whom it is intended. When he tells Aaron of his decision, the roommate responds, "Bully for you." (108). The ironic response heightens his dual shame rather than absolving him of it, throwing it back at him as mock praise.

Patrick's homosexuality undergoes the same bifurcation as his whitening. It is also described with the same double shame, shame for his sexuality and for aspiring to be part of the world that suppresses it. Like his Irish-ness, his sexuality is cast as something born with and unavoidable but to be repressed at all costs. The social identity of "gay", on the other hand, appears more like blackness as an external threat to the white masculine heterosexual epistemic structure he upholds.

The repressiveness of his passing for heterosexual is made most apparent by its constant avoidance in the novel. He first hints at his sexuality ambiguously when he and Will talk of their fantasies, "Neither of us, as it turned out, had conventional tastes, although we weren't about to fess up to it back then." (21). His obfuscation becomes clearer as he discusses the event that triggers Patrick's recollections of Will and frames the whole novel: the murder of a colleague, Felson, in a hotel used by gay prostitutes. Details of the murder, including its location, are only gradually released and heavily obscured by other contexts.

For example, he relates, "My wife, Stacey, is on the board of the Metropolitan, and opera has become a regular feature of our evenings. Last night was *Carmen*. Naturally, the plight of a lust-addled Don José led me to thoughts of Felson. How did he manage? Where did he find the time? I hardly have the time for my weekly squash game, and I try to devote my weekends to my girls." (76). The hint of his concern with finding the time to live out sexuality is buried in associations with his family life and opera, part of the "colors" he has adopted. When he outs himself for the reader, it is still closeted in heterosexual desires. Will boasts of losing his virginity to Lollie Baker, and Patrick feels jealous: "In fact my jealousy was far knottier than I was willing to admit, even to myself, at the time. Lying awake, listening to the last sad crickets of the Indian summer, I was in no way prepared to entertain the possibility that it wasn't Will Savage I was jealous of, but Lollie Baker." (84). This coming-out is tangled in elaborate litotic denial which affirms even as it contains his desire in negation, in shame, "in no way prepared to entertain the possibility".

Doug Matson, the appropriately sham Englishman, embodies the fear of the social identity "gay" as an exterior threat to the society in which Patrick passes. He is Patrick's English teacher and cultural mentor "who'd spent a polishing year at Oxford, where he'd acquired, among other things, a set of new vowels" (51), a *faux* English accent. Matson heaps scorn on the blues and hates Will who just as readily criticizes him and his "phony English accent" (51). At various times in their school years Will also refers to him as a "fag" (91), which seems of little consequence, for it is nothing more than the widespread habit of schoolboys to use this as a ritual insult. Boys at the prep school use the same characterization for Will and Patrick's closeness, "The way you guys homoed around together." (80). That in itself, however, indicates the important role heterosexual identity plays in the early socialization of these boys.

Matson later emerges as actually gay. Patrick's cultural mentor also becomes his sexual mentor, giving him his first homosexual experience at Yale. This moment is at first also repressed in the narrative. The scene of Matson's visit at Yale ends before the sexual act (125). Only later does Patrick allude to the act, after a chance encounter with Matson at a Greenwich Village Halloween parade in which Matson, in a toga, shouts for him to "come aboard" (233). He admits then of the Yale meeting, "I allowed myself to attribute to drunkenness my eventual acquiescence. Finally exploring that side of my nature which I had tried so desperately to deny, I found it was easier to pretend that I was not fully conscious, that I had not so much acted as yielded." (233). He clings to the litotic denied affirmation that gay/homosexual has come to represent for him in the construction of his identity. The later encounter also represents the threat from Matson of being "outed" by people outside, much the same threat his Irish family represents. Like Felson's, his sexuality is disguised in WASP colors, explored occasionally in sexual slumming that allows him to practice sexual Otherness but doesn't require him to cross a border of social identity and be openly "gay". It reaffirms those social borders and the structure of sham/e that regulates their transgression.

4.3.2. Reverse-passing for real and the will to be Savage

McInerney points to extensive play with the word "savage" when he puts it in the title and uses it as the family name of Patrick's friend and alter-ego. Savage takes on a double meaning in the novel: the savage as primitive and the Savage as civilization's elite. The person Will Savage, a member of that elite, seeks the primitive as liberating, the "real"

which opposes the social sham/e. He doubles the savage doubling, confusing savage as a signifier and the separation of the savage and the civilized as opposing concepts. The rest of the Savage family only further blurs the distinction, leaving no justification for their privilege except for their skill at manipulating power according to their will. Will, then, as the name indicates, embodies this will, a capacity he shares with his father to shape the world despite their diametric difference of opinion.

Patrick's closeness to Will arises initially as an attraction to the world of privilege the Savages enjoy. Their tie strengthens as Will subverts Patrick's ideals simply because he can. Patrick, who strains under those ideals, envies that ability. Will comes to represent liberation from his struggle with his bifurcated sham/e. The tragic flaw of the mythic character of Will, however, is that he is just as much a prisoner of the world from which he would liberate himself . He cannot escape the social categories that drive him to seek black music and black women, motivated largely by Mailer's White Negro adoptive reverse-passing ethos. In his efforts to break free of that discursive field, he nearly destroys himself through excessive drugs and sex, developing a strong reliance on Patrick to "play superego" (114). In the end, the interplay of will and the savage arouses the suspicion that his *faux* negritude may be just a guise for the fact that he has become like his father, part of a shadowy world of power and manipulation. Negritude may even be the new face of that world, the "new colors" of reverse-passing.

Will exists in the narrative through Patrick's point of view, so his role in the novel is characterized by Patrick's own paradoxical sham/e concerns of becoming white and liberating himself his not-quite-whiteness. Will himself embodies a dual whiteness, as his first appearance in the novel, a flashback of Patrick's, indicates. Confronted in a hotel in the 1970s by black revolutionaries demanding money for their cause, Will offers to write them a generous check. When they challenge its worth, he responds with icy disdain "exactly like his father – perhaps his great-great-grandfather, the slave owner, who'd killed a man in a duel over an obscure point of honor. He was a hippie one moment and a Savage the next, though of course he was both all along." (10).

As such he also embodies both sides of the "apology" for Patrick's family. When they first meet at school, Will "already was almost everything I wanted to be" (20). A party in the South that Will takes Patrick to recalls the longing: "a luminous white mansion floating on a wide dark lawn, its circular drive an enchanted ring of white Cadillacs, red Mustangs and a matched pair of British racing-green MGs. This looked

remarkably like the world to which I wanted to belong." (46). Patrick also gravitates to Will for his apparent consistency, the opposite of his own socially-determined other-directedness: the bold, ruthless Savage character. At the juke joint where Patrick reverse-passes, he contrasts his weakness of character with Will, "Spending much of his life among black people, he preserved his dignity and possibly his life by never pretending to be anything but a white man. He seemed to belong, but not by virtue of aping the behavior of the local populace, nor of a moist heartiness." (33).

It is through w/Will that the embodiment of Savage privilege becomes a savage attack against that system of privileging at the base of Patrick's sham/e. Will is patently shameless and as such desires as much as possible to tear down the sham of civilization in favor of a new "real" space of transcendent community. While Patrick adopts new colors, Will "was also transforming himself, sloughing off the dry shell of familial expectations." (20). He is the "errant son" who late at night will "defiantly jam the brakes and slam the doors as if to insist they'll never stoop to stealth" (38), quite the opposite of Patrick's career of hiding.

Will transfers his individual anti-authoritarian reflex to a larger social struggle. In his first meeting with Patrick, he pronounces, "Tell you what – I'm gonna design my own crest with the motto, Free the Slaves. And let me tell you, Pat – the slaves are you and me." (15-16). He elaborates later, "The whole shiteree started off with the thieving of the land from its rightful owners. And guys like my father have been perverting the democratic process for years. ... Checks and balances system my ass. It's a cash and carry system." (54). He explains early on his passion for the blues in the same terms:

> "Even before civil rights," he told me, "the musicians were breaking down the barriers, secretly integrating the city. I'd hide under the covers in my parents' house in East Memphis and listen to Rufus Thomas on WDIA in Memphis and WLAC out of Nashville and when I was older I'd sneak down to Beale Street with Jessie Petit – our yardman till my old man fired him – we'd split a pint and listen to the rhythm and blues and I'd say to myself, Shit, the segregationists are right – if white folks find out what they're missing they ain't never going to work for the man anymore. That's why the old man sent me here, they wanted to get me away from that Memphis scene. But the shit's out of the box now and it's spread way beyond Memphis." (15)

As a promoter of the blues, his self-reinvention becomes messianic. Already at school, boys reverse-pass through him, forming "the first incarnation of the entourage which became a feature of Will's adult life." They "gathered to listen to Will's records and talk about black music and Indian religion and Beat literature." (85).

His wife Taleesha observes a conflict there: "He can't make up his mind whether he wants to be a preacher or a politician or a rock star." (184). In fact, he is none of

those three things in particular but rather an example of the kind of liberation through music he seeks, living in mythic excess according to his will. The first journalist to interview Patrick about Will, signaling the public interest to follow, was "looking for colorful anecdotes with which to embroider the nascent Savage legend." (4). The interest others have in him is in "the careers he helped to create, the empire he constructed, the millions he accumulated and, in true rock-and-roll fashion, the millions he pissed away." (4). Patrick, however, comes to admire Will because, "The music was not an end in itself but the expression of a deeper program. Will was always trying to free the slaves." (4). That project meets only limited success, perhaps even failure, by the end of the novel, where "he put me in mind of some great Georgian rakehell who discovers to his surprise that he has survived into the Victorian era." (269).

These conflicting sides – politician, preacher, rock star, businessman, visionary, and rakehell – are his problem. They represent social roles that crystallize because those forces he opposes actually determine his forms of social opposition and therefore subvert his resistance. The key to this paradox is that his liberation is based on reverse-passing, the logic of the White Negro, the desire to perform "black" as "real" in order to subvert the structures of whiteness and the unmanly impotence Mailer felt it brought with it. This illustrates three problematic facets of the social project of reverse-passing as described at the beginning of this chapter. First, blackness as a social identity is constructed in conjunction with whiteness and thus requires a rigid form of whiteness in order to oppose it. Second, such a project requires, as the critique of Mailer described in chapter 1 of this study point out, a rigid stereotype of the black for one to imitate. It reinforces stereotypes created in asymmetrical power contexts. Third, this is only a prescription for whites, especially white men who feel emasculated, an ultimately egotistical project that does little to establish new forms of social community. Reinforcing stereotyped blackness as a form of liberation allows for its commodification to feed a market of white men who seek liberation from their fears of being square. Blackness remains a resource for white male wish fulfillment. The different sides of the white male w/Will emerge as this liberation project runs aground on these conflicts.

When Patrick regards Will in that first juke joint scene, he admires him for preserving his whiteness amid a black crowd, but that does not mean there is no reverse-passing. In fact, Will is slumming, that reverse-passing practice of visiting those of a lower class, assuming objects of their stereotyped Other identity to live out fantasies

projected onto them. A primary defect of slumming, as Newitz describes with regard to transvestism as "gender slumming",[43] is that it suggests that socially subaltern identities are merely frames of mind. They are a matter of choice, of lifestyle decisions. That makes it possible to eventually commodify those choices and market "liberation" outside the slums. Will does not become "black". Like Mailer, he appropriates objects of what is defined as black, specifically the music of supposed sexual liberation.

At school, Will also adopts new colors. The first suggestion of adoptive reverse-passing comes in his monologue about the blues as liberation when he says, "if white folks find out what they're missing they ain't never going to work for the man anymore" (15). "The man", of course, comes from African American slang to mean actually the white man, or more elaborately a power structure based on white masculinity. Patrick may not see Will performing anything but whiteness, but that is the projection of one worried about his own dissemblance. Will actually affects white negritude, more visible in a second juke joint scene shortly after the first. Will has followed his idol, Lester Holmes, to another gig. Holmes asks, "You following me." (69). Will responds, "How else I'm gonna learn?", which Patrick describes as "talking that talk". Will is really quite practiced in affecting the lingo, especially with reference to the music. He wishes to learn, though it is never said what. One can only assume blackness.

Will generally desires the subaltern Other as a channel of the "real" through which to subvert power structures at the root of sham society which determines that Otherness. This becomes quickly apparent when the first conversation between himself and Patrick turns to that embarrassing Catholicism. Will responds wistfully, "Wish I was ... Next best thing to being Jewish, which is the next best thing to being a Negro. At least you've got a real identity." (16). This observation and the ensuing inquiry about Catholicism endear the two to each other. Nonetheless, Patrick as an actual Catholic does not accept Will's projection of Catholicism as "real" and therefore something to aspire to. Instead, he sees Will's southern lineage as the real identity, as the "real natives of the Republic" (16), demonstrating again the internalization of what Ignatiev identified as the view that the Catholic Irish are not. The novel can never bring closure to this conflict over the reality of an identity, just as the sham/e of white male heterosexual identity is deconstructed but still holds sway.

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[43] Annalee Newitz, "Gender Slumming", *Bad Subjects* 7 (1993), 3 Sept. 2004 <http://eserver.org/bs/07/Newitz.html/>.

Taleesha Johnson, the black woman Will marries, plays a significant role in this problem of the real and the sham. Patrick's first narrative clue about his homosexuality, not having "conventional tastes", also contains in it Will's longing for blackness and the real. When the boys talk of sexual fantasies, Patrick reflects, "It certainly didn't occur to me at the time to ask what color of hypothetical female flesh we were trading in." (21). Visits to juke joints are characterized by Will flirting with black girls, but he also flirts with white girls at white parties. Flirting with all girls only leaves open the question for the reader of his preference and motives. The marriage with Taleesha answers the former question while highlighting the ambivalence of the latter.

That ambivalence is expressed in a secret meeting between Patrick and Cordell Savage. The father expresses concerns familiar to southern racist discourse such God intending separation and society's own judgment. He ponders aloud, "What worries me – we both know that Will is given to bold dramatic gestures." (110). It expresses one of the novel's main concerns that their union may be merely a gesture, a symbolic act, a sham to fulfill Will's projection of the real. He may desire Taleesha primarily because of her blackness. Patrick repeats that concern when Will tells of his plans to marry, "It *is* a great way to say 'Fuck you' to everybody, isn't it? A great big statement-" (115). Will responds ambiguously, "Look ... I just know this is right. Okay? I feel it all the way down. You know I operate on instinct. Taleesha's what I want in life, and marrying her's the right thing." (115). When Cordell later rails against the "travesty" (122) of the marriage, he asks Patrick if Will intentionally did this to mortify his family and Patrick answers, "Not the primary motive perhaps, though surely not irrelevant." He continues, "I think ... I think he's in love." (122). The novel avoids stating Will's "real" motives, tangled as they are in race conflict, sexual desire, and a meshing of personalities. In a daze of drugs, he once states plainly, "I want everything [from Taleesha]" (227). What they have is a certain compatibility, for over many turbulent years, a divorce, and their re-marriage, she remains the only person besides Patrick not awed by the legend, the sham of Will Savage. Her observation of his ambivalence shows that she is Patrick's counterpart in critically exposing the "real" Savage.

The inability to resolve this conflict at the heart of the reverse-passing White Negro philosophy turns the white male's projection of the black as "real" into an increasingly unreal blackness of desire. That blackness, stereotyped as a series of metonymies of presence for white reverse-passing, gives an overriding symbolic meaning

to those people who are seen to carry it naturally, depriving them of other possible forms of expression and thus leaving them, in Spivak's language, as unspeaking subalterns. They do not speak for themselves but instead are masks for white male uncertainty. As already indicated, Will's egalitarian impulse is thwarted because the commodification of those projected stereotypical signs of Otherness merely evokes the appearance of a dialogue that masks a monologue. The quest for the real only transforms the objects of the sham. Music can be bought on records, clothes worn, language adopted, lifestyle decisions made that affect reverse-passing, and only by those with sufficient funds at their disposal, i.e. largely whites.

Will's self-destruction in the 1970s and 1980s mirrors the self-destruction of his project as a social movement. One of the novel's narrative weaknesses lies in the recollective "and-then-there-was-the-time" intermittent portrayal of that period which becomes rather dull. This simplistic narration undermines complex concerns about the way in which this ambivalence led to the collapse of the protest era. Nonetheless, in its shorthand way, the novel does make this ambivalence visible. Will's records grow in popularity, and he becomes a financial success. Patrick relates, "Will grew larger in every sense – fatter, richer, more successful. He founded his own label, and eventually branched out to the white artists who were influenced by his black artists – this despite his oft-quoted remark that white boys just couldn't sing the blues." (189). However, the music industry hails him as a business revolutionary not a social one. Hence the irony that Will's financial situation relative to blacks, Patrick, and the rest of the United States becomes increasingly *non*-egalitarian.

"His vices and his virtues are almost indistinguishable," Patrick observes, "The qualities that have made him so successful will probably kill him." (192). The apex (or nadir) of his self-destructive lifestyle bring the ambivalence of his vision into view. Chapter 20 depicts Patrick tracking down Will to an office building in Memphis. He discovers Will in a room by himself in "cavernous darkness" (224). The blackness cannot quite hide the objects of Will's decadence and decay in the room: "a bottle of cognac on one side and a mirror piled with white powder on the other" (225), the voice of the late Bukka White singing "Fixin to Die" (225), a "Cadillac. Former property of the King himself" (226), and jars of Will's urine. Amid this not-quite-black cover, he reflects, "I always believed in what I was doing..." then speculates "But maybe it's all just commerce ... Maybe I was wrong. Maybe I'm just another huckster. Another big massa." (228).

Patrick responds, "You're the only person I know who really believes in something." This affirmation elicits the hopeless answer, "But what the fuck is it? I can't remember." If he has lost track of his vision, it is because the vision is muddled, a vision generated by that sham which he wished to dismantle. He recodes this paradox as a curse: "It's not just us. ... It's the whole goddamned Republic. The curse came over to the New World with the first black slave and it's been here ever since." (230).

That curse becomes juxtaposed with novel's growing speculation over sinister powers that may lurk at the core of the sham/e of identity, eliding inequality through commodification. In the end, uncertainty over the social role of Will becomes intertwined with uncertainty over whether he is an opponent of this system or a powerful part of it. The novel shares this paranoia with postmodern literature as well as literature like this that, though realistic in approach, treats themes central to postmodernism such as the manipulation of the social construction of reality by the powerful. Paranoia about figures who may be instituting and profiting from the epistemological system of heterosexual male WASP identity appears in subtle ways early in the novel and develops to become one of its major concerns.

Just as Taleesha embodies the uncertainty of the relationship between the real and the sham, Will's father Cordell embodies the paranoia, uncertainty over whether specific people may be manipulating identity for their own ends. At their first meeting, Cordell asks Patrick to look after Will, and the novel relates a series of clandestine contacts with the elder Savage. Cordell gains Patrick's confidence through the tantalizing offer of inclusion. In this way, he begs Patrick to talk Will out of marrying Taleesha, "Patrick, you've broken bread and hunted with us. I think you understand us, and I know you'll do the right thing by Will." (110). In fact, he has a whole network of informants, even on Patrick who provide him with Patrick's senior college thesis.

Understandably, Will develops an increasingly paranoid relationship toward his father. Its unreal proportions only mirror the unreality of Will's own social project in search of the real. In the apex/nadir scene in the almost black room, Patrick can barely make out a complex diagram on a wall: "At one edge of the posterboard was the name JAMES EARL RAY, from which locus dozens of lines branched out to the other names. On the other edge of the diagram, connected via several routes through four or five names was CORDELL SAVAGE." (226). As fanciful as that appears, Cordell's career as an arms dealer, about which Patrick as a corporate lawyer receives the occasional clue,

bears evidence of webs of shady associations that go far beyond monitoring his son. For example, Patrick finds Cordell's name in a file associated with Pinochet's Chilean *coup* (190). Will also implicates his father as a regular participant at the Bohemian Grove camp (190), a summer get-together for wealthy and powerful men where popular conspiracy theory claims great deals are made amid depravity in the opacity of the woods.[44] Patrick never really knows what Cordell does, nor is he centrally involved, serving only as an accessory with as much knowledge as Cordell gives him.

Will is also constantly developing elaborate schemes to thwart his father, schemes which similarly evade Patrick's scrutiny. Their secret deals and wars against each other turn the father and son into mirror images of each other. These activities also suggest a world-moving power to which Patrick, all passing aside, does not have access. That becomes particularly clear to Patrick when Cordell enlists his help in chapter 22. An apparent arms deal for which Cordell is "supplying merchandise to one party in a dispute" is jeopardized by compromising photos of his young new wife. He wants Patrick to find and contact Will: "I have reason to believe that Will's in touch with the other side ... I need to know if the blackmail's coming from his friends. ... If it's not coming from that quarter, then I'll know who else has a stake in this and I'll know what to do about it." (252). He contacts Will, who responds as cryptically, "Let's say I'm familiar with the terrain," (253) and agrees to a private meeting with his father in London. At this point, Patrick is again excluded. Will only relates later that "his people" (261) were not involved, allowing Cordell "to come down very hard on some of his own associates." (261). Patrick asks if they were killed, and Will answers, "You've never wanted to look too deep under the surface of things. Don't start now." (263).

In addition to the notion of secret conspiracies, this plot movement is just as much about being entitled to take part in them. Patrick is not in that world but still at its margins, whereas Will, all egalitarianism and reverse-passing aside, is part of a string-pulling elite, even without membership to his father's secret societies. He employs the same opaque tactics with the same results. His striving to develop the business of blues and rock has merely made him wealthy. It has also shown the way to commodify and

[44] Reliable information on this actual camp held north of San Francisco every July is very rare, since participants generally keep silent. As a result, the camp and its organizing body, the Bohemian Club, have become popular objects of conspiracy theory speculation. Numerous accounts, especially web sites, repeat similar stories and names. Rumored among the "Bohos" are nearly all presidents since William H. Taft, Henry Kissinger, Alan Greenspan and Nelson Rockefeller. A typical conspiracy site on the

market the "revolutionary" music of liberation in a way that tends to remove their oppositional potential. The music has become a means of profit, like his father's arms, ambivalent in value and suitable for any side in any conflict.

The final chapter begins with the observation, "And now the feel-good dogma of carpe diem is beamed into our homes by the corporate purveyors of goods and services, who bought the rights to his message, slimmed it down and mass-produced it. But are we any better off for it?" (267). The statement alludes to *The Dead Poets Society*, the popular movie that also tells of boys in boarding school in the mid-1960s just before the "revolution". Weaving that phenomenon into the novel hollows out the pretense of change, the undoing of the restrictive social sham through the real of individual free will that revolution supposedly wrought. If anything, the conflict of the period demonstrated the resilience of structures of money and power that inform the borders of identity.

The passage continues, "Inevitably, by virtue of not immolating himself in his own flame, Will has drifted slightly closer to my point of view. Does that mean that in the end I have won? If so, it is a melancholy victory that might to some eyes closely resemble defeat." (267). Will acknowledges, "Hell, maybe repression and conformity've made you happier than me." (265). He is disappointed in the progress of his cause, having only led to a change in musical tastes and slang, in social signs of consumption rather than the structures of society. Black and white are little closer to being dissolved as categories of difference, black having merely become a resource for white fetishization, an adornment to alleviate the feeling of white male sham/e.

4.3.3. The message of the genes: I fear nothing is true

McInerney does not offer a solution to this. In light of the ambivalence in which he casts his characters, a solution does not seem possible. The novel provides an end that brings together the disparate conflicts in it, but it does not resolve them. Lamb provides a self-constructed synthesis that harmonizes the conflicts in his novel as a victory of a restored authentic Self. McInerney, however, sees such a construction as a failure to overcome social structures of power that inform identity, a surrender to manipulated social constructions of the real. Thus, while *I Know This Much is True* concludes with a fairytale eternity of "happily ever after", *The Last of the Savages* leaves the reader with a situative "for now".

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subject is Alex Jones, "Bohemian Grove Exposed!" Info Wars, 4 Aug. 2003

The conclusion of the novel comes with the birth of Will's son. With the death of Will's two brothers earlier and all his other relatives in past tragedies, the son inherits his father's role as the "last of the Savages". This source of the novel's title strongly alludes to Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, referring to the tribe Cooper fictionally casts as disappearing and Lamb fictionally casts as restored and authentic. *The Last of the Savages* appeared before *I Know This Much is True*, so it does not respond to it, but it does respond to the notion of the vanishing noble savage native and a longing to restore it as an orginary, authentic attachment to the land. McInerney's achievement is to double this notion of the savage with the Savage, the "real native" of the Republic, the slave-owning family, a civilization of conquest and colonization that makes the savage possible by needing to define it as primitive and therefore in need of civilization.

The last of the Savages is Robert Johnson Savage, named after the blues legend, a new identity for an old family of slave owners. The son, whose mother is Taleesha, is also black, part black, black enough to be black in the United States. Will originally wanted to name his son "Muddy Waters", another blues legend and a pun about his "mixed blood". Taleesha relates to Patrick, "I told him the kid would have enough to contend with as it is. And of course he pretended not to know what I was talking about." (270). He bears one further genealogical trait that would make him a resolution to some of the novel's tensions: Will is impotent after his many years of debauchery, so Patrick is the baby's biological father. It satisfies, or rewrites, two of Patrick's main concerns. "I'm delighted to find myself a retroactive member of an old southern family, and the natural father of my best friend's son." (270). "Consummating", the language of marriage, resolves the homosexual component of his longing for Will, and his biological son will now carry the mantle of an old name and have celebrity parents.

Aside from Patrick's personal longings and Will's desire to "be absolved of the curse of his own lineage" (270), the boy represents more questions than resolutions:

> Will he combine our strengths, this mulatto boy, or be divided against himself? Looking hopefully that day into his light blue eyes for some trace of my blood, I wondered whether a child of two races might redeem the original sin of our heritage. Or whether, at least he might be happier with who he is than we were. (270).

Patrick can only conclude, "After flailing so awkwardly against my own modest heritage, I know that my only contribution to the great tides of destiny will be to relay the message of my genes". (271)

<http://www.infowars.com/bg1.html>.

The message of the genes remains perhaps the most complex question in the novel. It depends largely on how they are "read". Classic novels of passing often use the children of passers as a core tension or even as a conclusion. They embody the motivation behind social classifications of white and black. The children of Johnson's ex-colored narrator, for example, serve as a proof of his success at passing and ensure the stability of his new social role when he begins his final paragraph reflecting, "My love for my children makes me glad that I am what I am and keeps me from desiring to be otherwise". In *Clotel* the heroine dies but her daughter lives to be raised as "white" and free. Lamb's novel is no different. The birth at its end signals a new security, the ability to reproduce in a space of a securely authentic identity.

The Last of the Savages also ends with a birth, but amid unresolved conflicts. The birth does not confirm security. It perpetuates insecurity. In light of the endurance of one-drop identity concepts, Robert, for all his mulatto-ness, will surely be considered black. Certainly, he will enjoy greater wealth than the average African American (or mixed-race) child did when Will was young. Also, unlike almost every child born from such unions up to the 1960s when the novel began, this one is recognized by its white father (even if Will is technically not his biological father). However, none of this means a more "authentic" identity or an end to identity-based social conflicts. Patrick relates, "Our ghosts walk among us – soldiers and hippies, slaves and tyrants, moaning their griefs and rattling their sins like chains. Robert Johnson Savage will have no choice but to grapple with them." (271). As a "hybrid", the last of the Savages does not bring resolution to the conflicts of the "real" that gave birth to him. He merely embodies them. These conflicts continue with him both part and product of them.

One "message" of Patrick's genes is survival in the face of constant conflict and threat. Patrick survives to reproduce amid the society's many conflicts of identity. He not only provides the genes for Robert Johnson Savage but also for two daughters from his marriage as well. He is equally proud of that achievement, for the girls will carry on his project of passing, bringing his genes into upper-class WASP circles. They will enjoy as given the privileges and security he strove for. Despite Will's primitivism, Patrick has been the better savage: the fittest who survives. He has survived by understanding and conforming to the laws of his hostile environment. For him, this means laws of social inclusion which follow race, gender, sexuality, and class lines. Passing may subvert them,

reverse-passing may too, but neither is possible without a firm understanding of where those lines are.

Reverse-passing is a subversion that actually confirms the social efficacy of the construction it subverts, no matter what harshness may lie behind that construction. It makes the sham real. The "authentic" opposite of that sham becomes a part of its own artifice. In the end, *The Last of the Savages* is a sometimes confused, jumbled narrative, whereas *I Know This Much is True* is more fluid, though rather long. If McInerney's story is harder to read, it is because it is harder to tell. The complexity of a white male Self longing to become Other leads to an unhappy happy ending because it is an ultimately frustrating endeavor. It ignores and thus perpetuates forces which determine that division. The appearance of transformation is shown to be just that: an appearance. When Patrick asks ironically, "Is it possible we all get what we wished for?" (270). The question resonates with the book's hollowness of sham/e, throwing back echoes rather than answers. As an embittered passer and reverse-passer, he knows this much is true. He also knows that truth is a constantly contested social construct, not the eternal verity of restored authenticity, ending the book in simultaneous security and crisis.

5. Annihilation (f)or Preservation: Postmodern satirical apocalyptic visions of white male power by Tom Wolfe and Bret Easton Ellis

> "What but the human heart itself?" said the dark-visaged stranger, with a portentous grin. "And, unless they hit upon some method of purifying that foul cavern, forth from it will reissue all the shapes of wrong and misery – the same old shapes or worse ones – which they have taken such a vast deal of trouble to consume in the ashes."
>
> - Nathaniel Hawthorne "Earth's Holocaust"[1]

5.1. Facing the ends of worlds

Crisis is nothing new in the imagination of America or the United States. Modernism and its potential end, a disillusionment with the notion of progress, are what form the new crisis of postmodern uncertainty. Categorical uncertainty and ambivalence indicated by passing and its reverse and the critical deconstruction of borders of meaning become the mode. It appears that nothing is true; race and gender roles are revealed as constructs manipulated by powerful interests for their own benefit, a revelation that arouses great trepidation about the potential total lack of value and values. The new moment of crisis is couched in the social discourse of America and draws on its historical traditions of imagining crisis, specifically apocalypse and satire, in an attempt to come to terms with the contradictions of that discourse. This final chapter, therefore, examines the way in which contemporary crises of identity are treated in a postmodern dialectic of apocalypse and satire by white male writers in America.

Disrupting codes of racial and gender signification reveals the repressed fluidity of borders and thus open identities for constant performative mixing and redefinition. The disruption is supposed to bring forth a conscious space of Bhabha-esque hybridity or the thousand plateaus of Deleuze and Guattari. However, this chapter will argue that the subversion of identities and their borders, whether crossing of gender lines, queering sexuality, and disturbing the color bar, are part of a general period critical of western systems of knowledge. That western critique is in turn opposed by social constructions that evoke security by repressing its subversive potential.

The literary interplay of apocalypse and satire in this opposition produces an eschatological spin in which the end, like the truth underlying it, is permanently deferred. Social hegemonies and the forces behind their construction of the truth persevere, even

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[1] Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Earth's Holocaust", *Mosses From an Old Manse* (1844; New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1882): 455.

generate cataclysms supposed to end those constructions as a means of subverting that end. The two examples in this chapter of novels that explore identity in the context of postmodern social satirical apocalypse, *The Bonfire of the Vanities* by Tom Wolfe (1987) and *American Psycho* by Bret Easton Ellis (1991), present such a deferred end.

The language in the title "The Literature of Exhaustion" suggests, and its content confirms, that postmodernism is marked by a disillusionment with certain forms and knowledge structuration as a reaction to an era of "felt ultimacies" and "final solutions".[2] Barth is only one of many to juxtapose the postmodern occupation with disrupted systems of meaning and eschatological themes of finality. When Jameson invokes "late capitalism" in his formulation for postmodernism,[3] he also places postmodernism in an historical progression about to reach its ultimate end, in this case within a Marxist teleology. If anything, these examples, though they may be separated by two decades, reflect a postmodern mentality in which that very disillusionment is regarded as a sign of the potential end of social systems based on the belief of western progress.

This mentality has generated much of the thematic tension in canonized postmodern books, like the *Terribles* series by Ishmael Reed and *Gravity's Rainbow* by Thomas Pynchon, which critique the self-destructive warping of western ideals. It has also given rise to reactionary literature such as *The Turner Diaries* by Andrew MacDonald (1978), which inspired Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh. One can also place the Left Behind series by Jenkins and LaHaye (1995-2004) in the reactionary context,[4] using present-day biblical apocalypse reestablish the security of immutable divine knowledge opposed to postmodern uncertainty. The use of apocalypse in the former group of postmodern books about the exhaustion of systems of meaning differs greatly from it in the latter books that seek to restore those systems. In order to understand this difference it is important to examine the role of apocalypse in American thinking and literature in order to better place postmodernism in it.

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[2] John Barth, "The Literature of Exhaustion", *The Atlantic Monthly* 220.2 (1967): 29-34.

[3] Fred Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

[4] The Left Behind series, co-authored by Jerry Jenkins and Tim LaHaye and launched in 1995, has become something of a cult in Christian fundamentalist circles in the United States. It creates a religious action thriller through a potent combination of biblical portents, American patriotism, and xenophobia (the Antichrist is the Romanian Nicolae Carpathia who becomes UN General Secretary in order to establish a one world government). According to *Publisher's Weekly*, combined sales of the 12-book series had reached nearly 60 million as of this writing. Further, the series has generated an industry of spin-off books, movies, audio tapes, and nationwide discussion groups. See Cindy Crosby, "Tyndale, Tekno to Create New Left Behind Series", *Publisher's Weekly*, 2003 250.13 (2003): 17 and the Official Left Behind Series Site, 4 Aug. 2003 <http://www.leftbehind.com>.

Apocalypse, as a term, means revelation, the unveiling of the hidden truth. In connection with the concluding biblical book Revelations, it has come to be associated with the revelation of the *eschaton*, or final things, the ultimate battle of Armageddon between heaven and hell and the conclusive divine victory. The apocalypse as the revealed Christian truth is therefore both the conflict, revealed through the vision of St. John the divine, and its result, the revealed message of God's plan for the earth. Tellingly, apocalyptic literature experienced a significant boom toward the end of the first century A.D. at the peak of Roman power and decadence and the beginning of its slow decay. Jews and early Christians looked to such literature to take heart in the portents of the fall of Rome and a new kingdom of God to come very soon.[5] Since then, as Frank Kermode discusses, has been frequently invoked in the Christian-informed discourse of the west at times of crisis. That includes apocalypse in the specifically Christian sense and in a secularized sense of a great conflict that will destroy the facades of a corrupt world to reveal a true and better future.

In such situations, the apocalypse, as in the Left Behind series, is inevitably cast in the temporal space of very soon but not now, yet in a time so akin to the present that the apocalyptic narrative functions as a critique of it. Structural comparisons, for example, have been drawn to the Marxist and fascist visions of a fast-approaching final conflict followed by a reign of good. Eco, in turn, saw the apocalyptic reappearing in a certain forms of ideological intellectual critique which "offers the reader *consolation*, for he allows him to glimpse, against a background of catastrophe, a community of 'supermen' capable, if only by rejection, of rising above banal mediocrity".[6] It is insufficient simply to assert that the invocation of apocalypse has been perpetual, but rather one must examine what forces are at work in order to unlock the discursive underpinnings of the specific apocalypse for a specific context. Marxism and fascism both have their apocalyptic visions, but their content and their definition of the righteous to inhabit the redeemed world of the future differ widely. Outside their shared deterministic linearity, these systems are based on different assumptions and modes for constructing the world. The same must be kept in mind when describing missionary concepts of the "United States" and, more broadly, of "America".

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[5] Kermode 8. Kermode's work can be seen as the first modern work to treat apocalypse in terms of a fictional narrative construction.

[6] Umberto Eco, "Apocalyptic and Integrated Intellectuals: Mass Communications and Theories of Mass Culture", 1964, ed. Robert Lumley, *Apocalypse Postponed* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1994): 18.

As mentioned elsewhere in this study, Bhabha has suggested that each nation lives in a performative present, acting out a future revealed by a mythic past which informs the nation's sense of mission. This view is useful for examining concepts of apocalypse in the United States and of "America" as an imaginary space. Lois Parkinson Zamora, as described here in chapter 1, relates the sense of the New World Europeans projected upon the continental mass they discovered and named "America". The "New" World did not merely refer to the undiscovered land but the world of the future the colonizers and colonizing powers sought to erect upon the land. Spanish missionaries and Jesuits came with the same zeal as the English Puritans to erect a New Jerusalem in a New Canaan. As a component of this, on into the nineteenth century, Native American tribes were read as a lost tribe of Israel, the discovery of which portended a new age. The belief still lingers in some sectors of Mormonism and ideologically driven pseudo-theories that Amerindian languages are related to Hebrew.[7]

Specifically, (New) England's Puritans were strongly convinced of being able to read the world and its portents. They brought forth texts that invoked their role in a coming revelatory end as legibly evident and soon, as immanent and imminent. This can be seen in numerous examples. Winthrop's "Model of Christian Charity" claims that blessed New Englanders will "see much more of [God's] wisdom, power, goodness, and truth, than formerly we have been acquainted with".[8] Wigglesworth's "Day of Doom" (1662) was a wildly popular poem of the Apocalypse. Perhaps most succinctly, at the height of Puritan migration to New England in 1638, Thomas Tilliam wrote "Upon the First Sighting of New England", which called for pilgrims to go to America and prepare for the coming of God's revelation: "Prepare to heare your sentence thus expressed / Come yee my servants of my father Blessed."[9] The religious concept of the apocalyptic mission of America to be read in the signs of daily life has remained strong to this day, whether in Seventh Day Adventists or Mormons, and still commands much attention, as the Left Behind series demonstrates.

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[7] An apt refutation of such theories and other debunking of America's natives can be found at the web source "Infrequently Asked Questions", *Native Languages of the Americas*, 19 Aug. 2004 <http://www.native-languages.org/iaq.htm>.

[8] John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity", 1630, ed. Paul Lauter, *The Heath Anthology of American Literature*, third ed. (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1998): 233.

[9] Thomas Tilliam, "Upon the First Sight of New England", 1638, ed. Harrison T. Meserole, *American Poetry of the Seventeenth Century* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State UP, 1985): 365-6. Perhaps it bears mentioning that, according to this source, Tillam gave up on that dream and relocated with a faction to Heidelberg in 1661.

Corresponding to the paradigmatic layering discussed in chapter 1 of this study, the belief in the democratic mission of the United States after its founding did not replace religious missionary beliefs in America. Rather, it was been heavily influenced by them and their tropes of apocalypse. Kermode and others speak of a "secularization"[10] of the Christian, specifically Puritan, vision, its transformation to an American mission as herald of a coming new classical age, one of reason, democracy, and freedom. That does not mean that the United States is constantly cast as being in the middle of an apocalypse. Instead, at moments of conflict, apocalyptic language has been invoked to assure its citizenry that the conflagration at the time will result in a greater democratic future. If anything, one could speak of a proliferation of apocalypses in the American national myth.

Early on, writers cautioned against this kind of mythic structuration, as Melville did in his seminal *Moby Dick* (1851). An apocalyptic novel, it demonstrates the folly of the American ship endeavoring to at last rid the world of the evil Leviathan, a task Melville points out is specifically reserved for God (Isaiah 27:1) at the end of time. Nevertheless, the country's leaders and its people have routinely drawn upon apocalyptic language when speaking of both religious and secular American missions. This has been as much the case for the creation of the phrase "Manifest Destiny" to legitimize war with Mexico in 1843 as it is now for America's current ultimate "war on terror" to legitimize war on many fronts. At no time in American history, however, were apocalyptic forms as powerfully combined with the nation's sense of mission as in the Cold War, when the end was palpably near.

That said, though apocalyptic narrative forms may draw from a tradition, their employment is specific not only to a people but to a period, and it is highly contested. The Puritan vision of Christian apocalypse may have been transferred to the democratizing mission of the secular United States, but the two differed significantly. Similarly, postmodern critiques of apocalyptic themes which grew out of the Cold War are extremely different from Melville's critique of 1851. They represent distinct times and systems of thought. Postmodern literature treats technology, the growth of United States power, mass media culture, internal social tensions, the social construction of knowledge, and the role of signs and symbols in that construction. These themes reflect the era in which that literature was written.

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[10] Kermode 28.

Essential for the time of postmodern apocalypse as distinct from apocalypse in, say, Melville's time is the location of agnostic uncertainty at the center of the postmodern. It is an uncertainty not only about the misrepresentation but the very existence of the divine or even the intersubjectively good. David Robson reflects about *Gravity's Rainbow*, "The pastoralism of conventional Promised Land imagery gives way, here, to something much colder: a post-romantic, postmodern, post-Apollo space program version of the artifice of eternity."[11] Avoiding the modish suffix "meta-", it can be said that the crisis of postmodern uncertainty has produced an apocalypse of restorative apocalypses. Derrida characterized this as a revelation that does not mean redemption but rather the deconstruction of the apocalyptic narrative.[12] After the great conflagrations, in story after story, there is no saving eschaton.

This chapter's epigram from Hawthorne anticipated in some respects that concern years before. This story, which, Lewis relates, provided a conclusion that Hawthorne's confidant Melville "was to find at once profound and appalling".[13] It presents a great bonfire on the American prairie in which the world's people rid themselves of all the earth's "old shapes" only to reveal a simple, venal humanity. Rather than liberating the fire reveals the baseness which entraps humankind. The theme of the non-redemptive apocalyptic end is an old one in American literature. Kermode traces it back even further to *Don Quixote* and the rise of the modern novel as personal experience in conflict with received teleology. However, this modernist theme gained a particular urgency in the Cold War with the constant threat of humanity destroying itself by its own means in the name of questionable motives. That very culmination of modernism led to its critique in postmodernism. Beyond Armageddon (to borrow the title of an influential 1980s science fiction anthology) there is but a burnt world devoid of hopeful meaning.

An unnerving product of this culmination are postmodern plots in which the promised war never comes. Alternatively, if it does come then as a staged conflict, staged in order to maintain the power behind social constructions of identity, a theme to which most notably Ishmael Reed continually returns in his novels. In light of the actual course of events in the Cold War, this more sinister view has predominantly survived the

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[11] David Robson, "Fry, Derrida, Pynchon and the Apocalyptic Space of Postmodern Fiction", ed. Richard Dellamora, *Postmodern Apocalypse: Theory and Cultural Practice at the End* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1995): 61-78.
[12] Jaques Derrida, "No Apocalypse, Not Now (full speed ahead seven missiles, seven missives", trans. Catherine Porter and Philip Lewis, *Diacritics* 14.2 (1984): 20-31.
[13] Lewis, 14.

era. DeLillo writes so succinctly in *Underworld*, "But the bombs did not release." That development highlights the importance of the role of satire as the alternative postmodern mode for revealing meaning.

Knowledge systems such as identity and its borders may be revealed as social constructs and not eternal verities, but these constructs still have a strong valence. As Russ Castronovo pointed out, simply "relocating" a border as a center of hybrid enunciation does not mean it ceases to divide and create Otherness at very powerful levels. Postmodernism is therefore confronted with a paradoxical double crisis: the possible end of civilization "as we know it" in which that social discourse and knowledge itself were constructed, and its possible non-end, its perpetuation and reinvention by powers behind the construction. That second crisis is best described as satire, specifically the satire of the redemptive potential of satire, doubled like the apocalypse in postmodernism.

When it employs apocalyptic forms, postmodern satire offers a critical examination of the apocalypse as a revelation of truth. It ironically compares the social construction of knowledge to the notion of the eternal truth. Satire has long been used in the United States[14] to critique its sense of mission and the perversions of social identity, though it has been ignored by a general public influenced by just those systems of knowledge at which the satire is aimed. This does not mean that satire has always been the same. Structuralist theory in the first half of the twentieth century saw the function of satire as the ridiculous comparison of an egregious situation or person with the norms expected of them so as to rectify that erring. As late as 1987, Leon Guilhamet writes, "[The object of satire] has perverted his nature, knowingly or unconsciously, and, even where the satire is mild, he is implicated in some evil."[15] Satire in this sense is expected to act as a social corrective based on a common moral code. The perverse deviation from the moral standard a society is based on is shown to be socially produced and accepted, representing a grave danger to social and moral authority.

Conceptually, the structuralist model draws close to the apocalyptic narrative before postmodernism, a comparison many have drawn. Jonathan Cook brings the two together in his concept of "satirical apocalypse" as applied to Melville's *The Confidence-*

[14] See, for example, the extensive survey of the American satirical tradition in Helmbrecht Breinig, *Satire und Roman: Studien zur Theorie des Genrekonflikts und zur satirischen Erzählliteratur der USA von Brackenridge bis Vonnegut* (Tübingen: Narr, 1984).

Man (1857). Cook points out that apocalyptic literature and satire traditionally enacted literary protests intended to correct social corruption in their times. Both employed allegorical forms in a prophetic dialectic of crisis, judgment, and potential renewal.[16] It should come as no surprise, he suggests, that the great Roman lyric satirist Juvenal and Revelations author St. John the Divine were contemporaries, commenting on a socially corrupt Rome, though with different agendas. In the same respect, Montgomery bases the tradition of African American apocalyptic writing on the experience of the discrepancy between the promise of democracy and the social reality of living in the United States as black.[17] However, one could point to the same criteria as the source of socially-corrective satire in black works as well. Texts she explores in apocalyptic terms such as Ellison's *Invisible Man* could be just as easily held up as prime examples of satire, and they are.

That said, postmodern literature distinctly resists that kind of corrective satire. Writers like Pynchon, Reed, and DeLillo have taken a similar further step with satire as they have with apocalypse. In its postmodern form, satire is brought into dialogue with apocalypse such that each subverts rather than restores the truth-exposing function of the other. Just as a specific apocalyptic vision is deeply embedded in the cultural conflicts of a people and an era, satire, too, is a function of the discourse from which it emerges. Drawing on that, Steven Weisenburger refers to "degenerative" satire as the form of satire which marks the twentieth century, especially as it appears in postmodern literature. In this, he responds to voices who criticize much contemporary literature for ridiculing without restorative intent. In contrast to what he calls the older "generative" model of satire, he sees in degenerative satire a deconstructive project.

Weisenburger writes, "[W]hen we speak of [satire] we do not mean simply the ridicule of human failings as against some identifiable, universal codes. We mean the intent to ridicule and disfigure the codes themselves and, in addition, we mean both a recognition of that intent and the competence to find and interpret the other 'texts' conspiring in the disfiguration."[18] Just as with the postmodern doubled apocalypse, then,

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[15] Leon Guilhamet, *Satire and the Transformation of Genre* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1987): 7.
[16] Jonathan Cook, *Satirical Apocalypse: An Anatomy of Melville's* The Confidence-Man (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1996).
[17] Maxine Lavon Montgomery, *The Apocalypse in African-American Fiction* (Gainesville, FL: UP of Florida, 1996): 7.
[18] Steven Weisenburger, *Fables of Subversion: Satire and the American Novel 1930-1980* (Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1995): 12.

one can speak in such works of a satire of the concept of satire as generative or restorative. All may be ridiculously corrupt, but the "joke" at the end is that there is no censure and no end. The bombs are not released. The progression of Ishmael Reed's novels offers a particularly good example. As an African American writer, he challenged centrist national myths of apocalypse in *Mumbo Jumbo* (1968) with his "Neo-Hoodoo" aesthetic, but by the time he wrote his *Terribles* series in the 1980s he had lost much of that hope of disrupting the powers to dictate that myth.

The result, in the end, is an extremely grotesque portrait of society and its knowledge. This, according to Clark, is not an accident. The grotesque, he writes, "is repeatedly associated with gross unnatural distortion and calls to mind the fearful, the unearthly, the nightmarish and the demonic."[19] It is a distortion especially of forms, a mutilation of bodies and borders that plays the major role in the degenerative quality of contemporary satire. The reason for this Clark sees stemming from the same postmodern problem with apocalypse. He opens his book observing, "[C]ontemporary man as presented in modern literature is caught in a dilemma, facing the paralytic horror that some dread cataclysm awaits him together with the equally shattering fear that nothing whatsoever will happen."[20] Within that field of potential annihilation, the grotesque functions as violence done to forms. "[C]rippled language and turbulent style precisely mirror the turbulent world."[21]

Weisenburger does not cite Clark but seems to continue that thought. He elaborates on it as a postmodern deconstructive project in which "The postmodern satirist suspects all kinds of knowledge as dissimulations of violence, and all of us potential victims during their exchange. Contemporary degenerative satire is itself a discourse of violence. It is a means of exposing modalities of terror and of *doing violence* to cultural forms that are overtly or covertly dedicated to terror."[22] Left Behind, with all its grotesque apocalyptic gore and bizarre plot twists such as the Secretary General of the United Nations rebuilding Babylon (improbable, though the authors refer to Revelations as proof) would be a postmodern apocalyptic satire if framed within, say, a novel about the publishing industry. Press about the series spin-offs in which the Publisher speaks of wanting "to build in more product releases to extend the life of the

[19] John R. Clark, *The Modern Satiric Grotesque And its Traditions* (Lexington, KY: UP of Kentucky, 1991): 19.
[20] Clark 7.
[21] Clark 53.

line"[23] evokes an uneasy feeling of marketing cynicism behind the divine truth. The devotion of series fans amid the war on terror only increases that unease.[24]

For the contemporary literary treatment of the identity "white male" by white men this means situating their critique between powerful conflict and profound doubt about the potential of that conflict to overcome the borders of identity at the source of that conflict. The writers examined below demonstrate the constructed nature of the systems of meaning through which white men derive social privilege. However, they demonstrate even more strongly the inability to escape that construction. Reverse-passing, as we have seen, does not offer an alternative because it requires, and thus confirms, essential difference along stereotypical borders of division. These borders of identity are fundamentally interwoven into the whole social discursive field of competing systems of knowledge in which writers of reverse-passing narratives write. The same is also true of the grotesque. Postmodern writers who employ satirical apocalypse require the grotesque as an essential part of the social fabric in which their texts appear. Without the violent and perverse effects of racism and sexism, without conflicts of social identity and their grotesque results that underlie the distribution of power and the sense of imagined community, their texts simply do not make sense.

Wolfe and Ellis provide particularly pointed satires of racial and gender privilege. The satire is horrific, always threatening a cleansing, apocalyptic denouement that never actually comes. These texts are not to be read as apocalyptic allegories like Melville and the Puritans before him wrote. Instead, it is important to examine them in terms of their violent conflicts bearing a potential for revelation and the way in which that potential is both realized and repressed. Wolfe paints a scenario in which a city erupts in a race battle over a white male criminal defendant yet remains unchanged. Ellis presents a white man who ritually repeats the horrors visited upon subaltern Others in order to feel a sense of

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[22] Weisenburger 5.
[23] Crosby, as above.
[24] Details of the series heighten the feeling of some deeper sinister manipulation behind the scenes *a lá* Larry Beinhart's novel *American Hero* about staging of the first Gulf War. The first Left Behind spin-off series, a trilogy that follows military events in the same period, was announced in March 2003, right after President Bush announced plans to invade Iraq. The first book, *Apocalypse Dawn* then appeared that July, opening in the middle of a battle on the Turkish-Syrian border. Sales copy for the novel on the Left Behind web site draws connections between events in the Middle East and biblical portents the novel focuses on: "Reading the Left Behind series has been a haunting experience, especially since September 11, with the war on terror, the struggles between the U.S. and the United Nations, and the war in Iraq and its aftermath. Add to that the violence in Israel over the past two years with the current tensions over the 'roadmap to peace' and you get a sense that events described in the Left Behind series

powerful Self but utterly fails to attain that feeling, is never caught and brought to justice but is deeply caught in his world.

5.2. Ending as it began: *The Bonfire of the Vanities*

Tom Wolfe's novel did not appear in the post-Cold War era but rather toward the end of it, first serialized in *Rolling Stone* in 1984-85 and then bound in 1987. Nevertheless, it anticipated the end deferred by echoing the revolution deferred of the late 1960s. The conflict that emerged in that protest era did not lead to a more equitable society but rather has ended in social entropy, to use Freese's term,[25] in Wolfe's New York as a microcosm of the United States. In the words of *Publisher's Weekly*, it "mirrors a system that has broken down."[26] The novel represents the very tensions elided by the Cold War and social problems the United States has yet to confront since the end of that conflict.

Despite the fact that he himself, in the book's introduction, refers to the novel as realistic (introduction, *passim*), he laces it with the fantastic language of apocalypse. Like his view of the newness of New Journalism, he includes classical references and interior monologues among realistic portrayals.[27] These relay the events as not only facts but also discursive impressions. In the case of the novel, these intertextual elements point to both apocalypse and the irony of constructed and deferred apocalypse. This irony forms the novel's satire. The satire ridicules the selfish motives of all the novel's characters, especially the way in which they instrumentalize race as the foundation of their social discourse in a grotesque play to gain political and financial power.

The title sums up the tension of the apocalyptic and the satiric. Among other things, "Bonfire" invokes associations with both purgatory and the purging Armageddon, implying a horror and menace that is ultimately redeeming. The title, of course, alludes to the brief theocracy in Florence under Savonarola who led the first Bonfire of the Vanities in lieu of Carnival in 1497. Florentines publicly burned objects of vice such as gaming cards and pornography to protest the excesses of the Borgia Pope Alexander VI and

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seem quite plausible." "Apocalypse Dawn", The Official Left Behind Series Site, 4 Aug 2003 <http://www.leftbehind.com/channelbooks.asp?channelID=186>.

[25] Peter Freese, *From Apocalypse to Entropy & Beyond: The Second Law of Thermodynamics in Post-War American Fiction* (Essen: Blaue Eule, 1997).

[26] *Publisher's Weekly* statement lifted from book cover of 1988 Picador edition of *Bonfire*. All quotes in this chapter come from this edition.

[27] Tom Wolfe, "Like a Novel", ed. Tom Wolfe and E. W. Johnson, *The New Journalism* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973): 10-22.

purify the city in anticipation of the radical monk's millenialist prophecy of the coming apocalypse.

"Vanities" also alludes to Thackeray's famous satire *Vanity Fair*, the "novel without a hero". Wolfe even cites it as the model for his depiction of New York (introduction, *viii*). In a complex dialectic, "Bonfire" stands in contrast to the mirthful notion of the "Fair" as a grotesque social purging, much as Savonarola's historically juxtaposed carnival and apocalypse. "Vanities", on the other hand, represents a general reference to satire and its ridicule of the perverse that subverts the belief in this grotesque "Bonfire" as a redemptive end. The joke was on Savonarola too. When his prophecies did not come true, his popularity waned, and Florentines gathered in equal celebration to watch his public burning.

In the end of *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, only the grotesque, meaningless society with the white man as a central signifier remains. Wolfe creates this structure to critique the social instrumentalization of race and gender identities as they interact with class and politics. He sets the scene for a large racial conflict in the city that exposes the selfishness of claims of representation the characters at the center of that conflict make. For all the vanities involved, the conflict nevertheless has serious results, and yet in the end of the novel nothing has changed. No end comes to the situation of division and inequity or the language that produced it, nor is there any redemption. Therefore, the following analysis will focus on apocalyptic elements in the novel, on their satire, and on their combination and subversion in a postmodern dialectic of the deferred end.

5.2.1. The apocalypse and the real McCoy

It is not the intention of this section to portray *Bonfire* as a direct allegory of Revelations but rather to demonstrate how its conflict functions as an apocalypse in terms of the secular, albeit millennial, American sense of mission. The novel initially bears parallels to the Christian text, but they are few and not consequentially pursued throughout. That lessens any claim that this work is based directly on a religious intertext or that it look to the bible as a source for the novel's structure or revelations. At the same time, this waning indicates how *Bonfire* is not intended to fulfill a classic apocalyptic scheme. The novel begins with an impending racial cataclysm and a catalogue of racial sins in the city. However, its main conflict becomes located primarily in the person of its protagonist Sherman McCoy and his subsequent deconstruction as the Great White Defendant. The

apocalyptic events of the novel's bonfire burn away the stability of his concept of his own white masculinity yet leave in tact the social identity "white male" as a source of privilege, essential for the further survival of the city's social structure. Borders of identity and identity privilege are deconstructed for the reader but survive as grotesquely as before.

Though *Bonfire* is not an allegorical retelling of Revelations, one important parallel to its structure must be pointed out for the bearing it has on the novel's treatment of racial conflict. The biblical text is framed within an appearance by God, beginning its narration in chapter 2 with a litany of the corruption of the churches of Christianity. It lists in detail their failings as the source of their unfulfilled mission. Similarly, *Bonfire* begins by framing the narration in an introduction in which the author appears and sketches his motives for writing the novel. Its narrative opens with a prologue in which the corruption of the city of New York is portrayed. That prologue lists in detail the city's failure to represent all its citizens in contrast to the democratic mission the United States claims. This same structural opening is also pursued in a different form by Ellis in *American Psycho* (see below).

In the case of *Bonfire*, the prologue "Mutt on Fire" portrays the corruption of New York as profoundly race-based. Racial division is turned into a text of representation that forms the basis upon which the city functions. The litany emerges as the Mayor's public meeting in Harlem is interrupted by black hecklers disturbing his simulacra of democracy. "The whole point was to show that he could go to Harlem and hold a town-hall meeting, just the way he could in Riverdale or Park Slope." (12). His attempt to maintain this illusion that he, as Mayor, represents the whole city and thus transcends its race-based geographic borders is interrupted by shouts of "Chuck", a reference to "Charlie", "the old code name for a down-home white bigot," (9) the Mayor realizes. The Mayor finds the shouts insolent but is even more worried about the fact that TV cameras are on him. The hecklers have reinscribed the border between him and the local black audience. The shouts then become more ethnically specific, moving from "Goldberg", "the Harlem cognomen for Jew" (11), to "Hymie", a more aggressively negative slur for Jews.

The Mayor transforms his indignation toward the black people before him into a mental attack on the white voters of his city. "You don't even know, do you?" he thinks, "Do you really think this is *your* city any longer? Open your eyes! The greatest city of

the twentieth century! Do you think *money* will keep it yours?" (13). It frames the litany against the white residents of the city, the prosperous Jews, Italians, Irish, and especially WASPs as the whitest of the white, for not realizing that they do not represent the city's residents. The litany appears as an internal monologue:

> Come down from your swell co-ops, you general partners and merger lawyers! It's the Third World down there! Puerto Ricans, West Indians, Haitians, Dominicans, Cubans, Colombians, Hondurans, Koreans, Chinese, Thais, Vietnamese, Ecuadorians, Panamanians, Filipinos, Albanians, Senegalese, and Afro-Americans! Go visit the frontiers, you gutless wonders! Morningside Heights, St. Nicholas Park, Washington Heights, Fort Tyron – *por que pagar más* ... whose is it? Do you know? And where does that leave Ridgewood, Bayside, and Forest Hills! Have you ever thought about that! And Staten Island! Do you Saturday do-it-your-selfers really think you're snug in your little rug? You don't think the future knows how to cross a bridge? (13)

Far from being the voice of an all-powerful God, however, the "Mayor" (thus capitalized and never named) is unable to control any of this.

He is trapped in the very system of identity construction at the base of the society he represents. He does not speak out loud his exhortation to "Go visit the frontiers" or his final warning that they will be crossed. This demonstrates his own complicity in a social repression of those frontiers as unmentionable, for they belie egalitarian failing. He exits the room to avoid a riot and leaves the novel's narration as well, only to reappear once as a supporting figure. At best, he maintains the status quo, a function and not the leader of the social construction of borders of identity.

All the rage of the city's racial division, misrepresentation, and inequity from the opening scene is transferred to a mythic white male figure. Relatively early, in the first description of the District Attorney's Office in the chapter "The Girl With the Brown Lipstick", Wolfe describes the ongoing quest at the office for the "Great White Defendant" (121). All the assistant DA's share this pursuit with District Attorney Abe Weiss. To drive the *Moby Dick* allusion home, Weiss – a reference to "white" alluded to later in the goading protest slogan "Weiss justice is white justice" – is also nicknamed "Ahab", and his pursuit of the Great White Defendant is described as a "mania" (121). Parodying the Great White Whale, Wolfe rewrites the quest to battle the Leviathan of evil as its mere show, the simulation of revealing a democratic mission.

Weiss, the representative of the white power in the city, and all of his coworkers seek the Great White Defendant for two reasons. First, they want to alleviate their own guilt that their job is to "pack blacks and Latinos off to jail" (121). Second, it is intended as a public show to the non-white residents that, even though almost all the defendants they prosecute are not white, they still apply justice equally to rich whites. Weiss, after

all, faces a reelection in the 70-percent black and Latin Bronx (123). Thus, given the biblical and Melville-esque tones, an apocalyptic plot is pre-programmed by what the novel constantly terms "the Power". Assistant DA, Larry Kramer, walking to work, sees the Power represented in the Bronx by the court building, a tenuous power and a tenuous representation at best: "They stayed inside the building, this island fortress of the Power, of white people, like himself, this Gibraltar in the poor sad Sargasso Sea of the Bronx." (48).

The hunt for the Great White Defendant externalizes the Power. It transfers the identity of those hiding behind the facade of the courthouse, with its Apollonian figures of reason and rectitude, to an external figure similarly clad in such a facade. This takes place as a public demonstration of the purported equality with which the Power is exercised. The irony is that the hunt would not be necessary if the Power were not exercised as merely a show of equality designed to maintain social division and protect the unequal privileges some citizens, especially white men, enjoy. The citizens of the city are subjected to a show apocalypse that preserves the social structure of identity rather than disrupts it. For all the confrontation the Great White Defendant causes, the conflict is prearranged to protect a system in which WASP signifies elite, without which city would not function and daily politics could not be imagined.

Within this context, Sherman McCoy emerges as the Great White Defendant. He does so by unwittingly transgressing a border and visiting the frontier. He makes a wrong turn off the freeway into the Bronx. In a moment of panic, his mistress, Maria, takes over driving and hits the black boy Henry Lamb. Wolfe leaves unclear whether the boy and his friend were about to rob McCoy by setting up obstacles in the onramp out of the Bronx or help him by removing them. He supplies only Sherman's stream of consciousness as Lamb's friend asks if the white people in the car need help: "It was a neighborly voice. *Setting me up! One hand inside his jacket pocket!* But he sounds sincere. *It's a setup, you idiot!* But suppose he merely wants to help? *What are they doing on this ramp!* Haven't done anything – haven't threatened. *But they will!* Just be nice. *Are you insane? Do something! Act!*" (101). The ambiguity of the situation in this chapter, "King of the Jungle", emphasizes the projection of savage fear at the black Bronx Other and of being trapped by him on his territory.

It does not matter what the boys may have intended. There is only the terrified reaction of the white people lost in the jungle toward their vision of the threatening

native Other. The event sets in motion the legal structure based around the Great White Defendant. The question of his "guilt" becomes ambivalent at best and irrelevant at worst. His guilt, like that of Thackeray's characters, is both his own ignorance of and duplicity with the social show of meaning. The process as apocalypse reveals to himself and the reader the constructed nature of Sherman McCoy's identity as "white male", but the identity is nonetheless reinforced publicly through the process of his prosecution.

From the outset, his name radiates certainty and authenticity, a strength that reinforces his own self-assessment. Echoing his famous Civil War general namesake, he is a "sure man", both surely a man and sure of his manhood. The leading bond broker at the investment firm of Pierce & Pierce with a million-dollar apartment, trophy wife, daughter, servants, and a mistress, privately thinks of himself as one of the "Masters of the Universe" (19). He believes he wields the Power.

McCoy also brings with it the ring of the real, as in "the real McCoy", the unquestionably authentic. Appropriately, the origins of the phrase, "the real McCoy" are uncertain. The *Random House Encyclopedia of American Slang* cites a Scottish origin for "real McCoy" in an advertisement for "Mackay" (also McKay) whisky in the 1850s[28] but cannot verify this as the phrase's origin in North America. Alternatives refer to Prohibition bootlegger William McCoy, the McCoys who feuded with the Hatfields in the 1870s, and the inventor Elijah McCoy, an ex-slave who developed an engine lubricant which became an industry standard.[29] *Random House* claims that documentation refutes these other origins. No single explanation is the real McCoy. These various "origins" have at best reinforced each other, leaving the authenticity of the term origins open to conjecture and contestation.

The novel parallels the uncertainty of the "real McCoy" with hints of uncertainty about Sherman McCoy's authenticity as a member of WASP high society similar to Patrick Keane's concerns in *The Last of the Savages*. In the same "Masters of the Universe" chapter, Sherman encounters Pollard Browning, an old classmate. Sherman recalls, "Browning had been a fat, hearty, overbearing junior snob who at the age of nine knew how to get across the astonishing news that McCoy was a hick name (and a hick family), as in the Hatfields and McCoys, where as he, Browning, was a true

[28] "McCoy", *The Random House Encyclopedia of American Slang*, ed. J.E. Lighter, vol. 2 (New York: Random House, 1997): 527.

Knickerbocker. He used to call Sherman 'Sherman McCoy the Mountain Boy'." (22). This directly contrasts with the noble image of Sherman at the outset: "tall...almost six-one...terrific posture...terrific to the point of imperious...as imperious as his daddy, the Lion of Dunning Sponget ... a prominent chin...He was proud of his chin. The McCoy chin; the Lion had it, too." (17).

The constructed objects of masculinity, the posture, strength and size, are coupled by the sure man with his image of nobility and elite membership. Yet one also sees how belief in the authenticity of that masculinity plays a role in a conflict over his own membership to the social elite. Browning intimates that he may be a hick, white trash that does not live up to the high class standards of being white. Newitz *et al* examine the term "white trash" in terms of recent analytical developments that conceive of "white trash" as "simultaneously inside and outside whiteness, becoming the difference within, the white Other that inhabits the core of whiteness."[30] They suggest that "white trash" constructs an identity of failure, making them trash, the abject to be expelled in order to maintain that standard. Sherman produces an exaggerated white male Self by clothing himself in the identity of Master of the Universe to repress the danger that being a McCoy means not being not the real McCoy.

In the course of the public case against him, Sherman's conflict of Self dissolves as the social construction of the identity "white male" he labored to embody becomes more visible to him. This process begins when he is publicly taken to Central Booking after his arrest to demonstrate the equal application of the law. Part of the public show is his physical removal across the geographical borders that separate him from his Others. There he is thrown in the common cell with other prisoners, stripped both of his privileges and of his insulation against the Others. He becomes part of the "chow", the food of the criminal justice system, and thinks "That was it. It was a drainpipe, where mankind sought its own level, and the meat spigot was on" (518). Once the Master of the Universe, he has grotesquely been ground into the mass of social meat, his identity as white male now consumed by that universe to sustain itself by abjecting him as its villain.

At the peak of public furor, portrayed as a cruel white man who killed an innocent black boy in his German car, he has a moment of clarity. His epiphany, and that

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[29] These and some other possible origins are neatly summarized in several web sites. See, for example, "Where did the expression 'the real McCoy' come from?" Ask Yahoo! 1 June 2001, 27 Aug. 2003 <http://ask.yahoo.com/ask/20010601.html>.

[30] Newitz and Wray 170.

of the book, comes when his lawyer tells him that a mob outside his apartment house will kill him. Sherman observes: "I'm already dead, or the Sherman McCoy of the McCoy family and Yale and Park Avenue and Wall Street is dead. Your *self* – I don't know how to explain it, but if, God forbid, anything like this ever happens to you, you'll know what I mean. Your *self* ... is *other people*, all the people you're tied to, and it's only a thread." (587). The Bonfire has "killed" him by dissolving the border between his privileged identity and the rest of society.

It is his very world of ties that has abjected him in order to preserve itself and white male privilege. Even as he is stripped of his membership to that group, he is prosecuted because he is a member of it. That is best demonstrated when Browning, also his neighbor, demands he move out of the building. Browning appeals, "[Y]ou have a home here because you are a shareholder in a *cooperative* residential venture. It's called a cooperative for a reason, and certain obligations, on your part and the board's part, proceed from the contract you executed when you purchased your shares." (593). The postmodern apocalyptic form of the novel transforms Sherman McCoy of Yale into the publicly revealed "real McCoy", not-quite-noble real White Trash. He cooperates with the cooperative by leaving it, expelled by his own elite class in order to maintain its borders beneath the facade of social equity.

5.2.2. Satirizing the apocalypse: the vanity of the bonfire

The apocalypse, stage-managed by powerful people to preserve their own power, is entirely absurd, entirely satiric. From the outset, Sherman McCoy is patently ridiculous. The many other characters in the novel, large and small, are all humorous socially critical caricatures. Besides him, two of the most interesting figures, both in terms of the novel's diegetic progression and as exegetic keys to its satire, are black leader Reverend Bacon and journalist Peter Fallow. Not only the people but also the novel's events are shown to be perversions of assumed norms for the conduct of public discourse that those norms themselves generate. The scene in which (the sacrificial) Lamb is hit is but one example, as bitingly satiric as it is apocalyptic in revealing the deep fear the white man McCoy carries with him. Discussed below are two other sets of events, the initial protest for Henry Lamb and the society parties at which Sherman's status changes as a result of his media role. The scenes demonstrate the degenerative satire that deconstructs the system of signification in which democratic discourse is embedded. The mediated race conflict

evokes this discourse to maintain the borders of race division while eliding the sly motives of those staging the events to profit from that division.

Returning once more to Sherman, he is not only a sacrificial figure but also the butt of the novel's joke, its idiot. Bearing in mind *Vanity Fair* as a "novel without a hero", it was the single greatest failing of the 1990 film version of *Bonfire* to begin its narration by Bruce Willis as Peter Fallow referring to McCoy as, "our hero". The film proceeds to portray Sherman as a lone figure battling the overwhelming, corrupt forces in the city with ultimate vindication. In the end, he "gained his soul".[31] The movie missed the satirical point or consciously rewrote it. Sherman is not a hero in the novel. There is no vindication.

The very identification with the "Masters of the Universe" sets the tone for the novel's joke about him. The term, as Sherman's thoughts on the subject reveal, refers to a "set of lurid, rapacious plastic dolls that his otherwise perfect daughter liked to play with. They looked like Norse gods who lifted weights, and they had names such as Dracon, Ahor, Mangelred, and Blutong." (19). The association with the Masters of the Universe is ridiculous, the association with a line of plastic toys later flogged in a cartoon series. Furthermore, the figures are grotesque. They are grossly muscled figures with skulls and mismatching animal parts, bizarre fantasies and projections of strength and masculinity. They demonstrate both just how weak-minded Sherman is to hide himself in the shell of such a fantastic identity and what a grotesque fantasy it is. Wolfe carefully veils the big joke of the "Masters" metaphor, as though Sherman is repressing it out of embarrassment by couching it in Norse mythology: none of the very popular figures bear such names, but rather the central figure is a scantily clad warrior, a blonde, lightly tanned, muscle-bound white man named "He-Man".

Sherman is pathetic to the extreme. Clinging to a "hard body", a mass-produced image of explosive white masculinity who is the superhero alter-ego of a cowardly figure named Prince Adam, serves as manufactured compensation for his own deep uncertainty regarding his social position. Susan Jeffords provides a well-argued analysis of the emergence of the "hard body" media figure in the 1980s to compensate a widespread feeling among Americans of weak helplessness from the Vietnam era and its aftermath. She found the feeling particularly widespread among white males. Led by the Ronald Reagan cowboy image, the decade saw the appearance of He-Man, Rambo, and the

Terminator, one powerfully over-muscled white male image after another which relocate the white male at the center of power in the imagined American community.[32] To this day, the "normative body that enveloped strength, labor, determination"[33] which is "like Reagan's own, male and white"[34] has retained if not increased its potency, likely as a result of "winning" the Cold War.[35] Sherman McCoy is thus a dupe, a dupe of dupes, manipulated by mass-produced, grotesque objects of identity in the very universe of which he is supposed to be master.

Reverend Bacon stands in satirical contrast to him. Bacon claims to represent the black community through his public crusade against Sherman. The name, bringing to mind the "pork barrel" squandering of well-meant money for spurious causes, contrasted with the supposed revered role of a holy man, a "beacon" of the community, gets to the satiric core of this character. First introduced in chapter 6, "A Leader of the People", Reverend Bacon is at once a leader of the people of Harlem and a con. He is a veteran activist steeped in the rhetoric of racism and religion who manipulates the objects of that rhetoric largely for his own financial ends. The attacks he leads against the "white establishment power structure" he vilifies are largely shake-downs which extort money from that same establishment. Yet, as is remarked, because of him, "Things do change. I'm not sure he care's whether they change or not, but they do change." (178).

He first appears in the novel in connection with what appears to the embezzlement of $350,000 the Episcopalian Church donated to his cause to set up a daycare center in Harlem. It has been reallocated to Urban Guarantee Investments, of which he is sole proprietor and employee. The well-meaning liberal white male Yale graduate, Edward Fiske III, is sent by the church to get the money but is powerless to defeat the logic of the Reverend's explanation. Bacon's rhetoric oscillates between the

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[31] See Michael Christopher, adapt., *Bonfire of the Vanities*, by Tom Wolfe, dir. Brian De Palma, perf. Tom Hanks, Melanie Griffith, Bruce Willis, (Warner, 1990).
[32] Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1994).
[33] Jeffords 13.
[34] Jeffords 25.
[35] As evidence of the continued power of the hardbody image, one need only consider the speech Arnold Schwarzenegger made to troops in Iraq on the symbolically potent 4th of July, 2003. There he encouraged them with the words: "I play a terminator, but you guys are the true terminators." See "Arnold Takes Terminator to Iraq, Says Thank You to Troops", Schwarzenegger.com 5 July 2003, 10 July 2003 <http://www.schwarzenegger.com/en/news/uptotheminute/news_upto_en_t3_iraq.asp>. Schwarzenegger's subsequent election to Governor of California was also marked by a campaign based on similar signature rhetoric from his films.

funds already having been paid to poor Harlem firms (171) and the much more cynical "steam control".

Steam control, as he elucidates, represents an investment of capital that relinquishes part of it to the disenfranchised in order to control them: "You're investing in the souls...the *souls*...of the people who've grown up with a righteous anger in their hearts and a righteous *steam* building up in their souls, ready to blow." (174). He leads opposition, but that opposition is within the system of New York politics and depends just as much on the borders of racial difference. Far from dismantling those borders, he actually sustains them. He claims, "I'm the conservative, whether you know it or not." (174). His duplicity with this system is supported by information about an opaque transaction between Urban Guarantee Investments and none other than Pierce & Pierce (175). As a degenerative satirical character, he leads his crusade against McCoy because he sees an angle. He sees a way to portray himself publicly as fighting the Mayor's reelection on the grounds of racism. Doing so, Bacon maintains his own status as leader of a community he defines as permanently excluded, reinscribing the borders of difference he publicly opposes.

Working hand-in-hand within the scheme of Bacon and Abe Weiss is journalist Peter Fallow. It is Fallow, the idle but tillable, who publicizes the case. In this respect, it is significant that he is not only a journalist but also English. He brings with him a sneering hatred of all Americans, "hopeless children whom Providence had perversely provided with this great swollen fat fowl of a continent. Any way one chose to relieve them of their riches, short of violence, was sporting, if not morally justifiable, since they would only squander it in some tasteless and useless fashion, in any event." (188).

A con like Bacon, he relies on the inferiority complex and pretension of the city's white elite with respect to the English. He requires them to misread his Englishness as Fiske does. Fiske, the Yale graduate, aspires to the company of the English, even pays their bar bill because he feels they "understood the art of conversation" (178). The book is littered with references to Anglophile pretension and deference like this. Sherman's boss has an office in *faux* manor decor complete with functioning fireplace. Maria complains "I hate the Brits" (89) when her confusion of Christopher Marlowe the Elizabethan playwright with Philip Marlowe the Raymond Chandler detective in a conversation with an Englishman fills her with anxiety of non-cultivation.

Fallow is far from cultivated, a drunk who accepts a deal to report the McCoy case in Bacon's interest in exchange for contacts and exclusive interviews. He does so only to give his employer the impression of working. His employer, yellow newspaper *The City Light*, is culturally structured like Fallow. Founded by the English and based on their model of tabloid journalism, it is far from the image of understated English refinement. Instead, it corresponds to a different well-known, perhaps even more widespread, form of English cultural production. The Americans Fallow manipulates are indeed "helpless children" insofar as they are unable to master that identity, though using it as a source of distinction through the adoption of *faux* Englishness. Peter Fallow is the counterpart of He-Man,[36] another illusion of identity, this one of authoritative refinement and taste. It is an identity for the white elite in New York to defer to and at the same time imitate for the consumption of the rest of the nation. Thus, the role he assumes is as a cultural authority whose reporting turns the McCoy case into a grotesque spectacle, not so much revealing the truth behind the social construction of identity as turning that construction into the truth.

The first protest against Sherman brings the satirical functions of Bacon and Fallow together to create a staged media event that constructs the case against Sherman as a racial conflict. Fallow is sent by lawyer Al Vogel to cover the event, a demonstration led by Bacon's people in front of a poor social housing project building. Initially, the area around the building is still. Then a van appears, dropping off people to protest, an all-purpose group of "Bacon's people", to use the Mayor's phrase for the hecklers from the prologue. Assistant DA Larry Kramer observes that the protesters consist of "about two dozen white and a dozen black demonstrators, lolling about, chatting and assembling placards and banners" (326). Fallow, who arrives then, is "worried about the silence" (327). "Where were the crowds?" he wonders (327). The group only becomes active at the arrival of the television crew that was promised an exclusive of the demonstration. Emphasizing the staged nature of the event, the leader of the protest even asks the TV reporter there, "What do you want us to do?" (331). The scene is directed and choreographed to suit the television report, even drawing a huge crowd of onlookers, mostly teenagers, who give the impression of a large demonstration.

Fallow, eager to appear to work and to please Vogel, duly represents the event as a demonstration of the weak versus the powerful in an article the next day. The story

[36] Incidentally, a glance in the Internet indicates that the Masters of the Universe were and are about as

becomes the subject of an editorial with the title "HIT-OR-MISS JUSTICE" which calls for "an aggressive investigation of every angle of the Lamb Case". The event, launching the race campaign against Sherman, the Great White Defendant, is satirized as an event, portrayed as, at best, a mediated simulation. It simulates protest, even as the reporters simulate fair and unbiased journalism, couched as the stories are in the advocacy language of representing those unable to represent themselves. Like Baudrillard said of Watergate, it is "a simulation of scandal for regenerative ends."[37] Bacon simulates protests against medical and legal neglect such that the construction of racial division and the borders of racial identity remain the same. This allows him to continue appear to protest and Fallow to continue to appear to expose their dysfunction. Wolfe's literary treatment of a simulation for regenerative ends becomes a degenerative satire, for only the social facade and its grotesque results are regenerated.

The parties the McCoys attend stand in stark contrast to this event, but they function similarly as choreographed expressions of social status and division. Since the *Satyricon* of Petronius, festive social events like the gathering at the *cena Trimalchionis* have been stock locations of satire. They offer a microcosm of society as a whole in which to point out the ridiculously perverse in representative members of society and in their interaction at a staged event of self-gratification. The two society dinners Wolfe describes in detail in the chapters "The Masque of the Red Death" and "Hero of the Hive" follow in this tradition. These ridiculing portraits include references to luxurious decorations, elaborate meals and an assortment of wealthy or socially modish buffoons which are stock elements for such a festive satire. Such elements can be compared to the dismal descriptions elsewhere in the novel of the government offices and the projects, but more important than the contrast of wealth is the issue of exclusion and social borders. The exclusion of those not attending and the exclusion of Sherman at the parties are both informed by the mediated identity of the party guests.

The parties involve "precisely the same crowd" (615). Thus, the first and all its excesses act as a foil for demonstrating the transformation of McCoy's role within that crowd by the second party. The first, a typically bland society affair at the *arriviste* Bavardages, is described from McCoy's point of view, strongly infused with Sherman's concerns about losing his job amid the recently publicized Lamb case. However, no one

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popular in the UK.

[37] Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 1981, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1994): 16.

knows of his involvement yet, and, even though a *City Light* columnist is among the guests, the subject does not rate their attention. Neither does McCoy, "a social light of no wattage whatsoever in the Bavardage Celebrity Zoo" (390). Guests are more interested in the Nobel Prize-winning English poet, Lord Aubrey Buffing, and other "dancers, novelists, and gigantic fairy opera singers" (380) who ornament the "Celebrity Zoo". Guests are interested in these celebrities more for their fame than their work, "nothing but court jesters, nothing but light entertainment for...The Masters of the Universe, those who push the levers that move the world." (380).

By the second party at the di Duccis', *The City Light* has fingered McCoy as the driver of the car, and the *Daily News* in turn has written in his defense. Sherman and his wife, worried that *le monde* of their social clique rejects them, find instead that their hosts are "counting on your coming!" (615). Kate di Ducci steers them to the biggest "conversation bouquet" (616). Suddenly everyone wants to hear about Sherman's bravery in the Bronx. They are amazed that the bond market is so dazzling, having read about him in the *Daily News* as a "titan of finance" (620). The hostess and top guests sit at his table, and "During much of the dinner all six of these men and women were tuned solely to Mr. Sherman McCoy. Crime, Economics, God, Freedom, Immortality – whatever McCoy of the McCoy Case cared to talk about, the table listened." (620). He reflects as he rides home, "It's perverse, isn't it? Two weeks ago, when we were at the Bavardages', these same people froze me out. Now I'm smeared – *smeared* – across every newspaper and they can't get enough of me." (623).

The descriptive exposition of these two scenes was necessary to get across their difference. Rather than simply two scenes of ritual grotesque excess – and Wolfe does provide lurid descriptions of that excess – they demonstrate the way in which the subjects of that excess identify with it as a means to participate in an exercise of social cohesion. Like the demonstration, the collective activity of this scene is a function of a socially mediated identity. The party guests are like the gawking kids from Lamb's neighborhood drawn by the spectacle of the demonstration and the television van. They are drawn by the promise of taking part in the media event, taking part of the fair. Like Bacon, these people live through their media portraits, measuring success by the appearance of their apartments in *Architectural Digest*, wearing the latest fashions from magazines, speaking to each other as images received through the media, believing their own televised myths.

The difference between the party guests and the boys in Lamb's neighborhood is exclusion. These are private parties, a dozen guests at most, the "crowd" restricted and protected. The guests are fashionably mediated and excessively rich. They are also white. They are all white. The demonstration, on the other hand, is staged as a public event, strategically including black and white. Unlike the party, it thrives on the simulation of inclusion. White bodies are especially imported to the scene to create this sense of the authentic. The demonstration also counts on the presence of the public, the gathering of locals around the television camera to simulate community representation. On the other hand, both types of events are staged, maintain socio-economic borders by racializing them, and rely on the identification of the participants with those racialized borders. Each also requires the existence of the other, events through which antagonistic sub-communities reinforce their identity as Others within the whole mediated imagined community of New York.

5.2.3. The non-divine burning bush: Why the vanities are not consumed by the bonfire

It is within the mediated racial conflict that the novel's satirical portrayals really interact with its apocalyptic action. Wolfe employs realistic descriptions of the dire circumstances in which the city's poor, primarily blacks and Latinos, live. Their lives are so dysfunctional that "piece a shit" has become an informal legal term at the Bronx DA's office to describe the mire of circumstances in which most of the crimes there are committed. The people become that amorphous, grotesque "chow" of the criminal justice system, soon to become legal excrement, the expelled mass unrecognizable and unusable to the structure designed to process it. It is a chain of scatological association which demonstrates, as Clark writes, that, "[P]roud, self-delusional man ever aspires to elevate himself and his dignity, whereas the satirist destroys such upward mobility by reducing man to defecating animal before our eyes."[38] The government workers, from the Mayor to the assistant DA, are part of this digestive system, portrayed in dismal, shabby offices, living off low incomes in tiny apartments.

Without the doubled satire, this would be the ideal setting for a straightforward social critique with an apocalyptic ending in the tradition of *The Jungle*. However, Wolfe does employ that satire, a helpless recognition that the action is merely staged, the

[38] Clark, *Grotesque* 116.

apocalypse faked, despite the inequality that generated it, for in the end, there is no end. The attack against the social structures in the novel is itself informed by those structures, transforming the apocalypse from immanent and imminent to simply permanent. The simulated apocalypse maintains the construction of racial borders and conflict over them by remaining within that construction. Indicative of this process is the role of informal social networks of acquaintance and how they interact with the novel's use of white masculinity. The structure of those networks and their failure create the deferred end of permanent apocalypse.

In one chapter, Wolfe offers a tantalizing look at a model of social interaction alternative to both the mediated imagined community and the decadent "crowd" of the extravagantly wealthy. However, it ultimately fails as well. The Favor Bank described by Larry Killian fails because it cannot withstand the manipulations of the mediated imagined community. It is ultimately identity-based and thus remains within the borders of social constructions of race and ethnicity. Sherman laments, "There's no such thing as loyalty on Wall Street." (586), whereas the Favor Bank promises loyalty. Killian explains, "Well, everything in this building, everything in the criminal justice system in New York ... operates on favors. Everybody does favors for everybody else." (429). The solidarity of the Favor Bank is based on networks of personal acquaintances, allowing the people in it to operate in the "gray areas" (430). Robert Putnam even refers to Wolfe's Favor Bank as a model of "social capital" at the core of his prescription for reinvigorating disintegrated American communities in his influential *Bowling Alone*.[39]

Through the Favor Bank, Killian foils Abe Weiss's plan to have Sherman arrested in a media event in his home. It also aids the trial in a number of small ways. Useful as it may seem, Wolfe nonetheless aims a strong critique at it. The Bank may be a source for gaining favors, but it cannot stop Abe Weiss. Weiss is so desperate to gain publicity for the Great White Defendant that he has Sherman brought to Central Booking in front of the press, despite a favor Killian extracted from his contact at the DA's office. Killian rants, "This...is...not...right." (498).

The fact is, the Favor Bank is exclusive, and not just to people in the criminal justice system. Killian describes the network as involving "everybody" doing favors for "everybody else", but "everybody" in his network of contacts is Irish. His first contact with the Favor Bank is as a young assistant DA getting a favor from a judge who is a

"Harp like me" (429). The judge agrees to help him, assessing the situation, "Tommy, you seem like a good lad. I understand there's a certain Jew bastard been giving you a very hard time." (430). Jews are obviously not part of "everybody" involved in Killian's Favor Bank. Weiss is Jewish. So is the Mayor. Like the Irish, they have their own network of contacts. The Italians have theirs. The British (Fallow working for the *City Light* and going to Leicester's bistro with the other Brits) have theirs.

This is the core of the novel's whiteness. The first chapter of this study posited that the internal variety of ethnicities within whiteness lay at the roots of its tendency toward the invisible while at the same time reinforcing its outward visibility and the fixity of its borders.[40] *The Bonfire of the Vanities* provides a textbook case for this. It demonstrates the way in which whiteness is obscured in a web of sub-ethnicities that are all considered broadly white. Within "white", they are riven by these ethnic-religious associations. The instances quoted above of "Harps" and "Jew bastards" do not begin to give a sense of how tightly interwoven Wolfe's narrative is with such associations. No character ever looks at another without them. Kramer, for example, reflects on the makeup of the DA homicide office consisting once entirely of Irish, slowly being taken over by Italians, he being the only Jew. It is part of his role in the extended drama "*The Jews Confront the Goyim*" (122). The thought indicates the constant contestation, not of white *per se*, but of the hierarchy of power within that group. One must first be included in that white identity to take part in that contestation.

More to the point, these three main sub-identities, Irish, Italian, and Jewish, also provide apparent, visible texts of ethnic association. They allow, for example the black hecklers in the opening scene to oscillate in their attack between the generic white "Charlie" and the specifically Jewish "Hymie". The three sub-identities in turn gain their visibility against a background of that elusive Great White Defendant, i.e. a WASP, the one they can't really put a finger on. As a result, the WASPs are portrayed in the novel as barely visible, elusive, non-manifest, except as a vague concept of centralizing whiteness. McCoy does not go to explicitly WASP parties or take part in a WASP Favor Bank. He inwardly considers "the same crowd" at the parties to be "the same vulgar non-Knickerbocker crowd" (615), reflecting an internalization of the same contempt Pollard Browning has for him.

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[39] Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000): 20.

[40] See chapter 1, conclusion of section 1.2. "Mapping the limits of the white male".

Apparently, the goal of everyone in the novel is to command that elusive unmarked whiteness the WASPs currently occupy which constructs them as New York's natives and the center of its power. Weiss wants to command it to demonstrate the fairness of the justice system and justify his role as its leader. Bacon wants to command that whiteness as a sign of opposition. The Mayor, in his only other appearance, reveals this elusive character of the WASP as a centralizing identity in an amusing passage of reflections on the myriad *goyim*:

> He found the Christian churches baffling. When he was growing up, the *goyim* were all Catholics, unless you counted the *shvartzer*, which nobody did. They didn't even rate being called *goyim*. The Catholics were two types, the Irish and the Italians. The Irish were stupid and liked to fight and inflict pain. The Italians were stupid and slob-like. Both were unpleasant, but the lineup was easy to comprehend. He was in college before he realized there was this whole other set of *goyim*, the Protestants. He never saw any. There were only Jews, Irishmen, and Italians in college, but he heard about them, and he learned that some of the most famous people in New York were this type of *goyim*, the Protestants, people like the Rockefellers, the Vanderbilts, the Roosevelts, and Astors, the Morgans. The term *Wasp* was invented much later. The Protestants were split up into such a crazy bunch of sects nobody could even keep track of them all. It was all very pagan and spooky, when it wasn't ridiculous. They were all worshipping some obscure Jew from halfway around the world. The Rockefellers were! The Roosevelts even! Very spooky it was, and yet these Protestants ran the biggest law firms, the banks, the investment houses, the big corporations. He never saw such people in the flesh, except at ceremonies. Otherwise they didn't exist in New York. They barely even showed up in the voting surveys. In sheer numbers they were a nullity – and yet there they were. (627).

This stream of thought is not launched by the presence of a WASP, even though he does briefly discuss taking a position on Sherman McCoy in the scene. It begins with his amazement over the appearance a black bishop from the WASP Episcopalian Church.

The black bishop baffles him, turning over his system of identity signification. It disturbs him so much that his thoughts go from the *goyim* in general, who must be white since the *shvartzer* "didn't even rate being called *goyim*", to the WASPs in particular. They were at the center of something "pagan and spooky", made spookier by their being a nullity, phantoms with such psychic pull, "and yet there they were". The emergence of the black triggers in the mind of the Mayor an association with the white, not just the white but the WASP, as the vortex around which the fear of the black and all the *goyim* revolves in the battle for the city's power. Oscillating as the passage does between the humor and fear of the satirical apocalypse, the Mayor concludes with both: "You could joke about the Wasps, and he often did so with his friends, and yet they weren't so much funny as creepy." (627).

The point of view of the Mayor subject, with its language of *goyim*, *shvartzer*, stupid Irish, stupid Italians, and creepy WASPs, returns to the novel's theme of the

contested male WASP at the center of social signification. The whole novel consists of a pastiche of points of view. That pastiche provides an intersubjective narrative that at the same time expresses in the strongest possible terms that there is no neutral position outside these subjectivities. Instead of a neutral position, there is only the phantasmic male WASP as a socially organizing principle of identity. Identity traps the material conflict at the novel's core in systems of racial, ethnic and, all the points of view being male, gender signification.

The only instance in the book that appears outside these individual subject positions is the book's epilogue, the newspaper article without an author. The epilogue, however, describes a situation of non-escape from the web of associations that produced the novel's conflicts, and it is actually a part of that web. Within the logic of the narrative structure of a medially simulated apocalypse that never actually happens and obscures more than it reveals, the final joke of the satire is that the story concludes in the *New York Times*. As the newspaper of record in the city and the country, it claims authority. The *Times* is nonetheless part of the media that reinforce the efficacy of identity instrumentalized by the novel's characters. In fact, as the voice of authority, it reinforces more than most other media, and the anonymity of the article's author only underlines the construction of the paper's claim of neutrality and truth.[41]

The article cements the conflict's textualization. For example, it fixes the designation of Sherman as a "patrician figure" (727) (phrasing of the *Daily News*) and "king of the bond market" (728) (Abe Weiss press release) and of Lamb as "a 19-year-old black honor student who had been the pride of a South Bronx housing project" (727) (outright invention of Peter Fallow). Clark sees the grotesque as the violent recombination of disparate elements as in the combination of plants and fabulous animals in the grotto of Nero's Domus Aurea, from which the term stems. In literature this means the recombination of voices and systems of knowledge which "serves precisely to sharpen our awareness of logical, ethical, and aesthetic questions themselves."[42] Not only is *The Bonfire of the Vanities* as a whole such a work, but the final article is as well, a grotesque juxtaposition of textual constructions. Far from removing the borders of

[41] The recent scandal over *New York Times* reporter Jayson Blair who plagiarized and falsified information was such a major problem for the paper precisely because it undermined its hallowed reputation as arbiter of truth.
[42] Clark *Grotesque* 64.

identity difference on which those constructions rest, this form of juxtaposition in the article reinscribes them by repeating their images as components of an "official" story.

The article follows the concluding clash between Sherman and the protest movement against him. When his case is thrown out of court, the "righteous steam" erupts in a race riot Armageddon. The word of the judge, the force of the police, and the fortress of the law no longer hold back the tides of protestors who are agitated by both the staged demonstrations and the media storm around Sherman. It would appear that this is the Judgment Day Bacon warned of (174). However, the day comes and passes, and all is as before, the epilogue informs us. Some of the money and power has shifted: Killian is rich with fees from McCoy, the judge and Larry Kramer have lost their positions, and Peter Fallow has won a Pulitzer Prize. Otherwise, things are as before: Weiss is reelected because of his "tenacious prosecution of the case" (727), there is not even a mention of the Mayor, Maria the mistress is remarried, and Reverend Bacon continues to lead his self-serving causes. That Henry Lamb has died seems almost beside the point.

The significant change is that Sherman McCoy is now a "professional defendant". The epilogue's newspaper article is not about the aftermath of a race riot, a radical revolution, or the election of a progressive new government, nor is it even a story about McCoy's final verdict. It is the story of McCoy's arraignment for a new charge of manslaughter after Lamb's death. In the intervening year, the professional defendant has been tangled up in and lost a series of civil suits. The bomb was not released and is not released. Instead, Sherman McCoy now permanently embodies the city's phantom WASP as its visible representative. Far from apocalyptic revealing, the events have obscured him in that identity. The embedding of the end in an article in the *New York Times* only cements this contextualization of Sherman McCoy. He is trapped in a public discourse of borders of racial identity within a mediated imagined community that depends on an inexorable phantasm of whiteness. *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, vain as it is, burns on, funny and creepy.

5.3. The violence of the unrevealed text in *American Psycho*

Describing Bret Easton Ellis' *American Psycho* as funny and creepy would be putting it simplistically, but at its core it is exactly that. It is the third and most sensational installment in what can be describes as the writer's Faulkner-like universe of books that

depict the coupling of excessive privilege and moral emptiness in the wealthy social circles of an interrelated group of people.[43] This coupling provides the ideal foundation for a work of satire and apocalypse which dismantle that privilege in order to reveal the moral emptiness beneath.

At its release, most of the discussion surrounding the novel centered on its graphic depiction of violence. Most famously it was the subject of a boycott led by the Los Angeles chapter of the National Organization for Women and a resounding condemnation by Paul Rosenblatt in the *New York Times*.[44] Defenses were often half-hearted such as Norman Mailer's conclusion that the novel bore "legitimate themes" which needed a better writer.[45] A rare exception was Fay Weldon whose review observes, "This man Bret Easton Ellis is a very, very good writer. He gets us to a T. And we can't stand it. It's our problem, not his."[46] Later articles have asserted that, with exceptions such as Weldon's, these early treatments were more tirades that really missed the novel's main socially critical themes, caught like the protagonist Patrick Bateman in the very fascination with the gore he produces.

The grotesque murders the protagonist describes function to repress the anxieties produced by the forces that put him in his position of privilege. They distract from the moral vacuum of the world he lives in and at the same time make it more visible for the reader. Mingled in his descriptions of fashion, pop music, sex, and drugs, his slayings become just another image to cling to, and yet at their root is his hatred of those figures who violate that image. Just by embodying the objects of Otherness, his victims – female (primarily), non-white, poor, or gay – remind him of the ambivalence of the structure of identity borders through which he derives his privilege. The very grotesque nature of Patrick's violence, its break of countless social taboos, is shown to only reinforce the borders of social difference rather than subvert them, for in their essence, these borders

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[43] Ellis has claimed that the inclusion of the same characters in different books of his is unplanned but understandable, "it just makes sense to me as a writer ... After fourteen years I've changed in some ways but the fictive universe I'm creating really hasn't." In Jaime Clarke, "An Interview with Bret Easton Ellis", Anders Johannesen Bret Easton Ellis Homepage, 6 September 2003 <http://home.c2i.net/ajohanne/frames_jamieclark.htm>.

[44] Roger Rosenblatt, "Snuff this Book! Will Bret Easton Ellis Get Away With Murder?", rev. of *American Psycho*, by Bret Easton Ellis, *The New York Times Book Review* 16 Dec. 1990: 3, 16.

[45] Norman Mailer, "Children of the Pied Piper", rev. of *American Psycho*, by Bret Easton Ellis, *Vanity Fair* 54.3 (1991): 154-159.

[46] Fay Weldon, "An honest American Psycho: Why we can't cope with Bret Easton Ellis's new novel", rev. of *American Psycho*, by Bret Easton Ellis, *The Guardian* April 25, 1991, 2 Sept. 2004 <http://books.guardian.co.uk/reviews/generalfiction/0,6121,97012,00.html>.

are revealed as acts of force. Thus, while the novel is not explicitly about gender and race as *Bonfire* is, they form the motor which drives forward the protagonist's actions.

Gender and race drive the protagonist's actions, but not toward a conclusion. The novel presents no end but the statement "This is not an exit." (399). Events in Ellis's novels unfold in a time which provides a structure for tightly coupling satire and apocalypse toward this postmodern deferred end. The following analysis will repeatedly refer to this structure of time when discussing the novel's apocalyptic elements, its satire, and their interaction. Unlike Faulkner, who depicts the progression of Yoknapatawpha County over a progression of historical time, Ellis provides little or no feeling of time. His intensive use of the present-tense is only the most immediately apparent device for this non-time. Another is plot. Characters get older and do different things, and time passes as seasons, but there is little plot to the events in the novels, no tension that suggests change unfolding in time according to a meaningful scheme.

Glamorama, his fifth novel and the first with a discernable plot, nonetheless ends with little changed from the way things were before.[47] *American Psycho*, with far less plotting, collapses time to an extreme, describing a world that appears eternal, change coming at best in the form of new fashions. The appearance of the eternal is undermined by the portrayal of moral and social decay. Any apocalyptic end that might lead to is deferred by repression through the fixation on excessive consumption. This tone is struck at the beginning in one of the novel's three epigraphs, a line from the post-apocalyptic Talking Heads song "(Nothing But) Flowers": "And as things fell apart / Nobody paid much attention." It encapsulates both the feeling of the apocalyptic end and the satire of those too distracted to see it by the world they have constructed. Ironically, thus distracted, there is no end and no revelation.

5.3.1. Signs of the apocalypse

The first chapter's heading "April Fools" stands in direct tension with its opening words, "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here," graffiti "scrawled in blood red lettering" (3) on the wall of a bank. The juxtaposition of humor and horror is here from the start, the fools day and words Dante tells us are inscribed on the gates to hell (*The Inferno*, Canto III, line 9). Again, as with *The Bonfire of the Vanities*, this discussion of *American Psycho*

[47] Ellis acknowledges in an interview with Random House, that the difference between *Glamorama* and his other novels is "to put it bluntly, it has a plot". http://www.randomhouse.com/boldtype/0199/ellis/interview.html.

will not link it structurally with the Book of Revelations. Hell, after all is not the same thing as apocalypse. Instead, it will demonstrate the way Ellis uses apocalypse and other horrific biblical forms which are supposed to be redemptive then defuses that hope of redemption through satire in order to level a broad critique of failure of America's democratic mission.

Once more at stake in the novel is the representation of the nation, its embodiment in a certain identity, and the revelation of the failure of that embodiment. The horrific vision of that failure is the "psycho" of America, embodied by the American Psycho, Patrick Batemen, the novel's narrator and protagonist who is obsessed with the representation of bodies in every possible way. The novel's revelation then functions at multiple levels. It reveals the subjective view of the psycho, his deeds, and the social borders of identity which obscure both him and his deeds.

American Psycho is well placed alongside *Bonfire of the Vanities*, both contemporary satirical apocalyptic social critiques set in New York. *American Psycho*, however, relocates its critical emphasis from mediated public opinion and official municipal power structures, the purported pillars of society, to mediated consumer image and more shadowy areas of the private sphere. The first scene in *American Psycho* effects this move as a foil to the opening of *Bonfire*, complete with a litany of sins but with a vicious twist. The book's opening rant from Price nods to Wolfe. Price works together with Bateman at none other than Pierce & Pierce, the same company McCoy worked at, and one of their colleagues, Paul Owen, we are told, "knew McCoy" (49). Like Wolfe's Mayor, Price disappears shortly afterward and reappears only toward the end. If Price then assumes the role of the Mayor and thus of a kind of superego opening the revelations with a catalogue of sins, it is similarly a very warped catalogue and a very warped superego, as "Price", the cost of things, would indicate.

It begins with Price complaining to Bateman that he is an asset to society but as such does not make enough money: "I'm resourceful ... I'm creative, I'm young, unscrupulous, highly motivated, highly skilled. In essence what I am saying is that society can*not* afford to lose me." (3). The problem with New York and the source of his rant, he explains, is the "trash, the garbage, the disease" (4). As proof of this he refers to the *New York Post*:

> "In one issue – in *one* issue – let's see here...strangled models, babies thrown out from tenement rooftops, kids killed in the subway, a Communist rally, Mafia boss wiped out, Nazis ... baseball players with AIDS, more Mafia shit, gridlock, the homeless, various maniacs, faggots dropping like flies in the streets, surrogate mothers, the cancellation

> of a soap opera, kids who broke into a zoo and tortured and burned various animals alive, more Nazis...and the joke is, the punch line is, it's all in this city – nowhere else, just here, it sucks, whoa wait, more Nazis, gridlock, baby-sellers, black-market babies, AIDS babies, baby junkies, building collapses on baby, maniac baby, gridlock, bridge collapses-" (4)

This litany works at three levels. First, it represents a horrific background against which the glittering world of the rich is experienced, the fear of which is then projected through exclusion and abjection of those who "sin" by embodying that filth. Secondly, it represents a mediated world which transmits to the characters their sense of identity. Third, it represents the subject position of the privileged white man aghast at the "trash" which is not him.

At the end of that tirade, Price leaves behind the newspaper to ponder a fantasy of a worthless civil structure:

> But then, when you've just come to the point when your reaction to the times is one of total and sheer acceptance, when your body has become somehow *tuned* into the insanity and you reach that point where it all makes sense, when it clicks, we get some crazy fucking homeless nigger who actually *wants* – listen to me Bateman – *wants* to be out on the streets, this, *those* streets, see, *those* ... and we have a mayor who won't listen to her, a mayor who won't let the *bitch* have her way – Holy Christ – *let* the fucking bitch *freeze* to death, *put* her out of her own goddamn self-made misery, and look, you're back where you started, confused, fucked. (5-6)

Price constructs a figure, a homeless black female, which violates the system by supposedly deciding to exclude itself, to self-make the horror he describes. She is the sin against the system. In her very definition she is the undefined mass of excrement against which Price and all the rest identify themselves as assets according to a matrix of mediated signs of consumer value: designer labels, chic restaurants, taste. These are the things Price represents, like Wolfe's Mayor, a function of the construction of borders of identity rather than its leader.

The trick in the April Fools chapter lies in the person of Patrick Bateman. At first, his presence is barely felt, and then as a positive counterweight. He provides the occasional objection to Price as they ride in a cab to a dinner hosted by his fiancée, Evelyn. At dinner, he is repeatedly referred to as the "boy next door" in contrast to the more aggressive Price. He confirms this, speaking out about "more pressing problems at hand" (15), a long litany of problems covering Apartheid, Social Security, the equitable distribution of wealth, and reigning in mergers and corporate takeovers. He concludes, "We have to encourage a return to traditional moral values and curb graphic sex and violence on TV, in movies, in popular music, everywhere. Most importantly we have to

promote general social concern and less materialism in young people." (16). In this way, he challenges the shallow conversation at Evelyn's.

But, April Fools! Patrick Bateman only feigns this morality, turning it into the same social banality as everything else. He simulates rectitude but in fact pursues far more vigorously the materialist, misogynist, racist ethic of Price and the violence against those who "sin" against it. When Evelyn again calls him the "boy next door", he relates, '"No I'm not,' I whisper to myself. 'I'm a fucking evil psychopath."' (20). It presents at once a deeply troubling picture of progressive ideals as social facade, a covering of horrors within, and at the same time makes Bateman the agent of punishment, a rider of the Apocalypse, destroying those who disrupt the facade by embodying its failure. It is against exactly those people that he projects his hate and his violence: the subalterns, the poor, the non-white, women, gays, children, animals. Only once does he describe killing someone supposedly his social equal, Pierce & Pierce coworker Paul Owen, a competitor but a "fucking Jew bastard" (36).

From embodying to the body, Patrick Bateman demonstrates his obsession with bodies and their ability to exude value. The second chapter therefore aptly consists of one long paragraph describing the finest details of his morning toilet. Helyer points out that the way in which he names the numerous products and their supposed beauty benefits represents an internalization of their marketing image and the glossy magazine articles that promote these brand name goods.[48] Grant develops the theme further as an expression of a material excess that goes beyond use value and into an area of merely projected value, a hollowed-out world of appearance in the sense of Jameson's postmodern critique.[49] In the novel, that appearance becomes essence, the internalization of the value of the facade. Bateman constantly promotes the surface as the place of value. He mentally chides the dinner guest Stash, "probably uncomfortable at the table with us since he looks nothing like the other men in the room" (13). On the other hand, he praises the Huey Lewis song "Hip to be Square" for expressing the "pleasures of conformity and the importance of trends" (357).

His body conforms perfectly to an image of beauty: well-trained, well-cleansed, well-dressed, white, and male. Those upon whom he commits his violence fail to

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[48] Ruth Helyer, "Parodied to Death: The Postmodern Gothic of *American Psycho*", *Modern Fiction Studies* 46.3 (2000): 738.
[49] Barry Keith Grant, "American Psycho/sis: The Pure Products of America Go Crazy", ed. Christopher Sharrett, *Mythologies of Violence in Postmodern Media* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1999): 29.

conform to that beauty. He perversely inverts apocalypse, destroying those whose presence disturbs what appearance masks, while for the reader destroying that appearance to reveal the grotesque violence beneath. As the agent of that violence, Patrick Bateman practices it against those people whose bodies form the borders of white male identity by existing at its periphery. He reinstates those borders in the double sense with which borders are described in chapter 3 of this study. His violence reenacts both the physical violence with which his Others are excluded and the epistemological violence of defining them there, the "new masonry" and "old bones" (see chapter 3, section 3.1. "Internal separation and external wholeness").

Bateman accrues not a moral surplus in the sense of JanMohammed[50] but rather a representational one. This surplus increases his sense of embodying white masculinity and deserving its riches and social privileges. In turn, it requires the further reenactment of violence. Bhabha describes a Mimic-Man as a colonial subject who performs stereotypes of subalterity "which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority".[51] Bateman inverts this Mimic Man by mimicking his stereotyped *master* identity to the same effect. His is a Jeffords-like "hard body" *par excellence*. He pursues self-fetishization to an extreme to cover the trauma of difference. The literary aestheticization of his acts reveals rather than conceals the powerful asymmetric forces which determine both the privileging of his identity and its borders.

This fixation on a fetishized body is paralleled by the description of the rest of Bateman's world: the correct apparel, designer labels, trendy restaurants, dinners, drinks, clubs, consumer electronics, and so forth. All these elements exude luxury, status, and appearance, but most of all the awareness of their names and supposed value. Therefore, it is far more jarring that the graphic descriptions of the murders he commits, the source of the attacks against the novel, take on the same dispassionate obsession with detail. The details are essential for Bateman, but he derives little feeling from them, none of the horror they transmit to the reader. What he feels is antipathy for his murdered object for not bearing his marks of status. The immersion in the appearance of the object's destruction fills him with a sense of relief.

The first such scene is typical for this pattern. It demonstrates how his obsession with the minutiae of appearance interacts with his hatred of the subaltern status of his

[50] See chapter one and the discussion of the Manichean Allegory.
[51] Bhabha, "Mimicry" 88.

victims. The passage in the chapter meaninglessly titled "Tuesday" begins with a ritually detailed description of the victim, a black homeless man named Al:

> He's fortyish, heavyset, and when he attempts to sit up I can make out his features more clearly in the glare of the streetlamp: a few days' growth of beard, triple chin, a ruddy nose lined with thick brown veins. He's dressed in some kind of tacky-looking lime green polyester pantsuit with washed-out Sergio Valente jeans worn *over* it (this season's homeless person's fashion statement) along with a ripped orange and brown V-neck sweater stained with what looks like burgundy wine. (129)

The description of this man originates with his physique. Then it focuses on his clothes, even noting the designer of the man's jeans in a sarcastic remark about the man's "fashion statement", indicating how distant fashion is from the homeless man's world. There is even an attempt to guess what Al has been drinking.

Bateman then taunts him by proffering a ten-dollar bill in a sympathetic voice then pulling it back and asking with disdain, "Why don't you get a job?" After berating Al for his failure, laziness, drunkenness, smell, and crying "like some kind of faggot" (130), he concludes, "Do you know what a fucking loser you are?" (131). At this point he moves from verbal to physical violence against the man. The physical violence is provided in the same detail, an unnerving, revolting text that goes over a page as he stabs Al's eyes and abdomen and steps on the legs of Al's dog. When he is done, he throws down a coin and whispers, "There's a quarter. Go buy some *gum*, you crazy fucking *nigger*." (132). He says this without an exclamation mark, without any affect. Instead he relates, "I feel heady, ravenous, pumped up, as if I'd just worked out and endorphins are flooding my nervous system, or just embraced that first line of cocaine, inhaled the first puff of a fine cigar, sipped that first glass of Cristal." (132).

The feeling he is left with after this gruesome murder is the same pleasure as when engaging in any other performance of status. Al is textually commodified, his identity classification turned into the consumable brand name "crazy fucking nigger", a sign of value like "Cristal". This classification recurs throughout the murders, whether of Paul Owen the "fucking Jew bastard", the prostitute "bitches", the women "hardbodies", or the gay "faggot" in the chapter "Killing Dog". Any depth to what he does is repressed through a series of signifiers. They turn the bodies he destroys from representations of the ambivalent violence of social borders of identity into consumable brands that reassure him of his command of consumption.

To emphasize this point, "Tuesday" is followed by the chapter "Genesis". It is a banal praise of the pop group in the years since Peter Gabriel left it when "complex, ambiguous studies of loss became, instead, smashing first-rate pop songs that I gratefully

embraced." (133). Ellis explains that he carefully avoided figurative language in Bateman's narration "because everything is too surface oriented for that to occur."[52] Metaphor in Bateman's world, revulsion toward his acts, and the rejection of his system of knowledge signification occur exterior to his own narration. As Fay Weldon writes, "[T]here's always someone in the other books [of serial murderers] to play lip service to respectability: to the myth that the world we now live in is still capable of affect. The serial killer gets discovered, punished, stopped. There are people around to throw up their hands in horror, who can still distinguish between what is psychotic and what is not. Justice is done. There is remorse. Just not in *American Psycho*."[53]

The bodies of his victims are destroyed, leaving only their surface identity and Bateman's brand names for them, the last word on the subject. In the same way, three of the novel's goriest chapters are simply named "girls" (twice) and "girl" (once), leaving the sense of the helpless, young female as that which is left of the women he destroys in those chapters. The final word on Paul Owen is "fucking stupid bastard" (218). He ends the life of his ex-girlfriend Bethany with "dumb bitch" (247). Like that in Revelations, this apocalypse also relies on mass slaughter in its process of revealing. In the end, however, by silencing those slaughtered, this revelation radically reduces the scope of perception which would challenge Bateman's system of codification. Tanner writes, "The horrific representations of violence in *American Psycho* image the victim's body with tremendous specificity, yet render the subjective presence of the victim less immediate to the reader."[54] There remains only his world of surfaces, the social classifications of subalterity as brand names and their consumption.

5.3.2. Black humor

Understanding an apocalypse which tears away the surface only to reveal the surface does not function without also considering it in terms of its satire. Far from an antinomy, the novel's humor powerfully reinforces its horror. Ellis remarked in an interview, "I always looked at *American Psycho*, sick as this might sound, as a really funny book."[55] The book, he explains, is dedicated to a friend of his from whom he learned the kind of

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[52] Clarke "Interview".
[53] Weldon, as above.
[54] Laura E Tanner, "*American Psycho* and the American Psyche: Reading the forbidden text", Tanner, *Intimate Violence: Reading Rape and Torture in Twentieth-Century Fiction* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP, 1994): 96.
[55] Clarke, "Interview".

perverse humor used in it.[56] In this respect, Ruth Helyer draws a connection between the tradition of gothic horror and *American Psycho*. She draws on Botting's view that, "Gothic becomes a fiction of unconscious desire, a release of repressed energies and antisocial fantasies."[57] She concludes, "The Gothic novel celebrates unacceptable behavior, the violent, the self-promoting, and those who indulge their cravings. In *American Psycho* Patrick demonstrates all of these traits in a jarring kaleidoscopic montage."[58] The novel's gothic horror, its depiction of mental and social decay, repression, confusions of fantasy, and spectacular gore, nonetheless, Helyer notes, "provokes laughter".[59]

That laughter, the novel's humor, is at the core of its satirical work. As discussed above with connection to *Bonfire*, Clark couples the gothic and the grotesque in his analysis of satire. Though *Bonfire* makes some use of grotesque figures, it is *American Psycho* that most bears out Clark's theses. The novel presents Patrick's violence as a parallel to the grotesque manipulation of bodies at the base of the formation of social identities. That in turn reflects the manipulations of other forms of social distinction in the novel such as the division between "good" and "evil" or the revulsion the reader is expected to feel toward the novel and the materialist desires it nonetheless awakens. A similar function of the Gothic in fiction has been pointed out. Botting writes, "Gothic fiction is less an unrestrained celebration of unsanctioned excess and more an examination of the limits produced in the eighteenth century to distinguish good from evil, reason from passion, virtue from vice and self from other."[60]

The border play between such polarities becomes the location of satire, a postmodern satire as Weisenburger defines it in which the reader's structure of knowledge is thrown into as much doubt as that of the novel's figures. Probity becomes merely texts of money, status, race, and sex that elide inequalities and the social dehumanization at the base of the world in which Bateman functions. He can manipulate these texts, but they also manipulate him. The satiric humor functions in both directions. On the one hand, in the narrative, Patrick constantly portrays himself as grotesquely manipulating the objects of white masculinity and wealth, its status symbols, and texts.

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[56] Clarke, "Interview".
[57] Fred Botting, *Gothic* (London: Routledge, 1996): 18-19.
[58] Helyer 744.
[59] Helyer 732.
[60] Botting 8.

On the other hand, horrible as he is, the novel's serial killer is cast as ridiculous, stumbling through situations he attempts and usually fails to master.

The novel's graphic descriptions of violence are not in themselves humorous in this ridiculous episodic respect. However, the proximity of the violence to contrasting scenes of social confusion and superficiality constructs a grotesque space of humor between them. That space highlights their incommensurability and subverts the dissonance they produce by making these extreme contrasts consistent with the novel as a whole. The satire, like the apocalypse, folds in on itself. The very fact that the gothic horror stifles any careless laughter subverts the novel's satire by questioning what standard of values the grotesque can be contrasted with. Patrick Bateman, the white male central figure of this satire, oscillates between a role in a trickster narrative and society's abject mimic, becoming both. These roles will be looked at below, as they relate the novel's grotesque satire. They show how he is impossible to embrace yet somehow inexorable because he is an entirely textual being, embedded in a text of social division based on race and gender identity.

Patrick seems to derive power from his ability to play with texts of social mores by virtue of recognizing their artifice and using it as part of game of social pretense. This does not make him a trickster in the classical sense, but his character can be seen as the central node in a trickster narrative, particularly as he is engaged, as Hynes defines it, in play with the sacred and lewd.[61] The novel hints at this, after all, with its "April Fools" beginning. The trickster-like play is visible in the novel's language games, the manipulation of taboo, and the utilization of detail as a social disguise.

At the simplest level of Patrick's play with social texts are moments of cutting wordplay aimed at the objects of finance and probity. In a vapid conversation with models, he tells them he is "into, oh, murders and executions mostly" (206), a play on "mergers and acquisitions". One model, Daisy, responds, "Do you like it?". The talk moves on, subsuming his play in chatter. When a homeless black man opens his taxi door for him and asks for a tip, Patrick responds cruelly with the old play on "tip": "Here's a tip: Get a *real* job, you dumb fucking nigger." (212). Daisy, still with him, does not notice at all. A pivotal plot chapter involving Patrick's pursuit by police who witness one of his murders is entitled "Chase, Manhattan". The chase ends up revealing him even as it

[61] William J. Hynes, "Mapping the Characteristics of Mythic Tricksters: A Heuristic Guide", ed. William J. Hynes and William G. Doty, *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms*, (Tuscaloosa, AL: U of Alabama P, 1993): 40.

conceals him (see below), as signified by its neat elision under the eponymous bank name. This play continues in Ellis's next novel *Glamorama* when Bateman appears in an Armani suit with "weird stains on the lapel" and explains, "I like to keep – abreast" while winking at a woman.[62] Ellis even explains that it was that pun that made him want to include Patrick in *Glamorama*.[63]

That Bateman plays with taboos is a basic element of this character. His sacred and lewd *bricolage* with blood and body parts is grotesque to an extreme. Clark lists major taboo-breaking themes of the satirical grotesque such as "ennui", "scatology", "cannibals", "dystopia and machines", and "entropy and Armageddon",[64] However, he stops short of torture, rape, and mass murder, as though they were even too taboo for him. This is exactly where Ellis goes, however. Much in the spirit of Laura Makarius[65] and her thesis of the trickster as a manipulator of the central social taboo of blood, Bateman is adept at doing the unusual with it.

He not only sheds blood but also writes with it, as in Paul Owen's apartment with the blood of the prostitutes. He even draws a picture with it, he says, "that looks like this" (306) (no picture). For Bethany, he composes a poem written in blood or a blood-like red ink which concludes, "Fuck the nigger on the wall / Black man is de debil?" (233). The poem is not funny, but the fact that Patrick asks her to read it out loud at the exclusive Dorsia (see below), disrupting the mannered sophistication of the people around them, can be seen as a moment of uneasy humor. It confronts the restaurant guests with horrible associations the setting represses. A similar moment of lewd taboo break is the practical joke Patrick plays on Evelyn, his fiancée. As he breaks up with her at a restaurant, he presents her with a urinal deodorant cake covered in cheap chocolate. She tries very hard to eat it because he presents it to her in a Godiva Chocolate box. Finally, she gives up, explaining, "Its just...so *minty*." (337).

Another kind of play that demonstrates Patrick's mastery of the texts in which he lives lies in the ritual listing of all the amenities and luxuries he uses. The second chapter, "Morning", consists of an exhaustive description of his morning toilet, the hygiene articles he uses, and their proper application. He also provides precise details about the many other luxuries in his apartment. Droning on like a catalogue, the chapter offers in

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[62] *Glamorama* (New York: Macmillan, 1998). 38.
[63] Clarke "Interview".
[64] Clark 103-156.

its exhaustion not only a sense of his extreme wealth and status as the backdrop for the novel but also of his consciousness of the way in which these objects construct his world. Couched in them and their consumerist desire, he himself becomes an object of social desire. He is able to use that image to his advantage as a means of disguising his lack of any value and the brutality he visits on those he considers beneath him to compensate for that lack of value.

The novel's gothic horror consists precisely in those moments when the brutality beneath that social desire is exposed. At the same time, this scene addresses his personal hygiene, grooming, and dressing, acts which enable him to adopt the form of that object of desire. It again places him akin to the trickster as a shape-changer, a manipulator of forms, a task of which he is highly conscious. The many objects interact with the embodiment of the white masculine identity he performs. However, this shape-changing feature is ambivalent. One is not laughing with because of his play. One is laughing at him, for the satirical humor lies in the excess of description. It becomes ridiculous, reflecting the absurdity of his own over-inflated hard body image. An example of this excess is his kitchen: "Next to the Salton Sonata toaster and the Cuisinart Little Pro food processor and the Acme Supreme Juicerator and the Cordially Yours liqueur maker stands the heavy-gauge stainless-steel two-and-one-half-quart teakettle, which whistles 'Tea for Two' when the water is boiling, and with it I make another small cup of the decaffeinated apple-cinnamon tea." (29).

This description demonstrates the problem with identifying him as a trickster figure. In this ridiculous array of stuff, as good as Patrick is at manipulating it, he is unable, it appears, to realize how ridiculous it is. Aware as he is of its artifice, he still finds it highly desirable. The very artifice makes this stuff desirable. Why, Bethany asks, with his inherited money, does he bother to work if he hates his job? "I...want...to...fit...in," he responds (237). He provides no indication of emotion or affect with this response, but the ellipses disrupt the flow of the sentence, making it a difficult and a very important sentiment. Patrick strongly desires that conformity, both a disguise and a reward for all of his violent acts of reinscribing the borders of the identity he conforms to. Therefore, in equal measure to his trickster-like skill as a manipulator of social signs is his weakness and submission to them as a kind of failed mimic.

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[65] Laura Makarius, "The Myth of the Trickster: The Necessary Breaker of Taboos", Hynes and Doty, *Mythical Trickster*: 66-86.

Compensation for this weakness drives Patrick Bateman's gothic horrors. It is a weakness of social failures, his inability to master the world of superficial identities he claims to master. The novel's funniest scenes stem from this kind of social failure, much like the confusion of Sherman McCoy with his Master of the Universe image. The conflict between Bateman's monstrous nature and his weak role in the world around him is signaled early on in that appropriately named first chapter "April Fools", shortly after he first appears in it. The book begins as a third-person narrative of Tim Price, and Bateman doesn't appear as its first-person voice until page 8. At this point, practically nothing is known about him, not even his name, which is first hinted at as his initials "PB" arranged in sushi, a text composed of objects of conspicuous consumption. The name is partly revealed as "Bateman" at the end of page 9 and completed on page 10 with "Patrick" when Evelyn asks him to get Kirin beer, linking him to a brand name.

The narrator then only slowly comes into focus. He is first described as the "boy next door", contrasted with his own description as a "fucking evil psychopath", which, like so much else, goes unheard in the general hubbub. It becomes evident that Patrick does not use the "boy next door" image to hide his "true" psychopath identity. Instead, he is imprisoned in that boy image as a text used by the people in his world much like the phrases he uses for his victims. Like Sherman McCoy, he takes on the function of an inverted Mimic Man. Bateman is trapped in text of white masculinity that society requires of him and thus represents what Bhabha terms that "menace" of mimicry.[66] He conforms to social demands to perform heterosexual white masculinity, but he constantly slips and confronts the ambivalence of that identity as a device of social control. This slippage disrupts the authority the identity has to determine borders of social identity but fails to liberate him from it. Patrick's failure to be anything but the "boy next door" represents his failure to be the master of the texts that delineate him. It also makes one wonder if the boy next door might be similarly trapped.

One example that satirically connects elite fashion with identity through his failure to master both comes in the fourth chapter. Patrick attempts to impress other men he is out with by showing them his new business card: bone colored with "Silian Rail" lettering (44). Van Patten, to whom he shows it, trumps it with "eggshell with Romalian type". That in turn is beaten by Price's card, "raised lettering, pale nimbus white", which ultimately loses to yet another card. Patrick relates, "I am unexpectedly depressed that I

[66] Bhabha, "Mimicry" 88.

started this." (45). Appropriately, the men trump each other with the forms of whiteness and inscription through which their identities are represented.

Like the various shades of white on cards, for all the affirmation of his identity as a member of the white male elite, Patrick Bateman is constantly mistaken for others. He is unable to assert himself as an individual, even as an evil one. Men constantly confuse him with other men, addressing him as "Hamilton" (48), "McDonald" (111), "Williams" (127), "Taylor" (137), "McCloy" (182), "Baxter" (195), and "Halberstam" (216). Bateman can even use Paul Owen's confusion of him with "Halberstam" to invite Owen to lunch and kill him afterwards. A detective trying to locate Owen asks Patrick about Halberstam, having found the name in Owen's calendar for a lunch date when he was last seen. The detective then reveals that the real Halberstam had had lunch elsewhere and named several witnesses, including Bateman (274). Bateman, in turn, confuses at least as many other men, providing narrative caveats such as "someone who I think is" and "someone who looks like". Nevertheless, these men greet each other like buddies, with high-fives and the macho intimacy of last names as in "Yo, Bateman".

The same feeling of failure at status is the running gag of the restaurant Dorsia, a place so exclusive that his influence cannot get him into it. His first attempt to call and reserve a table ends with the sound of giggling and hanging up (75). Another time Patrick tries to get into the restaurant with his secretary by posing as the "Schrawtzes", a ruse which is quickly exposed when the real Schrawtzes appear (260-261). His brother Sean finally gets him a table. Sean, one of the main figures in Ellis's previous novel *The Rules of Attraction*, is that book's embodiment selfish hedonism. In *American Psycho* we find out in the chapter "Birthday, Brothers" that he has continued his career as one of the idle rich. Yet, it is Sean who knows Dorsia's owner and can get them in, a feeling that fills Bateman with inadequacy. Inadequacy turns into humiliation when Sean orders a lobster as a starter and as a main dish, eats neither, and lets his brother pay for both.

Most indicative of the intersection of the novel's horror and humor is his Dorsia failure with his ex-girlfriend Bethany. Not only can she get into Dorsia, but she is also dating its chef, Robert Hall. To drive the point home that she is better connected to elite fashions than Patrick, she also notices that an expensive original painting in his apartment is hanging upside-down (244). That Patrick subsequently murders her in great textual detail comes as no surprise when seen as an expression of his rage and frustration at not mastering the text of elitist fashion. As he approaches her with a nail gun, he screams,

"*Why are you dating Robert Hall?*" (245). Tellingly, he concludes the chapter by brutalizing her and reclaiming his fashion expertise: "'And another thing,' I yell, pacing. 'It's not Garrick Anderson either. The suit is by *Armani*! *Giorgio* Armani.' I pause spitefully, and leaning into her, sneer, 'And you thought it was *Henry Stuart*. Jesus.' I slap her hard across the face and hiss the words 'Dumb bitch'." (245). Here we see the grotesque infusion of the humor of his humiliation with the novel's gothic horror of her destruction. She is reduced to a mass of dead meat, leaving only the trademark epithet "dumb bitch", through which he reestablishes his sense of a privileged identity.

As described above, his casual public confessions to murder are simply covered over by the chatter around him. That failure even to be known is drawn starkly into focus in one of the novel's most powerful metafictional arcs that begins in the "Chase, Manhattan" chapter. The chase switches for the only time into the third-person as he is overwhelmed by the immediacy of the scene and its attendant adrenaline rush. His facade is blown, and he is openly sought by the authorities. Thus, his only defense becomes the violence he exerts on his subalterns, police officers, a cab driver, a whole Chinese restaurant, and a night watchman. He reverts to the first person only when he is in the security of his office building and decides to confess to his lawyer Harold Carnes, "to make public what has been, until now, my private dementia" (352).

The irony is clear: he could have gone public with his deeds when confronted by the police, but outside his exclusive world, he had no identity to shelter him. Only when back in this world, in the first-person, does he feel secure enough to "go public", but does so on his lawyer's answering machine, within a sphere of lawyer-client confidentiality. It comes as no surprise that when Patrick later meets Carnes, not only does the lawyer not believe his confessions but calls him "Davis". Carnes thinks that he as "Davis" left the message as a joke, a weak one: "Davis ... I am not one to bad-mouth anyone, your joke *was* amusing. But come on, man, you had one fatal flaw: Bateman's such a bloody ass-kisser, such a brown-nosing goody-goody, that I couldn't fully appreciate it." (387). Patrick insists he killed Owen, but Carnes contradicts, "I had ... dinner ... with Paul Owen ... twice ... in London ... *just ten days ago*" (388). When Carnes leaves, sealing the confusion of the scene by calling Patrick "Donaldson".

The discussion of whether the murders in the novel "really" happened occupies both internet chat rooms and Ellis's interviewers. He evades it routinely. What "really" exists within the narrative are the texts about the murders. Julian Murphet observes that,

"Bateman has ... done nothing but write, speak, construct himself in a variety of language games, none of which is more 'real' than the others ... All we can say for sure is that Patrick Bateman is, precisely, a fiction."[67] He is a fiction, and as a satire, a fiction that constantly collapses through its own weakness. It is a fiction of social privilege based on whiteness and heterosexual masculinity, his failure to master his own text, to even master the text of violence the sign white male both masks and informs.

This fiction creates a satire which critiques more simply constructed satire aimed at, say, "capitalism" as the root of "white male privilege" as critics like Grant and Tanner would contend.[68] That is also what eludes Mailer in his complaint that Ellis does not provide a character properly motivated by the society around him. Instead, Bateman articulates, as Freccero observes, "antihumanism as the mundane and mannerly order of the day".[69] More precisely, Bateman represents a text of signification which masks its antihumanism by occupying its normative space, by embodying its mundane and mannerly order. Ellis casts him as a divided figure, a manipulator of texts and the product of manipulated texts, a border figure between the most exalted heights of social privilege and the most vile depths of human depravity. As such Bateman's occupation of that normative space draws together the antihuman and the mannerly and asks how orderly that order is. The result is a social text rooted in ambivalence rather than a simple system of capitalist manipulation. At the same time that ambivalence enables the manipulation and contestation of the text of identity and social borders by corporations, politicians, financiers, and others who wield power in the United States.

5.3.3. The ending of a sense

Postmodernism, whether as a type of literature or a point of view for describing culture, settles itself in just this kind of ambivalent space. If anything, the heightened crossing of satire and apocalypse highlights this ambivalence even more strongly, using it in order to find something redemptive in otherwise hollow signifiers. That redemption, however, does not come as a single political agenda for social improvement. It comes rather as a map of sociotextual failures that provides a space for a Derridian textual "freeplay" by laying bare the valences of power that inform the ambivalence at the root of those

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[67] Julian Murphet, *Bret Easton Ellis's* American Psycho*: A reader's guide* (New York: Continuum, 2002): 49.
[68] Grant 29, and Tanner 97.

failures. A trickster figure commonly provokes confusion through his social manipulation whereas a Mimic Man is its victim. Bateman, in a sense, "passes" for a white male in an act which oscillates between these two figures, emphasizing just how tenuous that redemptive space really is.

Without a blueprint of affect in the novel, it is the reader's task to determine just how much of Patrick's world to reject and how much one is accomplice to it. As described above, in his *Sense of an Ending*, Frank Kermode elaborates a theory of the modern novel based on biblical apocalypse that does not come, despite signs that would herald it. Kermode elevates peripeteia, the irony of an unexpected climax, in which the novel's protagonist readjusts to accommodate this through a new set of expectations which give sense to an otherwise arbitrary world.[70] Ellis takes peripeteia to an extreme by not providing this readjustment that the modern reader by now expects. He does not provide an exit, leaving the reader still in the novel, in the space of the deferred end amid the forces which determine Bateman's power as a white male signifier.

The scene which brings this most clearly into focus comes in the chapter "The Best City for Business". It foregrounds the significance of his nature as the embodiment of heterosexual white male power while deferring any kind of confrontation with him. Bateman attempts to revisit the scene of one of his most gruesome crimes, the apartment of Paul Owen. There he slaughtered two prostitutes in the chapter "Girls" (the 39th chapter and the third with this title) and wrote "I am back" and drew the non-depicted picture on the wall in blood. He had murdered Paul earlier, using his key to take some garments. In trickster-like fashion, he had also taken advantage of the widespread identity confusion to leave an answering machine message in a voice everyone is sure is Paul's that gives the impression Paul had gone to Europe. Bateman revisits the scene because "There has been no word of bodies discovered in any of the city's four newspapers or on the local news ... So what I'm assuming is that, essentially, like, no bodies have been found." (366-7). He discovers that what is supposed to be Paul Owen's blood-soaked apartment is a completely cleaned space being shown to prospective buyers by the real estate agent Mrs. Wolfe.

The chapter, it should be said, has been the subject of speculation by many reviewers and the few scholarly articles about the book with reference to its

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[69] Carla Freccero, "Historical Violence, Censorship, and the Serial Killer: The case of *American Psycho*", *Diacritics* 27.2 (1997). 54.
[70] Kermode 18-26.

metafictionality. Internet chat tends to see it as "proof" that none of the murders occurred and everything was invented by Patrick.[71] Grant uses it as part of his case that the book is an anti-capitalist polemic. He reads Mrs. Wolfe as a subject complicit with a system of capitalism that protects Patrick.[72] Murphet reads Mrs. Wolfe as another nod to Tom Wolfe and maintains that her presence represents the realism of Wolfe and the reality that, in fact, Patrick is at the wrong apartment. The possibility is hinted at by the building's different appearance, the presence of a doorman who was not there before, and completely different furniture in the apartment.[73]

However, if Mrs. Wolfe is a reference to Tom Wolfe, which is not impossible, she does not represent the "real" as an objective contrast to Patrick's constructed world but rather the same mechanism of realist satirical apocalypse Wolfe employs. Even if she doesn't represent the writer, she is part of that mechanism anyway, a force which acts to defer the horrors Patrick constructs. Perhaps Patrick "really" committed his crimes, perhaps he only imagined them, but his attempt to corroborate his deeds with the location associated with them is corrupted, stopped, even elided by the commerce of the apartment sale and the presence of the agent, regardless of whether he is at the "right" apartment. Helyer writes, "Patrick is disconcerted by the capacity of the 'other' to be as cold, ruthless, and determined as he."[74]

His last piece of personal identity, his concept of himself as a vicious manipulator of social texts and propriety, is taken from him because he cannot distinguish himself from the rest of the world around him. The forces that determine his character simply go unanswered, affect is denied, the ending and its sense are deferred. The result is a psychotic epiphany of the grotesque in which the brutality of his world and the ambivalence of his knowledge system are revealed: "All frontiers, if there had ever been any, seem suddenly detachable and have been removed, a feeling that others are creating my fate will not leave me for the rest of the day. This...is...not...a...game, I want to shout, but I can't catch my breath though I don't think she can tell." (370).

A situation which denies either censure or sympathy for the devil resist any kind of cathartic redemption. He makes this claim himself, that in his repeated murders and his

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[71] Ellis has many fan sites. One specifically dedicated to *American Psycho* is Brian Kotek, "American Psycho Site", 12 Aug. 2003 <http://www.briankotek.com/psycho/>, an extensive site that includes discussion groups for various Ellis-related topics, including whether or not the murders "really" happened.
[72] Grant, 25.
[73] Murphet 47.

telling of them, "there is no catharsis. I gain no deeper knowledge about myself, no new understanding can be extracted from my telling. There has been no reason for me to tell you any of this. This confession has meant *nothing*." (377). This is quite true, at least within the framework Ellis has sketched. In the novel, his admission elicits no action, and Bateman not only arrives at no revelation through his crimes, but any chance of it diminishes increasingly the more he pursues them. However, it is only true within that framework, only true from Bateman's point of view, ultimately no more reliable than his confessing to murders he might not even have committed or his confusion surrounding Paul Owen's apartment.

Ellis interrupts the flow of Bateman's worldview with this kind of confusion. The confusion often reinforces his system of knowledge by deferring a confrontation with it. However, a final moment of confusion is provided in the novel as a way of presenting not a message of hope but rather the hope of interrupting Bateman. It comes in the form of Tim Price, the warped superego from the beginning of the novel who resurfaces, as Bateman sees it, "for the sake of form" (383). The complications Price brings with him are signaled when Bateman qualifies that Price resurfaces, "or at least I'm pretty sure he does." (383).

That uncertainty continues throughout, including Bateman's description of their dialogue: "Our conversation probably resembles something like this but is actually briefer." (384). The talk is already notable for its brevity and lack of information about Price. He appears to have gone through a change but may not have. All he has to say about his absence was, "It was... surprising" and "It was...depressing." (384). Though he appears dressed more or less the same and even has a better position in the company, it is not the same Price as at the beginning. The difference is expressed in the sparseness of his speech, no more monologues about the city and its vile inhabitants in the newspaper. Ellis emphasizes this aspect by placing this minimalist scene and its "actually briefer" dialogue after the long passage of gothic horrors Bateman relates from the newspaper: murders, maniacs, and zombies. This talk has disappeared from Price who now offers no opinions about the world at first.

In the novel's final chapter, Bateman, Price, and other men are sitting in a bar, making remarks about the television in their usual way, and it is here that Price begins to editorialize again. Watching an old speech of Ronald Reagan's, Price "looks

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[74] Helyer 729.

inappropriately stunned" and asks, "How can he lie like that? How can he pull that *shit*?" (396). It is an unusual moment of passion, of any kind of affect at all, regarding the world the men live in. From the first chapter, it is known that Price is politically outspoken, so the outburst fits his character. However, Price's perspective has shifted away from the city covered in vileness and toward the nation's former commander-in-chief, the nation's embodiment in a paternalistic white masculinity, the "hard body" of Jeffords, which covers that vileness with his national image of white male strength.

Nonetheless, characteristic for the book, his statement is immediately covered over by Patrick, who responds, "Oh, Christ ... *What* shit? Now where do we have reservations at?" (396). The conversation returns to its usual ephemera, but Price repeats his concern when he exclaims, "I don't believe it. He looks so...*normal*. He seems so...out of it. So...*un*dangerous." (397). Thus the scene becomes a tug-of-war between an attempt to probe at the figure of Reagan who did so much to characterize the era that produced *American Psycho* and the light conversation which resists that probing. The tug-of-war ends, or rather Patrick ends it in his narration: "Price won't let it die. 'Look,' he starts, trying for a rational appraisal of the situation. 'He presents himself as a harmless old codger. But inside...' He stops. My interest picks up, flickers briefly. 'But inside...' Price can't finish the sentence, can't add the last two words he needs: *doesn't matter*. I'm both disappointed and relieved for him." (397). The conversation drifts back to its ephemera, and the novel ends with the non-ending of the non-exit.

The point is not that the inside doesn't matter. Rather Patrick who views the inside that way as a means of not probing for it, as a means of maintaining the surface-ness of things. Patrick's view, the episode demonstrates, is shared by the other white men present. As leaders in a social power structure they represent, they thus continue to represent it as its normative sign and reinforce the hierarchical borders of identity. Ellis reflects on Patrick Bateman's survival to reappear in *Glamorama*, "I liked the idea that Patrick Bateman had moved into this fashiony world and by extension that he could probably inhabit *any* world."[75] Unlike Sherman McCoy, he never becomes a public figure in the novel, the Great White Defendant, but as a literary figure, he survives from book to book as a public figure outside it, taking on the mantle of that defendant. The attempt to repress his horrors that nonetheless erupt in gothic sequences becomes then the main evidence in his prosecution.

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[75] Clark, "Interview".

The protests and censorship of *American Psycho* represent to some degree an attempt to publicly prosecute the figure while unfortunately doing the same that the idle conversation at Harry's Bar did. By calling to "snuff" it, as Roger Rosenblatt did, the novel's opponents repress the ambivalence of system of identity signification in which Patrick Bateman emerged. As frustrating as Patrick's view and the failure of knowledge systems in *American Psycho* are, the ominous "This is not an exit" does not prevent escape from that frustration. The end can also be seen as an entrance into the complications of the social text surrounding the sign "white man" as presented in the book. Here consideration begins of productive ways treat the social borders that sign of identity informs rather than simply ban their effects. Patrick, however, like most of us, sees the non-exit as just that, inescapable, simply because that's what the sign says.

6. Conclusions: Exit the white man

> Man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end.
> - Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*

"This is not an exit," Patrick Bateman reads, as *American Psycho* closes. The degenerative satire in Ellis's novel that is so much a part of postmodernity goes to the heart of the paradox *White Men Write Now* has focused on throughout. The violence and pathos of transgressive satire do much to reveal conflict around conceptual borders of white masculinity. However, they also reveal the social forces which maintain those borders and the normative role of the identities they delineate. All of the novels looked at in depth in the preceding chapters do the same: Wittingly and unwittingly, they make visible the social construction of borders of identity and how the ambivalence of that construction is repressed through the category "white male". These novels were written in a contemporary postmodern context which looks suspiciously at master narratives, and their masters. At the same time, it writes that suspicion as a new master narrative.

Insofar as white masculinity as a field of master identity is now looked at with similar suspicion, it threatens to reoccupy a central role in the general contemporary era of deconstructive critique. It becomes the Great White Defendant. In these closing pages, another look will be taken at the way in which the novels each make this argument and foreground specific aspects of it. When looking at how they contextualize a contemporary America in which writers explore and try to deconstruct the nature of the borders of identities such as "white male", one large question arises: Though there are forces which maintain the privilege of white masculinity in order to preserve social stability, what has changed so that we can now ask the questions we do about it?

White Men Write Now argued from the beginning that the definition of "white male" as an identity is really a fluctuating field that only gives the appearance of stability. That is its function. The body of the study presented a description of what this field looks like today and the forms in which that stability appears, even disguised as instability. The point is that this is but the assessment of a moment. This emphasis is intended to oppose the sense of eternity with which whiteness, masculinity, and white masculinity are commonly viewed. If perceptions have changed to allow for a more critical examination of these signs of identity, it suggests that they will continue to change. The white male, an even more recent invention than Foucault's 500-year-old "man" as modern subject,

should fade as social and political developments progress in concert with academic agendas and philosophy. Literature, amid all that, should evolve, too. Therefore, as the arguments of this essay are revisited based on the literature it contains, they will be assayed for their transitory nature, for exits.

The seven novels treated here in depth were historically contextualized in the late and post-Cold War. That contextualization was based on the view that as a discursive subject, white masculinity has emerged and changed over time. This very view is, in a temporal sense, also novel. Only since Gossett has there been any sense of the evolution of "race" as an idea. Foucault, following the discursive genealogy of, among other things, biological classification in *The Order of Things*, can be seen as generally following the same line of thinking. Crucially, this conceptual development did not occur in an historical vacuum. Gossett wrote in 1963 specifically to critique segregation in the United States as baseless. Foucault, whose *Les mots et les choses* appeared only three years later, was and is celebrated for texts which are considered to have advanced thought as much as they enabled new forms of activism. Whiteness and white masculinity did not evolve independently in this time, either. What changed were the circumstances which facilitated their construction and discursive valence.

Chromatic whiteness theories from scholars such as Dryer and Chambers offer a compelling construction of white as both a presence and an absence, both a (non-)color and, in a broader sense, a (non-)identity. However, their gaze is ahistorical. These theories provide a useful way to consider "white" psychologically as a form of fetish through which to mask anxieties of difference and power structures that facilitate that difference. They also offer insight into representations of whiteness, its "visibility". However, they lack a sense of the development of western thinking which led to the adoption of white as a sign of European origin and of the interaction of that thinking with colonial and postcolonial relationships at the base of the sign's power. Following their loosely applied Freudian theory of whiteness, its power lies in the color white itself, not in the ideological manipulation of whiteness in the course of recent history.

Babb takes the important step of reversing the direction of that view. While recognizing the chromatic representation of whiteness as metaphor, she examines it as a cultural result rather than an *a priori* cause. Importantly, she distinguishes between people with "white" skin (meaning less pigmented, for white skin is rarely white) and the ideology of whiteness as a tool of social regulation. Following Frankenburg, she speaks

of "whiteness" as "a location" in the singular form. Her work leaves room for whiteness to be contextualized in spaces where is practiced, giving different whitenesses in different social spaces room to coexist, but she does not explore that avenue. It is that which provides an explanation how, for example, a white Argentine, who enjoys all the privileges of whiteness at home, upon entering the United States is suddenly considered "Latino" or "Hispanic". The distinction cannot be stressed enough between "whiteness" and "whitenesses". Whereas the singular form is an ideological tool for identity-based social regulation, the plural refers to a field of potential practices of whiteness in specific spaces within contingent historical contexts.

For this reason, speaking of whiteness in the United States requires considering the epochs which most informed this field of whitenesses. From the very beginning, its emergence as a category with layered meanings has been inextricably attached to the notion of the emergence of a new American people. More specifically – as the prevalence of the American Adam motif indicates – this has meant the emergence of a new masculinity. This "newness" finds itself enshrined in the very notion of the Americas as the "New World", closely attached to European concepts of modernity that developed in tandem with the discovery of that "New World". It was a modernity that had as much to do with transforming concepts of civilization as it did, Foucault indicates, with transforming concepts of "man", meaning, quite literally, men.

This sense of newness informs how we examine American self-definition from the earliest European settlements in the Americas down to today. As the United States was founded, it could draw on at least two national myths of origin to invent a tradition of the new. The first was religious renewal, of which the Puritan mission to build a new Jerusalem was the most mythic example. It was both at odds with and complemented the other myth of a new classical age of democracy and reason that emerged from the Enlightenment. For identity, this had a similar layering effect. Religiously informed groups like the Puritans who settled in the Americas viewed race and gender in terms of Christian teleology. The Enlightenment in turn added a layer of distinction between white, non-white, male, and female base on tropes of reason. The savages were incapable of reason, as demonstrated by their savage lives. Therefore, they were excluded from the category of Man when defining the "universal" rights of men, as were, by definition, women. The rationalism of the Enlightenment was also regularly misused to construct biological definitions of race and gender and fallacious scientific "proof" of white

superiority and the dangers of miscegenation. This did not erase the earlier teleological view of white and black but rather compounded it, potently mixing religious and scientific language with metaphors of color and civilization.

The assimilation or "whiting" of ever more European groups who shared the myth of the New World increased the complexity of whiteness and white masculinity, obscuring their socially regulatory function. This social regulation enforced a gendered hierarchy of race and ethnicity in the United States with white – Anglo, heterosexual – males at the top. It also served, as labor historians emphasize, to maintain class as well, dividing labor movements and motivating white men of all classes to support existing power structures through the supposed rewards of race and gender privilege. All of these developments have led to the emergence of a shifting field of white masculinity. Its specific forms are articulated situatively at moments of performance but together constitute a flexible totality that allows its normative appearance to be maintained.

That said, these arguments are really quite familiar to postcolonial discussions. They are familiar today. DuBois may have written of the construction of black as both slave and subhuman a century ago, but only recently has such thinking become part of a widespread systematic treatment of identity-formation in colonial, quasi-colonial, and ex-colonial spaces. Postcolonial theory, whether viewed as a body or as a focal point for competing bodies of theory, emerged alongside postmodernism and deconstruction. They share key texts and concepts, even if some representatives of those fields contest the conclusions and relevance of the others. Bhabha, we recall, recognizes that they treat similar concerns, "aporia, ambivalence, indeterminacy, the question of discursive closure, the threat to agency, the status of intentionality, the challenge to 'totalizing' concepts, to name but a few".[1] For his part, Young sees deconstruction in terms of a postcolonial critique, writing that it is essentially a deconstruction of "the concept, the authority, and assumed primacy of 'the West'."[2] Describing the genealogy of white masculinity as the result of asymmetric power relations means drawing on the whole of contemporary theory, not just postcolonialism as a closed body. It means, returning to this essay's thesis, recognizing the historical context of that contemporary theory.

Rebecca Aanerud's observation that "[I]nsecurity about what it means to be white is a distinctly post-civil rights phenomenon"[3] is an historical contextualization.

[1] Bhabha, "Postcolonial Criticism" 440.
[2] Young, *White Mythologies* 19.
[3] Aanerud 59.

Considering the number of influential works *White Men Write Now* draws on from the period beginning with the 1960s, one is tempted to speak of a conceptual sea-change which took place then. For example, postmodernism first emerged in that decade. It also brought forth work like Gossett's and Foucault's, ways to rethink totalizing concepts, identities, and narratives. The period witnessed the many decolonization movements and wars which challenged the symbolic and material power of the west. This all came in concert with a domestic protest era which led to a more widespread public discussion of the privilege and normative role of white masculinity in United States society.

That said, the "sixties" did not spontaneously occur but rather were a series of events that took place within the context of the Cold War and throughout it, at best peaking in that decade. The Cold War will not be the last of the great master narratives, but at the time it was treated that way, a final confrontation that would apocalyptically reveal and justify the mission of western civilization. It was a master narrative structure just as familiar to the rhetoric of America and its allies as it was to the eastern bloc and communist ideologues. As such, other concerns such as anti-colonialism, desegregation, and feminism were both repressed and subsumed by this public narrative. Thus, it was the very pressure of the Cold War which led to the radical reemergence in the 1960s of these movements in the United States as forms of opposition.

Along with these political and social movements came conceptual developments which also challenged the mastery of that narrative. Postmodernism and writers who are the objects of postmodern theory looked at just this complex of the Cold War, its militarism, the streamlining of industrial production around it, and the conformity it demanded. They critiqued its totalizing claims and the signs of identity it enforced. It is not the intention of this essay to simply reinstate the Cold War as the appropriate lens through which to view the emergence of new concepts of identity in general and white masculinity in particular. Rather it is to demonstrate what a powerful role the conceptualization of that conflict, or the series of conflicts between 1945 and 1990, played in these conceptual developments.

The Cold War greatly informs all the novels looked at here. Elements from that era, whether the bipolar conflict or the internal opposition of the 1960s, appear as motifs in all the books. Naturally, it should come as no surprise in contemporary novels that they refer to contemporary events, but one can see in all the novels that the Cold War greatly determined how they define those events. More importantly, they are all informed

by the period's destabilization of myths of "white male" as a fixed identity. They locate it within this historical context even as they critique that history. This reinstates white men as the subject of the period and of the critical deconstruction the period brought with it. However, bearing this in mind limits the privilege of white masculinity to a specific time in a specific context. It provides for an exit.

The historical novel first discussed, *Underworld*, by Don DeLillo, sets the tone by critically examining the Cold War in this respect. It features a white man, Nick Shay, and his "modernist search for lost time" both during and especially at the end of the Cold War.[4] However, that featuring is an aspect of the novel's main theme. Scholarly disagreement over whether Nick really is the main character parallels the novel's contestation of Nick's centrality in its narrative. Contestation, itself, is at *Underworld*'s center, appropriate for an historical novel about one of the twentieth century's great contests. This includes the contestation of what was being contested. It is just as much about the Cold War as an east-west conflict as it is about what other narratives of conflict are driven into the "underworld" by the Cold War's command of public attention and manipulation by powerful interests. As a metadiscourse of contestation, it retraces the historical and cultural emergence of metadiscourse critiques of totalizing narratives. Within that context, Nick's double nature as a certain and uncertain central character is pivotal. Much of the novel is not associated with him directly, and his is not the only first-person voice, but eventually everything can be connected back to him in a web of associations, and it is his story that occupies the most pages.

The eventual victory of the Cold War in determining the era and becoming the novel's central figure is paralleled by Nick's own merging with a white male middle-class identity, a "fiction", he notes, that nonetheless has important consequences. The "beset" quality of the white male as both the object and the subject of the Cold War conflict works to elide Others and their conflicts in the national imagination. DeLillo's incorporation and contrast of play, art, and politics only emphasize the struggle over this kind of signification. In the end, the mere presence of alternative patterns of signification troubles the view of the victory of the Cold War over public minds. Nick Shay may own the winning homerun ball from the legendary baseball game that began the novel, but the art of Klara Sax asks why that ball is a more important object of American identity than a castoff shampoo cap.

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[4] Duvall, *Reader's Guide* 25.

DeLillo's other large conceptual movement in the novel, consumerism and how it assigns symbolic value, further exposes this conflict over signification. Many attempts to contest identity are frustrated and repressed by the objects of consumerist desire. The triptych Part 5, Chapter 2 convincingly demonstrates this. It hems in a black protest against bus segregation with scenes of consumption in a "typical 1950s" home and the manipulations of an advertising agency at the same time. Nick, as the waste manager, is in charge of burying all the leftovers from the era, those consumed things which no longer have any value. As such, he occupies a central role in this process of repression. However, by the end, the novel's archeology unearths the fiction of his identity, a construction formed by the conflicts over power, wealth, and representation during the period. At the same time, the novel shows how this contestation also exposed the construction of white masculinity. The alternatives exhumed from the Underworld serve as a constant reminder of this construction and potential for opposition to it.

After the Cold War, this study focused on borders, an historical legacy and one of the most visible locations for contemporary efforts to deconstruct national identity. Work by non-white, non-male Others, especially Chicana/os, has frequently employed borders for identity critiques. White men writing critical literature may or may not be directly influenced by them. They nonetheless share the same conceptual time and its challenge to the fixity of borders that represses contestation of the identities those borders demarcate. Like DeLillo in *Underworld*, these writers undertake the archeology of the borders. They express a deep concern about the historical and mythic conflict they unearth. The conflict lays bare the contingency of that history, the ambivalence these borders were supposed to repress, and the powers behind their construction.

In this context, a model of the dual nature of a border was presented. A border is an ambivalent act, the violent repression of disorder and conflict. It is also a symbolic text which assimilates the act into national myth. The text elides ambivalence through its representation as an order that would be disturbed if the border were questioned. This gives the impression of accounting for difference in a conflict but itself represents an act of force, an imposed system of signification. As a case in point, the U.S.-Mexican border and the Mason-Dixon Line are essential to the national symbolic text. Materially and symbolically, they have profoundly informed white masculinity and its privileging in the United States. Deconstructing these borders then means deconstructing the conceptual borders of the white male as a social category in that country.

In *Mason & Dixon*, Thomas Pynchon returns to the time before the United States was founded to examine the creation of the border that is the title's namesake. His historical archeology, or in a postmodern sense, historiographic metafiction, dedoxifies perceived notions of the founding objects of the nation even as it explores how these objects became textualized in national myths. The most immediate way in which he destabilizes that text is in his language games. Through anachronistic slang, punning, and variations in grammar and spelling, these games subvert the hegemony of standard English. This play opens the language to a large potential of new associations and meanings standardization represses. It asks what people and interests are behind that standardization. Characteristic of Pynchon, the novel suggests not one conspiracy but a large field of conflicting conspiracies and secret forms of knowledge. Amid this field of language and knowledge conflict emerges the project of nation forming, which the surveyor Mason finally comes to realize. He sees how the project of drawing a straight line across America manifests this conflict through the violent enforcement of a visible mark upon the land. It outlines a new country and an array of associations with white masculinity as the subject of its freedoms, civilizing claims, and future power.

T. Coraghessan Boyle follows similar problems in the present in *The Tortilla Curtain*. He picks up the same national narrative thread of civilization versus nature that Pynchon critically dissected and pursues it in the contemporary setting of a middle-class housing project at the edge of Los Angeles. The novel's social satire casts a nature-loving liberal white man, Delaney, against an illegal alien, Candido, squatting in the canyon that borders the housing development. They are located on opposite sides of the identity border United States-Mexico and on the physical border of the housing development and the canyon. As such they are each constructed from the start as the other's vision of the *unheimlich,* the grotesque double upon whom they project their repressed fears. This provides a fascinating juxtaposition of nature preservation with the containment of the disordered Other. It leads to an increasingly tense struggle over the borders and over system of signifying the Other as disordered and ends with a cataclysm in which Boyle appeals to acts of human kindness across the borders of identity.

Bridging across those borders, a transcendence which it is hoped will lead to reconciliation, is a theme which seems to occupy many white men. The aim is admirable. However, one of the most popular scenarios for representing this in popular culture is reverse-passing which reinforces stereotypical constructions of identities and, by

corollary, their essential difference. Passing emerged in African American literature based on the practice of people considered black by "one-drop" convention but were so light-skinned that they could pass for white. Many pretended to be white, keeping their ancestry secret, and some even fully integrated into white society. As a literary device, passing was most frequently used to criticize skin privilege and embody, through the passers, the in-between identity of African Americans, American yet somehow not. Reverse-passing approaches passing, as the name suggests, in reverse, from a hegemonic center to a peripheral subject position to subsume its destabilizing authority.

In the discussion of white masculinity, reverse-passing refers to men considered white who discover non-white ancestry, what this study calls "ancestral reverse-passing", or consistently perform perceived signs of non-white Others, called "adoptive reverse-passing" here. Unlike African American passers, these reverse-passing men become members of a non-white group not through pretense but by being included as authentic. Using examples such as the movie *Dances With Wolves*, it was pointed out that the problem with such a scenario lies in its reliance, like Mailer's White Negro, on stereotypical forms of exotic white male Others to emulate, to reverse-pass for. Thus, it confirms the veracity and fixity of those stereotypes and the power of white masculinity as a center from which one can migrate to peripheral identities gathered around it.

I Know This Much is True by Wally Lamb shows just this. Ambitiously long, it attempts to be all-inclusive. Yet for all its elaboration, it rests upon the over-simplifying motif of reverse-passing as the solution to the woes of its white male protagonist. The protagonist, Dominick, begins his story with the schizophrenia of his twin, a schizophrenia which becomes emblematic of Dominick's own feelings of division and alienation. He frees himself of this through non-white and not-quite-white Others, especially the fictional Native American Wequennoc tribe. Discovering a distant Wequennoc ancestry, he reverse-passes to become a full member of the tribe. Within the structure of the novel, however, it could have been any Indians. The fiction of the tribe foregrounds it as an amalgam of constructed Indian-ness, the source for a stereotypical ethno-kitsch mysticism which connects him to the land. It requires the fixed projection of the primitivist Native American "in touch with nature", much in the way Delaney from *Tortilla Curtain* wishes he were, and thus becomes a narrative of liberal white male wish-fulfillment. It uncritically grants what Sollors termed "adopted ancestry". This cures

white male guilt and alienation toward Others by transforming him into them but preserves the Other's stereotypical exoticism as a space for that transformation.

Admirable for its brevity if not its fluency, *The Last of the Savages* by Jay McInerney complicates Lamb's formula with a critical assessment of the "sixties" ruptures and the White Negro ethos. Reverse-passing not only preserves stereotypes of the Other but also depends on a power relationship through which becoming "black" is a luxury of affluent whites men. The privileges of white masculinity in America, on the other hand, are reserved for a selected few who are not only white and male, but heterosexual, Anglo, and Protestant. Told by Patrick, of Catholic Irish descent and with homosexual leanings, the novel contrasts his story with that of his friend Will. Patrick learns to pass at prep school in the mid-1960s, adopting objects of elite whiteness, while Will, of wealthy southern heritage, promotes reverse-passing in the form of the blues and "black" styles for social liberation. McInerney concludes ambivalently. He notes that the message of revolution has become widespread by the novel's end in the early 1990s but that it represents a commodification of both the message and stereotypical blackness Will saw as its vehicle. In the process, Will becomes wealthy, while the structures of white masculinity Patrick conforms to and supports are still in place.

McInerney's focus on the time of this story recalls this study's thesis that a specific historical context has brought with it specific contemporary concerns with the identity "white male". Here again, one notes the narrative structure of a conflict in which the overturning of white male privilege was at stake but ultimately averted. All of the novels in this study draw on this structure. It is a particular focus of postmodern literature and literature that focuses on postmodern themes and finds its greatest expression in novels which feature a satirical apocalypse. Whereas Boyle presents a satire with apocalyptic elements, DeLillo describes an averted apocalypse with satirical moments, and Lamb's apocalyptic crisis with a sanctimonious liberal redemption seems to satire itself. With that in mind, this study turned to novels in which apocalypse and satire function equally strongly, interacting with each other to uncover profound aporia.

Much as Weisenburger coined the term "degenerative" to describe postmodern satire, suspicious of all systems of signification, one can speak of "degenerative apocalypse" that peels away all layers of false signification to reveal, ultimately, nothing. Nothing, that is, but forces that institute that signification. In this way, apocalyptic (de-)constructions of the world are satired while the satire itself represents an uneasy void.

The satirical social critique is not contrasted with any propriety to which society may return. Everything becomes grotesque. Specifically for white masculinity, this means that constructions may be revealed but people appear to need that identity in order to function socially, grotesque as that function is. There is no exit.

The Bonfire of the Vanities by Tom Wolfe is the only novel in this study that appeared before the end of the Cold War, but it anticipates the era to come. The novel explores forces that deferred the revolutionary potential unleashed by the Cold War era and its protests. The apocalyptic events, the race conflict at the narrative center, destroy the security its protagonist Sherman McCoy enjoyed through his own practice of white masculinity. However, the identity as a source of social privilege remains untouched, indeed necessary for the survival of the city's political structures. Hatred and rage in the city over social inequalities are bundled in a mythic white male that McCoy unwittingly, stupidly, ends up embodying. He is instrumentalized as the Great White Defendant by figures from the media and politics to further their own interests. This ensures that the public conflict will not unsettle the system of signification upon which the privilege of white masculinity rests. By focusing the novel through its characters' points of view, Wolfe creates a setting in which it is impossible to conceive of social identities outside their subject positions. As a result, these positions re-center the social identity white male, an identity that lurks like a phantom in the city as its one unifying force.

Bret Easton Ellis picks up in *American Psycho* where *Bonfire* ends. He even grounds his novel in Wolfe's fiction by placing his protagonist, Patrick Bateman, in the same company as McCoy, Pierce & Pierce. This novel, however, looks at the private consumption of identity and the supposed fixity of its signs as Bateman, a wealthy white man, vividly slays subalterns who bear signs of Otherness. The narrator's descriptions of the signs of affluence which adorn him and the images of beauty and refinement they reflect take on the feeling of permanence in the collapsed time of the novel. It is rigorously told in the present tense, prohibiting a view of the transitory nature of these signs. In this present tense, the murders take on the feel of a habitual reproduction of hegemony, mirroring the way in which endlessly mass-produced signs of consumption enforce his sense of Self. Despite the novel's constant apocalyptic deconstruction of the signs of identity through their grotesquely humorous satire, there is no redemptive revelation. Much as Wolfe imprisons the gaze at social identities by keeping his novel within the points of view of those who bear them, Ellis imprisons it by keeping within a

moment of time. In that respect, the progression of the novel does not provide an exit. Only closing the book at the end does, removing the reader from its language.

Therein lies the exit. The assessment of these novels may seem pessimistic, but the hope these texts represent lies in the fact of their existence within public discourse. They warn, wittingly and unwittingly, of the constructed nature of social texts in the United States, especially as they are organized around forms of white masculinity. They also demonstrate an awareness of the way in which the construction of "white male" identity currently ensures social hierarchies in America. Social crisis of this kind represents a need for paradigmatic discursive change, after which the conflicts also change, adopting new forms unrecognizable before that seem so logical in retrospect.

Today, we have different global conflicts than in the Cold War. The main work on this study began shortly after the events we now call "September 11th" or simply "9-11", horrors such named because, for those who witnessed them, there simply were no other words. The non-name and unfolding effects of September 11th indicate that the world is advancing in forms we cannot yet comprehend. There simply are no words. It has not become history yet. Challenges of globalization represent another – some say related – field which will profoundly affect the future. They will change how we conceive and organize nationhood as we come to terms with the economic and political discrepancies that inform conflicts over globalization.

This may bring a renewed focus on religion or concepts of civilization as primary markers of identity. It may lead to new models for less (or more) coercive means of economic distribution. It will surely also mean a lot more strife. Amid this, concepts of the structure of race and gender identities will also change, and not just because of all those now who call to "dislocate" or "decenter" white masculinity in theory. White masculinity, as white men write it now and it is contested across American society, will lose its symbolic hold as power relations shift within the United States and internationally. Consider a slight amendment to Foucault's concluding thought in *The Order of Things* by adding "white", an optimistic thought: "[White] man is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end." The hope lies in a future when, just as students today consult references for the metaphorical worlds of Shakespeare and Homer, they will have to do the same for the identity conflicts in today's novels. May studies such as this supply the stuff of their annotation.

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Anhang: Lebenslauf

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Familienstand	Seit 1994 verheiratet, keine Kinder.
Staatsangehörigkeit	USA
Studium	
09.1987 – 09.1991	University of California Berkeley. HF: Englisch Abschluss als Bachelor of Arts.
11.1992 – 01.1999	2. Studium an der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität (LMU) München HF: Amerikanische Literaturgeschichte NF 1: Kommunikationswissenschaft (Zeitungswissenschaft) NF 2: Neue und Neueste Geschichte Abschluss als Magister Artium, Notendurchschnitt: 1,16.
05.1999 – 02.2005	Promotionsstudium, Gesamtnote: magna cum laude 1,0.
10.2001 – 09.2004	Mitglied und Stipendiat des Graduiertenkollegs Postcolonial Studies, LMU München.
Praktika	
10.1991 – 07.1992	Marketingpraktikum bei der Computerfirma Micado, Bonn.
01.1992 – 08.1992	*Bonner Rundschau*, Bonn, Ressort Kultur.
Hospitanz	
10.1995 – 04.1996	*Werben & Verkaufen*, München, Ressort Marketingkommunikation.
Berufliche Tätigkeiten	
05.1989 – 09.1991	Video Zone, Berkeley, Manager
10.1993 – 12.1998	Wilhelm Heyne Verlag, München, Aushilfe Presseabteilung
1995 – 2001	Selbständige Tätigkeit als Übersetzer/Autor. Referenzen (siehe auch ab 2005) u. a.: - Bayerische Amerika-Akademie, München - Change Factory, Firmenberater, München - Angelika Böck, Künstlerin, München
03.1999 – 07.2000	Amerika Haus Verein, München, Programmassistent

06.2000 – 09.2001	Allianz Versicherungs-AG, München, Redaktionsassistent Kundenzeitschrift *Global Risk Report*. - Seitdem bis heute regelmäßige Beiträge, auch in der Nachfolgezeitschrift *Report*
08.2000, 05. & 08.2001	EUROVACANCES, München, Kursleiter Austauschschüler-Vorbereitung auf Aufenthalt in USA
11.2000 – 09.2001	Language Solutions, München, Englischunterricht
05. – 08.2000	Amerika-Institut der LMU, München, Leiter des Tutoriums zur Vorlesung "American Renaissance"
10.2000	Allianz Versicherungs-AG, München, Mitglied des Ausbildungsteams beim Allianz International Management Seminar
04.2004 – 08.2004	Amerika-Institut, LMU München, Lehrbeauftragter Proseminar "*Passing* in Frühwerken der afroamerikanischen Literatur"
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08.2005 – heute	LMU München, Presseabteilung / Internationale Angelegenheiten / Referat Internet - Projektbetreuung englischsprachiger Auftritt im Inland, Ausland und Internet

<u>Besondere Kenntnisse</u>

Sprachen:	
Muttersprache	Englisch
Sehr gute Kenntnisse	Deutsch
Computer:	MS Office-Programme - insbes. Word, Access, Power Point Internet Content-Management, Adobe Photoshop
<u>Hobbys</u>	Literatur, Leiter Amerika Haus Reading Group Film Kochen