

**The South's "Negligible Minorities": The Influence of Whiteness on the
Southern Construction of Race, Gender, and Class in Ellen Glasgow's Novels**

By

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A Doctoral Thesis

**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of
Doctor of Philosophy, Loughborough University**

October/2018

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Acknowledgements

I am deeply indebted to my supervisors Dr Mary Brewer and Dr Paul Jenner for their dedicated reading of my work and their constant support, both academic and non-academic, to me throughout my study. I am also thankful to other faculty members of the English Department at Loughborough University who provided me with insightful feedback, I specially thank Dr Deirdre OByrne and my internal examiner Dr Andrew Dix. My gratitude is also to Dr Sarah Robertson from UWE Bristol for examining my thesis.

I am personally grateful to my family members, especially my husband and brothers, who have continued to express their belief in me and my ability to accomplish this thesis.

Abstract

Race remains one of the least discussed topics among Glasgow's critics and no consensus about her racial politics has been reached. Some critics argue that race is almost absent from Glasgow's agenda of social criticism compared to her more vocal feminist views. Other critics accuse Glasgow of outright racism, citing what they see as a condescending and racist characterisation of African Americans in her works. A third view defends the existence of a valid impetus against racism in Glasgow's works but refers to her attitude as ambiguous. While these researchers aid understanding of Glasgow's fiction, their critique is tied into the more conventional approach to race studies that concentrates on the effect of racism rather than the role of the racist subject.

This study attempts to redress the limitations of the existing studies of Glasgow's works by incorporating her identity as a white southern woman and the identity of her white characters in the reading of race in her novels. My reading attempts to tease out the subtle or unconscious ideologies and practices of white identity that originated, transformed, and most importantly, naturalised the construct of race, gender, and class in the southern context. Thus, the approach taken is to focus on Glasgow's characters as identities shaped by a broad white culture that in itself was changing, affecting and effected by the South's historical, political, and social contexts. My approach is to embed close textual analysis of the novels within whiteness theories and within historical and social studies to render visible the multiple and changing origins of white identity. Focusing on six key novels: *The Battle-Ground* (1902), *The Deliverance* (1904), *The Voice of the People* (1900), *One Man in His Time* (1922), *Vein of Iron* (1935), and *In This Our Life* (1941), this research aims to analyse how Glasgow's aristocratic characters serve to critique white masculinity as a sustainable identity; how her poor white characters offer strategies to whiteness that challenge class exclusivity; and how her female characters adopt alternative approaches for self-realisation that negotiate with gender determinism.

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Introduction

Past and current researchers of early twentieth-century southern novelist, Ellen Glasgow, have struggled to categorise her literary canon. Contemporary critics and reviewers of her novels have rarely agreed about the political and social ideologies she adopts in her novels. Some of those critics have praised Glasgow as one of the first female authors to interrupt the South's literary romantic traditions, and to impose a more realistic attitude towards its idealisations.¹ For example, in 1926, critic Edwin Mims admired what he called "the social philosophy"² of Glasgow's novels. Mims claimed that "[n]o one has written with more penetration and discrimination about the forces of reaction and progress that have been for a half century contending for supremacy in the South."³ Literary critic and editor Henry Seidel Canby described her in 1941 as "a realist of the old South, when southern writers were still sentimentalists. She was an ironist when irony was rare in American literature."⁴

Other commentators referred to Glasgow's Virginian privileged childhood to demonstrate her inability to dispose of sentimentality in her portrayal of the new South.⁵ Prominent southern critic Louis D. Rubin Jr. believed that Glasgow "never understood what it was that was displacing the old. She never comprehended the nature of the new."⁶ Critics such as Edmund Fitzgerald, E. Stanley Godbold, and Alfred Kazin took the middle ground in placing Glasgow in the romantic/reactionary and realist/liberal continuum.⁷ In his biography of Glasgow, Godbold concluded that "Ellen herself was one day an old fashioned southern Girl and the next day a modern intellectual in total rebellion against the traditions of the past. She was never able to

¹ See M. F. J., "Miss Glasgow's Novel of Virginia To-Day," in *Book Buyer*, 20 (1900), 318-20. Edwin Mims, "The Social Philosophy of Ellen Glasgow," in *Social Forces*, 4. 3 (1926), 495. Douglas S. Freeman, "Ellen Glasgow: Idealist," in *The Saturday Review of Literature*, 31 August 1935, p. 12. Henry Seidel Canby, "SRL Award to Ellen Glasgow," in *The Saturday Review of Literature*, 5 April 1941, p. 10.

² Mims, "The Social Philosophy," 495.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Canby, "SRL Award," p. 10.

⁵ See Isa Carrington Cabell, "Womanly Submission—On Literary Thin Ice—A Violent Propagandist," in *The Bellman*, 24 May 1913, p. 665. James Branch Cabell, "The Last Cry of Romance," in *Nation*, 6 May 1925, pp. 521-22. Louis D. Rubin Jr., *No Place on Earth: Ellen Glasgow, James Branch Cabell, and Richmond-in-Virginia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1959), pp. 29-49.

⁶ Rubin, *No Place on Earth*, p. 45.

⁷ See Edmund Fitzgerald, "A Woman's Pilgrimage from Romance to Reality," in *Literary Digest International Book Review*, May 1925, pp. 376-378. E. Stanley Godbold, Jr., *Ellen Glasgow and the Woman Within* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1972). Alfred Kazin, *On Native Grounds: An Interpretation of Modern American Prose Literature*, A Harvest 3rd ed. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 2013), pp. 247-64.

shed either role, nor was she able to reconcile them. She was both ‘the mould of perfection’ and the one who cast it away.”⁸ Kazin described Glasgow’s critical outlook as a journey in which “[s]he began as the most girlish of Southern romantics and later proved the most biting critic of Southern romanticism.”⁹

While this thesis does not make another attempt to designate the literary technique of Glasgow’s narratives, it helps in adding new dimensions about how the modern reader might consider her works either as sentimental and reactionary, or as realistic and progressive, or as an interweaving of the two. To achieve this aim I will focus on Glasgow’s exploration of one of the most problematic political, historical, and social aspects of the American South, race and racism.

Ellen Anderson Gholson Glasgow was born in 1873. Her mother was a descendant of the Tidewater plantation aristocracy. Her father was a hard-natured Scottish-Irish Presbyterian and a rising industrialist. The presence in her family of these conflicting southern identities became the central opposition of attitudes which characterised Glasgow’s fiction, but it also contributed to the broad vision Glasgow had while dealing critically with either southern personality. As a shy, sick child, Glasgow failed to follow a formal public education, and she carried on her education in private. Her early intellectual education had been limited to romantic and idealistic literature. However, under the influence of her brother in law, she later studied Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Ibsen. She also read in political economy, in Malthus, John Stuart Mill, and Marx who developed her commitment to the poor and women’s rights and her belief in the individuals’ reason and sympathy to aid human progress. She was deeply influenced by the works of Darwin, Spencer, and Huxley as well.

Darwinian premises underlined Glasgow’s world view, her belief that principles are essentially derived from experience, that individualistic forces are needed to break through inhibiting social conventions, and her recognition that heredity and environment are the factors which limit people’s effectiveness as free agents. She was not interested in the Darwinian hypothesis and its scientific questions. She was more concerned with its potential for ending the southern emphasis upon hierarchical orders by its emphasis on change, diversity, and struggle. She focuses on the southern past in her novels because it formed its current mind with its hierarchical

⁸ Godbold, *Ellen Glasgow*, p. 99.

⁹ Kazin, *On Native Grounds*, p. 258.

constructions, turning southerners into uniformed and static beings. She balances her modern outlook with an ethic grounded in ancient stoicism. The combination of stoicism and Darwinian disciplines provides the cultural analysis that marks her early work with its basic intellectual framework of surface determinism and traditional realism.

Glasgow's literary career is divided into two main periods, the early period between 1897 and 1911 in which she initiated her project of compiling a social history of the South through a series of novels that depict the private and public life of southern society. She adopts the outlook of critical realism as a mode of rebellion against the Victorian traditions of her family and region. Of this series, the current study focuses on three novels set entirely in Virginia: *The Voice of the People*, *The Battle-Ground*, and *The Deliverance*. *The Voice of the People* is Glasgow's first Virginian novel; it appeared amid a great wave of popular historical romances. She examines in it how rigid attitudes of southern class traditions can pervert human nature. *The Battle-Ground* is considered the first realistic treatment of the war from a Virginian point of view. In it and in *The Deliverance*, Glasgow focuses on the qualities of the social order associated with the Virginia aristocracy and resists current literary fashion which exalted antebellum life and eulogised the survival of its influence after the war.

Glasgow directs her most effective criticism of the South's dependence upon a hereditary human nature and unchanging traditions in these novels. The protagonists of the two novels, moulded by the South's aristocratic myths of masculinity, accept the existing social structures as a mirror of the natural order of things. Glasgow suggests in *The Battle-Ground* that the actual destruction of hierarchal societies may liberate the finer possibilities of a man, while in *The Deliverance* human animosity can be overcome with compassion and love. The independent, self-made man in *The Voice of the People* and *One Man in His Time* begins where the southern aristocrat ended. His noble character is at conflict with the corrupted social institutions. He is the hero of Jeffersonian democracy who lives his productive existence according to the rights of his race. He is an outsider, a man struggling his way from an underprivileged status into a circle of privileged, smug aristocrats. Besides the Virginian class system, Glasgow touches on several critical social questions in her early narratives: the absence of public education, the power of capitalist interests in Virginia politics, and the emergence of populism.

After 1911, the twentieth-century renaissance in American literature was underway, and Glasgow was unable to go on writing her realistic fiction in an age unsympathetic to didactic narratives. Glasgow came to believe that the regional, to be artistically effective, must go beyond the representation of local realities to provide a far-reaching commentary upon human life. She expresses this opinion in the preface to *Barren Ground* (1925): “to touch, or at least feel for, the universal chords beneath the regional variations of character.”¹⁰ Her later novels from 1913 to 1941 focus on the mental formations that determine individuals’ destinies rather than the injustices produced by the social structures. There is a pattern to Glasgow’s later intellectual and literary development. It is the thesis of a shielded, protected, and delusional life that is synthesised through harsh reality into a pragmatic or ironic existence. She resorts to irony as the attitude her characters adopts to remove the pain from their reality. They do not evade reality but place humour as a buffer between their vulnerable selves and the painful truth.

In her later novels, public institutions and romantic love stop to be the solutions to the problems facing humanity. She focuses instead on more universal ethical and psychological transformations that would enable her characters to live in a society laden with social, political, and economic injustices. The social structures of the South that she criticises in her early novels produce in her later characters in *Vein of Iron* and *In This Our Life* a rebellion against a persistent pattern of an enclosed social and mental life. Moreover, she detects great lack of substance in the impudent younger generations; it is a theme that reoccurs through her novels after 1920. In *One Man in His Time*, *Vein of Iron*, and *In This Our Life* she treats this subject seriously, a literary choice that puts them apart from the rest of her comedies of manners in which she ironically portrays the excesses of the post-war generation.

In her early work, Glasgow reacted more against the hold of the past upon the South. In her later work, she could still be outspoken in criticising the lifeless aspects of southern culture at the same time that she increasingly distrusted the levelling tendencies she saw in contemporary democracy. Democratic reform and aristocratic conservatism each fostered positive qualities, but each could become tyrannical. Only in the life of private fortitude, could one find self-possession. This balance of extreme

¹⁰ Ellen Glasgow, *A Certain Measure: An Interpretation of Prose Fiction* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1905), p. 152.

views and high celebration of individual self-assurance was the underlying principle of Glasgow's career as a thinker and an artist. Although these six novels have different agendas, they all deal critically with problems associated with the South: its blind defence of traditional order; its belief in gender determinism and defence of feminine fragility; its rigid class attitudes and oppression of the poor white; and the major southern issue that escaped the critical reception of these novels, its physical and psychological exploitation of non-whites. This study comprises all these problems while tackling Glasgow's notions of agency, ideology, cultural intervention, as well as the experiences of marginalised characters growing up in South

The Objective and Methodology of Study

Race remains one of the least discussed topics among Glasgow's critics, and no consensus about her racial politics has been reached. Some critics argue that race, despite its impact on the South, is almost absent from Glasgow's agenda of social criticism compared to her more vocal feminist views.¹¹ Other critics accuse Glasgow of outright racism, citing what they see as a condescending and racist characterisation of African Americans in her works.¹² A third view defends the existence of a valid impetus against racism in Glasgow's works but refers to her attitude as ambiguous; Glasgow's attacks on slavery do not clearly establish a consistently oppositional attitude towards racism as a social problem.¹³ These apologetic reviewers and biographers justify Glasgow's limited racial perspectives by referring to her upbringing as an upper-class lady, raised in a southern home surrounded by ex-slaves and black servants.

¹¹ See Anne Goodwyn Jones, *Tomorrow is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South, 1859-1936* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), pp. 225-70. Martha H. Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl: Reimagining the American New Woman, 1895-1915* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2005), pp. 125-51.

¹² See Louis Auchincloss, *Ellen Glasgow* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964), p. 15. Godbold, *Ellen Glasgow*, p. 65, p. 182, p. 243. Adrienne Rich, "Education of a Novelist" in *The Fact of a Doorframe: Poems Selected and New, 1950-1984* (New York: Norton, 1984), pp. 314-17. Elizabeth Ammons, *Conflicting Stories: American Women Writers at the Turn into the Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 174-76.

¹³ See Diane Price Hernd, *Invalid Women: Figuring Feminine Illness in American Fiction and Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), pp. 240-51. Pamela R. Matthews, *Ellen Glasgow and a Woman's Traditions* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), p. xi. Susan Goodman, *Ellen Glasgow: A Biography* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), pp. 183-84. Jean Carol Griffith, *The Color of Democracy in Women's Regional Writing* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009), pp. 73-128.

Feminist critic Martha H. Patterson recognises Glasgow as having two contradictory positions: a reactionary, southern white bigotry and a more radical view on women's liberation. She suggests that Glasgow's feminist perspectives express a firm belief in women's place in the modern South. However, her racial perspectives are regressive and tend to whitewash southern racism. Patterson develops her argument by stating that Glasgow is committed to a dynamic rationale in her books, in which she shows how white women battle to improve their conditions while blacks forever remain behind. Glasgow's privileging of white women's experiences therefore eclipses any consistency in her support of racial justice. Patterson acknowledges that Glasgow does assault the sexual abuse of female slaves and attacks her white protagonists for their literal and metaphorical blindness to the aggressive nature of the plantation legacy. At the same time, Patterson criticises Glasgow for what she considers her stereotypical rendition of black characters as basically pleasant children and her propagation of the myth of plantation slaves' dependability. Patterson ends her discussion by stating, "Indeed, Glasgow ultimately undercuts the significance of her racial protest ... by redeploying the rhetoric of slavery to define the plight of Southern white bourgeois women rather than African Americans under Jim Crow."¹⁴

Another feminist critic, Elizabeth Ammons, judges Glasgow's feminist and racial politics as not wholly progressive. According to Ammons, "Just as Glasgow tried to rebel against the repressive white ideal of the Southern lady but was able to move only so far out of the orbit into which she was born, so she tried to rebel against certain racist attitudes of her time and region but was able to go only so far out of the system of values that she inherited."¹⁵ Ammons emphasises the impact of Glasgow's social position as a prosperous southern lady on her stereotypical perception of African Americans. Though in *Barren Ground* Glasgow clearly speaks out against racist attitudes, Ammons concludes that she still suffers from a blindness to the realities of race in the South. For example, she points out that Glasgow's description generalises about African Americans' "expression of wistful resignation". Glasgow "makes black Southerners but not white ones speak in dialect" and "indulges freely in stereotypes about the untrustworthiness and carelessness of black workers."¹⁶

¹⁴ Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl*, p. 141.

¹⁵ Ammons, *Conflicting Stories*, p. 175.

¹⁶ Ibid.

Earlier studies endorse Ammons's verdict. Louis Auchincloss argues that Glasgow "belonged ... to a generation that was taught to duck the [race] problem in its cradle"; "she did not choose to be overly concerned with the problem."¹⁷ Godbold maintains a similar opinion in his biographical analysis of Glasgow's novels. He reaches the opinion that Glasgow saw in all African Americans no threat or phenomenon begging for "thorough investigation"¹⁸ and that, especially in her early social chronicles, she maintained the picture of black characters "as faithful slaves, treated well by their masters."¹⁹ Glasgow's autobiography has been read as demonstrating how her white female identity limited her understanding of the true nature of the relation between black and white characters in her fiction. These critics attack Glasgow's portrayal of idyllic relations between slaves and masters as betraying her blindness to the tremendous amount of imbalance built into this relation. Adrienne Rich's poem "Education of a Novelist" (1984) is about Glasgow and how she consigned to illiteracy her Mammy Lizzie, who nurtured her literary gifts, by forgetting her promise to teach her how to read and write. In the poem Rich addresses the tragedy — for Glasgow, but far more so for black women — of the kind of benevolent racism that could allow a white writer to dislike the word "nigger" and wish to honour the wisdom of a black midwife and conjure woman and yet, simultaneously, to participate blithely in the exploitation of black people.²⁰ Ammons notes that Rich's poem "may say most when it cautions against white hypocrisy and its all too convenient displacement of guilt."²¹

Later studies of Glasgow also depict Glasgow's racial stance as restricted by her gender and class, characterising it as vague and inconsistent. Diane Price Hernd in her study of *Barren Ground* states that Glasgow's awareness and attitude towards race are ambiguous, as her vision of her black characters' lives "is restricted to the extent that they can be useful to white characters."²² Pamela R. Matthews states that "Glasgow's limitations in sensitivity to the imbalances of racism and classism are not difficult to imagine or find evidence of."²³ She attributes Glasgow's occasional racism in the depiction of the relationship between Dorinda and Fluvanna in *Barren Ground*

¹⁷ Auchincloss, *Ellen Glasgow*, p. 15.

¹⁸ Godbold, *Ellen Glasgow*, p. 243.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Rich, "Education of a Novelist", pp. 314-17.

²¹ Ammons, *Conflicting Stories*, p. 176.

²² Hernd, *Invalid Women*, p. 240.

²³ Matthews, *Ellen Glasgow*, p. xi.

to her limited perspective as an economically comfortable white woman who lived most of her life in her native Richmond, Virginia.²⁴ Susan Goodman points out that in her daily life, Glasgow puzzled over the issue of race, wavering between her feelings, often obscure and inherited, and her reason.²⁵ Jean Carol Griffith in her discussion of *The Voice of the People* states, “The author’s only stab at an African American point of view ... vacillate[s] between statements that insist on racial equality and ones that rely on a kind of Uncle Tom-Like acquiescence to racial hierarchy.”²⁶

While these previous studies help in understanding Glasgow’s fiction as participating in dialogues surrounding the question of race in the South, their critique belongs to the more conventional field of race studies that focus on the effects of racism on its victims while often overlooking the role of the racist subject. Racism for these critics is the conscious and unconscious bias held by white people against others because of their different race or ethnicity. White prejudice shows in the way non-white people have been denied opportunities to access political, cultural, and economic rights. However, early critical approaches to racism have made little attempt to reflect on the white identity of those who exercise and benefit from the perpetuation of racist practices. Whiteness studies provide an answer to this anomaly by focusing on white identity as an organising rubric through which white people are granted privilege that non-whites are denied. Furthermore, whiteness studies argue that white people adopt an identity that is the sum, not only of their skin colour, but which includes their sexuality, class, ethnicity, nationality, and so on. It is this identity that keeps them in control of the historical, political, and social aspects of racist discourse, ensuring that they remain at the receiving end of political, social, and economic privilege.

This study attempts to redress the limitations of the existing studies of Glasgow’s works by incorporating her identity as a white southern woman and the identity of her white characters in the reading of race in her novels. Race studies of Glasgow’s work mainly build their arguments by focusing on the treatment of African Americans in her books as the consequence of a racist literary imagination. They do not go further in their analysis to expand on the political and social economies

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Goodman, *Ellen Glasgow*, p. 184.

²⁶ Griffith, *The Color of Democracy*, p. 127.

constituting both Glasgow's identity and that of the main characters in her novels as key participants in the ongoing discrimination against African Americans in her fiction. In their datedness and scope, these studies do not constitute a sufficient literature to fill in the gap concerning whiteness in Glasgow's works. Glasgow published twenty novels covering periods in southern history from the 1860s to the 1940s, and she was most active during the 1920s, a period when the discourse on race in the United States was undergoing significant changes. It was a particularly turbulent period when African Americans were trying to redefine themselves within public discourses in the face of a deeply conservative, even violent backlash that included lynching and the enforcement of the Jim Crow laws. The existing scholarly work gives the modern reader an incomplete vision of Glasgow's contribution to the southern dialogue on race and consequently limits his/her reading of her novels.

This reading considers the contentious portrayal of African Americans but does not do so in order to dismiss such representations as inaccurate, biased, or racist. These judgements, as stated in the previous paragraph, lead to the closing down of a more comprehensive interpretation of the literary text and deny the reader the chance to engage with the arguments developed in Glasgow's novels. My analysis instead attempts to tease out the subtle or unconscious ideologies and practices of white identity that originated, transformed, and most importantly, naturalised the construct of race, gender, and class in the southern context. It focuses on Glasgow's approach to her characters as identities shaped by a broad white culture that in itself was changing, and was both affecting and effected by the South's historical, political and social contexts. It does so by embedding close textual analysis of the novels of study within whiteness theories combined with historical and social studies to render visible the multiple and changing origins of white identity. It highlights Glasgow's approach to whiteness, including her critique of the South's institutional and individual practices, locating her characters within and without positions of advantage in a society primarily shaped by a racist ideology.

This study is concerned with reading race as a mobile and fluid discourse of difference rather than a biological phenomenon. In that, it follows the path of whiteness scholarship that agrees on the constructed-ness of whiteness. Literary critic Valerie Babb defines whiteness as a politically-guided ideology: "Whiteness can be better comprehended if thought of not solely as a biological category of pigmentation or hair texture, but rather as a means through which certain individuals are granted

greater degrees of social acceptance and access than other individuals.”²⁷ Babb’s study investigates how in the United States, the racial category “white” intersected with national identity as a source of privilege. It examines the literary discourse of whiteness as a visible category and invites critics to recognise whiteness in literature as “an ideology”²⁸ and “a socially constructed fiction”²⁹ rather than a biological trait. For sociologist Ruth Frankenberg, whiteness consists in “the production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage.”³⁰ Frankenberg’s research, based on her interviews with forty white American women, establishes the importance of examining the personal accounts of white women to explore the construction of whiteness. This definition of whiteness is useful to this research as it attempts to approach southern whiteness as not only a racist concept but as a hierarchy of difference that works to grant privilege to a certain category of people while placing other groups who possess white skins in lower positions of social dominance. Identifying how whiteness is stratified into different grades of privilege is an elementary key in denaturalising it and reviewing its unjust practices, including its racist impact on non-whites. Glasgow’s white characters share the experience of moving from positions of normativity and advantage to marginality and disadvantage. Glasgow’s criticism of the mechanisms of whiteness in the South shows in her depiction of her white characters’ reaction to their changed position. How they evolve and gather themselves with “other” groups who share their new positions and treat those who fall outside their circles underscores Glasgow’s social critique.

Critical whiteness studies posit whiteness as a hidden or an invisible ideology which makes it difficult to study it as a specific subject position with its own set of concepts and relations. Alfred J. Lopez encapsulates Ryan Trimm’s interpretation of whiteness “as the signifier of a normalising, authorising discourse operating in a sort of temporal schism, a constant deferral of reference through which whiteness establishes itself as an originary non-identity that positions all other identities as

²⁷ Valerie Babb, *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature and Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), p. 3.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³⁰ Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters. The Social Construction of Whiteness* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 236.

racial, thus rendering whiteness both invisible and atemporal, or ‘out of time.’”³¹ The unmarked nature of whiteness allows people who benefit from it to perpetuate a system of inequality without having to acknowledge or understand its racist and unfair elements.

One way to deconstruct whiteness’s claim to normalcy and homogeneity is to focus on the social elements that constitute its influence. In their classic studies on how social movements — from essentialist racism to colour-blind liberalism — helped in confirming race as a master category in early twentieth-century America, Michael Omi and Howard Winant state that race is a process of “Othering” that is not limited to people of different races: “Gender, class, sexuality, religion, culture, language, nationality, and age, among other perceived distinctions, are frequently evoked to justify structures of inequality, differential treatment, subordinate status, and in some cases violent conflict and war.”³² These social categories, that intersect to produce different meanings of whiteness, are themselves non-uniform and situationally specific. Frankenberg explores the way in which whiteness is effected by and affects relations across individuals by arguing:

Whiteness changes over time and space and is in no way a transhistorical essence ... Thus, the range of possible ways of living whiteness, for an individual white woman in a particular time and place, is delimited by the relations of racism at that moment and in that place. And if whiteness varies spatially and temporally, it is also a relational category, one that is constructed with a range of other racial and cultural categories, with class and gender. This construction, is, however, fundamentally asymmetrical.³³

Following this rationale, this study attempts to deconstruct whiteness in six selected novels written by Glasgow. The historical epochs of these novels are important in delivering the stories they tell. They chronologically portray the South during crucial periods of its history: The Civil War, the late nineteenth century, and the turn of the twentieth century. These consecutive eras were tumultuous times for the South as it suffered economic devastation following the Emancipation, its loss of the Civil War and the subsequent Reconstruction. The early twentieth century, with immigration, the increasing turn to industrialisation, the rise of capitalism and

³¹ Alfred J. Lopez, “Introduction: Whiteness after Empire,” in *Postcolonial Whiteness: A Critical Reader on Race and Empire*, ed. Alfred J. Lopez (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), p. 22.

³² Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 105.

³³ Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters*, p. 236.

consumer culture, racial segregation and Jim Crow politics, and the global impact of World War One, proved to have had an even stronger impact on southern society.

The selection of these novels derives from the way in which they trace the development and adaption of race as an embedded category in the depiction of the South's construction of gender and class. My analysis focuses on three forms of white identity: the southern gentleman, the "poor white", and the southern Belle. My reading aims to reveal the challenges facing white characters as they negotiate gender and class ideologies of whiteness. How the dynamics of race, gender, and class continue to complicate the formation of white identity in the South is the primary focus of my reading. I conclude that Glasgow's aristocratic males offer a critique of white masculinity as a sustainable identity; her poor whites offer a counter strategy to whiteness that challenges its class exclusivity; and her female characters offer a strategy around it that negotiates with gender determinism. These characters, through acts of anxiety and guilt, adopting and abandoning, remembrance and forgetting, register their racial thinking as they negotiate their subjectivities. The racial ideologies they mediate are a major point of interest and whether these notions are approved of or condemned or just simply pass unnoticed and thus uncommented upon by Glasgow is equally significant. To understand Glasgow's position in relation to race it is important to summarise the current thinking around the issues of race, gender, and class within southern culture. The following section of this chapter will provide key contextual evidence.

The Role of Race in White America

Omi and Winant state that "[r]ace will always be at the centre of the American experience."³⁴ Their study demonstrates how books about early historical records such as James Truslow Adams's *The Epic of America* (1931) focused on times and places in American history when white supremacy needed to be asserted and reconfigured. Cementing the white American identity started in the seventeenth century as England became a dominant imperialist and colonial power and expanded its territories to the new continent. Adams's chronicle clearly reflects how the early English settlers in Virginia, the first colony in the North American continent, cast

³⁴ Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, p. 5.

their appearance and civilisation as the human norm and ideal. They viewed with condescension the Native Americans and their “rude” “houses”, “hunting and fishing” economy, and “nomadic habit of life”³⁵ and contrasted them with their self-perceived elaborate ways of living. Adams’s following statement exemplifies the early rhetoric of white supremacy that negatively stereotyped the characteristics of non-whites: “Their nervous systems were unstable and they were of a markedly hysterical make-up, peculiarly susceptible to suggestion. Cruel and revengeful, they ... [stood] pain as a matter of social convention, although when unsustained by that they were childishly lacking in self-control.”³⁶

Non-whiteness continued through the following century to be exploited to further white interests as the call for independence from the English monarchy was defined through the context of slavery. Imported black slaves were the bodies against which white Americans emphasised their freedom, independence, and their right to oppress. Babb explains how the issue of slavery contrasted later with the image of the new nation as the land of liberty, equality, and democracy:

Between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the privileging of whiteness in a multicultural nation raised many contradictions. Positioning one racial identity as superior and entitled to democratic rights that it would then be empowered to deny to others seemed, to some, at odds with a Republican discourse that asserted all to be created equal. The justification of this entitlement on the grounds of genetic and cultural superiority created an ideology that some found discordant with principles of pluralism.³⁷

White Americans, nonetheless, linked the rights to freedom and independence to the ability of self-governance and progress, citing all as exclusively white characteristics. Thus, categorising whites against non-whites helped in defending enslavement as the new republic separated itself from the old world and signed its Declaration of Independence in 1776.

Western expansion, the negative perception of non-whites as lesser humans, the increasing linking of racial difference to moral character and cognitive ability, and the strengthened European belief that real humanity and civilisation mostly held a white aspect helped in fostering an early American attitude toward national identity that solidified it along racial lines rather than geographic or ethnic ones. In *Standing at Armageddon: The United States* (1987), Nell Irvin Painter elaborates on how the

³⁵ James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1931), p. 7.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

³⁷ Babb, *Whiteness Visible*, p. 4.

concept of race continued to be incorporated in the American expansionist scheme during the nineteenth century. Non-whiteness in all its variations, with African blackness as its extreme, became associated with primitivism, lack of control, and loss of freedom, and thus was viewed with repulsion. Native Americans and Africans were ultimately excluded by the American cult of “manifest and ordinary destiny”³⁸ that rationalised the imperialist expansion of the United States on the ground of its historical and cultural superiority. Colonising and enslaving non-whites came to be interpreted as the white settlers’ attempt to overcome and control primitivism and evil, the so-called “White Man’s Burden.”³⁹ This simultaneously eased the transition of the settlers from being English to being White colonists united by a nationalist evolutionary agenda. Painter notes that during the 1890s:

Many white Americans ... renounced their Anglophobia ... to proclaim the kindredness of the English-speaking people and the natural superiority of Anglo-Saxons. The American nation became the expression of a single “race,” the Anglo-Saxon, in a view that swept under the rug the Native American Indians ... and ... blacks who had been Americans since colonial times.⁴⁰

Mathew Frye Jacobson argues in his book *Whiteness of a Different Colour* (1998) that this white racial consensus reigned until the middle of the twentieth century, when changing immigration patterns and the rise of biological and anthropological racism prompted a “fracturing of whiteness into a hierarchy of plural and scientifically determined white races”⁴¹ with the “Anglo-Saxon” population at the top of the heap. According to Jacobson, the 1920s and the new restrictive immigration laws represented an example of that change. America’s multi-ethnic society and its “probationary white groups” began to rearrange into a “reconsolidated” form of whiteness which “granted the scientific stamp of authenticity as the unitary Caucasian race.”⁴² The “earlier era’s Celts, Slavs, Hebrews, Iberics, and Saracens, among others, had become the Caucasians so familiar to our own visual economy and racial lexicon”,⁴³ but whose ethnic origins would not rise to the superior category of the Anglo-Saxons.

³⁸ Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States* (New York: Norton, 1987), p. 150.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁴¹ Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Colour: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 7.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

In Glasgow's early twentieth-century South, however, the fundamental dichotomy between blacks and whites was still powerfully reinforced by the southern practices of lynching and segregation. In *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (1998), Grace Elizabeth Hale argues that the practices of lynching and segregation during the Jim Crow era were primarily the result of southerners confronting their diminishing post-war political and economic autonomy. Hale maintains that the South's anti-black practices ultimately revealed its inability to think about race without projecting its "own concoction of guilt and nostalgia"⁴⁴ on black bodies that bore the heavy cost of the South's investment in white supremacy. Similarly, segregation was the South's way of incorporating change without losing its status as the region that most exemplified stabilities of place, creating "geographical anchors"⁴⁵ across the southern landscape that sought to fix race in the face of an increasingly mobile nation.

To understand Glasgow's views on race and racism, it is useful to follow the sequence of events and thoughts that complicated her point of view. Glasgow's memoir, *The Woman Within: An Autobiography* (1954), details how her childhood shaped her racial perspectives. Glasgow's earliest race memories provide a framework to understand what will develop as the meaning of racial difference in her fiction. Her recollections demonstrate the paradoxical significance of non-whites as both an evidence of and a source of threat to white privilege. This point is illustrated through her depiction of two black cooks who worked for her family when she was young. Glasgow emphasises them not as individuals, but as colourful figments of white imagination and functions of white womanhood. For example, she highlights the exotic difference of the female black body in her recollection of Aunt Jane, the cook: "a tall, straight, handsome Negress, who wore large loops of gold in her shiny black ears."⁴⁶ Despite the need to economise through the difficult years of Reconstruction, Glasgow's mother always refused to dismiss her cook since she "belonged"⁴⁷ to her before the Civil War. Glasgow admits that her Mammy Lizzie Jones nurtured not only her literary abilities but also primarily nurtured her "enduring

⁴⁴ Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage, 1998), p. 10.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁴⁶ Ellen Glasgow, *The Woman Within: An Autobiography*, 2nd ed. (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1994), p. 28.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

kinship” with nature and “all inarticulate creatures” that both women shared.⁴⁸ When Lizzie left, Glasgow could only “choke back” her “strangled sobs.”⁴⁹ However, as the chronicles of Glasgow’s literary and personal life progress, her preoccupations with voicing her maturing ideologies leave her Mammy behind, merely hovering, and unacknowledged.

As characteristic of the white literary tradition, Glasgow states that her loyal and content black characters were not the creation of her imagination: “For several of my Negro characters, I went directly to life; even in my childhood, such servants were not uncommon, and I have tried to render them faithfully.”⁵⁰ Recent historians conversely recognise that intimate relations between white children and female black help such as Glasgow’s cook and Mammy are, in fact, a southern creation aiming to ease white conscience over racist practices and to reclaim the past South. James Baldwin points out that the idealised relation between white children and their black caretakers could hardly be the true reality because a black woman caring for white children “knows how bitterly her black family is endangered by her white one.”⁵¹ Hale connects the Mammy’s mythology with the South’s progressive years, during which many southerners felt the need to redeem their past. Hale observes that whites’ belief in Mammy’s love and loyalty was critical in justifying the South’s regional past, making it usable in the present for literary works.⁵²

Glasgow, however, was not oblivious to the evils of slavery. In her autobiography, she recalls the sound of her mother’s voice saying that even in the midst of the Civil War horrors, a wave of thankfulness rushed over her when she heard that the slaves were free. Though Glasgow maintains that “the few servants we inherited were happy”, she is still able to see that “there were others. There was the auction block; there was the slave trader; there were the parted families; there were the returned fugitives; there were the rice plantations in the Deep South.”⁵³ Glasgow

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 27.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 31.

⁵⁰ Ellen Glasgow, *A Certain Measure: An Interpretation of Prose Fiction* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1943), pp. 36-37.

⁵¹ James Baldwin, “The Devil Finds Work,” in *Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Library of America, 1998), p. 533.

⁵² Hale, *Making Whiteness*, p. 101. For more interpretation of the ideology of the Mammy see Cheryl Thurber’s “The Development of the Mammy Image and Mythology,” in *Southern Women: Histories and Identities*, ed. Virginia Bernhard, Betty Brandon, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, and Theda Perdue (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1992), pp. 87-108.

⁵³ Glasgow, *The Woman Within*, p. 40.

was equally disappointed with the silence of southern letters towards the slaves' hardships: "Even those Southerners (and there were many of these in Virginia) who regarded slavery as an anachronism rather than an iniquity, and looked ahead reluctantly to a doomed social order, lacked either the courage or the genius that rides in the whirlwind and directs the storm."⁵⁴ Trained into a benumbing life of geniality and pleasantry, southerners' inability to discern the injustices of slavery was characteristic.

In her novels, Glasgow consciously wrote against the stereotypic romanticising and buffooning of black people that she disliked in contemporary southern fiction. She states that even in her earliest books she intended "to avoid the romantic delusion, so prevalent in fiction at the turn of the century, that the South was inhabited exclusively by aristocrats and picturesque Negroes, who afforded what used to be called 'comic relief' in the novel."⁵⁵ In both her autobiography and novels, the black families she and her white characters mixed with during childhood were "fine Negroes, intelligent, thrifty, hard-working, and greatly superior to the 'poor whites'" who were "regarded with merited contempt."⁵⁶ However, as this study shows, the most negative aspect of Glasgow's novels is their episodic use of stereotyped black characters as comedy-providers. Although the novels contain numerous observations as to how African Americans are oppressed or marginalised in the South, their occasionally stereotypical depiction is problematic and could lead the reader to overlook the social and racial critique embedded in the texts.

However, I suggest that positioning her black characters as a picturesque backdrop often associated with the South's rich soil or lush tobacco crops could be Glasgow's political strategy to critique the white rhetoric of black threat. In this sense Glasgow's literary choice of marginalising the role of African Americans in the new South may be understood as a counter-narrative to white supremacy. I base my suggestion on Glasgow's essay on the political scene in Virginia, in which she invites Virginians to break away from the racist policies of the Democratic Party and to vote for the Republican Party as the party which "stands for the moral issues."⁵⁷

⁵⁴ Ellen Glasgow, "The Novel in the South," in *Ellen Glasgow's Reasonable Doubts: A Collection of Her Writings*, ed. Julius Rowan Raper (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), p. 70.

⁵⁵ Glasgow, *A Certain Measure*, p. 167.

⁵⁶ Glasgow, *The Woman Within*, p. 52.

⁵⁷ Ellen Glasgow, "My Fellow Virginians," in *Ellen Glasgow's Reasonable Doubts*, p. 58. In 1921 elections, the Republican Party called for poll-tax repeal, election-law reform, right of labour to

In her attack on the Democratic Party, Glasgow refuses to accept the party's manipulation of white anxiety about the racial other to dominate the political scene. Glasgow argues that in the first decades of the twentieth century, the race question has been "the Mr Mugglewuggle" of the Jim Crow era. She explains that every time southerners became dissatisfied with the policies of the Democratic Party, they would be warned that "if we didn't look out and behave" and vote for the Democrats, the black-enfranchising policies of the Republicans would enable African Americans to "pop up and get us." However, Glasgow maintains that African Americans, even after their emancipation, essentially remain "a small and ineffectual minority ... without education, without experience in government, without property, and without influence of any sort." Glasgow invites southerners to free themselves from the racist fiction of black threat as a "phantom" that southerners have created "and then given it a name and let it rule over" them. For Glasgow, the Republicans' suggested reforms are "the beginning of wisdom" as they target the interest of all Virginians and don't exploit "the fear of the people" to control the political scene.⁵⁸

In the previous quote, Glasgow tacitly admits the centrality of the white experience that secured her position as a white person at the expense of African Americans' rights. By stating that blacks have no access to their democratic rights, Glasgow disputes their agency, in the sense of their ability to advance and threaten white entitlement. Her choice to emphasise their silence indicates her acceptance of the facts of history that deprived them from having an equal access to power and selfhood. However, her unwillingness to credit white anxiety is an earnest attempt to fight complicity in the Democratic political strategies of whiteness that aimed to create a myth of white uniformity. Democrats aimed to create an emotional bond of fear between whites through stigmatising non-whites as threatening figures to justify excluding them from southern democracy.⁵⁹ As this thesis attempts to demonstrate,

organise, better schools and roads, and a business administration. All these principles were meant to destroy white supremacy. See *Ellen Glasgow's Reasonable Doubts*, pp. 55-58.

⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 58-60. "Mr Mugglewuggle" is an imaginary figure of terror Glasgow was afraid of as a child.

⁵⁹ In her book *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), Sara Ahmed analyses institutional texts from the United Kingdom and Australia to show how those who want to marginalise certain social aspects such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and so on, do so by bonding the society's majority through negative feelings of fear and hatred towards the different "others" who are fixed with despised characteristics. Stigmatising minorities becomes the majority's way to define, sustain, and — most importantly — separate itself from minorities. Ahmed emphasises, "Emotions provide a script, certainly: you become the 'you' if you accept the invitation to align yourself with the nation, and against those others who threaten to take the nation away" (p. 12).

Glasgow's narrative strategy to comment on the South's racial discourse was not to openly condemn racism but to attempt the un-working of whiteness strategies, to expose its dynamic. She does so without trying to mark herself as a radical thinker but at the same time as someone who is aware of her accountability. Glasgow admits her culpability in perpetuating the mechanism of homogenous white policies: "the fault is yours and mine because we have made no effort to free ourselves from a tyranny of ... men who think the same thoughts."⁶⁰

Patterson cites Glasgow's feminist loyalties as another explanation for her nonparticipation in anti-racist campaigns. She states that in the second stage of the women's suffrage movement in the South, roughly between 1909-1920, southern suffragists rarely raised the race issue and were almost exclusively on the defensive against those who argued that the tenets of the suffragists' movement would eventually unite with those of anti-racism, thus jeopardising the newly re-established order of white supremacy in the South.⁶¹ In accordance with Patterson's reasoning, Omi and Winant cite the break of the white women's suffrage movement with the black freedom movement around the turn of the twentieth century as an example of the rupturing relationship between white women and black rights. Suffragists acknowledged denying blacks voting rights as a condition for the southern states' ratification of the 19th Amendment. Black women activists like Ida B. Wells, Mary Church Terrell, and Anna Julia Cooper condemned this abandonment as a betrayal of their cause.⁶²

During Reconstruction, Glasgow avoided the prevailing obvious racist portrayals of African American characters in her fiction and sometimes made public statements that criticised the popular racist way of life in the Jim Crow South. She once mentioned that she would have been an abolitionist had she lived before the war.⁶³ The family business of iron works relied heavily on slave labour and then on prison labour and was a source of anxiety and social debt for Glasgow. As Goodman notes, "In various manifestations, economic and sexual, the thing not named but

⁶⁰ Glasgow, "My Fellow Virginians," pp. 60-66.

⁶¹ Patterson, *Beyond the Gibson Girl*, p. 132.

⁶² Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, p. 108.

⁶³ Godbold, *Ellen Glasgow*, p. 244.

imagined—the ‘real’ relationship between her family and their black employees—would become for Glasgow a moral debt and the subject of fiction.”⁶⁴

A more intimate reading of Glasgow’s biography could reveal her personal investment in the interpretation of racial difference in her novels. Glasgow’s life events and experiences which are mentioned below are related. They assume specific meanings of whiteness and blackness that are current at her time and are linked to both Glasgow and southern black people’s lived experiences. For Glasgow, whiteness symbolically personifies moments of unknown terror. People who come in contact with it are exposed to death, anxiety, scepticism, and failure of control and peace. Blackness corresponds to these moments, correlating racial difference with times of suffering and powerlessness. Through fictional episodes in novels such as *The Battle-Ground*, *The Voice of the People*, and *In This Our Life*, the black characters’ lack of control of their lives is made explicit in the incidents that violently detach them from their known worlds. Their difficult and traumatising experiences are clearly signalled as being linked to white oppression and its endemic violence.

Glasgow speculates that she could not have been older than two when, lying contentedly in her mother’s arms, she looked toward the window to see “a face without a body staring at me, a vacant face, round, pallid, grotesque, malevolent.”⁶⁵ Uncertain subsequently about the precise nature of this vision, Glasgow wondered why it had the power to “pin me to life, as a pin fixes a butterfly.”⁶⁶ Glasgow narrates how this vision kept reoccurring as she suffered the loss of three of her family members: her mother to typhoid, her brother and brother in law to suicide. Later on in her life, while anxiously anticipating the publication of her first novel, Glasgow had the same vision when she suffered the death of her lover Gerald B, and made her own suicide attempt in the midst of the nightmare of World War One.

Glasgow employs blackness to capture the sense of distress and helplessness she felt through her traumatic experience. In this she subverts the idea of blackness as a source of violence and danger. In her seminal literary study, Toni Morrison reflects on the construction of blackness by American writers since antebellum times. She

⁶⁴ Goodman, *Ellen Glasgow*, p. 12. According to Glasgow’s biographers such as Goodman, Godbold, and Raper, the unnamed relations between Glasgow’s family and black workers involved Glasgow’s father, rumoured to be a notorious philanderer whose sexual transgressions included miscegenation with “mulatto” women.

⁶⁵ Glasgow, *The Woman Within*, p. xx.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

concludes that the disturbing image of black people aimed to satisfy the whites' need to rationalise their expansion schemes and their exploitation of dark people through slavery. The result was "a fabricated brew of darkness, otherness, alarm, and desire that is uniquely American."⁶⁷ Glasgow's complaint about her father with his lack of compassion and the masculine world of cruelty and violence that victimised both her and her mother extends to include black characters. She emphasises the meaning of her childhood as a state of vulnerability and powerlessness when she connects her own wary life to two other significant memories, and both significantly involve blackness as equivalent to powerlessness and defencelessness: the pursuit by boys of a helpless and terrified black dog, and the forced removal of a poverty-stricken black man. In her account of the first incident, Glasgow is saddened by the sight of "a large black dog flee[ing] in terror". "The dog passes me; he hesitates", Glasgow recounts, "He turns his head and looks at me, and he flees on."⁶⁸ Glasgow's state of powerlessness reoccurs in her encounter with Uncle Henry who is taken by force to the alms-house: "I am standing ... watching the struggles of an old Negro, Uncle Henry, as he is brought out from his cellar and put into the waggon from the almshouse ... I see only that he is very old, that he totters, that he shakes ... he mumbles ... he struggles; he fights off men who hold him."⁶⁹ Glasgow reemphasises her inability to change the situation: "Nothing that I can do will stop them from taking the old man away ... nothing that I can do will make the world different."⁷⁰

In Glasgow's memoir and novels, female and black powerlessness is a response to the cruelty of a world where imbalances of gender, race, and class encourage their despairing attitude. The world's malice — the face by the window — overwhelms any individual attempt to comprehend it, much less to encounter it. "The cruelty of children, the harshness of health and happiness to the weak, the blindness of the pitiful—these were my terrors", Glasgow asserts later.⁷¹ Glasgow's emphasis makes it difficult not to read her inability to speak her fear symbolically. Her failures at self-expression combined with her identification with inarticulate dark individuals and creatures force the reader to recognise the complex relationship between

⁶⁷ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Random House, 1992), p. 38.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

blackness and helplessness and silence, between whiteness and violence. She, her mother, the blacks, the animals, did not choose silence; they are victims of white patriarchal violence that reinforces their cultural powerlessness.⁷²

The importance of incorporating analysis of Glasgow's autobiography and essays is that it shows what she as the author, not her characters, thought on the topic of race. Hence, these accounts inform my analysis of Glasgow's fiction. Glasgow's non-fiction demonstrates that she had very pronounced ideas on race and the values that cluster round its dominant construction. Similarly, Glasgow's novels strive to stake out an anti-racist position by dramatising the life experience of the different social groups that make up the social ladder of whiteness. Glasgow depicts the challenge white women and poor whites pose to white authority, causing it to change over time. At the same time, she fixes non-whites at the bottom of the South's social structures as an acknowledgement of their powerlessness to escape the bonds of white prejudice.

Whiteness Theories and Literary Analysis

Julius Raper, the author of the most comprehensive studies of Glasgow, points to the importance of Glasgow's racial, gender and class identities in explaining the apparent incompatibility of her positions.⁷³ Raper notes that when it comes to discussing the racial politics in Glasgow's fiction, the situation is complex, and the reviews contemporaneous with Glasgow herself provide no help.⁷⁴ On the subject of race, Glasgow's views are judged as restrained compared to writers of the next generation such as Thomas Wolfe or William Faulkner, and the reviewers let this restraint pass with little comment. Reviewers followed Glasgow's own emphasis, thereby neglecting the importance of her silence.⁷⁵ Raper, however, argues that when

⁷² My analysis of the meaning of blackness in Glasgow's memoir is inspired by Christopher Freeburg's *Melville and the Idea of Blackness: Race and Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century America* (2012). Though Freeburg's book is specifically focused on racial contests and blackness in Melville's work, it forecasts the broader scope of analysing blackness as an instrument to signify "the violence of subjects' experience of existential limits and the destruction of subjects' social viability" (p. xi).

⁷³ Raper's scholarship includes: *Without Shelter: The Early Career of Ellen Glasgow* (1971), *From the Sunken Garden: The Fiction of Ellen Glasgow, 1916—1945* (1980), and his collection of Glasgow's prose *Ellen Glasgow's Reasonable Doubts: A Collection of Her Writings* (1988).

⁷⁴ Julius Rowan Raper, "Ellen Glasgow: Gaps in the Record," in *Regarding Ellen Glasgow: Essays for Contemporary Readers*, ed. Welford Dunaway Taylor and George C. Longest (Richmond, Virginia: Library of Virginia, 2001), pp. 127-37.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

Glasgow exercises restraint in her presentation of southern race relations, she is following the conventions of realistic fiction: that is, she is mirroring the denials of her white characters. He further adds that when so many reviews neglect such important matters, they perpetuate the conspiracy of silence that formerly surrounded sexual relations between races in the South, whether those relationships involved exploitation or arose from mutual consent. Moreover, Raper regards Glasgow's silences regarding race as most revealing of white complicity, from the death of Nickolas Burr as he attempts to stop a lynching in *The Voice of the People* to Parry Clay's false imprisonment in *In This Our Life*. Raper also cites African American characters, Mandy in *Virginia* (1913), Memoria in *The Sheltered Life* (1932), and Parry, as the most powerful and efficiently sketched minor figures Glasgow portrayed. Through these characters, she deftly dramatises the existence and effects of miscegenation in southern culture.⁷⁶

Among whiteness studies that anticipated Raper's proposition and connected the literal representation or depiction of non-whites with white experience is Frankenberg's *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism* (1997).⁷⁷ In this edited collection, Frankenberg states that white southerners subjected non-whites to "meticulous scrutiny," more defamatory than celebratory in most cases while positioning themselves and their region as the microcosm of the nation. In the southern "trope-ical family", the white man is "[a] strong, dominant, arbiter of truth, and self-designated protector of white womankind, defender of the nation/territory (and here defence of the nation and its honour often entails defending white woman's racial chastity)." The white woman is "frail, vulnerable, delicate, and sexually pure but at times led 'astray.'" Blackness is the available trope serving as a connection between racial and sexual otherness. African Americans are sub-humans incapable of reasoning, control, and progress. Black women are seen as promiscuous and black men are seen as sexually obsessed with white women. An alternative narrative is that both black men and women serve the role of the primitive, stereotyped as closer to

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 129.

⁷⁷ Hale's aforementioned study also employs the discussion of literary tropes in her discussion of the South's cultural history during the Jim Crow era.

nature compared to whites who are corrupted by living in the “civilised” world. Consequently, they are pictured as spontaneous and simplistic.⁷⁸

According to Frankenberg, some of the most prominent critical positions within whiteness studies approach it in terms of identity formation or subject-hood, in terms of the historical and materialist conditions that mapped out the salience of whiteness in the formation of nationhood and democratic rights, and in terms of behaviour or public performance.⁷⁹ These three positions inform the discussion of whiteness in this study as it analyses the formation and failings of masculine identity in *The Battle-Ground* and *The Deliverance*; the struggle of the poor white to claim his democratic rights in *The Voice of the People* and *One Man in His Time*; and femininity as it deviates from its anticipated behaviour in *Vein of Iron* and *In This Our Life*.

One of the most influential studies in white identity formation is Richard Dyer’s *White* (1997), which focuses on the presentation of white bodies in popular culture. Dyer argues that becoming white means aspiring to a self “without properties.” White subjects strive to attain a position of “disinterest – abstraction, distance, separation, objectivity – which creates a public sphere that is the mark of civilisation.” This abstract conception of selfhood leads white people to view themselves as “everything and nothing.” Since “nothing” is a notion that may be interpreted as “non-existence, or death,” whiteness cannot exist without an “other” against which it can attain its selfhood.⁸⁰ Morrison’s above-mentioned study complements Dyer’s in its focus on the role of non-whites in building American whiteness. Morrison invites researchers of race relations in America to attempt to “avert the critical gaze from the racial object to the racial subject; from the described and imagined to the describers and imaginers; from the serving to the served.”⁸¹ Morrison defines Africanism in American literature as the “vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfilment of destiny.”⁸²

⁷⁸ Ruth Frankenberg, “Introduction: Local Whitenesses, Localizing Whiteness,” in *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, ed. Ruth Frankenberg (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), pp. 1-12.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-3.

⁸⁰ Richard Dyer, *White* (New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 38-39.

⁸¹ Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, p. 90.

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 52.

In America, the Africanist presence is the foil for all that defines one as American. Therefore, by definition, the Africanist presence is none of those things. It exists only to be negated.

In order to examine this Africanist presence and its consequences in establishing whiteness, Morrison lists several areas needing critical examination to challenge white constructions of Africanist presence. The first area is the use of the Africanist character as surrogate and enabler. Here, Africanism is self-reflexive. In other words, it allows white characters to think about who and what they are by thinking about who and what they are not. Whites are free, powerful, moral, civilised, and so on because Africanist characters are not. A related notion is the use of the Africanist idiom to establish difference and signal modernity. Here, Morrison refers to the politics of white renderings of black speech. Some of the examples she offers include the desire to render Africanist characters as alien and uneducated, to reinforce class distinctions, to serve as a marker for illegal sexuality, and to signify white urbanity and sophistication. As a result, the Africanist character is used “to enforce the invention and implications of whiteness”, and critics need to examine how the Africanist presence is used to justify white assertions of power. A final area is how the Africanist narrative is used as a meditation on white humanity — in other words, how the Africanist character’s narrative of her own plight is used as a vehicle for a white character’s meditation on his own place in humanity.⁸³

A couple of recent studies have tackled how in Glasgow’s novels non-whiteness is employed as a mirroring device in her white characters’ construction of themselves. Susan P. Wright’s essay “Contextualising African American Characters in Glasgow’s *The Battle-Ground*” (2007) examines the Virginian upper-class as they stand up to the changes brought about by the Civil War, particularly the South’s changing economy after the emancipation of slaves. Wright affirms that Glasgow recognises the truth that without the existence of slaves, the aristocracy would not have existed. Glasgow also interprets the tradition of maintaining the distance between white aristocracy and black slaves and servants as the southern way of maintaining its class-bound identity in a changing world.⁸⁴ In her book *The Plantation in the Post Slavery Imagination* (2009), Elizabeth Christine Russ discusses the image

⁸³ Ibid., pp. 51-53.

⁸⁴ Susan P. Wright, “Contextualising African American Characters in Glasgow’s *The Battle-Ground*,” *The Southern Literary Journal*, 2 (2007), 24-36.

of the “mulatto” in Glasgow’s *The Sheltered Life*. In the novel, Jenny Blair falls in love with George Birdsong after witnessing him save the life of a black child. The child turns out to be the son of Memoria, a biracial woman who is George’s mistress. Memoria’s home becomes Jenny and George’s meeting place and she also plays an indirect role in exposing their affair. Russ argues that the notable absence of Memoria in the narrative, despite her central role, is reflective of the anxiety the southern culture felt towards notions of miscegenation and the instability the mulatto represents in the white/black dichotomy. By marginalising Memoria Glasgow reflects her society’s tendency to evade the threat by simply eliding it, even if superficially, from its consciousness.⁸⁵

Social and Literary Gradation of Whiteness

In this section I summarise the characterisation of the poor white as a challenging figure to the notion of white supremacy. I then move to discussing Glasgow’s literary representation of class struggles and the few studies that examine her approach. Race and class helped in shaping early America since non-white labour, crucial to the territorial expansion and economic development of the nation, was consistently undermined by the rhetoric of whiteness in its attempt to deter inter-class conflict and create a sense of solidarity between white Americans. Labour and class studies such as David Roediger’s *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (1991) and Theodore Allen’s *The Invention of the White Race* (1994) examine how economic and social imperatives helped in giving rise to whiteness in the United States.

African slaves were brought to Jamestown in 1619 to build the lands of the English settlers. Eighteenth-century America witnessed an increasing number of immigrants from different white ethnicities besides England. Welsh, Irish, and Scottish immigrants sold their labour as indentured servants for many years, demonstrating conditions similar to African slaves. Initially, those working-class subjects, and other white ethnicities from southern and eastern Europe, had seldom been deemed white. Allen cites how in 1844 for example, the Supreme Court declared

⁸⁵ Elizabeth Christine Russ, *The Plantation in the Post Slavery Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 36-64.

that the immigrants were legally treated like Native Americans as aliens whose citizenship could only be acquired by a “process of individual naturalisation.”⁸⁶ However, the postbellum industrialised South demanded an expanded labour force, and thus its doors were kept open to white immigrants who perceived little difference between their situation and that of African Americans.

Nevertheless, the acquired citizenship of black labour after the Emancipation and the economic crisis of Reconstruction, resulting in later strikes and labour conflict during the 1870s and the 1890s, required the gradual whitening of European labour. As Roediger notes, this was not accomplished solely by legislative decrees but also by the white workers themselves in their attempt to establish their identities as waged labourers in opposition to black slaves. By parodying black characteristics in minstrelsy and travelling theatre and excluding them in labour unions, “[w]hite workers could, and did, define and accept their class positions by fashioning identities as ‘not slaves’ and as ‘not Blacks.’”⁸⁷

According to Dyer, whiteness must not only be made visible; it must be made strange.⁸⁸ One way to do this is to focus on social subjects and groups that do not get the rights or wages of their whiteness despite the nation’s claim of a homogenous whiteness encapsulating all whites in social and economic privilege. Literary studies such as Susan J. Tracy’s *In the Master’s Eye: Representations of Women, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature* (1995), and Matthew Taylor Wray’s *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (2006) zero in on the South’s economically marginalised group of poor whites or “white trash”. They study the stereotyped treatment of the poor white in literary texts as an uneducated, violent, poverty-stricken individual who is criminally minded, sexually perverse, and reactionary in his/her politics. A major focus of these studies is the oppositional stance of the poor white as white and marginalised. Tracy notes that in sharing the racial and gender traits of the dominant southern planters, the poor white male “was more threatening”⁸⁹ to them than women and blacks. Wray similarly comments that “the term [white trash] reveals itself as an expression of fundamental tensions and

⁸⁶ Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race* Vol. 1 (London: Verso, 1994), p. 47.

⁸⁷ David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 13.

⁸⁸ Dyer, *White*, p. 4.

⁸⁹ Susan J. Tracy, *In the Master’s Eye: Representations of Women, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), p. 17.

deep structural antinomies: between the sacred and the profane, purity and impurity, morality and immorality, cleanliness and dirt.”⁹⁰

First coined in 1883, eugenics started to gain national attention during the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, coinciding with the South’s depression years that started after the war and persisted until the Great Depression in 1929. Incorporating scientific racism into ideologies of class difference, eugenicists believed white America was endangered by the inferior genetic stock of its poor rural whites, mostly residing in the southern states. Extending social Darwinist theories of ethnic selection to a class-based one, American eugenicists went so far as to support the practices of segregation and sterilisation of lower-class whites. They defended their procedures as an attempt to face the threat of “the familial growth, and the sexual propagation of poor Southern whites”, and to create “a stronger nation.”⁹¹

Glasgow tackles the question of the environmental versus the genetic in her novels. She appears to reinforce the existing stereotype when she refers in her autobiography to poor whites who were “regarded with merited contempt”⁹² by genteel southern families. Glasgow points to a theme prevalent in her novels when she equates positive representations of black characters with degrading portrayals of white ones as she further adds, “But, then, the Negroes on such a plantation possessed security, and the ‘poor whites’ possessed nothing but the freedom of malnutrition. As for us, we would play eagerly with little-coloured children, but we were ashamed of association with the ‘poor whites.’”⁹³

However, detailing the unfortunate position of white characters was Glasgow’s way of attacking the southern aristocratic tradition of idealism. Glasgow attributes an “evasive idealism” to the genteel South, a contradictory phrase suggesting that middle and upper-class society had attempted to reach some standard of perfection only by eluding the harsh reality of its marginalised people, the “negligible minorities” of non-whites, women, and poor whites.⁹⁴ Glasgow believed that for the South to recreate its culture it needed to transform its stale traditions and

⁹⁰ Matthew Taylor Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 2.

⁹¹ Ashley Craig Lancaster, *Southern Literary Studies: Angelic Mother and the Predatory Seductress: Poor White Women in Southern Literature of the Great Depression* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), p. 47.

⁹² Glasgow, *The Woman Within*, p. 52.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Glasgow, “The Novel in the South,” p. 71.

adapt to changing gender roles, increasing racial strife, developing industrial economies, and emerging technologies. The agents of this dynamic will not be genteel southerners, with their hypocritical and dying traditions, but men of the working and lower classes. Glasgow states in an interview that what the South needed to rise again is “blood” and “irony”. “Blood it needed because southern culture had strayed too far away from its roots in the earth; it had grown thin and pale; it was satisfied to exist on borrowed ideas, to copy instead of create.”⁹⁵ And irony is an indispensable ingredient of the critical vision; it is the safest antidote to sentimental decay.”⁹⁶ In “blood” Glasgow was calling for the South to cure itself by eliminating the old generation’s bad “genes” and creating new individuals able to rise up to new challenges. “Irony” was the intellectual device that might be used to expose the fallacy of southern ideals that privileged male, middle and high-class whites without resorting to melodramatic sentimentality and pity for those marginalised. Glasgow opts for irony as a most befitting literary and social tool because it further disengages the modern southern writer from the sentimental tradition of his/her predecessors. The use of irony also enables the writer to probe into individual consciousness as well as observing public institutions with detached objectivity. Employing irony in social criticism consequently helps in restructuring society on a personal and a public level.

Glasgow balances the importance of the individual and the environmental when she describes the road to improvement and heightened political and social awareness as a personal and public one. She argues for a link between democracy and the ability for the individual to create their own destiny stating that “true democracy consists chiefly in the general recognition of the truth that will create destiny” because “[i]t consists in the knowledge that all people should possess an opportunity to use their will to control—to create—destiny, and that they should know that they have this opportunity. They must be educated to the use of the will, and they must be taught

⁹⁵ Glasgow here seems to echo George Santayana’s criticism of America’s intellectual tradition. Santayana believed that the individuality and freedom embraced by early Americans turned into meaningless ideals that were held but not exercised by their middle and upper-class descendants, thus losing their influence on the current generation. In his lecture “The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy” (1911), Santayana states, “I don’t think the hereditary philosophy of America has done much to atrophy the natural activities of the inhabitants; the wise child has not missed the joys of the youth or manhood; but what has happened is that the hereditary philosophy has grown stale” (p. 4). See *The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy and Character and Opinion in the United States* (2009).

⁹⁶ Glasgow, *A Certain Measure*, p. 28.

that character can create destiny.”⁹⁷ Glasgow clarifies her position when she states that “environment inevitably has its effect on the character, and, therefore, on will, and, therefore, on destiny. You can so oppress and depress the body that the will has no chance. True democracy provides for all equal opportunities for the exercise of will.”⁹⁸ While admitting the importance of social, economic, and political equality, Glasgow suggests that freeing individual consciousness from prejudices is what motivates change.

Duane R. Carr’s “Heroism and Tragedy: The Rise of the Redneck in Glasgow’s Fiction” (1996) discusses how ideas of character/environment shape Glasgow’s fiction. Carr analyses Glasgow’s characterisation of Maria Fletcher in *The Deliverance* and Nickolas Burr in *The Voice of the People* and concludes that Glasgow’s portrayal was not a progressive one. While representing the two protagonists as examples of lower-class individuals who are attempting to escape social stigma, Glasgow credits their undertaking only with relative success. Carr maintains that Glasgow’s fascination with the theories of Darwin ultimately led her to portray unsatisfactory subjects who, after all, did not possess in their genes “a better strain” that would have helped them “to defeat the centripetal forces of long inbreeding.”⁹⁹ David W. Coffey’s “Ellen Glasgow’s *In This Our Life*: The Novel and the Film” (2001) delineates the major differences between the literary and film versions and offers some suggestions to why the film version strayed from its literary source.¹⁰⁰ Of particular interest to Coffey is the depiction of the African American characters in Glasgow’s original and in the subsequent motion picture. Coffey argues that Glasgow was a genetic determinist in the nature versus nurture controversy; she tended to side with those who argued that the determining factor in shaping a person was inheritance rather than environment. Coffey argues that Glasgow was inclined to credit the achievements of her characters to their “white blood” thus downplaying the impact of racism on limiting the development of non-white characters.¹⁰¹ He concludes that the African American character of Parry Clay is contrived in the novel primarily to advance the plot and is ultimately denied the kind of inner strength with

⁹⁷ Ellen Glasgow, “‘Evasive Idealism’ in Literature,” in *Ellen Glasgow’s Reasonable Doubts*, ed. Julius Rowan Raper (Baton Rouge: University of California, 1988), pp. 125-26.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 126.

⁹⁹ Duane R. Carr, “Heroism and Tragedy: The Rise of the Redneck in Glasgow’s Fiction,” in *Mississippi Quarterly*, 49. 2 (1996), 336.

¹⁰⁰ Coffey, “Ellen Glasgow’s *In This Our Life*”, pp. 117-126.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

which Glasgow endows the white female character Roy Timberlake. However, I argue in my discussion of Glasgow's novels that she repeatedly sets a contrast between the better prospects for her white characters who receive encouragement from those around them, and the much less hopeful expectations for black characters, like Parry, against the forces that oppose them because of their race.

Gendered Policies and their Literary Representation

Gendered practices were as important as racial practices in the early formation of American history and culture. The following section summarises how white women were excluded from white privilege and mentions some of the literary studies that challenge white gendered ideals, including Glasgow's novels. Omi and Winant comment that "[j]ust as there was a 'racial frontier' in the settlement of the United States, so too was there a 'gender frontier.'"¹⁰² They link race to gender and non-whites to white women when they comment that "in political and legal theory, the sexual contract and the racial contract have been extensively compared."¹⁰³ They cite Ann Laura Stoler who emphasises that it is not possible to disconnect the politics of gender from race: "Intimate domains—sex, sentiment, domestic arrangement, and child rearing—figure in the making of racial categories and in the management of imperial rule", thus conflating the domestic and the political.¹⁰⁴

The early history of the North American continent witnessed sexual encounters between the English settlers and the Native Americans. Within the institution of slavery, rape and miscegenation were routine practices that were rarely attacked because they were woven within the racist rhetoric of the availability of non-white bodies. Joel Williamson notes that these interracial sexual practices were linked to the regulation of the image of white femininity. Williamson notes, "Perhaps pedestalising the white mistress of the plantation was an attempt to salve the wound that had been done, and was being daily done deeper, to the Southern lady by husbands, sons, and fathers in liaisons with slave women."¹⁰⁵ Under the rhetoric of idealising white women, their autonomy, intellect, and bodies were strictly restricted

¹⁰² Omi and Winant, *Racial Formation*, p. 80.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹⁰⁵ Joel Williamson, *A Rage for Order: Black/White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 37.

by white men who ruled them as patriarchs, just as they ruled the slaves as masters. Prioritising the central role of the white male property owner led to neglecting white women as participants in the public sphere in the same manner in which slaves were disenfranchised.

Feminist scholarship such as Kathryn Lee Seidel's *The Southern Belle in the American Novel* (1985), and *Tomorrow is Another Day* by Anne Goodwyn Jones foregrounds the role of gender in justifying the structures of inequality in the South.¹⁰⁶ Affluent southern men employed the ideal of masculine gallantry in the service and protection of feminine purity to rescue themselves and their antebellum legacy from the accusations of savagery associated with slavery. In the new South, white women needed protection from lower-class whites in addition to black men to cover up for the social inequalities created by the capitalist system. These studies argue that the demand of the South on its women to be pure and chaste was challenged by literary works that demonstrated how female characters who repressed their physical needs consequently engaged in a range of negative behaviour because of their denial of the physical. These women mirror the paradox in their white society, whereby the attempt to cling to gender ideals ultimately push women into sexual behaviour stereotypically associated with non-white women. Mason Stokes's reading of southern texts, *The Color of Sex: Whiteness, Heterosexuality and Fictions of White Supremacy* (2001), and Vron Ware's study of colonialism, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (2015) similarly focus on nineteenth-century texts and the role of whiteness and white supremacy in these texts.¹⁰⁷ They analyse the image of idealised white femininity as the direct result of characteristically southern constructions of race,

¹⁰⁶ Works discussed in Seidel's study include: Isa Glenn's *Southern Charm* (1928), William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1929) and *Sanctuary* (1931), Ellen Glasgow's *They Stood to Folly* (1929) and *The Sheltered Life*, Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936), Kyle Onstott's *Mandingo* (1958) and *Drum* (1962), Margaret Walker's *Jubilee* (1966), Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976), Lonnie Coleman's *Beulah Land* (1973), Barbara Terry Johnson's *Delta Blood* (1977), Phyllis Whitney's *Poinciana* (1980), and Juana Linsey's *Glorious Angel* (1982). Ammons's study reads the works of southern writers Augusta Jane Evans, Grace King, Kate Chopin, Mary Johnson, Ellen Glasgow, Frances Newman and Margaret Mitchell.

¹⁰⁷ Stokes analyses Charles Jacobs Peterson's *The Cabin and Parlor* (1852), Metta V. Victor's *Maum Guinea and Her Plantation "Children"* (1861), Thomas Dixon Jr.'s *The Leopard's Spots* (1902), and Charles W. Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901). Ware examines two abolitionist British pamphlets: *Album of the Female Society for Birmingham for the Relief of British Negro Slaves* (1828), and *An Appeal to the Christian Women of Sheffield from the Association for the Universal Abolition of Slavery* (1837). She also examines the writings of Annette Ackroyd and Josephine Butler concerning social reform in India, and the publications of British antiracist journal *Anti-Caste* edited by Catherine Impey, whose anti-imperialist works are compared to Ida B. Wells's literary crusade against racism in the United States.

gender, and class. This image was employed to legitimise the propagation of the authority of white men, the values of the middle and upper classes, and the racism of white southerners.

Glasgow characterised her upbringing as the union of two opposing influences, the shrewd and strict ethics of her father, the manager of Tredegar Iron Works, and the gentle and kind-hearted manners of her mother, a fragile Belle of the Virginia Tidewater.¹⁰⁸ Glasgow delineates the racial terms of her father's character when she states that "[h]is virtues were more than Calvinistic; they were Roman. With complete integrity, and an abiding sense of responsibility ... he had all the Scottish respect of learning and kept his Latin until the end of his life."¹⁰⁹ Glasgow dreaded her father's unyielding Presbyterianism which she describes as "more patriarchal than paternal."¹¹⁰ Glasgow also witnessed how her mother, with her precarious emotional and physical states, always disguised her anger, her problems, and her despair in order to be the jovial and carefree southern hostess that her society expected her to be. It does not come as a surprise that in her literary and prose compositions Glasgow is consistent in dismissing the South's sentimental literary tradition of elaborating the myth of true womanhood as essentially a projected masculine fantasy. She writes, "It is the peculiar distinction of all women myths that they were not only sanctioned but invented by men."¹¹¹ Glasgow equates feminism with a "revolt from pretense of being"; it is "at its best and worst a struggle for the liberation of personality."¹¹² Matthews quotes feminist scholar Domna C. Stanton in her discussion of Glasgow's position. Matthews recognises Glasgow's emphasis on self-liberation because in a "phallogocentric order" which holds as "essential" the idea of a "totalized self-contained subject present-to-itself," individualism has been impossible for women in their position as unnecessary other to necessary masculine selfhood.¹¹³

Literary studies that approach whiteness in terms of performativity focus on the portrayal of female characters who act in ways that challenge the conventional gender and sexual models of community. Leslie A. Fiedler's study *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1960) illustrates the development of this branch of whiteness

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Pamela R. Matthews, "Introduction," in *Ellen Glasgow, The Woman Within*, p. viii.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

¹¹¹ Glasgow, "Some Literary Woman Myths," in *Ellen Glasgow's Reasonable Doubts*, p. 36.

¹¹² Glasgow, "Feminism," in *Ellen Glasgow's Reasonable Doubts*, p. 32.

¹¹³ Quoted in Matthews, "Introduction," p. xix.

studies. Fiedler lists an inventory of weak white males and white females who are involved in sexual affairs, and, thus, fall out of the South's gendered conceptions of virtue. John N. Duvall's contemporary work *Race and White Identity in Southern Fiction: From Faulkner to Morrison* (2008) discusses in-between Caucasian characters as a result of their problematic relations to other categories of white identity such as sexuality or class. They embody a sort of cultural blackness that "make visible the race nature of their whiteness."¹¹⁴ In her feminist study of whiteness, Griffith charts the challenging ways in which white women created by Edith Wharton, Willa Cather and Glasgow direct their lives through changing notions of whiteness as they are effected by their gender and class marginalisation. The initial revolutionary acts of these female characters redefine and are redefined by the twentieth century's new dialogues of American democracy. Their later disappointments demonstrate where this whiteness challenges but fails to surpass class and gender difference.¹¹⁵

The first chapter of this study takes a comparable approach to the role of non-whites as an important element in the formation of white masculinity in *The Battle-Ground*, and *The Deliverance*. Dan Montjoy in *The Battle* and Christopher Blake in *The Deliverance* are two figures of southern masculinity who strive to fashion themselves according to the ideal of the English Gentleman and southern cavalier. They are torn between the notions of their inherited privilege as young aristocrats and the impact of external forces compelling them to adopt then abandon their masculine model. Ex-slaves, women and poor whites become inseparable from these male protagonists' attempts to refashion their ways of being, working as mirrors through which they evaluate their white male selves. The two critical periods of the Civil War and the Emancipation in *The Battle-Ground* and Reconstruction in *The Deliverance* afford these texts the chance to investigate hegemonic, normative masculinity as it shifts in response to changing social, political, and cultural conditions. This chapter places Glasgow's white men, the foci of white ideology, within the field of struggles over social priority and demonstrates the significant role the "other" plays in

¹¹⁴ John N. Duvall, *Race and White Identity in Southern Fiction: From Faulkner to Morrison* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 5.

¹¹⁵ Jean Carol Griffith, "Reading White Space: Placing Race in the Novels of Edith Wharton, Ellen Glasgow, and Willa Cather" (Ph.D. diss., Texas A&M University, 2003). The novels covered by the study are *The Descendant* (1897), *The Voice of the People*, *Life and Gabriella: The Story of a Woman's Courage* (1916), *Barren Ground*, *The Romantic Comedians* (1926), *The Sheltered Life*, and *In This Our Life*.

negotiating their identities. I place the southern gentleman in the first chapter of my thesis since my discussion of white masculinity forms the base of the thesis's next two sections on poor whites and women.

Chapter two of this thesis provides more space to Glasgow's stance on class and its role in identity formation and social performance. It emphasises the historical and materialistic element while discussing the white ideologies behind class warfare during the massive upheavals that occurred in the South, starting from Reconstruction in the 1880s to the early decades of the twentieth century. The clash of values that resulted between the two classes, the upper and the lower, the old and the new is mostly shaped by racial and evolutionary views. While Glasgow admits the influence of Darwinism, specifically in her early writings,¹¹⁶ she ultimately employs its scientific theories to emphasise the role of people's altered expectations in enabling them to triumph over their environment after being almost overwhelmed by it. Glasgow does refer to the spiritual and physical characteristics of her white characters as part of their Anglo-Saxon blood as well as their individual personalities. In this, she appears to embrace the racist implication of the theory of evolution. Glasgow nonetheless makes it clear that her white characters are able to change their courses because they depend on resources available to them because of their skin colour. Nickolas Burr in *The Voice of the People* and Gideon Vetch in *One Man in His Time* lead the Democratic agenda, but they encounter the limits to their whiteness at the door of the elite class in Virginia. However, the compensatory privileges these white characters possess — the right to vote, possess, and move — sharply contrast them with non-whites who are credited with no space for progress.

The third chapter finds in *Vein of Iron* and *In This Our Life* Glasgow's criticism of the injustices imposed on the modern woman by lingering patriarchal notions. The sexual mal-performance of Glasgow's white women places them on the margins of whiteness but provides them with an alternative narrative for self-realisation in an oppressive society. Ada Fincastle in *Vein of Iron* is a woman who dares, ultimately unsuccessfully, to occupy an oppositional stance within her society. Although Ada feels herself an outsider and is constructed as a kind of "Other" throughout the text, she initially struggles to be an insider. She ends conforming to the

¹¹⁶ According to Raper, Glasgow read Darwin's *The Origin of Species* and *The Descent of Man* in addition to the works of Ernst Haeckel, Thomas Henry Huxley, and Herbert Spencer. See *Without Shelter*.

position of a contented wife and mother figure. In *In This Our Life*, Roy Timberlake insists on living outside the sexual boundaries of her society. She is a brave individual who rejects all the social and sexual shams and chooses to live independently but unhappily as an outcome of her liberated personality. Roy's sister, Stanley, is the one satisfied through the fulfilment of her categories as white and female. Her youth, beauty, and weakness are accorded their privileges, but her immoral character is used to criticise the patriarchal values that inspired her. All three women, each in her way, try to own their minds and their bodies, but they all fail to completely escape the restrictions of the South's sexual limitations.

Throughout this study, the employment of African Americans to demonstrate class and gender differences turns out to be a consistent literary device. They are a reflection of a world of moral decay brought about by white supremacy, classism, and sexism. Glasgow sentimentalises African Americans' place in southern society and portrays their activities in the public realm as ineffectual to reflect their invisibility and silence. But she creates black characters who are more hardworking and sufficient than white characters and implies that they hold a sophisticated knowledge of whites that is not matched by the whites' knowledge of them. In her work, she attacks lynching and displays open dissatisfaction with segregation and the disenfranchisement of black adults, insisting that southerners evaluate their own racial attitudes. Though Glasgow occasionally plays to her white audience with stereotypical images of the South's "happy darkies", she, simultaneously exposes the reader's faulty thinking about African Americans.

Glasgow ought to be remembered and reckoned with in American literary history. She published twenty-one novels, an autobiography, a short story collection, and a collection of prefaces to her fiction that was favourably compared to the prefaces written by Henry James. She won prestigious literary awards like the Pulitzer Prize and the William Dean Howells Medal. She was critically reviewed in all the critical journals of her day, and she sold many books. Just two years before her death in 1945, literary critic Carl Van Vechten said about Glasgow in his 1943 review, "She is perhaps as certain of posthumous fame (she already enjoys the contemporary variety) as any novelist alive today."¹¹⁷ However, Glasgow is mostly invisible in the

¹¹⁷ Carl Van Vechten, "Most Revealing Prefaces: The Theory and Practice of a Novelist's Art Set Forth," in *New York Herald-Tribune Weekly Book Review*, 17 October 1943, p. 6.

critical record, with some notable exceptions in the feminist studies of Dorothy M. Scura, Matthews, and Linda W. Wagner, within the American academic community at present.¹¹⁸ The majority of her books are no longer in print, and she is not to be found in the teaching modules of literary departments. Existing scholarly work regarding her canon, generally confined to southern critics, tends to contend against its incentive for current researchers, referring to her so-called bigotry and provincial treatment of contemporary issues. Catherine Rainwater notes that the rural settings of Glasgow's novels have interrupted the critical appreciation of their relevance to the more universal and current themes of modern southern literature. She further adds, "Though the southern dimensions of Glasgow's art obviously merit the attention they have received, regionalist criticism has nevertheless constituted a vase holding Glasgow studies in place."¹¹⁹ However, critics who dismiss Glasgow as a minor regionalist are remarkably short-sighted, for they overlook the volume, variety, and depth of her work. This thesis will help to bring back Glasgow's work for reconsideration by incorporating the modern notions of whiteness studies. By highlighting her comprehensive treatment of the contemporary South, its history and locale, and its social issues, this study will allow the modern reader to understand more the relation between past and regional narratives of race, gender, and class and their present and more universal construction

¹¹⁸ Catherine Rainwater, "Through a Gate and into another Life: Ellen Glasgow after 1945," in *Regarding Ellen Glasgow: Essays for Contemporary Readers*, eds. by Welford Dunaway Taylor and George C. Longest (Richmond: The Library of Virginia, 2001), p. 4. Rainwater here is quoting C. Hugh Holman who wrote about Glasgow and encouraged the academic community to discover the depth and the wide-ranging scope of her mind.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

Chapter One

Southern Aristocracy and White Masculinity in *The Battle-Ground* (1902) and *The Deliverance* (1904)

The old generation of southern aristocrats manifested their white masculinity in relation to the ownership of slaves and land as the reward of patriotic and honourable citizenship. They also, via patriarchal privilege, legitimised their dominance over their household dependants. However, their pre- and post-Civil War male descendants in *The Battle-Ground* and *The Deliverance* grow anxious and uncertain over this legacy of white masculinity. Moreover, their attempts to approximate their male ancestors in tales of mastery, chivalry, violence, and vengeance fail, turning at the end into humiliating and limiting experiences for them.

Contemporary reviewers of Glasgow's novels applauded her realistic treatment of the South. *The Battle-Ground* was commended as "a striking and forceful presentation of antebellum as well as bellum days."¹ *The Deliverance* was praised for narrating a story different from the sentimental "babble ... of fearful and wonderful 'types of chivalry.'"² Later critics took notice of Glasgow's feminist insight into the southern culture of masculinity. In turning Dan Montjoy in *The Battle-Ground* from a gullible cavalier to a defeated soldier, Glasgow successfully exposes "the flaws of the patriarchal system."³ By making the impoverished and illiterate Christopher Blake pay for the mistakes of his ancestors in *The Deliverance*, Glasgow demonstrates that "[i]f the planter caste had been sinned against during these years ... in the halcyon antebellum era it had been irresponsible."⁴

This chapter elaborates on Glasgow's critique of southern manhood by examining her portrayal of Dan and Christopher in both novels. My analysis will show how the construction of the protagonists' white masculinity is represented as a complex, anxious, and animosity-ridden process. The protagonists' engagement with

¹ Quoted in Dorothy M. Scura, in *Ellen Glasgow: The Contemporary Reviews*, ed. Dorothy M. Scura (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 53.

² *Ibid.*, p. 85.

³ Lucinda H. MacKethan, "Restoring Order: Matriarchal Design in *The Battle-Ground* and *Vein of Iron*," in *Ellen Glasgow: New Perspectives*, ed. Dorothy M. Scura (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995), p. 89.

⁴ Frederick P. McDowell, *Ellen Glasgow and the Ironic Art of Fiction* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1963), p. 70.

and abandonment of the masculine ideal highlights both their desires and anxieties concerning the ideal of white masculinity. Glasgow's approach to southern masculinity is a criticism of the historical and social factors that emphasise white masculinity as a repetition of the antebellum heritage with its racist and sexist associations and as a negative attitude that harms its perpetrators and those involved in relationships with them.

Inspired by historical and social studies of the intersectionality between gender, class, and race, this chapter analyses the novels' assumptions about the South's discursive conceptions concerning white masculinity.⁵ The novels deal with white masculinity as more of a system that continually reshapes itself in response to circumstances than a natural category inherently inaccessible for interpretation and analysis. To Glasgow, southern aristocracy was more varied than the trans-historical image of it as the embodiment of paternalistic mastery, cavalier valour, or celebrated fierceness. In *Dan and Christopher*, Glasgow discusses two models of southern masculinity who strive to fashion themselves according to the models of the southern dandy and cavalier, and the crushed, avenging aristocrat. They are torn between the notions of their inherited privilege as young aristocrats and the impact of external forces compelling them to embrace and then abandon their masculine culture. The two critical periods of the Civil War in *The Battle-Ground* and Reconstruction in *The Deliverance* are instrumental. They afford these texts the chance to investigate what is supposed to be normative masculinity as it "shifts in response to the changing social, political, and cultural terrain" placing "white men, and white masculinity, within a field of struggles over cultural priority."⁶

⁵ Starting as early as the second half of the twentieth century, these studies include William Taylor's *Cavalier & Yankee: The Old South and the American National Character* (1957), Sally Robinson's *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (2000), Lorri Glover's *Southern Sons Becoming Men in the New Nation* (2007), John Mayfield's *Counterfeit Gentlemen: Manhood and Humor in the Old South: New Perspectives on the History of the South* (2009), the essays edited by Craig Friend in *Southern Masculinity: Perspectives on Manhood in the South since Reconstruction* (2009), and Emmeline Gros's thesis "The Southern Gentleman and the Idea of Masculinity: Figures and Aspects of the Southern Beau in the Literary Tradition of the American South" (2010).

⁶ Sally Robinson, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 4.

The Battle-Ground and the Model of the Antebellum Aristocrat

The novel emphasises the concepts of subject formation and its interface with both the American literary tradition and southern context in its construction of white masculinity. Dan's personality takes after a particular southern form and its social notion of manliness that intersects with race, sex, and class. William R. Taylor's genealogy elaborates upon the ideal social order the southern aristocrat created for himself as the naturally endowed patriarch, the only one fitted for governance due to his inborn talents, noble origin, unwavering patriotism and racial authority. This model required the subordination of all those upon whom he bestowed his paternalistic benevolence.⁷ Primarily created to defend the position of the South before and during the Civil War, this image found even greater support from writers of the Lost Cause romances of Reconstruction era that dominated the literature of the late nineteenth-century South.⁸

Taylor cites a portion of Daniel Hundley's study of the southern society as a perfect example of the southern fabrication of the image of the gentleman that exaggerated his capacities. In this sketch, the elements of noble descent, innate goodness, physical perfection, state patriotism and tribal authority are intertwined:⁹

[A] descendant of English Cavaliers ... The gentleman was tall, slender and generally characterized by "faultless physical development." Life in the open air and the Southern passion for field sports had conditioned him to combine "firmness" with "flexibility" and had made him a more resilient and more balanced individual than his excitable and hare-brained Northern counterpart. Nonetheless, he was highly educated, frequently at the University of Virginia or at some comparable institution, after which he was apt to have made the Grand Tour of Europe. He possessed a natural dignity which was partly the result of exercising from childhood the habit of command and partly a trait inherited from "those mailed ancestors who followed Godfrey and bold Coeur de Lion to the rescue of the Holy Sepulchre." He governed his plantation with a patriarchal authority which was based on natural traditions of family rule rather than on any artificial kind of coercion. Planting, politics and military service rather than the professions were his preferred

⁷ William R. Taylor, *Cavalier & Yankee: The Old South and the American National Character* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), pp. 145-225.

⁸ Mary Ellis Gibson, "Patriarchy," in *The Companion to Southern Literature: Themes, Genres, Places, People, Movement, and Motifs*, ed. Joseph M. Flora and Lucinda H. Mackethan (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), pp. 622-24.

⁹ Hundley was a Virginian lawyer who studied at Harvard and the University of Virginia. Taylor describes Hundley as "a sophisticated and experienced observer" who painted a realistic picture of the South, but whose "depiction of the Southern gentleman is pure myth." See *Cavalier & Yankee*, p. 152.

occupations. In every way ... the Southern gentleman was characterized by virility and by a mastery of his environment.¹⁰

This enduring image of the southern planter-cavalier is re-evaluated in *The Battle-Ground* through a mixture of historical portrayal, social criticism, and literary satire. Through its construction of Dan's male identity, the novel defines the racial, gender, and class codes on which southern antebellum plantocracy built its masculine authority and criticises its outdated notions of masculinity, qualifying them as unreflective, prejudiced, and fractious. Though southern aristocrats reveal themselves as benevolent patriarchs and role models, the narrator contrasts their moral reasoning and explanations of their actions with contradictory perspectives and events that oppose their beliefs and expectations and expose their fallacies.

In his adolescent years, Dan strives to adapt to the traditions of the southern patriarch exemplified in his grandfather, Major Lightfoot. The physical description of the master and his mansion conveys a ghastly impression of decay and oppression. Tanfer Tunc notes that the southern Gothic, popular with literary modernists, uses elements of traditional European Gothic literature to deconstruct the "magnolia myth" of the antebellum plantation as mainly populated with chivalrous planters, demure southern Belles, and contented slaves.¹¹ The Major is an old "gaunt" man with eyes of a hawk, a "Roman" nose, long silver hair, and an "austere" air about him.¹² He is the living equivalent of the Lightfoots' Chericoke house, which is described as a "much older house than the Uplands", with a "queer" atmosphere surrounding it. It is a haunted house, with a giant elm tree that scratches and bangs on the windows and a "crooked" staircase that reaches up high and thus creates an echo (159). The gothic elements reflect in the Major's flawed character and the Chericoke haunted atmosphere. They are employed to further the novel's social critique of the idealised antebellum life.

The Major is deeply invested in defining himself in white supremacist terms that are particular to his legacy and social position as a slaveholder. He boasts of the fact that he is related to the Fitzhughs (31); the Major is also a close friend and admirer of William L. Yancey (86). George Fitzhugh and William Yancey, according

¹⁰ Taylor, *Cavalier and Yankee*, pp. 152-53.

¹¹ Tanfer Emin Tunc, "Caroline Gordon's Ghosts: *The Women on the Porch* as Southern Gothic Literature," in *The Southern Literary Journal* xlvii, no. 1 (2013): 80.

¹² Ellen Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company), 1905, pp. 15-7.

to Elizabeth and Eugene D. Genovese, were among southerners who advocated slavery as the most befitting form of social paternalism in which southern slaveholders can take care of their “poor and incompetent.”¹³ Another racial characteristic the Major highlights is his benevolence to the black slaves. Mia Bay in her historical study of ex-slaves’ views on their former masters questions the authenticity of this rhetoric, arguing that “the wealth of comparisons between slaves and animals in testimony of ex-slaves does call into question ... whether the enslaved African-Americans found any recognition of their humanity, implicit or otherwise, in the reciprocal obligations of the master-slave relation.”¹⁴ The text implies that the Major’s paternalism is his way of demonstrating his class superiority. In one episode he attacks red-neck Rainy-day Jones for whipping his slave. He buys the beaten slave and retorts back at Jones, “There is no man alive that shall question the divine right of slavery in my presence; but—but it is an institution for gentlemen, and you, sir, are a damned scoundrel!” (89) The Major bases his racial privilege of owning slaves on his paternalistic attitude towards them, an attitude that he stipulates as class-confined. Only aristocrats are entitled to own slaves since they are the only class who know how to treat them well.

Mayfield, in his discussion of the making of the patriarchal myth, comments that an essential characteristic of the patrician or elite masculine ideal is his hegemony as husband, father, and slave master. The master of the plantation has authority over everyone else in the household, even his guests. He is a supporting figure who creates of the plantation mansion a “paternalistic Eden” for his wife, children, slaves, and visitors.¹⁵ The novel renders visible the cost this “paternalistic Eden” required in the form of submissive wives, children and happy, contented slaves. It does so by indicating the paralysing effect of this alleged loving bond on the emotional development of slaves. The Major is emotionally attached to his driver Congo, and their connection is expressed in ownership terms that make the separation between the white master and his owned slave unfathomable. On one occasion, in an outburst against the abolitionists’ arguments, the Major tells Congo, “They say I’ve no right to

¹³ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *Slavery in White and Black: Class and Race in the Southern Slaveholders’ New World Order* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 83.

¹⁴ Mia Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind: African-American Ideas about White People 1830-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 135.

¹⁵ John Mayfield, *Counterfeit Gentlemen: Manhood and Humor in the Old South: New Perspectives on the History of the South* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009), p. 12.

you, Cong,—bless my soul, and you were born on my land!” (87) Reared on the notion of belonging to the master and thus eternally connected to him and to their mutual home place, Congo remains on the plantation after the emancipation of slaves. He is content to play the role of the faithful servant as the only natural relation he knows to connect him to his white master. While the rest of the plantation masters fear a slave rebellion, the Major is certain of Congo’s loyalty. He assures his neighbour, “Oh, you needn’t mind Congo ... Congo’s heart’s as white as mine.” Congo follows approvingly, “Dat’s so, Ole Marster” (245). In light of this incident, we can understand Tracy’s comment, in which she states that the majority of white southerners endorsed the patriarchal nature of slavery by promoting a relationship in which “‘the master’s reciprocal feeling of parental attachment to his humble dependent’ is reflected in the slave’s loyal devotion to the master and his family.”¹⁶ In his master’s eyes, Congo’s affirmation of the notion of patriarchal benevolence even endows him with white goodness which, in turn, is cast in doubt by associating it with repeating the myth of the benevolent master and the loyal slave.

The text elaborates on the Major’s racist character by dramatising his belief in slavery as divinely sanctioned. This is exemplified in his response to Mr Ambler’s suggestion of selling the slaves to the government: “When I hear a man talking about the abolition of slavery, I always expect him to do away with marriage next” (63). The Major’s statement is interesting as it accurately echoes Charles Pinckney’s statement while addressing the Congress: “There is ... not a single line in the Old or New Testament either censoring it or forbidding it ... If you say there shall be no slavery, may you not say there will be no marriage?” The Genoveses quote Pinckney’s statement as evidence of the way in which the southern elites attempted to establish slavery as a pillar of social order after they felt their hegemony threatened by the North’s call for the freedom of slaves.¹⁷ Both examples show how via a connection between race and gender slaveholders attempted to project slavery as religiously and socially sanctioned. The Major is absolutely convinced of the racial innocence of the whites’ enslavement of blacks. To him, “the sons of Ham were under a curse which the Lord would lighten in His own good time” (68). As Sarah E. Gardner notes, defending the South’s decision to go to war involved citing the

¹⁶ Susan J. Tracy, *In the Master's Eye: Representations of Women, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), p. 16.

¹⁷ Genovese and Genovese, *Slavery in White and Black*, p. 14.

Puritanical religious and political tenets of the white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant settlers of North America who employed “the curse of Ham” to connect slavery with God’s pleasure. By choosing war over freeing slaves, pro-slavery southerners believed that:

not England, not their northern neighbors, but God, who rules on earth as in heaven, according to the counsel of His own righteous will, had brought to their doors these beings, so ignorant and degraded, yet none the less His children and their brethren, that they might lead them to that truth which should form them anew in the image of God.¹⁸

The novel also illuminates the connection between the slavery advocates’ nationalist and racist ideologies. The privilege of the aristocrat to own slaves was founded on his patriotism and protection of the South’s lands and values, both — according to Mayfield — seen as defining features of his gender and class.¹⁹ The Major links his military history to his and Virginia’s right to exercise the freedom to own slaves which is granted by the constitution. He argues with the unionist Mr Ambler: “Didn’t we fight the Revolution, sir? And didn’t we fight the War of 1812? And didn’t we fight the Mexican War to boot?” “And bless my soul, aren’t we ready to fight all the Yankees in the universe, and to whip them clean out of the Union, too?” (85) The narrator offsets the incredulous Major’s beliefs by making him repeat his expressions of surprise in a clumsy, repetitive manner.

The Major’s chauvinism equals his racism, and both are characteristic of the patriarchal system of control. In relation to his wife, the Major is typically controlling and dismissive, employing a rhetoric that asserts women’s naturalised inferiority. When Mrs Lightfoot sensibly warns him of spoiling Dan, the Major rejects her judgement and bluntly questions her mental state: “Molly is breaking” (76). He justifies his controlling grip on his household by employing the medical analogy of gout: creating a link between the two in his statement that “gout’s like a woman ... if you begin to humour it, you’ll get no rest” (18). By watching his grandfather, Dan learns what kind of a masculine ideal is socially desired and identifies eagerly with it. This masculine ideal, with its defining classist, racist and sexist associations, becomes the novel’s object of criticism, and its negative effects complicate Dan’s identity.

Part of Dan’s problem is that he looks up to his grandfather as a role model. However the Major — with his militant attitude and defiance — does not provide the

¹⁸ Quoted in Sarah E. Gardner, *Blood & Irony: Southern White Women’s Narratives of the Civil War 1861-1937* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), p. 32.

¹⁹ Mayfield, *Counterfeit Gentlemen*, p. xiii.

best example of the putative inner strength and spiritual grace of the old gentry. Another type of southern masculinity that is comparatively more moderate is Mr Ambler, a former statesman and the owner of the neighbouring Uplands plantation. Even in his physical characterisation, Mr Ambler is far less domineering and younger than the Major. He is a short man of a soldierly manner, a shaved face, exemplary features, and thick and dark hair who “appeared singularly boyish” compared to the Major (17).

Mr Ambler is portrayed as a man of good humour and balanced personality. Unlike the Major, he is a Whig in political principle and manner, not “from prejudice” (59). Taylor evaluates the course of the Whig Party during the national crisis between the North and the South as less rigid in its white supremacist policies than its rival, the Democratic Party. Mr Ambler’s sensible approach “for independence and integrity in American character” is characterised by “[m]oderation, tolerance and compromise”. His preferred route has taken him “to Washington, to Union and to selflessness” which, according to Taylor, “was the National Road and the route of the Whig party.”²⁰ Mr Ambler’s actions accentuate his kind nature. He provides shelter to his impoverished relatives (20), buys slaves who are at the risk of being sold to the Deep South (47), and agrees with his wife’s scheme to free his black servants after his death (19).

Mr Ambler, as a typical southern aristocrat, is nonetheless limited in his ideas about race. When the conflict over slavery makes the Civil War inevitable, he is of the opinion that it would be best to ship the “Negroes back to Africa” (63). For Mr Ambler, slaves are basically commodities that could be disposed of to maintain national solidarity. Mr Ambler’s aristocratic and racial heritage limits his view of what really takes place in his society. The narrator dwells on this point through the detailed description of the following scene:

The master of Uplands was standing upon his portico behind the Doric columns, looking complacently over the fat lands upon which his fathers had sown and harvested for generations ... his eyes wandered leisurely across the blue-green strip of grassland to the tawny wheat field, where the slaves were singing as they swung their cradle ... He had cast his bread upon the soil and it had returned to him threefold. As he stood there, a small, yet imposing figure, he represented something of the genial aspect of the country. Even the smooth white hand in which he held his hat and riding-whip had about it a

²⁰ Taylor, *Cavalier & Yankee*, p. 253.

certain plump kindliness ... he looked but what he was—a bland and generous gentleman. (45)

Melanie R. Benson notes in her literary analysis of the rhetoric of value in southern male writings that “elite southerners fetishize[d] their own racial primacy (as “original,” whole, and superior) by engaging mathematical fictions of increase, multiplication, and accumulation.”²¹ Mr Ambler’s attitude supports Benson’s notion that the life of abundance in which the “fat lands” had produced in multiples of three, “threefold” the harvest “for generations” supported the creation of Mr Ambler as a conventional southern planter. Mr Ambler’s accumulated wealth and superior position blinker his view by projecting back at him the stereotypical picture of the contented, hardworking and cheerful slaves. This imposing figure who keeps his riding whip close at hand is oblivious to the fact that, as Beth Harrison comments on the scene, “for all his ‘kindness’ and ‘generous nature’, he is nonetheless the owner of an oppressive institution.”²² Mr Ambler is the perfect image of the plantation patriarch, who believes that all went well under his protective power. The feelings of both benevolence and discipline that this picture effuses are evidence of the contradictory nature of the southern aristocrat. This contradiction comes from the fact that despite positioning himself as the patriarch of a happy family including the content slaves, the southern aristocrat possesses no real sympathy towards his slaves. In *The Voice of the People*, General Battle exhibits the same contradiction in his treatment of his former slaves. One moment he threatens to run them off the plantation, the next his sense of responsibility causes him to share his supplies with them.

However, when Mr Ambler hears of the news of the attack of abolitionist John Brown on Harper Ferry, all his racial anxieties come to the surface:

A dim fear, which had been with him since boyhood, seemed to take shape and meaning ... in a lightning flash of understanding he knew that he had lived before through the horrors of this moment. If his father has sinned, surely the shadow of their wrong had passed them by to fall the heavier upon their sons; for even as his blood rang in his ears, he saw a savage justice in the thing he feared—a recompense to natural laws in which the innocent should weigh as naught against the guilty. (243)

²¹ Melanie R. Benson, *Disturbing Calculations: The Economics of Identity in Postcolonial Southern Literature 1912–2002* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), p. 4.

²² Sharon Talley, *Southern Women Novelists and the Civil War: Trauma and Collective Memory in the American Literary Tradition since 1861* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2014), p. 148.

This paragraph exemplifies one of the most repetitive themes associated with the presence of the racial other in the white imagination. Morrison points out that more significant than the stereotypical role of African Americans as the foil against which all that is positive about the white race is defined, blackness is employed in American literary imagination to reflect white guilt and fear.²³ In the scene of Mr Ambler overseeing his lands, the fertile lands, the plentiful crops, the riding-whip, and — most important — the singing slaves are all markers of Mr Ambler's racial dominance. Black characters perform their expected role as content labourers, and therefore are part of the imaginary Eden in which the whites live. But when black characters take on unorthodox roles as rebels, they are not real people anymore. They are transformed in the white mind into shadows, some sort of a “dark and abiding presence that moves the hearts ... with fear.”²⁴ Slavery is the fear that lurks in the thoughts of slaveholders, a curse just waiting to fall upon them. When the curse does finally fall, savagery and blood enter the picture, and the guilty overshadow the innocent. Mr Ambler's internal thoughts show how he attempts to ease his sense of guilt by describing slavery as no less inevitable than original sin. He is fated to be a slaveholder the way black people were destined to be enslaved. But Mr Ambler realises deep in his mind that there are no innocent slaveholders. The brand of hegemonic patriarchy he espouses that was established on the rightful ownership, benevolence and nationalism is no longer a tenable position. By coming into contact with the ramifications of slavery, Mr Ambler questions the validity of his position as a member of the governing planter class. Slavery becomes with Mr Ambler a symbol of human guilt which must be amended.

Glasgow further develops the narrative of white guilt as the crack in Mr Ambler's consciousness widens when he rushes back to his house to check on his family in fear that they might have been harmed by rebellious slaves. He finds his wife attending Mahaley, a dying slave (249). In the slave's cabin, he sees the miserable conditions under which his slaves are living; the narration reveals Mr Ambler's internal thoughts: “as he stood there the burden of his responsibility weighted upon him like old age. Here in this scant cabin things so serious as birth and death showed in a pathetic bareness” (250). General Battle in *The Voice of the People*

²³ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary imagination* (New York: Random House, 1992), p. 52.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

had to make a similar trip to his quarters to view first-hand the “long, whitewashed row of almost deserted cabins that since the close of the war had fallen partly into disuse and had decayed rapidly.”²⁵ He had to meet with his former slaves, whose freedom had not participated in easing their circumstances. However, Mr Ambler, relieved by the fact that none of his slaves joined the rebellion, is quick to project on to them his more conventional racial thinking. The slaves present to Mr Ambler the stereotypical image of contentedness and even cheerfulness despite their hardships: “In these simple lives, so closely lived to the ground, grave things were sweetened by an unconscious humor which was of the soil itself” (250). Mayfield notices that slave stoicism was a common theme in the orations of pro-slavery apologists. According to the apologists, the slave was a model of “patience, considerateness, discretion, long-suffering, amiable obedience.”²⁶ However, they misinterpret the nature of that submission of Mahaley and the other slaves to their dreary lives, which is, in fact, a direct result of powerlessness. Mr Ambler reiterates and reinforces the apologist argument in his perception that this stoicism is innate, a sign of their natural stoicism, a common position that sits alongside another common picture of the black race wisely accepting their enslavement as a necessary evil.

The novel’s last criticism of southern masculinity is delivered through its reference to the assumptions of southerners about the approaching war. As the threat of the Civil War becomes more prominent in the novel, southern men assert that proving their manliness against the Northerner would be an easy task. The narrator foreshadows the South’s defeat when he ironically describes the vacuous Major’s certainty of victory. The Major boasts that the South’s triumph would be so easy that the whole war would not last more than two weeks. He refuses to provide his nephew Champe, who voices his own fancies of returning as a victorious General, with more than one outfit as a needless expense (279). However, when southerners started battling the North, the war did not proceed as lightly as they had anticipated. Gros summarises the real outcome: “the Civil War revealed that the Southerners’ self-contained principles had failed. In an age that had required an elaborate display of manliness, Southern men had been unable to prove their manliness to those who, they

²⁵ Ellen Glasgow, *The Voice of the People* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1900), p. 50.

²⁶ Mayfield, *Counterfeit Gentlemen*, p. 22.

believed, were their social, moral, and political inferiors.”²⁷ By making the male characters in the novel repeat the myth of the South’s military superiority, Glasgow ironically juxtaposes southern expectations with the harsh reality that confronted southern men and exposed the reality behind their self-proclaimed distinctiveness.

As the archetypes of dominant and comfortable plantocracy, southern gentlemen maintain their loyalties to their gender, class, and race traditions. They are blind to the ugly realities of their superiority, which is based on the enslavement of another race and always requires the subordination of slaves and women. They are also oblivious to their true mettle, which is exposed later by their military defeat. The masculine model of the old order that Dan adopts earlier in the novel is doomed to fail because of the very foundations on which it is constructed. The next section of the chapter analyses Dan’s model of self-indulgent and arrogant masculinity and supplements the novel’s previous criticism of white masculinity. The identity embraced by Dan ultimately proves to be limiting and harmful to his self-perception, romantic affairs, and relations with others.

The Influence of Whiteness on Masculine Identity

The novel takes place in 1854 in southern Shenandoah, Virginia. Dan Montjoy, sixteen years old, arrives at his maternal grandfather’s plantation Chericoke, after having journeyed over two hundred miles from an unknown place where he recently buried his mother, Jane Lightfoot. His grandfather, Major Lightfoot, welcomes his grandson despite his unabating grudge towards his daughter after she escaped with the “dirty scamp”, Jack Montjoy (22). Dan quickly becomes accustomed to the habits of being raised up as the plantation’s heir. Overindulged by his grandfather, he assumes all the manners of a young dandy. He falls in love with Virginia Ambler, an outstanding beauty from the neighbouring plantation of The Uplands. He follows the customs of sons of the southern gentry and leaves to pursue his education at the University of Virginia and takes up a tour of Europe during the summer of 1859. As he returns, his love for Virginia grows weary, and he falls in love instead with her sister Betty, who has been in love with him for years. After a series

²⁷ Emmeline Gros, “The Southern Gentleman and the Idea of Masculinity: Figures and Aspects of the Southern Beau in the Literary Tradition of the American South” (PhD diss., Georgia State University, 2010), p. 3.

of foolish escapades, Dan is jailed, expelled from the university, and disinherited by his grandfather. The first part of the novel ends with Dan living in a commoners' tavern and working as a stage driver to earn his living.

Dan becomes aware early in the novel of his precarious social position, which prompts him to seek sensational ways to reinforce his image as a southern cavalier. His theatrical behaviour testifies to the constructed nature of white masculinity. He grows more anxious and uncertain of his identity as he becomes increasingly aware of this fact. To ease his uncertainty and fill the void he gradually senses, Dan attempts to find objects that fill the emotional gap he feels. Black slaves and women — the social groups that stand for what is the foil to white masculinity — become Dan's way to reassert his identity and agency. As a result, they are portrayed in the first part of the novel as essentially different and inferior to white masculinity.

The text attributes Dan's early enactment of male codes to his inner feeling of inferiority and insecurity. Mayfield confirms the association between masculinity and anxiety and self-doubt. He coins the term "masquerade culture" in his description of a different and more recent form of masculinity that started to evolve in the South following the increasing sectional animosities between the South and the North in the 1850s. A cavalier-like masculinity, which is characterised by overt expressions of manliness, romantic patriotism, quick temperament, and jealously guarded egotism, concealed a kind of inferiority complex the southerner felt towards the Yankee.²⁸ Dan's internal turmoil stems from his awareness of his hybrid identity as the son of a commoner, which always drives him to over-assert his aristocratic maternal ancestry as the son of a plantation heiress. Dan uses other social groups (slaves, women, and poor whites) to affirm his manly reputation of power and prestige both to himself and to them.

The text primarily points out that race is essential in the formation of the southern codes of masculinity. In her study on nineteenth-century southern youth, Lorri Glover argues that the South, as a society so deeply rooted in slaveholding, considered manly independence as the opposite of slavery. Southerners valued the exhibition of mastery as the most essential characteristic that the southern youth must acquire while growing up:

Southern gentry men defined their distinctive independence in contrast to slavery. Whites compelled submissiveness from their slaves and defined

²⁸ Mayfield, *Counterfeit Gentlemen*, p. 124.

slaves as dependent and therefore debased; white men considered dependence and submission anathema for themselves. Southern boys thus learned to privilege independence—the antithesis of enslavement—above all other attributes and to publicly exercise their prerogatives as elite white men.²⁹

Dan is raised in a highly stratified racial culture by a grandfather who is careful to define himself as a member of the white gentry by virtue of his lineage, paternalism and patriotism. As a result, Dan is eager from the start to assume the celebrated characteristics of southern masculinity. Dan's racial training by the Major and the need to exhibit manliness are most apparent in the following segment: "As the boy strode manfully across the farm, his head thrown back, his hands clasped behind him, the old man followed, in wondering pride, on his footsteps. To see him stand amid the swinging cradles in the wheat field, ordering the slaves and arguing with the overseer, was sufficient delight unto the Major's day" (64). In his posture, standing on his lands, ordering slaves around, Dan is the personification of masterful manliness.

Glover argues that aristocratic southern parents preferred to coax their sons into good behaviour, leaving most of the moral decisions to their sons' judgement. This relaxed kind of parenting helped to produce young men who were anxious to achieve an over-assertive manhood. This led the young men to behave in a rebellious manner that posed a constant challenge to their parents' and the society's moral standards as a result. In the novel, the signs of trouble in Dan's realisation of masculine identity start early. The Major's pride turns into discomfort as he catches Dan cursing and swearing at the overseer. He approaches Dan exclaiming, "Ah, you will make a man, you will make a man!" "But you mustn't curse, you really mustn't, you know" (65).

The novel portrays Dan as a troubled young man who finds his pleasure in external objects and whose irresponsible behaviour problematises his attempts to realise himself. Similar cases of erratic performances of southern masculinity are found in Gros's thesis. Gros aims in her exploration of the conventional depictions of southern masculinity to see how the old South's male model was fashioned and preserved even under pressure. Through the study of antebellum and postbellum texts, Gros emphasises how the older generation of southern elite males defined, enacted,

²⁹ Lorri Glover, *Southern Sons Becoming Men in the New Nation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press), 2007, p. 23.

and maintained a distinctively more subtle model of southern masculinity, while the younger generations' performance of masculinity resisted, modified, or flouted those ideals. Gros contrasts the public behaviour of young southerners to that of their forefathers who felt no need to over assert their patriarchal position. She criticises the likes of Dan as "make-believers and charlatans who have transformed manhood, formerly associated with 'lofty sentiment,' and 'high accomplishment'—i.e. the epitome of inward strength and spiritual grace—into a performative 'manufactured' manhood that is socially created and outwardly displayed."³⁰ To the Major's dismay, when Dan leaves for university, he becomes directionless and self-indulgent. He drinks, becomes a gambler, and his European tour only earns him the title of "Beau" Montjoy, a ladies' man, and a dandy with an obsession for fancy clothes demonstrated by his collection of imported red cravats (84, 126-27).

The southern slaver-holder's early obsession with ratifying his public masculine image influences Dan's personal conduct to his disadvantage. He commits actions that emphasise his masculine image, summarised by Mayfield as being "emotional, touchy about a vague thing called 'honour,' prone to self-indulgence punctuated by bursts of violence."³¹ Dan duels and injures another "Virginian gentleman" over a bar-room "hussy" as his grandfather puts it (210-11). The old man is horrified that duels, which traditionally "constituted the ultimate defence of reputation and display of status among adult Southern gentleman ... and played a profound role in demarcating gentility among men in the region ... are no longer fought for honour but are tainted with a desire for public exposure and fame."³² He is enraged at Dan's incarceration and subsequent dismissal from the university, and consequently, he disinherits him. It is ironic that Dan's accentuation of southern aristocratic masculinity as mere material possessions and bravado is what ultimately strips him of his class privilege to become "a common stagedriver" (254).

In conclusion, the novel's portrayal of Dan offers a more complicated example of southern manliness than the persona popular in antebellum literature. According to Mayfield, early planters and gentlemen's "view of themselves was stable and simple. ... they lumber[ed] about like cultural dinosaurs, dominating things by sheer bulk,

³⁰ Gros, "The Southern Gentleman," pp. 71-72.

³¹ Mayfield, *Counterfeit Gentlemen*, p. xvii.

³² Gros, "The Southern Gentleman," p. 100.

force, and a single-minded conviction that God put them on earth to rule.”³³ However, Dan is continually threatened by his personal insecurities, his aspiration to idealised manhood provokes troubling behaviour. The text also alludes to race as a critical component in forming the southern slave-holders’ public acts. As Glover comments on slavery’s destructive impact on southern sons, “Slaveholding not only created the wealth and power of this class of boys but also shaped their “self-willed” attitudes. ... slavery exerted an insidious effect on the character of white children. Surrounded by slaves and the violence necessary to command them, boys in particular grew lazy, arrogant, and cruel.”³⁴ In the novel, southern boys like Dan find in self-indulgent hedonism an outlet for their growing insecurities, their families’ expectations of them, and what their racial and class privilege has turned them into.

White Masculinity and Racial Difference

Dan’s self-affirmation in the first part of the novel depends on the subordination and objectification of non-whites and women. Dan celebrates himself as an embodiment of white masculinity with women and black characters acting as the means to achieve his status, both of whom end with no voice and agency of their own. However, during the course of the novel, Dan changes his masculine ideals and starts to acknowledge the crucial role played by women and non-whites as guiders and protectors of the white male rather than his governed and silenced inferiors.

White southern masculinity is traditionally defined by opposition. The power of white masculinity derives from its difference from and claimed superiority to what it is not, non-white, feminine, and lower-classed. Glover emphasises that southern aristocrats regarded themselves as the South’s true embodiment of white masculinity. She explains that poor whites did not meet the aristocracy’s class-bound definition of manhood. Black men never gained access to white masculinity within southern society. Only men from the elite class were automatically viewed as masculine because of the influential position they occupied in their community.³⁵ Dan, in his

³³ Mayfield, *Counterfeit Gentlemen*, p. xiv.

³⁴ Glover, *Southern Sons*, p. 33.

³⁵ Glover, *Southern Sons*, p. 3. Mason Stokes echoes the same notion; he states that in the South, “whiteness ... of the aristocratic mold ... was the only real whiteness going.” he identifies purity, immobility, and self-reliance as the ideological basis of the Southern elite whose whiteness existed as “a normative and disciplinary social structure.” See *The Color of Sex: Whiteness, Heterosexuality, and the Fictions of White Supremacy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), p. 24. Anthony Wilson

initial interaction with black slaves, his love interest, and his lower-class war comrades projects onto them white cultural stereotypes of race, gender, and class in an attempt to reify his white male privilege.

The novel shows signs of a critical attitude towards whiteness, while dealing with the explicit racist ideas of the white ideal embraced by Dan and the rest of its white characters. The narrator details the racist notions white male characters hold towards slaves, viewing them as commodities, animals, childish, and mere enablers of white society's sense of superiority. However, the narrator does not overtly label and condemn these practices but rather opts to neutrally relate passages exemplifying white racism, thus inviting readers to form their own interpretations and judgements regarding the racist views in the text. In her reading of the novel, Gardner attacks what she considers Glasgow's mainstream racist representation of African Americans:

Big Abel, Congo, and the rest of the Lightfoots' slaves were all familiar characters to Glasgow's readers, for the 'faithful darkey' made an appearance in almost every Lost Cause novel. No matter how firmly Glasgow insisted that she eschewed the traditional elements in sentimental Southern literature, she could not write a civil war novel without them.³⁶

Indeed, the novel seems to portray stereotypical pictures of slaves that populated numerous plantation romances. The reader meets the happy, faithful slaves who keep their cheerfulness even as they are sold and deported from one place to another. There are the arrogant house servants who admire and imitate their masters, and the vain cooks who need to be rebuked by their mistresses. There are the young thieves, and the superstitious conjurors, and both the despised free blacks and the passive ones who prefer to remain at their masters' plantations even after being freed. But as Raper notes, in *The Battle-Ground*, "there is an undercurrent ... which goes deeper than this stereotype prevalent in fiction by southern novelists."³⁷ The novel, for all these stereotypical pictures, is mainly juxtaposing two different worlds. There is

quotes Scott Romine's comment that "antebellum Southern aristocrats who created narratives of aristocratic origin and hereditary nobility" contributed in fashioning "whiteness as a stable, fixed essence." See "Narrative and Counternarrative in *The Leopard's Spots* and *The Marrow of Tradition*," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Literature of the U.S. South*, ed. Fred Hobson and Barbra Ladd (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), p. 217. The white man of the elite class, according to Frankenberg, established his racial and social status by promoting himself as a "strong, dominant, arbiter of truth, and self-designated protector of white womankind, defender of the nation/territory." See "Introduction: Local Whitenesses, Localising Whiteness," in *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, ed. Ruth Frankenberg (Durham: Duke University press, 1997), p. 11.

³⁶ Gardner, *Blood & Irony*, p. 150.

³⁷ Julius Rowan Raper, *Without Shelter: The Early Career of Ellen Glasgow* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1971), p. 161.

the world described in white characters' accounts, in which blackness has to remain "strongly urged, thoroughly serviceable, companionable, ego-enforcing, and pervasive" to maintain racial and class homogeneity.³⁸ Then there is the other world in which the narrator draws a line between the racial prejudices held by white Virginians, and their slaves' real characters and way of life. The image of the slave as inferior, equal to animals and mere possessions, is contrasted with his true humanity and personality. The labelling image of Levi, the free Negro, as a mysterious loner is undermined through the representation of him as an independent and honest character. The stereotype of the white patriarch providing protection to his infantilised slave is juxtaposed with situations in which the slave is the protector of and the provider for his white master.

The first racist image the text highlights is the configuration of slaves as mere possessions. In the white mind, slaves are frequently dehumanised to become commodities that could be handed over as tokens of familial love. The Major is more than happy to answer Dan's request to make Big Abel "belong" to him as compensation for being unjustly whipped (64). When young Betty appeals to Dan's sentiments by stating that she belongs only to him, he replies, "I reckon Big Abel and Pony are as much as I can manage." Betty insists on her statement, alluding to marriage, but Dan is preoccupied with his real "possessions" and bluntly answers back, "oh you couldn't, you're white" (67). In Dan's mind, only non-whites — just like animals — could be owned. This claim is internalised through Congo, who on the sight of a runaway slave bearing evident marks of torture, reacts impulsively, holding the slave down until his master claims him. The narrator comments on the incident by stating that Congo was in reality "delivering his brother into bondage" (88). This example, in brief, points out the overwhelming nature of slavery that dissolves any connections or affinity between slaves.

Animal metaphors were commonly used in southern plantation narratives to signify the racial inferiority and subordination of the slave in white-authored texts. It was also a typical description in the narrative of the ex-slaves "who were treated the same as the stock on the plantation."³⁹ White characters in the novel use the animal metaphor, but in the self-serving notion that both slaves and animals inspire white

³⁸ Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, p. 8.

³⁹ Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind*, p. 127.

affection and condescending paternalism. Mrs Ambler's comment upon the sight of Dan on horseback that "the servants and the animals adore him" clearly underscores this perception (66). Being affectionate to a race viewed as primitive as animals only nourishes these white characters' sense of their superiority. When Dan comes home after his European tour, the black household gathers to greet him. The narrator employs the animal metaphor as she vocalises Dan's opinions about the etiquette of interracial relations:

[T]he whole household was assembled to receive him. ... he caught the outstretched hands, scattering his favours like a young Jove. ... The dogs came bounding in, and he greeted them with much the same affectionate condescension ... Had the gulf between them been less impassable, he would not have dared the hearty handshake, the genial word, the pat upon the head—these were a tribute which he paid to the very humble. (174-76)

The novel discusses the controversy over the character of the free black through the figures of Aunt Ailsey and Free Levi. Historically, free blacks were always perceived as a threat to the stability of plantation society. They neither identified with whites because of their colour nor with slaves because they were free. The slaveholding community saw them as "an auxiliary", "idle, profligate, and dishonest", with a potentially corrupting "influence on slaves." They were called "thriftless, dishonest, pests to society, and [the] worst inmates of the city." As a result, authorities imposed stricter regulations on free blacks, stopping them owning or hunting and forcing them to "verify their whereabouts" on a regular basis.⁴⁰

Aunt Ailsey and Free Levi are portrayed as anything but idle, dishonest or evil. They are sensible, hardworking, but even they do not escape being used as — in Morrison's terms — enablers and surrogates through which white characters manage their life experience.⁴¹ The novel begins with Betty's intention to go to Aunt Ailsey, a former slave, to dye her red hair black. Basically, Betty is using Aunt Ailsey as a means of facilitating her social conformity by helping her dye her hair — a sign of individualism and maybe rebellion — into a more acceptable black colour. In stereotypical terms, Aunt Ailsey's cabin is presented as a place to feed the imagination. It stands alone, made of rough logs, full of animals' skins, with a big fireplace casting a red glow and heat over the cabin. Aunt Ailsey's cabin is also the

⁴⁰ William A. Link, *Roots of Secession: Slavery and Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003), pp. 151-55.

⁴¹ Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, p. 51.

place where Dan and Betty come to face each other, thus it serves in initiating their self-revelation. When Dan and Betty take shelter in the cabin from the rain, the young lovers are so invested in their white world that the symbols of the hardship of the free black, the exposed beams, the crude wooden walls, and the bare pantry are “invisible” to them. Even the fact that Levi, the current occupier of the cabin, is out in the rain after being bedridden for three months for rheumatism, escapes the couple’s attention. The significance of the place is limited to the fact that it is where Dan finally expresses his opinion of himself and the empty life he had led so far. It is where Betty herself articulates her ideal of the man that she wishes him to be (148-49). The absent Levi and his invisible hardship are conveniently disregarded by the young couple. The association between black people and romantic love forms a pattern that is difficult to miss in future novels. In *The Deliverance*, the sound of laughter floating suddenly from the black children pursuing the tobacco flies causes Christopher to cease his work and come out into the little path where he meets Maria and almost instantly falls in love with her.

Levi is initially presented to the reader as an enigmatic figure to whites and blacks alike. His independence is unfamiliar in a society that associates slaves with their dependence on their masters. Levi as a free black man ends bearing “alike the scornful pity of his white neighbors and the withering contempt of his black ones” (148). The narrator challenges this viewpoint to give an impression of an “honest-eyed” man, earning his living as a blacksmith, thus earning his free independence despite his poverty. Levi is employed by the narrator as a guiding figure when Dan stops to borrow “light” from him to find his path away from the plantation. Raper perceives the significance of Levi’s character as the text’s criticism of the cruelty of the system of slavery that does not grant slaves to marry, and as a symbol to Dan of emancipation from the plantation system.⁴² The naivety of Dan’s fancies of a secure and comfortable great future that awaits him contradicts with a more realistic image of Levi toiling with his hammer to earn his living (221). Levi, his cottage, manners, and lamp serve as road signs at which Dan stops to get guidance and start his journey. It is the journey that ultimately changes Dan’s beliefs about his masculine heritage, making of Levi an instrument in Dan’s liberation of his limiting masculine ideals.

⁴² Raper, *Without Shelter*, p. 162.

Another non-white character that Dan uses to define himself against and to address his insecurities is Big Abel. Glover argues that southern boys, while growing up, needed to interact with slaves. Slaves served as means through which white boys could cultivate their racial sense of superiority and establish the racial hierarchy between the races. It was why “[r]elatives often gave comparably aged slaves to their young kin both as playmates and as the means by which to model the adult power dynamics.”⁴³ It is interesting that the moment Dan lays eyes on his grandfather’s coach driver Big Abel he approaches him in a “lordly manner” and decides to keep him close to himself (40). Considering it was during Dan’s early days on the plantation in which he tries to prove that he belongs there, Dan’s decision to choose his grandfather’s finest slave to “quiet [his] deep insecurities”⁴⁴ is significant. It is more interesting that when later Dan gets unjustly “whipped” by his grandfather, the compensation that Dan demands from the Major is to have Big Abel (64). Suffering the physical indignity that is customarily given to slaves, the Major considers that owning a slave would help in redeeming Dan’s damaged sensibilities.

Big Abel serves many purposes in Dan’s life. He is the medium through which Dan’s own worth is measured. Griffith comments that the character of Big Abel is an example of the personal slave who in antebellum literature played the typical role of “a guide to [the young aristocrat’s] coming of age as a Virginian gentleman, an authority for acceptable behavior for a growing boy of the gentry.”⁴⁵ When Dan quarrels with Champe over whether a true gentleman would go barefoot, Dan tells Champe “Big Abel says a gentleman doesn’t go barefooted, and I am a gentleman” (41). The importance of Big Abel is further developed when Champe protests, “I’d like to know what Big Abel knows about it.” Dan grows angry and gets ready to fight exclaiming, “I’ll whip any man who says Big Abel doesn’t know a gentleman!” (41) The main purpose of Big Abel is to affirm Dan’s status as a gentleman. By questioning Big Abel’s ability to distinguish quality, suspicion could reach those whom Big Abel regards as gentlemen, i.e. Dan’s worthiness as a result may be questioned. Dan pushes his relationship with Abel beyond the usual master and his

⁴³ Glover, *Southern Sons*, p. 27.

⁴⁴ Morrison, *Playing in the Dark*, p. 37.

⁴⁵ Jean Carol Griffith, *The Colour of Democracy in Women’s Regional Writing*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009), p. 81.

slave one, in his tacit recognition of the slave's remarkable role in affirming the elite status of his master.

Once Dan gets expelled and disinherited by his grandfather, he starts to doubt his entitlement to the masculine traditions of ownership, specifically the racial ritual of retaining slaves. Consequently, when Big Abel shows up to join him, Dan tells Abel to go back to the plantation. But Abel is insistent that he will remain with Dan (233). Abel's decision to join Dan in his exile and later in the Civil War is pointed out by critics as an example of Glasgow's sentimental portrayal of the relationship between slaves and their masters. For example, Constante Gorba states that through Big Abel, Glasgow perpetuates a critical component of "the Lost Cause"⁴⁶ myth, prevalent in plantation romances.⁴⁷ Nonetheless, my reading of the figure of Big Abel and other non-white characters in the novel rather interprets their role as significant in demarcating Dan's earlier attachment and later relinquishment of the masculine ideal, a theme that I will discuss further in my presentation of the topic of war in the final part of the novel.

White Masculinity and Gender Difference

As Dan seems to found his masculine ideal on the detraction of the racial "other", his self-realisation appears to depend on female submission. In his first romance with Virginia Ambler, Dan reduces her to an admired spectacle rather than an active agent, and she is deprived of her voice in consequence. But he eventually revises his gender ideals at the hands of her sister Betty, an assertive woman who does not hesitate to shake his ego by accusing him of exaggerating his theatrical male acts.

Dan's adolescent fascination with Virginia is mainly based on the typical southern adulation of feminine submissiveness: "He liked that modest droop of her head and those bashful soft eyes, as if, by George, as if she were really afraid of him" (108-09). Gros, on femininity as a defining element in the construction of male

⁴⁶ The popular sentimental literature of the plantation romances pleaded that the South did not participate in the Civil War to protect the inhumane institution of slavery, but rather to defend Southerners' constitutional rights of slaves' ownership. By maintaining that Southern slaves were loyal to their benevolent, caring holders, "the Lost Cause" myth helped in defending the Southern cause for war.

⁴⁷ Constante Gonzalez Groba, "Ellen Glasgow's *The Battle-Ground*: The New Woman Emerges from the Ashes of the Civil War," in *Innocence and Loss: Representations of War and National Identity in the United States*, ed. Cynthia Stretch and Cristina Alsina Risquez (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), p. 43.

authority, notes, “Because of the high-stakes—money, status, plantation, and manhood—finding a mate ... as a general rule for Southern antebellum society ... is not simply a private, emotional matter, but is intrinsically bound up in consideration of public reputation.”⁴⁸ In this sense Dan’s initial infatuation with Virginia becomes understandable. Virginia is an icon of southern beauty, a Madonna figure, celebrated for her delicate white beauty by men and women alike. It is interesting to trace the multiple adjectives used to render Virginia’s beauty in racial terms. She has a bright smile, satiny brown hair, white shoulders, radiant glance, white throat ...etc. When Dan contemplates the idea of getting married, he entertains the thought of Virginia being painted in a portrait like Diana. With the picture of both Virginia and his dogs hanging on the mantle, “that was something to be really proud of” (138). Like his hunting dogs, Virginia for Dan is a precious possession, another manifestation of his racial, class, and gender superiority.

Glasgow vocalises her views on gullibility as a particularly masculine quality when it comes to romantic relations through the wise and witty Mrs Lightfoot. Mrs Lightfoot pinpoints the wrong reasons behind Dan’s attachment to Virginia and observes that “if he fancies the thing that is suited to him, he is less of a man than I take him to be” (82). The narrator further satirises Dan’s romantic meetings with Virginia as a mere fancy in which Dan is playing his much-loved role of a cavalier: “In another dress, with his dark hair blown backward in the wind, he might have been a cavalier fresh from the service of his lady or his king, or riding carelessly to his death for the sake of the drunken young Pretender” (137). In referring to the historical figure of failure in Bonny Prince Charles, known also as the Young Pretender and the Young Chevalier, the narrator foreshadows the failure of Dan’s false romance.

Betty’s character provides an example of feminine moral superiority that was popular in antebellum literature. According to Gros, southern women followed Victorian gender codes of morality and were “expected to practice womanly spirituality and provide support for both men and their heirs.” She quotes Nina Silber who states that “because women were assumed to be the moral caretakers of the age, southern female characters in antebellum fiction often embodied the anti-materialist sensibilities of the region and the pre-war era.”⁴⁹ Mayfield also attributes to

⁴⁸ Gros, “The Southern Gentleman,” pp. 104-05.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

antebellum womanhood a rehabilitating influence on masculinity as a man's "guide and his repository of common sense and natural self-discipline ... she curbs the man's romantic emotionalism and tempers his pride. More to the point, she keeps his theatrics under control."⁵⁰

In the novel, Dan's questioning of his adopted masculine ideal is triggered by Betty. Betty is portrayed as a self-reliant, honest character. In her relationship with Dan, she is always careful to guide him to find his identity. Dan is haunted by the fact that he is the son of the brute Jack Montjoy, who had put his mother in an early grave and deserted him afterwards. He even uses his mixed identity as an excuse for his aggression. Talking to Betty of the way her attitude provokes him, Dan warns her, "when you treat me like this you raise the devil in me ... as I told you before, Betty, when I'm not Lightfoot, I'm Montjoy." Betty is quick to answer Dan back, "When you're neither Lightfoot nor Montjoy, you're just yourself, and it's then, after all, that I like you best" (189). Betty invites Dan to see behind the public images he displays as either the plantation lord or the hot-blooded renegade because she instinctively realises the emptiness and meaninglessness that lie behind both models of masculinity.

Betty is keen on exposing Dan's vanities and tries to show him the error of his masculine assumptions about women. When Dan professes his love, Betty is fast to comment, "You are not in love with me now ... you have found out that my hair is pretty, or that I can mix a pudding, but I don't often let down my hair, and I seldom cook" (193). When Dan tells her that he realised his feeling for her while she was kneeling by the fire, she interrupts him saying, "But I can't always kneel to you, Dan" (194). Dan's promise to Betty "Since it's a man you want, I'll be a man" (195), entails his awareness that his previous acts so far do not qualify as marks of true manhood. Even in their endless games and foolishness, Betty cleverly portrays their romance as more of a mockery of the traditions of courtship. When she equates their courtship to Homer's Hector and Helena (186-87), the implication is that Dan is merely playing a part in his wooing of her and that he has to drop his act and be true to himself and to her.

Betty's goal is to enable Dan to free his judgment, inclinations, and identity from the dominant antebellum white model and above all to engender agency rather

⁵⁰ Mayfield, *Counterfeit Gentlemen*, p. 43.

than a sham mimicry. In one scene, Betty plays the part of a fortune-teller. When Dan asks her about his future, she is certain how he will turn out — wholly like a Lightfoot, a “well-fed country gentleman,” with rich fields and too many servants, who “grow[s] stout, red-faced ... and ... dull” (171). This version of the southern aristocrat, with all its privileges and drawbacks, seems to suit Dan’s expectations better than the other life-style Betty recommends as a man of faith. Dan cannot imagine himself as a fat-souled, thin-bodied beggar who sits in the dust by the roadside and eats his sour grapes (172). But Betty never despairs of guiding Dan to his inner strength because she perceives it as the most valid component in the formation of his masculine identity. Betty’s interventions and position on masculinity reflect Glover’s perceptions that white privilege does not translate directly into manhood: “Simply being wealthy, white, and independent did not make a boy a man.”⁵¹ Dan has to reach a degree of autonomy to meet Betty’s scrupulous demands and ultimately affirm his masculinity. Betty’s resilient character exceeds her pretty and prudish sister Virginia.⁵² She points forward to future heroines of equal strength and determinism such as Ada in *Vein of Iron*, and Roy in *In This Our Life*. They all have the intelligence, sympathy, and fortitude that enable them to take on their less than adequate lovers.

The novel highlights the significant role non-whites and women play in telling the story of white masculinity. It achieves this by focusing on Dan’s romantic and racial encounters with his beloved Betty, his private servant Big Abel, and other plantation slaves. These romantic and racial interventions in Dan’s behaviour work as directors of change that lead him to question his early behaviour. In the initial stages of Dan’s education, both blacks and women are depicted as inferior and submissive. Dan dismisses black characters for their racial difference and women for their sexual one. However, throughout the novel, these groups turn from happily serving white masculinity into the novel’s tactic to question it.

⁵¹ Glover, *Southern Sons*, p. 23-24.

⁵² This contrast is repeated in *Virginia* (1913) between the forceful Susan Treadwell and her friend, the bashful Virginia Pendleton.

The School of War and Camaraderie of the Poor White

Dan's reconsideration of his racial and sexual hierarchies goes hand in hand with his changing attitude towards the war, the ultimate test for southern masculinity. The second part of the novel starts with a chapter titled "The School of War" (283). The title counterpoints an earlier one named "The School for Gentlemen" (56). In the school for gentlemen, Virginia is celebrated as the place in which true gentlemen ought to learn polish, chivalry and the art of oratory. The trained cavalier, according to Gros, has always entertained a "passion for performative masculinity, his conversational and oratorical grace, become commodities that he publicly trades in or uses to separate himself from non-elite rivals."⁵³ The narrator satirises southern masculinity and foreshadows its defeat through the juxtaposition of titles. The parallel is deliberate and indicative of the ineffectuality of southern masculinity in the face of war as a real test of manhood.

Very young and enthusiastic volunteers enter into the school of war, greeted with flags and drums, and cheered by eloquent rhetoric. Dan's fantasies about his military experience are vocalised as more of a conditioned response rather than an authentic emotion. Dan's patriotism responds purely to exterior effects:

The sound of the bugle, the fluttering of the flags, the flash of hot steel in the sunlight, the high old words that stirred men's pulses—these things were his by blood and right of heritage. He could no more have stifled the impulse that prompted him to take a side in any fight than he could have kept his heart cool beneath the impassioned voice of a Southern orator. (299-300)

Mayfield explains that the young southerners' enthusiasm for the war was because "the war was particularly a young man's essay into manliness, and love of country merged seamlessly with [masculine] performance and even a Byronesque sense of romantic doom."⁵⁴ What motivates Dan and the rest of the southern cavaliers is not a belief in the validity of their cause, but rather a romantic patriotism, which the narrator poignantly and ironically portrays as racially determined: "a page from the eternal Romance; a page upon which he and his comrades should play heroic parts; and it was white blood, indeed, that did not glow with the hope of sharing in that picture, of hanging immortal in an engraving on the wall" (296).

⁵³ Gros, *The Southern Gentleman*, pp. 96-97.

⁵⁴ Mayfield, *Counterfeit Gentlemen*, p. 124.

Dan goes to war bearing his class privileges with him, believing that they determine his worth. He packs his toiletry kit with him, and when scorned by other soldiers, he answers back that he is willing to defend his country but only as a gentleman (285-86). He is idle while Abel cuts his wood and cooks his food (285). He shares the other cavaliers' discomfort that men far below them in class are appointed as their officers (293), overlooking the fact that their lack of real military skill is the reason for appointing them as infantry.

The news of small victories such as the Battle of Bull Run Creek are heartily welcomed, and the soldiers, who so far have not been involved in an actual battle hastily revel in a premature sense of invincibility. But as days and months pass without engaging in a large-scale combat, Dan, in a growing tendency for self-understanding, starts to recognise the army's real situation. He sees himself aimlessly moving with troops driven from one spot to another, within an army that is too weak to advance and is only able to postpone defeat by fighting back in small skirmishes. This awakening drives Dan to alter his perceptions and he starts to "ask himself impatiently if this were the pure and patriotic army that held in its ranks the best born of the South? To him, standing there, it seemed but a loosened mass, without strength and without cohesion, a mob of schoolboys come back from a sham battle on the college green" (317).

As the myth of the white racialised patriarchy starts to unravel, the superiority of the Federal army becomes more visible to Dan, "Ah, They advance well, those Federals-not a man out of line" (293). When Dan finally engages in a real battle, he wraps himself in the Confederate flag hoping to achieve his dream of glory, but the intensity of the battle reveals what lay behind the mask of the romantic hero: "the ... brute within him" (222). Dan is mercilessly stripped of his romantic illusions to become more of an animal than a man: "all the primeval instincts, throttled by the restraint of centuries—the instincts of blood-guiltiness, of hot pursuit, of the fierce exhilaration of the chase ... turned the battle scarlet to his eyes" (312). While barbarism is literarily associated with non-whites, here it is attributed to the white male, who turns into an animal-like savage.

After the end of the battle, Dan awakes to find Abel nursing him. He acknowledges the symbolic and actual role Abel plays in his life, looking after him, guarding his belongings, in essence preserving what is left of the aristocrat in him: "I should have lost my identity but for you, Big Abel" (321). Abel even saves Dan's life

when he rescues him from a fire lifting him like a “baby” (370). The irony of the supposedly infantile slave becoming the paternalistic figure in the master-slave relation is notable. The white characters’ stereotypical representation of blackness as inferior and childlike clashed in reality with their roles in protecting and even saving the white male. Nevertheless, this does not place the character of the slave in a better life, nor effectively challenge the status quo of race relations, any more than the Mammy figure.

While the army is marching to Romney, Dan meets with Pinetop, a mountaineer who came down to fight for his state, not for the aristocrats’ right to own slaves. Pinetop is portrayed as a resilient and witty character, but one who is lacking in social awareness. He believes that the emancipation of slaves is unworthy of the North’s trouble. He exclaims, “[I]f these here folks have come arter the niggers, let ’em take ’em off and welcome. I ai’nt never owned a nigger in my life, and, what’s more, I ai’nt never seen one that’s worth owning” (323). Pinetop’s speech and behaviour seem to coincide with historical studies of the racial relationship between Appalachian people and African Americans in the South. There are two basic notions regarding the racial attitudes in Appalachia and how they determined its course during the Civil War. On one hand, there is the notion that Appalachians were not preoccupied with the same racial prejudice that the rest of the South have.⁵⁵ However, their negative attitude towards slavery majorly stemmed from class resentment as a result of the “sectional inequities that benefited the Tidewater slaveholding elite at the expense of westerners.”⁵⁶ Slavery and the competition forced by the plantation system drew small-scale farmers out of their lands into the mountains. They were eventually denied the economic opportunities offered to other whites. Southern highlanders “were penned up in the mountains because slavery shut out white labor ... It denied those that looked down from their mountain crags upon the realm of King Cotton a chance to expand, circulate, and mingle with the progressive elements at work elsewhere in the republic.”⁵⁷ Consequently, the region’s non-slaveholder majority

⁵⁵ Loyal Jones, “Appalachian Values,” in *Voices from the Hills: Selected Readings of Southern Appalachia*, ed. Robert J. Higgs (New York: Ungar, 1975), p. 512. Carter G. Woodson, a black Appalachian native, stated that the Scotch-Irish who settled the southern highlands, were a “liberty-loving, and tyrant-hating race,” who exhibited “more prejudice against the slaveholder than against the Negro.” See Carter G. Woodson, “Freedom and Slavery in Appalachian America,” in *Journal of Negro History*, no. 1 (1916): 147.

⁵⁶ John C. Inscoe, *Race, War, and Remembrance in the Appalachian South* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2008), p. 22.

⁵⁷ Julian Ralph, “Our Appalachian Americans,” in *Harper’s Monthly Magazine* (June 1903): 37.

held a Unionist stance during the early period of the war and many of them idealised Abraham Lincoln.

Conversely, there is the more popular notion that southern mountaineers were southerners after all and that they regarded African Americans in the same terms as the rest of the South. Joseph John Gurney, a British Quaker travelling through the Virginia Mountains in 1841, encountered black workers and was distressed at the “miserable manner in which the slaves were clad.” He reported that their master “assured me that the slaves were among the happiest of human beings; but it was nearer the truth, when he afterwards observed that they were remarkably able to endure hardships.” Gurney concluded that “certain it is, that the negroes here, as elsewhere, are an easy, placid, and longsuffering race.”⁵⁸ The inherent fear and contempt Appalachians held towards African Americans was a result of the “black invisibility” element.⁵⁹ The homogeneous white population was hostile to the black race they were not familiar with. Though they resented slavery, they were equally resentful of slaves, and given the choice of either eliminating the plantation system supporting slavery or freeing slaves, they chose the first. Frederick Olmsted quoted one Tennessee mountaineer: “He’d always wished there had n’t been any niggers here ... but he would n’t think there was any better way of getting along with them than that they had.”⁶⁰ The later support of the secession and the region’s joining of the Confederacy were fuelled by the highlanders’ desire to keep blacks out of their region and their concern about their influx under a Republican government. Georgia governor Joseph E. Brown appealed to this racial fear by urging mountaineers to support their state’s separation from the Union: “so soon as the slaves were at liberty, thousands of them would leave the cotton and rice fields in the lower part of our State, and make their way to the healthier climate in the mountain region. We should have them plundering and stealing, robbing, and killing in all the lovely vallies of the mountains.”⁶¹ Many mountain residents felt that slavery would be safe in the union rather than out of it. They felt betrayed by Lincoln when he issued his Emancipation

⁵⁸ Joseph John Gurney, *A Journey in North America, Described in Familiar Letters to Amelia Opie* (Norwich, England: J. Fletcher, 1841), pp. 53–4.

⁵⁹ Edward J. Cabbell, ed., *Blacks in Appalachia* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985), p.3.

⁶⁰ Frederick Law Olmsted, *A Journey through the Back Country in the Winter of 1853–54* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1860), p. 239.

⁶¹ Quoted in Michael P. Johnson, *Toward a Patriarchal Society: The Secession of Georgia* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), p. 50.

Proclamation in September 1862 and abandoned their loyalist stance as a result.⁶² In conclusion, Pinetop's episode exemplifies how Appalachia's racial attitude and involvement in the war were shaped by social, economic, and sectional forces that regarded slavery through ethnic and political lenses rather than humane and moral ones.

In a revealing segment, Dan finds out about Pinetop's illiteracy, and the narrator delivers one of the most memorable and often-cited passages of the novel:

Until knowing Pinetop [Dan] had, in the lofty isolation of his class, regarded the plebeian in the light of an alien to the soil, not as a victim to the kindly society in which he himself had moved—a society produced by the free labor which had degraded the white workman to the level of the serf ... Besides that genial plantation life which he had known he saw rising the wistful figure of the poor man doomed to conditions which he could not change ... Even the specter of slavery, which had shadowed his thoughts, as it had those of many a generous mind around him, faded abruptly ... In his sympathy for the slave ... he had overlooked the white sharer of the Negro's wrong. (442-43)

Raper concludes that this quote presents Glasgow's attack on the apologist oratory of aristocratic slaveholders such as George Fitzhugh, who argued that slavery was beneficial to poor whites because it provided society with a bottom rail to which no white man could sink: "Miss Glasgow filters the more realistic opinion that the inability to compete with free or low cost black labor 'degraded the white workman to the level of serf.'"⁶³ I read this passage as a good example of how the novel implicates racial identity in its social criticism, exposing and mocking the amount of hypocrisy and contradiction involved in constructing southern aristocracy.

Dan belongs to the southern aristocrats, who identify themselves as "kindly", "genial", and "generous" but who are labelled by the narrator as "lofty" and "isolated." Dan starts to recognise how the hierarchical nature of the South has excluded poor whites like Pinetop from white privilege. On the one hand, many southern planters were able to acknowledge the moral dilemma imposed by the institution of slavery. The figure of the "Negro" after all enabled the material and moral existence of the aristocratic class even as his enslavement continued to "shadow" the thoughts of white southerners. It is the southern aristocrat's recognition of his own guilt that enables him to claim to be "generous" and "sympathetic" in the

⁶² Inscoc, *Race, War, and Remembrance*, p. 22.

⁶³ Raper, *Without Shelter*, p. 164.

first place. In brief, the issue of slavery remains restricted to the self-serving image of a genial white race, occasionally troubled by the guilt they feel towards their enslavement of another race. Conversely, southern aristocrats committed to oblivion the poor white whom they regarded as “an alien to the soil”, a “plebeian,” who shared nothing of the privileges of whiteness they proclaimed. In the exposure of Pinetop’s illiteracy, the narrator attacks the injustices the southern gentleman has done to the poor white, rendering his self-proclaimed generosity and sympathy as short-sighted and false in reality. Dan tries afterwards to teach Pinetop to read, and his aptitude for learning impresses Dan. But the relation between the two ends abruptly by the end of the war; Pinetop heads back to Tennessee and Dan to the valley. For Glasgow, the democratisation of the South that is brought by the war would need more changes to occur in order to mobilise the fixed relation between the South’s aristocracy and its labouring population.

The news of the South’s defeat in Appomattox and the freeing of the slaves reaches Dan as the novel nears its end, and at this point Glasgow delivers her last criticism of the benevolent master myth. With the end of slavery, Dan is too quick to shed the last of his responsibilities as an obliging master. When Dan and Abel approach a frame house to have a meal, Dan remarks to him, “I’ll pay for my supper and you’ll pay for yours, that’s fair, isn’t it?—for you’re a free man now” (490). After days of rest, Dan starts back to the valley to find Chericoke burned to the ground, his grandparents living in the overseer’s house, and the former slaves wandering about the place. Dan, equally worn down by a long war that lasted for four years, is now looking to a future in which he can see nothing but “a terrible patience which would perhaps grow into a second nature as the year went on.” Dan expresses the anxieties of his class who feared the decline of their position with the changes following the war. These changes will destabilise what Dan hitherto has perceived as the fixed nature of the southern planter class: “his future would be but one long struggle to adjust himself to conditions in which he had no part. His proper nature was compacted of the old tradition which was gone forever, of its ease, of its gayety, and of its lavish pleasures” (492-93). The image of poverty and defeat in the final scene is presented yet again in the blind Mrs Blake in *The Deliverance*. Glasgow seems to stress that the legend of the gentry’s glamorous mode of life which is brought to an end by war could only survive in debilitating worship of the past.

Mayfield highlights the contribution narratives similar to *The Battle-Ground* make to the studies of white masculinity. Mayfield observes that literary texts that reveal how the southern man came to be anxious about his identity and ineffectual at the test of war offer a more nuanced narrative of white masculinity. They ultimately show that “[w]hite male Southerners had a far more textured and ambivalent sense of manhood than we generally give them credit for.”⁶⁴ In the same manner by which the myth of the southern gentleman fails the South in its war with the North, Dan’s aristocratic inheritance fails to survive the circumstances of the new world he finds himself in by the end of *The Battle-Ground*. What mainly contributes to Dan’s failure is his embrace of the dominant ideals of masculinity with their racist and sexist assumptions. It limits and harms his life experience and hinders his finding out the truth about himself and those around him. Dan’s first adoption of the masculine ideals and his later abandonment of them expose the contradiction inherent in the ideology of white masculinity. Establishing itself as a natural authority, white masculinity is criticised for endorsing shallow acts of indulgence and chivalry. More important is how the novel gives authority to women, poor whites and non-whites as it emphasises the important part they play in transforming Dan’s character. These are the social groups that were excluded from the social dominance allocated to the prosperous, white male. Emphasising the crucial roles of these marginalised groups helps in decentralising the position of white masculinity and challenging its hegemony.

***The Deliverance* and Postwar Masculinity**

The Deliverance follows on from *The Battle-Ground*; the story of Christopher Blake in *The Deliverance* starts where Dan’s ends in *The Battle-Ground*. Christopher is an impoverished aristocrat left ruined by the Civil War and the economic devastations of Reconstruction. Similar in structure to *The Battle-Ground* with its pre- and post-war episodes, Christopher proceeds in his transformation through two main periods: before and after his enemy’s murder. Also like Dan, the construction of Christopher’s masculine identity is portrayed as an anxious and complex negotiation with his surrounding culture. Christopher suffers from feelings of estrangement and isolation as he tries to affirm his identity as a masculine figure in the post-war era.

⁶⁴ Mayfield, *Counterfeit Gentlemen*, p. xv.

The reader is first introduced to Christopher as a miserable illiterate young man who goes through the daily drudgery of tobacco farming. He is heavily ridden by the compulsion to kill Bill Fletcher to avenge a series of ambiguous incidents that after the war put Fletcher, once the Blakes' overseer, in the Blakes' family home, and reduced them to living in a farmhouse. The first part of the novel represents how Christopher identifies as a young man with a prevalent image of white masculinity in the post-war South, that is, a victimised and wounded man who is haunted by past memories and obsessed with avenging himself against his enemy. Christopher's identity is greatly influenced by his aristocratic heritage which is epitomised by his mother. As Dan's obsession to be the idealised image causes him to enlist in the Confederate army, Christopher's leads to his enemy's murder. Dan's interaction with slaves, women, and poor whites during the war causes him to doubt and modify his views on race and gender, and his social views. In the same manner, the reconstruction of Christopher's identity occurs in relation to others, his mother Mrs Blake, the black workers in the tobacco fields, and his lower-class opponent, Fletcher. As Christopher progresses during the second part of the novel in his relations with these different groups, who simultaneously reify and deconstruct his masculine ethos, I explore how he finally recognises the limiting and violent impact of his white masculinity.

Masculine Identity and the Old South

The Battle-Ground describes changes in the physical environment from the comfort of the plantation to the adversary of war and how they change Dan's outlook. In *The Deliverance* this external disruption has already occurred before the novel begins. The novel focuses instead upon more subtle transformation in Christopher's conceptual environment which includes his aristocratic past and his present anger. The novel demonstrates that Christopher's masculine identity is realised as a complex dialogue between himself and the views and practices of the class he comes from with its racial, gender, and social prescriptions. Christopher's identity is shaped by narratives of nostalgia, especially his mother's. Mrs Blake's character, with its racist and classist subtexts, contributes to Christopher's distorted view of his present life. The novel's depiction of nostalgia reveals its criticism of the southern aristocrat's blindness to his blemished past and precarious present. This nostalgia nourishes

Christopher's indulgence in fantasies of revenge against Fletcher, the culprit of the Blakes' downfall, his disdain of his new position as a tobacco farmer, and his evasion of how southern ideals of white masculinity, exemplified in his father, played a part in bringing about his demise.

The novel engages from the start in a sentimental narration of the Blakes' glorious aristocratic past. The impressive heritage of properties, the exquisite parties with famous names, the different etiquettes and manners, and even the impressive visual markers are all elaborated upon to delineate the racial and class ideals on which the Blakes rested their past life. The focus of the narrator's criticism is the Blakes' matriarch, Mrs Blake. Mrs Blake's actual blindness symbolises her detachment from reality, how her entrapment in the past prevents her from living her present life.

According to Christopher Breu, the nostalgic narrative of the glorious antebellum aristocracy is "one of the dominant ones of southern history in the [Reconstruction] period, positing the antebellum years as a golden era of southern history, one characterized by an organic social hierarchy oriented around the ideology of paternalism and a truly noble—and seemingly larger-than-life—southern 'aristocracy.'"⁶⁵ The narrator stresses the theme of the aristocracy's superior past through Mr Carraway: "a successful lawyer in a neighbouring town, who, amid the overthrow of the slaveholding gentry ... had risen into a provincial prominence".⁶⁶ Mr Carraway represents an old-school character who regards the culture of aristocracy with utmost reverence. His account of the Blakes' properties ostensibly celebrates their racial superiority and class distinction. Particularly impressive to Mr Carraway were the Blakes' vast lands that the observer could not "clap sight of", the three hundred slaves working on them plus the fifty working in the Blake Hall (6), and the mansion that "had the privilege of sheltering General Washington" (71). Mr Carraway's description of the Blakes' mansion employs a stereotypically southern lexicon that celebrates the plantocracy's lineage, history, and fine sentiment:

Clean, white, Doric columns of the Portico ... the ancient roof ... the hospitable steps ... the outward form of the dwelling spoke to the imaginative mind of that inner spirit which had moulded it into a lasting expression of racial sentiment ... For more than two hundred years Blake

⁶⁵Christopher Breu, "Privilege's Mausoleum: The Ruination of White Southern Manhood in *The Sound and the Fury*," in *Southern Masculinity: Perspectives on Manhood in the South since Reconstruction*, ed. Craig Thompson Friend (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009), p. 110.

⁶⁶ Ellen Glasgow, *The Deliverance: A Romance of the Virginia Tobacco Fields* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1943), pp. 3-4.

Hall had stood as the one great house in the county—a manifestation in brick and mortar of the hereditary greatness of the Blakes. (15)

Furthermore, when Fletcher turns the Blakes from their mansion and moves to live in the Hall, Mr Carraway instinctively perceives the new occupancy as a violation of the aristocratic legacy and an invasion of the new wealth of the lower-class. Fletcher receives Mr Carraway in a “desolate, crudely furnished room, which gave back to his troubled fancy the face of a pitiable, dishonoured corpse.” In Mr Carraway’s eyes, the ancient and superior southern civilisation succumbed to an inferior new system: “The soul of it was gone forever ... What remained was but the outer husk, the disfigured frame, upon which the new imprint seemed only a passing insult” (16).

Christopher’s arrogant and antagonistic character is the product of his mother’s influence. Mrs Blake delivers a stereotypical southern narrative that celebrates the distinction and nobility of the past. Through Mrs Blake’s physical, mental, and moral characteristics, the narrator criticises the present aristocracy as a poorer version of a once seemingly superb culture. The physical qualities of Mrs Blake sum up the past and the present state of the South: “In her face, which she turned at the first footstep with a pitiable, blind look, there were the faint traces of a proud, though almost extinguished, beauty—traces which were visible in the impetuous flash of her sightless eyes, in the noble arch of her brows, and in the transparent quality of her now yellowed skin” (53).

Mrs Blake’s former splendour and her current pathetic and helpless figure best reflect the confusion and anxiety the southern aristocrat went through during the years following the defeat of the South and the emancipation of slaves. Deborah N. Cohn identifies the turmoil of the post-war era and the manner in which southerners handled the crisis. Cohn sums up the drastic change in the southern scene when she states that “[t]he war had put an end to a way of life that had ordered society for many years. The plantation system was delegitimised, and the downfall of an economic order was accompanied by the breakdown of established modes of race and class relations.”⁶⁷ Cohn further adds that southerners’ indulgence in sentimental accounts of the past prevented them from integrating into the new social order:

⁶⁷ Deborah N. Cohn, *History and Memory in the Two Souths: Recent Southern and Spanish American Fiction* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1999), pp. 45-46.

The transitions from established forms of society to new orders have not been smooth in either case, nor have they been fully realized. While blacks, abolitionists, and northerners welcomed the changes that ensued, many southerners channelled their resentment toward the North's reconstruction of their way of life into an apotheosis of plantation society that emblemized their efforts to retain their privileges.⁶⁸

The novel, while engaging in a southern rhetoric that celebrates the aristocratic past, satirises the southerners' tendency to overlook the deficiencies existing in their heritage. Nostalgic narrative usually involves what Breu calls a "retrospective fantasy construction"⁶⁹ that makes it have little to do with the reality of the past. In the same manner, Mrs Blake's fragmentary recollections of her family members stress their fine assets, and the narrator comically sketches her memories. For example, Mrs Blake recounts the great lengths her great aunt went through to keep decorum: "Great-aunt Susannah ... has often told me that once ... she suffered untold tortures from 'budges' for three mortal hours rather than be seen to do anything so indelicate as to uncross [her knees]" (102). Aunt Susannah, who was a local celebrity for "danc[ing] a minuet with General Lafayette" (103), is Mrs Blake's idealised model of her female ancestors, for whom "patience and humility became a gentlewoman better than satin and fine lace" (103). Mrs Blake's loyalty to her past does not allow counter-narratives that would blemish it. For example, her brother Uncle Tucker refers to the family's grandfather who "used to fish his necktie out of the punch-bowl every Saturday night." Mrs Blake will not tolerate the distortion of her loving memory; she replies drily, "I do wish you would let my great grandfather rest in his grave. He's about all I've got" (112).

By choosing to make Mrs Blake physically blind, the narrator develops the theme of wilful blindness as a southern way of evading the unpleasant truths of life. The Blakes are no longer a great family: "the three hundred slaves [are]... in reality scattered like chaff before the wind" (74). However, in Mrs Blake's mind, the South was not defeated, and the Blakes' legacy remains intact. Mrs Blake's ignorance is formed and indulged by her family and household who keep information from her. This ignorance enables her to retain her polite manners and genteel views of love and life. She keeps an optimistic view of the world, telling her son, "I can say to you that

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Breu, "Privilege's Mausoleum," p. 110.

this is a cheerful world in spite of the darkness in which I linger on. I'd take it over again and gladly any day" (70). She reminisces over her late husband's handsome figure: "he was, my dear, one of the few fair men among us, and taller even than old Colonel Fitzhugh, who was considered one of the finest figures of his time" (54). Likewise, she sings the praises of the Confederate army which contained in its ranks heroic men like her brother: "A man who has taken the enemy's guns single-handed" (159). Mrs Blake is careful to remind the prosperous Jim Weatherby of the stern class distinctions between the Blakes and the Weatherbys: "There's nothing I like better than to see a good, hard-working family prosper in life and raise its station. Not that I mean to put ideas into your head, of course, for it is a ridiculous sight to see a person dissatisfied with the position in which the good Lord has placed him" (272-73). What Mrs Blake cannot see are life realities that sharply contrast with her beliefs. These include: the trouble her family goes through to keep her in a comfortable state, the suicide of her husband after wasting his fortune, Uncle Tucker losing the war as part of an army that lacked military experience, and the working-class Weatherby faring better socially and economically than the destitute Blakes. Mrs Blake withdraws through her blindness from her family's struggle for life into the shelter of her past. Her false position is an early representation of the pernicious aspects of the aristocratic tradition. Glasgow later uses Lavinia Timberlake in *In This Our Life* to illustrate the manner in which the sheltered life may produce female invalidism and, consequently, the tyrannical female. Lavinia, as an invalid, manages to prey upon the compassion of her husband and, thereby, to control him.

In Mrs Blake's relation with her black servants, she most emphatically continues to define herself by her aristocratic heritage as the plantation mistress who maintains a close relationship with the few "slaves" remaining in her service. Raper comments upon Mrs Blake's racial outlook as typical of her class's paternalistic attitude: "the core of all genteel southern ideology, is that it founds itself upon an ideal, an absolute, which easily becomes the unchallengeable 'good end' that justifies questionable tactics, including the sacrifice of other people."⁷⁰ Another variation on the southern mistress is Mrs Ambler in *The Battle-Ground*. Julia Ambler is the perfect plantation matriarch, tending to all her house residents. She is a sympathetic soul who accepts her prescribed position and role as a southern mistress, with all its dualities,

⁷⁰ Raper, *Without Shelter*, p. 192.

without questioning. She is the source of her husband's plan to free his slaves in his will. However, her superstition-ridden mind cannot transcend the "timid wonder that the Bible 'countenanced' slavery."⁷¹

Mrs Blake plays the role of the matriarch who asks after her household, "what has become of Nathan, the son of Phyllis? He used to be a very bright little darkey twenty years ago." In reality, she is incapable of performing this part any longer because of her physical and mental frailty, something she confesses as she adds, "I always intended putting him in the dining-room, things escape me so" (55). The narrator emphasises Mrs Blake's racist nature in the segment about Nathan's mother: "Phyllis, I remember, got some ridiculous idea about freedom in her head, and ran away with the Yankee soldiers before we whipped them" (55). Mrs Blake holds the belief that freedom for slaves is a ludicrous notion and that all free blacks are rebellious failures. In what I believe to be a typical technique of Glasgow's narratives, the narrator does not condemn Mrs Blake's racism but rather chooses to disqualify it by concluding her monologue with the fact that "since the war Nathan had grown into one of the most respectable of freedmen" (55). In ironically contrasting Mrs Blake's beliefs with reality, the text accomplishes its task of exposing the falsehood of her observations.

As Mrs Blake is dying, she requests the presence of all her former slaves along with her children. The faces of Mrs Blake's son and daughters are set beside those of Uncle Boaz, Aunt Polly, and Docia in a final gesture to the southern paternalistic myth of slavery as a "black and white family."⁷² Mrs Blake's subsequent speech perpetuates the aristocratic ideal of benign relations between the white mistress and her coloured dependants. She propagates her black retainers' servitude: "You have been good servants to me for a long time, and I hope you will live many years to serve my children as faithfully" (476). She conveys to her son the southern mistress's Christian belief that posited "masters as morally obliged to care for their slaves and mistresses as the moral agents responsible for reenacting that care."⁷³ She tells him, "Always remember, Christopher—always remember that a man's first duty is to his

⁷¹ Ellen Glasgow, *The Battle-Ground* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1905), p. 69.

⁷² Griffith, *The Color of Democracy*, p. 85.

⁷³ Marli Frances Weiner, *Mistresses and Slaves: Plantation Women in South Carolina* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), p. 70.

wife and children, and his second to his slaves. The Lord has placed them in your hands, and you must answer to Him how you fulfil the trust” (476-77).

Griffith remarks in her reading of Mrs Blake’s advice to her son that “Glasgow employs Mrs. Blake’s true status ... to suggest that even in her more aristocratic past, Mrs. Blake (and, by extension, the Southern Lady) held an ultimately demeaning position that required her own subservience and the even greater subservience of her slaves to the master.”⁷⁴ I would add that this scene, besides solidifying the place of the southern patriarch, comes as a logical conclusion to the text’s ironic treatment of the aristocratic tradition as obsolete. The South’s racist and classist ideals are based on a void and finished past, and to hold to them, as Mrs Blake does, is meaningless. This thought is further developed as Mrs Blake declares her intention to free Boaz, a former slave she promised to emancipate fifty years earlier. She justifies her delay by saying that Boaz will find his freedom “nothing but a burden and a trouble” (272). Mrs Blake’s final act is doubly absurd; Boaz, in reality, a free person, needs his mistress less than she needs to free him to maintain her faded image as the kind-hearted plantation mistress. Mrs Blake is not capable of discerning the imperfections of her ideal world because they are invisible to her literally as a blind person and literarily as a white character. Nevertheless, the ideal of whiteness is significant to her identity as well as to Christopher’s, functioning both as defining and limiting to their self-realisation.

Christopher’s look and early behaviour follow a particular white model created by American literature and which is related to prevalent southern attitudes about class, gender, and race. Friend investigates the postbellum period from Reconstruction to the start of the twentieth century. He highlights the different ways in which class, race, and geography shaped different types of masculinity. Some of the recognisable male categories he analyses are: the Christian gentleman, martial masculinity, primitive masculinity, and the self-made man. According to Friend, these variants were the outcome of changing circumstances when southern men found the old established ideals useless to their times. Friend uses the term “passionate manhood” to describe a trend of writing that increased in popularity during the years following the Civil War. This movement emphasised “the physical demands of frontier life and farming” that were “less accessible to men in the late nineteenth

⁷⁴ Griffith, *The Color of Democracy*, p. 85.

century.” It paid “a new attention to the male body” and was, in essence, a “celebration of male emotions through acts of competition, aggression, force, [and] sexuality.”⁷⁵

While the attention given to Christopher’s physical markers seems to share this tendency, it is tweaked to emphasise class as well as race in celebrating white masculinity. The novel dedicates multiple segments to dwell upon Christopher’s striking appearance. Through the eyes of the class-awed Mr Carraway, the reader meets Christopher for the first time: “Carraway saw but a single worker—in reality, only one among the daily toilers in the field, moulded physically perhaps in a finer shape than they, and limned in the lawyer’s mental vision against a century of the brilliant if tragic history of his race” (12). Mr Carraway is impressed by Christopher’s physical features, the “certain coarseness of finish found most often in the descendants of a long line of generous lives. The keen yes, thick fair hair, the high-bred curve from brow to nose, and the fullness of the jaw which bore with a suggestion of sheer brutality upon the general impression of a fine racial type” (13). Christopher’s description is rooted in a language which emphasises white uniqueness. It is reminiscent of Johann Blumenbach’s preferable portrayal of the Caucasian variety:

Colour white ... hair brown or chestnut-coloured: head sub globular; face oval, straight, its parts moderately defined, forehead smooth, nose narrow, slightly hooked, mouth small ... the chin full and rounded. In general, that kind of appearance which according to our opinion of symmetry, we consider the most handsome and becoming.⁷⁶

From the Blakes’ paternal ancestry comes Christopher’s most striking physical traits, combining to form a specific racial type that is described as inspiring class-awe, and as sexually appealing. Christopher’s “bared head, with the strong, sunburned line of his profile ... as a portrait done in early Roman gold” (66) impresses Maria Fletcher. She feels “[a]ll the natural womanhood within her respond[ing] to the appeal of his superb manhood” (130). Auchincloss criticises Glasgow for what he considers her sudden slump “to the level of the lowest potboiler” in her tantalising account of Maria’s physical attraction to Christopher.⁷⁷ However, Maria is the granddaughter of Fletcher, who is the Blakes’ former overseer. Despite their accumulated wealth, the

⁷⁵ Friend, “From Southern Manhood to Southern Masculinities: An Introduction,” p. ix.

⁷⁶ Quoted in Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: Norton, 2010), p. 63.

⁷⁷ Louis Auchincloss, *Ellen Glasgow* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1964), p. 14.

Fletchers belong to an inferior class. In Maria's physical attraction to Christopher, the narrator emphasises the impact of aristocratic masculinity by depicting the lower-class's submission to it in naturalistic, sexual terms.

Another characteristic associated with passionate masculinity in the narratives of post-bellum white masculinity is the celebration of the white male's primitivism. These new narratives drew men to nature and primitive activities such as timbering and farming, and juxtaposed them with the more civilised activities of the earlier models of southern manhood.⁷⁸ The narrator similarly establishes an affinity between Christopher and the pastoral landscape in the novel; the reader can detect this thought in the following quote: "he seemed, indeed, as much the product of the soil upon which he stood as did the great white chestnut growing beside the road. In his pose, in his walk, in the careless carriage of his head, there was something of the large freedom of the elements" (12). A born agriculturist, Christopher is naturally endowed with the skill of growing tobacco: "the weed thrives under his very touch, though he can't abide the smell of it, an' thar's not a farmer in the county that wouldn't ruther have him to plant, cut, or cure than any ten men round about ... he kin pick up a leaf blindfold an'tell you the quality of it at his first touch" (7).

However, the aristocrat's inherent love of leisure and his disdain of drudgery prevent Christopher from finding beauty or satisfaction in his rural environment. The apparent harmony with nature that was described earlier is contradicted by Christopher himself. He describes his aristocratic heritage of pleasure, violence, and chivalry to Maria as the ideal dream that sharply contrasts with his humble position as a tobacco farmer: "'to this day I never look at a plant nor smell a pipe without a shiver of disgust. The things I want are over there' ... 'I want the excitement that makes one's blood run like wine ... War, and fame, and love'" (346). Christopher is alienated from his present, and his disassociation is constantly fed by his dreams of the past. In his dreams, Christopher reconstructs the popular myth of the southern cavalier, but imagination is the only space in which he can realise his masculine fantasies. The previous quote shows that southern masculinity will in effect remain a myth.

Through the tragedy of the Blakes, the novel points out the moral corruption at the heart of southern masculinity, associating it with recklessness and extravagance.

⁷⁸ Friend, "Southern Manhood to Southern Masculinities," p. ix.

Mayfield refers to the social customs of the masquerade culture that made the southern man “most vulnerable to ruination by the unwritten rule that required him to buy drinks, consign notes, and demonstrate his generosity and ‘liberality.’”⁷⁹

Irresponsibility that resulted from a life of excess and desire to demonstrate power and status led certain southern aristocrats eventually to doom. The leading cause of the Blakes’ undoing is the family patriarch, the late Mr Blake. His drunkenness, lack of business savviness, and blind trust in his overseer eventually caused him to lose his mind and lead the family to bankruptcy. Christopher perceives the faults of his ancestors’ ways of life. However, he does nothing to correct his conduct and instead embraces their degenerate form of masculinity. As Christopher Blake looks at the portraits of his ancestors in the sitting room of his uncle’s farmhouse, he ascertains that they have been both genial and self-indulgent and that he has inherited this very weakness:

For more than two hundred years his people had been gay and careless livers on this very soil; among them all he knew of not one who had gone without the smallest of his desires, nor of one who had permitted his left hand to learn what his right one cast away. Big, blithe, mettlesome, they passed before him in a long, comely line, flushed with the pleasant follies that helped to sap the courage in their descendants’ veins. (203)

But Christopher follows the path of his predecessors; he gets “the old gentleman’s dry throat” (12) and uses drink as a means to drown himself in fantasies of revenge against Fletcher. Christopher’s savagery which is induced by circumstances but is also nurtured by his narcissism and a certain hereditary recklessness also provides the psychological side of Dan in *The Battle-Ground*.

Through Fletcher, the narrative hints at another factor that contributed to the downfall of the southern aristocrat, besides his own inadequacies. In different segments, the narrator refers to Fletcher’s sudden acquisition of wealth, thus appealing to the reader’s sense of suspicion: “The prodigal Blakes—burning the candle at both ends, people said—had squandered a double fortune before the war, and in an equally stupendous fashion Fletcher had amassed one” (41). The narrator questions the rare coincidence that made Fletcher the only bidder on the Blake mansion, thus buying it for “the absurd sum of seven thousand dollars” (410). It must have been an illegal agreement between Fletcher and the local authorities that enabled

⁷⁹ Mayfield, *Counterfeit Gentlemen*, p. 57.

him to rob the Blakes of their residence. According to Breu, “the victim narrative” of postbellum literature intersected with the trauma of the southern aristocrat that stemmed from the loss of the Civil War. By hinting at an alliance between Fletcher and the corrupted authority — appointed by the Federal government at the time — the novel recasts the Blakes, and in association the South, “as an equally unambiguous victim of ‘northern aggression’ after the end of the conflict.”⁸⁰ Christopher is but too aware of his victimisation: “He knew now that Fletcher—the old overseer of the Blake slaves—had defrauded the innocent as surely as if he had plunged his great red fist into the little pocket of a child, had defrauded, indeed, with so strong a blow that the very consciousness of his victim had been stunned” (23). The significance of this image is that it dramatises the state of loss the antebellum aristocrat went through in the post-war world of capitalism when his precarious figure was played over by the market’s con artists. The novel also shares the assumption made by writers who criticised the extreme character of some southern gentlemen. Virginian humourist Joseph Baldwin for example sums up the character of the southern aristocrat as the unfortunate outcome of nature and nurture: “All the habits of his life, his taste, his associations, his education—everything—the trustiness of his disposition—his want of business qualifications—his sanguine temper—all that was Virginian in him, made him the prey, if not of imposture, at least of unfortunate speculations.”⁸¹

The novel’s examination of Christopher’s subject formation through his family, especially his mother, utilises the South’s cultural imaginings around aristocratic white masculinity. It reveals its constructed nature by portraying it as a process that involves social and cultural forces and nostalgic psychological processes conditioned by normative ideals of gender, race, and class. More importantly, the novel criticises these cultural norms by portraying them as limiting and even destructive to the male experience.

Filling the Gaps in White Masculinity

The novel’s representation of Christopher’s strenuous process to embody the masculine ideal offers the reader the opportunity to see the negative effects of white

⁸⁰ Breu, “Privilege’s Mausoleum,” p. 111.

⁸¹ Quoted in Mayfield, *Counterfeit Gentlemen*, p. 62.

masculinity's racist assumptions. Christopher's anxiety over his current situation causes him to emphasise his racial superiority over non-whites, represented by the Blakes' black help. Non-whites are thus not given a chance by Christopher to voice their own identities. But the text defines them differently to its protagonist's perception; their roles eventually question and stand opposite to the white masculine's experience. By sympathising with their former masters, ex-slaves and house servants provide a counter-narrative to Christopher's isolated existence; his failing to empathise with them is a point of further criticism to his masculine values.

The tentative position of the post-war southern aristocrat prompted him to invoke his masculine legacy through his relationship with black servants and workers who remind him of his antebellum heritage. Creech explains the imperative of paternalism as a surviving claim of white masculinity to ensure its authority: "because personal independence was intricately tied to dependency, hierarchy, and relationships of power (including oppressive ones), independent manhood entailed caring for dependents as a form of mutual obligation, [and] reciprocity."⁸² In the novel, the thought of paternalism as a defining feature of the relation between white southerners and their former black slaves, is passed to Christopher by his mother. Bay notes that such a narrative required the involvement of African Americans' dependence as an enabler of white masculinity: "the planter class's ideology of paternalism ... designated slaves the dependent children of their benevolent masters."⁸³ In the same manner, the Blakes' former slaves frequently turn to them for help. However, their blind faith in their former masters' patriarchal authority is contrasted by the narrator with the Blakes' perception of their protective role as mainly an opportunity to relive their slave-owning past.

One idea underscores *The Deliverance* and before it *The Battle-Ground* criticising the myth of benevolent patriarchy, that the patriarch's affection for his slave is an extension of his love of his image as the landowner, in charge of lives and properties. The narrator's criticism of white paternalism as an act that involves no sincere emotion is reflected in small incidents, such as when Uncle Isam visits Christopher to get advice about his cabin and to look up his birth date in the servants' age book kept by the family. Christopher is surprised by the long absent man's

⁸² Creech, "The Price of Eternal Honor" p. 36.

⁸³ Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind*, p. 119.

requests but is happy to oblige him with “a patriarchal dignity of manner” (63). In a more detailed segment, the narrative elaborates upon the true motivations behind Christopher’s apparent caring attitude towards his former slaves. Christopher’s friend informs him that his former slave, Isam, is infected with smallpox. Isam’s children are dying of the disease, and the rest of his family are exposed to it. Starving and helpless, Isam sends a note to Christopher asking for his help (445).

Auchincloss criticises Glasgow for reminiscing over antebellum days in her portrayal of Christopher: “He is another of Miss Glasgow’s supermen—he risks smallpox to bury the children of a former family slave.”⁸⁴ But Griffith rightly discerns the embedded criticism the novel directs towards the southern aristocrat’s lack of genuine sympathy when she states that “Christopher’s loyalty is, in reality, nothing more than inherited weakness that lacks the true loyalty felt by Isam and other black members of the family.”⁸⁵ Griffith’s opinion is supported by a close reading of the first response from Christopher on hearing Isam’s news, which is lacking in human sympathy; he laughs, and his laugh sounds “rather brutal” (445). The only value Christopher associates Isam with is that he “used to belong to us” (445). The significance of Isam’s peril is that it provides Christopher with a chance to demonstrate white superiority, the inheritance of his slave-owning ancestors. He replies to his friend’s objection to carrying out the dangerous task, “I don’t care a straw for uncle Isam and his children, but if I didn’t go up there ... I’d never have a moment’s peace. I’ve been everything but a skulking coward, and I can’t turn out to be that at the end. It’s the way I’m made” (447). The narrator stresses the point that what inspires Christopher to help Isam is his desire to embody the cavalier’s bravery and recklessness: “A sudden animation had leaped into his face and his eyes were shining. It was the old love of a ‘risk for the sake of the risk’ which ... had always seemed to lack the moral elements of true courage” (447). The narrator further criticises Christopher’s masculine claim of power by showing that this projection of himself, in reality, diminishes his humanity and sympathy: “the careless gaiety with which he spoke robbed the situation of its underlying sombre horror” (447). The narrator renders Christopher’s seeming courage as a moral failure, a failure to

⁸⁴ Auchincloss, *Ellen Glasgow*, p. 14.

⁸⁵ Griffith, *The Color of Democracy*, p. 82.

recognise the tragic circumstances of African Americans in his attempt to perpetuate the myth of white masculinity.

The Blakes' former slaves and the few remaining servants play a significant role in maintaining their former masters' ideals of benevolent antebellum aristocracy. Griffith notes that "in *The Deliverance* ... the Blakes, have lost everything except their proud name and the loyalty they owe former slaves ... Dependence upon and loyalty to the former master or his children remains characteristic of slaves a full thirty-odd years after their emancipation."⁸⁶ Griffith's comment is aimed at criticising the novel's apparent perpetuation of the apologetic slavery rhetoric that defines loyalty to and dependence upon the white master as characteristic of the helpless, weak and ignorant black race. Several passages and incidents in the text suggest this premise. For example, Tom Spade recounts to Christopher the humility and deference to the Blakes' authority black men demonstrate even after the Blakes have lost their status: "Well, it seems that every thriftless nigger in the county thinks he's got a claim upon you ... Thar's a good six hunnard of' em, black an' yaller an' it's God A'mighty or Marse Christopher to' em everyone" (444). Uncle Boaz, the senior Mr Blake's body-servant before the war, chooses to remain in the service of his mistress. But his current miserable state parodies the Blakes' inferior position. The once fine butler, who "used to wear his master's cast-off ruffles an' high hat" (11), is now an old man "all bent up with the rheumatics" (11). Despite all his physical infirmities, Boaz uncomplainingly spends time looking for his mistress's stray cat (9). He patiently bears Mrs Blake's reprimands pretending that he mislaid the key of the wine-cellar rather than letting her discover the truth that they cannot afford to buy expensive port for her anymore (48). Even in the master's absence, the servant is loyal to his memory. Mehitable mourns the memory of the generous, fine looking, Mr Blake, contrasting him with the vulgar and tight-fisted Fletcher who is always looking for a cheap bargain in his dealings with her (20-21).

However, implied in the text is the notion that the white master needs his former slave to help him keep the illusion of his class ideals as much as the latter needs him for protection and support. This assumption is alluded to in the narrator's comment that "the descendants of the old Blake slaves were still spoken of by Cynthia as 'the servants,' though they had been free men and women for almost thirty years"

⁸⁶ Ibid.

(443). This is further developed when Docia offers her purple wedding stone for Christopher and Cynthia to replace their mother's diamond stone so they can sell it without her discovering its absence (148). Docia's symbolic act shows how blackness is invested in perpetuating white illusions of superiority. This is most apparent in the red-neck Peterkon's account of the origin of the animosity between Fletcher and Christopher:

Old Bill Fletcher stole his house an' his land an' his money ... but he couldn't steal his name, an' that's what counts among the niggers, an' the po' whites, too. Why, I've seen a whole parcel o' darkies stand stock still when Fletcher drove up to the bars with his spankin' pair of bays, an' then mos' break tha' necks lettin' 'em down as soon as Mr. Christopher comes along with his team of oxen. You kin fool the quality 'bout the quality, but I'll be blamed if you kin fool the niggers. (8-9)

African Americans are portrayed in the novel as accessories to keep the post-war social hierarchies in the southern society intact by keeping their respect exclusive to the aristocrat. The Blakes' former slaves keep their master's names even after their emancipation. They follow the Blakes as they move out buying bits of lands around them to practise small-scale farming. It is through them that the Blake name is kept alive. Even when they come to own property, black farmers bend their heads to greet their former master. Bay confirms Peterkon's deduction when she comments that "some ex-slaves evidently divorced lower-class whites from the upper-class whites who employed them."⁸⁷ She adds that this was "a sentiment that was often encouraged by slave owners, who looked down upon poor whites themselves."⁸⁸ The Blakes' former slaves in effect follow the class sensibilities of their masters. New wealth such as Fletcher's would not blind the black race from discerning their humble origins.

The use of the racial other to emphasise class differences between upper and working-class whites is confirmed in the verbal altercation between Fletcher and Christopher regarding the black tobacco labourers. Fletcher accuses Christopher of turning the field hands against him; he keeps ranting, "I tell you, you've set all the niggers against me, and I can't get hands to work the crops ... you've gone and turned them all against me—white and black alike." Fletcher is not willing to admit that it is his rather cruel treatment that drove the workers away. Fletcher is originally an

⁸⁷ Bay, *The White Image in the Black Mind*, p. 155.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

overseer and despite his new wealth does not abandon the offensive practices of his former position, which include slave-whipping. Christopher replies, “There is no use blaming the Negroes ... they’re usually ready enough to work if you treat them decently.” The narrator comments on this class-inspired statement as defining the superiority of the southern aristocrat: “his pronunciation of the single word would have stamped him in Virginia as of a different class from Fletcher” (18).

Christopher’s class distinction is defined by his supposedly inherent knowledge of how to treat slaves. Brought up on a plantation in Virginia, the early cradle of southern slavocracy, Christopher, by southern conventions, possesses the innate knowledge that good treatment is the only way to win a slave’s devotion. This is an inaccessible experience to the originally red-neck Fletcher. Christopher clearly supports the proslavery rhetoric which claimed that “[i]n return for their labor, slaves were guaranteed food, clothing, and shelter under the stewardship of a benevolent master.”⁸⁹ The historical inaccuracy of his statement is probably understated by the narrative in its focus on non-whiteness as essential for the post-war aristocrat to realise himself as a knowledgeable and competent figure still. The novel does not indicate that Christopher is questioning the idea of race difference; rather, he understands it in essentialist terms. What is significant here is how the white man constructs his identity by employing the rhetoric of race difference. This racialisation of white masculinity has its negative effects on both the white male by keeping him in a state of denial and the non-white by perpetuating his difference.

The Course of Victimised, Vengeful Masculinity

Christopher’s masculine identity is the outcome of the transforming position of the southern aristocrat during the postbellum era from mastery and privilege to self-doubt and hardship. My argument is that the uncertain status of southern manhood after the war and the emancipation of slaves translates in the novel into an emphasis on wounded and victimised masculinity that celebrates notions of violence to avenge itself. The course of Christopher’s life journey is chronicled according to the year’s seasons. In the first and second books entitled “The Inheritance” (3), and “The Temptation” (125), the reader first meets Christopher in the summer, during

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 55.

which his romance with Maria starts to blossom. In the third book, ominously titled “The Revenge” (235), Christopher’s notions of violence and revenge are expanded on by the narrator. Christopher saves the life of Fletcher’s weak-willed but beloved grandson William and from that time onwards starts shaping the boy as the means for his revenge. It is during the fall that Christopher starts to carry out his plan to hurt Fletcher by corrupting his grandson William. In the winter, Christopher fulfils his scheme of revenge against Fletcher when William murders his grandfather who disinherited him because of his reckless behaviour. In the fourth book “The Awakening” (337), Maria, another Betty who just like her completes her healing influence by the novel’s end, returns to Christopher; he confesses his guilt and goes to jail. The last book, “The Ancient Law” (441), is about Christopher’s moral rebirth and eventual liberation from the masculine traditions of his ancestors; significantly this transformation takes place during the spring. The seasonal structure of the novel’s themes — inheritance, romance, revenge, and rebirth — registers their interconnectedness in the narrative of white masculinity in the post-war era. In *The Battle-Ground* events also occur in times unified by the natural cycle of birth, growth, maturity, and death. In the first book, Dan’s early upbringing and education are set in summer. Dan’s confusion and the cessation of the South are set in the autumn. He learns the hard realities of war in winter and is reborn in spring after he transcends his masculine and class heritage.

Two views keep Christopher in a constant state of rage that eventually leads him to carry on with his schemes of revenge against his enemy. The first is his sense of futility and helplessness and the second is his sense of victimisation. Here I try to locate Christopher’s state of mind within the literature of post-war masculinity that defines it as a failure to propagate antebellum masculinity. I then show how the narrator conveys the two sentiments as barriers between Christopher and his ability to free himself from the imperatives of his culture, recalling the image of African Americans as an extreme example to show Christopher’s lack of agency.

Despite Christopher’s attempts to relive in his mind the glory of his past, his living conditions continually render him a helpless man. He is an illiterate tobacco farmer whose drunken father committed suicide after wasting the family fortune. His present life is burdened with the responsibility of taking care of his family (his mother, two sisters, and uncle) on a small farm. What further complicates life for Christopher is that he has to maintain his blind mother’s illusion that the family still

lives in Blake Hall, not a cottage on the farm. In brief, Christopher lives what Mayfield calls the southern man's nightmare monsters of humiliation: "public disgrace, exposure, cowardice, poverty, addiction ... family madness, [and] general worthlessness."⁹⁰ Christopher's exposure to public disgrace through a life of constant poverty and drudgery creates in him a constant feeling of his worthlessness. He is acutely aware of his present degraded state. He tells Maria, "Look at the coarse clothes, smelling of axle-grease, the hands knotted by toil and stained with tobacco juice, the face soiled with sweat and clay. That is I, who was born with the love of ease and the weakness to temptation in my blood, with the love, too, of delicate food, of rare wines, and of beautiful women" (156).

According to Breu, Christopher's retrospective account in which he recalls the more attractive past is a popular narrative of victimhood in postbellum fiction. Breu argues that the theme of "melancholy victimhood" dominated fiction about twentieth-century southern aristocrats as victims who "can only pale in comparison to the heroic stature of the antebellum southern aristocrats ... [and whose] world was a tragic one organized around loss and the disappearance of the ideal."⁹¹ Robinson similarly contrasts the antebellum southerner's masculine image of competence with the image of defeat represented by the postbellum southerner:

[T]he genteel aristocrat evinces a civilized and somewhat enervated masculinity and the tragically defeated Rebel a wounded one. While the southern gentleman [is] characterized by his desire to protect women and children from the dangerous others ... the tragically defeated Rebel evinces the failure of chivalry and, indeed, a failure of masculinity that will haunt southern men far into the twentieth century.⁹²

Robinson investigates post-sixties texts by male writers that put homogenous masculinity under the spotlight by describing it as traumatised, angry and needing to release suppressed feelings in a manner that is typically violent and chaotic. Robinson concludes that the literary portrayal of masculinity in these texts was to respond to the liberal movements of the sixties which were perceived by white men as threatening to their political and social privileges. Despite the chronological irrelevance of Robinson's study to the historical context covered by the novel, it still shares with it

⁹⁰ Mayfield, *Counterfeit Gentlemen*, p. 109.

⁹¹ Breu, "Privilege's Mausoleum," p. 111.

⁹² Robinson, *Marked Men*, p. 164.

the attitude of scrutinising the traditions of white manhood as they get redefined and reconfigured in reaction to a changed situation.

Christopher tries to hold to the family-protecting ideals of his gender and class by taking care of his sisters and by keeping his mother safely ignorant of the truth. Christopher toils on the farm so that his young sister's "small white hands" remain "unsoiled" (76). He even agrees to work for Fletcher since the extra money will help with his mother's expensive tastes. But the narrator undermines Christopher's actions as futile attempts at keeping up an unworthy heritage. Lila, Christopher's young sister, is oblivious to the past Christopher is trying to keep: "She remembered none of the past grandeur, the old Blake power of rule, and the stories of gallant indiscretions and powdered beaux seemed to her as worthless" (117). Christopher himself expresses his sense of the wasted effort he made to protect his mother's false pretensions. He tells his sister after his mother's passing "her blind eyes are open, and she sees at last my failure and my sin, and the agony that I have known" (484). For Christopher, keeping his mother's vain past at the expense of his present is a mistake that ruined his life and proved futile against death as life's greatest reality. Now that Mrs Blake is dead she can discern her son's desperate situation, "but she cannot shield [him] now, for all her wider vision" (484).

To mask his awareness of his impotence, Christopher adopts a self-demeaning lifestyle as a defence mechanism to enable him to confront his world. This self-torturing life perspective is defined by Breu as "melancholia," which is "characterized by 'a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of self-regarding feelings to the degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-reviling.'"⁹³ Christopher's increasing sense of a lost life, his mourning of his past, and his abhorrence of his present conditions drive him into a melancholic, benumbing state of mind: "He had grown to feel a certain pride in the ignorance he had formerly despised—a clownish scorn of anything above the rustic details of his daily life. There were days even when he took a positive pleasure in the degree of his abasement" (203). Only familial considerations keep Christopher from a full disownment of his heritage: "when but for his blind mother he would have gone dirty, spoken in dialect, and eaten with the hounds" (203).

⁹³ Breu, "Privilege's Mausoleum," p. 112.

The extent to which Christopher's situation is debased is early measured by his having to work on the fields as a boy while the children of former slaves went to the "Yankee woman's school" (7); hence, he grows up illiterate. It is a black man who reveals the fact of Christopher's illiteracy later. Christopher bitterly tells his sister, "A darky asked me yesterday to read a post bill for him down at the store, and I had to skip a big word in the first line" (52). According to Raper, illiteracy during Reconstruction was not restricted to the poor whites. It was common among the white and black race as "white southerners saw to it that all public education, black and white, was crippled, ostensibly to protect the public debt," but in reality, this "ensured the existence of an illiterate and manipulatable majority of southern voters until after 1900."⁹⁴ By signalling both the "darkey" and Christopher as victims of white racial politics, the text delivers its criticism of white power relations as damaging to those who are supposedly protected by them as well as those who are excluded from their privilege.

The image of slavery is furthermore deployed to emphasise Christopher's growing sense of degradation in the same manner it was previously employed to signify the earlier aristocrat's supreme position. When Christopher passes by his former lands, he observes Fletcher commanding the field hands: "he heard the coarse, hectoring voice of Fletcher, who stood midway of the naked ground ... as he watched him now, bearded, noisy, assured of his possessions, the sight lashed him like the strokes of a whip on bleeding flesh" (88). The scene of the black field hands subjected to the authority of his enemy strips Christopher of any illusions about his past position to the degree that he experiences the imaginary pain of whipping, the punishment inflicted on slaves in reality. This rhetorical positioning of the fallen aristocrat in the place of a controlled and whipped slave dramatises the degradation of postbellum masculinity as an antithesis to "[r]eal gentlemen ... [who] would never subject themselves to ... exploitation and humiliation." Mayfield further confirms the association between the loss of mastery and slavery in the southern masculine stance: "In the highly symbolic structuring of Southern masculinity, to be manipulated and mastered was to be a slave, regardless of race."⁹⁵ However, what the narrator downplays in this narrative is that Christopher only suffers an "imaginary" pain

⁹⁴ Raper, *Without Shelter*, p. 130.

⁹⁵ Mayfield, *Counterfeit Gentlemen*, p. 57.

resulting from his inability to perform the masculine transcripts of mastery. What the black field slave used to suffer was an “actual” beating as a result of his subjection to the coveted white masculine performance of domination.

Mixing the position of the post-war aristocrat with that of African Americans follows what I suggested earlier about the novel’s eliding of historical facts in its focus on gender and class imperatives as primary devices in developing the characterisation of white masculinity. Nonetheless, African Americans remain essential to the text because their early enslavement and later enfranchising mark the gain and loss of aristocratic masculinity. The postbellum enfranchisement of African Americans resulted in the South undergoing a sort of political, economic, and cultural mix between white and black rights. Black men started to have access to “some of the rights and properties of white manhood.”⁹⁶ Consequently, white masculinity found itself in an “imperilled state”,⁹⁷ with white men experiencing feelings of defeat and fear. Friend makes a similar comment and adds that the loss of honour and mastery suffered by southern men was the reason behind the development of the theme of violent, revengeful masculinity in postbellum literature.⁹⁸ The narrator stresses defeated white southerners’ obsession with revenge through Christopher’s dreams of murder. In his dreams, Christopher tries to transform his defeat into victory and his frustration into a hatred that approaches madness: “In imagination he had so often seen Fletcher drop dead before him, had so often struck the man down with his own hand, that there were hours when he almost believed the deed to have been done—when something like madness gripped him, and his hallucinations took the shape and colour of life itself” (156).

The opportunity for retribution comes to Christopher when Fletcher’s grandson, William, is nearly killed in an accident but is saved by Christopher before he discovers his identity. The two young men start a friendship in which William looks up to Christopher as an ideal of reckless and self-reliant manhood. William’s “hero-worship” (192) of Christopher prompts him to copy his manners and actions, something that Christopher uses to his advantage. He starts to teach William drinking, fighting, and disdain for his grandfather’s authority. The narrator stresses the moral

⁹⁶ Aliyyah I. Abdur-Rahman, “White Disavowal, Black Enfranchisement, and the Homoerotic in William Faulkner’s *Light in August*,” in *Faulkner and Whiteness*, ed. Jay Watson (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2011), p. 174.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

⁹⁸ Friend, “Southern Manhood to Southern Masculinities,” p. xii.

failure of Christopher's tough-guy masculinity, much admired and imitated by William, by revealing the mean sentiments that direct it. By corrupting the boy, Christopher reaches the lowest level of his own self-esteem: "While he sank still lower in that defiant self-respect to which he had always clung doggedly until to-day, there was a fierce satisfaction in the knowledge that as he fell he dragged Will Fletcher with him—that he had sold himself to the devil and got his price" (195).

What unites Christopher and William other than their love of male bravado is the antipathy they both feel towards Fletcher. In Christopher's case, Fletcher is the man who swindled him of his fortune and caused him to be cut off from his heritage. Despite being Fletcher's grandson, William feels no true love for his grandfather. Bill Fletcher's personality stands behind his alienation of his family members. In deceiving and victimising the Blakes, abusing his black field workers, forcing his granddaughter into a loveless match, and relentlessly exercising his will over his grandson, Fletcher represents the baser version of the powerful southern patriarch. However, the narrative credits him with an absence of hypocrisy and simplicity of consciousness that sets him free from the inner conflicts that corrupt Christopher's imagination and reality. In his manners, Fletcher "spoke, to an acute observer, of a masculine sincerity naked and unashamed" (24). In his brute acts but simple consciousness, Fletcher's character parodies Christopher's aristocratic masculinity which survives on delusion and deception to provide justifications for its tangible moral failings.

Christopher's revenge is completed when Fletcher disinherits his grandson for marrying a poor white girl with Christopher's aid. Later on, William kills his grandfather in a rage of despair. The portrayal of Christopher's slowly consummated revenge in the following quote invokes the reader's observation of hatred as a natural phenomenon, like day and night, that paves the way to its fruition of revenge: "Day by day, step by step, silent, unswerving, devilish, he had kept about his purpose, and now at the last he had only to sit still and watch his triumph" (428). Also conveyed in the narrative's criticism of hateful and violent masculinity is the sense that the evil and moral corruption it inflicts upon the soul is isolating and alienating. As Christopher's revenge is pronounced in natural terms, the completion of his vengeance marks the end of his connection with nature: "He had lost gradually his sensitiveness to external things—to the changes of the seasons as to the beauties of an autumn sunrise ... his enjoyment of nature had grown dull and spiritless" (253).

Mayfield argues that the image of violent masculinity was figuratively elevated to serve the purpose of creating a new form of masculinity that combined the natural and the civilised to stand up to the challenges of the masquerade culture. The new southern man was a “useful alloy”⁹⁹ of the savage and the noble. What Christopher actually ends up as is not useful or romantic or noble at all, but rather a narcissistic and even lethal compound of aristocratic melancholia and common violence: “He faced the brutal truth in all its nakedness; he knew himself for what he was—a man debased by ignorance and passion to the level of the beasts. He had sold his birthright for a requital, which had sickened him even in the moment of fulfilment” (427).

As the novel approaches its end, Christopher is completely transformed by his love of Maria. *The Deliverance* establish romantic love as the basis upon which characters build on their newfound appreciation of humanity. The stereotypical sentimental equations of love with feelings of egotism, exile, and morbidity are abandoned for an appreciation of romance as a facilitator of more great sentiments. It is this broadened view caused by the notion of love that leads Christopher to converse his attitude towards life from a morose man seeking vengeance to a state of acceptance and reconciliation. In *The Voice of the People*, as Nickolas is sitting with Eugenia, watching her face rising against a background of the beautiful nature, his brain starts to feel the “joy of life”. He starts to regard his universe as “a great, kind world, with a big, beneficent God above the blue, and to love all mankind—not harboring an angry thought or an ill feeling!”¹⁰⁰ Susan Goodman links this philosophy to Glasgow’s past disappointments with her romantic relations. She concludes that Glasgow’s craving for affection and its expressions led her to attempt to transcend her personal experiences into a more universal love of life and the living.¹⁰¹

Christopher feels “between himself and the face of his enemy a veil had fallen—the old wrong no longer stood out in a blaze of light. A woman’s smile divided him like a drawn sword from his brutal past” (441-42). Christopher pleads guilty to the murder of Fletcher, thus acquitting William, and ends spending years in jail as an atonement for his sin. It is in jail that Christopher is free from his “inheritance [sitting] heavy upon him and his disordered mind” (90). In jail,

⁹⁹ Mayfield, *Counterfeit Gentlemen*, p. 69.

¹⁰⁰ Ellen Glasgow, *The Voice of the People* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1900), p. 66.

¹⁰¹ Susan Goodman, *Ellen Glasgow: A Biography* (Maryland: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), p. 92.

Christopher ends the struggle between the victimised aristocrat and the violent vigilante; he discovers in himself “a kind of generous philosophy which remained with him afterward in the form of a peculiar mellowness of temperament” (354).

While Christopher’s imprisonment could be viewed as the narrative’s punishment of white masculinity for its wrongful doings, the narrator renders this punishment as a moral triumph for masculinity, which ceases to perpetuate its tradition of victimisation, hatred, and violence. Christopher’s “deliverance” is thoroughly accomplished when he finds himself “gazing with a dull impersonal curiosity at the portraits smiling so coldly down upon the hearth. The memory of his mother left him as immovable as did the many trivial associations which thronged through his brain” (542). Christopher’s freedom from his past puts him at last “into a profound and untroubled sleep” (543). This ending calls to mind Glasgow’s call for “blood” which indicates that the South needs to leave behind its past and fixed hierarchies to find hope for the age ahead of it.¹⁰²

Fredrick P. W. McDowell argues that *The Deliverance* ultimately participates in the South’s narrative of victimhood. Christopher, a descendant from aristocratic stock, was morally and materially destroyed by the war. His violence basically mirrored “the resentment of a whole region that suffered deep humiliation during ‘Radical’ Reconstruction for the principles it had in all honour upheld by going to war.”¹⁰³ The novel, however, ultimately refuses to participate in the mythical representation of the “unambiguous”¹⁰⁴ heroic southern masculine. The text emphasises the antiheroic present more than the heroic past, alludes to the invalidity of the aristocrat’s claim to this past, and reduces the supposedly noble aristocrat to an example of uncivilised crudity. As Gardner states, “All of the elements of the Lost Cause myth were still present, however; they had just been turned on their heads.”¹⁰⁵ Only the relinquishment of the past heritage and the present narrative of victimhood with its connotations of nostalgia, melancholia and violence, the novel suggests, can provide the aristocrat with an alternative base on which he can build a future.

The masculine models in *The Battle-Ground* and *The Deliverance* complicate the narrative of southern masculinity as they approach it through the ideals of the old

¹⁰² Glasgow, *A Certain Measure*, p. 28.

¹⁰³ McDowell, *Ellen Glasgow and the Ironic Art*, p. 69.

¹⁰⁴ Breu, “Privilege’s Mausoleum,” p. 111.

¹⁰⁵ Gardner, *Blood and Irony*, p. 157.

gentry. The changes the South went through before and after the Civil War are reflected in the novels' portrayal of the construction of white masculinity as an anxious and complicated process. The old generation's established ideals of virtuous patriarchy guided by honour and mastery prove unfit to be inherited by their descendants. These young men highlight the limitations of their tradition by employing its negative aspects of hedonism, chivalry, victimisation, and violence. Their later failure to live up to the expectations of the masculine ideal is in itself a triumph because it gives these men the opportunity to break with the limiting and damaging sensibilities of white masculinity. The old aristocracy was always publicised as a natural aristocracy but as Friend puts it, "gone with the wind was the world of plantations, slaves, and the exclusivity of the gentlemanly class."¹⁰⁶ Women, former slaves, and poor whites prove essential in these novels' analysis of the southern aristocrat. Objectified and silenced by the male protagonists to feed masculine illusions, they are eventually employed by the narrative to define white masculinity as essentially a failure. By incorporating marginalised groups in their analysis of white masculinity, the novels suggest that the survival of the southern male largely depends on his ability to let go of his past claims of entitlement and to engage in his present world with all the different social groups that live in it.

Expanding Glasgow's literary tradition beyond a strict representational realism to include the interaction between her own identity, shaped by the plantocracy heritage, and her modern take on southern progress renders her response to change more complicated than perceived earlier. Partially committed to the traditions of plantation culture, Glasgow was more anxious to rescue the southern experience from the plantation myth, popularised in southern literature. Chapter one explored the implications of this interaction, focusing on her vision for the future South, a vision that will resonate in her later novels. In *Dan and Christopher* Glasgow reemphasises the theme of the bad aspects of the aristocratic tradition. They both are vain young men with an uncertain future until they are freed of their cultural inheritance. They learn that they can survive without it and are humbled by the fact that they are indebted to individuals outside their social group. They are the opposite of Nickolas and Vetch in *The Voice of the People* and *One Man in His Time* who are strangers to the sheltering aristocratic traditions and are wide aware of the aristocrats'

¹⁰⁶ Friend, "Southern Manhood to Southern Masculinities," p. viii.

deficiencies. However, these working-class men's personal hardship teaches them early the wisdom that they need other people to improve their lives, and consequently, they reach out to politicians of aristocratic background to restore Virginia's political scene.

Chapter Two

The Challenging Voice of the Poor White in *The Voice of the People* (1900) and *One Man in His Time* (1922)

Picturing the South as a rural haven is one of the most prominent themes in southern literature, beginning with the establishment of Virginia as America's first colony. Philip D. Atteberry captures the position of the sentimentalist tradition in early southern literature when he states that Virginia was invariably portrayed as a "pastoral paradise" by southern novelists, starting with Colonial novels, continuing through the Civil War novels, and ending with Reconstruction novels. Whether "threatened by Indians ... invaded by Yankees ... [or] despoiled by carpetbaggers and scalawags,"¹ the South was nostalgically depicted and cherished. During the 1920s and the 1930s, the "Agrarians' inward looking, white male stance" continued to homogenise the South as an orderly society, governed by the sophisticated ideals of the plantation aristocracy.² Relationships between southerners from different classes were depicted as organic, with everyone fitting comfortably into his/her position. The slow pace of life in the South was equally commended as harmonious with its agricultural setting, and the whole region existed, in southern letters, as a leisurely rural utopia detached from the influence of time.³

In her novels *The Voice of the People* and *One Man in His Time*, Glasgow expresses her doubts about the South as a superior culture of orderliness and stability. The novels focus on the political and social struggles the region witnessed through two critical periods of its history. In *The Voice of the People*, yeoman Nickolas Burr ascends to the position of Virginia's governor, fighting the class prejudice, political corruption, and racial violence dominant throughout Reconstruction (1865-1877). Former circus worker and then governor Gideon Vetch in *One Man in His Time* seeks social justice for the working-class in the early twentieth century. Vetch's struggle

¹ Philip D. Atteberry, "Ellen Glasgow and the Sentimental Novel of Virginia," in *Southern Quarterly*, 23. 4 (2007), 7.

² Sarah Robertson, "Poor Whites in Recent Southern Fiction," in *Literature Compass*, 9. 10 (2012), 633.

³ The Nashville Agrarians, through their literary manifesto *I'll Take My Stand* (1930), established the pastoral motif. Robertson adds that through "sentimentalized notions of subsistence farming and the yeomen ideal, the strong attachment to the land ... and the attacks made against modernization", the Southern Agrarians' literature aimed to emphasise the independent character of the South, creating in time a myth that will be revived in current Southern literature (637).

encompasses the progressive years of the 1920s that followed the end of World War One. During this period, many groups of political and social reformers called for major domestic changes which marked a turning point for the nation's political, economic, and social scene.

However, contemporary reviews of the novels overlooked Glasgow's criticism of southern culture and focused instead on her affectionate narrative of Virginia's old locale and values. They cited her descent as a member of the aristocratic class as evidence that she was sympathetic to Virginia's old regime. Critics disapproved of what they saw as Glasgow's favourable treatment of southern heritage in *The Voice of the People*. I. F. Marcossion for example commented, "Miss Glasgow combines a fine reverence for that departed splendor with a keen, discriminating knowledge of the needs and the advantages of the present."⁴ Similarly, Canby concluded that in *One Man in His Time*, "Miss Glasgow, striving for realism, still romanticizes."⁵ He contended that she contrasted the chaotic modern days with a more stable past: "the author holds the balance of her sympathies between the old regime and the new spirit that is coming in after the war."⁶

However, later critics register Glasgow's subtle but telling focus on class and racial struggles through her creation of a class of new men to fight against the political, economic, and social failures of the old regime. McDowell notes that in depicting a fight between the heroic individual and an un-heroic party in *One Man in His Time*, "Glasgow examined not only the changing social scene after the war but the expression in politics of the influences which have brought such change—the effect ... of energetic democratic forces, surviving from the pre-war progressivism in the South, upon a ... devitalized aristocracy."⁷ A view that Mark A. Graves extends when he states that Glasgow's novel charts "realistically the rise of the middle-class men and the decay of the Southern Gentleman ideal so largely mythologized in American culture," creating "a form of Southern Realism that departed from the sterile romantic

⁴ I. F. Marcossion, "The Voice of the People, Ellen Glasgow's Notable Book of Southern Social and Political Life," in *Louisville Courier-Journal*, 2. 1 (1900), 8.

⁵ Henry Seidel Canby, "A Changing Order," in *New York Evening Post Literary Review*, 1 July 1922, p. 771.

⁶ Ralph Wright, "Women in Love," in *London Daily News*, 8 September 1922.

⁷ Fredrick P. W. McDowell, *Ellen Glasgow and the Ironic Art of Fiction* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963), p. 139.

glorification of the South.”⁸ Matthew Stratton similarly praises *The Voice of the People* as a “conventionally realist” but “politically progressive” novel.⁹

In my reading of the two novels I emphasise how they ultimately aim to deconstruct the southern myth of a civilised, inherently gracious, and aristocratically-dominated society, unencumbered by the conflicts brought by changing times. The novels, in their examination of class, expose the moral failings of the surviving aristocratic class, sympathetically depict poor southerners, realistically portray their brutal environment, contradict the prevalently negative contemporary attitude towards them, and finally sacrifice them to emphasise the corruption of their time.

Glasgow puts the character of the poor white at the centre of her narrative. Poor whites formed a large part of the southern community and led disadvantaged lives. However, their poverty and brutal conditions were ignored or downplayed by the sentimental accounts of early southern writers. As W. J. Cash notes in his early social and intellectual history, *The Mind of the South* (1941), “Beneath [the upper-classes] was a vague race lumped together indiscriminately as the poor whites—very often, in fact, as the ‘white trash.’ ... And so, of course, the gulf between them and the master races was impassable, and their ideas and feelings did not enter into the makeup of the prevailing Southern civilization.”¹⁰ In its analysis of the novels, this chapter emphasises Glasgow’s resistant approach to the constructed image of the poor whites as a social category existing outside the white values of the southern community.

My reading places the novels’ portrayal of class difference within the South’s contemporary racial context that ensured the supremacy of middle and upper-class whites. In doing so, I aim to follow in the path of historical studies that provide an understanding of how the South’s distinctive racial and class ideologies participated in the oppression of poor whites and non-whites by infusing the values of middle and

⁸ Mark A. Graves, “What Ellen Glasgow Meant by ‘Average’: Southern Masculinity and the Rise of the Common Hero,” in *Regarding Ellen Glasgow: Essays for Contemporary Readers*, ed. Welford Dunway Taylor and George C. Longest (Richmond, Virginia: Library of Virginia, 2001), pp. 69-70.

⁹ Matthew Stratton, *The Politics of Irony in American Modernism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), p. 77. Stratton here praises Glasgow’s keen social and political sense over what he sees as her undeveloped literary technique. By not fully incorporating the use of irony, according to Stratton, Glasgow’s early novels belong to a more traditional form of realism that mainly revolts against social and political institutions. They lack an acute sense of the individual consciousness which Stratton considers to be the origin of all reforms. But Stratton later affirms that Glasgow provides this missing element through her more evolved ironic characterisations in her following fiction.

¹⁰ W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, Inc., 1991), pp. xlix-l.

upper-class whites throughout the social system.¹¹ I also focus on the narratives' refutation of stereotypes of the poor whites' inherent inferiority through portraying characters who can shape their own reality. However, the political and economic powerlessness that long marked the trajectory of the poor white is equally emphasised. My discussion makes use of social and cultural studies that describe the image of the poor whites in American culture, focusing on their literary representation in southern letters.¹² By criticising the culture of the upper-classes as narrow-minded and corrupt, the novels attribute the poor whites' degraded state to the South's moral and material failings rather than to their alleged intellectual inferiority. The novels show that the South, despite its propagation of homogeneous white privilege, fails to realise this seemingly class-blind rhetoric; its poor whites are left with no real or consistent support system to address their problems and improve their lives.

The Voice of the People and Criticism of Surviving Gentry

The narrative's attack on the flawed, ignorant, and fixed outlook of upper-class southerners shows in its account of the relationship they have with their neighbouring poor whites and black domestics. It is through this relationship that the novel comments on white identity and criticises white power relations on a wider social scale. Southern gentlemen in the novel betray moral weaknesses in their preoccupation with perpetuating strict difference between white and black identities, upper and lower-classes. The novel refuses the identity and politics these men exemplify and employs irony to reveal their fallacies.

Judge Bassett, a representative of the post-war's surviving gentry, represents conflicting sentiments in the aristocratic position that wavers between conservative and progressive views. Historian Edward E. Baptist depicts social relations in the South as fraught with complexity. Agreement among whites on the essential values of the institution of slavery and the importance of asserting white supremacy failed to prevent the serious and persevering fight for power between different classes.

¹¹ Examples are Joel Williamson's *A Rage for Order* (1986), John Milton Cooper Jr.'s *Pivotal Decades* (1990), Neil Foley's *The White Scourge* (1999), and David Brown and Clive Webb's *Race in the American South* (2007).

¹² These include Flynt's *Dixie's Forgotten People* (1979), Tracy's *In the Master's Eye* (1995), Wray's *Not Quite White* (2006), Benson's *Disturbing Calculations* (2008), and Ashley Lancaster's *The Angelic Mother and the Predatory Seductress* (2012).

Planters, yeomen, poor tenants, and sharecroppers competed vigorously with one another. Southern society was a continuous negotiation between planters who needed to re-establish their former authority, and the working-class that would not permit them to do so.¹³ The judge, for example, is presented as a member of a particular brand of whites who are referred to as a distinct race: “From his classic head to his ill-fitting boots he upheld the traditions of his office and his race”.¹⁴ The anachronism of aristocracy and its inherent resistance to changing and challenging ideologies are reflected in the narrator’s portrayal of the judge as someone who upholds the old South’s prejudice against those below them.

The novel associates the Colonial and slaveholding past of southern families with their class-bound values. Verifying class difference in racial terms is discussed in studies such as Benson’s *Disturbing Calculations* and Lancaster’s *The Angelic Mother and the Predatory Seductress*. These studies focus on the turbulent early decades of the twentieth-century South. In these years, “much of the recognizably rural, folk South and its rigidly organized communities had been altered by urban expansion, migration and immigration, and an increased focus on individual opportunity and progress.”¹⁵ Following the economic crises and the Depression of the 1920s and the 1930s, along with the disruption of World War One and Two, these studies cover three radically different class positions and show the persistence of elitist white rhetoric in the modern South, which continued to differentiate itself from lower whites.¹⁶ Benson delineates the intersection of class and race difference in southern rhetoric. She notes that southerners of the old aristocracy, “confronted by tools and promises of a new order,” found themselves increasingly attached to the hierarchal perspectives of old slavery.¹⁷ Through their names, Burwells, Battles, Bassetts ... etc., upper-class families in the novel represent the continuance of racial heritage from the past to influence the present.¹⁸ The narrative’s account of the clash

¹³ Edward E. Baptist, *Creating an Old South: Middle Florida’s Plantation Frontier Before the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), p. 282.

¹⁴ Ellen Glasgow, *The Voice of the People* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1900), p. 4.

¹⁵ Benson, *Disturbing Calculations*, p. 130.

¹⁶ The subjects of the two studies are the elite white male from the Deep South in the works of Walker Percy and William Faulkner and “white Trash” in the works of Dorothy Allison, Erskine Caldwell, and John Steinbeck and the cross-cultural African American woman in the works of Alice Walker.

¹⁷ Melanie R. Benson, *Disturbing Calculations: the Economics of Identity in Postcolonial Southern Literature* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), p. 2.

¹⁸ The biographies of those families can be found in *Colonial Williamsburg: The Official Guide* (2014), a comprehensive history of Williamsburg and its prominent figures. This work is contributed by Taylor Stoermer, Barbara Brown, Carl Lounsbury, Ronald L. Hurst, Paul Aron, and Amy Watson.

of values that resulted between the two classes, the upper and the lower, the old and the new is shaped by racialised language. This shows in the narrator's comment on the old families' reaction to their present lives: "a sudden impulse to draw nearer in the shelter of the race—to cling more closely to that unswerving instinct which had united ... generation to generation" (254).

The patronising attitude of this class of southerners who are united as a closed family by the aristocratic traditions is the chief barrier between Nickolas Burr and his advancement in life. Nickolas, at the age of twelve, turns against the wretched life of his overworked family and makes his way to a career in law under the patronage of Judge Bassett. The judge reveals a sort of progressive inclination when he overcomes his class objections and loans Nickolas books to read and offers him encouragement. He dismisses the objections of Mrs Webb who advises him, "It is folly to educate a person above his station," by replying that "Men make their stations, madam" (118). In his progressive views, the judge portrays what Williamson defines in his historical study as a southern conservative defensive mechanism against assimilating with present change. Williamson interprets southern history as an interplay between race, gender, and class, exploring the link between modern democracy and the social groups it influences. He argues that the new South's increasing industrialism and capitalism resulted in a widening gap between the rich and the poor, which led to the appearance of a new conservative ideology directed by democratic and progressive principles. Williamson describes it as "an uncanny ability to change just enough to survive. That carefully measured flexibility was—and is—its genius."¹⁹ By patronising young Nickolas, the judge is mostly responding to the current time rather than acting out of a true sense of duty.

The novel further discredits the alleged genteel sense of charity, the aristocratic sense of "noblesse oblige."²⁰ This criticism is illustrated by the manner with which Judge Bassett deals with Nickolas's aspirations. Though impressed by the boy's distinctive character, the judge cannot see sense in Nickolas's wish to abandon his family's profession of peanut farming to follow a career in law. The judge mentors Nickolas, but at the same time he comments, "Why don't you stick to the land and make yo' bread honest?" (126) Judge Bassett seems to hold the belief that while the

¹⁹ Joel Williamson, *A Rage for Order: Black/White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 49.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

lower-classes may have the right to merge into the upper-classes and even assume characteristics that belonged to the aristocracy, they are more “honest” about their nature and heritage if they stay where they are. There is also a double quality to the judge’s practise of noblesse oblige. While his class privilege assumes with it the responsibility of supporting the less able whites like Nickolas, his race privilege leads him to join the Democratic Party and keep the freedom and advancement of non-whites under control by encouraging the blockage of blacks’ education and votes (271). His behaviour is dictated by his southern heritage which depends on keeping race hierarchies intact.

The judge portrays in his help of Nickolas the condescending paternalism of his class. His sense of offence at Nickolas’s ambition to progress beyond his class betrays a degree of hypocrisy that is highlighted by the narrative. Lancaster quotes Leigh Anne Duck’s argument about the apprehensiveness amongst elites about educating the poor whites. Duck claims that the upper-classes needed to have poor whites confined to the rural parts of the South. By keeping them in a “fixed temporality” away from the rest of society, middle and upper-class whites did not have to fear that these types of people would invade their domain.²¹ The tendency of the aristocratic class to cling to its prejudices shows when young Nickolas asks Judge Bassett for a book. The judge finds it harder to hand out his education to Nickolas than the ordinary charity he is used to handing to the poor. He wonders why Nickolas “didn’t ... ask for food—money—his best piece of fluted Royal Worcester?” (11) Had Nicholas asked for the usual help, the judge could better identify his request with his racial and class heritage. As a southern gentleman descended from the old families of Virginia, the judge is accustomed to the role of paternalistic caregiver. What the judge is not accustomed to is to aid in disrupting the stability of the social hierarchy by opening Nickolas’s eyes to new opportunities, thus jeopardising the position of his own people.

Much later in the novel, Nickolas — now a governor — visits the judge to seek his advice regarding a state affair. On his deathbed, Judge Bassett is in a feeble state of mind and can only conjure the humble past of Nickolas and the nature of

²¹ Ashley Craig Lancaster, *The Angelic Mother and the Predatory Seductress: Poor White Women in Southern Literature of the Great Depression* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), p. 67.

relations that should exist between the two classes. When his servant announces Nickolas's name, the judge responds, "yes, I remember, what does he want? Amos Burr's son—we must give him a chance" (434). The judge unconsciously emphasises the impossibility of any relationship between the upper and lower-classes other than a paternalistic one. Paternalism is the medium through which the upper-class white indulges his sense of charity, compelled by his paternalistic heritage, and the poor white receives his salvation at the hands of his betters.

If Judge Bassett represents the conflicting sentiments in the aristocratic ideology that wavers between conservative and progressive views, General Battle is an example of the southern gentleman's uniform prejudice based on the traditional notions of class and race. General Battle is another icon of the Civil War devotees who commemorate slavery as the South's Lost Cause. It is his devotion to the past that grants him the title of General even though he was only a Colonel during the war. Sunk ever deeper in the past glory of the southern knight, he is oblivious to his current condition as a fat drunk who cannot mount his horse. How the General's class and race dictate his attitude towards his former slaves is satirised by the narrator, making him appear a buffoon. The former slaves who chose to return to the familiarity of the plantation life are never secure given the General's ambivalent sentiments. On one occasion, the General vows to let his slaves starve, while on another occasion, he chooses to divide his meagre supplies with them.

General Battle's rage at his remaining slaves and his later indignation with his former slave Ishmael for leaving the quarters to live in a separate cabin can be understood in relation to Williamson's analysis of the changing concepts of paternalism. In his discussion of postbellum aristocracy and its struggle to keep its paternalistic image, Williamson states that white southerners' attitude towards paternalism made a "most amazing travel between 1865 and the 1880s." The transformation was especially true among whites who had retained slaves and who as a plantation class had been among the most vocal in propagating southern paternalism as a justification for slavery. In 1865 and 1866, upper-class whites demonstrated a bitter hatred of the newly freed men.²² The novel comically portrays the General's angry ramblings against his former slave as more of a father's disappointment in the actions of a prodigal son. Behind the satirical image lies the true cause for the

²² Williamson, *A Rage for Order*, p. 49.

General's wrath, which is his racism. The idea of an independent black man is unfathomable to the southern aristocrat. When Ishmael insists that he left the General's care because "freedom it are er moughty good thing", the General reacts by flowing "into the house in a rage" (60). He cannot perceive his former slave as a fully developed human being who wishes to exercise his rights for freedom and independence.

However, while the novel does show some sympathy for the surviving and struggling postbellum gentry, it equally undermines their outdated ideologies and develops a sharp criticism of the aristocracy's fading ideals. Besides General Battle, who is sinking into sloth and past fantasy, the reader is introduced to the rigid standards of Mrs Webb, who operates to oppress and freeze people in their narrow stations. Mrs Webb is the widow of a dead Confederate officer. She wears a button cut from a Confederate uniform as a testament that "the women of the South have never surrendered!" (114) In spite of her unfortunate current situation, "She had once been heard to remark that if she had not something to look back upon she could not live" (111). To keep the past very much part of her present, she proudly displays her meagre possessions, her husband's sword, and a ragged Confederate battle flag. She is equally keen on keeping her status as a prosperous mistress intact. She stubbornly abstains from taking part in the daily chats women usually have concerning their household affairs. Her explanation is that "she held it to be vulgarity to allude ... to the trials of housekeeping" (226). She spends six hours a day with her black servants, but "had she spent twenty-four she would have remained secure in her conviction that they did not come within the sphere of her life" (226). Mrs Webb's behaviour, just like Judge Bassett's and General Battle's, is dictated by the guidelines of her class. The behaviour of these gentlemen and women had always assumed a contradictory model of "deference ... humility and ... authority."²³ However, their "everyday interactions" exposed "the hypocrisy and brutality" of their social values.²⁴ By setting a virtual barrier between her and the black household to keep up a façade of an affluent aristocracy, Mrs Webb is essentially a hypocrite. Her attitude is interesting since she is the one who backs up her objection to Nickolas's education with the opinion that it does people no good to try to assume a class other than their own. She

²³ Susan J. Tracy, *In the Master's Eye: Representations of Women, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Antebellum Southern Literature* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), p. 157.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 157-58.

objects to Nickolas's attitude as impudent and takes hers for granted, though both behaviours betray the same inclination to escape the realities of the present.

Through Nickolas's romance with Eugenia Battle, Glasgow employs intimate narratives to establish the connection between the personal and the political. The romance is another example of the struggle between classes. Its end shows that class prejudice against the lower-class is too strong to be eradicated even in the case of strong romantic emotions. Eugenia is described as an unconventional young woman who, due to growing up motherless, eschews the traditional maternal dictates of weakness and subservience to men. However, she fails to do the same with her class prejudices. When Nickolas is unjustly accused of seducing a simple girl, the upper-class circle in his community quickly assumes his guilt, including his beloved Eugenia. Nickolas's ensuing violent reaction overthrows his self-poise. Despite the temptation to yield to his demonic impulses to avenge his reputation, Nickolas, in contrast to Christopher in *The Deliverance*, still possesses enough command of himself to draw back from gratifying them in the right time.

Nickolas's subsequent violent reactions to the accusation are focalised through Eugenia's eyes in explicitly racial terms. The notion that a class difference would amount to a racial difference shows when Nicholas, his face growing "black" in anger, vows never to forgive Eugenia for accusing him (251). To Nickolas, it is inexcusable of her to accuse him and to defend her brother Bernard, the man responsible for a girl's lost honour and "the man who had lied away [Nickolas's] honour for the sake of the whiteness of his own skin" (260). But Eugenia, taking Nickolas's anger as a confirmation of "the rudeness of his class,"²⁵ feels that she must inevitably obey "her blood" (260).

In her metaphorical use of the word "blood", the narrator emphasises the influence of the aristocratic social system in shaping Eugenia's psychology as rooted and situated within self-denial when it comes to facing ugly truths. She refuses to believe Nickolas when he tells her that her own brother is the guilty man. By choosing the side of her class, with all its bigoted pathos and "evasive idealism", she regresses into the conformist characteristics of idealised femininity. She answers "the specious pleading of [her] race" (238) and enters later into a loveless marriage with Dudley

²⁵ Julius Rowan Raper, *Without Shelter: The Early Career of Ellen Glasgow* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1971), p. 133.

Webb; a match that survives basically on her wifely and motherly sense of duty. In an emotionally bare existence, Eugenia ends fulfilling her class and gender responsibilities. The narrative's portrayal of her life is supported by Tracy, who offers a similar perspective on the existence of the upper-class woman living "without questioning the authority of ... her degraded ... planter class."²⁶ Eugenia's life choices are the result of shifting her loyalties back to a classist and sexist culture that victimises others like Nickolas for their class and women like her for their gender.

It is not possible to say whether Nickolas's failure to win Eugenia's hand and the acceptance of her class results entirely from psychological and social forces or is caused by a lingering class consciousness on their author's part. Tracing the similar romantic situations in *The Battle-Ground* and *The Deliverance* would argue for the latter opinion. Betty supports the defeated and destitute Dan, and wealthy Maria accepts the underprivileged Christopher, but both men bear noble blood. These cases imply that it is the non-aristocratic male who has to transcend his class to be accepted.²⁷

The Problematic Experience of the Poor White

In this section, my focus is on Nickolas's life journey from his beginnings as a poor man in the small town of Kingsborough until he moves to Richmond where he becomes the state governor of Virginia.²⁸ The significance of Nickolas's story is that it demonstrates the narrative's agenda of representing the poor working man as a tough and compassionate character, questioning the antagonistic stereotyping of the poor whites by their culture, and attesting to the ability of men from the lower-classes to challenge existing power relations if provided with education, ability, courage, and support.

Minrose Gwin notes that in southern narratives the theme of place occupies a central position in shaping southerners' sense of themselves: "Southerners have always maintained that place makes us who we are and that the stories we tell

²⁶ Tracy, *In the Master's Eye*, p. 119.

²⁷ Only in Glasgow's *The Romance of a Plain Man* (1909), a romance between a working-class male and an aristocratic female ends with marriage.

²⁸ Kingsborough is a fictional name for Williamsburg, Virginia.

ourselves about ‘home’ ... are the means through which we negotiate identity.”²⁹ The colonial town of Kingsborough, in which Nickolas is born and raised, symbolises the oppressive conditions that work to fix individuals into their limited places. In the beginning, the novel appears to engage in a nostalgic depiction of the town and its memorials, the College of William and Mary, the overgrown churchyard, and the wide, sandy streets. But the town is also marked by its insane asylum and its ancient and derelict sites that reflect the spirit of its inhabitants. Described as an “original race”, the people of Kingsborough are still dominated by the authority of their remaining aristocrats who survive their humble present through their superior past. Kingsborough and its “race” is a daunting perspective for people who want to negotiate class boundaries like Nickolas. It is a static environment that “dozed through the present to dream of the past and found the future a nightmare” (13). Richmond stands in contrast to Kingsborough because it is marked by mobility and modernity. Only in Richmond can Nickolas find the opportunity to fulfil his dream of a better future.

Nickolas’s life journey is the point through which I explore the narrative’s take on the ability of individual determination and discipline to secure success for the poor white in a contentious environment. The text attributes Nickolas’s success to his strength of character and courage to overcome material and social obstacles. However, Glasgow’s belief in willpower and freedom of choice is a key feature in the novel and enable Nickolas to overcome the brutal circumstances of his background as exemplified by his family’s farming experience. These conditions are dramatised by the text’s detailing of their daily labours, continuing disappointments, and their dehumanising stereotyping by others. This contradicts the idyllic pastoral world of traditional southern novels and offers a radically different perspective on southern society.

Wayne Jr. Flynt comments on the fixed stereotyping of the poor white that equated his economic position with his personal characteristics: “‘Southern poor white’ became a sociocultural term describing a broader frame of character, rather than an economic term depicting a lack of material well-being.”³⁰ Wray traces the

²⁹ Minrose Gwin, “Nonfelicitous Space and Survivor Discourse: Reading the Incest Story in Southern Women’s Fiction,” in *Haunted Bodies: Gender and Southern Texts*, ed. Anne Goodwyn Jones and Susan V. Donaldson (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1997), p. 437.

³⁰ Wayne Jr. Flynt, *Dixie’s Forgotten People: The South’s Poor Whites* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009), p. 9.

early establishment of the poor white's image in antebellum literature analysing its language that overlapped racism with classism. Wray states:

Although ... southern antebellum authors varied in their views on slavery, they were united by a shared sense of conservative paternalism, one typical of antebellum planter elites. In their view, "natural inferiors," by whom they primarily meant women, blacks, and poor whites, should defer to their "natural superiors," the white men who could protect and lead them.³¹

The negative labelling of poor whites even took a scientific turn at the start of the twentieth century through eugenic studies asserting their biological inferiority.³² Viewed as genetically weak, it was argued that the poor white was incapable of evolving. This highly questionable conclusion of the eugenics' deterministic theory nevertheless served the rhetoric of landed gentry, who relentlessly judged the plain and provincial life of the poor whites. According to prominent public figure Bayard Taylor:

[T]he white trash of the South represented the most depraved class of whites I have ever seen. Idle, shiftless, filthy in their habits, aggressive, with no regard for the rights of others, these barbarians seem to have united all the vices of the negro with those of their own race, and they almost shake our faith in the progressive instinct of the Anglo-Saxon.³³

Nickolas's example is too dynamic to fit the negative eugenic stereotype. Flynt reaches a similar outlook in his analysis of southern folk crafts, music, storytelling, and religion. He stresses that aspiring poor whites "constructed an alternative culture" in which they stressed both the role of "victimization and agency" in their lives.³⁴ Nickolas is likewise characterised as hardworking, energetic, and ambitious. He completes his legal training armed with patience and determination. Every morning, he toils in the fields and then heads to the Judge's house for more lessons in law. He is not ashamed of his "common" background, as the Judge's daughter calls it, or his worn-out garments. When his Sunday school teacher decides to assist him, her father reminds her of the importance of "recognis[ing] the existence of class" (90). The Judge best summarises Nickolas's battle against both his life

³¹ Wray, *Not Quite White*, p. 55.

³² According to Thomas F. Gossett the eugenicists were primarily interested in attempting to prove that geniuses tend to come from superior human stock, and that feeble-mindedness, criminality, and pauperism are also strongly influenced by hereditary factors. See *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (1997), p. 155.

³³ Quoted in Matthew Taylor Wray, *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 59-60.

³⁴ Flynt, *Dixie's Forgotten People*, p. xxi.

conditions and class prejudice: “He has a brain and he has ambition. Think what it is to be born in a lower class and to have a mind above it” (119).

According to John T. Matthews, certain factors resulted in the decrease in tenant farming at the start of the twentieth century. Small-scale farming became less popular as African Americans came to the possession of more properties after Reconstruction and many lands became barren. A few tenant farmers realised that the soil they overtaxed no longer sustained them or their families and they moved out from outlying rural areas to towns and cities. Those who succeeded in their new professions formed a new middle-class, thus rearranging the social geography of the South. Those who insisted on remaining with their lands suffered the most adverse conditions.³⁵ Nickolas also decides that there is no longer any benefit to farming for someone who wants to better his position. He ignores his father’s objection to getting “more schoolin” (35) and tries to find a balance between his life as a member of a yeoman family and his career as a law apprentice.

The narrator is careful to make a distinction between two classes of poor whites in her depiction of Nickolas’s politics. She contrasts his independence and dynamism to other poor whites in the novel, including his parents. Historically, white and non-white southerners used to differentiate between two kinds of poor whites: “rednecks” and “white trash”. They “ma[de] a distinction and perceive[d] the redneck as an uneducated, lower-class working man, while the label ‘trash’ [was] reserved for the irregularly employed, allegedly immoral and lazy no-count lowest of all.”³⁶ Nickolas belongs to the better working-class and is inherently different from the “‘trash’ ... good-for-nothing, lazy white man.”³⁷ He becomes increasingly obsessed by a passion to “strive and to win; to surmount all obstacles” (124), a resolution that fits the historical description of yeomen who “were searching for better opportunities; by nature, they were acquisitive, restless and anxious for upward mobility.”³⁸

One way in which the novel assigns Nickolas to the class of yeomen is by associating him with democratic theories that shape his sense of his future and his social sensibilities. As a young boy, Nickolas is most inspired by the teachings of

³⁵ John T. Matthews, *William Faulkner: Seeing Through the South* (Chichester: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., 2009), p. 143.

³⁶ Julian B. Roebuck and Ronald L. Neff, “The Multiple Reality of the ‘Redneck’: Toward a Grounded Theory of the Southern Class Structure,” in *Studies in Symbolic Interaction*, 3 (1980), 234.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 108.

³⁸ Brown and Webb, *Race in the American South*, p. 108.

patriotic and historical Virginians like Jefferson: “The judge had given him a biography of Jefferson, and he had learned his hero’s life with lips and heart” (84). Nickolas later develops “an old-fashioned democracy about him—a pioneer simplicity” (217). By always keeping “the agricultural interests at heart” (290), Nickolas becomes head of Virginia’s Democratic Party. In a clear victory for “the voice of the people”, Nickolas is elected the state’s governor. “At that moment he was the people’s man”, the narrator underlines. “His name was cheered by the general voice. ... He had determined that the governor should cease to represent a figurehead, and for right or wrong, he was the man of the hour” (346). The affirmative description of Nickolas’s lifestyle “as hard working and family/community oriented” contrasts “the main description of *white trash*.” The latter group is socially summed up, to quote Carla D. Shirley, as “people that don’t care, they don’t take care of themselves, they don’t take care of their families, and their home.”³⁹ Espousing democratic principles and becoming the archetypical populist hero sets Nickolas apart from any possible association with the morally and socially feckless class of white trash.

The narrator frequently compares Nickolas with past, iconic democratic leaders in an obvious celebration of democracy and its promise of equality to all. However, the novel is not oblivious to the current state of democracy at the hands of southern Democrats. In arguing the same claim, Flynt maintains that southern Democrats were “pathetic and even hostile to the interests and needs of the great mass of common people,” they turned into “demagogues” who “inflamm[e]d the white masses over some grievance, real or imagined ... [and] often ignored the issues they had raised.”⁴⁰ The novel mirrors the political scene and portrays southern partisans as manipulative figures who maintain power through racial appeals. They ignore class issues and are held by the narrator as responsible for the system that keeps the lower-class subordinated.

Alternatively, the novel presents the populist force, represented in Nickolas, as the South’s true salvation if it wants to survive the changing times. Brown and Webb trace the complicated relationship between white and black southerners from the 1850s to the 1950s. While acknowledging that “the binary division between black and white has been fundamental in shaping the course of southern history,” Brown and

³⁹ Carla D. Shirley, “‘You *might* be a redneck if...’: Boundary Work among Rural, Southern Whites,” in *Social Forces*, 89. 1 (2010), 50.

⁴⁰ Flynt, *Dixie’s Forgotten People*, pp. 54-55.

Webb argue that class has “been [a] critical feature ... of the southern past and present, despite [its] downplaying by historians over the years.”⁴¹ On the one hand, they focus on periods of southern history in which racial affiliation played an important role in unifying whites through the class spectrum against non-whites such as the years following the Civil War and Reconstruction. On the other hand, they chronicle moments during the 1930s and the 1940s in which the white alliance was filled with fractures because of the rising discontent between the lower-class whites, a “class [that] threatened to supersede race.”⁴²

Populism as a political and social movement that advocated agrarian reform for the working-class against exploitive capitalism highlights one of these moments. The novel portrays populism as a social revolution that represents the South’s real moment of triumph. Nickolas conforms to Brown and Webb’s “classic stereotype of the average yeoman farmer depicted ... as hard-working, self-sufficient in foodstuffs and other items such as clothes, and largely independent of slavery and planters.”⁴³ Praised for his self-sufficiency, independence, ambition, and vigilance, Nickolas possesses all the populist qualities to overcome the prejudice associated with the crude division of southerners into upper and lower-classes. When Nickolas becomes the governor of Virginia, he insists on implementing an orderly state authority to achieve his policy. He advocates for different factions in the political party to unite their opinions under populist principles to advance the agricultural system of the South and better the conditions of poor whites. He refrains from using intimidating tactics and manipulative, dishonest means to achieve his goals and suppresses any violent rebellions stirred by white supremacist rhetoric. Nickolas’s death at the hands of a lynching mob while defending a black man against lawless lynching furthers the contrast between the law-observant and disciplined character of the populist yeoman and the uncivilised nature of the white trash.

Historically speaking, tenant farmers and sharecroppers supposedly lacked the pride of the white race that was nourished by the institution of slavery. They moved in a different sphere to that of the planters and slaveholders. However, their whiteness was rhetorically emphasised as “a populist and popular device for generating nationalism in a fledgling society that garnered support from all interest groups despite

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 5.

⁴² Ibid., p. 339.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 107.

tensions of gender, class and religion.”⁴⁴ In reality, the hardships of the white working-classes contradicted white claims to social advantage and “created ... broader challenges to the idea that whiteness alone implied freedom and dignity for workers.”⁴⁵ Describing a congressional meeting, the narrator romanticises the poor white class’s investment in whiteness. Nickolas surveys the faces of a group of farmers loitering in front of the city hall: “a countenance that was unerringly Anglo-Saxon, though modified by the conditions of centuries of changes. One would have recognised instinctively the tiller of the soil—the single class which has refused concessions to the making of a racial cast of feature” (299). The scene celebrates modern democracy through which the working-class exercise their civil rights, demanding their share in white privilege. By emphasising the farmers’ labour as “the tiller[s] of the soil”, the narrative can be aligned to texts that “counter the notion of idleness that has beset many poor white males in southern fiction.”⁴⁶ However, while race theoretically enables whites to exercise their democracy and claim their role in the economy of their region as opposed to non-whites, their underprivileged social position subjects them to economic oppression and class homogenisation. Despite the image of the rugged, self-reliant, hard-working, and proud “Anglo” farmers the scene at the city hall inspires, the narrator admits to the impact of agricultural and economic blows in modelling their real lives. In the face of the tenuous “conditions” that shaped their lives, the poor whites, with the aid of their skin colour, could resist the problematic perception of them as a different “racial cast” that bears no resemblance to privileged whites. Nevertheless, in their struggle to factor a way out of their depreciated existence, poor whites are already registered by the narrator as a “single class”, a dehumanised category rather than self-actualised individuals.

If the whiteness of poor southerners was literarily and politically employed in the sentimental and democratic rhetoric that enabled southern fantasies of a proud and enduring race, the poor men and women in the novel prove to be boiling with rage and resentment at the sacrifices demanded of them by both their environment and their government. Nickolas determines that he will never be like his resigned father; he decides early in life to rise above his station and effect social and economic change

⁴⁴ Steve Garner, *Whiteness: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 70.

⁴⁵ David Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 174.

⁴⁶ Robertson, “Poor Whites in Recent Southern Fiction,” 636.

through the law. His parents take an active interest in a political system that persists in ignoring their plight and demanding their monies. Marty Burr, Nickolas's mother, contends that "if this here government ain't got nothin' better to do than to drive poor women till they drop I reckon we'd as well stop payin' taxes to keep it goin'" (95). Amos Burr, Nickolas's father, complains bitterly that since the Civil War, the government has promised to ease the plight of the farmer but has failed to do so. "Ain't it been lookin' arter the labourer, black an' white?" Amos enquires, "Ain't it time for it to keep its word to the farmer?" He later demands, "I want my rights, an' I want my country to give them to me" (216). Marty and Amos Burr, however, are in no position to do more than complain. In following the Burrs' daily conversations, the reader begins to see the problems of class at the heart of southern traditions. The economic predicaments of poor whites are politically ignored by false accounts of their self-sufficiency as proud members of the white race. Nickolas's family serves as an example of how a literary narrative attempts to "[figure] out the connection between the abuse of men and women and the abuse of agricultural labourers under global capitalism."⁴⁷ Appealing to white supremacy becomes the outcome of a convenient union between politicians and capitalists to obviate labourers' discontent and their struggles.

The In/separability of Race and Class

While the novel establishes a contrast between the static position of African Americans and the mobility of the poor white, it deeply problematises the relation between the homogeneous middle and upper-class white South and the marginalised social groups of poor whites and non-whites who are victimised by its politics. Class struggles are closely intertwined with racial struggles when, by the novel's end, Nickolas is killed while defending a black man against a lynching mob.

While class discrimination against the white farmer receives consistent attention in the novel, racial and class discrimination against his non-white worker seems to escape it. The discourse of economic independence and prosperity exemplified by Nickolas turns out to be racially circumscribed. Nickolas, though representative of the people's voice, is more concerned with defending the plain white

⁴⁷ Matthews, *Seeing Through the South*, p. 150.

farmers' interests than their black counterparts. Early in the novel, Nicholas, now a lawyer, is reviewing in his mind the points of a white farmer's case and one he believes to be coming to him. Meanwhile, he meets with the former slave Ishmael. The old man is laden with a heavy bag, and Nicholas is kind enough to offer to take it to the old man's cabin. What happens next is that Nickolas, busily contemplating his future success, passes the cabin. The narrator highlights Nickolas's dismissal of the black man. Nickolas "forgot Uncle Ish as readily as he forgot the bag he carried" (186). This symbolic incident acquires significance afterwards, when Nickolas becomes a governor and his apathetic policy towards the black population drives Aunt Delphy to complain, "I ain' got much use fer Marse Nick myse'f. He's monst'ous hard on po' folks" (403). Nickolas collects black votes though they are not influential because of their disenfranchisement. His behaviour is mainly motivated by his belief in the "immortal principles of Virginia Democracy" that advanced the case of "his people" (295). However, when Nickolas reaches office, he does not attempt to change the political status quo for black southerners. Nickolas's attitude does not fit into the progressive ideas he considers himself to embody. By leaving out the similarly difficult situation of African Americans from his agenda, Nickolas fails to tell the complete story of class struggle in the post-war South, with all its people black and white.

The novel, however, examines the racism that formed the core of the post-Reconstruction era. The novel takes place in the years following Reconstruction during which African Americans were given citizenship and voting rights. As a result, civil rights were not defined by race, or as Hale notes, the white southerner lost the "citizen-versus-slave dialectic."⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the removal of the Federal forces that protected the emancipated slaves in 1877 marked a huge setback for racial justice in the South. Following the end of Reconstruction, southern Democrats were very diligent in their quest to terminate any rights granted to African Americans. Consequently, white southerners employed the policies of segregation and disenfranchisement. Hale explains the motivation behind southern tactics: "Whites created the culture of segregation in large part to counter black success, to make a myth of absolute racial difference, to stop the rising."⁴⁹ By keeping blacks in their

⁴⁸ Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage), p. 5.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

place and emphasising their inferiority, African Americans were ultimately denied any opportunity for social, political, and economic advancement. The novel highlights the ordeal of African Americans during these years in which relations between whites and blacks were being restructured in a way that exacerbated problems between the races. From the relationships between white landlords and their black domestics to lynchings of blacks, the text underlines the different kinds of racist assumptions held against African Americans.

The novel suggests that what determines the nature of the relation between white people and their black domestics is white sentiment based on slavery rhetoric rather than genuine feelings. The legacy of slavery defended the myth of faithful mammies and uncles who appeared to exist solely for the service of their white masters, with no lives of their own. This discourse gave potential emotional value to black retainers who seemed not to seek their individuality and humanity after emancipation and who remained in servitude, thus solidifying the white identity of their owners. This idea is explored through the relation between Eugenia and her nanny Delphy. According to Brown and Webb, the generations of black and white southerners born after the Civil War were strangers to each other, separated not only physically but also psychologically. Whites were threatened by what they saw as a black population unwilling to accept their subordinate status within white society. As contemporary journalist Ray Stannard Baker observed, “Many Southerners look back wistfully to the faithful, simple, ignorant, obedient, cheerful, old plantation Negro and deplore his disappearance.”⁵⁰ In the novel, the nurse first hired to care for Eugenia and Dudley’s son is an African American of the new order. Claiming that she “can’t trust [her son] with one of the new negroes,” Eugenia fires the woman (406). Dudley, finding the notion of his wife raising his son unaided by an experienced black woman unbearable, hires Eugenia’s former nurse, Delphy, as the child’s nanny. This time, Eugenia does not object, for Delphy’s experience with raising white children gives her “unshakable” authority (410). Such superior knowledge, as Hale observes, seemed to provide proof that Mammy, knowing her white folks and loving her white children, also by extension loved the white South.⁵¹ Mammy figures stood not only in opposition to but also as a sharp criticism of the “new order” of African Americans, as

⁵⁰ Brown and Webb, *Race in the American South*, p. 189.

⁵¹ Hale, *Making Whiteness*, p. 102.

Eugenia's changing attitudes suggest here. Delphy, unlike the "new order" nurse, embodies the virtues of the slavery days Mammy who, according to Cheryl Thurber, was mythologised as "a reminder of the past, her past, and the legacy of the Old South that is also past."⁵²

When Eugenia attends to her father in his final illness, she summons two distinct images from her memory, which are of her mother and her nanny. What is curious, besides the timing of the recollection, are the connotations invoked around each figure. Dyer indicates how whiteness is made as an end of a racial/ideological spectrum in which the white race embodies the much-estimated qualities of intellect, peacefulness, and order. While this association buttresses white supremacy and racism, it yet implies the notion that white people are less animated than non-whites who have more "life" in them. Dyer clarifies, "'Life' here tends to mean the body, the emotions, sensuality and spirituality; it is usually explicitly counterposed to the mind and the intellect, with the implication that white people's over-investment in the cerebral is cutting them off from life."⁵³ As Eugenia contemplates the memory of her mother, the following adjectives are used, "pale", "still", "beautiful", "faded", "miniature", "wistful", "holy", "blessed", "white", and above reproach. The mother figure seems to inspire a detached and lifeless presence frozen in a white aura of numbing godliness. When Eugenia's thoughts shift to her old black nanny, the emotional lexicon changes into "loved", "black", "restful", "bosom", "homespun", "tireless", "rocked", "friend", "faithful", "playmate", and "closer" (279). The appealing image of the black nanny is described as affectionate and close. Sharon D. Kennedy-Nolle interprets such stereotypical portrayal of African Americans by white writers as indicative of their ambivalence over acknowledging African Americans as American citizens. She adds that even as white authors reconstruct a place for blacks, they employ sentimentalising writing that tends "to portray freed people as little more than picturesque appendages" to white imagination.⁵⁴ The real Mammy's character is embellished by Eugenia's nostalgia to become an endearing memory of the life of the antebellum plantation aristocracy. Delphy, alive and real, is transformed through

⁵² Cheryl Thurber, "The Development of the Mammy Image and Mythology," in *Southern Women: Histories and Identities*, ed. Virginia Bernhard, Betty Brandon, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, and Theda Perdue (Columbia: Missouri University Press, 1992), p. 87.

⁵³ Richard Dyer, *White* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 56.

⁵⁴ Sharon D. Kennedy-Nolle, *Writing Reconstruction: Race, Gender, and Citizenship in the Post war South* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015), p. 29.

Mammy stereotypes into a figment of Eugenia's cherished past just like her dead mother.

Glasgow's critics object to what they see as the narrative's nostalgic rendering of black characters like Delphy, Ishmael, and Caesar. Griffith points out that in *The Voice of the People* and other early novels, Glasgow sentimentalises African Americans' place in the private white house but portrays their activities in the public sphere as dangerous, ineffectual, and comical. She maintains that Glasgow's Caesar and Ishmael represent blacks as a race as incapable of acting autonomously, consequently throwing into question whether the war was worth the destruction it caused in the first place.⁵⁵ However, the novel associates African Americans' stereotypical behaviour with the social and historical conditions that circumscribe it. In other words, we cannot talk of African Americans' stereotyped naivety and lack of citizenship awareness independently of the social and political factors that designate them, which the novel highlights and critiques.

In the novel, not all those in office are politically corrupt. Nickolas for example seeks lower-class white and black votes, votes that were restricted by a white political elite. According to Brown and Webb, disenfranchisement enabled this elite to minimise the electoral influence not only of blacks but also of poor whites seeking to impose more order and efficiency on the electoral process by restricting the eligibility of lower-class voters.⁵⁶ Nickolas also has no part in the unashamed techniques of African American disenfranchisement, enumerated by Brown and Webb. These included the ballot box abuses, poll taxes, grandfather clauses, and constitutional interpretations clauses.⁵⁷ Nickolas stands alone against Democratic demagogues such as Dudley Webb, who consider themselves far better Democrats than him. According to the novel, Webb and his like in their partisan affinities, never consider public welfare. They look upon Nickolas's ethical conduct towards African Americans as disruptive. Williamson links corrupt white supremacist Democratic policies with the disenfranchisement of African Americans. He explains that honest federal elections would have made the illegal exclusion of black voters more difficult and would have jeopardised an all-white Democratic supremacy at home.⁵⁸ It is no

⁵⁵ Griffith, *The Color of Democracy*, pp. 116-20.

⁵⁶ Brown and Webb, *Race in the American South*, p. 188.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Williamson, *A Rage for Order*, p. 90.

wonder that in the novel Democratic politicians who hold to white supremacist ideology are the same people who ensure black people's disenfranchisement. Diggs, another Democrat, relates to a sympathetic Webb how he managed to block black voters from reaching the ballot boxes. Webb smiles at hearing Diggs's story and comments, "Since the Negroes have stopped voting in large numbers we're even going in for honest elections" (400). Nickolas's friend, Galt, summarises the text's indictment of the corrupt practices of Democratic politicians by pointing out their manipulation of the racial sentiments of the public and their forged ballot results. As Galt sarcastically states, "when Dudley Webb begins to stump the State ... He'll win over ... the old Confederates when he gets on the Civil War, and the rest will come easy. There won't be need of bogus ballots and disappearing election books when the members of the Democratic caucus are sent up next session" (330).

Judge Bassett commends Caesar's loyalty when he tells General Battle how Caesar is the first black man in Kingsborough to vote the Democratic ticket, describing him as "a gentleman" (271). However, black people's votes are not influential as Caesar's motives illustrate. He does not hesitate to vote since he "heard [the judge] say that the man of his race who would dare to vote with white men would be head and shoulders above his people, a man of mind" (271-272). This incident reflects what Williamson describes as a popular practice of the Democrats. Williamson states that the Redeemers — the business-led faction of the Democratic Party — attempted to subtly persuade the newly freed slaves that those who had lately been large slaveholders were their best friends. They advised blacks to vote for them rather than "the new-coming Yankees and defecting Scalawags who were then so sweetly wooing them."⁵⁹ Taking Williamson's statement into consideration, Caesar's behaviour could be read differently. The text condemns state politics that denied black men the opportunity to participate effectively in public life. But more importantly, it exposes the manipulative tactics of white statesmanship against black people. Conservatives succeeded in making a faction of black voters vote against their own interest for Democratic Redeemers whose policies reflected white supremacist ideology — all by appealing to their wish to be, according to southern white standards, sensible men.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 49.

The peripheral presence of African Americans in the novel could also be attributed to their hostile relationship with white poor farmers and tenants. Economically, the antagonism between the two races could be attributed to an intensified sense of competition in the free labour market that replaced slavery. The increasing animosity between poor whites and blacks was the result of the South's changing economy after the Civil War and the emancipation of slaves. Many landowners preferred to rent their farms to the more hardworking, defenceless, and manageable African Americans who became even more submissive under Jim Crow. The competition for jobs between white and black tenant farmers became more intense, and their harsh work conditions were relatively comparable.⁶⁰ Psychologically, while there were still many powerful social distinctions between blacks and poor whites, a crucial distinction between them had disappeared: both now were forced to work at sharecropping or tenant farming.⁶¹ This gave poor whites a further incentive to cling to their "wages of whiteness" in order to feel superior to black people.⁶²

In *The Deliverance*, Glasgow introduces Peterkin, who perceives the Blakes' ex-slaves with "a particular disfavor" described by Glasgow as being typically held against the black man by the low-born white.⁶³ In *The Voice of the People*, Amos Burr, the lean, overworked man, with knotted hands the colour of the soil, is the typical white yeoman. He is an honest, peaceful man, but when he tries to commend his son to Judge Bassett he describes him as "leetle, but he's plum full of grit. He can beat any nigger I ever seed at the plough" (5). Marthy Burr is just as racist as her husband when she expresses her distrust of her black servants' competence: "I wouldn't have it on more'n an hour befo' one of them worthless niggers would have spilt bacon gravy all over it" (319). Also, many poor farmers in the novel voice their grievance over what they consider the reduction of their white privileges due to the economic gains of black farmers. In an obvious reference to the practices of segregation and lynching that were associated with the white lower-class, white

⁶⁰ Matthews, *Seeing Through the South*, p. 127.

⁶¹ Wray, *Not Quite White*, p. 116.

⁶² The wages expression was coined by W. E. B. Du Bois in his book *Black Reconstruction in the United States, 1860-1880* (1935), to describe the social and economic advantages conferred to whites as a result of their race. Roediger reads it in *The Wages of Whiteness* as "public and psychological" wages that enabled the white working-class to claim a short-term sense of superiority over non-white workers (p. xx).

⁶³ Ellen Glasgow, *The Deliverance: A Romance of the Virginia Tobacco Fields* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Company, 1904), p. 4.

characters retaliate against the “large negro majority” by devising “original methods of disposing of it” (401).⁶⁴ One character, Diggs, naturalises the violence of the white trash: “It was fighting the devil with fire ... self-preservation was a law long before Universal Suffrage was heard of” (401).

Segregation and lynching were the most formidable obstacles created by white southerners to prevent African Americans from realising their civil rights. Southern whites were able to legalise segregation on the basis that blacks generated dangerous crimes, diseases, and evil, which threatened to contaminate the rest of the white population unless they were physically restricted. Theories of biological racism such as social Darwinism asserted that the innate depravity of African Americans rendered it impossible to integrate them into a democratic society. An exemplary text of the period was *The Negro a Beast* by Charles Carroll, published in 1900, in which the author asserts that African Americans were more like apes than human beings. “No Negro Civilization has ever appeared!” claims Carroll.⁶⁵ In the novel, Nickolas negates the prospect of interracial sexual relationships as the narrator vocalises his thought on a biracial woman of the “new era” seated on a train near him. Nickolas can only see in the woman “the degenerate descendant of two races that mix only to decay” (309). Robertson, in her analysis of the racial past in Katherine Anne Porter’s *The Old Order* (1955), notes that texts written during the inter-war era expressed a characteristic fear of miscegenation. This concern reflected the anxiety modern southern writers felt about bigger changes in the southern context, including its interracial relations. These writers’ “fear of change”, which is expressed in their white characters’ “anxiety surrounding miscegenation”, echoed their “desire to maintain order and stability through the preservation of a pure bloodline.”⁶⁶ Hale also notes that eugenic anxieties were further intensified by an increase in public interracial mixing; they ultimately justified segregation as a means to keep the Anglo-Saxon stock pure. Hale moreover suggests that this image of the mulatto on the train was a common expression of white anxiety about racial hierarchy because trains became “spaces of racial conflict” connecting blacks to one another and to whites.⁶⁷ By mentioning

⁶⁴ Flynt notes, “The typical lynch county in the South was mostly white, sparsely populated, and overwhelmingly poor” (p. 55).

⁶⁵ Quoted in Brown and Webb, *Race in the American South*, p. 190.

⁶⁶ Sarah Robertson, “Accessing Blood-Knowledge in Katherine Anne Porter’s *The Old Order*,” in *Mississippi Quarterly* 62, no. 1/2 (2009): 250.

⁶⁷ Hale, *Making Whiteness*, p. 127.

Nickolas's negative thoughts toward the mulatto's image, the text reflects the concerns of its time that punished African Americans for white nostalgia and fear.

Hale further connects racial and class conflicts in the South when she states that "lynching as the controlled inversion of segregation also helped ease the class tensions within white supremacy." "For poor whites," lynching symbolised "the racial power that contradicted the inferiority of their class position."⁶⁸ The novel's ending contradicts its early reviews which criticised it for keeping the figure of the black man out of sight. Ultimately, the black figure contributes to Nickolas's demise and with it to the prospect of the democratic hero finding his way through the intersecting social and racial conflicts of the time. The "people" of the novel gather in a small crowd and head to the state prison to lynch a black man accused of raping a white woman. When Nickolas hears the news, he exclaims to his friend, "There hasn't been a lynching in the State since I've been in office" (423). Brown and Webb mention the rising objection of some whites against lynching practices in the South. Such objections were mainly motivated by pragmatic ends that sought white interests rather than moralistic inhibitions: "the persecution of African Americans inhibited the maintenance and growth of an essential labour force."⁶⁹ Hale, in turn, refers to modern economists' criticism of lynching, since they saw the region's extreme racism as existing in conflict with southern modernising efforts.⁷⁰ Nickolas, as a firm believer in keeping public order, is not interested in knowing the details behind the lynching. He is content with the evidence that is rumoured to exist against the black man. What Nickolas is more concerned with is that any procedure under his democratic government must be dictated by law, the law by which he rose above the lower-classes.

The final scene in the novel exemplifies how racial conflict can be employed ideologically to highlight class difference. Nickolas advances to face the mob that has come from his hometown to execute the black man, and he recognises their familiar faces. Nickolas comes face to face with reminders of his past as a member of a poor white community: "The face of a boy he had played with in childhood ... features as familiar as his own" (440). The mob is masked in white, which serves here as a homogenising symbol of white identity, and racist hatred. Blinded by darkness and

⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 236.

⁶⁹ Brown and Webb, *Race in the American South*, p. 189.

⁷⁰ Hale, *Making Whiteness*, pp. 286-87.

hatred, the crowd cannot recognise Nickolas and shoot him by mistake. Nickolas dies, and in his death, he is further distinguished from his people. Nickolas's "dogged ambition" sets him apart from the poor white whose racial violence underlines their inferiority and who choose "violent acts of revenge ... to escape the plight of their class."⁷¹ By dying while protecting the black man from being lynched, Nickolas reinforces Glasgow's views of exemplary democracy. Glasgow saw the South's future in the yeoman supported by the state authority and public order as opposed to stale class hierarchies and racial violence. Nickolas's death could also be interpreted as the price he pays for not recognising the racial trepidations of class in the South. By not getting involved directly in the situation of blacks, Nickolas avoids addressing racism, which constitutes the most important feature of the South's political and social makeup. Southern race and class ideologies depended on each other to produce white supremacy and its extreme expressions of violence and death.

In conclusion, the novel reveals the fallacy of the myth of the South's cultural superiority. It advocates the possibility of injecting new blood in Virginia's postbellum society as an answer to its political, economic, and social problems. However, this new blood exclusively belongs to the white yeoman, who embraces democracy to advance his class status from the oblivion of poverty to the prominence of social and political control. However, this formula proves to be difficult in a society that still struggles with political corruption, race and class prejudice. Class prejudice keeps affluent Virginians from recognising the potential of the poor white. While the latter succeeds in becoming a man of the people, he neglects the hardship of his non-white constituents who are in turn kept behind stereotypical representations. Hatred and stereotyping of blacks are connected to crooked and self-serving Democrats who dictate the white supremacist political order of the era. They are also linked to competition with poor whites in the job market and white anxiety over racial mixing. Imaginary white fears lead to segregation and lynching, and opposing race and class ideologies which eventually result in violence too strong to be survived by the ambitious poor white.

⁷¹ Benson, *Disturbing Calculations*, p. 38.

***One Man in His Time* and Stereotyping the Aspiring Poor White**

Similar to the story of Nickolas Burr, *One Man in His Time* explores the poor white's experience, but it is entirely set in urban Richmond. The poor white figure of the novel, Gideon Vetch, comes from a small working-class town but moves to a new cosmopolitan environment. His and the novel's progress is described against the backdrop of public houses, workers' compounds, and factories. Vetch is situated beyond the rural South with its more closed class system. However, the different environment of the big city does not provide him with a significant escape from rigid class hierarchy. Through the advancement of Vetch's public career, the text explores the concerns of poor southerners as they attempt to make a change in the difficult conditions of their class in the modern South. Central to the novel's social agenda is the insular space the poor whites continue to occupy in times of progress and expansion. This idea is expressed throughout in the stereotyping of Vetch as a dislocated provincial figure who originally came from an inferior place. Vetch is a stranger to the intricate political and economic structures of the metropolitan setting. He embodies the perspective of the outsider, attempting to situate himself in the modern South and revolutionise its fixed class ideologies. The absence of supportive political and cultural proxies ultimately frustrates Vetch's struggle for social and economic reform. His individual efforts lack the order of civil actions and his attempt to find an alternative to class welfare devolves into violence that ends with his death.

The novel depicts Vetch's success story, using it as a medium to discuss southern society's oppression of the poor white that renders him as an alien and a misfit. It also shows how the poor white's strength of character and moral and social consciousness enable him to force recognition from his hostile and condescending society. Vetch's characterisation as a man of the people whose social reforming plans are favoured over the party of privileged Democrats represents the novel's class awareness. The future of this society no longer lies in the hands of its aristocracy the way it did in the past, but in the hands of men from a class long-ignored by southern politics and letters, the poor whites.

The novel starts with Vetch as the governor of Virginia, a man who in the past used to be a circus performer but who, through sheer force of personality and facility for leadership, becomes the head of his party. Vetch is a self-made man who makes a stand in an apathetic social and political world. He and Nickolas from *The Voice of*

the People share an overmastering personality.⁷² This new take on the image and social role of the poor white, according to Stuart Kidd, was common during the progressive era of the 1920s and the 1930s. Kidd recounts contemporary southern intellectuals and artists who started a cult of the “transcendent commoner”, a self-made man who was able to enrich his character despite his poverty. This cult shaped a national attitude towards the agrarian self-made man as the last true individual left in the nation. Dismissing southern urban culture as decadent, it was the rural and small-town South with its cultivation of “individualism, community, character and self-sufficiency” that shaped the multi-layered identity of the poor white and his civic consciousness.⁷³ The advancement of the cause of the poor white in the novel is emphasised by its gradual but steady call for both the reader and the other characters to be aware of him. Through the narrator’s positive characterisation, Vetch develops into an admirable character in the reader’s perception. At the same time, the governor turns into a truly powerful, unusual, and loveable man in the eyes of his opponents, such as Stephen Culpeper, an enervated, upper-class lawyer and Democrat, and his glamorous and wealthy cousin Corinna Page.

As Vetch reaches his current position as the head of his party, he continues to naively believe that his future vision and plans will find support from his opponents in the Democratic Party since the Democrats publicly call for an equal opportunity for all whites and Vetch’s programmes aim to benefit everybody. But class prejudice compels the conservative and aristocratic party members, represented in the novel by John Benham, to stereotype Vetch and continuously attack his politics. Graves discusses what he judges as Glasgow’s ambivalent treatment of the common man in southern politics. He highlights moments in the novel in which Vetch is repeatedly described by Benham and his fellow Democrats as a “great demagogue”, a man who possesses the unscrupulous power to inspire the crowds with both support and discontent leading to possible chaos and violence. Graves concludes that “while [Glasgow] admires the drive and ambition that allow the middle-class man to overthrow the stifling pretensions of the aristocracy and revitalize the Southland with new blood and vigor, she also mourns the loss of scruples and gentlemanly

⁷² The two characters are also similar in many respects to Michael Akershem of *The Descendant* (1897), Glasgow’s first published novel.

⁷³ Stuart Kidd, “Visualizing the Poor White,” in *A Companion to the Literature and Culture of the American South*, ed. Richard Gray and Owen Robinson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2007), pp. 111-15.

competition legendary in the Old South.”⁷⁴ But the text in fact complicates southern politics and intersects it with overriding values of class difference. The novel moreover recognises Vetch as a man of merit and vision for the future and sets him against his supposedly superior but complacent opponents.

The novel portrays the elite’s attack on Vetch’s leadership abilities and his methods to achieve the office as bound to their prejudiced perception of his lower-class background. Focusing on the origins of the poor white stereotype, Foley divides the society of agrarian Texas into the main social classes of privileged white landowners and poor white tenant farmers and sharecroppers. Foley argues that the distressing circumstances of the poor field workers and their swelling numbers triggered certain attitudes by upper-class whites towards them. These positions were guided by class stereotypes which racialised poor whites as nearly non-white thus “fissuring ... whiteness in the region into Nordic white businessmen farmers and poor white tenants.”⁷⁵ In his account of the emerging socialist and independent parties around the period of World War One, Foley describes the hostile attitude of the Democratic Party towards its opponent parties with their poor and working-class majority. He discerns class anxieties in the defensive attitude of the surviving Democratic aristocrats towards the threatening image of the rising lower-class whites represented by independent parties.⁷⁶ Lancaster also notes that the middle and upper-classes generally denied governing aptitudes to poor whites and were surprised by some of the poor whites who projected a sense of community.⁷⁷ Likewise, Vetch’s political rivals understand the success of the poor white as anathema to the natural endowment of class privilege. Racially and socially, Vetch is the antithesis of privileged whiteness, and the negative stereotypes he suffers from his aristocratic adversaries are numerous.

The novel elaborates on the verbal attack against Vetch by prejudiced Democrats. For the Virginian aristocracy, Vetch is no more than white trash, and even his vitality comes from his circus roots. He is of an Irish descent — as his name indicates — and more of a class hybrid since his mother ran away from her excellent Virginian family to marry a half-Irish circus performer. Vetch’s policies are seen as

⁷⁴ Graves, “What Ellen Glasgow Meant by ‘Average’,” 67.

⁷⁵ Neil Foley, *The White Scourge: Mexicans, Blacks, and Poor Whites in Texas Cotton Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p. 8.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁷⁷ Lancaster, *Angelic Mother and the Predatory Seductress*, p. 90.

dishonest because they manipulate the desires and needs of the underprivileged: “A man who was born in a circus tent, and who still performed in public the tricks of a mountebank!”⁷⁸ He is not a proud man of state but rather a man with a talent for controlling the ignorant and disadvantaged crowd with his will and eloquence: “it was power over the undisciplined, the half-educated, the mentally untrained. It was power ... over empty stomachs” (6-7). Darrow, another Democrat, explains Vetch’s popularity with the public as a result of their inherent gullibility: “people don’t really want to be helped—they want to be fooled.” With his ability to move the crowd, Vetch works a magic that bewitches people “like the conjure-stuff of the darkeys” (184). In a language that mixes class with racial difference, Darrow claims that it is Vetch’s poor white status, his vague and humble past, and his controversial policies that meet the crowd’s need for sensationalism and suspense and create his popularity.

Through his ethnicity, class, and politics, Vetch is viewed as an illegitimate character in the eyes of conservative whites who would perpetuate the middle and upper-class values of the South. Historically, Vetch and his class were never the protagonists of the South’s cultural scene. They are relegated to the margins of the social scene, founded by the plantation hierarchy, and enforced by the slavery system. Wray rehearses the trajectory of the poor white’s stereotyping and the class that benefited from the persistence of this racist and classist legacy:

From the seventeenth to the early nineteenth century, the language of race and the language of class were not nearly as distinct as we presume them to be today. To be sure, they were considered different categories, but between the lower classes and the lower races, there was considerable overlap in the symbolic properties, characteristics, and traits ascribed to each. Behaviors and attitudes regarding conventional morality and work were particularly salient here, with the lower classes and lower races typically characterized as holding deep aversions to both.⁷⁹

But these conventional class conceptions, which were used to rationalise the expanding gap between landed and landless whites, are negated in Glasgow’s narrative which contends that the true factors behind Vetch’s triumph are his ability, his real love of his fellow men, and his sense of justice. Moreover, the narrator combines this defence of the common man’s character with a criticism of the old order’s sentiments and politics.

⁷⁸ Ellen Glasgow, *One Man in His Time* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap Publishers, 1922), p. 6.

⁷⁹ Wray, *Not Quite White*, pp. 22-3.

The text's criticism of conservative politics is carried out through Vetch's political rival, Benham. As opposed to Vetch's more progressive views, Benham stands for a class-bound democracy. The text characterises Benham as a stereotypical gentleman whose politics are based on the nobility's ideals of stability and the maintenance of social hierarchy. Benham is an impressive "tall thin man of middle age, with a striking appearance and the straight composed features of an early American portrait" (111). Dyer, in his analysis of the literary presentation of white characters, suggests that the impressive portrayal of certain persons is a technique to connect physical superiority to ideals of whiteness through a focus on refined whites who epitomise white standards.⁸⁰ Dyer's argument finds support in Benham's description. A modern replica of Virginia's early colonisers, Benham is the archetype of white privilege. The life of comfort showing in Benham's "shining gloss that comes of good living and careful grooming" (111) is the reward he enjoys in exchange for the public virtue and observance of manners he exhibits, always posing as a "charming guest, an impressive speaker, [and] a sympathetic listener" (112).

In sum, Benham's superior appearance is used by the narrative to further connect him to the privileged class of aristocrats who enjoy the privileges and guard the boundaries of whiteness. The text, however, hints at subtle deficiencies in this perfect portrayal. What Benham's image reflects is superficial, what the narrative describes as "shining" and "gloss" (111) rather than depth and substance. Benham's "not quite generous mouth" (112) also suggests his character's lack of true sympathy. The inherent apathy of the aristocratic class that comes as a result of many generations of relaxed and affluent living is further criticised as Corinna acquaints herself with Benham. Corinna cannot help but feel the absence of the humane side in Benham's character despite his intellectual and social gifts: "A mental thinness perhaps? An emotional dryness? Or was it merely that here also she felt, rather than perceived, the intrinsic weakness of the old order?" (112) Corinna wonders at first if Benham's emotional inadequacy is a personal feature, but afterwards, she perceives it as characteristic of the class to which he belongs.

Through Stephen's eyes, the narrator vocalises Stephen's perception of Vetch as the opposite of Benham. Going back to Dyer's argument, he states that the "possibility of white bodily inferiority falls heavily on the shoulders of those white

⁸⁰ Dyer, *White*, p. 74.

men who are not at the top of the spirit pile.”⁸¹ Vetch’s irregular features and common appearance would be consistent with Dyer’s conclusion. Stephen is initially unmoved by the governor’s ordinary and uninspiring looks: “His face was irregular in outline, with a high bulging forehead and thick sandy hair which was already grey. In the shadow his eyes did not appear remarkably fine; and there was nothing striking in their deep setting under the beetling sandy eyebrows” (170). But then Stephen starts to feel the impression Vetch leaves with his “tall, rugged figure, built of good bone and muscle and sound to the core, with the look of arrested energy which was doubtless an inheritance from the circus ring” (13-14). The narrative’s emphasis on Vetch’s muscular vigour and strong-built frame does not contradict Dyer’s previous argument. Dyer highlights another common literary trend that was popular since colonial times which was to portray “those for whom their body is their only capital.” This trend attributed to lower-class whites an overachieving masculinity that originally responded to the challenges the new land posed on the frontier men. Dyer states, “In the context particularly of white working class [men]”, “an assertion of the value and even superiority of the white male body has especial resonance.”⁸² In the text, it is Vetch’s low social background as a circus worker rather than the demands of the frontier life that is the reason for his muscular strength. Vetch also shares with the colonial frontier man the fact that they are both poor white men who fight against a hostile environment, but in Vetch’s case it is the social rather than the natural setting that stands as his opponent.

Moreover, the text attributes humanity and genuine compassion to Vetch as it denies them to Benham. On the one hand, Benham’s class privileges and detached sentiments help him to keep his youthful looks, which show in his black and shiny hair and “the healthy red of his ... mouth” (112). On the other hand, Vetch’s humble origins prematurely turn his “sandy hair” to “grey” (170) but creates of him a true humanist who feels the struggle of his fellow men. And while Benham keeps on criticising Vetch for being uncouth and for undermining conventional manners, Benham is observed by those around him as a man who suffers from “mental thinness” and “emotional dryness” (112). While Benham’s looks reflect social sophistication, his character does not possess Vetch’s more exceptional qualities that

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 147.

⁸² Ibid.

make him a more fitting figure for leadership; these characteristics are his humanity and real dedication to a cause. As observant characters like Stephen and his cousin Corinna compare Benham and Vetch, they reach the same conclusion regarding the two men's suitability for leadership. Vetch is the more proper leader, as his vital energy and sympathy enable him to invigorate stale traditions and initiate progress. However, he would have made a perfect leader if he had tempered his vitality with a more ordered approach to politics. The politics of early Democratic Virginians provide a valuable model for revolutionaries like Vetch, but modern politics, in the hands of self-involved men like Benham, devolves into adherence to bureaucracy and defence of partisan interests.

The Progressive 1920s and the Political, Economic, and Cultural Effect of Capitalism

The narrator situates her social criticism within the radical times brought about by industrial, economic, and social changes which conquered the new South. Glasgow criticises the political and cultural world of modern capitalism by highlighting Vetch's rebellious and defiant attitude. Vetch challenges the privileges of the aristocrats and capital owners and mocks the impractical bureaucracy and wasteful rhetoric of the Democrats. His social opinions reflect a world of idealistic dreams and emotions contrasted to the capitalist world of the South's real authority, the Democrats. His activities, exclamations, objections, and opinions aim to challenge that authority. Vetch clearly defines the underlying issues opposing the progress of the poor: "The rate of wages is falling ... and the cost of living is still as high as in war times. Rents are going up every day, the housing of the working-classes ... is growing worse. We shall soon be facing the most serious problem of the system under which we live, the problem of the unemployed. Already it is beginning" (175). Described more as a social reformer than a manipulative politician, Vetch is described as a man of realities who wants to confront and guide people, not with words and ideas, but with facts and actions towards his progressive agenda.⁸³

⁸³ Raper suggests that President Woodrow Wilson served as a model for the progressive aspects of Vetch's characterisation. He bases his claim on the letters of diplomat Henry Anderson, Glasgow's fiancée at the time, to her which contain accounts of the President's politics. See Julius Raper, *From the Sunken Garden: The Fiction of Ellen Glasgow* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), p. 49. However, while both progressive leaders Theodore Roosevelt and Wilson are renowned for their transformative legislative and administrative achievements, Roosevelt's more dynamic and

Vetch's speech reflects a great deal of anger and dissatisfaction about events and social issues in the South in the years following World War One. It is important to register that while most of the nation considered the 1920s a time of "prosperity", the South had already begun an economic decline.⁸⁴ With agriculture as its primary source of income, the South suffered during the 1920s because of the increasing numbers of tenants and sharecropping farmers. White workers who moved to the cities and mill towns to work in factories did not fare much better either. They were faced with few job opportunities and difficult working conditions. Factories and plant workers suffered from dehumanising, unsafe working conditions, and insufficient wages for them to survive. The need to regulate business increased as industrialisation increasingly privileged private profit over public welfare. Even as it helped in creating new job opportunities, it also participated in an uneven distribution of wealth. Disputes between labour and management became rife, with the owners seeming to ignore their workers' conditions. Workers' attempts to organise labour protests were met with a brutality that was sanctioned by the government.⁸⁵

As many Americans became aware of the problems affecting poor whites, they called for the need to regulate the agricultural and business industries. During this period of labour dissatisfaction many men became politically radical, turning to socialism and communism. They were supported by what came to be called "muckraking", a sensational journalism that helped expose corruption and greed at the top of big American corporations and squalor and abusive working conditions at the bottom.⁸⁶ All these factors gave shape to the reform movements of the Progressive era in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Consequently, the strife experienced by the white worker dominated the political and social scene. Cooper addresses the political, economic, social, and diplomatic developments in America between 1900 and 1920, detailing the progressive agenda of Theodore Roosevelt's presidency. He chronicles how in the South progressive reformers campaigned to reform labour

exuberant personality seems to fit Vetch's characterisation more than Wilson's reserved and controlled nature.

⁸⁴ Williamson mentions how the 1890s were especially difficult years for the agricultural South: during the "depression in 1892 and 1893, agricultural prices fell dramatically. Farms that had supported a family comfortably with cotton selling at twelve cents a pound became marginal at eight cents a pound, and failed totally at seven, six, and five—a point reached in 1894". See *A Rage for Order*, p. 90.

⁸⁵ John Milton Cooper Jr., *Pivotal Decades: The United States 1900-1920* (New York: Norton, 1990), pp. 80-82.

⁸⁶ Henry F. May, *The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of Our Own Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 302-05.

legislations throughout the region. Heading the progressive movement, Roosevelt came to the presidency in 1901 on the strength of his appeal to the poor white, the forgotten man who was victimised by unemployment and poverty during the Depression years. Publicly identified “as a man of the people”, Roosevelt waged war on the Depression, promising “bold, persistent action.” He ushered in an era of trust-busting and fervent nationalism, using his “bully pulpit” to address social issues. Roosevelt brought prosecutions against big business. He often sided with labour to address workers’ concerns in a culture in which materialism seemed to have run amok, with most of the country’s wealth and power concentrated in the hands of the notorious “robber barons.”⁸⁷

The novel reflects the dominant political and social concerns of the era as Vetch preaches a social agenda reminiscent of Roosevelt’s reformist programme that made him a defender of “[t]he ordinary small American citizen.”⁸⁸ What Vetch stands for is a racially and nationally-bound democracy. Thomas F. Gossett analyses nineteenth-century texts on “race as the explanation for American democracy” and which correspond to Vetch’s ideology. These works stress that democracy runs in the blood of Anglo-Saxons and promises them social mobilisation, so they will not step down to the level of other races like Native Americans and African Americans.⁸⁹ Vetch calls for:

a progressive reorganization of society—for a fairer social order and a practical system of cooperative industry, the only logical method of increasing production without reducing the *labourer* to the old disorganized *slavery*. I believe in the trite formula we workers preach—in the eight-hour day, the old age pension, which is only the inevitable step from the mother’s pension, the gradual *nationalization* of mines and railroads. I believe in these things which are the commonplace of to-morrow. (177; my italics)

In Vetch’s socialist approach the author puts forth her own thoughts regarding the relation of capital to the means of production in her society. In her essay, “What I Believe” (1933), Glasgow sounds more like a socialist when she emphasises the right of the worker as a basic moral and material reality against those who get to take the profits from people’s work by the privilege of owning the factories. Glasgow simultaneously argues for personal renewal and that “the private ownership of wealth

⁸⁷ Cooper, *Pivotal Decades*, pp. 34-39.

⁸⁸ James Truslow Adams, *The Epic of America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1931), p. 351.

⁸⁹ Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 93.

should be curbed; that our natural resources should not be exploited for individual advantage; that every man should be assured of an opportunity to earn a living and a fair return for his labour.” She adds “that our means of distribution should be readjusted to our increasing needs and the hollow cry of ‘overproduction’ banished from a world in which millions are starving.”⁹⁰ And it is precisely through Vetch’s advocacy of internal renewal in the capitalist and industrial system as a means toward achieving specific political and economic objectives and ultimately social justice that the author restates and expands upon her own agenda.

In line with the text’s endorsement of socialist reform, it also criticises the rise of consumerism. The novel particularly condemns the way in which the authority of consumers comes to determine the thinking of political and social organisations, such as the Democratic Party. Distorted by the culture of consumerism and its impulses for self-gratification, democracy turns into a display of conflicting factions, each seeking to achieve self-interests at the expense of public welfare. The text attributes a destructive impact on the spirit of contemporary democracy as it is coupled with the cult of nationalisation that pervaded American political thought by the early twenties. American democracy became a degrading force for all that stood as specific to southern culture and its refined, original, and reverential traditions: “Democracy, relentless, disorderly, and strewn with the wreckage of finer things, had overwhelmed the world of established customs” (2). The narrator mourns how southerners’ past ownership of proper experience and original knowledge is being neglected as a source of living by the new consumer culture: “Traditions had fled in the white blaze of electricity; the quaint brick walks, with their rich colour in the sunlight, were beginning to disappear beneath the expressionless mask of concrete. It was all changed ... it was all obvious and cheap ... it was all ugly and naked and undistinguished—yet the tide of the new ideas was still rising” (1-2).

Since it is the aristocrat who represents past traditions, naturally he is the one who mourns their absence the most. Wray notes how the elite class, since Colonial times, characteristically feared poor whites: “planter elites ... and colonial authorities ... whose cultural sympathies lay with the non-Celtic English, looked askance at lubbers and crackers and regarded them with a mixture of fear and distaste in the pre-

⁹⁰ Ellen Glasgow, “What I Believe,” in *Ellen Glasgow’s Reasonable Doubts: A Collection of Her Writings*, ed. Julius Rowan Raper (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), p. 222.

Revolutionary era.”⁹¹ In the novel’s modern South, the aristocratic past succumbs to the changing forces of democracy. Contemporary democracy brings modernity and evolution but is also common and unrefined in character as it blends previously distinct classes and different values. Glasgow’s narrative pictures the ascending poor white as “the hunted” who “turned at last into the hunter” (6). Vetch is the man “the hour had called forth; but the man had been there awaiting the strokes, listening, listening, with his ear to the wind. It had been a triumph of personality, one of those rare dramatic occasions when the right man and the appointed time come together” (6). This quote highlights the shift in the democratic impulse that situates the poor white as the hunter pursuing his instinct to track and capture his object.

The old guard of the Democratic Party repeatedly oppose Vetch’s politics and actions because they perceive them as aiming to avenge his class against theirs. He is viewed by them as a source of national and economic threat who embraces the “favourite dogma of near-Socialists” (150). This idea finds support in Foley’s account of the perception of independent and labour parties by the Democratic Party and its supporters. Foley notes that the elite class stigmatised progressive reformers who campaigned for workers’ welfare. By linking Vetch with a socialist agenda in the novel, southern aristocrats further allude to his difference from real Americanism associated with democracy and patriotism. This notion is echoed in Foley’s comment that socialism was viewed by the southern elite as “tantamount to ‘hanging Thomas Jefferson in effigy.’”⁹² In reality, the class-prejudiced politicians’ criticism of Vetch’s revolutionary politics tends to betray a fear of progress and change, with their implication of class mobilisation, rather than a genuine concern for the Democratic programme they claim to protect.

Furthermore, the text provides a different perspective on Vetch’s political thought as more evolutionary and corresponding to the public welfare than conservative Democracy that is institutionally oriented. Vetch’s political views are more ethical as they aim to reach those who need governmental intervention to better their conditions. Allied to the interest of the poor and needy but with consideration for the public interest, his political programme is inspired by some socialist principles rather than being extremist. Darrow, Vetch’s supporter, channels Vetch’s philosophy:

⁹¹ Wray, *Not Quite White*, p. 155.

⁹² Foley, *The White Scourge*, p. 69.

Improve human nature, and then you will improve the conditions in which it lives. Improve the rich as well as the poor. Teach 'em to be human beings, not machines, to one another—that's Gideon's idea, you know,—humanize—Christianize, if you like it better—civilize. It's a pretty hopeless problem—the individual case—charity is all rotten from root to branch. If you could see the harm that's been done by mistaken charity! (193)

The quote reveals that while Vetch believes in the state's responsibility to better the conditions of the poor, he is equally convinced that the poor white's character must be regenerated before his environment can be constructively improved. Vetch refuses both the upper-class sense of noblesse oblige and paternalism that possessed a false sense of responsibility for the lower orders and which was cultivated by the institution of slavery.⁹³ He mirrors the views of early social thinkers who rebelled against social Darwinism. According to Gossett, these men were “equally hostile to the kind of determinism propagandized by the eugenicists.” They were “convinced that education could discover and develop latent ability among the lower classes.”⁹⁴ Gossett states that social Darwinists and the eugenicists claimed it was the genetics of the poor classes that kept them poor. He quotes David Jordan, president of Stanford University, “Poverty, dirt, and crime,” Jordan declares, are due to poor human material. “It is not the strength of the strong but the weakness of the weak,” he adds, “which engenders exploitation and tyranny.” Employers were not unjust to badly paid wage earners, insisted sociologist Franklin H. Giddings. The poor were “unfree task-workers, not because society chooses to oppress them,” he explains, “but because society has not yet devised or stumbled upon any other disposition to make of them.”⁹⁵ This essentialist determinism is refused by Vetch who insists that environment is responsible for the character and condition of the poor. Improving the state of the poor cannot be done because public welfare continues to be controlled by the upper-class's charitable impulses. More important to Vetch is to enlighten men's characters, and he believes that private economic and social institutions could not undertake such a huge task on their own. Governmental bodies must get involved in recognising the individuality of the poor white and consequently identifying his needs.

⁹³ Williamson, *A Rage for Order*, p. 225.

⁹⁴ Gossett, *Race*, p. 162.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

Vetch, as a member of the working-class, is determined to move beyond the sphere of abstract rhetoric. His close bond with his fellow men elicits in him a tendency to seek connections to the personal experience as the real one. This tendency is what leads him and Darrow to invite blue-blooded Stephen Culpeper to the poor side of Richmond to experience at first hand the difficult world of the poor workers in the city housing projects. They introduce Stephen to a carpenter named Canning. Canning is out of work and lives with a messy haggard wife, three noisy children, and a badly nourished baby “with the smooth unlined face not of an infant, but of a philosopher” (188) tied on a high chair. Canning is suffering from a nervous breakdown after participating in the war and comes back to experience the tragedy of unemployment. Darrow surprises Stephen when he discloses to him the fact that this abandoned neighbourhood and the ones next to it belong to the Culpepers. Raper commends this episode, which details the crushing impact of poverty on the soul as “the surest scene Glasgow had written since ‘the White Magic’ chapter of *Virginia*.”⁹⁶ Glasgow’s vivid description of the poor’s living conditions is similar to Vetch’s action in the same episode. They both bring the grim reality of poor people’s lives to upper-class southerners who tend to view it abstractedly. These tenants’ wretched dwellings come to embody the ugly reality of the false aristocratic heritage of paternalism. By meeting with Canning, Stephen comes face to face with his guilty heritage. The shock carries Stephen through the darkness in which he has been living to a new reality. Vetch has “knocked a hole in the wall” behind which he was suffocating and “shown him the way out” (196). He has spoken to the democratic impulses in Stephen, and some barrier in his soul “between himself and humanity” (200) has broken down.

Whites Only

While the novel calls for economic and social renovations, it characteristically ignores the racial problems that intensified during the 1920s. McDowell rightly criticises the overlooking of racial oppression in a novel preoccupied with a reform agenda: “an absence of all reference to the Negro contributes to the unreality of [the]

⁹⁶ Raper, *From the Sunken Garden*, p. 45.

book.”⁹⁷ This attitude is further aggravated by the fact that the 1920s were particularly difficult times for African Americans. According to Cooper, “the first two decades of the twentieth century marked what one historian called the ‘nadir’ for black Americans since the abolition of slavery.”⁹⁸ This period witnessed expanded Jim Crow segregation and literacy laws that disenfranchised blacks. Interracial violence intensified in the form of race riots, during which mobs of whites attacked black communities with implicit government approval, and lynching reached record highs.⁹⁹

The novel’s investment in an exclusively white society with its different challenges and concerns is reflected in its reduction of African Americans to ornamental elements employed to endow certain scenes with quiet tones. Throughout the novel, the black image is limited to black men singing in the market town and a few black nurses dozing on the public garden’s benches. It seems that the narrative views black people as a race with no vitality or spirit. Black people are loitering or snoozing at a time the white man is fighting for his social and political rights. In a scene that symbolises the arrested progress of the black race, Corinna catches sight of an old black woman dragging a basket of wood to the top of the hill. The impression Corinna had “was very peaceful, wrapped in that languorous stillness which is the pervading charm of the South.” Action disturbs Corinna’s dreamy senses when a man passes hurriedly and comes with “a brisk, springy stride up the brick walk.” The man who is a “picture of embodied activity, of physical energy” turns out to be Vetch. He takes the basket from the old black woman and carries it up to the top of the hill (208). The contrast between laziness and dynamism, inaction and action, in a sense, sums up the narrative stance towards blacks and whites in a manner that licences the turning of attention from black people to whites.

However, the reduction of the visibility of black people in the text comes as a logical result of a “Volksgeistian” ideology which sanctioned the obviation of racism by white minds. I suggested earlier that Vetch’s politics could be traced to the example of Roosevelt, whose progressive programmes were shaped, according to Williamson, by white democratic rhetoric. Williamson maintains that Roosevelt’s reformative actions, targeted primarily towards the interest of the poor whites, were

⁹⁷ Fredrick P. W. McDowell, *Ellen Glasgow and the Ironic Art of Fiction* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963), p. 141.

⁹⁸ Cooper, *Pivotal Decades*, p. 71.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

mainly shaped by Volksgeistian Conservatism. Williamson states that this new southern conservatism, popular during the 1920s, certified a white withdrawal from blackness physically and ideologically. It was a white-bound movement that dominated the social and intellectual South in the 1920s and the 1930s. This modified southern conservatism:

poured great energies into the effort to propagandize the gospel of whiteness and to realize its genius. The emergence among white people of popular education, popular religion, popular politics, and a warming interest in Appalachian and swampland folklore as deep-freeze depositories of Anglo-Saxon purity were all, in significant measure, conscious attempts to bring forth white soul. What might well be called "Volksgeistian Conservatism" was abroad in the land, and it left deep and lasting marks upon Southern white culture in the twentieth century.¹⁰⁰

The race-laden language found in Roosevelt's public speeches would support Williamson's claim. The attainments of the democratic ideals Roosevelt fought to secure for the poor were based upon racially-specific attributes. Roosevelt argued that self-governance came "to a race only through the slow growth of centuries, and then only to those races which possess an immense reserve fund of strength, common sense, and morality."¹⁰¹ According to Williamson, southern conservatives, such as Roosevelt, regarded blacks as "a child race" that have not yet acquired the evolutionary characteristics of "the ... mature and strong" white race. For them, "neither race was inherently better or worse than the other. They were, simply, different."¹⁰² They believed that only blacks could save blacks, "and that the true labour of white leaders lay on the white side of the colour line." Revealing a symptomatic self-serving white sentiment, southern conservatives alleged that "the white race, in the interest of the efficiency and the happiness of the masses of its own life, must bring its culture still more closely into relation with social needs."¹⁰³

In Canning's episode, there is a very brief account of the even more miserable living conditions experienced by the black population. Darrow explains to Stephen that the reason for keeping the poor tenants' houses in a terrible state is because the cost of repairing them would be so high that it would make them unprofitable. The Culpepers' manager spares the expenses of maintaining the district for white families

¹⁰⁰ Williamson, *A Rage for Order*, p. 216.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States* (New York: Norton, 1987), p. 152.

¹⁰² Williamson, *A Rage for Order*, p. 221.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

since he is confident that if they refuse to live in it, black families in the next neighbourhoods are prepared to move in their place. Black tenants are so jammed in their own quarters that they are obliged to move out and pay the same price for apartments abandoned by white tenants. Darrow encapsulates the inhuman and corrupted state of affairs: “Coloured tenants stand crowding better than white ones, and they will pay a better rent for worse housing” (185). It is worth noting that no further comments are made regarding the exploitation property owners practised on their black tenants, and though the text invests considerably in detailing the tragic life of the poor whites, the reader remains ignorant of the far worse conditions of their black neighbours. Vetch and Darrow choose to lead Stephen to meet Canning and the poor whites’ residences. They do not ask him to take a similar look at the black tenants’ houses though they are equally his responsibility as renters in his family’s property, and they live in even poorer circumstances. By doing so, Vetch literarily and symbolically channels Stephen’s attention to the problem of the white man, keeping that of his black neighbour invisible. Williamson’s argument on Volksgeistian conservatism can be employed to explain the novel and its protagonist’s blindness to racial struggle in favour of class struggle.

The Prospect of Sympathising Voices

In the text’s domain, the non-white vanishes, the poor white exists in its very centre, and the aristocrat is welcome to join him if he learns to see differently, to acknowledge and accept difference in a nonhierarchical way. In the following section I argue that Corinna and Stephen’s ecstatic discovery through Vetch of a different world from theirs forms a necessary step towards their realisation of this condition. They move from their previous pervasive sense of anxiety and emptiness to a solid and self-transforming embrace of what they used to consider as flawed and different but now accept as human and concrete.

The social position of the Culpepers, Stephen’s family, is foregrounded by the text as the most determining influence in shaping his perceptions on life. Stephen is acutely aware of his family’s position in the social hierarchy. Particularly important is the consistent manner in which the Culpepers’ appearance is utilised by them to confront changing times. The social markers of bloodline, customs, and ownership are employed as strongly as a physical obstruction to change and progress. Most obvious

is the Culpepers' mansion that stands as a symbol of the once powerful but now isolated and alienated spirit of the aristocrat: "the house stood there divided and withdrawn from the restless progress" (3), notes Stephen. Stephen's parents also embody the pride of the upper-class that perceives itself as a distinct race. Mr Culpeper, "a man who hopes that he is Christian and knows that his blood is blue" represents his class's characteristic vanity and self-complacency (67). Mrs Culpeper, the "incarnation of the evasive idealism of the nineteenth century" (61), is very much like her husband. She can see the world only through her class ideals, exposing her backward and rigid personality to the narrator's sarcasm: "Her mind was thin but firm, and having received a backward twist in its youth, it had remained inflexibly bent" (61). The Culpepers offer an example of class-bound whiteness in which history, ownership, and revered hierarchy combine to form a class of "homogeneous whiteness,"¹⁰⁴ which unites them as a distinct race against threatening heterogeneous whiteness presented by Vetch and poor whites. The narrator emphasises this impression of the Culpepers: "Standing for what was old, they had stood ... for ... all the instincts which blend to make the tribe and the community ... these were the stubborn forces embodied in the Culpeper stock" (60).

But signs of the aristocratic class's weaknesses that will lead eventually to its decline are also noted. For using their material and moral prerogatives to maintain the separation between classes, for remaining ignorant and complacent, aristocracy, represented by the Culpepers, will eventually be challenged and beaten by time and change: "Saturated with tradition as with an odour, and fortified by the ponderous moral purpose of the Victorian age, they had never doubted anything that was old and never discovered anything that was new" (59). The lens of class difference limits Stephen's perceptions at first. The reader begins to see Stephen, the last in the line of Virginian aristocrats, as more of a wandering soul who is deeply disturbed by his experience in the war. The conservatism in which Stephen is reared oppresses him, and "the clustering traditions" leave him with an increasing sense of "dissatisfaction with his life and his inability to make a sustained effort to change it" (3). Far removed from the culture of his predecessors, he longs "for [the] heroic and splendid deeds" of his Virginian ancestors, "the heroes of the Revolution" (2). Stephen finds his

¹⁰⁴ Stephane Rose, *Abolishing White Masculinity from Mark Twain to Hip-hop* (Plymouth, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2014), pp. 106-07.

existence in the city to be affected by his class's abstract and limited generalisations on life and feels no sense of connection or purpose. He is apathetic to his present if not positively revolted by it: "beneath the surface there was, he told himself, a profound revulsion from everything that he had once enjoyed and loved—an apathy of soul which made him a moving shadow in a universe of stark unrealities" (70). But it is Stephen's desperate mental attitude that makes him most ready for readjustment: "He knew that he was sinking deeper and deeper into this morass of indifference; he realized, at times vividly, that his only hope was in change" (70).

The symbol of future change is soon to be presented in the image of Vetch. Vetch proves to be the answer to what Stephen needs most, which is the magical "something different" (70). According to Wray, depictions of the lower-class white as more of a primitive force of nature were found early in the image of the frontier man. This frontier man was "restless, constantly moving to stay ahead of the advancing forces of both farmers and businessmen, evading the "soft," feminizing traps of European influence and American domesticity and forging new path ways for "manly" democratic independence."¹⁰⁵ Stephen needs to be inspired by a new force that reinvigorates his stale existence. Vetch, with his poor white background, is portrayed in a manner reminiscent of non-whites and their stereotyped association in the white imagination with nature and primitivism. He is more of a racial "other" who provides Stephen with a basic and fascinating experience. Vetch's views equal in their impact the intervention of "natural forces", "of storms and fire and war and pestilence" (27). Their force would enable Stephen to express the uncontrollable impulse and rich vein of feeling he keeps buried beneath his indifferent behaviour. Only in listening to Vetch might Stephen develop the "exotic flower" (69) that sprang up within him in response to the challenge of war.

The change in Stephen's character shows in his altered perception of Vetch from rejection to acceptance. At first Stephen's predisposition causes him to refuse the idea that a man of an inferior class to his can rise to prominence: "A Gideon Vetch was governor of Virginia! ... Here also the destroying idea had triumphed" (4). He accepts what other Democratic partisans circulate about the questionable means the governor uses to achieve his goals, but is convinced that Vetch came to office not due to his own merit but because the party neglected the voices of his voters: "the old

¹⁰⁵ Wray, *Not Quite White*, p. 51.

party had been sleeping, of course; it had grown too confident” (4-5). The text describes a crisis in Stephen’s sensibilities as he struggles to evade the large impact of Vetch’s charismatic character upon him by inhibiting any positive response and substituting it with fear and revulsion. As Stephen wanders around the city, he catches a glimpse of the governor’s body through the state house’s window. Stephen instinctively rejects Vetch because “to Stephen and his race of pleasant livers the two sinister forces in the universe were change and death. ... and what were those other people—the people represented by that ominous shadow—except the ragged prophets of disorder and destruction?” (7) Stephen’s adverse reaction to Vetch’s presence surpasses that of political difference and calls to mind the stereotypes that literary texts employed to describe the white fear of the racial other. The fear of another class of whites rising to dominance becomes in Stephen’s consciousness like the fear slaveholders felt towards slave rebellions bringing with them destruction and chaos. But Stephen grows to recognise Vetch’s potentials and abilities. He would not any longer try to “evade the man's tremendous veracity, his integrity of being, his inevitableness” (5). Stephen’s increasing awareness compels him to admit that “‘the demagogue,’ as he called him, had his appropriate place in the age” (5).

Stephen’s transformation resembles that of his relative Corinna Page. The daughter of the former ambassador to Britain, Corinna leads a life of wealth and glamour. Stuck in a passionless marriage, she feels that her life has been futile and mean. For Corinna, aristocracy itself has lost its vigour, the characteristic most applied to its history. She likens the intellectual decay of the present upper-class to their characteristic thoughtlessness: “the strain is so highly bred that each generation becomes mentally more and more like the fish in caves that have lost their eyes because they stopped trying to see” (219). Associating Vetch with raw, primitive forces also shows in the way Corinna feels towards him as “the very fountain of life—no, of humanity” (115). In their discussion of Vetch’s political views, Corinna is deeply impressed with Vetch’s commitment to his cause. He speaks of the democratic spirit which she hears as the voice of collective humanity. Vetch’s enthusiasm reaches “to some buried self beneath the self that she and the world knew, to some ancient instinct which was deep as the oldest forests of earth” (282). Both Stephen and Corinna’s continuing association with Vetch enables them to eventually accept his truths and the emptiness of their traditional perceptions. This leads them to understand the need to reinvigorate their world through plebeian democracy.

The Unfortunate Fate of Reform

I conclude my reading by claiming that Vetch's murder by fanatic strikers serves the novel's social agenda by dramatising the opposing forces of democratic and conservative politics in an urban setting. While the novel signals a positive future for the working-class's struggle through the formation of a community of sympathetic aristocrats such as Stephen and Corinna, Vetch's death at the end of the novel gestures towards internal conflicts within urban politics that will jeopardise the rising awareness of and need for social justice. He attempts to prevent a disastrous general strike that is led by his assistant, Gershom, and a group of strikers against a dairy factory, which threatens to stop all dairy trains and cut supplies to the factory. He refuses to side with the strikers' plan though he supports the strikers' right to fight against capitalist exploitation and to provide for their families. What Vetch refuses is for the strikers to go against other businesses by planning to stop all dairy trains, thus creating chaos in the whole region. The novel ends with his death after being wrongly shot by a stray bullet while trying to prevent a bloody fight between the strikers and the state's defence force.

Vetch's more fanatic followers such as Greshom are criticised in the narrative as demagogues whose lack of true knowledge and experience prohibits them from proposing an intelligent and realistic perspective. They are more showmen who exploit the workers' need to be heard. Their incitement of the crowds creates a dangerous situation that carries with it the potential for violence and furthers the public association between the socialist movements and strikes, chaos, and gutted factories.¹⁰⁶ In refusing to support the strikers' tactics, the text distances Vetch's more moderate approach to regulate the industrial scene from their chaotic actions. He predicts his own death while trying to prevent the strike: "You think, of course, that I stand with one extreme, not in the centre, but you are mistaken. I am in the middle. When I try to bring the two millstones together they will grind me to powder" (222). Vetch's statement dramatises the tentative position he occupies between the underprivileged class's claims for social justice and the quest to redefine power and the persistent capitalist forces of southern aristocrats, despite their waning culture.

¹⁰⁶ Cooper, *Pivotal Decades*, p. 146.

Both Vetch and Nickolas are sacrificed in the novels' tragic plots to indicate that the politics of the period provided no one who combined their class, character, and stature. It could be read as a failure on Glasgow's part that she chooses to prove the impetus of the narrative, the impossibility of a reality that builds a lower-class politician with a conscience, rather than attempting to prove it wrong with a possible better future for the poor white.

The text criticises the Democratic partisans' retreat into empty rhetoric instead of attempting to form a broad consensus among diverse social groups and pursue a pragmatic approach to economic and social justice for the masses. The narrator delivers her attack on capitalism and its dismissal of democracy through vocalising the thoughts of the spectating aristocrats who prioritise cultural myths over real social politics, thus mocking the possibility that a union between Democratic institutions and aristocrats might serve social justice. The monologue of Judge Horatio Page exemplifies the inherent flaws of the old order as they defend real and fictional privileges they acknowledge as doubtful and obsolete:

Of course I am willing to admit that time does create in us the sense of a divine right in anything that we have owned for a number of years, as if our inheritance were the crown of some archaic king. I myself feel that strongly. If it came to the point, though I have said that I am too old to fight for distressed Virtue, I should very likely die in the last ditch for every inch of land and every worthless object I ever owned. When Vetch talks about taxing property more heavily I am utterly and openly against him because it is my instinct to be. I refuse to give up my superfluous luxuries in the cause of equal justice for all, and I shall fight against it as long as there is a particle of fight left in my bones. (47)

Glasgow uses the race and class accomplishment of her white aristocratic character as narrative strategy to enhance her increasingly critical appraisal of the southern mythologies. Southern culture, in the judge's estimation, places an undue emphasis on the upper-classes and retains a narcissistic fascination for aristocracy and property. His speech evinces an understanding of the ideological foundations of the culture he is a member of — and an equal resentment of them. In a specific southern discourse, with its endemic slave culture, it seems that anger and self-righteousness are acceptable only when they are deployed by white upper-class men lashing out against what they see as the erosion of their privileged status. The judge confirms what Williamson mentions about capitalist patriarchy: "white Southerners [were] ... especially possessive of the land themselves and so idolatrous of the legalities of

ownership.”¹⁰⁷ At the same time, the judge’s speech reveals more about the speaker’s self-confessed fear and guilt than they do about his actual concerns for social justice. The judge admits that he and his class have reduced the complex theme of class welfare to issues of inheritance and virtue rather than social justice. The speech ultimately serves the text’s purpose of undermining the existing mythology of the upper-class and elevates the cause of the poor white against the rich. It confirms the novel’s main conviction that the renaissance of southern culture does not lie in its upper-classes with their fading class prejudice but in the working-class, armed with vision and experience.

In the end, Vetch could be guilty of naively harbouring a dream of humanising economic and industrial institutions, thus extending the privileges of white democracy to the alienated poor white. He exposes the inherent flaw in the elite class heritage that persists on relying on ownership and paternalism as its racial and class right while ignoring the plight of the underprivileged. Fighting against class stereotypes and against conflicting ideologies, Vetch stood little chance of bringing his idealism into reality. Mourned by Stephen and Corinna, Vetch becomes the “man who was inspired by an exalted illusion—the illusion of human perfectibility” (372). Vetch’s life and death come to symbolise the inescapable confrontation between homogenised classes and men, social conventions and daring characters, rhetoric and realism, old and young generations. Nickolas and Vetch, unlike Dan and Christopher in chapter one, begin their stories with triumph and recognition. The aristocratic heritage behind the young aristocrats become their burden and, unlike these self-made men, they end in poverty. Nonetheless, they achieve a state of grace that Nickolas and Vetch never found. Their blood grants them the support of their women while blue-blooded Democrats fail the poor white, demonstrating the essential hierarchy of the South.

One Man in His Time is marked by a distinctly urban presence of political and economic change that complicates further the social issues associated with *The Voice of the People*. Vetch with his personal story is the resisting voice to the consumer culture and distorted/ing democracy. The racialising of class difference is evident as the poor white is frequently depicted as a new breed that threatens the genteel class as it provides a promise for the common man. Class difference takes a central position as the reader follows the rise of a lesser white man through the progressive notions of

¹⁰⁷ Williamson, *A Rage for Order*, p. 40.

democracy and growing capitalism and his struggle against the ideas of privileged whites that are preserved by the old generation of Virginian aristocrats like Benham. Vetch's rise changes his life and the lives of lower-class whites but maintains the status quo of African Americans. Disenchanted aristocrats like Stephen and Corinna promise to initiate a social awareness that may represent a future for a united new power against prevailing political and economic power relations; however, the present prospect of this unified voice is dimmed by Vetch's death.

The Reconstruction and Progressive South fail Nickolas Burr and Gideon Vetch, causing them, in turn, to fail to unite the vision of its classes. History, politics, and economy combine to form of southern whites almost different races. The aristocrat is torn between a dominant past and a challenging present; acts of resistance and defiance motivate the poor white. Each class develops a sense of the self and the other that is too difficult to overcome. The novels also imply the notion that obliviousness to the black man's problems would only result in more injustices as segregation, lynching, and strikes work to manifest some of the political and economic resentments experienced by lower-class whites. But the legacy of plebeian Nickolas and Vetch is entrusted to the hands of a more drastic form of democracy, changing the world with "the breaking up and the renewing, the dissolution and readjustment of ideals" (372).

Both novels fulfil Glasgow's vision of the Old in the New South by recovering the poor white's contribution to the region's social and political formation while bringing around the role of the southern aristocrat. At the same time, they perpetuate the pattern of non-whites' elimination and omission that will continue with the rejection of Native Americans in *Vein of Iron* and the imprisonment Parry in *In This Our Life*. The New South's model Glasgow outlines in *The Voice of the People* and *One Man in His Time* reflects the social, political, and cultural benefits that accumulated to the poor white southern man as a result of his investment in the agenda of white progress. I will continue to elaborate on these social and cultural determinants in my examination of Glasgow's gender politics in chapter three. This chapter has described the reaction of Glasgow's male characters to the economic and political changes that occurred in the South following Reconstruction and extended to the early decades of the twentieth century. In a similar reading, chapter three examines how her female characters respond to the myth of southern womanhood while living through the flux of the 1930s and 1940s.

Chapter Three

Three Discourses of White Femininity in *Vein of Iron* (1935) and *In This Our Life* (1941)

Women's biological function of giving birth was processed through the traditional construction to represent them as close to nature; their bodies restricted their agency, imagination, and sensation. In Dyer's argument regarding the ideological form of whiteness as a disembodied or beyond-the-body state of abstraction,¹ whiteness becomes gender-defined as a masculine trait since femininity itself is characterised by embodiedness.² Fiedler connects this deterministic association of women's selfhood and their bodies to the failure of early American literature to portray women convincingly. He contends that female characters were repeatedly represented as either entirely pure and virginal, incapable of passion, or sexually knowledgeable and dangerous.³ Sara M. Evans affirms Fiedler's argument and traces the stereotypical representation of southern women in literature to Western sexual myths brought by southern colonists to the new nation. These myths maintained a conception of a female nature "which embodied a polarisation between the virgin, pure and untouchable, and the prostitute, dangerously sexual."⁴

American and especially southern literature largely maintained, until the start of the twentieth century, a limited and limiting narrative of women's identities. By being dichotomised as either virtuous and maternal, or sensual and pathological, white women through their very embodied-ness were denied real bodies. By keeping them framed within white patriarchal ideals of sexuality, they were denied agency. However, and according to Ware, the numerous changes engendered by the twentieth century "provided both a physical and an ideological space in which different meanings of femininity could be explored or contested."⁵ Ware provides an example from Colonial literature of how female identities can develop into more complex forms responding to racial and cultural differences. She specifies three distinct

¹ Richard Dyer, *White* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 38.

² Ibid., p. 153.

³ Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York: Criterion Books, 1960), pp. 273-328.

⁴ Sara M. Evans, "Women," in *The Encyclopaedia of Southern History*, eds. by David C. Roller and Robert W. Twyman (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), p. 1353.

⁵ Vron Ware, *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism and History* (London: Verso, 1992), p. 120.

character types: The first is “the Good” woman who illustrates an opposition to all forms of unfairness and who is destined to suffer. The second is “the Bad” woman who enjoys the trappings of power and superiority. The third is “the Foolhardy” woman who initially displays feminist inclinations as part of her unwillingness to conform and ends by breaking the taboos of her society, usually with disastrous consequences for herself.⁶

In this chapter, I adopt Ware’s schema in my discussion of the portrayal of female characters in Glasgow’s *Vein of Iron* and *In This Our Life*. I read Ada Fincastle’s character in *Vein of Iron* as a woman who dares but does not succeed in occupying an oppositional stance within her society. Although Ada feels herself an outsider and is constructed as a kind of an “other” throughout the text, she initially struggles to be an insider. She ends fitting herself into the position of a contented wife and mother figure. It is not without frustration and discomfort that Ada finds herself able to embrace the social category for which she is culturally destined. Ada is not “a willing rebel”,⁷ unlike the character of Roy Timberlake in *In This Our Life*, who ends up living outside the sexual boundaries of her society. Roy is a brave individual who rejects all the social and sexual shams and chooses to live independently, though unhappily. In contrast, Roy’s sister, Stanley, is very satisfied with her cultural role as the southern Belle. Her youth, beauty, and weakness are accorded their privileges, but her manipulative character is used to criticise the patriarchal values that inspire her.

My analysis employs critical whiteness studies and feminist theories about the effects of racialisation on white female identity.⁸ I also use cultural and literary studies of race and gender in the US context⁹ and in the southern context.¹⁰ My conclusion will establish that Glasgow’s heroines, each in her way, try to own their minds and their bodies but they all fail to completely escape the restrictions of the

⁶ Ibid., p. 232.

⁷ Rebecca Aanerud, “Fictions of Whiteness: Speaking the Names of Whiteness in U. S. Literature,” in *Displacing Whiteness: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism*, ed. Ruth Frankenberg (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), p. 41.

⁸ These include Dyer’s *White* (1997), Frankenberg’s *Displacing Whiteness* (1997), Ruth H. Bloch’s *Gender and Morality in Anglo-American Culture 1650-1800* (2003), and Bridget Byrne’s *White Lives: The Interplay of ‘Race’, Gender and Class in Everyday Life* (2006).

⁹ References include Babb’s *Whiteness Visible* (1998), Mason Stokes’s *The Color of Sex: Whiteness, Heterosexuality, and the Fictions of White Supremacy* (2001).

¹⁰ Examples are Jones’s *Tomorrow Is Another Day* (1981), Seidel’s *The Southern Belle in the American Novel* (1985), Anne Firor Scott’s *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (1995), and Duvall, *Race and White Identity in Southern Fiction* (2008).

South's sexual limitations. Their struggles form Glasgow's criticism of the injustices perpetrated against women by the patriarchal South.

Published in 1935, *Vein of Iron* is considered one of the very last literary endeavours by Glasgow alongside *In This Our Life*. However, *Vein of Iron* has not received the same level of attention although both novels are cited equally as evidence of Glasgow's matured artistry, and her ability to employ witty irony to "condemn the modern age."¹¹ A primary reason for the novel's falling out of favour with Glasgow's critics is its incomprehensive treatment of the effect of the modern life on her characters' development. Glasgow's disinterestedness in the modern age resulted in what McDowell calls an "attenuated artistry", a failure to interpret the relevance of the era.¹² Raper agrees with McDowell and concludes that Glasgow's treatment "suffers an inevitable loss of intensity" compared to her more celebrated novel *Barren Ground*, despite their shared emphasis on the individual spirit of the new woman of the South.¹³

The novel begins with the group narrative of Ironside society rather than Ada's personal story. This group narrative works to associate Ada's white identity with Ironside by emphasising its distinct characteristics. These include highlighting the group's ethnic, religious, and cultural unity. Another aspect of this narrative is that it endorses the Ironsiders' homogenous white identity against non-white people (Native Americans) through stereotypes, and relates historical incidents that emphasise the criterion of whiteness as relevant in the construction of the group identity. My analysis of the novel focuses on its description of gender ideals as most relevant in establishing Ada's in-group/out-group dichotomy as she complies with or rebels against her society's social and sexual norms.

Reading the novel while keeping the objective of this chapter in mind will reveal a new sense of its purpose. By linking the discourse of race, with its historical, political, social, and economic vicissitudes to the construction of femininity, the reader can conclude that what the novel is mainly about is capturing the essence of its heroine's racial heritage and how it guides her sense of identity. Ada is the descendant

¹¹ Barbo Ekman, *The End of a Legend: Ellen Glasgow's History of Southern Women* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wikesell International, 1979), p. 115.

¹² Fredrick P. W. McDowell, *Ellen Glasgow and the Ironic Art of Fiction* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963), p. 202.

¹³ Julius Rowan Raper, *From the Sunken Garden: The Fiction of Ellen Glasgow* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), p. 150.

of colonisers whose strict values regarding gender expectations continue to mould her beliefs and actions either by confirming or rebelling against them. The novel also underlines social and economic forces that condemn Ada's working-class background which result in her struggles and unfulfilled hopes. Ada's identity, defined by race, gender, and class stereotypes, ultimately is not granted full self-expression in her quest for emotional and material fulfilment.

The Connection between Racial Past and Sexual Paradigms in Ironside

The novel sets out to capture the life of Scottish-Irish Presbyterians who come to the Valley of Virginia and drive away its native people in the second half of the eighteenth century. The stories of Ironside's early society correspond to race and gender ideologies structured through its expansionist history. The Ironsiders share with other white settlement groups the tendency to apply to racially different people key beliefs and values that stem from their colonising agenda. Consequently, their angle on Native Americans, the indigenous people, is deeply entwined with concepts of threat and danger. Relevant to the threatening images of Native Americans are the captivity narratives of white women, which act to reify white racial and sexual relations and conceptions of both groups of people. Captivity narratives, according to Babb, form a site for expressing race and gender concerns that fostered white ideologies. They invoke with their sexual violations "an increasing concern with white sexual purity, and by extension, white race purity. Loss of sexual purity through intercourse with other races endangers visible race difference."¹⁴ Gender roles are equally bound up with this discourse, portraying the experience of the captive white woman as a passive one: "a frail woman submissively kneeling before her Indian captor."¹⁵ Ruth H. Bloch focusses on the moral theories of Scottish philosophers and religious works and their effect on the American Revolution's fiction. She concludes that these early polemics underscored the connotations of compliance, impassiveness, and discretion in their establishment of the feminine ideal. Women's submission coincided with a white, gendered division of virtues. Women were expected to

¹⁴ Valerie Babb, *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature and Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), p. 76.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

exercise private, Christian virtues: temperance, prudence, faith, etc. ... Public virtues such as vitality and courage were primarily male attributes.¹⁶

The novel engages with the captivity narrative genre through the story of Grandmother Tod Fincastle. When she was a little girl of ten years old, the Shawnees had taken Ada's great-great-grandmother Tod into captivity. She lived for seven years as a captive in a Shawnee village and ended marrying the tribe's young chief at sixteen. Later on, she was returned to her family under a treaty between the settlers and the natives. However, the narrator eschews racial and gender divisions when she states that grandmother Tod "had liked the young chief too well ... He was a noble figure; he had many virtues, she had wept when they came to redeem her".¹⁷ Racial purity gives way to human emotions that blur established divisions, the young chief with his nobility and virtues is not the negatively stereotyped barbaric Indian, and white women's inhibited sexuality is negated through Tod's subsequent behaviour. Tod, later on, marries "an elder in the church" but "as long as she lived" suffered from "[s]pells of listening, a sort of wilderness, which would steal upon her in the fall of the year, especially in the blue haze of weather they called Indian summer." Tod then "would leap up at the hoot of an owl or the bark of a fox and disappear into the forest" (41-42). In repeated episodes, Tod sexually longs after her first young husband. Her desire is aggravated by the fact that she is now married to a senior man from the church community whose sexuality is probably subdued by his age and religious stance. The mention of "Indian Summer", a term Alan C. Elms connects with returning sexual vigour,¹⁸ of wilderness and animals with their associations with anger and sexual urges,¹⁹ and of the forest as a place where memory and individuality dominate over social coercion,²⁰ all evoke an image of sexual force. Tod's challenge to white sexual propriety, which "idealise[d] the inherent asexual nature of whiteness" through narratives of captivity,²¹ is inherited by her great-granddaughter Ada. Ada engages in a sexual relationship with Ralph as an act of defiance. Both women

¹⁶ Ruth H. Bloch, *Gender and Morality in Anglo-American Culture 1650-1800* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003), p. 140.

¹⁷ Ellen Glasgow, *Vein of Iron* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1935), p. 41.

¹⁸ Alan C. Elms, *Uncovering Lives: The Uneasy Alliance of Biography and Psychology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 47.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

²¹ Babb, *Whiteness Visible*, p. 76.

prioritise their wants and inclinations over sexual norms stressed by white notions of females' racial and sexual purity.

Racialising the Sexual Rebel

The novel situates Ada's body within the centre of her early life experience, influencing her identity formation and her actions. The narrative starts to achieve its purpose by constructing Ada's physical image as different from the desirable southern feminine qualities traditionally encouraged. The reader first meets Ada as a young girl of distinct appearance and personality. Her beauty is different and does not conform to stereotypical "Victorian ideals of femininity" that underpinned the construction of the southern Belle. The southern Belle was mostly portrayed as a racially pure, white, Anglo-Saxon beauty, with yellow hair, pink skin and blue eyes.²² However, Ada's skin is not quite white, with "the drift of red in her cheeks, the freckles that never faded from her nose even in winter" (8). Her more earthly beauty is further emphasised by her "flying hair, between brown and black" (8), and her "dark grey or smoky blue" (7) eyes that imitate the seaside of the western Scottish isles. Described as "uncertain, or ... 'improbable'" (7), her eyes reflect her unique and nonconformist character.

The novel privileges Ada's more real and complex beauty to the prescribed aesthetics that simultaneously emphasised both the whiteness and flatness of southern women. This point is highlighted when Ada's appearance is contrasted with that of her rival Janet Rowan. Janet, lovely but empty, is the archetype of Victorian femininity. She has a "flaxen head", a "pleading face, as vacant as an empty eggshell ... faintly pink and transparent", and "periwinkle blue [eyes] ... round, soft and innocent of expression" (87). Celebrated by her family as "the living image of Queen Victoria as a girl" (87), Janet's character is called into question as she is portrayed as morally irresponsible. She moves between numerous lovers and when she gets into trouble she falsely accuses Ralph — Ada's boyfriend at the time — of raping her. However, Janet's conduct is never suspected; moreover, Ironside society exercises pressure on Ralph to marry her. When Ada protests against the injustice of the social codes, her father comments "drily" that "it is the custom ... to accept a woman's word

²² Ibid., p. 91.

in such cases” (147). John’s comment reveals the fact that social customs, which framed Janet within the privileged racial and social picture of whiteness, would refuse to question her sexual purity as skin colour and moral purity have always been associated with an idealised white femininity.

Dyer makes a connection between white aesthetics and class differentiation when he notes that “the distinctions within whiteness have been understood in relation to labour. To work outside the home is to be exposed to the elements which darken white skins.”²³ In this sense, Ada’s skin colour seems to correspond to her social position as the daughter of a working-class family. Her mother, the fragile, porcelain-skinned Mary Evelyn, offers another conventional example of white femininity. Mary originally comes from an aristocratic background but experiences a shift in class privilege after falling in love with and marrying Ada’s father. On one occasion, she remarks to Ada that Ada has “the Fincastle skin”, something that would make life much simpler for her, as “the Fincastle constitution” (96) would be less affected by the weather conditions and working hours on the family’s land. Ada, now aware of her humble social status and of the fact that “to be a lady is to be as white as it gets”,²⁴ answers back, “I’d rather be like you, Mother” (96). Mary dismisses Ada’s wish as something that is improbable and impractical, thus affirming a link between white skin and social class.

The novel frames Ada’s sexual behaviour within and without her community’s adherence to religious doctrines insistent on sexual repression. Her loss of Ralph to Janet results in her decision to rebel against her society’s strict morality by spending a couple of nights with him before he leaves for France to take part in the war. Her act contradicts her previous sexual inhibition even when she experiences moments of high physical attraction towards Ralph. McDowell interprets Ada’s reserved sexuality as part of her inherited pride and integrity that prevents her from giving into an illicit love affair.²⁵ However, this comment overlooks the influence of Ironside’s religious and racial values regarding sexuality. The Ironsiders’ religion tells them that sexual relations are to produce children in marriage: “It was God’s law ... that married people ... must bring all the children they could into the world to share in the curse that was put upon Adam and Eve” (167). Christianity, according to Dyer, has aligned

²³ Richard Dyer, *White* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 57.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ McDowell, *Ellen Glasgow and the Ironic Art*, p. 212.

whiteness with sexual purity. Dyer comments that in the archetype of Mary and Christ, Christianity has provided “models of behaviour ... to which humans may aspire.” The denial of bodily urges becomes essential to this model as men strive for “self-denial, and self-control” to reach a state of purity and grace which in turn “constitute something of a thumbnail sketch of the white ideal.”²⁶ Duvall registers the shift from the theological and sexual to the racial when he states that in white culture: “whites were supposed to exclusively possess mind and intellect, while [others] represented the body and emotion.”²⁷ Ada’s early attempt to keep herself aligned with the parameters of whiteness is careful not to violate them because “if one’s desires transgress culture sexual taboos ... one is then primitive (prior to the repressions of civilisation) and, implicitly, racially other.”²⁸

But Ada grows sceptical of her Puritan legacy, and with her assertion “I don’t care what God does to me” (170), leaves with Ralph for Eagle Ridge, a lost and deserted Indian ground. She is determined to surrender herself to the pleasure of the moment. The Indian presence is stereotypically equated with her rebellion and her surrender to passion and wilderness. Ralph tells her, “All the Indians have gone, and we’re the last of the lovers” (208). Ada’s repeated reference to the hoot of the owls and ghosts of Indians links back to her great-grandmother Tod and her yearnings for her lost Indian lover (213). However, both Ada’s religious values and culturally moulded sensibility prevent her from surrendering to the intensity of emotion alone: “No, it wasn’t any use trying. She could never learn, like Ralph, to live in the moment, not even in the burning moment of ecstasy” (197). Her alienation from sex, a sentiment she inherits from her father, the Presbyterian minister, produces within her a dualistic view of love that is unembodied and sceptical of the senses. Ada’s attitude towards sexual relations ultimately affects her relationship with Ralph after they get married as he drifts into affairs with other women despite his love for her. Her romantic view of love in a sense portrays her as the idealised women of an earlier period, lacking in sexual libido. While this ideology served to bring erotic relations under greater control, “its idealised, asexual view of women erected a barrier between the sexes and greatly inhibited the indulgence of sexual feelings.”²⁹ By showing that

²⁶ Dyer, *White*, p. 20.

²⁷ Duvall, *Race and White Identity in Southern Fiction*, p. 62.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

²⁹ Bloch, *Gender and Morality in Anglo-American Culture*, p. 50.

neglect of the senses ultimately produces couples like Ada and Ralph who are unhappy although they hold to each other, the novel engages in criticism of Western theology with its stress on otherworldliness and distrust of physical pleasure.³⁰

The result of Ada's adventure proves to be life-changing for her; she becomes pregnant with Ralph's child. The scene of Ada in labour emphasises the inescapable consequence of her biology as a woman after she engages in sexual relations. Ada exclaims to herself, "Where could the soul hide itself when the body was degraded and tortured? What reserve, what defences were left? A thought throbbed in her mind: This is life, this hideousness! This is love, this horror!" (260) The baby comes, and Ada refuses to be broken by social pressures that treat her as a fallen woman. The only moment of weakness she experiences is when her Grandmother, a real Calvinist to whom "illicit sex would be confused with original sin and a fallen world", passes away from distress.³¹

Ada's sexual rebellion results in her encountering the social discrimination usually experienced by those outside the codes of whiteness. Barbara Smith argues that "to transgress or to challenge gender means to risk exile from the larger group ... For women [and men] of all races and classes, challenging sexism may result in being forced out of the group (however defined), required to live as an isolated individual or to form an intentional community with others similarly ostracised."³² The change in her social position is highlighted when she gets attacked by children in the street. These are the sons of her friends who used to attack lower-class Toby Waters in the past. The irony here functions to point to the newly-established link between Ada and the white characters who are banished by their society for challenging its norms. This point is further emphasised when Toby's mother, Mrs Waters, provides shelter to Ada from the mob. Mrs Waters's reputation is of a sexually loose woman whose "otherness", despite her white skin, is emphasised. She is referred to by other characters as a witch who practises the black magic of sex with "tall, dark people"

³⁰ Glasgow's perception of nurtured primitive impulses and gratified passion as terms in which happiness is measured shows a Nietzschean influence. Glasgow read Nietzsche's *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886) and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883). See *Ellen Glasgow's Reasonable Doubts: A Collection of Her Writings* (Baton Rouge: University of California, 1988), p. 94. This theme will reoccur during my discussion of Glasgow's assertion of sexual temperament as a productive force for white womanhood in *In This Our Life*.

³¹ Raper, *From the Sunken Garden*, p. 167.

³² Barbara Ellen Smith, "Which 'We' Are We?: The Politics of Identity in Women's Narratives," in *Everyday Sexism in the Third Millennium*, eds. by Carol Rambo Ronai, Barbara A. Zsembik, and Joe R. Feagin (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 221.

(84). The description of Mrs Waters's sexual behaviour "appropriates blackness in a way that plays on stereotypes of "primitive" sexual licence."³³ By associating Ada with the "black" Mrs Waters, Ada's own whiteness is thrown into further doubt; both Ada and Mrs Waters are viewed as less white for breaching norms of gender and race.

As Ada's position shifts, so does her perception of other marginalised groups she used to perceive as threatening to white social values. She used to feel embarrassed whenever she met with Mrs Waters on the road. To her, Mrs Waters was "a bodily disfigurement [that] had been thrust under her eyes" (83). Ada's changed perspective, however, makes her see through the nature of her society. The Ironside society, in its preoccupation with the way things should be, builds its people's lives around rituals but lacks human sympathy to sustain its social values. Mrs Waters dies, and the church congregation refuses to bury her among Christians in the churchyards. Ada objects to the decision, and when she is reminded, "You are a member of the church", she answers back laughingly, "isn't everybody a member of the church ... everybody, except poor Toby Waters, who needs religion more than any of us?" (243) By insisting on projecting only the harsh side of their culture, the side that has been developed through colonial history, the Ironsiders fail to acknowledge the human side of themselves, the side that stands outside white boundaries and which includes Toby and his mother.³⁴

Duvall argues that the relation between identity and place figures as a major concern of southern writers who unconsciously end up racialising their white characters. In their fiction, certain white characters who perform against their white identity when it comes to class and gender norms pay the price of going through an experience that is usually associated with black people. The rupture in these white characters' sense of stability and belonging leads them to leave their homes and find new places. There, they try to restore their identity away from social judgement. Duvall states, "'coloured' whites ... carry a sense of home with them but cannot go back again precisely because of the distances—whether literal or psychological—that they travel from the rural South."³⁵ These 'black' white characters' relationship to

³³ Duvall, *Race and White Identity in Southern Fiction*, p. 21.

³⁴ Glasgow's expressed hatred for puritan traits takes an approach similar to early twentieth-century American fiction and criticism by H. L. Mencken, Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, and William Faulkner. According to Carrington C. Tutwiler Jr., Glasgow's library included volumes and works by these names. See *A Catalogue of the Library of Ellen Glasgow* (1969), pp. 78-122.

³⁵ In 1980, "when the employment situation for skilled blacks improved", many working middle-class African Americans returned to the South. See David R. Goldfield's *Black, White, and Southern: Race*

home oddly mirrors the diaspora of African-Americans who fled the rural South to escape racist violence.”³⁶ Ada’s transformation that results from her altered position leads to her experiencing a sense of insecurity by falling outside social norms. She decides to escape her narrow society with its short supply of human sympathy and to move to the city of Queenborough. Ada promises herself that she will come back one day in the future to her family land “when ... all the children in Ironside had grown up” (290).

The novel marginally highlights race and gender assumptions through early Ironside narratives of white women’s captivity by Native Americans. However, it later openly confronts gender and social politics through Ada’s personal narrative of sexual defiance and subsequent social stigmatisation as non-white. Ada and her great grandmother’s parallel stories highlight how whiteness’s religious and social values lay emphasis on gender difference. By situating women’s sexual purity within the ideals of white femininity, white female characters like Ada undergo difficult experiences in their attempt to escape the embodied nature of their lives. By giving birth to an illegitimate child, suffering social ostracism, and deciding to escape Ironside, Ada’s story points to the painful consequences of such an endeavour.

Ralph returns from the war and marries Ada after he finds that his frivolous wife Janet has divorced him and left Ironside with another man. But Ralph after the war is a different man, and Ada senses that their relationship is lacking something. In Queenborough Ralph works as a car salesman, risks the family’s savings in the stock market and engages in an affair with the neighbour’s daughter. He suffers a road accident, goes through an extended period of hospitalisation and becomes a physical and psychological burden to Ada and her family. He recovers eventually but then loses his job in the Depression. After Ada’s father travels to Ironside to die there alone, Ada decides after his funeral to stay in Ironside and take care of the family farm, continuing the matriarchal role that she started in Queenborough, taking care of her husband, son, and her ancestors’ land.

The novel shows how women’s potential for self-fulfilment is complicated by society’s perceptions of women’s roles, and their relationship to an economy of material deficiency and absolutist religious beliefs. Ada’s marital problems with

Relations and Southern Culture: 1940 to the Present (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), p. 244.

³⁶ Duvall, *Race and White Identity in Southern Fiction*, p. 66.

Ralph and the difficult life she experiences in Queenborough during the Depression, both combined with her religious inheritance, provide her with an image of predictability. She develops a sense that there is a distinct role for her to play as a woman that she has to fulfil. She consequently makes the transition from defiance and independence to submitting to white patriarchal authority. She ends playing the role of the submissive, supporting wife and nurturing mother whose primary job is to ensure the continuity of the race and promote its values and beliefs.

Through Ada and Ralph's marriage, the novel subverts the narrative of the masculine/feminine dichotomy as disembodied reason versus unreflective sensuality. Ralph, who has been thoroughly trapped by his society's patriarchal notions, experiences freedom only in following his instincts, including vanity and sexual desire, to abuse the rules of sexual propriety that forced him into a loveless marriage with Janet. Unfortunately, Ada's strength and goodness cause him to associate her with his moral consciousness, while beauties like Janet and Minna continue to mirror his ego and sexual needs. From the start of the romance, Ralph tells Ada that the main reason for him falling in love with her, besides her physical attraction, is her strength of character. "But you aren't a woman" (276), Ralph tells her, meaning that she does not behave like a woman. Ada is direct, forthright, and speaks her mind rather than hiding behind a fake mask of innocent and helpless femininity. Her relationship with Ralph is mainly directed by her tendency to develop a passionate and unwavering attachment to two things: objects of her need and desire, and loyalty to the family as a primary cause in life. Ada's "single-heartedness", the term her grandmother uses to criticise her, proves to be her primary burden, especially in her relation with Ralph. As Ralph's love comes to be one of her most desired needs, and as he becomes her husband, Ada's love and loyalty to him continue to feed her strength of character and "vein of iron" even when she starts to weather under pressure.

The novel, however, employs the rhetoric of ethnic difference in its attempt to emphasise Ada's morality and sense of duty. She proves to be the best choice Ralph has made in his life, because Ralph, with the "Irish strain in his blood" that gave him his "charm" and "friendly manner" (71), lacks her strength and ethical integrity according to the narrative. The narrative associates Irishness with a lesser moral order than Ada's ethnicity, thus reflecting the ideas of white ethnicities circulating around at the time which resulted in "the proliferating racial hierarchies" in white ethnic groups and posited the Celts "as [a] less developed white race, particularly relative to the

Anglo Saxon.”³⁷ An early sign of Ralph’s weak character is his choice not to fight the social pressure the community places on him to marry Janet. When he later comes back from the war, he is filled with his sense of an injured and victimised soul. He tells Ada:

Disgust is the only feeling I have left, and that’s not much worse than the way I felt when I left Ironside after that rotten deal. I’d like to go off somewhere with you two alone, but I suppose I’d better try to pull through where I can find a job. I don’t give a damn for law any longer. It’s too old, and so am I. I’ve been living for a thousand years, and I’m as dry as a husk. (276)

Mainly consumed by his self and his experience, Ralph’s repeated use of the subject “I” contrasts with Ada’s stream of thought as she listens to him: “her whole being was charged with his precious sense of recovery, fulfilment, completeness, perfection” (284). Isabelle Bertaux-Wiame would have identified Ralph and Ada’s narrative as the stereotypical male/female narrative, where men tell their stories using the active “I” assuming their subjectivity, while women in contrast talk typically of their lives regarding relationships.³⁸ For the rest of their marriage, Ada becomes an example of what Gillian Brown describes as the feminine role of “domestic individualism”, facilitating men’s sense of selfhood without having the opportunity to experience fulfilment for the female self. In other words, white women, through the cult of true white womanhood as the breeders and keepers of the race, would keep their individualism confined to the domestic sphere in service to the more self-possessed white masculinity that would operate in the public sphere. They would have access to their selfhood only through their relations with others, especially their men, rather than through their own experiences.³⁹ By achieving fulfilment through her husband rather than through her own initiatives, Ada embraces the conventional feminine code of self-denial and devotion to family relations.

Ada’s strong, inherited sense of familial relation, and her belief in her matriarchal vocation, sustains the relationship despite her frequent disenchantments with Ralph. Ralph’s “masculine vanity” survives on Ada’s “act of faith” (366). He flirts with Janet, has an affair during the war, and a second relationship with 16-year-old Minna. Even his hospitalisation after the accident is prolonged by his nerves,

³⁷ Steve Garner, *Whiteness: An Introduction* (Abingdon Oxon: Routledge, 2007), p. 122.

³⁸ Quoted in Bridget Byrne, *White Lives: The Interplay of ‘Race’, Gender and Class in Everyday Life* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 47.

³⁹ Quoted in Davy, “Outing Whiteness,” p. 211.

which places increasing financial strain on Ada. Ralph proves in all his failings that he is not a match for Ada's strength and sense of commitment. When Ralph comments that "one thing you can count on in Ada, she'll never let anybody down", she smiles and replies, "I like getting the better of life, and I'm not ashamed that I do" (381). The nature of Ada and Ralph's relationship calls to mind an incident that happened to Ada when she was a little girl. She asks her father to use her savings to buy her a doll with "real hair" (13) instead of the cheaper china doll she usually gets. But John, who needs the money to pay for the farm's rent, spends most of the money on the mortgage and ends up getting her another china doll. Ada's disappointment is immense, but she accepts it eventually as "something would always stand in the way" (30). She takes the doll and puts it in a special bed significantly built by Ralph. Thus to begin with, Ada is presented as a courageous character who questions the limitations of her society and dares to fulfil her desires. However, she eventually develops the tendency to accept the disappointments in her marriage, make adjustments and continue to live. Her religious heritage, its "disembodied or beyond-the-body state of abstraction" with regard to white men and women, resonates with her until the end.⁴⁰ Standing on her ancestors' land, she ponders that "even if [Ralph's] flesh had ceased to desire her, or desired her only in flashes ... some hunger deeper and more enduring than appetite was still constant and satisfied" (462).

While the novel starts with reconsidering the formation of feminine identity in contrast to conventional gender codes regarding women's sexuality and social conformity, it leaves the status quo of gender relations intact by its end. Ada originally seeks in Ralph romance, freedom, and self-satisfaction but ends up settling for the basic facts of normal family life. Her initial commitment to self-fulfilment turns with the course of marriage into a need to complete her feminine identity, which she gradually perceives as something predestined for her rather than created by her. She settles in time for the simpler phantasies of a common married life, solidarity with friends in need, and an opportunity to start life again in her fathers' home. Similarly, Roy in *In This Our Life* begins with romantic illusions, passes through disillusionment with men, moves to pity for individuals like Parry and a world in war, then commits an act of rebellious freedom.

⁴⁰ Davy, "Outing Whiteness," p. 211.

Irontside and Racial Homogeneity

The role of Ada's "act of faith" in the survival of her marriage echoes the early act of faith that brought her ancestors to a strange land and kept them searching for a place to settle, survive and find happiness. The ambivalent attitude of the narrative towards the Irontside community is foregrounded through the establishment of its distinct white homogeneity. While the novel maintains apparent reservations against certain racist, sexist, and social aspects of Irontside, it still credits its community with sustaining moral and social values, and contrasts it with the sense of isolation and loss Ada and her family experience later in the big city.

The novel starts by clearly defining the distinct racial descent of the Irontside community. Irontsiders are the descendants of the "pioneers" who were driven out of Strathclyde and remained insular in Ulster. The purity of their bloodline is emphasised as the narrator comments that the pioneers "had seldom or never crossed blood with the Irish" (19). Framing the Irish as a racially different group reduces them to a minority and situates them with the Native Americans outside the culture of Irontside. The narrator's desire to cement the Irontsiders into a single racial line goes against historical records emphasising the diversity of the white population in the southern colonies. This society in reality "consisted of English, Scots, Irish, and, within each of these groups, many heterogeneous communities ... divided along lines of ethnicity and class."⁴¹ Babb mentions in her account of early southern records in the 1700s that early colonists in their attempt to overcome such diversity and to stand up against Native Americans followed a particular strategy of emphasising their whiteness and its social associations: "*white* ... replaced *English, free* and *Christian* as a denotation of the colonists' identity, precisely what *white* embodied—race, religion, class."⁴² However, in Irontside, the narrator re-inscribes the social evolution of whiteness in terms of a racial "soul", a realigned racial character slowly accumulated through the past and which lives in the present through the heritage of a single bloodline. Whiteness in Irontside is essentially something spiritually inherited rather than socially acquired. On this logic, the Irontsiders did not become whites; they

⁴¹ Babb, *Whiteness Visible*, p. 23.

⁴² *Ibid.*

are inherently white in the sense that they are actually and figuratively one homogenous entity that supposedly suffers no difference amongst its ranks.

Furthermore, the novel employs certain tactics of white colonial ideology that initially were used to justify the occupation of foreign lands and the eviction of the native people. Specifically, textual references are made to the religious and racial obligations leading to the colonisation of Virginia and the persecution of Native Americans. It is almost a genetic imperative that leads the early settlers of the novel to new territories: “the bolder spirits among the Ulstermen had pushed southward” (19). Colonial southern fiction, according to Babb, characteristically portrayed colonisation as “a divine providence” which was supported by notions of racial superiority. Such rhetoric can be read in Alexander Duncan’s speech in 1845, in which he credits Anglo-Saxon qualities as the source of American democracy’s stability:

Providence seems to have a design in extending our free institutions as far and as wide as the American continent...Wherever our settlements have been pushed and our laws have been extended, all that have existed of human laws and of human beings have given way. There seems to be something in our laws and institutions peculiarly adapted to our Anglo-Saxon-American race, under which they will thrive and prosper, but under which all others wilt and die.⁴³

It is interesting to note how a racial narrative like the one mentioned in the novel, with its emphasis on colonisation as an act of providence, provides the ground for the blatant racism found in Duncan’s speech. Advocating a white supremacist ideology, Duncan conveniently avoids considering how the forceful removal of the non-white Natives is what facilitated the “wilting” and “dying” he sees as a preordained result of the Anglo-Saxon heritage.

The novel frequently refers to the spiritual relationship early Ironsiders shared with God. It participates in a mythology of the pioneers’ experience, turning the Scot migrants into “pilgrims sharing a special bond with God as they settle a new land.” Ada listens to the story of Ironside from her grandmother who plays a prominent role in transmitting her people’s heritage to her granddaughter. According to grandmother Fincastle, the first John Fincastle — a man of the cloth and Ada’s ancestor — led “his human flock up from the Indian savannahs” (11). Ada’s grandmother further embellishes the sacred aspect of John Fincastle’s search, he “had always believed ...

⁴³ Babb, *Whiteness Visible*, p. 41.

that the Lord had directed him to their grove of oaks in Shut-in Valley. Far into the night he had prayed, asking a sign, and in the morning when he had risen to fetch water he had seen a finger of light pointing straight from the sky to the topmost bough of an oak” (11). However, the novel ironically deviates temporarily from this “covenantal” narrative.⁴⁴ Ada who had heard her grandmother’s stories and much more about the divine origin of Ironside “imagine[s] that the fine town of Fincastle ... had been named after the pioneer for whom God made a sign” (12). The narrator shatters the myth when she comments upon the mundane origin of the colony’s historic scenes. These sites “commemorated not an act of God, but the family seat of Lord Botetourt in England” (12). By referring to the former governor of the colony of Virginia, the novel reaffirms colonisation as a human act rather than an act of God.

Colonial writings also emphasised notions of unity and solidarity in their characterisations of the settlers. Babb cites a letter from Puritan emissaries to the Virginia Company that overlooked the colonisation process. In the message, the community is portrayed as being “knit together as a body in the most strict and sacred bond and covenant of the Lord.”⁴⁵ The Ironsiders are described as reliant upon each other for the good of the community. When the early families had “broken” into the Indian Territory, all the families “hastened with saws, axes, and hammers to the spot ... Men and women worked together” (20-1). But what unites these families, first and foremost, is not divine protection but the materialistic and physical process of occupation. It is breaking into another people’s grounds and carrying out construction schemes that unite the colonisers. It is also interesting to note the colonisers’ sense of gender equality in the previous quote, irrespective of their actual treatment of the Native Americans and their lands. However, because “[i]n American society, the doctrine of equality existed alongside an entrenched premise of white superiority,”⁴⁶ the colonisers are unable to recognise the discrepancy between their ideals and their actual treatment of non-whites. As whiteness remains primarily a masculine domain, even white women like Ada, later in the novel, come to lose this early value of equality to which their female ancestors had access.

⁴⁴ Ibid. pp. 40-59.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 61.

⁴⁶ Michael Foley, *American Credo: The Place of Ideas in US Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 408.

Another factor that worked as a unifying force for the settlers is their fear of Native Americans. Dana D. Nelson, in her analysis of the engagement of southern narrative with Native Americans, remarks that “imagined projection into, onto, against Indian territories, Indian bodies, Indian identities” was figuratively employed to emphasise the “abstracting identity of white” nationhood and play down possible “internal divisions and individual anxieties.”⁴⁷ The novel repeatedly credits the survival of the first Ironsiders to their resolve to live, the result of living in a continuous state of surprise, danger and expectation of ruin. They lived in a fugitive state with the Native Americans and whenever their lives were imperilled: “they had risen from the ruins of happiness” (40). The novel references stories about the cruelties committed against the settlers by the Natives in the massacre of Smiling Creek. Babb comments upon similar narratives as affecting and enabling of white ideology that functioned to facilitate the occupation of other people’s lands:

[D]epicting English suffering against the backdrop of Native American cruelty and barbarism created the many racial caricatures and themes that helped strengthen developing conceptions of whiteness. The ultimate effect on the narratives’ readers was the creation of group identity, solidified through feelings of identification, compassion, and fear.⁴⁸

Engaged in a similar rhetoric, the novel mentions the story of Mrs Morecock who “had seen the brains of her baby spatter her skirts” (248). Another example is an elderly neighbour who “had seen two wives and two families of children scalped and killed by savages” (41). The narrator adds that for both Mrs Morecock and the elderly man, “the will toward life had not failed them” (248).⁴⁹ Mrs Morecock begins life again, the man marries a third wife and brings up a new family. By selecting these incidents, the narrator characterises the early settlers with a hardness of nature that is the outcome of the natives’ barbaric acts. It is this heroic strength of character that enables the settlers to colonise the land and survive the Natives’ aggression. This notion is emphasised as Ada vocalises her thoughts upon hearing parallel stories: “had they been soft to the touch of fate, the exiled Shawnees would still be roaming their lost hunting-grounds” (248). Ada has learned from her ancestors, the early settlers,

⁴⁷ Dana D. Nelson, *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 67.

⁴⁸ Babb, *Whiteness Visible*, pp. 69-70.

⁴⁹ Glasgow’s settlers exemplify the Nietzschean doctrine that endows the self-reliant man with the force to prevail and shape his destiny. Besides *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Glasgow was familiar with *The Will to Power* (1910). See *Ellen Glasgow’s Reasonable Doubts*, p. 211.

how to come to terms with death as a part of life and an acceptance of life's conflicts. It is this philosophy that is racialised from the start of the novel and that continues to underscore Ada's approach to incidents in her life. Ada becomes a victim of the capitalist economy and suffers disappointment in marriage, but she retains her racially-formed identity that valued life against the Native Americans' threats. Native Americans, according to this narrative, serve as the cause for the early settlers' collective heroism which extends to their descendants in their private struggles. Non-whites, therefore, seem to enable the propagation of white courage across time and space.

Another place where the novel departs from the conventional colonial narrative is its portrayal of Native American religious beliefs. While early accounts established Protestantism as the whites' religious ideal,⁵⁰ and established the prevalence of white Christian civilisation over Native Americans' pagan and supposedly inferior culture,⁵¹ the novel underscores common ground between the settlers and the natives by noting that the Indians too have some conception of a divine essence. When Ada looks at the top of Thunder Mountain with her father John, they observe a heap of brownstones on its very top. John explains the brownstones to his daughter as a result of each Indian "brave drop[ping] a stone as an offering to the Great Spirit, just as she dropped a penny in the plate Deacon McClung passed in church" (16).

Through the Fincastle clan, the novel criticises racial violence and its origin and evolution in western civilisation, specifically the forged affiliation between Christianity and imperialist thought. Babb notes the shift in the colonists' perspective in earlier Virginian documents from a narrative of settlement as undertaken by a chosen people converting heathens to God to a white race's desire to establish dominance over another race by force. In the 1610 document *A True and Sincere Declaration of the Purpose and Ends of the Plantation Begun in Virginia*, religious terms encouraged and justified the colonial mission. A later report in 1622 enclosed the following threat: "Our hands, which before were tied with gentleness and fair usage, are now set at liberty by the treacherous violence of the savages ... the way of

⁵⁰ Babb, *Whiteness Visible*, p. 72.

⁵¹ Louise Michele Newman, *White Women's Rights: The Racial Origins of Feminism in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 117.

conquering them is much more easy than of civilising them.”⁵² Hence the Christian/heathen distinction was turned through expansionist discourse into a civilised/savage binary, and ultimately into a white/non-white distinction, something that is rejected by the early Fincastle as inhuman.

By resorting to brutal tactics, the colonisers possessed the power to prevail over the Native Americans’ claim to their lands. The phrase that summarises the early Americans’ imperative of forceful expansion is “manifest destiny.” It was first coined in 1839 by the journalist John O’Sullivan. He used it as a justification for the land enlargement of the United States whether by treaty, terrorisation, or outright force. O’Sullivan pointed to the magnitude of national growth and concluded that it was evidence “of an underlying force that possessed both material and moral dimensions.” To O’Sullivan, the expansion of the United States was direct proof that the American nation was different from the nations of the Old World. It was distinguished by a special fate “to overspread and to possess the whole continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated self-government.”⁵³

When the first John Fincastle refuses to give away the hiding-place of some Cherokees who had trusted him, he is strung up and nearly choked to death by a party of white hunters. He later on documents in his diary the abominations committed by the early settlers against Natives under religious pretences. He concludes his record by noting that “only a God-loving man can be a good hater” (142). Earlier and in a similar context, the narrator seems to reach a similar conclusion: “many of the men who had come to the wilderness to practice religion appeared to have forgotten its true nature” (41). The criticism directed against the cruel practices of self-proclaimed God-fearing Christians is delivered in a sarcastic manner that exposes the contradictions in their views.

The sympathetic behaviour of the first Fincastle reflects the fundamental contradictions embedded in white, imperialist ideology. Although the narrator describes John as “the trespasser on the hunting-grounds of the Indians,” he becomes the Indians’ friend and protector. He is a man of piety, but it is his militia that undertakes the murdering of innocent tribes in Cornstalk. He decides to go alone into

⁵² Babb, *Whiteness Visible*, p. 21.

⁵³ Quoted in Foley, *American Credo*, p. 380.

the wilderness, carrying with him two copies of the Bible and a book of meditations of a heathen emperor.⁵⁴ The Bible symbolises the Western dream of expansion. They are “the heaven and hell within himself, the something evermore about to be” (21). For John to carry the book of heathen meditations implies the notion that early settlers needed more than religion and moral codes to guide them in their adventure into the wilderness. They equally needed human sympathy to help them let go of their prejudices and integrate with the new world and its original inhabitants.

When John returns from his mission into the Natives’ deeper lands, he starts to advocate “a free country ... a country so vast that each man would have room to bury his dead on his own land” (20). Influenced by his contact with the indigenous Americans, John becomes a supporter of the Native Americans’ claims. He goes against Western traditions and sensibility, which according to Steve Garner, depended on European conceptions of individualism and capitalist understanding of ownership, emphasising a person’s right to property through his financial ability to acquire and cultivate it.⁵⁵ John’s vision is much closer to that of the Native Americans who “did not own land in this way, rather they saw themselves as collective stewards of the land, managing it for the following generations.”⁵⁶

The novel elaborates how the origin of Ironside society reflects common white imperialist strategies through its racialization of supposedly universal notions of innocence, courage, enterprise, love of life and individualism. Through these strategies, the first Ironsiders justify excluding Indians, while their descendants exclude all those who stand outside the category of ideal whiteness: mainly women, poor whites, and non-whites. This racial framing renders the Fincastles’ attitude that simultaneously struggles against and identifies with their community’s values more comprehensible.

⁵⁴ According to Raper, the referenced book of meditation is *The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius*, see *From the Sunken Garden*, p. 153. This information coincides with my interpretation of the quote as *The Meditations* is known to revolve around the themes of stoicism, harmony with nature, and renouncement of judgement of others.

⁵⁵ Garner, *Whiteness*, p. 28.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

In-Group/Out-Group Experiences

The novel emphasises the depth of the colonisers' heritage within Ada's character. Nonetheless, the social position and the compassion of different generations of Fincastles to non-white peoples imperil the white ideologies of Ironside society. More important is that their humanistic impulses are portrayed as moral victories. The narrative's endorsement of the Fincastles' attitude is revealed as Ada and her family move to Queenborough and carry on negotiating their social position against the complexities of city life.

The novel portrays significant occasions in which Ada and the Fincastle family, her father, John in particular, come to experience racial difference from the angle of gender and class, in a manner that makes visible their different gradations of whiteness. Young Ada's wish to be as "white" as her mother registers her early awareness of the social difference whiteness confers on people with white skin but not necessarily of white identity. Duvall in his discussion of the racial difference of white characters in southern fiction comments that "southern fiction explores a series of imbricated relationships between racial and other forms of otherness, particularly that of gender/sexuality and class. In white southern fiction, a whole range of issues surrounding otherness emerge, if we acknowledge the ways in which being Caucasian is a necessary, but finally insufficient, condition of southern Whiteness."⁵⁷ Duvall's statement resonates with the text's early preoccupation with the impact of class on Ada's self-identification.

Ada's initial behaviour is portrayed as more motivated by her own insecurity regarding her family's social standing; a point emphasised as the narrator mentions that "[e]ver since she was too little to lace her own shoes, she had wondered what it meant to be poor." She is eager to establish a difference between herself as a member of a socially recognised working-class family and the "white trash" category denied the social standing of whiteness. She persists in asking her grandmother, "what does it mean ... to be poor?" When her grandmother answers her, "it means ... not to have enough to eat ... not to have enough clothes to cover you," she is thrilled to have her whiteness and class affiliation affirmed: "Oh, then, we aren't poor, grandmother," Ada cries "joyfully" (18).

⁵⁷ Duvall, *Race and White Identity in Southern Fiction*, p. 2.

Later on, Ada observes a group of children abusing Toby, the village idiot and the son of the infamous Mrs Waters. Initially identifying with the abusers, Ada is excited, but as she starts to take notice of Toby's face her feelings change: "It was just as if her heart, too, had turned over. 'I don't like to hurt things,' she said, and there was surprise in her tone. In a flash of vision, it seemed to her that she and Toby had changed places, that they were chasing her over the fields into that filthy hovel. But it wasn't the first time she had felt like this" (4-5). By initially joining the children in their abuse of the social outcast Toby, Ada tries to assimilate to the cultural practices of her community that emphasise the difference between dominant middle-class values and those who are excluded from middle-class society. But by voicing Ada's inner feelings, which to her surprise identify her with Toby more strongly than with the rest of the group, the narrative places Ada with Toby at the lower end of the social stratum. Ada and Toby are poor whites who ultimately are victimised by a homogeneous whiteness that excludes "less white" social groups from its domain.

Through pitying Toby, Ada's own victimisation is anticipated; Toby becomes the image through which Ada identifies the victim in herself. Later when Ada learns that Ralph is going to marry Janet, she feels that her future has been ruined by her community's social code: "all forces of society" including "religion, law, morality, influence, even money" (148) have bullied Ralph into marrying Janet. To guard the borders of middle/upper-class whiteness, with its stress on superior morality and sexual purity for its women, the Ironside community makes victims of Ralph and Ada. In a significant scene, Ada's grief reaches its highest point at the Murderers' Grave, the place where outlaws are buried after being executed and where Toby and his mother live. She calls Ralph's name, after which she hears a voice. Ada finds Toby's face bending, repeatedly asking for the "sugar" that Ada used to give him before his teeth began to rot. By being denied what they both desire, Ada her lover and Toby his sugar, the natural law that condemns Toby's teeth to decay for eating too much sugar becomes as imperative as the moral codes that deny Ada her lover. Ada's increasing association with the socially victimised makes her feel a kinship with Toby again: "he was a creature like herself, she thought, more repulsive than any animal, but born, as she and an animal were born, to crave joy, to suffer loss, and to know nothing beyond" (166).

In Queenborough, and in the crowded, multi-ethnic, working-class Mulberry Street, Ada takes a job in a shop to support her family. Ada's judgement of city life

during the post-war period of the twenties and the thirties is coloured with her own Presbyterian sensibilities that represent her life in the city as “a period of exile and a time of the fall.”⁵⁸ However, historical commentary reflects a similar impression of the era. Henry F. May, for example, refers to “the savage disillusion of the postwar years,” during which the “old moral idealism” of pre-war days seemed to have disappeared, racial violence peaked, and liberalism gave way to the “anti-intellectual, pseudoidealistic gospel of Prosperity First.”⁵⁹ This sense of chaos is reflected in the Fincastles’ reaction to their surroundings: “Everything, from the aimless speeding of automobiles down to the electric dust in the sunlight, appeared to whirl on deliriously, without a pattern, without a code, without even a centre” (293). Ada, disenchanted with urban life, loses her newly acquired sense of reconciliation with what is uncustomary. She starts to develop a tendency to shield herself behind the Ironsiders’ old values.

Working in a clothing department, Ada only sees the materialistic side of a uniformed, characterless democratic America, which, while it opened the door for many to achieve wealth, turned society into a consumerist machine: “I, I, I, I ... Never an end. Always the bright, blank, current, eager, empty, grasping, insatiable” (277). Adams coincidentally describes the excessive spending that came with the economic prosperity of the post-war years as “a certain recklessness” that took the place of the progress of idealism accomplished under Roosevelt and under Wilson.⁶⁰ Even Americans who could not afford it lived high in the twenties, flouting the traditions of economic thrift and restrictive behaviour. Ada with an increasing sense of attachment to her racial roots unsurprisingly projects her social criticism on to non-whites: “nobody seems to pay for anything he buys. It is all on the instalment plan, buying and selling. The coloured maids in our boarding-house buy silk stockings by instalment. They wouldn’t be caught wearing cotton stockings or lisle thread like mine” (312). Ada criticises the recklessness and thirst for increased consumption of city people. She uses the example of black maids as racial others to establish the most recognisable difference between her social values and everyone else’s.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Lucinda H. Mackethan, “Restoring Order: Matriarchal Design In *The Battle-Ground and Vein of Iron*,” in *Ellen Glasgow: New Perspectives*, ed. Dorothy M. Scura (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995), p. 103.

⁵⁹ Henry F. May, *The End of American Innocence: A Study of the First Years of Our Own Time* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), pp. 393-94.

⁶⁰ James Truslow, *The Epic of America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1931), p. 394.

The flood of foreigners that participated in changing the social scene of America seems to be another source of criticism with the Fincastles. When a famous German scholar visits John, John wonders what language they are trying to share. He finds that he can better understand his simple neighbour Midkiff, with whom he stands in bread lines, better than his foreign acquaintance (426). John's attitude of siding with his poor neighbour against the foreigner is a reaction against what seemed at the time to be an America that encouraged internationalisation at the expense of its people. The novel voices the "Anglo-Saxon ... patrician anxieties" of its time which, according to Jennie A. Kassanoff, "weighted heavily in the minds" of American elites.⁶¹ The German philosopher states the impact of foreigners on the American character in a matter-of-fact manner: "Even in the midst of the Depression, America provided a living for hundreds of foreign lecturers, and it not only paid them for speaking, it sat quietly in rows and listened to what they said" (425).

The young become particularly scrutinised and judged by Ada and her family. They are critical of drunken boys who spend their nights at clubs and girls who embrace boys in public and behave even wilder than the boys. Ada especially abhors the sight of girls wearing lipstick "painted as red as a wound, and the flaunting bare knees above rolled stockings" (310). This hatred of all that hints at sexual pleasure points to Ada's falling back on her inherited and social dogma that refuses to acknowledge the natural side of men and women. Ada clings to her past through the memory of her strict Calvinist grandmother: "she found herself thinking abruptly, that her grandmother, more than her own mother, seemed to live on in her mind and nerves" (311).

Ada's social activism is shaped by the behaviour of her honest, hardworking, determined female ancestors. They are white women in a colonial space who "also had their mettle tested" in a manner that contributed to their strength of character.⁶² Grandmother Fincastle works within the novel as Ada's spiritual guide who upholds the values of "industry, veracity and self-denial" (392). She increasingly believes that the strength that had sustained her grandmother and before her the generation of the early settlers is missing from Gilded-Age Americans who had become "soft, self-

⁶¹ Kassanoff, *Edith Wharton and the Politics of Race*, p. 15.

⁶² Peter Schmidt, *Sitting in Darkness: New South Fiction, Education, and the Rise of Jim Crow Colonialism 1865-1920* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), p. 201.

satisfied and cowardly.”⁶³ Ada tries to enact her grandmother’s role and the early settlers’ tradition of uniting her neighbourhood in a network of mutual aid. During Ada’s childhood, Grandmother Fincastle functions as the village elder and caretaker: “people back in the mountains owe[d] their lives to her and to the medicine in her saddlebag. Often on stormy nights ... somebody was near death, and the doctor was away ... she would pack her saddle-bag with medicine ... and start ... on horseback up Lightning or Burned Timber Ridge” (9).

In a similar manner, the Fincastles, headed by Ada, reach out to their neighbours. They are selflessly generous when one of the neighbourhood is in need. They give what they can even if it means depriving themselves. It is noteworthy that the neighbours to whom Ada extends her sympathy, like Mrs Rowling, the Hamblens, the elder Bergens, and Mr Midkiff are the ones who share her sensibilities. They are all united by their regard for industry and self-denial and their alienation from present-day values, against which they appear as antiquated. The novel suggests that Ada and her family are guided by the racial past of their ancestors. They live like their pioneer forefathers in a hostile environment, trying to protect the weak and ensure the survival of them all. In the usually wintery and bleak Mulberry Street, the novel portrays the firelight and window lamps in Ada’s home to emphasise her matriarchal image: “Every winter afternoon that lamp with the red shade flashed a welcome when she looked over the way from the beginning of the last block” (279).

Despite Ada’s effort to keep her family and help her neighbours, things take a turn for the worse when the Great Depression hits America after the stock market crash of 1929. Gambling in stocks became a trend among Americans as the working-class tried to imitate the bourgeois in pursuing “instant gratification and consumerist ease.”⁶⁴ Consequently, several families’ moral integrity and economic security are compromised after they lose their savings on the market. Ada’s ancestors’ belief in the virtue of hard work enables her to escape the weakness of consumerism. Ada’s impression of the Mulberry Street crowd reflects the novel’s criticism of false democracy that promised the working-class the opportunity of wealth but failed to protect them from bankruptcy: “the old and tired; the young and restless; white and black; children and animals—all hurrying by, caught up in waves of blown dust, from

⁶³ Kassanoff, *Edith Wharton and the Politics of Race*, p. 93.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

toil into idleness, from hope into failure” (386). John Fincastle shares his daughter’s doubts; he wonders to himself “Would American culture remain neither bourgeois nor proletarian, but infantile? Would the moron, instead of the meek, inherit democracy?” (294) John’s question historically coincides with elitist social critics who voiced their concern over the demise of “the civilisation of the past” by too much social mobility.⁶⁵ Ada and John reflect the narrator’s anxiety over the submission of the South’s social institutions to a false and inferior modern democracy that threatens its distinct character.

Class division continued to shape the social scene, and while the masses suffered the greatest economic blows, capitalists kept thriving and spending. According to Michael E. Parrish, “While hungry men, women, and children stood in line outside soup kitchens or foraged in garbage cans for a meal ... wealthy patrons ... dined on filet mignon and a French Bordeaux. For every investor ruined in the Wall Street panic, there was another who picked up a bargain by buying stocks cheap, holding on to them, and reaping a fortune after 1940.”⁶⁶ In the novel, Ada is conscious of the lack of control the working-class have over their future as they are manipulated by capitalists who change the market prices and the value of labourers’ lives. She voices her frustration at the helpless situation of her people who try to reconcile their inherited values with the cold order of their existence: “These were the simple folk, the little people, who had had the gospel of thrift preached to them from the hour of their birth, who had feared charity more than death and a pauper’s grave more than eternity, who had trusted their pitiful independence to a name, a promise, a reputation” (386). The quote highlights how the past ideals that united the early southerners into a racial whole are undermined by the shifting economic currents of the modern age, creating new social hierarchies and class fissures between them.

As the economic situation of the whole family worsens, Ada and her father start to grow more nostalgic for their homeland. It is notable that the novel employs images of non-whites to reflect the state of anxiety and loss of security Ada and John experience as their nostalgia for home combines with their sense of loss in the big city. In one incident, Ada dreams of herself as a child being chased by a Native American warrior: “and while she waited for the crash into her skull, the painted face

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 14.

⁶⁶ Michael E. Parrish, *Anxious Decades: America in Prosperity and Depression 1920-1941* (New York: Norton, 1992), p. 412.

of the Indian turned into a sheep—into the benign features of the old ewe that had gazed at her over the stalk of mullein” (333). Life in the city, with its turmoil of modern democracy and where racial and class barriers get blurred, is equated with the image of threatening Indians who attempt to kill Ada. It is only upon returning to the family farm, to the familiar life of Ironside where social values are kept intact that benignity replaces danger.

This use of the racial other to discuss white characters’ anxieties is also employed by Ada’s father, John. John chooses to return to Ironside alone to spare his low-income family the expenses of his funeral when he dies. Just before his death, John has a dream of his mother leaving him in a cabin in the mountain to go on one of her medical missions. As John waits, he is seized by fear:

[A] sudden dread, a panic terror, clutched at his heart. ... the family flocked from the cabin and began to dance around him, singing and jeering. And as soon as he saw them he knew what he had dreaded—for they were all idiots. His mother had brought him to one of the mountain families that had inbred until it was imbecile. ... A world of idiots, he thought in his dream. (455)

John’s helplessness against the adversarial conditions of the modern world gets mixed with the stereotypical images of Appalachian people as isolated mountain dwellers who are ignorant, morally defective, and mentally weakened by inbreeding and lack of medical care.⁶⁷ John’s imagination creates illusory patterns — the idiots — that symbolise the repressed aspect of his life experience in the alienating and oppressing city that are too difficult to bear. The idiots become the living figures of John’s inner reality. As John starts to slip into unconsciousness, he also sees “the dark ... stern and bright ... face of his mother” (457). It is not the first time that darkness is employed to reflect John’s state of mind. In an earlier episode, John observes an “old Negro” who is knocked down by a speeding car. In the black man’s face, John sees “neither astonishment nor indignation; there was only perplexity” (434). What brings forth the memory of the mother’s dark face and before that the sight of the black man is that they both reflect John’s sense of loss as he struggles against his failures to survive and support his family in the big city.

Ada takes her family back to Ironside after John’s death. With the loss of her father and her grandmother before him, Ada is left with one source of power to carry

⁶⁷ Wayne Jr. Flynt, *Dixie’s Forgotten People: The South’s Poor Whites*. 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2009), pp. 126-46.

on and endure; her relationship with her husband and her family becomes the mainstay of her being as she understands the need to replace desire with experience. She eventually comes to terms with and even finds peace in accepting her fate. She, in effect, ends up imitating the attitude of her ancestors who “had risen from the ruins of happiness” but kept on going on, rebuilding the ruins (40).

Vein of Iron is the story of a woman whose strength and determination lead the reader to expect that she will be able to break the barriers of gender to achieve her dreams. Ada’s attempts to defy the sexual codes of her society are linked to her racial imperatives and experiences which exile her from her society. However, Ada grows to find that she has little control over her life due to the social and economic contingencies of her city life and the influence of her racial heritage, both of which prove too strong to break. She ends up performing the expectations of her gender in supporting her husband and nurturing her family while maintaining the fundamental outlook of her ancestors. Glasgow’s heroines share her self-made men’s determinism and their sense that they are involved in a struggle against all. However, while Nickolas and Vetch’s struggle is connected to acts of violence, Ada and Roy’s struggle is modified by fortitude which enables them to endure the desperation of commonplace living. Both Ada and Roy try to put an end to their enclosed and external reality and begin to venture into a broader and deeper world. However, tradition, which speaks more empathically with her family’s voice, keeps Ada unable to break entirely with the past and venture to the future.

***In This Our Life* and Extreme Examples of Modern Femininity**

Published in 1941 and adapted into a popular movie starring leading actresses Bette Davis and Olivia de Havilland the following year, *In This Our Life* is one of Glasgow’s most widely-read novels. Despite its good reception by the reading public, critics gave the novel a “nihilistic reading” that treated it as an exaggerated psychological melodrama about the problems of the modern family.⁶⁸ They criticised Glasgow for exploiting the “degeneracy of Southern life” and advancing “a hopelessly pessimistic outlook on life in general.”⁶⁹ They pointed to the novel’s

⁶⁸ Linda W. Wagner, *Ellen Glasgow: Beyond Convention* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), p. 111.

⁶⁹ Quoted in Ekman, *The End of a Legend*, p. 123.

repetition of pessimistic sentiments as the chief contributor to its stylistic weakness.⁷⁰ A common explanation for the novel's overly negative portrayal of human nature is that it was written during the 1930s and the 1940s, when Glasgow "had begun to feel a violent dislike for the modern age and its representatives."⁷¹ McDowell for example reads the Timberlakes, who are "alienated ... from both the morbid chivalric tradition of the past and from the appalling ugliness of the industrial present," as Glasgow's metaphor for the modern crisis of meaning.⁷²

In this chapter's focus on the novel's two female protagonists Roy and Stanley Timberlake, I argue that their extreme reactions to the sexual values of idealised womanhood are a deliberate literary choice aimed at invalidating the patriarchal rhetoric of the new South on women's sexual purity and sense of duty. Stanley's liberal, feminine identity and Roy's conservative one appear to be innate, but they are actually a product of wavering race and gender ideals. Their characters are both a product of their life decisions and the ideals enforced upon them by the men in the family, namely their father Asa and Uncle William. Stanley fulfils the ideals of white southern femininity through her looks and pretence of innocence and helplessness. In this she follows the example encouraged by her uncle William, whose racist and sexist ideologies are highlighted by the novel. But what is remarkable about Stanley is that she does not lose her agency in the process. She performs the part of the southern Belle but in reality, she does what she wishes, forcing the men around her to fulfil her wishes. By contrast, Roy follows the moral and dutiful example of her father, Asa, a man who 'endures' his role as a faithful husband and sacrificing father. Roy's neglect by her husband and family forms the novel's critique of a society that fails to overcome its hypocrisy. Roy eventually recognises her preference for the pleasures of bodily love rather than the abstract pleasures of morality and duty. Through Stanley and Roy, Glasgow offers a critique of idealised femininity narrowly defined according to the masculine prerogative. She suggests instead that women's recognition of their bodies as an essential part of their lived experience forms the means to their happiness, not their disembodied morality and sense of duty.

⁷⁰ Raper, *From the Sunken Garden*, p. 171.

⁷¹ Ekman, *The End of a Legend*, p. 134

⁷² McDowell, *Ellen Glasgow and the Ironic Art of Fiction*, p. 215.

Stanley and the Masculine Example of William

The southern patriarchal presence exemplified in William and Asa serves as a backdrop for the stories of the female characters in the novel. Stanley and Roy's characters develop by manipulating and/or rejecting their elders' masculine values. Stanley and Roy's satisfying means of self-realisation are represented as acts of resistance against the southern models represented by William and Asa. By rejecting the patriarchal models offered by William and Asa, the novel indicates that for women to negotiate a new sense of themselves, the South's gender boundaries established by white patriarchy are to be challenged.

Stanley's behaviour can be read as a feminine appropriation of her uncle's traditional southern masculinity that maintains its structural position by employing white rhetoric with its classist, sexist, and racist values. Both William and Stanley forsake moral and familial obligations in their quest for power, and both are described as corrupt and destructive forces in the novel. The novel highlights the problematic values William holds and which stress the difference between men and women, rich and poor, and white and black. He is another patriarch who represents the ethical rather than the material failing of the southern patriarch. The Genoveses pinpoint the moral bearing of the early upper-class southerners as conveniently tied to their ownership of public and private domains. For these men, self-interest was always portrayed as coinciding with their sentimental attachment to those who lived within their extended households and laboured in their factories and businesses.⁷³ This celebrated natural superiority and republican virtue based on ownership survive in their worst forms within the characterisation of William. In his racism, corrupted capitalism, and sexism, he is the embodiment of the modern age's materialism and the pursuit of carnal pleasures.

Hailed by his community as a "staunch pillar of the Stock Exchange and of St. Luke's Episcopal Church", William's persona reflects a superior image that matches his social standing.⁷⁴ In reality, William's acquisitive nature causes him to violate the established business practices in the city. His dealings are contaminated with "injustice ... greed and oppression" (12). "He could grind down a living wage to

⁷³ Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Eugene D. Genovese, *Slavery in White and Black: Class and Race in the Southern Slaveholders' New World Order* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 30.

⁷⁴ Ellen Glasgow, *In This Our Life* (Redditch, Worcestershire: Read Books Ltd., 2013), p. 13.

powder, or, to gratify some deep-seated instinct, he might exercise an unscrupulous power over a debtor” (252). His failure as an employer is obvious in the way his employees only represent to him as “a list of printed names at the top of a page” (12). William inherits the oppressive discourses and practices of antebellum slavery and patriarchy, and dominates the capitalist scene through corrupt politics and an obsession with garnering surplus value at the expense of others.

The novel negatively portrays Stanley in the same way, thus confirming its criticism of William’s values that she emulates. Fiedler links the Belle’s changed characteristics in American literature to the country’s loss of innocence in the early twentieth century, when the American Girl ceased to be an example of goodness and purity. Fiedler cites another bad Belle, F. Scott Fitzgerald’s Daisy Buchanan, as a prime example: “To Fitzgerald ... [the] fairy glamour is illusory, and once approached the White Maiden is revealed as a White Witch, the golden girl as a golden idol. On his palette, white and gold make a dirty color; for wealth is no longer innocent, America no longer innocent, the Girl, who is the soul of both turned destructive and corrupt.”⁷⁵ Similarly in the novel, Stanley’s lack of goodness, her greed, and obsession with control contest the ideal figure of the good and passive southern Belle. Rather than being pure and passive, Stanley is a force for destruction: “Even as a baby, Stanley had been animated by some deep motive to grasp at any object that gave happiness to another. Hadn’t she always cried for Roy’s dolls? And had she ever failed to seize and hold them in the end?” (22) When she gets engaged to Craig, it is mainly because she knows that he was engaged to another girl. In her relation with men, Stanley is only interested in “what she can get out of [them]” (247). Stanley mirrors her uncle’s materialist obsession and moral corruption; both are linked to his populist views on white supremacy, and which are demonstrated by the narrative as harmful sensibilities.

The novel criticises the culture of modern southern society by making it part of the female’s damaged understanding of her identity. Stanley embodies all the shallowness that Glasgow considered typical of the post-war world. Asa unsuccessfully tries to install some awareness of the universal crisis of the impending war in his self-obsessed daughter: “The world is in a state of panic. Yet you can think of nothing but your own grief ... And not even of your grief—for you are trying to

⁷⁵ Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel*, p. 301.

run away from that—but of your craving for happiness.” Stanley who is only focused on her small existence, answers back, “Oh, but, Father, I’ve nothing to do with the world! I have only one life” (426).

Stanley represents the generation of young women who witnessed past ideals crumbling following World War One. Her rationale for her excesses is that she only wants “[t]o live, to live intensely, to live furiously.”⁷⁶ Beatrice M. Hinkle, writing about the new morality, cites women’s demands to partake in “forbidden experiences,” their “open defiance” of tradition, and their intentions to achieve “a reality in their relations with men that heretofore had been lacking.”⁷⁷ In what could be read as an echo of Hinkle’s statements, Stanley justifies her numerous romantic relationships by her desire to find “something real.” “I had a right to be happy!” (366), she cries out to her father. Stanley’s legitimate right to experience her life and her freedom would be understandable and commendable were they not flawed by her moral deficiencies: “she was vain, selfish, unscrupulous in her motives” (355). Stanley’s quest for freedom will always remain elusive because as Asa tells her, “How could you expect happiness, my child, when you brought so much pain?” (366)

William clings to his racial past and to the sexist patterns it stresses; he and other southern patriarchs are the reason that young women like Stanley choose to manipulate the social construction rather than challenge it to create a more liberal reality where their identity is secured. Anne Firor Scott notes how idealised southern femininity was used to secure white masculinity. Physically weak, and “formed for the less laborious occupations”, the southern Belle depended upon male protection and more often employed her girlish charm to secure it.⁷⁸ William ensures his white male privilege through fixing the female body and identity as passive and dependent. Asa comments on William’s lavishing gifts to his young and parasitic mistresses, “any light scrap of fluff ... who thought it worth her while to play upon William’s senses, could wring tears from his hardened eyes, and persuade him to feather her love-nest” (252). William’s need to exert power, to be needed, and to be in control explains his sexual preference for young women. William’s desire is an analogous version of the old southerner’s idolisation of the fragile and coquettish southern Belle.

⁷⁶ V. F. Calverton, *The Bankruptcy of Marriage 1928* (New York: Arno Press, 1972), p. 17.

⁷⁷ Beatrice M. Hinkle, “Women and the New Morality,” in *Nation* 119, November 1924, p. 543.

⁷⁸ Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady: From Pedestal to Politics 1830-1930* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), p. 4.

Stanley is another “scrap of fluff” to whom William serves as an indulgent benefactor, never refusing her anything that she wants. As a child, he places her in a better school than her father could have afforded. When she declines to go to college, he sends her abroad for a “classic tour”. Once she is back looking “lovelier than ever,” William hands her a large sum of money and a smart sports car as wedding gifts. He does so despite his protests against her engagement to Craig, whom he describes as a “stuffy intellectual” unworthy of his precious niece (31). William’s need to provide for his niece even gets mixed with incestuous sexual desire. William implicitly attains a form of psychological sexual gratification from his young niece. His wife Kate observes, “William loved her in his peculiar way, which, strangely enough, seemed to her gluttonous (yes, that was the only word for it)” (161). Even Asa’s own son comments that William “ought to give [Stanley] away. She really belongs to [him]” (78). The emotional incest between William and Stanley is further exemplified when William gives Stanley a big wedding cheque, demanding a kiss on the lips from the “minx” (70). When Stanley later elopes with Roy’s husband, Fitzroy rants that she needs “a sound whipping”, and the narrator comments on his manner, “His sly chuckle held a lustful note” (253). Asa correctly sums up William’s position: “I wonder how much of his anger with Stanley ... is mere jealousy in a perverted form?” (252)

William’s sexism naturally includes his belief that there is something “unwomanly” about strong women. William’s “constant slights to Roy” (13) dismiss her fine qualities. When Roy holds her ground after her husband’s betrayal and keeps on working and living, William admits that “it was brave,” but then he adds further that “it wasn’t womanly. I like a woman to be womanly” (248). For Roy to rely on her own resources for survival rather than a man’s is unfathomable for William. He holds to what Bloch describes as the early puritanical/patriarchal model and its “cultural assumptions that women were weaker in reason, more prone to uncontrolled emotional extremes, and in need, therefore, of practical, moral, and intellectual guidance from men.”⁷⁹ William, in fact, fears modern women like Roy, so he chooses to understand them as unrestrained by proper social norms: “She’s too modern. And I can tell you what’s wrong with the whole modern outlook, from A to izzard. There’s not an ounce of religion in the younger generation” (150).

⁷⁹ Bloch, *Gender and Morality in Anglo-American Culture*, p. 59.

Just like William, who reproduces the South's antebellum traditions to affirm his masculine authority, his niece Stanley perfects the role of the southern Belle to get what she wants from life. Stanley's unsympathetic characterisation places her among the South's literary "bad belles", who were developed to confront the complexities of the modern age. According to Seidel, many southern authors during the southern Renaissance expressed their frustration with the old South and its values by depicting the "fallen" or bad Belle, a narcissistic, "high-strung," hysterical woman whose "repressed instincts are displaced into other forms of behavior."⁸⁰ In fact, Seidel argues that this vice-ridden Belle and her virtuous counterpart, embodied by Stanley and Roy in the novel, "are drawn from one consistent image." The Belle has been taught to "repress instincts and displace emotions that linger in her unconscious, awaiting release."⁸¹

However, Glasgow further complicates the figure of the bad Belle by turning Stanley's performance of southern femininity into a means of defying patriarchal repression rather than enduring it. Stanley is especially valued by men for how she embodies an ideal southern white femininity, represented in her looks, fragility, and supposed racial purity and innocence. But unlike southern Belles before her, Stanley turns the myth of the southern Belle to her advantage. She assumes full agency in her interactions with men who, according to the myth, should make the rules and control women's bodies. She dominates her relationships with men and thus becomes a better survivor in the contemporary "man's world." She abandons her fiancé Craig, elopes with and marries Peter, her sister's husband, drives him to suicide, and escapes criminal persecution for the death of a little girl. She does it all without suffering any consequences and with the full support of her family. By turning her body into the means to free and indulge herself, Stanley succeeds in leading a victorious life in which others bear the costs of her actions. Stanley's perverse character and successful life form Glasgow's criticism of the South's confining gender roles through which only manipulative women like Stanley are able to survive and prosper.

The novel characterises the southern woman's appeal to men as a sexual quality that derives its commanding effect from its very softness. Stanley's beauty and her cajoling manner are her greatest assets in a culture that celebrated "grace and

⁸⁰ Kathryn Lee Seidel, *The Southern Belle in the American Novel* (Tampa: University of South Florida Press, 1985), p. xv.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

beauty and the inspiration of gaiety” but that was “shallow-rooted at best.”⁸² C. Hugh Holman, in his study of Fitzgerald’s texts that are set in the South, concludes that southern girls are particularly appealing because they embody the southern male’s characteristic appreciation of beauty and youth.⁸³ Roy remarks that Stanley is winning because she is “what men want her to be” (331). Lavinia confesses to Asa, “you thought Stanley was my favourite because she is beautiful. But it wasn’t that. She was so soft, that’s why I petted her” (211). Lavinia later observes that Stanley’s power is more potent with southerners than with others: “It may be the Southern way—I don’t know—but they seem to excuse everything because she is young and has beauty. They like beauty, I suppose, more than most people” (458). The ageing and power-hungry William emotionally feeds upon the youth and helplessness of his niece. William’s cruel nature responds to Stanley’s weakness because “[t]hat was now, and would always be ... the primary instinct of man—or was it merely the instinct of sex” (221). Under the façade of beauty and weakness, Stanley manipulates the male southerner’s vanity, possessiveness, and need to protect. As her father observes, “she would always win in the end, not with him alone, but with other men also; and she would win, he told himself, not through strength, but through some inner weakness, whether her own or another’s” (455-56). Stanley does not get what she wants by force but by a skilful mixing of loveliness and guile that proves especially appealing for the southern male as it affirms his gender values.

The novel suggests that the objectification of southern women eventually puts their moral and psychological wellbeing at stake. In her sexual relations, Stanley objectifies men in a manner similar to her objectification by southern patriarchy; she worries not about their wellbeing, but about how they can comfort her. She paradoxically uses weakness as strength to control others and unapologetically discards those who do not match her strength. She ends her relationship with Craig because “Craig had been as wax in her hands, and Stanley, who worshipped power, could never forgive where she dominated” (259).

Stanley transgresses familial and sexual mores when she elopes with her sister’s husband. At first, Peter and Stanley are happy together, but once they are

⁸² Ellen Glasgow, *A Certain Measure: An Interpretation of Prose Fiction* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1943), p. 95.

⁸³ C. Hugh Holman, “Fitzgerald’s Changes on the Southern Belle: The Tarleton Trilogy,” in *The Short Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald: New Approaches in Criticism*, ed. Jackson R. Bryer (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1982), p. 61.

married, they start having violent quarrels. They have very little money, and yet she insists on living as she always did. Peter has to work hard to pay the bills and the rent, and she, who feels lonely, starts going out with other men. In jealousy and desperation, Peter begins to drink heavily. One day he realises that he cannot live either with or without her and shoots himself. Stanley's destructive touch is obvious and gets emphasised in the 1942 movie adaptation of the novel as Bette Davis, who previously appeared as Jezebel in a film of that name, was assigned her role.⁸⁴ Stanley exploits the southern patriarchal code of chivalry, that strong men protect weak women, to her advantage. After Peter's suicide even Asa succumbs to excusing her: "Because of Stanley's youth and her touching plight, the family, and before long the whole community he suspected, would melt into compassion" (372). The quote shows how the limitation southern men put on women can function to the detriment of the masculine world and its celebrated ethos.

The demands on southern white womanhood drive Stanley to affected gentility and hypocrisy to preserve the myth of faultless white femininity. Stanley's body is marked with the traditional characteristics of idealised femininity, best exemplified in her innocent white beauty and irresistible southern charm. Duvall cites Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* (1970) to demonstrate how whiteness was still the unquestioned standard of beauty in twentieth-century America.⁸⁵ Glasgow's novel equally makes several references to Stanley's charming white skin but later negates the celebration of Stanley's beauty by likening it to the demeanour of a spoiled child: "A single flaw in her features marred ... their young loveliness ... Her mouth, naturally red and moist and tremulous, had a trick of never quite closing, and in moments of anger or excitement her thrust-out lower lip would give to her face a vacant and hungry look. Like a disappointed baby" (27). Stanley's white beauty is more of an act rather than a natural quality, for once Stanley lets down her guard, she loses her white beauty with all its connotations of purity and innocence. The red colour on her lips and the dark gap between them spoil her whiteness. Her youthful looks become more reminiscent of a spoilt and dissatisfied child rather than an innocent and tranquil one.

⁸⁴ David W. Coffey, "Ellen Glasgow's *In This Our Life*: The Novel and the Film," in *Regarding Ellen Glasgow: Essays for Contemporary Readers*, ed. Welford Dunaway Taylor and George C. Longest (Richmond: The Library of Virginia, 2001), p. 121.

⁸⁵ Duvall, *Race and White Identity in Southern Fiction*, p. 133.

In addition to the negative impact of the masculine model, the novel explores the influence of inherited gender roles in shaping embodied feminine identity after the idealised southern model. At the same time, it points to assumptions about female identity that go beyond its embodied-ness. Seidel points to the role of home nurturing in shaping the attitude of the southern Belle to create of her a seducing figure. She is trained from childhood in using her feminine charms to force men to realise her wishes. At the same time, she has to keep her desires behind a façade of modesty. Mainly for the purpose of capturing a suitable husband that would secure her future, the southern Belle “is asked to exhibit herself as sexually desirable to the appropriate males, yet she must not herself respond sexually. She must be as alluring as the Dark Lady, yet as pure as the White Maiden.”⁸⁶ Stanley has been trained as a coquette by her mother, Lavinia, who hopes that her daughter will break men’s hearts in a way she could not do because she was not beautiful enough: “In her youngest child, who embodied all that she had longed to be and was not, she had re-created, not her actual youth, but that other more vital youth which had existed in her imagination alone. To touch Stanley was like touching an exposed nerve in Lavinia’s ego” (23). Lavinia imposes the role of the southern Belle on Stanley because she is essential to Lavinia’s plan to live through her. Stanley’s body becomes Lavinia’s way to create for herself a world of beauty and youth that were unattainable to her in real life.

However, confining Stanley to her body even when it becomes a symbol for reconstructing Lavinia’s life results in Stanley’s prioritising her sexual desires above any moral imperatives. Seidel points to the moral paradox created by the demands of southern femininity and the negative impact they leave upon the southern Belle’s psyche: “A society that prefers its lovely women to be charming and flirtatious coquettes who never yield their purity can create a situation of impossible tension for the belle”.⁸⁷ Lavinia remarks to her husband upon Stanley’s resumption of her sexual adventures after Peter’s death, “The matter with Stanley is that she is never content unless she is exerting her power. I mean, her power over men. When she complains of her loneliness, she means there aren’t any men who amuse her” (460). Lavinia is aware of the result of her training; she has created a girl who is lovely from the

⁸⁶ Seidel, *The Southern Belle*, p. xvi.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

outside but is insatiably ruthless and eager to exert power denied to her by exploiting the very means that caused her entrapment in her bodied image.

Considering that *In This Our Life* is Glasgow's last published novel before her death, it is worth dwelling further on the novel's treatment of race, which shows more antislavery sentiments than Glasgow's earlier novels. To accomplish that we need to return again to Morrison's theory of the role of Africanist characters in American literature. As Morrison states, "the fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive; an extraordinary meditation on the self."⁸⁸ And "this black population was available for meditations on terror — the terror of European outcasts, their dread of failure, powerlessness, Nature without limits, natal loneliness, internal aggression, evil, sin, greed."⁸⁹ The novel's use of black characters to witness and reflect white fears and sins shows through Parry and his mother, Minerva. Asa, in a statement reminiscent of Morrison's observation, sums up their role and contemplates the notion of white ignorance and the black knowledge they represent:

[H]ow little we actually know of the Negro race. Our servants know all about us, while we know nothing of them. They are bound up in our daily lives; they are present in every intimate crisis; they are aware of, or suspect, our secret motives. Yet we are complete strangers to the way they live, to what they really think or feel about us, or about anything else. (34)

The novel points to William's fear of losing power as a proud white southerner to non-whites in his reaction to Parry's situation. Parry is the Timberlakes' driver, who harbours a dream of pursuing his education to become a lawyer. Parry's ambition sparks resentment in William, who possesses the financial means to help him to get an education but refuses to do so. William cannot reconcile himself to the idea of "the old savage and the new freedom" (148). He does not believe in African Americans' right to education, as it would emancipate them from a subservient posture of gratitude towards their white benefactors. Trent A. Watts observes that views similar to William's were not unpopular at the time. He cites a public speech by a southern governor that conveys the same message: "that *education does not make the negro a more useful or desirable citizen*. ... When you educate one of them you usually make an immoral woman, hypocritical preacher or bungle-some forgerer. ...

⁸⁸ Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Random House, 1992), p. 17.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

You dissatisfy him with his inevitable lot and then kill him for being dissatisfied.”⁹⁰ In the same manner, William tells Parry, “but I hope you won’t let your head get chock-full of tomfool ideas about education. Your race doesn’t need lawyers. There are too many white lawyers already, and if any of you get into trouble that’s not your fault, your white friends are always ready to help you out” (156).

Parry’s mixed blood also represents the intersection of two worlds that William can only fathom as separate, black and white. As a result, the allusion to Parry’s mixed blood infuriates William. When someone addresses the issue of Parry’s race by asking, “when you come down to facts, which is his race, anyway?” William shouts back at him, “For God’s sake! Is this the time, sir, to begin airing your radical theories?” But the man is not intimidated by William’s thundering, and he derisively flings back at him, “They aren’t theories, sir, but facts” (481). William’s touchiness on the subject brings the reader to speculate that William, the great uncle of the Fitzroys, has always been aware of his ancestors’ involvement in the sexual practice of miscegenation. Raper reaches the same conclusion when he defines Parry’s genealogy as Roy and Stanley’s distant cousin, who combines the Fitzroy blood with black and Indian.⁹¹ It would not be implausible to assume that William might have been involved in the practice himself, given his clinging to the old planters’ dogmas. Slave-owners’ masculinity, according to Laura J. Schrock, has often taken an aggressive form, driven by a necessity to dominate all females, white and black. This is why countless accounts of southern masculinity “include the specter of miscegenation.”⁹² William’s greedy and domineering character would identify with this desire to sexually conquer and absorb women of all races by connecting him to miscegenation, furthermore, the narrator exposes the hypocrisy behind William’s claim to be defending and protecting the pure white race against aspiring non-whites.

William’s racism shows in the way he encourages black people’s subordination as a means to retain white supremacy. William holds on to his racist heritage that frequently stereotyped African Americans as morally lax people who “get drunk on a thimbleful” (481). He tolerates black people provided they conform to the stereotypical image of an inferior and contented race. His wife Kate observes

⁹⁰ Trent A. Watts, *One Homogenous People: Narratives of White Southern Identity, 1890-1920* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2010), p. 13.

⁹¹ Raper, *From The Sunken Garden*, p. 177.

⁹² Laura, J. Schrock, “‘Too little to count as looking’: Blackness and the formation of the white feminine in Eudora Welty’s *The Golden Apples*,” in *The Mississippi Quarterly*, 66. 1 (2013), 99.

that “William liked cheerful Negroes” (153), but at the same time did not hesitate to exercise his cruelty towards them when they challenged his views. Kate expresses her mortification at her husband’s cruel manner with blacks when she comments that she is “thankful ... that William had not been alive in the ages of slavery” (154). By citing Kate’s feeling, the narrator undermines the mythology of the southern patriarch who propagates his benevolence but lashes out at those who threaten his aristocratic status.

Black characters are also employed in Stanley’s story to question the sexual practices and gender formation of white characters. The first of the Timberlakes’ household who senses something wrong taking place between Stanley and her sister’s husband is Minerva, Parry’s mother and the family’s washer woman. Minerva accidentally witnesses the two in an intimate scene; she instinctively senses its uncomfortable implications: “Not a word, not so much as a speck of a word, passed between ‘em. But, never mind, she knew what she knew; and she’d felt the sort of sultriness that whips around in the air when a thunderstorm is all but ready to break” (112). Minerva says nothing of what she sees; her recognition of the ugly truth behind apparently unblemished white sexual patterns and her passivity towards it coincide with the literary employment of her non-whiteness as a witness and reflection of white corruption mentioned earlier by Morrison.

Stanley and Parry’s plot serves as an example of what Schrock defines as the role of black characters in forming white femininity: “In an unexpected paradox that highlights the complexity of race and gender relations, the white female participates in the deconstruction of black manhood in order to ensure the status of racial and sexual privileges she derives from her subjugation to the dominant figure on the mythical American landscape.”⁹³ Before the end of the novel, Stanley ruins two more lives in a segment that connects southern sexual and racial prejudices and proves the hypocrisy and corruption that underpin the South’s cultural values. Stanley quickly recovers from her initial grief after Peter’s death and is bored because there are no men around her whom she can control. When William chooses Parry to be Stanley’s chauffeur, his reasoning is that the presence of blackness might lead Stanley to assume a more appropriate behaviour befitting her gender and racial profile. Nevertheless, Stanley chooses to let loose her wild impulses; she translates her frustration by driving her car at a high speed down Queenborough’s streets instead of

⁹³ Schrock, “ ‘Too little to count as looking,’ ” 113.

using Parry. Considering the Lynds' observation regarding the connection between cars and sexuality,⁹⁴ William's gift to Stanley becomes a symbol of her destructive sexual impulses. One day when Stanley is out, she hits and kills a little girl and then runs away to escape punishment. She blames Parry. Her family suspect the truth but pretend to believe her because "[c]oloured people don't feel things the way we do ... not as a young girl would, anyway" (517). By refusing to clear Parry's name, Stanley chooses not to move out of her secure social position. In Stanley's search for fulfilment, Parry's selfhood is sacrificed, and his destiny destroyed because his mixed blood remains a bigger threat to the white dominance Stanley benefits from as a privileged white woman.

Eventually, Stanley's father makes her tell the truth. Though Parry is released, his self-esteem is crushed by the injustice of his treatment and his life is ruined. Meanwhile, Stanley remains blameless. The similarity between Stanley and Fitzgerald's Daisy, pointed out earlier by Fiedler, resurfaces. Like Stanley, Daisy kills someone with her car and allows another to take the blame. Also, just as Stanley is responsible for the death of Peter, a man who had been obsessed with her, Daisy causes Gatsby's death. Both escape punishment by manipulating the chivalrous instincts of the southern male. Coffey remarks that in the film version of the novel Stanley's character "plunges over a cliff to a fiery demise." He argues that the director and screenwriter destroy Stanley because "they wanted to create a film that would attract satisfied customers in large numbers."⁹⁵ However, the novel realistically allows Stanley to survive because she possesses the right weapons to survive amid the South's decaying patriarchal norms.

William's character embodies the degenerate values of the South's patriarchal and racist ideology, which propagated the image of a strong and benevolent male figure and his physically weak female dependants. It is a white masculine authority that had evolved from a pro-slavery past and was often employed in its defence. The novel, however, exposes the materialistic, racist, and sexist nature of this hierarchy as it exposes the destructive power of constraining southern women in a very limited social role. The novel also highlights how Stanley's social and sexual interactions

⁹⁴ In their book *Middletown: A Study in Modern American Culture* (1929), Robert S. Lynd and Helen Merrell Lynd note that between September 1923 and 1924, nineteen out of thirty girls accused of "sex crimes" had been charged with committing them in cars (p.258).

⁹⁵ Coffey, "Ellen Glasgow's *In This Our Life*," p. 122.

reflect the masculine values of white femininity that mark her beauty and guile, and emphasise her embodied image as an idealised southern Belle. Stanley, however, recreates those norms to her advantage, producing a more complex example of the bad Belle as a result. Stanley's agency in a limiting masculine society is perceived by the narrative as a feminine prerogative: "it was not fair to hold Stanley responsible. She couldn't be blamed either for Southern sentimentality or for maternal hysteria. Her power was unconscious ... Her harmfulness lay not in what she had done, but in what she was and would always continue to be" (372). A major argument in the portrayal of Stanley's life experience is how the South's racist and sexist values, represented by William, position women in a constant paradox between reality and illusion. Pressuring women under patriarchal phantasies of femininity translates into deficient moral standards for women with tragic consequences, an idea verified through Stanley's car accident and its impact on Parry.

Roy and the Feminine Example of Asa

The novel criticises the South's conventional gender constructs that code self-sacrifice and familial affection as feminine. This critique of southern gender constructs of women's inherited characteristics is revealed or demonstrated in its interpretation of self-denial and virtue as signs of sentimental weakness that scar those who believe in and practise them. In the first part of the novel, Roy adopts the conventional, idealised white femininity, equating it to sexual purity, devotion, and sacrifice. In this, she follows the example of her father Asa, whose life is the ritual repetition of the role of the family's patriarch who is faithful to his wife and provides for his children. Both Asa and Roy are portrayed as fine characters who are forced into a false position in life by their moral codes shaped by sentimental notions of honour and duty. Their actions are determined by their dedication to gratify the desires of their loved ones while neglecting their own.

The discrepancy between Asa's contemporary world and the mythical southern past leaves him as a cynical, depressed, and ineffectual character. Asa's insignificant appearance is early established: "There was nothing about him to attract a lingering glance, nothing" (8). The son of a tobacco factory owner who committed suicide after bankruptcy, Asa is reduced to being a worker in his father's factory after it was purchased by his wife's uncle, William. He is equally enslaved by his

hypochondriac wife Lavinia, nursing and catering to her every need. Asa's dedication to his family is apparent and is acknowledged by them: "he worked like a slave for us" (79). Caught between historical codes of honour and the cruelties of the modern economy, his image is reduced to that of a menial serf. Both Asa and John Fincastle in *Vein of Iron* are characters who appear to be less than they are, their strength, which inspires their daughters, is buried under their patriarchal image but they have inner resources to call upon in emergencies. They are better examples than the young men their daughters marry; John does not escape his powerlessness in sexual phantasies while preying on Ada's strength as Ralph does. Asa acknowledges and admires Roy's integrity instead of abandoning her like Peter who is intimidated by Roy's non-traditional example of femininity.

As a patriarch, Asa's failings are exposed through the juxtaposition of his outer behaviour and his internal thoughts. He, in his daily drudgery, is driven by his belief in his role as the family's patriarch, a figure who bases his authority on his ability to care for his dependents rather than by familial affection.⁹⁶ He tells himself, "I can't help my antiquated sense of responsibility for things ... I can't help harbouring the absurd notion that there is a dignity attached to the state of man" (265). However, Asa's dignity as he describes it is antiquated and "an anachronism" (10). Asa's mockery of his own sensibility is his way of defending himself against his sense of failure, as his diminished economic position leaves him with little claim to be the archetypal southern man epitomised by William.

Asa's example shows that conforming to southern gender values constrains personal growth and independence. For Roy, this way of life initially inhibits the development of her identity. Roy, portrayed as an independent and confident woman, nonetheless surrenders to sentiments that eventually marginalise her and free her husband from social constraints. She becomes an example of white femininity that is confined to sentiment and body. Karen Sánchez-Eppler argues that in the antebellum period "[f]eminists and abolitionists were acutely aware of the dependence of personhood on the condition of the human body, since the political and legal subordination of both women and slaves was predicated upon biology."⁹⁷ Roy

⁹⁶ Frankenberg, "Introduction: Local Whitenesses, Localizing Whiteness," p. 11.

⁹⁷ Karen Sánchez-Eppler, "Bodily Bonds: The Intersecting Rhetorics of Feminism and Abolition," in *The Culture of Sentiment: Race, Gender, and Sentimentality in 19th Century America*, ed. Shirley Samuels (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 93-4.

experiences the excitement of love, equated here with sexual pleasure, and lets passion control her. She cannot resist Peter whose appeal overwhelms her, despite her awareness of their incompatibility: “His animal well-being diffused the glow, and the warmth, and the physical combativeness of pure energy” (134). On another occasion, she recognises their divergent characters: “they had had nothing in common ... but that quiver of the nerves and the flesh. But that alone had been everything” (271). She is not blind that “as a husband, [Peter] lacked the quality which used to be called character” (30). Nonetheless, she chooses to exert herself to enable his self-realisation and fulfilment. She refuses to take a vacation to support the family and keeps working while her husband is on a fishing trip because “[s]he was the sort of woman, fortunate or unfortunate ... who would cheerfully sacrifice herself, not only for a man, but for his career” (31). Her femininity becomes doubly fixed, emotionally through her beliefs in selfless love and family duty, and physically by her sexual attachment, and both marginalise her to the advantage of white masculinity represented by Peter.

At the start, Roy differentiates between her need for romantic love and her right to sexual satisfaction, which is observed by the narrative as stifling her personal development and understanding. Her initial understanding of love as a spiritual value is influenced by a white logic. Sánchez-Eppler, in her analysis of the attitude of antebellum writings toward black and female bodies, explains that this white logic laid “an emphasis on the special and discrete nature of the spiritual realm [which] permitted to women’s souls a power that was denied to their bodies.” This claim of women’s spiritual superiority in reality worked as a “placebo for women’s and slaves’ lack of social power.”⁹⁸ In the novel, Roy’s nonphysical interpretation of love restricts rather than enables her freedom. She feels that love is the only value that gives meaning to her life. She tells herself, “I love love because in the world we know it is the only reality left” (325). She mourns the loss of her feelings of love more than her absent husband: “Was her distraught longing merely the agonized involuntary clutch of emotion at an endangered part of her life, the most precious and necessary part, which was broken away?” (133)

Roy’s desire to hold on to love as the true value in her life can be understood in relation to her times. According to historian Fredrick Allen, reversion to sentimentality was mainly a reaction to the spirit of the modern age. Allen interprets

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 112-13.

the ferments of American youth during the 1930s and 1940s as a result of the political state of the country, finished with a world war and living with the pressure of entering a new one. The younger generation, faced with the imminent prospect of its mortality, indulged itself in sensual pleasure in a manner that broke the past's traditional barriers.⁹⁹ Roy witnesses the disintegration of moral structure in the world she lives in; she reacts to it by emphasising love as a power that transcends selfish desire. In this she seems to echo Allen's own frustration at the spiritual emptiness of the age: "If romantic love was dethroned, what was to take its place? Sex?" Allen wonders.¹⁰⁰ Roy expresses a similar faith: "I want love. Some women may live without love, but I cannot. When love goes, I slip down again into emptiness" (305).

Roy becomes distrustful of sexual desire as it proves to be a painful experience: "How could she give all of herself, and yet find that all of herself, to the last heartbeat, was not enough?" (200) Her anxiety and distrust of men after her failures with Peter and Craig cause her to withdraw from the vulnerability of sexuality to the independence of work. In her negative sexuality, she appears more relevant to the early definition of white womanhood as a nonsexual being who "lack[ed] sexual interest altogether" in her quest for moral exemplification and religious piety.¹⁰¹ However, Roy's decision to be celibate is more of an escape than a convention, and consequently, it does not bring her peace. As a sign of her psychosexual pain, she is troubled by images of Peter who haunts her dreams, cloaked in darkness, the stereotypical manifestation of sexual desire in white women's imagination: "she could feel the dark wings sweeping up from the depths below, and tracking her down through the labyrinth of her dreams, hanging, poised, and watchful" (201). The novel contextualises Roy's confused attitude towards sentiments and sexual fulfilment within the gender values of her society, embraced by her father, and the social troubles of the twentieth century. It then proceeds to emphasise the importance of the bodily experience as equal to sentimental emotion in shaping women's identities and life courses.

Similarly, Asa has to dismiss his real feelings and overemphasise commitment and dedication as the real bonds that keep his family together and

⁹⁹ Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday 1931* (New York: Harper and Row, 1957), p. 121.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Anne Goodwyn Jones, *Tomorrow is Another Day: The Woman Writer in the South 1859-1936* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981), p. 9.

himself as the sheltering patriarch. The portrayal of marital and familial affairs in the novel provides a significant perspective through which to see the intersection of race and gender elements, exemplified in Asa's relation with his wife, Lavinia. Asa's self-esteem has suffered early in life from "a competent elder sister [who] drummed into his head [that] he was not unusual, either in mind or body" (7). Asa's desire to be the strong and controlling man he was never allowed to be because of his misfortunes leads him later to marry the plain and unimaginative Lavinia Fitzroy. Lavinia succeeds in coaxing Asa's wounded masculinity, and he ends up marrying her because "[h]is lean identity had filled out and drawn nourishment from her flattery" (15).

The marriage, like the sham sentiments that induced it, looks from the outside the picture of matrimonial loyalty and devotion, but it is, in reality, a soulless match that survives on notions of familial duty. Asa devotes his life to nursing his constantly ill wife but at the same time keeps imagining another reality, "that it was splendid to be young and magnanimous and irresponsible" (265). As Raper notes, Asa's "obsequiousness bears an outward resemblance to the willed devotion of chivalry. But it is instead a habitual expression of the diminished self-esteem instilled in him."¹⁰² Both Asa and Lavinia resort to marriage as a means to reconstruct themselves according to the South's racial and social orders. For Asa, marriage turns from an opportunity to realise his masculine image into a site of new and different limitations and defeat.

Asa's self-abnegating morality invites admiration from those around him, except his daughter Roy. In her adherence to morality and duty, Roy might be perceived as a rather flat character whose femininity is shaped by limiting gender values. However, a closer look at Roy's character suggests that the emphasis is focused on her making her own identity. She despises the fact that Asa's daily sacrifices do not result from natural affection, but from obedience to socially constructed gender roles that constrain men's and women's behaviour. Asa knows that "Roy ... in her brave modern fashion, disapproves of his loyalty to any place so unmistakably left behind by the years" (17). He envies Roy's brave rejection of social shams: "she mocked openly at the images which he had feared and obeyed in his conscious mind" (51). Because he plays the patriarchal role without real sentiments,

¹⁰² Raper, *From the Sunken Garden*, p. 175.

Roy considers his conduct a moral defeat and refuses to submit to the power of social appearances: “I won’t be like you!” (544), she exclaims to her father. In his comment on Roy’s character, McDowell states that “Roy’s abrupt dismissal of her father’s values—such as duty, responsibility, and the need to act in accordance with a sense of personal integrity—represents a mistake in Miss Glasgow’s craft if Roy is to generate the respect which Miss Glasgow felt to be her heroine’s due.”¹⁰³ However, Roy’s real refusal is of outdated sexual notions, which limit marital relations to antiquated images of chivalry and responsibility on the masculine side and weakness and dependence on the feminine side. This sexual dichotomy is so strict it places Asa in an irremediable position whereby he must project the image of a doting husband and father while resenting his surrender to this image. It also confines Lavinia to a life of sickness and decay and results in a failed marital relationship for both of them.

Roy is equally resentful of her mother Lavinia’s example of passive femininity. Unstable and neurotic, Lavinia, in Roy’s eyes, is a pathetic and not very admirable woman. Roy’s rebellion against her is comprehensible because as a mother she is expected to be a source of strength for her daughter. Roy adheres to work and financial independence because they provide her with an opportunity to realise herself differently from her mother: “Not for anything in the world would she exchange her lot for her mother’s” (140). Roy’s rebellion is against her mother’s disabled womanhood that survives solely by laying claim on men’s sense of chivalry and fakes sickness to elicit their sympathy. Roy’s “realistic point view ... that stern principle” is set against what Lavinia has always believed in “as far back as she could remember ... sentiment, chivalry, feminine weakness and sex compulsion” (211). Roy’s verdict against Lavinia is realistic to the point of cruelty: “she wasn’t even a successful woman. She wasn’t pretty as a girl. She lacked charm. She wasn’t feminine. She made no appeal” (331).

Roy’s strength and self-sufficiency eschew the traditional image of southern womanhood by assuming the traditionally masculine role of the family breadwinner and by willingly releasing her husband from his marriage vows when he abandons their marriage. She tells her father with a firm smile, “of course we mean it. I remember there were to be no strings to our marriage. Even when I was little, I hated anything with a string to it” (138). In her embodiment of feminine morality and

¹⁰³ McDowell, *Ellen Glasgow and the Ironic Art*, p. 224.

masculine strength, Roy simultaneously conforms to and departs from the traditional image of the southern woman. This notion is implied in her father's reflection upon her character, "What he liked in Roy was something strong and self-reliant and unyielding, some hard fine grain of integrity. She possessed all the qualities, he told himself that men have *missed* and *wanted* in women: courage, truthfulness, a tolerant sense of humour, loyalty to impersonal ends" (26; my italics). These are the modern version of the feminine qualities that the southern plantation mistress was endowed with: "moral consciousness, sentimentality, introspection, and benevolence."¹⁰⁴ However, as Stokes notes, "southern male chivalry" disguised a "fear of female independence."¹⁰⁵ By claiming too much independence and strength, Roy relinquishes the most pivotal trait in southern femininity that endeared her to the southern male, that is, her frailty, for female frailty serves to emphasise the white male protector's strength, courage, and class privilege.

The novel's criticism of white masculinity that idealises traditional femininity, with its affiliations of domesticity, intimate attachment, loyalty, chastity, and self-sacrifice, is accomplished via Roy's betrayal by her husband. Ware remarks that Western theories of sexual difference that pair men with reason and abstract ideas and women with sentimentality and sensuality ultimately aim to assure masculine dominance. Women who try to associate themselves with male identity are essentially defying the established ideas about the male/female binary. As a result, these women are perceived as overwhelming and threatening of the social hierarchy of male dominance.¹⁰⁶ Roy's virtues are portrayed as unwomanly in the new age in which the worst aspects of southern masculinity survive. Asa feels that her virtues have always been unconsciously wanted in a woman but were never consciously sought by men who approach her: "For he doubted, with his rational part, whether men had ever wanted truthfulness in women. Or loyalty, for that matter, to impersonal ends" (26). Avoiding the southern Belle's traditional role costs Roy. Her virtues appeal only to the conscious ideals of men. Men praise these virtues in a woman and yet clearly prefer flattery to truthfulness, and loyalty that is based on sentimental attachment rather than an independent and thoughtful character. This is the reason the male

¹⁰⁴ William R. Taylor, *Cavalier & Yankee: The Old South and the American National Character* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), p. 147.

¹⁰⁵ Mason Stokes, *The Color of Sex: Whiteness, Heterosexuality, and the Fictions of White Supremacy* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), p. 37.

¹⁰⁶ Ware, *Beyond the Pale*, p. 92.

characters in the novel end up preferring the weak and sensual Stanley over the sensible and strong Roy. There is little in Roy to attract the unconscious side of southern males since she repeats rather than complements their self-proclaimed masculine values. As Ada and Ralph in *Vein of Iron*, Peter follows his masculine needs and pulls away from Roy rather than following the guidance of his masculine ideals and joining her in a unity of souls.

The novel shows how difficult it is for women to assume freedom from the limitations imposed by gender constructs in a society that associates opinion, autonomy, and independence with men alone. Roy's love of Peter, despite its strong sexual nature, ultimately does not outweigh her strength and independence. She emphasises her modern viewpoint by stressing her marriage's freedom from meaningless codes of honour. She absolves Peter of any blame when he leaves her because she believes that since love has gone from their relation, it should not continue purely based on loyalty to social principles. It is true that Peter's selfishness and egoism are what drive him, like the rest of the male figures in the novel, towards Stanley. However, even Asa admits that Roy's self-control and exemplary character would be threatening to men in its overemphasis on rationality: "She is stronger than any of us, and finer in many ways; but she lacks tenderness—or is it merely imagination? She is riding a single virtue, the new gallantry, too hard—perhaps to self-destruction" (186). Ultimately, Roy's strong character, even in her search for love, refuses to adhere to the feminine codes of prioritising men's love. Her face hardens, and her youthful looks diminish, but she refuses to be a victim. Asa commends her bravery as "an advance upon the classic manner of the deserted" (219). Roy proves herself neither weaker nor less capable than men of retaining her character in times of crisis.

The novel reemphasises its argument that women's sexual agency remains a better option than the masculine prescriptions of women's roles. Roy eventually recognises that she has the right to explore sexuality and its embodied pleasures. Her decision is a reaction against what she recognises as the confinement and marginalisation of women under patriarchal authority. Ware connects white women's achievement of independence to their ability to perceive the ways in which "women were systemically excluded from political and economic life."¹⁰⁷ Likewise, Roy's

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p. 94.

liberated sexuality is linked to the hatred she directs towards the “man’s world” (331). She expresses her anger and frustration at the South’s sexist perception of women. A society that is accustomed to “sparing women” (345), and expects them “to be grateful” (54) for their exclusion from the abstract values of social responsibility, is essentially reducing them to a fixed state of being. To escape the “narrow coils of identity,” Roy decides to start looking for “something larger and deeper than self in which one might plunge and sink, and so become a part of the whole” (290). Her changing attitude coincides with the approach of World War Two, which she views as another masculine arena in which men transform their complex ideologies into “the stuff of misery.” Women’s biology determines their procreative job, and they try to compensate for men’s folly and keep the race alive. Roy comments that “[f]or women, there isn’t even a battlefield. There’s only the maternity ward” (564). In both cases, white women who are reduced by the patriarchal, masculinist discourse to their bodies rather than their individual selves find themselves “outside the male contests over land, money, and political power.”¹⁰⁸

Sexuality provides Roy with the means to transcend her gender limitations; her adventure at the end of the novel represents the act of love not as a sentimental value but as a fact of the body. By engaging in a sexual act purely for pleasure, she perverts the late nineteenth century’s diagnosis of sexual indulgence outside marriage. According to Stokes, this concept was central “to the maintenance of both the white race and a “white” morality.” It maintained that “sexual pleasure occurring outside a reproductive context” was “unhealthy” and “pathological.”¹⁰⁹ In the novel, female sexuality becomes a healthy choice to achieve autonomy. As Roy’s story nears its end, she meets a young Englishman who is about to join the army preparing to fight in the Second World War. Like Roy, he feels the need to find something bigger and deeper and speaks of fighting as the prospect where he can feel needed and feels he belongs to the living. However, his grotesque purple scar, a burn he hides under his hat, mirrors Roy’s emotional state. Roy feels a violent hatred for the kind of world she is living in. She wants to strike back at it for having hurt her; this is why she gives herself to a strange man whose unhappiness eclipses her own. Judith Allsup suspects that Roy’s engagement in sex with a stranger would promptly lead to emotional

¹⁰⁸ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender, and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 31.

¹⁰⁹ Stokes, *The Color of Sex*, pp. 14-16.

fulfilment.¹¹⁰ Nevertheless, the narrator assures the reader that this act eases “little by little, the throbbing bitterness in [Roy’s] mind. She could feel the tormented egoism, the wounded vanity, slowly ebbing away” (569-70). Roy’s sexual adventure serves as means for her to reconstruct her identity, to allow her body to be as much a part of her femininity as her strong, independent and moral character. This ending represents a problem for Roy’s story of liberation seems to scarcely begin. While in *Vein of Iron* Ada’s sexual adventure with Ralph occurs at the start of the novel.¹¹¹

The novel’s final note suggests that the openness of the female identity to refashioning would lead it to new possibilities in life. Roy decides to leave the family house and Queenborough, a decision motivated by her recognising that to attain the promise of self-realisation she must abandon “both traditional and modern male-dominated hierarchies for an egalitarian homeland.”¹¹² Roy’s departure, which coincides with William’s terminal illness, points to the fact that “the male tycoon and the female victim” have to die, “making way for a new world.”¹¹³ Roy moves from uncertainty, through various crises, to hope and the belief in herself and her ability to achieve professional success, autonomy, and independence. The small world of personal betrayals and the large world of social injustice and war cannot prevent her from having another chance in life. Roy leaves the family home: “Everything, in that fresh early light, appeared changed. She felt a sudden surprise, as if she had overtaken time, and were walking into a new age and a new world” (573).

In Glasgow’s later novels the quest for a new self begins with the clear indication that present reality is not enough. She establishes a pattern of self-development in which her female characters discover unacknowledged aspects of their selves projected upon other characters. It is a pattern that Glasgow started in *One Man in His Time* in the relationship between Stephen and Vetch as the latter echoes to the first dynamic energy and healthy change. In *Vein of Iron* Ralph mirrors to Ada her unacknowledged sexual desires; in *In This Our Life* Asa mirrors to Roy her traditional view of marriage. Next, they experience either an enchantment or a rejection of these others; Ada falls for Ralph and marries him while Roy rejects to repeat her parents’

¹¹⁰ Judith Allsup, “Feminism in the Novels of Ellen Glasgow” (Ph.D. diss., Southern Illinois University, 1973), p. 134.

¹¹¹ This could be the reason for Glasgow writing a sequel to Roy’s story in *Beyond Defeat: An Epilogue to an Era*, published posthumously in 1966.

¹¹² Helen Fiddymont Levy, “Coming Home: Glasgow’s Last Two Novels,” in *Ellen Glasgow: New Perspectives*, ed. Dorothy M. Scura (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995), p. 231.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

pattern in her relationship with Peter. Then they claim the desires and liberties they hitherto repressed; Ada in her sexual encounter with Ralph and Roy with her brief sexual act with the English man. Finally, they undergo a path of disillusionment or realistic adjustment; Roy leaves her family's home for good while Ada returns to the family's land accepting her role as a matriarch who looks after her husband and community.

White-defined values on gender roles continue to shape Asa and Roy's racial sensibilities. Asa's character is constructed on a racist memory that is more appealing to him than his reality. His relation with Parry endows Asa's current victimised state with significance. His loss of caste is emphasised as his family's house is demolished to make room for a set of public houses. As he observes the destruction of the house, he mourns the past in which patriarchy was secured: "the old house was going out with its age, with its world, with its manners, with its fashion in architecture" (10). Asa is another fictional white character who, according to Stokes, responds to his changing conditions by becoming preoccupied with his white past "as a once beautiful abstraction, now fallen to the real world of dirt and labor."¹¹⁴

Parry is the son of the family's washer-woman, Minerva, once the Timberlakes' slave. When the reader is introduced to Parry for the first time through Asa's eyes, he is "a deep shadow" (32) that stirs and drifts away from the mulberry tree, now marked for destruction with Asa's family house. Parry is a source of interest to Asa mainly because Parry connects Asa to his treasured past; he reminds Asa of his past access to the social prerogatives of white patriarchy and responsibility: "Asa had always felt an interest in Parry, chiefly, he supposed, because the boy's family, on his mother's side, had once belonged to the Timberlakes" (32). Asa's consideration for Parry is in truth motivated by self-concern, and Parry is used by Asa to feed his own white "narcissism."¹¹⁵ For Asa, Parry is less recognised as a real person; he is more of a memory that reminds Asa of his family's slave-owning heritage. In front of Asa, the house and the tree that are vulnerable to the force of the present stand as symbols of the ancient past. Next to them stands the ambitious and nearly white Parry, who represents the extinction of the stereotypical image of the past slave. Asa's relationship with Parry echoes the initial scenes of *The Voice of the People*, in which

¹¹⁴ Stokes, *The Color of Sex*, p. 29.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 53.

the young, poor white Nickolas asks the aristocratic Judge Bassett to help him get an education and later goes on to become the Governor of Virginia. Parry is also an ambitious and intelligent young man who is eager to finish his higher education in the North but is unable to do so for his dire financial situation. Asa is mindful of Parry's dilemma in the race-ridden South, so his consistent answer to Parry's future is of full despair: "There isn't much chance for you in the South ... But I hope you'll get on. How ineffectual it sounded, and what did it mean anyway? ... The situation appeared hopeless" (36). The contrast is obvious; forty years later, southern aristocrats have lost their hope and power to practise their patriarchal benevolence. Also, the nature of racial patterns remain unchanged in the South; the prospects for a black man like Parry are much less optimistic than those of the poor white Nickolas.

Parry's race also becomes significant to Roy's story. Raper notes a point of resemblance between Roy and Parry when he remarks that "Roy's need to rebel against the social order that her mother, great-uncle, and younger sister embody is mirrored in ... the intellectual ambition of Parry Clay."¹¹⁶ The outcome of this rebellion proves better for Roy than for Parry. Parry's false accusation leads to his moral defeat after he spends time in jail. Parry's fate, when set against Roy's refusal to surrender to defeat, could lead to the conclusion that women could challenge masculine dominance in a manner African Americans are not able to channel in their fight against the more aggressive racist domination of the South.

Schrock analyses the appearance of black characters in Eudora Welty's novels about white female characters who search for selfhood. She notices that the empathetic recognition by white women of blacks' oppression is significant for female identity. Roy's reaction towards the discriminatory treatment of Parry "illustrates at least the possibility that the individual white female consciousness can prevail over a collective consciousness formed by racist repression."¹¹⁷ She breaches collective southern racist codes that have always ignored reality regarding the unjust and cruel treatment of African Americans when she reflects to herself, "If the coloured boy had not run over the child, it was, of course, a regrettable incident that he should have been questioned and sent to jail; but, after all, coloured people were used to that sort of mistake." The narrator confirms Roy's judgement by adding that

¹¹⁶ Raper, *From the Sunken Garden*, p. 173.

¹¹⁷ Schrock, " 'Too little to count as looking,' " p. 113.

“[t]he one thing nobody wants in this world, Roy had thought, is truth” (524). However, her brief instance of interracial sympathy proves to be short-lived. In her immersion in her own moral and sexual dilemmas, Roy’s attention quickly returns to her disappointment at the behaviour of her fiancée Craig, who is tested and found wanting in his evasion of Stanley’s guilt: “The easiest way, she thought bitterly, the way of escape, the eternal way of evasion! Well, she was sick of softness, she told herself. She was sick of kind impulses that ended in cruelty. She was sick of good will too sapless to harden into action or character” (525). Though Parry’s character does not occupy a place in Roy’s consciousness, he still informs her awareness of her society and its failings.

At the outset, Asa’s adherence to dominant gender values hinders Roy’s understanding of love and sexual pleasure as a liberating rather than confining power to achieve autonomy and freedom. Roy’s observations of her parents’ personalities and relationship eventually spur her independence. The traditional concept of a marriage based on duty and loyalty and false sentiments is ridiculed by Roy who chooses to marry for genuine emotion, sexual integrity, autonomy and self-definition; she refuses to remain in the marriage once these values are lost. Roy’s failed marriage allows her to make a different statement about the construction of the feminine self that is based on independence and strength of character. Unlike her father, who channels his patriarchal frustration into memories of the past and rejection of the present, Roy is an activist who aims to redefine herself in the private and public domains. Asa’s patriarchal values are confined by race and gender heritage, but Roy develops more understanding of the racist nature of the white southern culture where malicious racism is muffled by the genteel southern white attitude to race and gender.

Rebecca Aanerud, in her call for readers to be aware of the role of whiteness in determining the characterisation of fictional white females, concludes that reading a female character “as simply a woman, unraced and universal, erases the degree to which not only her whiteness but also her class position and her ... sexuality have everything to do with her frustration.”¹¹⁸ This chapter answers Aanerud’s appeal in its attempt to link Glasgow’s female characters to racial, gender, and social discourses and to show how these discourses hinder their quest for self-fulfilment. Glasgow’s women start as young girls believing in romance and in freedom. However, their men

¹¹⁸ Aanerud, “Fictions of Whiteness,” p. 43.

end up costing them a great deal, seeking in them the Christian virtue of strength and chastity and the southern ideal of beauty and coyness. Glasgow's narrative suggests that what southern men search for in women is a justification for their masculine authority, and in their search, they keep denying women their freedom to grow out of their idealised image. It is the freedom Glasgow's young girls look for when they mature, as well as the strength to live and grow. Ada's colonising heritage, Roy's modern independence, and Stanley's southern charm are how these women negotiate their agency in a society that allows women little space to triumph over their embodied identities.

This chapter scrutinised the underlying socio-political implications of the central roles southern women play in *Vein of Iron* and *In This Our Life*. The polemical of these novels which contemplate issues of courage and agency and for women to be the heroines of their life stories is equal to the sentimental. While not deliberately exposed and expelled, racism is portrayed as a symptom of deeper spiritual, social, and political problems in the South. Glasgow's motives for myth unmaking derive directly from her status as a white southern woman who was confined by the ideological principles of the Old South. The implication of her having done so, throughout the 1930s and into the 1940s, is that Glasgow still invokes the old order as liable for exploiting the depressed conditions of white southern women and non-whites for its own benefit.

Conclusion

The point of this thesis has been to perform textual analysis on a number of novels by Glasgow to gather information on the practices of whiteness in the early twentieth-century South. I have explored selected novels for how they reveal practices of white privilege as it intersects with gender and class limitations. I have followed in my focus on gender and class Glasgow's expressed interest in these two social markers. In her treatment of the South's "negligible minorities,"¹ Glasgow specifies white women and poor whites as two social groups marginalised by a southern public discourse that favours patriarchy and capitalism. I have argued that Glasgow's narrative demonstrates how women and poor whites are denied their voices in a manner similar to the white supremacist oppression of the third and final group she singles out, non-whites. I have added to my discussion of these three groups the figure of the southern male who breaks free of his traditional model. My rationale has been that southern whiteness arranges its social values around the character of the middle and upper-class white male, and masculinity which in turns defines itself against these three groups, relegating them to the margins.

Glasgow disconnects her white characters from their mythical representations in southern literature by showing how they respond in reality to roles inscribed by white culture. In chapter one, Glasgow's aristocratic men experience both their whiteness and patriarchy as uncomfortable positions. They are burdened by their notions of white masculinity with its sexist, classist, and racist underpinnings. Their inability to fully inscribe the masculine model is reflected in their feelings of anxiety, emptiness, and anger. Ultimately, Glasgow rejects the old masculine code and reconceptualises it by juxtaposing her white male characters with women, poor whites, and non-whites instead of isolating them in the traditional position of dominant white males. Chapter one examined the relationship between the social and cultural determinants of the plantation gentry. The theme of mobility and progress, with which Glasgow was so aware, becomes in her novels *The Battle-Ground* and *The Deliverance* a symbol of the process whereby Glasgow was able to explore and recognise the possibility of a future for the post-war South.

¹ Mentioned in the "Introduction," p. 27.

The poor white in chapter two evolves from an obscure figure to become a leader of social reform. He fights for survival in adverse circumstances and finds in white democracy a promise of social status and advancement. However, snubbed by the upper-class's prejudice, the poor white recognises his victimisation by white rhetoric that celebrates his racial status but ignores his daily struggles. He finds a way to resist his economic and social oppression by acting on behalf of his people as well as himself. However, led by white interest, he overlooks the similar hardship of non-whites in a society fraught with race problems. As a result, while he positively employs his white prerogative to achieve class mobilisation, he fails to combat the white supremacist practices of his community. Chapter two probed the interplay between class, politics, and history in *The Voice of the People* and *One Man in His Time*. Glasgow's narration of traditional southern history from the perspectives of economically disadvantaged whites enabled her to reveal the material base of the plantation economy which exploits a structure of environmental and cultural forces that distribute authority according to race and class. Her protagonists perceive their own exploitation in this structure. They also envision alternative stories of empowerment that allow the South's poor whites to profit from a "progressive" economy. Complicating this narrative is the inconspicuousness the novels assign to black southerners, banning them from imagining and profiting from the same alternative visions.

In chapter three, Glasgow's female characters challenge the South's patriarchal ideals of white women's embodied identity that confines them to feminine codes of sentimentality, affection and loyalty to family, and sexual propriety. Glasgow's variations on white femininity and her portrayal of diverse female experiences, ranging from adherence to abstract values to indulgence of sexual desire, offer a more nuanced understanding of female identity. Her female protagonists navigate sexist barriers that are reinforced by racist and classist notions and attain distinct personalities that are not without negative aspects. However, they all succeed in contesting the southern monolithic representation of white femininity as an embodied identity. In all three chapters, I follow the same trajectory of white characters portrayed by Glasgow, in which whiteness begins as a homogeneous, positive identity, but ends as an inadequate ideology that harms whites and non-whites alike. Chapter three was concerned with the intersection between Glasgow's authorial pursuits of her ethnic heritage in *Vein of Iron* and *In This Our Life* and what

could be perceived as more liberal feminist views that would pave the way for the southern civil rights movement around 1945. Glasgow's negotiations of issues of authority and oppression embedded in the myth of southern womanhood suggest her desire to reflect the anxieties many modern white southern women felt about women's progress and her determination to promote it.

This thesis adds to literary scholarship that argues for the existence of multiple identities in the racial category "white". Analysing literary works that complicate whiteness by showing its gradation through social elements other than white skin provides the chance to deconstruct its purportedly essential nature; whiteness can no longer remain an unquestioned given. These works open the space for reconceptualising whiteness in other ways than through its social dominance. In the novels addressed here, Glasgow's characters are initially ideologically white; they subscribe to sexist, classist, and racist thinking and customs until they lose their white privilege, which forms a turning point for them. Glasgow turns the individual experiences of these men and women, who become undermined by the very values they held earlier, into opportunities to develop a critical attitude towards social and political injustice. The southern gentleman realises he can do little without the solidarity of the poor white and the emotional and moral integrity of a female partner, and Glasgow suggests that the three of them can recognise in the non-white more than just a measure or reflection of their place in the social hierarchy.

In her study *The Future of Whiteness* (2015), Linda Alcoff calls for studies that realise whiteness as a dominant cultural force that plays a role in "the constitution of individual subjects with particular ways of experiencing and perceiving as well as interacting with the social and natural environment."² Alcoff criticises works that ignore the ways in which mixed social components such as gender, ethnicity, and capitalism are integral to the discourse of whiteness, for they provide "a wrong understanding of how meanings operate as well as of how social identities are formed." She states that such works fail to racialise white people away from the white/non-white dichotomy and consequently essentialise whiteness "as necessarily, fundamentally and centrally about white supremacy."³ Conversely, works that show whites experiencing marginality in their lives allow their readers to understand better

² Linda Martín Alcoff, *The Future of Whiteness* (Cambridge, Malden: Polity Press, 2015), p. 74.

³ Ibid., p. 20.

the similar practices of whiteness in the society they live in by seeing their limitations and the possible alternatives to them. These readers possibly come to “inhabit” their white identity in ways that go beyond its association with racism. They are the same “[w]hites who take up the challenge of ending the spread of white supremacist ideas and eroding the white material advantages still accruing from slavery and colonialism.”⁴ This thesis does not claim that either Glasgow or her characters go all the way in turning their experience of social inequality to a proper act of interracial sympathy. At the same time, I do try to portray Glasgow as a social critic whose narratives supply her readers with motives to consider antiracist positions. Glasgow achieves this by inflecting her characters from initial positions of homogeneous whiteness to individual experiences that contest its racist, sexist, and classist inadequacies.

I portray Glasgow’s treatment of racial difference as more complicated than contemporary and modern critics have suggested. Beneath Glasgow’s ostensible sentimental treatment of southern heritage, there is a curious interdependence between non-whiteness and the representation of gender and class difference. Glasgow employs non-whites as instruments for self-reflection on social injustice experienced by marginalised whites like women and poor whites. However, she also juxtaposes the varying positions these white characters occupy in different times and places with the stable oppression of non-whites. In doing this, Glasgow points to the fact that racial difference rather than gender or class difference remains the main obstacle that prevents the “racial other” from accessing his rights. More importantly, non-whites in Glasgow novels are subjected to the extreme practices of white ideology, such as disenfranchisement, segregation, lynching, and wrongful imprisonment and killing. Consequently, Glasgow inverts the traditional connotations of black and white; while blackness is employed as a space for contemplation and reflection on white matters, whiteness is associated with violence and destruction. In its analysis of the role of non-whites in Glasgow’s narrative, my thesis has deconstructed whiteness and revealed its negative impact on non-whites and whites themselves. I have followed in my analysis the basic principles of whiteness studies summed up by Eric Kaufmann: “a focus on the previously neglected contours of the majority white group. ... a treatment of the American past that emphasizes the oppression experienced by those

⁴ Ibid., p. 204.

deemed to be ‘non-white’ rather than the myth of American universalism. ... and a shared constructivist approach to white identity that focuses on shifts in the definition of whiteness across time and place.”⁵

Kaufmann also argues that the South, “with its frontier narrative and rural-Protestant symbolism,” stressed middle and upper-class white Anglo-Saxon Protestants as its dominant social group.⁶ Evidence of the dominance of White Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture is evidenced through the popularity of expressions southerners used to differentiate themselves from non-WASPs. According to Kaufmann, “terms like ‘American’, ‘old American’, ‘native American’, ‘Yankee’ or ‘Protestant’ were at least as common as ‘white’ – especially north of the Mason and Dixon line.”⁷ He concludes by emphasising the importance of studying the impact of the dominant ethnic identity rather than racial difference in a particular society as it offers more explanations to its established social distinctions. In her turn, Glasgow, in both her fiction and non-fiction, distinguishes between a southern regional experience and a national one. She criticises the creation of homogeneous identity in American literature as the only American identity, and she refuses the equation of Americanism with nationalism as a whitewashing of a more complex and diverse southern character. She argues that literature dealing with distinct southern issues would not be less American: “I believe that America, if not the didactic term ‘Americanism,’ is big enough to include the [South’s] diverse qualities”. She champions novelists, who in their portrayal of the region, “recoiled from the uniform concrete surface of an industrialized and democratized south.” The strict and confining definition of Americanism which is inspired by white principles became for Glasgow a “menace, not only to freedom of thought, but to beauty and pleasure and picturesque living”, instrumental in refining southern culture.⁸ To focus on southern history and culture was for Glasgow a way to fight against a homogenised American whiteness that championed materialism and race-bound democracy. Thus, she focuses her criticism on gender and class-bound southern whiteness, which, while solidifying national

⁵ Eric Kaufmann, “The Dominant Ethnic Moment towards the Abolition of ‘Whiteness’?” in *Ethnicities*, 6. 2 (2006), 234.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 240.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 235.

⁸ Ellen Glasgow, “The Novel in the South,” in *Ellen Glasgow’s Reasonable Doubts: A Collection of Her Writings*, ed. Julius Rowan Raper (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), pp. 78-9.

concepts of non-whites as non-citizens, challenges the concept that to be an American means to be white and that whiteness unites all white groups.

Similarly, I highlight in my thesis the southern setting, and I prioritise it over the national context. A significant factor in determining this thesis's primary resources is the critical periods in southern history they cover and which became landmarks in defining southern culture: the early Colonialism, the antebellum and postbellum South, Reconstruction and Redemption, and the economic and social changes at the turn of the century. The contemporary social dilemmas Glasgow's characters deal with, including the dominance of aristocratic traditions, the neglect of class warfare, the objectification of women, and the oppression of non-whites, are fundamentally the tragic consequences of accommodating slavery as the South's "peculiar institution". However, Glasgow's white characters are not confused by the standards of whiteness that emphasise racial difference, placing whites against blacks. What they find more difficult is how they are culturally racialised in a society, which through its obsession with keeping the dominance of middle and upper-class southern values, let them occupy the same marginalised position with non-white groups.

A possible direction for future scholarship on Glasgow and whiteness might trace the relation between her fiction and southern culture, which optimises the social principles of middle and upper-class White Anglo-Saxon Protestants. While this study points out how these traditions influence gender and class hierarchies, further research could explore how the same values determine the South's discourse of other social elements such as religion, ethnicity, nationality and citizenship. For example, I find that Glasgow's early novels such as *The Descendant* (1897), *Life and Gabriella* (1916), and *The Builders* (1919) constitute an excellent resource for analysing Glasgow's racial messages. Readers of these novels can identify how their racial constructions are organised around national codes criticising immigration, entitlement to welfare, and the South's involvement in World War One. A relatively recent work that approaches whiteness in Glasgow's work by paying attention to the South's historical and regional context is Izabela Hopkins's essay "Passing Place, or the Elusive Spaces of Southern Whiteness in Thomas Nelson Page's *Red Rock* and Ellen Glasgow's *The Deliverance*" (2014). Hopkins moves beyond whiteness's opposition between white and black and focuses on analysing the white construct in the post-Reconstruction South. She suggests that "the notion of place — in historical, cultural, and regional terms" influences "both the conceptions of the Southern variety of

whiteness and its literary reconstructions.”⁹ Consequently, the Blakes in *The Deliverance* are portrayed more as misplaced whites “because of the social upheavals attendant to Reconstruction and because they are caught in the inertia of collective memory which fixes them in socially and historically predetermined spaces and against which rebellion is futile.”¹⁰ The abstract principles of whiteness that endorsed aristocratic heritage become tangible and are redefined through the physical place and time as new classes, like the Fletchers, come into possession of wealth. Works such as Hopkins’s can form a source for researchers interested in how the culture of a particular region, like the South in the United States, can be incorporated into the analysis of whiteness as a limited and contradictory ideology.

Lucinda H. MacKethan spots Glasgow’s recognition of white hegemony in *The Battle-Ground* and *Vein of Iron*. In these novels, Glasgow created white female characters as an “indictment” of “the system” that “sanctioned the victimization of women, blacks, and indeed all those not empowered by white male privilege.”¹¹ Glasgow was an upper-class southerner who maintained a sustained critique of southern white attitudes towards women and poor whites. She also made explicit how her white characters, through the process of self-realisation, make use of a racial identity that provides them with an individuality unavailable to non-whites, who remain mainly serviceable and representative. Her work shows an example of a white woman writer who succeeded most of the time in reaching beyond her region, position, and race. Literary studies that combine whiteness studies and feminist reading of white women writers contribute to the increasing body of a “white” feminist criticism that expands the critique of gender discrimination to include interrogation of the racial origin of discriminatory ideologies in the fiction of white women. These studies provide a solution to the problem of white privilege and exclusion that faced early white feminist criticism that was solely concerned with “the plight of a select group of college-educated, middle- and upper-class, married white women.”¹²

⁹ Izabela Hopkins, “Passing Place, or the Elusive Spaces of Southern Whiteness in Thomas Nelson Page’s *Red Rock* and Ellen Glasgow’s *The Deliverance*,” in *The Mississippi Quarterly*, 67. 2 (2014), 213.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 218.

¹¹ Lucinda H. MacKethan, “Restoring Order: Matriarchal Design In *The Battle-Ground* and *Vein of Iron*,” in *Ellen Glasgow: New Perspectives*, ed. Dorothy M. Scura (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995), p. 91.

¹² bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* 2nd edn (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p. 1.

Future studies could also incorporate whiteness theories to provide more understanding of Glasgow's real-life performances. Godbold was not the only critic who misunderstood Glasgow's public appearance as an embarrassing and even disastrous one. Godbold details in his biography Glasgow's appearance on a specific occasion:

At the coming-out ball in Richmond for her niece, Ellen appeared as Madame Paradise of Williamsburg, friend of Samuel Johnson. Her dress of brocaded silk with flowers on a cream-colored background and real lace in front was designed by a local artist, Margaret Dashiell. A Negro girl was hired to follow her as her slave and hold her hat and prayer book."¹³

Godbold follows his narrative by criticising what he considers Glasgow's wish to imitate the living tradition of the old South without bearing in mind the ugly racist truths that lay behind its gracious exterior.

However, a second reading that includes Glasgow's understanding of her whiteness may reach a different conclusion. Glasgow here represents her insight into southern identity. Southern society is dominated by the values of its aristocracy, which in turn remains attached to its slavery heritage. Lucy Ludwell Paradise, to which the quotation refers, comes from plantation aristocracy; her family reigned over the social and political life in Virginia for three generations during the eighteenth century. In this culture, feminine identity is embodied through its association with racial purity, "the cream colour", charm and beauty, "the brocaded silk, the artificial flower, the lace", and Christian morality, "the prayer book". Finally and most importantly, southern identity, as essentially white, demands the presence of the non-white for it to be defined, hence the black girl, and it defines its relation to the non-white in oppressive terms for "the girl had to follow Glasgow's steps". Glasgow can be read, instead of being a superficial elitist, as attempting a social critique of southern white identity that still keeps its extreme forms of classism, sexism, and racism in the modern twentieth century.¹⁴ I have stated in my introduction that

¹³ E. Stanly Godbold, Jr., *Ellen Glasgow and the Woman Within* (North Carolina: Louisiana State University Press, 1972), p. 183.

¹⁴ My belief that a characterisation more sensitive to the issues of race, gender, and class about Glasgow would influence the critical judgements of her fiction corresponds with Goodman's statement. Goodman claims that her biography focused on areas neglected by previous scholars who wrote about Glasgow and her novels; in "my own 'version' or vision of Glasgow's life", Goodman maintains, "I have used a variety of approaches, from psychological to historical, whatever has worked." She then calls for biographers to take advantage of important events in Glasgow's life because "Glasgow's life reflects one of Glasgow's basic premises: that life and art intertwine to form a single strand." See *Ellen Glasgow: A Biography*, p. 5.

Glasgow's contemporary critics mainly viewed her as an upper-class white woman who was more enthusiastic to criticise southern patriarchy and capitalism than its racial system. In doing so, they have missed the chance to appreciate the depth of self-reflection on white identity within her novels. The whiteness that Glasgow's characters reflect is the result of Glasgow's self-awareness of the moral shortfalls of her racial heritage. Glasgow establishes for whiteness an unfortunate course in which it starts as a homogeneous and normalised state but shifts and transforms into a contradictory and limited ideology that harms whites at the same time it reproduces and perpetuates racism against non-whites. Both Glasgow and her marginalised white characters recognise the authority of whiteness's values over marginalised whites and ideologically relinquish this authority in their attempt to gain social equality. The possibilities of this white transcendence for Glasgow's white characters and readers are as open as the endings of her novels. As Glasgow's white characters keep on negotiating their identities on the shifting grounds of race, gender, and class, her readers can always explore more ways in which whiteness construct both these fictional lives and the realities of their own lives.

Past critics had implied that Glasgow succeeded in highlighting the problems created at the moment of defining what are or should be southern women's roles within and outside familial structures while projecting a more conservative viewpoint on southern classism and racism. Matthews for example argues that Glasgow sought primarily to indict male policing of female desire in *In This Our Life*. However, considering the generational, ethical, gender, and racial attitudes in the novel reveals a more urgent issue: the threat the Old South's man poses still to its women and non-whites. Indeed, when the range of Glasgow's artistic politics is considered, one might well challenge the longstanding assumptions about her investment in the Old South's traditions. Carol Manning righteously accredit the work of Glasgow when she argues that "the Southern Renaissance began for women well before World War I" because they "encountered intense cultural tension decades earlier".¹⁵ Jones echoes Manning's sentiments in her survey of Glasgow's fiction as someone whose writing promoted the "national needs for a new gender for women".¹⁶ Jones and Manning anticipate the

¹⁵ Carol Manning, "The Real Beginning of the Southern Renaissance," in *The Female Tradition in Southern Literature*, ed. Carol Manning (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), p. 40.

¹⁶ Anne Goodwyn Jones, "The Work of Gender in the Southern Renaissance," in *Southern Writers and Their World*, ed. Christopher Morris and Steven Rienhardt (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 1996), p. 54.

current need to broaden earlier mappings of the origins of the southern renaissance by highlighting the self-conscious dismantling of southern myths among earlier white southern women writers like Glasgow. That Jones and Manning do not extend Glasgow's negotiations of the myth of southern womanhood across broader issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality indicates that more work remains to be done toward recovering her cultural insight before, within, and beyond the birth of the South's modern literary movement.

This study focuses on a writer who, apart from her racial identity, is a descendant of slaveholders and a woman born of the privileged class in the American South. I have argued for a revaluation of Glasgow's cultural work to recognise the resonating effect of her fictional speculation of southern myths. Her status distinctively positioned her as both an agent and target of change committed to engaging this dialectic in her writing. Glasgow asserts the authority of the myths; more important is how she shifts the readers' focus from the constructed traditions to the reality of their impact. She appears to have strategically deployed these myths to respond to changes taking place in the South's cultural architecture. I have made use of whiteness and cultural theories throughout, expressing my thoughts about her instinct toward racial association and disassociation. Glasgow's both intimate and material expressions of whiteness could offer a yet more nuanced perspective on her work. Glasgow's subtle, though persistent, narrative strand throughout the novels of study shows the need to re-examine the cultural politics which dated before the 1920s southern renaissance and initiated new impulses among southern writers "to look at and within themselves and their region with critical discernment".¹⁷ Rather than pursuing the single theme of the racial divide, current readers of Glasgow should face the interpretive challenges that extend from her potentially radical constructions of whiteness. Moreover, in remaining committed to this tale, they need to assess Glasgow's narratives, in all their multiple registers, that support and sustain that ideology and others that repudiate it and respond to them in relevant terms. In doing so, they can reach the conclusion that Glasgow's work resembles that of current white southern writers in its authentic knowledge of the South's power relations that have given to its gender, class, and racial restrictions an enduring authority.

¹⁷ Edgar MacDonald, "The Ambivalent Heart: Literary Revival in Richmond," in *The History of Southern Literature*, ed. Louis Rubin, Blyden Jackson, Rayburn Moore, Lewis Simpson, and Thomas Young (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), p. 264.

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