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IMPOSSIBLE WHITENESS:

RACE, GENDER, AND AMERICAN IDENTITY IN EARLY TWENTIETH-

CENTURY AMERICAN LITERATURE

by

Tarah Ann Demant

A dissertation presented to the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Washington University in
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requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

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Introduction

The End of White America

We have a great desire to be supremely American.

-Lothrop Stoddard
Quoting President Calvin Coolidge

Upon the election of Barack Hussein Obama as the 44th President of the United States, the cover of *The Atlantic* featured a picture of the president-elect staring solemnly at the reader and an accompanying caption over his profile in big, bold, black letters: “THE END OF WHITE AMERICA?” Race¹ had certainly permeated the campaign that ended in Obama’s election, but, perhaps unsurprisingly, national discussions of race had side-stepped the issue of whiteness and focused instead on the question of Obama’s blackness: Was Obama too black to be elected? Was he not black enough? Was he black at all? Was his blackness a major factor in the way he would govern? Was he even, in fact, American? All these questions speak to the continued relevance of race in America (despite simultaneous claims that Obama’s candidacy and eventual victory somehow signaled a “post-racial” America),² as well as an underlying bias that understands non-

¹ Though I do not put “race” in quotations marks here or throughout this study, I understand race as a socially and politically constructed category, one that could very well be encapsulated in quotes to emphasize its constructed and varying nature. Further, I also understand the categories of differentiated races, both historical (many of which we no longer considered races) and those we use still today, as cultural constructions, “designations” that are “coined for the sake of grouping and separating peoples along lines of presumed difference” (Jacobson 4). Additionally, race and the categories considered therein are not fixed even throughout the period covered in this study. Any quotations marks remaining for this lexical set is to show a specific word or phrase is taken from the quoted text, or to emphasize a certain author’s specific reference to a word or category (e.g. “Hindoos,” “Native-born,” or “Native” Americans [referring to white Americans of certain lineage] for example).

² For the question of Obama’s racial position as being “black enough” or “too black” see Gwen Ifill, *The Breakthrough: Politics and Race in the Age of Obama* (2009), pp. 52-62, 67; and Harvey Wingfield and Joe R. Feagin, *Yes We Can? White Racial Framing and the 2008 Presidential Campaign* (2010), pp. 31-49. For the question of Obama not being black, see Debra J. Dickerson, “Colorblind” (2007). For an overview of the claims that Obama is not American, see: David Freddoso, *The Case Against Barack*

whites as raced while implicitly understanding whites as lacking race (Obama's rival John McCain did not bear the parallel burden of commentary fretting: Is he too white or not white enough? Will his whiteness dramatically affect the way he governs?).

This invisibility of whiteness, as Richard Dyer notes in his seminal study of whiteness, *White* (1997), is central to maintaining whiteness as “normal” and non-whiteness as abhorrent and in need of investigation. In such, the focus on Obama's race as opposed to the race of his white opponent is not surprising as, “[t]here is no more powerful position than that of being ‘just’ human. The claim to power is the claim to speak for the commonality of humanity. Raced people can't do that—they can only speak for their race” (2). This is not to say that whiteness is not a central concern in our discourses, or in this election specifically, in fact, “for most of the time white people speak about nothing but white people, it's just that we couch it in terms of ‘people’ in general” (3). The political commentary and second-guessing about the role of race in the campaign revealed this underlying bias as discussions of race during the election season had largely skirted the underlying and unspoken white anxiety that lay at the root of this “suddenly” relevant question of race during the election. With the election of the first non-white president, the cover of the *Atlantic* finally asked the question implicit in all the campaign race-talk: what does this mean for American whiteness?

To make sense of this question, the author of the cover-story, Hua Hsu, opens the discussion in a somewhat surprising way: he turns to fiction, specifically a novel at the

Obama: The Unlikely Rise and Unexamined Agenda of the Media's Favorite Candidate (2008), p. 72. For an overview of the debate of America as “post-racial” see again: *Yes We Can?*, pp. 201-44.

center of the American literary canon—the *The Great Gatsby* (1925).³ The article on American whiteness in a post-Obama nation opens quoting Tom Buchanan:

“Civilization’s going to pieces,” he remarks. He is in polite company, gathered with friends around a bottle of wine in the late-afternoon sun, chatting and gossiping. “I’ve gotten to be a terrible pessimist about things. Have you read *The Rise of the Colored* [sic] *Empires* by this man Goddard?” They hadn’t. “Well, it’s a fine book, and everybody ought to read it. The idea is if we don’t look out the white race will be—will be utterly submerged.” (46)

Hsu goes on in “The End of White America?” to outline these long-standing white American race-anxieties and fear of white racial loss. These anxieties may be resurfacing in the early years of this century, but they have their roots deep in the early years of the last century. What Hsu calls the “racial paranoia” of Tom Buchanan was rooted, after all, not in the pages of fiction, but in the mainstream politics and science of early twentieth-century America (48). Tom is only a mouthpiece for the theories of white apocalypse that he has read about in *The Rise of the Coloured Empires*, a thinly-veiled reference to the immensely popular *The Rising Tide of Color* (1920) by eugenicist Lothrop Stoddard who warned that the increasing number of (inferior) non-white races meant the dwindling prevalence and influence of the white race.

Nearly a century after Stoddard’s *Rising Tide* and Tom’s fear of white racial loss, the same alarm is being sounded. What happens, Hsu asks, “when the fears of Lothrop Stoddard and Tom Buchanan are realized, and white people actually become the

³ As Hsu argues, *Gatsby* is almost inescapable to the America reader: it’s “a book that nearly everyone who passed through the American education system is compelled to read at least once (46).

minority?” (48). In demographic terms, such fears will be realized within fifty years (and probably even sooner), and in cultural terms, Hsu argues, such fears have already become a reality: “where culture is concerned [...‘white America’ is] all but finished” (48).⁴ Instead, thanks in large part to America’s legacy as “a nation of immigrants”—as the common phrase goes—American culture is now, and will continue to be more, “multiethnic, multicolored” (48). This inevitability of this white failure is, of course, exactly what Lothrop Stoddard and Tom Buchanan portended, and the election of America’s first non-white president “is just the most startling manifestation of a larger trend: the gradual erosion of ‘whiteness’ as the touchstone of what it means to be American” (46).

Considering the warning of race-thinkers like Stoddard, it is not surprising that an article on contemporary American whiteness would begin by harkening to the era in which *The Rising Tide of Color* was published. After all, at the turn of the twentieth century, a sharp rise in immigration had intensified and inflamed long-held racist attitudes toward non-whites in America. Congress responded with a series of restrictive immigration acts; President Theodore Roosevelt wrote letters to the nation warning against falling birth-rates among “old-stock” Americans; eugenicists (among them Stoddard and his mentor Madison Grant) responded with titles that warned of *The Passing of the Great Race*, *The Rising Tide of Color*, and the need to invest in *The Re-*

⁴ “Culture,” Hsu argues, “is being remade in the image of white America’s multiethnic, multicolored heirs” (48). Hsu is interested largely in the cultural, rather than political or civil, ramifications of this demographic shift—the question, as Hsu puts it, is what American culture will look like when whiteness “no longer defines the mainstream” (49). While most of Hsu’s article is a measured consideration of what it means to have “white” culture, and what a more multicultural America may look and sound like, Hsu’s piece sidesteps the questions of white political and civil dominance that have accompanied white cultural norms, and I would hesitate to agree that even with demographic shifts that dominant culture is not white, nor that those who are white do not enjoy the privileges of dominant-culture standards even as such things as musical tastes may shift.

forging of America. An increasingly narrow definition of whiteness sprang from these discussions of immigration and American identity. As historian Matthew Frye Jacobson details in *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (1998), there was a “fracturing of whiteness into a hierarchy of plural and scientifically determined white races” that celebrated Anglo-Saxon and Nordic superiority (8). In essence, whiteness as a racial category increasingly became the focal point of contested cultural and political debate.

Despite Hsu’s later contention that *Gatsby* “doesn’t gloss as a book on racial anxiety [because] it’s too busy exploring a different set of anxieties” (46), it should not be a surprise that any discussion on white American racial identity root itself specifically in American literature. Books like *The Great Gatsby* don’t “gloss” as books on racial anxiety because, much like the political commentators who worried over Obama’s race while ignoring that of his white opponent, we have been trained as readers to see whiteness as invisible, which is to say, not to see whiteness at all. Yet, despite this hitherto virtual invisibility of whiteness, American literature—particularly of the early twentieth century—is an important vehicle for representing the ambiguity of American racial identity and the challenge and ultimate impossibility of being white.

Although contemporary scholarship recognizes the importance of race in American literature, I argue for increased attention to the racial category of whiteness specifically and show white authors as being actively invested in the production of whiteness as a category of racial and national identity. I explore the evolving understanding of whiteness in American literature with an interest in establishing the historical, social, and gendered contexts of its production and I highlight the ways gender,

particularly, undermines stable understandings of American whiteness. As such, the literature of the early twentieth century becomes a meditation on the consequences of this national discourse of self-defeating American racial epistemology and this project traces this lineage and asks us to re-think the American canon as consciously engaged in the dialectic of American whiteness.

The anxiety of whiteness is a long-standing American tradition. In Benjamin Franklin's 1751 *Observations Concerning the Increase of Mankind, Peopling of Countries, &c.*, Franklin wonders:

why should the *Palatine Boors* be suffered to swarm into our settlements, and by herding together establish their languages and manners to the exclusion of ours? Why should *Pennsylvania*, founded by the *English*, become a colony of *Aliens*, who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them, and will never adopt our language or customs, any more than they can acquire our complexion? (*emphasis in original* 224)

Here the racial difference of German immigrants is evident to the American viewer in various ways: country of origin, phenotypic difference of complexion, linguistic separation, and cultural foreignness each and all establish the immigrants as racially different from the “purely white people” of America (224).⁵ Any study of whiteness in

⁵ Franklin's “Observations” was a demography of the thirteen American colonies meant to sway the British to alter colonial policies. It outlined colonial population trends and argued against the importation of slaves, heavy taxes, and barriers to trade. Franklin's understanding of American whiteness is rooted in his sense of white Americans as being racially English, and since “the number of purely white people in the world is proportionally very small” (224), Franklin argues against policies that would threaten American whiteness. Yet Franklin did not see America as only white; instead, he argues against the importation of slaves and immigrants so that “the complexion of my Country” can stay a “lovely white and red” (224), indicating his inclusion of Native Americans as part of the American racial makeup.

American literature could well start as early as Franklin's *Observations* and take us into the present, spanning the geography of the early colonies to the furthest American frontier. Whiteness frames the incestuous white home of Edgar Allen Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher* (1839) and is the moral compass for the civilized (and civilizing) white gold-hunter on the savage Alaskan frontier of Jack London's *White Fang* (1906). Whiteness wanders from Nella Larsen's *Passing* (1929) to Phillip Roth's *The Human Stain* (2000). Whiteness is in the literature of America's cities, countryside, and even waterways: it floats on the raft down the Mississippi and it swims with the white whale.⁶

Within what I would call a national literary obsession with whiteness, I locate my argument in the opening decades of the twentieth century in an historical moment in which whiteness is being obsessively and very publicly discussed, parceled, distilled (then hyper-distilled), and redefined, and this dissertation seeks to re-historicize American authors Edith Wharton, Anzia Yeziarska, and F. Scott Fitzgerald. In this sense, this project is an historical recovery of Wharton, Yeziarska, and Fitzgerald, who highlight varying aspects of the national racial debate and chart the rise and eventual decline of a "scientifically" refined and nationally exclusive American whiteness.

I locate the crux of this discussion largely in the American northeast, with a particular reliance on New York as a site of racial and national anxiety. In many ways, New York and New England more broadly make sense as a starting point in the debate over American whiteness in the early twentieth century. The leading voices in nativism, eugenics, and anti-immigration were situated in the northeast: statesman Henry Cabot Lodge was from Massachusetts as was Lothrop Stoddard; both Theodore Roosevelt and

⁶ See: Valerie Babb's chapter "Of Whales and Whiteness" in *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature and Culture* (1998).

eugenicist Madison Grant were from New York City. Likewise, Edith Wharton split her American hometowns between Lenox, Massachusetts and New York City. Anzia Yezierska landed on Ellis Island and moved directly to Hester Street in Manhattan. And, in much the same way as Gatsby makes himself an Oxford man, F. Scott Fitzgerald made himself a Princeton man who then moved to New York City to begin his career. I focus on these white authors in an effort to fill a critical gap that has largely limited inquiries of race to non-white authors, or, when it has considered race in the work of white authors has implicitly reinforced the invisibility of whiteness by concentrating on issues of non-whiteness.

Yet, while these distinctions of geography, nation, and race are convenient—even necessary—to focus our work as scholars, they are, fundamentally, also false: Wharton lived in Paris; Fitzgerald was from the Midwest; and as a Jewish immigrant from Russian-Poland, Yezierska would not have been considered white in the context of the 1920s New York about which she writes. These three authors even complicate a simplistic understanding of American Literature itself: Yezierska was born outside of America, and while Fitzgerald did some writing and living abroad, Wharton did the majority of her writing and living outside the United States. What's more, the literature itself crosses borders both literal and metaphorical: Wharton's characters seem to have the world as their playground—living in America, venturing to Europe, and vacationing in the West Indies; Yezierska's characters live in the shadow of the specter of the Old World they left behind; Fitzgerald's characters spend entire novels across the Atlantic. Despite—or perhaps because of—this border crossing, each of these authors pinpoints an anxiety of white American identity, tracing its lineage, marking its borders, and charting

its decline. I deconstruct the various ways in which whiteness is being defined, legally, culturally, and in the marketplace, and the ways in which Wharton, Fitzgerald, and Yeziarska reveal these standards of whiteness and the inevitable failure of such racial and national refinement. While eugenicists and nativists warned of the need to increasingly restrict understandings of whiteness to protect a supremely American race, what these authors show is that such rarefaction of whiteness undermines the very standard it seeks to protect by making whiteness impossible.

This introduction traces the dialogues of early twentieth-century American nativism, eugenicist theory, and the development of a national whiteness in congruence with the changing reality of America's racial landscape due in large part to shifts in immigration trends. Moreover, I highlight the ways in which questions of gender particularly complicate these pressured understandings of whiteness. With race, gender is an integral component of American identity. I outline how Wharton, Yeziarska, and Fitzgerald each scrutinize contemporary racial dialogues and reveal the challenges presented by ideologies of nation and race in which gender dynamics resurface and provide increasing complications to and in American whiteness. Where Wharton offers a critique of whiteness and Yeziarska offers a strategy around whiteness, Fitzgerald offers a final lament for the failure of whiteness as an exclusive, sustainable American identity. Seen together, these authors chart a growing disillusionment with and the final failure of whiteness in early twentieth-century American fiction. I situate these texts theoretically in the burgeoning field of whiteness studies and the limited, but growing, literary critical engagement with theories of whiteness. In this we see not only that Wharton, Yeziarska,

and Fitzgerald are actively participating and even shaping such debates, but that they are representative of a growing need to address whiteness in American literature.

Our National Existence: The Construction of American Whiteness

The authors I consider in this study all wrote during times of heightened nativist rhetoric and discourses of Anglo-Saxon superiority that were fraught with anti-immigration sentiments, racism, and fears of white race suicide. Though racial tensions between black and white Americans had in no way disappeared, white Americans became increasingly concerned with a “new” race problem from foreign shores. Between 1890 and 1910 particularly, millions of new immigrants entered the country (Cott 357), immigrants who were increasingly not from Western or Northern Europe, but from Eastern and Southern Europe, bringing with them the huddled masses of what were classified as “less-desirable” races. Public outcry rose against what one U.S. anti-immigration group called “The Evil Effects of Unrestricted Immigration” (qtd. Higham 40). In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, editorialists targeted these immigrant populations for specific, hostile attack. Immigrants were considered the “enemy forces,” threatening America with “an invasion of venomous reptiles.” They were dehumanized as the castoffs of Europe’s “inhuman rubbish.” The threat posed by the immigrant was summed up by one writer in characteristically catastrophic tones: “Our National Existence, and, as well, our National and social institutions are at stake” (qtd. Higham 55).

The influx of immigrants at the turn of the century was accompanied by an increasingly nativist revision of race. As John Higham details in *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (1988), there were two primary strands of

“race-thinking” that had come out of the nineteenth century: one was derived from political and literary sources, and assumed a nationalistic form in an American “Anglo-Saxon tradition” (133); the second grew from the increasingly detailed work of naturalists who were beginning to systematically catalogue and categorize groups of people into racial “types” (134). By the end of the nineteenth and through the course of the twentieth century, “the separation between the two streams of race-thinking gradually and partially broke down. Racial science increasingly intermingled with racial nationalism [...and there was a] fusion—and confusion—of natural history with national history, of ‘scientific’ with social ideas” (134). Soon, pseudo-scientific work began to justify Anglo-Saxon superiority (already implicit in far-reaching anti-immigrant sentiment). Two years before he would become a senator from Massachusetts, for instance, then Representative Henry Cabot Lodge published a “scientific” analysis of the “distribution of ability” in the American population, a study whose findings confirmed the inferiority of every non-Anglo group in America. Lodge’s work blurred the distinctions of the political and scientific. As a staunch opponent of immigration, Lodge used his study to warn that inferior groups (ever increasing in number through unchecked immigration) threatened “a great a perilous change in the very fabric of our race” and if action was not taken, America’s character would be “bred out” (qtd. Higham 142).

The notion that Anglo-Saxons in America could be “bred out” was of grave concern to Cabot’s close friend Theodore Roosevelt, whose preaching on the perils of race suicide throughout his political career provides a clear example of the centrality of gender inherent in debates about race and immigration. In 1907, “A Letter from President Roosevelt on Race Suicide” explained the problem: the “American family of

native American descent has so few children that the birth-rate has fallen below the death-rate. This, of course, means race suicide” (550). Roosevelt’s focus on breeding brought particular pressure to bear on “native American” women whose most important role (and function) was ensuring race survival. Roosevelt’s use of “native American” in his warnings against race suicide is essential to the racial understanding of Roosevelt and the ever-growing pool of nativists, eugenicists, politicians, and statesmen who sought to define, specialize, and defend white American identity. Labeling those of Anglo-Saxon or Nordic stock as “native” Americans helped eugenicists define any threat to Anglo-Saxon identity (and racial purity) as a threat to American identity (Herman 181), thus perpetuating the ideology that “native” (and legitimate) American identity was synonymous with Anglo-Saxon heritage.⁷ In a letter one year later to his successor William Howard Taft, outgoing President Roosevelt pressed the importance of preserving this Anglo-Saxon/American heritage:

Among the various legacies of trouble which I leave you there is none as to which I more earnestly hope for your thought and care [than this one...] there is good reason to fear that unless present tendencies are checked your children and mine will see the day when our population is stationary, and so far as the native stock is concerned is dying out. (1433-4)

For Roosevelt, and for an increasing number of Americans, Anglo-Saxon bloodlines were not simply a hereditary family past, but a national race future.

⁷ The irony of the label “native American” for Anglo-Saxon white Americans, a term which became popular in the early 1890s on the heels of the capture of Geronimo, the death of Sitting Bull, the battle of Wounded Knee, and the “closing” of the frontier, seems to have been lost on the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century whites who were using this term—without irony—to describe themselves.

In the opening decades of the twentieth century, multiple social scientists produced popular treatises that lent a biological explanation to the foreign peril those like Lodge and Roosevelt had already sensed, and legitimized fears of white racial collapse. These treatises helped solidify nativist claims of Anglo-Saxon superiority and fueled fear of the racial Other. The first major edition of such work was Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), which warned of the crumbling of racial purity (the foundation of national and cultural identity). Grant divided the Caucasoid races into hierarchal sub-categories and, by appropriating popular Darwinian and Spencerian ideas of evolution,⁸ Grant's scientific racism attacked the Alpine, Mediterranean, and Jewish hybrids that had "invaded" America and that "threaten to extinguish the old stock unless it reasserts its class and racial pride by shutting them out" (Higham 157). Grant fervently warned against racial intermingling, under-breeding by the "higher" race, and, perhaps most importantly, was the first to designate the "Nordic race" as the "white man par excellence" (Grant 127). As Jacobson argues, "Grant's views on the hierarchy of whiteness are highly symptomatic; they not only influenced debates over immigration and restriction, but also influenced and reflected popular understandings of peoplehood and diversity" (82). In *The Passing of the Great Race*, "the old Anglo-Saxon tradition had finally emerged [...] as a systematic, comprehensive world view" (Higham 157). Grant gave a scientific basis for American white identity to be rarified as Anglo-Saxon/Nordic identity and, in order to guard this white supremacy, provided the impetus to limit political and social access to "non-white" immigrant groups.

⁸ Herbert Spencer's *Principles of Biology* (1864) and Darwin's *The Origin of Species* (1859) and especially *The Decent of Man* (1871) were widely (mis)appropriated in race-thinking in America and used to prove Anglo-Saxon superiority and substantiate the threat of the "lesser" races.

Madison Grant was the “high Priest of racialism in America” (qtd. Singerman 114). But if Grant served as the prophet of Anglo-Saxon American whiteness, his leading disciple Lothrop Stoddard made it American gospel. In 1920, Scribner’s published Stoddard’s *The Rising Tide of Color*, and though Grant’s work had enjoyed popularity among influential people, Stoddard’s work was the first to have broad mass appeal. “As much as any single person,” Thomas F. Gossett argues in *Race: The History of An Idea in America* (1963), Lothrop Stoddard “alarmed the nation over the perils of race” (390). *Rising Tide* warned of the danger of the “colored world” (the “yellow,” “brown,” “black,” and “red” races) that would soon overwhelm the white world in immigration and birthrates if left unchecked (9). The colored world, argued Stoddard, was on the rise and on the move, soon to overrun the white races. Stoddard’s emphasis on the danger of immigrants to white (meaning Anglo-Saxon) America helped fuel anti-immigrant sentiments throughout the nation. America’s continually hostile attitudes toward immigrants and immigration can be traced in the increasingly restrictive immigration laws of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 gave way to the much more broadly exclusive Emergency Quota Act of 1921 that limited immigration of ethnic groups to 3% of their current U.S. population. This act purposefully favored Anglo immigrants whose populations were already much higher in the United States and sought to forestall the more undesirable races (like those from Eastern and Southern Europe). Yet only three years later, the Immigration Act of 1924 (the Johnson-Reed Act which included the National Origins Act and Asian Exclusion Act) was passed to supplant the Emergency Quota Act, considered not restrictive enough. The 1924 Immigration Act dramatically decreased the numbers of

allowable immigrants, specifically non-Anglo immigrants, and marked what Jacobson calls the “high-water mark of the regime of Anglo-Saxon or Nordic supremacy” (Jacobson 93). With the help of such eugenicists as Grant and Stoddard, “White supremacy was becoming [...] the American Way” (Higham 170).

Central to such anti-immigration sentiments and nativist protectionism was, of course, the assumption that America’s national and cultural identity was fundamentally white (specifically Anglo-Saxon and Nordic). In *To Be Suddenly White: Literary Realism and Passing* (2006), Steven J. Belluscio points to the American immigration policy as the prime culprit that “fostered a primarily Anglo-Saxon conception of America” (31). Yet whether such restrictive immigration policies were causal or rather symptomatic of this Anglo-Saxonizing of American identity, “whiteness [was increasingly] a prerequisite to American citizenship” (23). In his 1927 *Re-Forging America: The Story of our Nationhood*, Stoddard addressed this connection directly: “No question has been more beclouded by abstract theorizing than that of the relation between nationality and race” (255). The connection was deeply justified, argued Stoddard, to obtain the “instinctive community feeling” necessary for “a true national life” (255). At the root of the connection was:

like-mindedness which is necessary for mutual agreement and harmonious co-operation. But to carry the matter still farther, like-mindedness springs from similarity of temperament, which, in turn, depends on similarity in blood [... This is the] connecting link between nationality and race.
(emphasis in original 256)

Not surprisingly, Stoddard's emphasis that such national similarity was "in blood" relied on familiar tropes of biological essentialism. Stoddard was certainly not alone in his emphasis on the need for like-mindedness in national identity, or that such like-mindedness was to be found amongst those of the same race. While nearly opposite to Stoddard in political ideology, Horace Kallen, a Jewish-American philosopher and champion of ethnic diversity and cultural pluralism, had earlier noted in his 1915 essay "Democracy Versus the Melting-Pot: A Study of American Nationality" that before new waves of immigration, "the whites were *like-minded*. They were possessed of ethnic and cultural unity" and it was this "homogeneity of the people, their like-mindedness" that had bound them together (*emphasis in original* 69).

To obtain such like-mindedness in national identity, Stoddard pointed to the need for racial unity. Stoddard's previous "research" (including his enormously influential *Rising Tide*) had convinced him, and many Americans, of "the need for a racial basis to true nationhood" (*Re-Forging* 256). Since America was founded "by a blend of closely related North European stocks" (256), this racial basis and true nationhood was, argued Stoddard, logically located in Anglo-Saxon and Nordic identity. Indeed, the basis of American identity was this white identity, and America's future depended on maintaining this specific whiteness. Stoddard argued that only if "America remains predominantly North European in blood will its institutions, ideals, and culture continue to fit the temperament of its inhabitants—and hence continue to endure" (256). Non-northern-European immigrants could not claim this American identity, and thus, Stoddard noted, the "non-white elements in our population thus constitute a special problem which requires separate treatment" (257)—this "treatment" would grow from America's general

anti-foreign attitudes amplified through specific national stereotypes of ethnic groups (classified as racial groups) like the Italians, Slavs, and Jews, and would be bolstered by the growing ideology of Anglo-Saxon superiority and white, American identity.

As Jacobson rightly notes, “[t]his racial refinement from ‘white’ to ‘Anglo-Saxon’ is neither accidental nor idiosyncratic; rather, it reflects a political revision of whiteness” (80).⁹ This ideology of whiteness was pervasive not only in political and scientific discourses, but also, I will argue, in the literature of the period. Not only is the literature of the early twentieth century aware of this debate, but it actively participates in the discourse of whiteness. The work of Wharton, Yeziarska, and Fitzgerald specifically shows a deep engagement with American whiteness, and a heightened recognition of the gendered and national complications of such racial ideology. This dissertation reveals the shifting terms of whiteness in these authors’ work and charts the anxieties and consequences that arise from yoking American identity to the impermanent and permeable standards of whiteness.

Seeing the Invisible: The Literature of American Whiteness

This national racial debate suggests that not only is whiteness itself a shifting category in America, but that the ways one should (and often must) understand and define race are themselves ephemeral. In my first chapter, I argue that Edith Wharton’s *The Age of Innocence* (1920) exposes the varying—often oppositional—discourses of American whiteness that function independently and simultaneously in the construction of

⁹ Tracing these shifting terms of whiteness is essential to understanding the role of race itself in America. As Michael Omi and Howard Winant note in *Racial Formation in the United States* (1994), “without an awareness that the concept of race is subject to permanent political contestations, it is difficult to recognize the enduring role race plays in the social structure” (vii).

American racial identity. The long arc of Wharton's historical drama offers a lens through which we can see how American whiteness evolved from a more simplistic understanding of non-blackness to a more nuanced, more exclusionary category. In *Age*, Wharton builds on America's nineteenth-century racial legacy as a way of understanding the restrictive consequences of whiteness for a contemporary audience in the early twentieth century. While nativists warned of the need to buttress the walls of whiteness in order to protect "native" Americans from the ill-bred foreign-born, Wharton charts the complicated ways such ideology undermines those who would be white in upper-class New York, and the consequences for those who fall victim to whiteness's simultaneous variability and exclusivity. What's more, Wharton herself provides an elucidative example of the need to re-read texts and authors who have been previously assumed to not "gloss" as being "about race" or even as raced themselves. Despite the healthy amount of biographical information available about Edith Wharton, I reveal the deep gaps in Wharton's biography particularly in her understanding of and relationship to race. Such a re-reading of Wharton reveals the need for critics to re-consider white authors as raced authors, and to recognize, as Wharton herself does, the complicated ways in which whiteness is constructed in American literature.

In Chapter Two, I move to a discussion of the specifically gendered restrictions implicit in American whiteness and argue that Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905) reveals the impossibility of white racial purity for would-be "white" women. I argue against previous readings of *House* that point to the strength of white elite in the novel while positioning the heroine Lily Bart as a paragon of American whiteness. Instead, I show how Anglo-Saxon conceptions of whiteness were unable to adequately account for

identity complications of sex, gender, and sexuality and ultimately undermine the possibility of whiteness for women. What's more, Wharton points to the unfixed and unstable nature of identity itself as a barrier to achieving American whiteness. The inability of lily-white Lily Bart to maintain a stable racial identity (marked in her social rejection and, finally, in her death) and the counter-narrative of the financial and social success of the distasteful Jewish parvenu Simon Rosedale reveal the underlying cracks in the façade of national race stability: whiteness has become so paranoid and insular, so impossible to define or achieve, that it has left itself vulnerable to the ill-bred, foreign, and generally racially undesirable it sought to exclude.

The story of immigrant author Anzia Yezierska in Chapter Three would seem to be the embodiment of just such nativist fears. Yezierska, a Jewish immigrant from Russian-Poland, was hailed as America's "Sweatshop Cinderella" and her public identity as an American success story seems to encapsulate nativist warnings of the rise of the non-white immigrant who is able to claim American identity. Yet despite her well-publicized reputation, the immigrant author Yezierska concedes to pervading sentiments that whiteness (as defined by Anglo-Saxon standards) is intrinsic to American identity, thus excluding the immigrant from either possibility. The alienation from American whiteness that I trace in Yezierska's biography is reflected throughout her work, and I focus on *Arrogant Beggar* (1927) and popular "Americanization" programs designed for immigrant assimilation to show that "immigrant uplift" was underpinned with a specifically Anglo-Saxon understanding of American identity and paradoxically relied on exclusive understandings of American identity while trying to assimilate the immigrant into America. It is exactly because of their reliance on an impossible standard of

American whiteness that these programs inevitably fail for the immigrant. Yet, the failure of the immigrant to achieve American whiteness does not mean a victory for white identity, rather, as we see in a novel like *Salome of the Tenements* (1922), Yeziarska deconstructs this impossible whiteness and suggests a home for the immigrant Other in America not dependent on achieving whiteness, but rather by bypassing it altogether.

The failure of Yeziarska's immigrant heroines to achieve American whiteness coupled with the inability of Wharton's Lily Bart to retain her whiteness reveals a critical consequence of such rarified, exclusionary whiteness: whiteness is not something you can gain, only something you can lose. And the explicit fear of racial loss is the focus of my final two chapters. In Chapter Four I argue that Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) actively struggles with the fear of racial destabilization and the failure of a white, male American identity. The presence of the racial Other in *Gatsby* along with Gatsby's own racial insecurity points to the increasing difficulty of maintaining American whiteness. Yet, if *Gatsby* understands the increasing volatility in American identity as symptomatic of changes in America's racial makeup, it also recognizes the part that shifting gender roles play as well. In *Gatsby*, it is the aggressive, white, American man Tom Buchanan who seeks to reassert both racial and gender control in order to reclaim an imagined racial past and reassert a longed-for stable American whiteness.

It is Fitzgerald who finally recognizes that the interconnected nature of whiteness with racial, gender, and national identity is what ultimately makes whiteness impossible. In my final chapter, I take up Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night* (1929) as reflective of the intersectional pressures of American whiteness and the inability to maintain an American identity that is burdened with an explicitly white, masculine standard. *Tender* recognizes

the full crisis of American whiteness—the need to race American identity as white and the failure to maintain such a standard—and the failure of the novel’s hero Dick Diver becomes a failure of American whiteness itself. It is, ironically, the staunchest advocates of this American whiteness who finally contribute to its undoing by specializing whiteness to the point of impossibility and increasing irrelevance.

Wharton, Yeziarska, and Fitzgerald point to the specific and intentional ways in which whiteness has been constructed as a meaningful race category and national identity. And yet, whiteness has not always been, and is still not often enough, considered a racial category at all. In *White*, Dyer notes that though there “has been an enormous amount of analysis of racial imagery in the past decades [...] a notable absence from such work has been the study of images of white people. Indeed, to say that one is interested in race has come to mean that one is interested in any racial imagery other than that of white people” (1). Dyer’s *White* “is a study of the representation of white people in white Western culture” (xiii). Studying whiteness as a racial category itself is important, argues Dyer,

[not] merely to fill a gap in the analytic literature, but because there is something at stake in looking at, or continuing to ignore, white racial imagery. As long as race is something only applied to non-white peoples, as long as white people are not racially seen and named, they/we function as a human norm. Other people are raced, we are just people. (1)

As such, the very act of recognizing whiteness as a category works against the invisibility of whiteness as race. As sociologist Ruth Frankenberg notes in her early consideration of whiteness *White Women, Race Matters* (1993): “whiteness is a location of structural advantage [...] a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed” (1).

That they remain unnamed contributes to the ubiquity of whiteness as an assumed standard of “normal,” and reinforces whiteness as a dominant cultural norm against which other racial identities are judged, and under which they are subjugated. Not only is whiteness largely unmarked and unseen, but, as Peggy McIntosh has noted of white privilege, whites are “carefully taught not to recognize” whiteness (178).¹⁰

The study of whiteness, I would argue, is particularly important in an American context. As Michael Omi and Howard Winant argue in *Racial Formation in the United States* (1994), “Race will *always* be at the center of the American experience” (5), and the often-invisible role of whiteness has left us with incomplete understandings of American history, character, and identity. As such, historical studies such as David R. Roediger’s *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (1991), Vron Ware’s *Beyond the Pale: White Women, Racism, and History* (1992), Noel Ignatiev’s *How the Irish Became White* (1995), and Jacobson’s *Whiteness of a Different Color* (1998)¹¹ have been instrumental in building a fuller understanding of the construction of whiteness in American identity and culture and in revealing a more complete American history. I locate this line of critical inquiry not only as essential to a

¹⁰ For the invisibility of whiteness, see also: Harlon Dalton, “Failing to See” (2008). The invisibility of whiteness is not only a deficit to literary study, but as McIntosh notes, has significant consequences in terms of white power and privilege. In Elizabeth Ammons’s “Forward” to *White Women in Racialized Spaces: Imaginative Transformation and Ethical Action in Literature*, Ammons notes, “the socially constructed invisibility of whiteness has served to assert its alleged racelessness, which, of course, is designed to keep whiteness somewhere outside the pervasive system of dominance and subordination that it, in fact, maintains and enforces to keep itself—white power—in tact” (x).

¹¹ Roediger’s *The Wages of Whiteness* argues that Marxist writing has largely “naturalized” whiteness and oversimplified race (6), and that whiteness, specifically, was a response to the “fear of dependency on wage labor” (11). Roediger then outlines the ways in which claiming whiteness was a benefit to workers. In *Beyond the Pale*, Ware reveals white femininity as a historically constructed category and traces the role of racism in feminism throughout the nineteenth century. As the title suggests, Ignatiev’s *How the Irish Became White* outlines how the Irish “Celts” came to be included and understood as “white” in America. Ignatiev reveals the various racial statuses of Irish immigrants and their descendents in America and argues that much of the success of the Irish in America depended on an embracing of a certain white supremacy.

broader understanding of race in general, but also as an essentially feminist concern as race is inextricably bound to gender and gender does not act independently of other identity factors like race, class, sexuality, or nationality.¹² Moreover, in so much as feminist inquiries are invested in understanding the ways power distinctions are configured in society, we can usefully think of this study as a reflection on the ways in which that power has been fundamentally “raced” in American literature, and the way race itself is gendered. Such an understanding should be a concern for all literary critics, but one of particular urgency to feminist critics, as we can only offer a partial understanding of gender identity or issues of power and privilege if we fail to think about the intersection of other social categories and discourses. Studying these intersections of identity—here of race, gender, and nation—allows a fuller, more complete and dynamic understanding of American literature and history.

The irony of overlooking whiteness is that as literary critics, we have often been implicitly talking about whiteness all along. As author and critic Toni Morrison has made clear in her seminal *Playing in the Dark* (1992), not recognizing the presence of something doesn't mean it's not there. In *Playing in the Dark*, Morrison uncovers the presence (both implicit and explicit) of blackness—the “Africanist presence”—in American literature and notes that “[e]ven, and especially, when American texts are not ‘about’ Africanist presences or characters or narrative or idiom, the shadow hovers in implication, in sign, in line of demarcation” (46-47). The corollary of Morrison's work

¹² Many black feminist theorists have revealed the often-incomplete pictures of gender oppression critics and historians (including white feminists) have constructed that do not take into account the intersecting oppressions at work for women of color. Black feminist scholars like bell hooks, Frances Beale, Kimberly Crenshaw, and Patricia Hill Collins have insisted identity is not monolithic, nor can it be understood by looking at only one identity category. See: Frances Beale “Double Jeopardy: To Be Black and Female” (1970); bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984); Kimberle Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color” (1991); and Patricia Hill Collins “The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought” (1989).

in identifying the often-overlooked blackness present in American literature is this study's commitment in identifying the overlooked whiteness in American literature. And I take an important lesson from Morrison's *Playing*: when a novel is not flagged (either implicitly or explicitly) as being "about" whiteness—and perhaps especially when critics have assumed a novel is not "about" whiteness—is exactly the moment we as critics need to explore the role of whiteness in the novel.

The continued invisibility of whiteness in American literary studies is what Elizabeth Ammons calls "white escape-hatching" ("Forward" x); the lack of this criticism signals "the desire and practice of perpetuating white privilege by exempting whiteness from serious race analysis" (ix), and yet my inquiry into whiteness in American literature is not a path wholly untrod. In her 1998 study *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature and Culture*, Valeria Babb investigates "the ways in which white becomes synonymous with being American and what the impact of that synonymity was and is on a multiracial nation" (2). Babb's study opens the discourse of whiteness as a category of study in literature and helps literary critics recognize whiteness as "an ideology" and a "socially constructed fiction" (4, 10), rather than an immutable fact. As such, Babb pushes literary critics to consider whiteness outside such biological factors as "skin color, eye color, or hair texture" (10), common markers of contemporary cultural understandings of racial difference, and instead urges us to look to broader identity and cultural factors that reflect the "mutable relationship of social power" that actually makes up racial identity (13). Babb's work encourages critics to make whiteness visible, particularly in the work of white writers, a task taken up by Renée R. Curry in *White Women Writing White: H.D., Elizabeth Bishop, Sylvia Plath,*

and Whiteness (2000), which traces the un-proclaimed dominant white perspective from which each of these authors wrote. Curry argues that these white, female poets “participate in and facilitate the maintenance of whiteness as an unmarked and dominant force” (170). Such studies have allowed literary critics to conceptualize and study whiteness in more nuanced ways, as in John N. Duvall’s *Race and White Identity in Southern Fiction: From Faulkner to Morrison* (2008), which moves beyond an understanding of “Caucasian” in Southern literature as the necessary assurance of whiteness, and instead shows that oftentimes “white” characters in Southern literature are coded as being fundamentally blackened and thus complicate Southern whiteness.¹³

The above examples notwithstanding, the role of whiteness still remains largely invisible to our critical literature, and I am invested in uncovering the ways in which whiteness—though oftentimes still an implicit critical assumption of normalcy—is revealed as a complex, shifting idea (and lived reality)¹⁴ throughout the literature of America. The work of Wharton, Yeziarska, and Fitzgerald provides us an instructive and useful entry-point into the important critical conversation, as it reveals first the need to make whiteness visible, and further that the created, vexed nature of whiteness is integral to fully understanding the American character.

¹³ See also: Patricia McKee’s *Producing American Races: Henry James, William Faulkner, Toni Morrison* (1999), which focuses on the different forms of cultural media that produce racial identities in James, Faulkner, and Morrison, differentiating between the “visual” production of white identity and the “oral and aural” production of black identity (1); Mason Stokes’s *The Color of Sex: Whiteness Heterosexuality and Fictions of White Supremacy* (2001), which focuses on nineteenth-century American text and the role of whiteness and white supremacy in these texts; and *Staging Whiteness* (2005), by Mary F. Brewer, which traces the cultural histories of various plays in twentieth-century American and British theatre and the ways in which whiteness has been “produced and endowed with cultural authority” in these texts and stage productions (xii).

¹⁴ Though, as this dissertation will show, race is itself a mutable and changeable idea (rather than an innate biological reality), this doesn’t mean that people don’t experience the burdens of racial identity, constructed though it may be. As geneticist Albert Jacquard and philosopher Jean-Bertrand Pontalis have rightly noted: “though there are no *rac*es, racism certainly exists” (qtd. Wieviroka 1).

Chapter One

Writing the Race:

Edith Wharton, *The Age of Innocence*, and Discourses of American Whiteness

It is doubtful if a novelist of one race can ever really penetrate into the soul of another.

-Edith Wharton
“The Great American Novel”

In the opening scene of *The Age of Innocence*, Newland Archer takes his place in his opera box at the Academy of Music in New York as soprano Christine Nilsson, playing Marguerite, begins her famous “Jewel Song” from Gounod’s *Faust*: “‘*M’ama ... non m’ama...*,’ the prima donna sang, and ‘*M’ama!*,’ with a final burst of love triumphant, as she pressed the disheveled daisy to her lips and lifted her large eyes to the sophisticated countenance of the little brown Faust” (4). As the familiar scene of Faust’s seduction of the Marguerite unfolds, Archer shifts his gaze from the opera stage to the opera box of May Welland, his fiancée, and he watches another, smaller scene unfold as:

[the] young girl in white with eyes ecstatically fixed on the stage-lovers [...] dropped her eyes to the immense bouquet of lilies-of-the-valley on her knee, and Newland Archer saw her white-gloved finger tips touch the flowers softly. He drew a breath of satisfied vanity [...] ‘The darling!’ thought Newland Archer [...] She doesn’t even guess what it’s all about.

(5)

This opera scene that serves as the backdrop for the opening chapters of the novel would have been familiar to the “exceptionally brilliant audience” of elite New Yorkers in the 1870s, when the novel is set, through 1920, when the novel was actually published (3).

Gounod's *Faust* was the most popular opera in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America and, as it does the novel, it opened the New York opera season for decades.¹⁵ It had premiered at the Academy of Music in 1863 as a marker of high artistic taste and when the Metropolitan Opera House opened its doors in 1883 in order to compete with the well-established Academy, it opened with *Faust* featuring, familiarly, Christine Nilsson as Marguerite (Grim 17). Though the Metropolitan Opera opened a decade later than the setting of the opening of *Age*—and even though it was built dangerously close to being unfashionably “above the Forties”¹⁶ as discerning opera-goers in the novel suspect it will be (3)—the Metropolitan Opera House entrusted the popularity of *Faust* to combat its somewhat unfortunate location in upper-New York and to adequately compete with its cross-town rival.¹⁷ And of course, *Faust* remained a

¹⁵ In 1871 *Faust* had the Academy of Music “literally overflowing” with listeners; the crowd was so anxious to see the opera that it “was not only impossible after 8 o’clock to find a seat, but even to squeeze into the auditorium at all” (“Amusements”). In 1873 the *New York Times* hailed the opera as “the most popular lyric opera of modern times” (“Foreign Affairs”), and “by 1934 *Faust* had been performed over 2,000 times throughout the world” (Grim 17). It was a particularly popular opera in New York and was used to ensure an opera house’s cultural position.

¹⁶ The Metropolitan Opera House was, in fact, built on Broadway between 39th and 40th Street, bordering the unfashionable district of Manhattan above 40th Street, which was considered “outside the boundaries of polite and settled society” (Waid, *The Age of Innocence* 3n).

¹⁷ The limited number of opera boxes at the Academy was too small to accommodate New York’s growing self-identified aristocracy. The need for the new opera house was prompted when, “on a particular evening [at the Academy of Music] one of the millionairesses did not receive the box in which she intended to shine because another woman had anticipated her, the husband of the former took prompt action and caused the Metropolitan Opera House to rise” (qtd. Kolodin 4). The “millionaress” was a Vanderbilt, and the Vanderbilts would be key stakeholders. They were joined by other such notable families as the Astors and Roosevelts (in the family of James Roosevelt, oldest son of Franklin Delano and Eleanor) (Kolodin 4-5). The opera house would enjoy the rather enthusiastic patronage of Mrs. Belmont who chaired the Metropolitan Opera Guild until 1942 (Kolodin 33). Mrs. August Belmont was, as her name implies, the wife of millionaire Jewish financier August Belmont, whose “meteoric rise” in New York society alarmed the more genteel of the “brownstone culture” (in which the Jones and Wharton families claimed membership) (Lee 57). The characters of Simon Rosedale from *The House of Mirth* and Julius Beaufort of *The Age of Innocence*, were largely based on Belmont (Lee 57 and Benstock 358). The connection between Belmont and Beaufort was so strong that when Wharton’s sister-in-law Minnie Caldwell Jones read *The Age of Innocence*, she wondered how many people would “recognize [...] August Belmont” (Lee 569). Belmont’s rise into high society was so complete that he chaired of the Academy of Music (Peltz 7).

reliable marker of high society long after either of its premieres in the competing opera houses.¹⁸ Indeed, in the novel itself, years later Archer is again in his opera box at the Academy of Music listening to the same opera and, “in the familiar setting of giant roses and pen-wiper pansies, the same large blonde victim was succumbing to the same small brown seducer” (192).

The opera, particularly the seduction scene, is a conspicuously recurring backdrop in a novel that highlights a dramatically changing New York, and its prominence in *The Age of Innocence* serves multiple purposes. Certainly, as William E. Grim highlights in *The Faust Legend in Music and Literature* (1992), the opera serves as a marker for taste in the novel, a “symbol of wealth, power, and as an arbiter of fashion” used to “distinguish one portion of society from another” (14, 15). Grim’s passing assessment of *Faust* in Wharton’s novel is certainly apt in that by opening the novel at the opera, Wharton is able to set her own stage and highlight the upper-class New Yorkers who enjoy private opera boxes, expensive fashion, and fashionable high art. In the autobiographical essay “A Little Girl’s New York” (1938),¹⁹ Wharton remembers the opera as a type of social “spectacle” where the “audience [was] still innocently following the eighteenth-century tradition that the Opera was a social occasion” (246). In this sense, attending the opera is as much about being seen as it is about seeing—as much about the scenes in the opera boxes as the scenes on the stage. As Archer’s eyes wander back and forth between the drama of the opera and the going-ons of the Wellands’ opera

¹⁸ Wharton was certainly a fan of *Faust*. In her travel-narrative *Italian Backgrounds* (1905), Wharton recalls being affected by the beauty of the frescos of Gaudenzio Ferarri in Milan; the frescos are so moved with the “winds of inspirations—a breeze from the celestial pastures” that the “walls of the choir seem to resound with one of the angel-choruses of ‘Faust’ [...] Happy the artist whose full powers find voice in such a key!” (169).

¹⁹ “A Little Girl’s New York” was published in *Harper’s Magazine* the year after Wharton’s death in 1937 as a postscript to her earlier 1934 memoir *A Backward Glance*.

box where sits his fiancée, the fair, young May Welland, he reveals the stage and the opera box both as spectacles in their own right.²⁰

In this sense, the persistence of the seduction scene from *Faust* in the novel is important not only for the opera itself (as Faust seduces Marguerite again and again in the pivotal replayed scene), but also for the crowd watching it and being watched. The seduction scene of the opera illuminates Newland Archer's central dilemma in the novel: shortly after his satisfied gaze drifts from the seduction taking place in the opera to his fiancée May, Newland's own seduction begins as the serene scene of the Welland opera box is interrupted by the entrance of Countess Ellen Olenska, May's exotic and mysterious cousin, and Newland is now gazing upon the two women—and the two opposing ways of life they represent—between whom he must ultimately choose. May is all sweetness and light; she comes from the right family and is a picture of nineteenth-century femininity: docile, obliging, pliant, and characterized by her feminine innocence.²¹ Ellen, in stark contrast, is dark and mysterious; she is well-traveled, opinionated, passionate, and has recently fled her Polish husband, the Count Olenska. Ellen's desire to seek a divorce from the Count has caused much controversy amongst her more genteel New York relations, who abhor a controversy. *Age* follows Archer as he is

²⁰ As Maureen Montgomery argues in *Displaying Women: Spectacles of Leisure in Edith Wharton's New York* (1998), the opera is an "optical excursion" where people come to see and be seen (127). Even for the demure May, the opera is an opportunity of "self display" (55).

²¹ In many ways, May embodies the "cardinal virtues" of white womanhood outlined by Barbara Welter in her famous "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860" (1966). Piety, purity, submission, and domesticity were the virtues outlined "true" womanhood (by which Welter means white women of a certain class and region). Criticism of Welter's seminal piece has pointed to its inadequacies in its use of "womanhood" as an encompassing term and the evidence that Welter presents often targets middle-upper class white women on the East Coast, women like May Welland. It's not clear in Welter's argument if these virtues are expected for other women throughout America (lower-class women, women of color, women on the frontier, immigrant women, working women, etc.), used as a ruler against which these women can never measure up, or if these virtues are reserved to set upper-class white women, like May Welland, apart from other morally and, not coincidentally, racially different women.

torn between his love for the seductively “real” Ellen, and his obligations, and even real devotion, to May and the society she represents.

The seduction scene in *Faust* not only parallels Archer’s own temptations, but also foregrounds the greater race and gender anxieties that will play throughout Newland’s marriage to May and thwarted romance with Ellen. Both the opera scene and the parallel scene of Ellen and May are coded in conspicuously racial terms. The actors on the stage are themselves part of the racialized drama: the perennially popular fair-skinned, blonde Swedish soprano Christine Nilsson plays the innocent white heroine Marguerite opposite the smaller, swarthier French tenor Victor Capoul as Marguerite’s dark seducer, Faust.²² That the white heroine is at risk of being overcome by the exotic seducer is a familiar enough trope, and, at the very moment in which the tall, Nordic Marguerite is seduced by the small, dark Faust, Archer’s interior narrative begins, and the racialized drama playing out on the stage becomes an ever-present backdrop for the smaller, more interior dramas of Wharton’s characters.²³ As Archer surveys the opera house, his construction of May collapses in the construction of Marguerite. May and Marguerite become blurred visions in their white alignment: the fair, blonde May Welland, a “young girl in white,” Lilies-of-the-Valley in her lap, looks on to the stage where the fair, blonde Marguerite/Christine, “in white cashmere” clutches her own white flowers (5). The overwhelming whiteness of May, emphasized in her connection with Marguerite/Christine and her white clothing, white flowers, and white features, is made

²² Both Nilsson and Capoul made their debuts at the Academy of Music in New York in a production of *Faust* in 1870, coinciding with the scene from *The Age of Innocence*, which opens “On a January evening of the early seventies” (3). When *Faust* opened the Metropolitan Opera of New York in 1883, Nilsson and Capoul were still playing across from each other as Marguerite and Faust.

²³ As Carmen Trammell Skaggs notes in “Looking Through the Opera Glasses: Performance and Artifice in *The Age of Innocence*” (2004), the opera serves as a structural frame for Newland to survey the performance not only of the opera itself, but of the players in his society as well.

all the more white when she is then contrasted with her cousin Ellen, the dark foil who interrupts the otherwise placidly white scene.

This opening scene suggests race as a crucial factor in Wharton's imagination and offers an important lens through which we can read Wharton's work. Certainly the construction of racial meaning in this scene sets up a contrast between Ellen and May that will play throughout the novel (Ellen will continually be emphasized as the exotic Other, particularly in comparison with May). It is a contrast that is appealing to Archer, who watches the white, innocent May with an approving eye while musing about his fiancée's naïveté ("She doesn't even guess what it's all about!"). Archer's musings are certainly understandable as he collapses May's overwhelming whiteness with an assumption of her innocence. Yet, as Archer and the reader will later learn, despite her white innocence, May will continually know *exactly* what it is all about, an underestimation of May that will dramatically shape Archer's fate. Archer's (mis)reading during this scene serves as a broader warning against overly- simplistic readings of racial identity in the novel. While we might easily read the opera scene as highlighting an anxiety familiar to turn-of-the-century America—the threat to Anglo-Saxon "native" Americans by a physical and cultural invasion by the racialized "Other" (whether embodied in a sexually threatening little brown Faust or a sexually and culturally threatening exotic cousin Olenska)—the novel simultaneously presents and then undermines such a trope in its sympathies with Ellen and the heightened awareness and critique throughout the novel of the ways racial and gendered meaning has been constructed in America.

Wharton's Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Age of Innocence* spans a large swath of American history, and though it was written fifteen years after *The House of Mirth*

(1905), which I will discuss in Chapter Two, it serves as a useful introduction to any discussion of American racial identity—specifically whiteness—in Wharton and indeed, in the American canon. The novel begins in the early 1870s and ends decades later with a new generation of Americans redefining racial barriers the novel points to the increasing difficulty, even futility, in trying to maintain strict and impermeable definitions of American whiteness. This tracking of American racial history in *Age* charts the breakdown of easily containable racial categories, ultimately questioning any racial matrix in which there is only white heroine or threatening racial Other. As such, the novel undercuts any nostalgic vision of a bygone era of American “innocence” by revealing that American whiteness has never been easily discernable or completely extricable from non-whiteness, a challenge to American nativists in the early twentieth century who bemoan the pending loss and racial corruption of American whiteness. It is not that Wharton does not depend on common racial stereotypes, because as her fiction, non-fiction, and her biography suggest, many such racist tropes are ingrained in Wharton (and certainly a multitude of them are evident throughout *Age*). Instead, I will argue, Wharton’s fiction both participates in and exposes the racial anxieties of the turn-of-the-century and early twentieth-century America and for all that Wharton’s writing oftentimes builds on pedestrian racial stereotypes and prejudices, *The Age of Innocence* forces the reader to reconsider race more carefully, to deconstruct easy definitions of whiteness, and to question a national racial history that will lead to such fragile (and futile) American whiteness by the early twentieth century.

A Backward Glance: Re-Reading Wharton Criticism

Newland's moment of early misreading in *The Age of Innocence* is an apt starting position not only in the way it helps us begin our inquiry into the racial implications of the scene and the novel as a whole, but for addressing the critical literature and biography of Wharton herself. Like Newland's well-intended but woefully incomplete conclusions about May Welland, the lack of critical literature on Wharton's relationship with issues of race suggests at best an incomplete reading and at worst a willful misreading of Wharton and her fiction by her critics. Indeed, Wharton has often been, to borrow a phrase, politely misrepresented when it comes to her troubling racial politics. This misrepresentation of Wharton's personal politics parallels an under-representation, even an intentional overlooking, of Wharton's participation in various racial discourses that are not simply present but prominent throughout her fiction and writing. By addressing issues of race and racism in Wharton's life, work, and critical legacy, I evaluate how Wharton understands race in her life and work and how she is invested in national dialogues of race, gender, and nation. Moreover this project does not shy away from tracing Wharton's oftentimes uncomfortable attitudes regarding race and identifying her racism as part of her overall racial vision and as an important part of her fiction. In looking closely at Wharton's biography with an eye to issues of race, I identify Wharton's racism and racialized vision throughout her life and imagination, and argue that we must reread her fiction in light of these dialogues and Wharton's active participation therein. Further, by tracing the critical reluctance to address these issues of race and national identity that this study seeks to correct, and by filling the biographical and critical gaps, we can clearly see Wharton not as a writer somehow above the fray of

ongoing American racial discourses, but as one deeply conscious of and engaged in such discourses of American whiteness.

These gaps in Wharton criticism have at times been circumstantial, at times intentional. In her recent, exhaustive biography *Edith Wharton* (2007), Hermione Lee notes what she calls the “polite misrepresentation” of Wharton’s pointed anti-Semitism by Wharton’s first major biographer and, with Nancy Lewis, editor and collector of her letters, R. W. B. Lewis (613)—a misrepresentation that has been seldom-corrected in subsequent biographies and criticism of Wharton. In *The Letters of Edith Wharton* (1988), editors Lewis and Lewis purposely left out letters that were considered racially distasteful. At the 1988 Edith Wharton Society conference, “Wharton and her Letters,” a question and answer session was held with Lewis and Lewis to address this new (and first) published collection of Wharton’s letters, and the editors were asked specifically about such instances of intentional exclusion:

Question: In deciding which letters to include, did you try to protect Wharton in any way? In other words, did you omit letters that show an unpleasant side to her personality?

R. W. B. Lewis: We tried to be fair to her, to represent her life fully. Occasionally, she expressed some prejudices that we wish she didn’t have. In a few of the letters we rejected, there are some racist or anti-Semitic remarks. There was one letter that we originally planned to include that did contain some vilely anti-Semitic comments.

Nancy Lewis: Actually, the publisher persuaded us not to use the letter. Our editor contacted us and said that if we included this letter, it would be the only some [sic] to get attention.

R. W. B. Lewis: That's right. The publisher thought that letter would overshadow all the others in the media and that it would be wrong to include an atypical letter that could distort the public view of Wharton.

(Lewis and Lewis, "Lewises Discuss" 1)

From letters that have nevertheless surfaced (largely in references throughout Lee's biographical work) that indicate Wharton's broad racism and persistent anti-Semitism, it is questionable how "atypical" any anti-Semitic letter of Wharton's actually is, and even Lee's naming of this exclusion as a "polite misrepresentation" seems, itself, a polite misrepresentation of the magnitude of such omissions and the subsequent inadequacies of Wharton scholarship that has followed.

Perhaps due to the detailed nature of her biography of Wharton, Lee's own corrective contribution to understanding Wharton as herself a raced writer, one actively participating in racial discourses, is easily overlooked. These previously suppressed facts of Wharton's racial politics are buried, no matter how unintentionally, in a mass of biographical information and are easily passed over.²⁴ This is not to argue that the most important aspect of understanding Wharton and her writing is held in the reality of her conservative politics or racial biases, but, as I will argue in this chapter and the next, the

²⁴ Historian Howard Zinn addresses this burden of the historian who must decide not only whether to include something (or, as Lewis and Lewis did while editing Wharton's letters, intentionally exclude it), but also how to include such facts in a larger historical or biographical study. As opposed to the "outright lying or quiet omission" of facts that might lead to "unacceptable conclusions" about an historical figure, the "bury[ing]" of facts in an overwhelming amount of other information is itself an indication of the conclusions to which the historian wishes to lead the reader (8).

neglect of these facts, as well as the critical avoidance in understanding white authors as authors belonging to a race themselves, have prevented our understanding of Wharton as participating in the discourses surrounding the question of race in America, discourses that were practically an American obsession when Wharton was most active in her writing and producing on average a book a year from 1899 to 1933. This gap in reading Wharton has given us an incomplete vision not only of Wharton's contribution to this national dialogue, but has also limited our readings of Wharton's work itself.

As Jennie A. Kassanoff describes in *Edith Wharton and the Politics of Race* (2004) (the only full-length study of Wharton and race) the questions of Wharton's racial politics, and the role of race in Wharton's work, is a debate that has been "by turns reproving, apologetic, defensive, and ambivalent" in Wharton criticism (39). As early as 1991, critics have been calling for critical attention to issues of race in Wharton's work. In Hildegard Hoeller's "'The Impossible Rosedale': 'Race' and the Reading of Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*," Hoeller locates "race" as a "complex and crucial notion" in *The House of Mirth*, and wonders why "Wharton criticism has been astonishingly silent on the novel's reliance on and echoing of such anti-[S]emitic ideas" (14). Four years later, in her chapter entitled "Edith Wharton and the Issue of Race" in the *Cambridge Companion to Wharton* (1995), Elizabeth Ammons, too, charges that as critics "we must refuse to continue to approach [Wharton's] work as if race is not an operative category within it" and calls for the "many studies [which] are needed in order to bring fully to the surface the ways in which race functions in Wharton's fiction" (68). And though in 1999 Anne MacMaster's "Wharton, Race, and *The Age of Innocence*" pointed to "racial difference [as] a latent topic in *The Age of Innocence*," one "at first

invisible,” but still central to the novel (188), Stuart Hutchinson still bemoans the lack of critical material on Wharton and race in his 2000 “Sex, Race, and Class in Edith Wharton,” and suggests that in the “recruitment” of Wharton by feminist criticism, the critical work produced “ignores what should have been a fundamental qualification, namely her recurrent and creatively unexplored prejudices about sex, race, and class” (431).²⁵ Yet, while Hutchinson may be justified in his disappointment at the still anemic critical work on Wharton and issues of race particularly, his claim that the feminist “recruitment” of Wharton has encouraged such critical avoidance is misleading—it is self-identified feminist critics and Wharton scholars like Elizabeth Ammons, Anne MacMaster, and Jennie Kassanoff who are writing on the question of race in Wharton. Indeed, Kassanoff recognizes that the “study of Edith Wharton’s [conservative racial] politics raises a number of challenges for the feminist scholar” (1), but insists that, as feminist scholars particularly, “We need to evaluate Wharton’s work on its own terms, unconstrained by either well-meaning protectionism or patronizing neglect” (4). This chapter, indeed, the project of this dissertation, aligns itself with this claim and sees this inquiry as a fundamentally feminist project.

Heoller’s early assertion that investigating such issues in Wharton is an embarrassing task may very well help explain the decision of the early editors of Wharton’s letters to white-wash their selection by withholding the uncomfortable

²⁵ There has, since 2000, been an increase of attention to issues of race in Wharton’s fiction, including articles like Lori Harrison-Kahan’s “‘Queer Myself for Good and All’: *The House of Mirth* and Fictions of Lily’s Whiteness, which complicates Lily Bart’s racial position as it is connected to her role as a “New Woman” and her connection to the “Jewish Parvenu” Simon Rosedale (39); or Carol J. Singley’s “Race Culture, Nation: Edith Wharton and Ernest Renan” (2003), which argues for Wharton’s racism as a type of intellectual snobbery based in her high esteem of French nationality and customs as seen in Wharton’s 1919 *French Ways and Their Meanings* (34-36). What’s more, the 2006 Edith Wharton panel at the Modern Language Association Conference in Phoenix, AZ focused on “Nation, Race, and Citizenship in Edith Wharton,” indicating that other critics have begun to recognize the fundamental role of race in Wharton’s work.

evidence of the author's avowed detestation of Jews, use of racial epithets, and general unsavory comments about people of color, as well as the minimal amount of criticism that addresses Wharton's racial politics in her work. Moreover, the embarrassing task of looking at Wharton's distasteful conservative politics is compounded by a general sense that Wharton scholars have not known exactly what to make of Wharton's racial conservatism (including her racism) in her novels, other than to note that Wharton herself was famously (amongst her peers if not her critics) anti-Semitic, culturally snobbish, and as suspicious of black art as she was of black people.²⁶ Identifying her Jewish characters as embodying popular turn-of-the-century anti-Semitic stereotypes, for example, almost seems redundant in this regard. Instead, critics have taken what Kassanoff calls the "don't-ask-don't-tell approach to Wharton's conservatism" (1). Yet, beyond acknowledging that race is an "actual, important presence" throughout Wharton as a critic like Ammons insists we do ("Edith Wharton" 68), we must further recognize that race is a crucial element in the construction of identity in Wharton's work, one that is interwoven with the construction of gender, class, and national identity. In re-reading Wharton—her work and her biography—with an eye toward the previously ignored, misrepresented, or overlooked aspects of Wharton's racial vision, we see the issue of race not merely as a byproduct of her biography and personal biases, but as a conscious

²⁶ Wharton's conservatism is not limited to her political views or social prejudices. Wharton's own artistic investments, as well as her criticism of more "modern" art, reveals what we might call her formal or artistic conservatism, as well. In "Form, 'Selection,' and Ideology in Edith Wharton's Anti-Modernist Aesthetic" (1999), Frederick Wegener argues that the very form of Wharton's fiction is indicative of her general conservatism and her "regressive social and political views [...] are closely intertwined with her convictions about the writing of fiction and the making of art, just as her aesthetic embodies so many of her most fervently avowed social and political beliefs" (134). Wharton's insistence on conventional narrative form and what was increasingly characterized by critics as the "old-fashioned novel" during the time of high modernism and what Wharton disparagingly referred to as the "new methods" of such writers as Virginia Woolf represented for Wharton a "a larger moral crisis or decline" both in fiction and the larger world (117). For Wharton, artistic representation was another part of a *gestalt* that tended toward conservatism.

artistic choice. Wharton puts to use the varying racial discourses of her day as a narrative strategy that connects her to her audience—who themselves were embroiled in unavoidable national discourses of race, nationalism, nativism, immigration, and eugenics—and illuminates a crumbling white world. A recovery of Wharton’s biography reveals the author’s personal investment in national discussions of racial identity and the pressing need for critics to recognize Wharton as a raced writer, invested in understanding the complicated ways in which race—and whiteness specifically—are constructed around her.

A Great House Full of (Unopened) Rooms: Reconsidering Wharton Biography

In Wharton’s 1893 short story, “The Fullness of Life,” a woman recently dead is reflecting with the Spirit of Life on the subject of her marriage:

“I have sometimes thought that a woman’s nature is like a great house full of rooms: there is the hall, through which everyone passes in going in and out; the drawing- room, where one receives formal visits; the sitting-room, where the members of the family come and go as they list; but beyond that, far beyond, are other rooms, the handles of whose doors perhaps are never turned; no one knows the way to them, no one knows whither they lead [...].”

“And your husband,” asked the Spirit, after a pause, “never got beyond the family sitting-room?”

“Never,” she returned, impatiently; “and the worst of it was that he was quite content to remain there.” (14)

This section seeks to open some of the doors that Wharton's biographers and critics have seemed largely content to leave closed and seeks to fill the gaps in Wharton's biography and situate her as an active participant in racial discourses throughout her life.

There is no shortage of biographical information about Edith Wharton. Wharton is the subject of multiple biographies, biographical critical studies, and continued public interest about her life and times. We can see recent examples of such interest in Wharton biography in both scholarly and public communities in the newly-discovered trove of Wharton's letters—some written when Wharton was fourteen years old, and all of them making a collection of Wharton's earliest surviving letters—that were sold at auction at Christie's in June 2009 for just under \$200,000, or in *The New York Times* article "Edith Wharton Always Had Paris" in October of the same year, which suggests Parisian travel in the footsteps of America's famous Mrs. Wharton.²⁷ And yet, for all the biographical information about Wharton circulating in our libraries, newspapers, and even sometimes our daily news, there are conspicuous gaps in her biography that become obvious when we try to understand Wharton's investment in racial discourses in America.

Wharton's own raced vision was established early in her childhood, as she remembers in her 1934 memoir, *A Backward Glance*. Indeed, Wharton's earliest race memories provide a framework by which we can begin to understand what will emerge as

²⁷ The collection consists of over one hundred and thirty letters written by a young Wharton to Anna Bahlmann, a governess hired in 1874 to teach German to the then twelve-year-old Wharton; Bahlmann would remain in the family's service for almost forty years (Mead 32). The lot and sales record of Christie's auction house (catalogued online) estimated the value of these letters at between \$80,000 and \$120,000, but shows the final sale price for the collection was \$182,500. Elaine Sciolino's *New York Times* article on Wharton details Wharton's time in Paris and offers travel suggestions that shadow the author's footsteps. Edith Wharton has been a fairly consistent presence in the news thanks to her New York roots, a variety of prominent films in the last decade based on various Wharton novels, the unfortunate financial trouble of her Massachusetts' homestead-now-museum "The Mount," and, most recently, the selection of *The Age of Innocence* in 2010 by the National Endowment of the Arts as the novel for the nationwide "Big Read." To say the least, Wharton remains in our national consciousness.

the threats of racial difference in Wharton's fiction. What's more, these memories show the paradoxical need for the racial Other by the very white society their difference threatens. As Wharton describes the two "negro cooks" employed by her family when she was a child, for example, she highlights their exoticized difference, and emphasizes them not as individual women, but as functions of white womanhood. Wharton—who notes that her family was from the "purest blood of Dutch Colonial New York" (4)—remembers these household servants as the "Dark Ladies," "our two famous negro cooks" who were "great artists" in the kitchen (60, 58). The women are described in vibrant color, as "brilliantly turbaned and ear-ringed," with "their indefatigable blue-nailed hands" that worked the food (59-60): "Mary Johnson [was] a gaunt towering woman of a rich, bronzy black, with huge golden hoops in her ears, and crisp African crinkles under vividly patterned kerchiefs; Susan Minneman, a small smiling mulatto, more quietly attired, but as great a cook as her predecessor" (59). Wharton's description then continues in similar bright detail:

How simple yet sure were their methods—the mere perfection of broiling, roasting and basting—and what an unexampled wealth of material, vegetable and animal, their genius had to draw upon! Who will ever again taste anything in the whole range of gastronomy to equal their corned beef, their boiled turkeys and stewed celery and oyster sauce, their fried chickens, broiled red-heads [...] or (in their season) broiled Spanish mackerel, soft-shelled crabs with a mayonnaise of celery [...] and salads of oyster crabs, poured in varied succulence from Mary Johnson's lifted cornucopia—ah, then, the *gourmet* of that long-lost day, when cream was

cream and butter butter and coffee coffee and meat fresh every day, and game hung just for the proper number of hours, might lean back in his chair and murmur 'Fate cannot harm me' over his cup of Moka and his glass of authentic Chartreuse. (59)

I quote this passage at length because Wharton's recorded memory of these "dark women" present throughout her childhood remains only in the bright colors they wore and the food they produce. In this, the women's identities are collapsed into their colorful difference and the service they performed. Ammons notes this passage as one where "racism, antifeminism, and nationalism merge for Wharton in an allegory about well-fed, gorgeous, pre-modern childhood (her own) as a time of physical and aesthetic satiety provided by black women" ("Edith" 77). It is, Ammons rightly notes, the height of white privilege that allows Wharton to recall the time so fondly, when the reality of such production—the work, the service, and the individuality of the servants who produce it—is lost in the glow of rose-colored nostalgia. Even the possessive "their" in Wharton's writing is seemingly interchangeable between the women ("their methods") and the food itself ("their season"). And Wharton's final nostalgia is not for Mary Johnson herself, but for privilege of being served the food the dark ladies would prepare and came to represent.

Indeed, but for this brief description of the color of their clothing and their skin, these women are otherwise invisible in Wharton's narrative and memory, yet they must be there for such events as "Opera nights" in the Jones household that Wharton remembers as "*my mother's big dinners*" (*my emphasis* 60). Wharton, somewhat like her critics, seems to have a selective memory regarding the racial Other in her life. It is, of

course, the very invisibility of the “great negro artists” that makes her mother’s white femininity (as well as her “mother’s” dinners) possible, and the racialized hierarchy of these women keeps everything in the Jones household running smoothly to maintain white cultural privilege. Yet, Wharton was not entirely ignorant of the difficult work cut out for servants of the Jones household where Wharton’s mother Lucretia Jones “expected much of her servants” who, in turn, could expect little reward (Benstock 4). Wharton explained the Jones household structure to her friend Percy Lubbock: “I was brought up in a household where there was [no consideration of servants] at all” (qtd. Benstock, 476n).²⁸ Though here Wharton seems able to recognize her mother’s blind spot regarding the role of servants, she seems unable to recognize her own blindness in her descriptions of servants as merely the roles they serve, or, even more so, in her not mentioning them at all as with their conspicuous absence during Lucretia’s Opera-night dinners. The black women are an assumed, invisible, aspect of Wharton’s white privilege—the unseen hands that keep Wharton’s fondly-remembered childhood home working. Until, Wharton bemoans, it changes. After the full-page description of the food (and, by proxy, the black women who prepared it), Wharton mourns the loss of such homemaking traditions:

I have lingered over these details because they formed a part—a most important and honourable part—of that ancient curriculum of house-keeping which, at least in Angle-Saxon countries, was soon to be swept aside by the ‘monstrous regiment’ of the emancipated: young women

²⁸ Percy Lubbock was a man of letters in his own right, and friends with E.M. Forster, Henry James, and Edith Wharton, among others. In 1947 he published *Portrait of Edith Wharton* and his collected papers and notes for this work are housed at the Yale Collection of American Literature, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library.

taught by their elders to despise the kitchen and linen room, and to substitute the acquiring of University degrees for the more complex art of civilized living. The movement began when I was young, and now that I am old, I mourn more than ever the extinction of the household arts. (60)

The irony in Wharton's conflation of Anglo-Saxon tradition and white American femininity is that it is the black servants, not the white women, who are the ones upholding such "ancient" Anglo-Saxon customs of culinary arts. The white women who threw such venerable opera nights as her mother's need their black doubles not merely for rhetorical purposes of constructing female whiteness, but for the actual purpose of sustaining their white female identity (here in its domestic function); whiteness is literally and figuratively sustained by blackness. In Wharton's bemoaning of the loss of such gender-race arrangement, her anti-feminism is collapsed into a whitewashed memory of the "honourable past" of Anglo-Saxon countries (America as one of them), one that is threatened by the emancipation of African Americans as much as it is of white women receiving higher education, a concept Wharton also found distasteful.²⁹

Wharton's other memories of living in a multi-racial country are equally as troubling. In *A Backward Glance*, Wharton recalls a print of her paternal grandparents' homestead and describes "the aboriginal Jones habitation; but it was more probably the slaves' quarter. In this pleasant house lived a young man [my father]" (17-18). Here Wharton recognizes with a surprising nonchalance that the house in the print most likely housed the slaves her family owned, but willfully re-inscribes a pleasant white family

²⁹ Wharton was notably opposed to women's formal higher education. Yet Wharton, like many upper-class white women, was highly educated herself by private tutors throughout her life and though she never attended a formal school or university, she received the first honorary Doctorate ever given to a woman by Yale University in 1923.

history onto the highly racialized slave quarters. Wharton was born in the middle of the Civil War to Northern parents, and spent many of her childhood years, the early years of reconstruction, traveling Europe. Though she was not seemingly an opponent of black emancipation, her racial prejudices are evident not only in the virtual invisibility of the black servants and sometimes erasure of blackness in her memoirs, but also in her seeming acceptance of common nineteenth-century stereotypes about African Americans. Voicing the common racist trope that blacks were sub-intelligent, Wharton remembers being rebuked as a child for saying of a “dull kindly servant,” “Of course he’s good—he’s too stupid to be bad” (*Backward* 159). Though she admits the rebuke of such an assumption was “no doubt very salutary,” she insists to the reader: “there was a grain of truth in my comment” (159).

Wharton’s attitudes toward the assimilation of blacks and the rise of black culture in America are similarly steeped in upper-class white privilege. She was particularly distressed by the rise of black art both as a topic and as a phenomenon. Commenting on (white author) Carl Van Vechten’s *Nigger Heaven* (1926), she wrote to Gaillard Lapsley (a common friend of hers and Henry James): “Have you read *Nigger Heaven*? It is so nauseating (& such rubbish too) that I despair of the Republic.” She thought it had been “all made up,” but friends told her they had been “taken by the ‘Juenes’ into nigger society in Harlem, ‘et que c’était comme dans le libre.’ And now I must *stop & be sick*” (*emphasis in original*, qtd. Lee 614).³⁰ For Wharton, the idea of “nigger society”

³⁰ That Wharton is sure to point out that it is young people (*jeunes*) who have led her friend into such terrifying “nigger” society in Harlem points to a generational gap in social norms that Wharton seems to be at least aware of, if not interested in addressing, as in her bemoaning of the young women choosing higher education than the “ancient curriculum” of house-keeping, which she associates with her own generation (though, of course, the “extinction of the household arts” that has passed since her childhood is largely accomplished not by the likes of Wharton herself, but, again, by her invisible servants). In many ways, much of Wharton’s conservatism can be understood, though not dismissed, as a generation shift across the

becoming public fodder is a sickening prospect, one that she is able to mitigate in her own fiction as blackness becomes a benign, mostly invisible presence throughout her novels. Like the Joneses' black slaves whose only function is to identify the noble Jones estate, or the black cooks who are collapsed into the food they prepare in her childhood household, blackness in Wharton's fiction appears merely as it functions to maintain white identity, like the mulatto servant in *The Age of Innocence* whose only identity is the function of opening doors. Throughout Wharton's work we can assume such antebellum racism as much in the non-presence of blacks as we could in their actual representation because in Wharton's world, they have been fully assimilated into a function of white identity.

Wharton was not above common racist stereotypes, as when she was touring Rome (on one of her many trips to Italy), and wrote to a friend in 1903 about the "stupid Italians" who were too dumb to appreciate their own culture (*Letters* 77). In another instance in *Italian Backgrounds* (1905), Wharton's travel-narrative, Wharton uses familiar racial cues to easily categorizes tourists arriving at her hotel:

Here they come, familiar as the figures in a Noah's ark: Germans first—the little triple-chinned man with a dachshund, out of "Fliegende Blätter,"³¹ the slippered Hercules with a face like that at the end of a meerschaum pipe, and their sentimental females; shrill and vivid Italians [...] Americans going "right through," with their city and state writ large

century: the America of Wharton's youth was certainly a far cry from the America at the time of her death in 1937.

³¹ *Fliegende Blätter* was a popular satirical German humor magazine that often ran cartoons featuring caricatures of common racial and national stereotypes.

upon their luggage; English girls like navvies, and Frenchmen like girls
[...] (12-13)

The parade of nations offers the well-seasoned traveler Wharton a moment of bemusement at the tourists who unintentionally display their national identities like banners across their clothes. Yet this moment relies on various contemporary stereotypes of race and nation (the two often being confused in national discourses), as in the boisterous Italians, the energetic but naïve Americans, the masculinized English girls (who look like work-men), or the emasculated French men. It also is a moment in which Wharton freely applies broad generalizations (the sentimental females of the Germans, for example) to entire national identities.

But Wharton was most consistent with contemporary race “scientists” such as Madison Grant or Lothrop Stoddard in that her strongest prejudice was directed against the Jews, whom she often called “Yids” in her private correspondence and conversations. On her deathbed, Lee describes, Wharton “talked of her love of Balzac, her strong feelings for the Catholic Church and her dislike of Jews” (748). The account of Wharton’s death remembered by her good friend Elisina Tyler (who was with her at her death) suggests an even stronger anti-Semitism. As Tyler recalls, one of Wharton’s last remarks before she died was how much she “hated the Jews” because of the crucifixion (Lee 613). In her correspondence, we see Wharton’s anti-Semitism surfacing in letters to some of her closest confidants: her sister-in-law Minnie Jones and her close friend Gaillard Lapsley.³² In a 1933 letter to Lapsley in which she relays a “joke rhyme” she

³² That such comments were reserved for her close, trusted friends suggest, as Lee implies, that with other contacts, Wharton “tried harder to adapt to the new” and avoid such racist attitudes and language (Lee 613). This further suggests Wharton understood at least to some extent that such comments were potentially socially unpalatable.

thought particularly clever: “Rupert de Vere is sad today/ His wife’s run away/ And he grieves for the Kid—Poor little Yid!” she quoted and continued, “Don’t you admire that?” (qtd. Lee 613). In 1921, regarding a criminal trial she followed with Lapsley she wrote: “Of course you’ve seen the Daily Mail that they’ve caught Mrs. Rachel Gobsweib, and sent *her* up. Her name alone makes the nature of her offence sufficiently clear” (*emphasis in original* 613). Of André Maurois, a French author with whom she sometimes participated in the *entretiens* in France, which were popular among her friends and in literary circles, she wrote he was “a very bright little Jew... about as well fitted for lecturing on English poetry to the English as one of my Pokes” (613).³³ And, reminiscent of the scene in her memoir in which she bemoans the effects of higher education for (white) women on the great housewifery “traditions” of Anglo-Saxon culture, we see Wharton’s racist and sexist conservatism come together in a 1923 letter to Minnie in response to a request she had recently gotten from a young Jewish woman: “I’m not so much interested in traveling scholarships for women—or in fact in scholarships, tout court! –they’d much better stay at home and mind the baby. Still less am I interested in scholarships for female Yids, and young ladies who address a total stranger as ‘Chère Madame’ and sign ‘meilleurs sentiments’...” (613). Such anti-Semitism is particularly compelling when we think about the Jewish characters of her own novels, and, indeed, Wharton addressed the role of Jews in fiction in her in most widely-known (and most widely-published) anti-Semitic comments in a 1925 letter to F. Scott Fitzgerald, in which

³³ Maurois (born Emile Salomon Wilhelm Herzog) was born into a Jewish family, but married two Catholic women in his lifetime and was not religious. Yet, despite Maurois’s own sense of identity, in “the eyes of the literary and social worlds of Paris, Maurois [...] belonged to a Jewish milieu in its broadest and nonsectarian scope” (Kolbert 81). The case of Maurois is instructive in that despite Maurois being religiously secular and culturally French, he is still, to Wharton—as to American eugenicists—racially Jewish.

she congratulates Fitzgerald for his portrayal of Wolfsheim (in earlier drafts called Hildesheim) in *The Great Gatsby*. After suggesting Fitzgerald should have given more detail on Gatsby's early career, Wharton writes, "meanwhile, it's enough to make this reader happy to have met your *perfect Jew* [...] the lunch with Hildensheim [Wolfsheim] and his every appearance afterward, make me augur still greater things!" (*emphasis in original*, 309).³⁴ Fitzgerald's "perfect Jew" in *The Great Gatsby* is Gatsby's notorious underworld business associate who is involved in organized crime, fixed the 1919 World Series, and wears cufflinks made of human teeth.³⁵

The point of this extended inquiry into Wharton's biography is to show that in painting a fuller picture of the author we can see Wharton is active (be it in private conversations, letters amongst trusted friends, or memories of a rosy white youth) in racialized discourse throughout her life and to locate her as an author for whom issues of race are directly relevant, though much of the biographical and critical work on Wharton has implicitly suggested otherwise. Such a re-reading of Wharton and her work does not ask us to gloss over her problematic moments, racist politics, or oftentimes uncomfortable conservatism, but instead brings such issues to the fore so that they are fully recognized as part of a text's ultimate fabric. In considering this line of inquiry we can, for example, see a text like *The Age of Innocence* as an outline of America's race

³⁴ Wharton's famous letter to Fitzgerald is perhaps her most reprinted letter. It was originally published in Fitzgerald's posthumously published *The Crack-Up* (1945), a collection of previously unpublished letters, notes, and essays by Fitzgerald, as well as a small number of letters to Fitzgerald by notable American authors, Wharton included. The letter was then published as a facsimile in the *Fitzgerald-Hemingway Annual* in 1972, and finally, was included in the collected *Letters of Edith Wharton* in 1988. I cite the text from the earliest publication of the letter in *The Crack-Up* ("From Edith Wharton").

³⁵ Wharton's close friend John Hugh Smith, perhaps somewhat overzealously, but not entirely inaccurately, understood Wharton as part of this race-thinking as he described her as part of the "wave of American émigrés" who had retreated to Europe because they couldn't continue life in America where "the American working class was smothered by the peasants of Eastern Europe and the middle class poisoned by the plague of the Jews" (Lee 612).

history at the turn of the century as it exposes the changing narratives of American whiteness.

Invisible Race and Visible Racial Difference

In *The Age of Innocence*, Wharton reveals a broader racial discourse of American identity that spoke beyond familiar postbellum racial debates focused on black and white, and that began to understand the racial Other as a broadening category and a growing threat to an increasingly specialized white identity. One of the limitations of understanding race in Wharton's fiction, and indeed a limitation in the broader critical and theoretical conversations about racial identity—in particular, white identity—in America has been the critical embedded-ness in racial discourses that understands race in overly simplistic ways. As Kassanoff notes, even the growing critical literature on the role of race in Wharton's fiction “at times suffers from some definitional constraints [... inadvertently placed on it by its earliest critics]. In particular, these critics tended to define race in narrowly phenotypic terms” (39). *The Age of Innocence* itself reveals this understanding of race as woefully inadequate. While the Old New York society of the novel is largely dependent on such bifurcated racial hierarchies (white masters and black servants) for its daily operations and general lifestyle, Wharton exposes the failure of this racial diametric for understanding the more nuanced realities of white identity as they develop in the new century.

In *Age*, Wharton engages in varying, and sometimes competing, discourses about race—defining what race is, who gets to belong to desirable races, and what the consequences are of both racial impurity and the quest for racial purity. Wharton's

tracing of these racial debate—and even her own inconsistent racial strategies in her novels—reveals the impermanent and permeable nature of definitions of race in America, and the many contradictions at work in nativist and eugenicist strategies for white American racial purity. What’s more, Wharton makes use of current race debates as part of her narrative strategy not only to make sense of the decline of Old New York, for which Wharton seems to have a simultaneous fascination and revulsion, but to criticize it at its height. Even while she and the nation struggle to understand and define just who the racial Other is, racial Otherness becomes a mirror held up to white-upper-class New York by which it can see its own “savagery.” By beginning the novel in the 1870s and ending it decades later, Wharton is able to reveal not only America’s complicated race history, but expose the insufficient ways America has come to talk about race.

In one sense, the novel reveals Wharton’s understanding of America’s race history in that which it fails to fully consider: the mostly invisible black servants that exist in the shadows of *The Age of Innocence*. The necessary presence, yet virtual invisibility, of such benign blackness certainly hints at Wharton’s own way of reading America’s race (and racist) history as one that is relevant only so much as it has come to buttress an assumed white privilege enjoyed by the main actors of the novel. A particularly troubling example of such privilege—and the racial Other necessary to uphold it—can be seen early in the novel when the Welland family retires to St. Augustine, Florida (where May’s father takes the family for his rest-cures).³⁶ The

³⁶ St. Augustine, Florida had long been known as a “winter mecca for the infirm” through the 1880s when American business tycoon Henry Morrison Flagler, a partner of John D. Rockefeller, came upon it and immediately began plans to develop the area into a larger tourist attraction for white northerners (Akin 116). Flagler transformed St. Augustine into “the Newport of the South” by financing and building several high-end luxury resorts and hotels (116). In such resort towns, the “low-paying” and low-end jobs typically fell to black Americans (Braden 129).

majority of the Welland's house staff stays behind in New York, and so "Mrs. Welland was obliged, year after year, to improvise an establishment partly [of servants] made up of discontented New York servants and partly drawn from the local African supply" (89). That these black servants are commodified as part of a "supply" creates an uncomfortable slippage that reminds the reader that very recently such "local Africans" *were* commodities to be bought and sold as supply, particularly this deep in the American South. The literal trading of Africans and African-Americans as "supply" by whites to maintain a white dominant national order during the only recently abolished slave-trade is a not-distant memory with lingering and dramatic consequences, and the residue of slavery remains in the Welland's own use of this "African supply" to ensure their white household is maintained while they vacation in Florida at the height of Reconstruction.

Indeed, if the Wellands are vacationing in the mid 1870s as the novel's timeline would suggest, they are placing themselves in the middle of continued racial conflict and white supremacy when the "Black Codes" of ex-Confederate States were actively limiting black civil, political, and economic involvement and opportunities, and Jim Crow laws were beginning in earnest.³⁷ Florida was at the center of multiple labor struggles for black workers and while Henry Flagler was building luxury hotels and

³⁷ In Florida, as in all of the former Confederate states, Black Codes were passed at the regional and state level to limit African-American political participation, civil rights, and economic opportunities. To the benefit of the white tourists and patrons, such codes secured a steady stream of cheap labor from the "supply" of recently freed slaves. Codes levied special poll taxes on black voters, limited land-ownership and leasing rights, outlawed black political gatherings, limited employment options, etc. Historian Theodore B. Wilson explains, these codes "simply made explicit the obvious intent [...] to keep freemen, so far as was possible, in the status assigned to the free Negro before the Civil War" (69). (Though Wilson's *Black Codes* seems to serve as an apologia for Southern legislation, it usefully details these codes, if only, in the end, to partially defend them.) The elections of 1876 "decided the fate of Reconstruction in the South" and mark a turning point from state-based "Black Codes" to more nationalized Jim Crow laws (Ortiz 46). The *Florida Times-Union* described the victories of 1876 in heroic terms: "[The white man] violated the sanctity of the ballot box to save his State from shame and his community from destruction" (Ortiz 47). The results of these elections "transform[ed] Florida into a southern state with low wages and racial oppression" for African-American Floridians (Ortiz 31).

condos for the upper-class white tourists (much like the Wellands) in St. Augustine, black Floridians (those fortunate enough to be allowed to work) were relegated to servant roles with low wages and little recourse (Ortiz 17-22). From the end of the Civil War well through the next century, African-American suppression, an active Ku Klux Klan, and black degradation were rampant across Florida. This fraught racial situation peaked the year *The Age of Innocence* was published, with what historian Paul Ortiz calls “the bloodiest election in modern American history” (17). In the lead-up to the 1920 November election, white supremacist groups organized around Florida to suppress black voters through coordinated campaigns of terror, violence, and intimidation, and by the end of election day, hundreds of African Americans had been driven out of their Florida hometowns, and somewhere between thirty and sixty black Floridians (and one white Floridian) were dead, many of them beat to death or burnt alive by white mobs (221-3).³⁸ While the election of 1920 marked a particularly brutal manifestation of racial violence and racist attitudes, it was, in many ways, simply the culmination of “normal” race relations and realities in Florida from Reconstruction through the new century.

While Wharton’s St. Augustine is set years before the most conspicuous black suppression and anti-black violence that marked the 1920 election, such black suppression was building in the years during which the novel is set and was nationally visible during the time in which the novel was written. Yet, the novel highlights St.

³⁸ The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) brought a case against Florida to the US Congress in December of that same year and charged southern election officials of purposely violating the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments by creating separate voting registration standards for whites than black, and then by intentionally discriminating against African Americans who were trying to exercise their right to vote during the November election (Ortiz 224). When Florida representative William J. Sears was called upon to testify regarding these charges, he “expressed his commitment to maintain white supremacy” in the state of Florida and his fellow congressional members on the hearing committee were enthusiastic in their support for Sears’s vision of Florida (226). The congressional committee dismissed the charges brought against Florida and its election officials.

Augustine as the quiet, relaxing beach-resort that it no doubt was for white tourists in closing decades of the century. Florida's tourism depended on such experiences of its white patrons to ensure its stable economy. One full-color brochure advertisement from the Florida East Coast Railway shows a palm tree-lined path opening to a serene beach with the caption: "Florida East Coast/ The East Coast of Florida is Paradise Regained" (qtd. Braden Plate 7). And it certainly is the perfect respite for Newland, who joins the Welland party mid-way through their vacation. As he walks the main street of St. Augustine toward the vacation house of May Welland, he thinks to himself: "Here was truth, here was reality, here was the life that belonged to him" (88). Newland's reality is a far cry from the unseen reality of Mrs. Welland's black servants, and that, of course, is the point—that the lives of the racial Other are unseen, ignored, and invisible is necessary to uphold the fiction of white supremacy. In that same Florida brochure that promised paradise for the white tourist, two dark-skinned black porters line the walkway toward the beach, one carrying the unseen tourist's (the assumed reader) golf-clubs, one carrying the baggage; each uses his other arm to gesture openly toward the beach in welcome to the approaching tourist/reader. Such white leisure, the brochure knows, is dependent on and desires such black servitude, and the reality of Florida's—and the nation's—racial history lingers in Wharton's text despite the (unintentional or willful) ignorance of the lived realities of non-whites in America.

That such servants get only a passing mention in the text (though they undergird the Wellands' lifestyle while living there), directs the reader as to how we should understand these servants' importance, function, and even personhood. In a large part, their presence—even their invisible presence—simply helps to better illuminate and

make possible the Welland's own whiteness. As Toni Morrison argues in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), the Africanist presence (either of actual or implied blackness) is a "vehicle" for American self-knowledge throughout American fiction, particularly fiction we don't normally think of as "raced" or about racial identity (52). The Africanist presence is necessary, argues Morrison, in the construction of whiteness:

These images of impenetrable whiteness need contextualizing to explain their extraordinary power, pattern, and consistency. Because they appear almost always in conjunction with representations of black or Africanist people who are dead, impotent, or under complete control, these images of blinding whiteness seem to function as both antidote for and meditation on the shadow that is companion to this whiteness—. (33)

In *St. Augustine*, the African servants that Mrs. Welland is compelled to employ make possible her whiteness not only in the literal sense of ensuring the physical needs and comforts of the Welland family (their food, living standard, etc.), but the servants also rhetorically ensure that the reader can better understand just how white and in control the Welland family is when compared to their invisible, identity-less omnipresent black servants.

The paradoxically simultaneous virtual erasure of and white dependence on the racial Other can also be seen in the descriptions of Catherine Mingott's unnamed "mulatto maid" who is only marked by color or function when she is mentioned at all. Reminiscent of Wharton's childhood memories of her mother's "brilliantly turbaned" servants, the unnamed maid of the Mingott house is described by her "bright turban"

(131), and her “white teeth shining like a keyboard” (179). Or, more invisibly, she is introduced as her task: “The mulatto maid put her [Mrs. Mingott] to bed” (164). This type of racial invisibility recalls Wharton’s own childhood memories of the “Dark Ladies” who operated largely behind the scenes of the Jones household, and demonstrates the importance of servants in how they both serve and reveal whiteness.

The invisibility of these servants has been reinforced by critics who themselves have largely ignored the servants in Wharton’s fiction, and, when they do consider them, focus on white servants. In *Edith Wharton: A Study of her Short Fiction* (1991), Barbara A. White argues that while “Wharton never completely shed her ‘deep class prejudices’ [... her later work in short stories] shows a relaxation of those prejudices to the point where there is a greater lower-class presence with the perspectives of lower-class characters, especially servants, being presented more strongly and sympathetically” (98). Yet, if this is a claim specific to Wharton’s short fiction, it is also only true of white domestic servants; the servants who receive fuller attention by Wharton (and are, consequently, rounder characters) are all white domestic servants.³⁹ Yet, some of the same lessons about the role of white servants in Wharton’s fiction do still apply to the role of their more invisible black countertypes. As Sherrie Inness argues in “‘Loyal Saints of Devious Rascals’: Domestic Servants in Edith Wharton’s Stories ‘The Lady’s Maid’s Bell’ and ‘All Souls’” (1999), servants in Wharton’s fiction firstly reveal that “the upper class were dependent upon those who served them” (340). Wharton, Inness argues, uses servants to “reveal the decay of the old aristocratic order with which she was raised”

³⁹ White domestic servants appear prominently in several of Wharton’s short stories such as “Afterward” (1910); “The Temperate Zone” (1924), “The Young Gentleman” (1926), “The Day of the Funeral” (1933), and “All Souls” (1937). In “The Lady’s Maid’s Bell” (1902), the narrative first-person is a white domestic servant.

(348). And while the black servants of the Mingott or Welland households may not go on to reveal the “increasing power of the lower classes” as Inness argues other servants in Wharton’s fiction do (348),⁴⁰ they do mark a different social order before the turn of the century, one in which racial divisions in America seem simpler than they do by the 1910s during which the novel was written. Such clear racial Otherness of the servants in the novel reveals their primary function: unlike white servants in Wharton’s fiction who might blur the line “between maid and mistress” (Inness 348), the black servants in *The Age of Innocence* further highlight the whiteness of the families they serve. But it is a whiteness that cannot remain stable, and the growing instability of the category of whiteness causes gender, social, and literary anxiety that we see throughout the novel as characters seek to situate themselves in an increasingly insecure whiteness.

In the Blood and of the Clan: Tracing America’s Race Dialogues

There is a recurring effort to define and authenticate white identity in *The Age of Innocence*. That Wharton was well versed in competing narratives of racial identity (how you define race and who gets to belong to which race) is evident in the overview of racial dialogues and possibilities she provides in the novel. As characters try to situate themselves and understand and secure their place in society, they often rely on familiar tropes of racial identity. *The Age of Innocence* outlines what John Higham describes as the two general types of race thinking at the turn of the century: the “Anglo-Saxon tradition” that identified “culture with ancestry” (133), and a newer type of race-thinking

⁴⁰ Many of Inness’s claims do not readily apply to the black servants in *The Age of Innocence*. While servants of any race in Wharton’s fiction “give Wharton’s readers a vision of the inequities of class divisions” (348), it takes a close read of *Age* to recognize the existence of the black servants let alone to consider their class position.

that evolved from naturalists and anthropologists (134).⁴¹ Wharton's investment in the novel lies in demonstrating the hold that each of these conceptions of racial belonging can have on the individual and collective society and in revealing the impact of the shifting definitions of racial identity.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Newland's mother Mrs. Archer, a self-appointed representative of Old New York, understands her racial position in more traditional terms. Unlike Newland, she will not struggle with the complications of her own identity or the strictures of her society—a society she knows and understands very well—and she situates her family in terms both racial and national when she explains to Newland their lineage: “Our grandfathers and great-grandfathers were just respectable English or Dutch merchants [...] One of your great-grandfathers signed the Declaration, and another was a general on Washington's staff” (32). This explanation is given to Archer and his sister to dismiss what Mrs. Archer considers the “rubbish about the New York aristocracy” (32), popularized in Wharton's life as the New York “Four Hundred.” With growing numbers of people clogging up the boxes at the opera, Mrs. Archer offers a clearer and stricter definition of racial identity needed to maintain Anglo-Saxon order.

The growing ranks of the New York elite were a cause of concern for many. An 1895 *Cosmopolitan* article “The Myth of the Four Hundred”⁴² outlined the issue at hand: the “old régime” in New York was being overtaken by a new, growing mass of

⁴¹ Eventually, as I outline in the Introduction, the separation between these two “streams” of race-thinking would partially break down, so that nativists and eugenicists would begin to include “scientific” evidence and support in their arguments for white superiority (134).

⁴² Here the author uses “Myth” to refer to the growing mythology over the “smart set” of New York whose lives were increasingly followed by people across the country in newspapers, magazines and novels that detailed the lives and trivialities of the New York elite (Harrison 333). Such demand, Harrison argued, exaggerated “into importance the most trivial actions of those who have no claim whatsoever upon public interest” (333).

millionaires (Harrison 335). Such a threat (the Old rich being overtaken by the New rich) seems almost like a patrician parody of nativist warnings of increasing numbers of penniless, non-white immigrants overtaking America, but the infiltration of the New rich into the elite ranks of New York society serves as a symptom (or highly specialized microcosm) of the problem flagged by nativists in more frantic terms. Moreover, this specific infiltration of New York high society specifically concerned eugenicists like Madison Grant, whose own family “had adorned the social life of Manhattan since colonial times, and [...] he resisted doggedly any intrusion of [what he considered] the hoi polloi” (Higham 155). The infiltration of the New York elite was just the latest in a long line of examples of the breakdown of national racial exclusivity. The requirements for inclusion in New York’s elite were slipping and becoming crass and, most disturbingly, accessible: “‘Good enough—wise enough—well-born or well-mannered enough’ is not considered; but ‘rich enough’! The thing is incredible” (Harrison 336). Instead of such respectable markers as being well born (or having the manners that show you are well born), one’s wealth was all one seemed to need to rise socially: “to be ‘rich enough’ [is] to cross the inner boundaries of the best society” (336). Such democratic access is a troubling trend for a society reliant on exclusivity. As the *Cosmopolitan* article mockingly reported, “A story told last season was of a plutocratic young matron who observed, ‘Really, now that society in New York is getting so large, one must draw the line somewhere; after this, I shall visit and invite only those who have more than five millions’” (336). Of course, that the young matron is reliant on the level of wealth to determine her company misses the point entirely (hence why Mrs. Archer insists to Newland that such “New York elite” are “rubbish”): the question of where to “draw the

line,” as nativists and eugenicists were insisting at the turn of the century, was not in terms of one’s wealth (which anyone could acquire), but in determining who was “well-born.”

Mrs. Archer’s explanation of her own well-born legacy suggests that the grounds for the New York elite have been corrupted by money away from a more ‘civilized’ understanding of racial lineage. Mrs. Archer is able to compensate for a more precarious gender position by touting her own whiteness assured in Anglo-Saxon bloodlines and can lay claim to the very inception of the nation with patriarchs who signed the Declaration and served with America’s first president. Thus Mrs. Archer secures the Archers firmly as “old stock” Americans (and disassociating themselves from the *nouveau riche*, who could very well be anybody from anywhere) and positions the family as those who can define and must defend the ranks of Old New York. The Archers, Mrs. Archer insists, are part of what Matthew Frye Jacobson explains in *Whiteness of a Different Color* (1998) as “the Anglo-Saxon ‘old stock’ who laid proprietary claim to the nation’s founding documents and hence to its stewardship” (4). Mrs. Archer’s claim is notably both race- and class-bound. In claiming Dutch and English lineage, Mrs. Archer is defining her more legitimate position in America’s elite, and defending the elite against the growing swarm of would-be high-class challengers (who may have the money of the New York elite, but not the pedigree).

The slippage between race and class identity is a confusion that would have been familiar to readers of Madison Grant’s 1916 *The Passing of the Great Race* who counted on Anglo-Saxons and Nordics to reassert their “class distinctions” and “race pride” to secure their superior identity (228). It was a slippage that understood race and class as

part of the same heritage, and the debate about who belongs in the New York Four Hundred (a status that would seem to be more financial than racial), points to the underlying racial requirements of American identity. Mrs. Archer joins with those like Grant in pinpointing this necessary racial status as one that can be traced “in the blood.” Newland Archer’s bloodlines connect him not only to a clear Anglo-Saxon heritage (in his Dutch and English ancestors), but, importantly, tie that racial heritage to American national identity (in the Archer ancestors’ national service and associations) and the elite economic positions to which such a racial identity is entitled. Such a way of understanding race handily justifies the position of the current New York socialites as white, American elite while constructing an insurmountable barrier for all but the very few whose wealth is coupled with such a racial pedigree.

The importance of maintaining the purity of that bloodline is evident in Archer’s match with May, the exemplar of “pure” white womanhood. When we first see the blonde, blue-eyed May at the opera, she is wearing a white dress, holding white lilies, and stroking them with her white-gloved hands, hands that her grandmother declares should be sculpted, after all, she points out, “the skin is white” (20). May is described as a “faint white figure” (50); she is adorned in white to look like the goddess Diana (42); her “white arm” is pinched by her grandmother when May blushes at the suggestion of children (130). May’s association with whiteness is overwhelming, and, to Archer, paradoxically seductive. Early in the novel, when Archer thinks of his pending marriage to May, he thinks: “What a new life it was going to be, with this whiteness, radiance, goodness at one’s side!” (16). The conflation of goodness and whiteness is unsurprising as May’s whiteness serves as a further indicator of her innocence and purity. As

Elizabeth Ammons argues in “Cool Diana and the Blood-Red Muse: Edith Wharton and the Innocence of Art” (1982), May is in many ways painted as the archetype of “female innocence” (447), particularly when compared to her exotic cousin Ellen.⁴³ Archer will later come to resent what he understands as the “abysmal purity” that has been bred into May (6), but her purity, both sexual and racial, functions as a necessary feature of white, upper-class women, upon whose bodies were placed the fears of miscegenation and race-suicide, and the conflation of these aspects of white, female identity helps to ensure racial security. The emphasis on May’s whiteness, purity, and innocence, reinforces racial ideologies that defined one’s race as being innate and immutable—something in the blood.

When writing to her friend Bernard Berenson in December of 1920, Wharton revealed her apprehension that *The Age of Innocence* would be taken as a sort of historical melodrama (it was set, after all, fifty years before its publication), and the

⁴³ Ellen, Ammons argues, represents “female passion” (447). When juxtaposed together, the two are representative of competing American female identities: that of “American girl” (May) and “woman as artist” (Ellen) (433). The presumption of May’s innocence is, of course, deeply embedded in her assumed gender role. For a salient consideration of the well-traversed discussion on the gendered implications of the assumed innocence of May, see: Judith P. Saunders, “Becoming the Mask: Edith Wharton’s Ingenues” (1982). May’s presumed innocence lies at the heart of a debate about just how much May knows or suspects about Archer’s intentions with Ellen, or his internal life and desires. While Ammons describes May as “the highest ideal [...of] her class’s ideal of helpless femininity” (*Edith* 147), Margaret B. McDowell describes May as “a woman of considerable strength” (99). Certainly May’s auspiciously timed telegrams serve to thwart Archer’s potential infidelities (see: Jean Frantz Blackall, “The Intrusive Voice: Telegrams in *The House of Mirth* and *the Age of Innocence*” [1991]). Yet, the critical dichotomy that separates May’s innocence from her strength seems too overly simplistic. In the closing pages of the novel, Dallas (May and Archer’s adult son) reveals to Archer that May had probably “guessed and pitied” Archer in his love for Ellen, and had asked Archer to give up “the thing you most wanted” (214). Yet May’s request here is unspoken (“She never asked me” Archer tells his son [214]), and her unflagging faith in Archer (which does pay off for her in the end) is part of the innocence expected of her. In essence, May plays her role so well that her innocence becomes her asset—the letter she sends rejoicing in their newly-set wedding date interrupts Archer at a crucial moment with Ellen, and it wins her the security of marriage to Archer (108), and her fortunately-timed pregnancy (announced to Ellen early) prevents Archer’s plans to leave the country with Ellen and secures May’s family line (205). As a contemporary review from the *New York Evening Post* asks: “Was May right when with the might of innocence she forced Newland to give up life for mere living? [... *Age*] says that the insistent innocence of America had its rewards as well as its penalties” (Canby 289). May’s power is, as Archer has predicted it, an “invincible innocence” (91).

pressing point of the novel would be lost: “I *did* so want ‘The Age’ to be taken not as a ‘costume piece’ but as a ‘simple & grave’ story of two people trying to live up to something that was still ‘felt in the blood’ at that time” (*emphasis in original, Letters* 433). Archer and Ellen’s tragedy, of course, is that they can never be together because they are, in this sense, trying to live up to the obligations of society felt deeply in the blood. Yet these societal obligations are not coincidentally also racial: the societal expectations enforced at the expense of Archer and Ellen’s love are invested in upholding the standards of white society through the union (and assumed child-bearing) of May and Archer. The novel’s critique of this society is clear (it is stifling and deadening), but it shows how seductive such racial understanding could be for a society anxious about racial outsiders.

Yet, if *The Age of Innocence* offers a way to locate and understand racial identity through biological certainties (the Dutch and English bloodlines of one’s white, American family, or the overwhelming whiteness of one’s phenotype and consequently one’s demeanor), it also challenges any overly-simplistic definition of race. In *Age*, Wharton suggests an evolving understanding of racial identity that incorporates cultural and anthropological paradigms and complicates biological racial certainty. R. W. B. Lewis describes Wharton as “addicted to anthropology” (*Edith* 432). Wharton had a “long-standing intellectual passion for anthropology” (498), and was well read in contemporary evolutionary, sociological, and anthropological theories.⁴⁴ Like Archer

⁴⁴ Wharton read evolutionary theory by Herbert Spencer, Darwin, Nietzsche, Ernst Von Haeckel (German biologist and naturalist), T. H. Huxley, George Romanes (Canadian-born English evolutionary biologist). She read Max Weber, and anthropologists Paul Topinard (French physician and anthropologist) and Edvard Westermarck (Finnish sociologist). She had read Scottish anthropologist James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* and the work of Norwegian-American economist Thorstein Veblen (Lee 23). These theories make their way into much of Wharton’s writing indirectly, and even, at times, directly. In her 1910 short story

himself, who supposes that “his readings in anthropology caused him to take such a coarse view” on the society around him (43), Wharton’s own reading in anthropology shaped her understanding of the consequences of America’s racial discourses.

In *Age*, Wharton is able to “combin[e] the role of novelist with that of ethnographer” (Saunders, “Portrait” 86), and Wharton offers an alternative to understanding Archer and May’s whiteness. Wharton’s heavy use of anthropological language throughout the novel suggests we can read *The Age of Innocence* as an ethnography where the family is “clan” and “tribe” (31), the customs of the tribe are dining, and leisure, and one must go through “the solemn rite of selecting [... one’s] extensive wardrobe” (121). These customs provide a predictable, albeit stifling, routine and the security of knowing one’s place in society. In the opening pages of the novel, Archer is acutely aware that he must act according to certain codes long-rooted in his society: “what was or was not ‘the thing’ played a part as important in Newland Archer’s New York as the inscrutable totem terrors that had ruled the destinies of his forefathers thousands of years ago” (4). What seems like the frivolities of when to arrive at your opera box and with whom you converse while there are the cultural markers that help Archer navigate his place in the world and help him, and the reader, understand that world. Archer can rely on the innate “ancestral authority” of his society to dictate the

“Afterward,” for instance, a young wife is trying to figure out where her missing husband has gone. A shady business partner of the disappeared husband appears and misappropriates Spencer when trying to explain part of her husband’s past business dealings and why a business deal gone awry had led to the suicide of the third business partner: “I guess that’s what scientists call the survival of the fittest” (173). The speaker is trying to use Spencer’s theory of “survival of the fittest” to justify why the business deal went wrong for the one business partner, while the other two (himself and the missing husband) escaped financial ruin. The reader knows the business deal was probably not “straight” as the speaker himself hints, and that the now-dead unfortunate partner was not the victim of evolution, but of some sort of fraud. The use of “survival of the fittest” here is also deeply ironic in the story, because though the less “fit” partner took the financial ruin and then committed suicide, as a ghost he has taken the missing husband presumably to his death.

codes of behavior and rules of engagement (35). And at first, Archer is glad for this racial security. When he first meets Ellen for instance, her palpable foreignness makes Archer grateful of his pending marriage to his “kinswoman” May, and he “thanked heaven that he was a New Yorker, and about to ally himself with one of his own kind” (21).

Wharton’s use of such sociological and anthropological language to understand the New York elite is particularly reminiscent of Thorstein Veblen’s popular *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), which argued that contemporary societal behavior was a social remnant of pre-historic times and simply a variation on early tribal life. The leisure class, argued Veblen, exhibited a familiar and inherited “clan-ishness” (391). Much like Archer’s understanding of how he must navigate what is or is not “the thing,” a process as serious as “totem terrors” that connected him to his kin of millennia past, Veblen explained contemporary social taste in similar terms:

The content of the canons of taste [...] is in the nature of things a resultant of the past life and circumstances of the race, transmitted to the later generation by inheritance or by tradition [...] canons of taste are race habits, acquired through a more or less protracted habituation to the approval or disapproval of the kind of things upon which a favourable or unfavourable judgment of taste is passed. (392)

Archer’s daily navigation of social traditions, strictures, and mores is a navigation of his own racial identity. These shared traditions are the “instinct of race solidarity” (Veblen 221). But it is a race solidarity that Archer finds increasingly restrictive. Though through the vibrant and alluring Ellen, Archer is given glimpses of what he thinks of as

the “real” lives of “real people’ [who] were living somewhere, and real things [were] happening to them...” (111), his own life is unavoidably dictated by his racial legacy as handed down in millennia of cultural traditions. As he stands at the altar of his own wedding he waits for the bride to appear and considers his place in the ceremony and his agency in his own life:

Archer had gone through this formality [of waiting] as resignedly as through all the others which made of a nineteenth-century New York wedding a rite that seemed to belong to the dawn of history. Every thing was equally easy—or equally painful, as one chose to put it—in the path he was committed to tread [...] (109)

Here Newland must suffer his inherited cultural transmission in this “rite” not only in the wedding itself, but also in the union to his kinswoman May (and the race solidarity such a union would ensure). In the novel this wedding scene can seem abrupt; after all, the wedding comes directly after Archer tries to confess his love to Ellen. But Archer’s sense while standing at the altar that this is the unalterable path that he must tread points to the inevitability of his marriage to May (and the futility of the previous scene where he attempts to convince Ellen of an elopement). It is, as Veblen explained, the inescapable result of race solidarity: “whenever an accession of pecuniary strengths puts the individual in a position to unfold his life process in large scope and with additional reach, the ancient propensities of the race will assert themselves in determining the direction which the new unfolding of life is to take” (109-10). Archer may be more thoughtful than many of his kinsmen (he is sensitive to the desirability of the “real” life embodied in Ellen), but he is still unavoidably and finally bound to his “own kind.”

The anthropological and sociological perspectives at work throughout the novel suggests that one can determine one's "own kind" by reading social customs and patterns—charted as an anthropologist may chart the rites and rituals of a newfound society or as a sociologist may chart the history of a certain class of people. Further, it suggests that race may be understood as culturally based—a stark contrast to Mrs. Archer's understanding of her own racial genealogy or to the insistence on May's physical whiteness as a racial determinant. Instead, one can determine "one's own kind" not simply by such blood-legacies or phenotypic racial indicators, but by the company one keeps, like the Wellands' fraternization with the "ruling clans" when "they rolled from one 'tribal' doorstep to another [for social calls]" (31, 43). This more anthropological way of explaining such "tribal" customs gives us a way to understand the fixedness of Archer's life-trajectory (as inherited societal norms) and the racial legacy of New York's upper class (as custom, rather than biology). What's more, it allows Wharton herself the distance of an ethnographer, one who can look back on a society with a critical eye and chart the ways of knowing, the language of belonging, and the racial positions of its people. As such, her use of the biological "certainties" of race is as much a part of this ethnological project as her use of the contrasting anthropological terms she uses. And, indeed, the two are intertwined. As Wharton described in *A Backward Glance*, these old families of Old New York were "the Americans of the original States, who in moments of crisis still shaped the national point of view, [and they] were heirs of an old tradition of European culture" (7). Here, the cultural legacy is embedded in the racial—the Old New Yorkers are inheritors of a Colonial racial heredity (of New York's Dutch and subsequently English settlers) as well as a culturally

transmitted racial legacy (in the old traditions disseminated down through the generations). Yet, if the relationship between these two ways of understanding racial difference (at its most simple: biology or culture) points to a certain interdependence between these two ways of defining one's racial position, it also points to a troubling ambiguity: is Archer's racial alignment with May inevitable because they share the same tribal customs, or do they share tribal customs because their racial lineage is aligned? As Wharton traces these overlapping and conflicting ways of understanding race, she exposes this ambiguity of racial identity at work in racial discourses of America, but offers no clear answer as to which racial matrix holds the true answer to American identity. The very question itself is damaging enough.

Exclusionary Whiteness: The Problem of Ellen Olenska

The society of *The Age of Innocence* is deeply invested in various ways of understanding and refining American whiteness—as benefactors of an invisible black servant class, descendants of a long Anglo-Saxon legacy, or as members of a rigid tribal system. But for all its dedication to racial hierarchies, Wharton shows that the same society will suffer dramatic consequences from such exclusionary whiteness. In each of these racial systems, meant after all to reinforce a strict version of whiteness, Ellen Olenska, as “native” to Old New York as any Archer or Mingott, becomes racially suspect and shows that the varying discourses of whiteness in America have created a paradoxical standard of whiteness that threatens the very society it is meant to protect.

While the black (and invisible) servants of the Wellands' summer-home help to highlight the Wellands' whiteness, the mulatto maid of the Mingott home compromises

Ellen's whiteness. Each time the nameless servant appears in the novel, it is in direct association with Ellen Olenska, to the point that the maid operates as a stand-in for Ellen in these scenes. When May and Newland are at Mrs. Mingott's celebrating May's archery competition victory, Mrs. Mingott calls for Ellen (who is unexpectedly in town), and, because Ellen does not immediately answer, the "mulatto maid-servant in a bright turban" comes to inform the party that "Miss Ellen" has gone down to the shore (131). It is in this moment, with the maid present and the pronouncement of Ellen Olenska's name, that Ellen becomes "a living presence to him [Archer] again" (131). Later in the text, Archer is specifically seeking Ellen and rushes into Mrs. Mingott's house, "But in the yellow sitting room it was the mulatto maid who waited" (179). Where before the maid directed Archer and the reader to Ellen, here she is her stand-in. Archer will not see Ellen that day, only the mulatto maid. With these associations, it is perhaps not surprising then that Ellen is often described in dark colors, with dark hair, and when she blushes, the color rises "duskily" (75).⁴⁵

What's more, Ellen is marked specifically as a racial outsider in the same ways that mark May as a racial insider, a strategy of highlighting Ellen's racial difference that MacMaster calls Wharton's "racial doubling" (191). Though Ellen is, like May, a Mingott, the matriarch Catherine Mingott understands Ellen's difference as being something in the blood and laments, "It's only my poor Ellen that has kept any of [the Spicer family] wicked blood" (96). This wicked blood from a family of the Mingott line (handsome and troublesome Bob Spicer is Catherine Mingott's father) manifests itself in

⁴⁵ That Ellen's color is described as being "dusky" is itself racially suggestive. For example, in Frances Ellen Watkins Harper's *Iola Leroy* (1892), long-time friend of Iola and slave Tom Anderson has the death sweat wiped from his "dusky brow" (54-5), or in Langston Hughes's "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" (1921) the rivers that make up the legacy of the "Negro" are referred to as "Ancient, dusky rivers" (23).

racial difference and Ellen is continually characterized by her distinguishable darkness. The dark-eyed, dark-haired Ellen who has returned to New York having fled her marriage to a Polish Count is the “black sheep” of the family (9). She is characterized as the “bold, brown Ellen Mingott” (21). Unlike May, whose blush only highlights her otherwise white complexion, Ellen’s color rises “duskily” (75). Her relations remember her as a child in “crimson merino and amber beads, like a gipsy foundling” (38). Even Ellen’s clothes are dark, sexual, and exotic: in the opening opera scene she wears a dark blue velvet gown in the style of the Empress Josephine, aligning her with the always-exotic French. She is even identified early on as the mysterious, “dark lady” (77), a description which recalls the black servants of the Jones household of Wharton’s youth (as does the conspicuous color of Ellen’s clothing), and in the final scene of the novel, Archer’s lasting memory of Ellen, and his last description of her, is as the “dark lady” (217). Ellen’s palpable difference, and the threat she presents to her paranoid, white society, is why she must ultimately be thrust back out of what is, after all, her home country. Archer is increasingly seduced by Ellen’s difference, which threatens not simply May’s position, but the stability of the white family and the standards by which whiteness is determined. The answer to critic Elizabeth Ammons’s question—could it be that Ellen is “ejected from the American leisure class not simply because she is female, artistic, and sexy but because she is *dark*, female, artistic, and sexy” (“Edith” 83)—is easily “yes.”

But, what troubles the racial logic that works to make Ellen racially Othered is that though Ellen may have some wicked blood that seems to manifest itself in her literal and figurative darkness and apparent love of color, she is after all a Mingott from Old New York, bred from the “right people,” and as such, Ellen’s racial mobility challenges

standards of white racial identification meant to protect the white family. To fully account for Ellen's dismissal from the ranks of white New York, then, Wharton turns again to anthropological understandings of race. After all, as MacMaster points out, the differences between May as the "fair heroine" and Ellen as the "dark" is seen "according to her respective devotion to or defiance of convention" (192)—which is to say, May's whiteness is gauged by how well she fits into her society and Ellen's darkness by how markedly she does not fit. Ellen's general attitudes and customs codify her as "the strange foreign woman" (17). Ellen resists conformity and flouts convention at every turn. She is "complicated, flawed, sensual, curious, and creative" (Ammons, "Cool Diana" 440). Her very clothes betray that she is "heedless of tradition;" receiving Newland at her apartment one evening, she wears an erotic robe of "red velvet bordered about the chin and down the front with glossy black fur" that reveals her bare arms (67). Her apartment in New York is a tangible manifestation of her Otherness. Ellen's flat had "been transformed into something intimate, 'foreign,' subtly suggestive of old romantic scenes and sentiments [...there was a] vague pervading perfume that was not what one put on handkerchiefs, but rather like the scent of some far-off bazaar, a smell made up of Turkish coffee and ambergris and dried roses" (45). The exotic, quixotic Ellen is an amalgamation of various foreign sensations; intimacy, strong sentiments, oriental smells—all of these separate Ellen from her undemonstrative, reserved, white New Yorker "kinfolk." The very location of Ellen's apartment shows her cultural disconnect. It was located in the culturally suspicious "'Bohemian' quarter" (65), an "almost unmapped quarter inhabited by artists, musicians and 'people who wrote.'" These scattered fragments of humanity had never shown any desire to be amalgamated with the

social structure” (64). Surely the cultural objection to Ellen’s sharing a neighborhood with “people who wrote” is humorous when we consider that Wharton herself was a person “who wrote,” yet it also shows how easily one might cross the boundaries not simply of acceptable neighborhoods, but of racial belonging.

Ellen Olenska’s company further separates her from what we might assume would be her racial lineage as a Mingott, and perhaps no alliance makes her more racially suspect than her friendship with Julius Beaufort, whom Wharton fashioned after New York millionaire and Jewish financier August Belmont.⁴⁶ Beaufort is a character reminiscent of *The House of Mirth*’s Simon Rosedale, and Wharton employs many of the same anti-Semitic stereotypes she uses freely in *The House of Mirth*. Beaufort has a certain “native shrewdness” (87), which makes him well suited for finance and is a “vulgar” (23), “purse-proud” man (87), who merely “passed for an English-man” (13), but most certainly “was ‘a foreigner’” (168). Archer explains that “a woman engaged in a love affair with Beaufort ‘classed’ herself irretrievably” (87). Ellen is not engaged in a love affair with Beaufort, but for Ellen, mere association with the ostensibly Jewish banker races her irretrievably and she becomes, in words reminiscent of the seduction scene from *Faust*, “Beaufort’s victim” (87). Her alliance with Beaufort adds to a dizzying list of ways in which she is cast as racially Other so that in the end Ellen must be cast out. Which she is, ever so genteelly, after a large dinner in her honor—a ritual described as “the tribal rally around a kinswoman about to be eliminated from the tribe” (200).

Ellen’s (compromised) racial position is troubling exactly because it seems so easily compromised. A wicked ancestor in an otherwise good family, a friendship with a

⁴⁶ See note 17, p. 29.

vulgar foreigner, a penchant for artistic company, a clash of cultural sensitivities—these things all stand as threats to the insular New York society in that they challenge the social norms of the reigning tribe. But that Ellen is not only socially spurned, but also cast as the dark outsider and racial threat indicates that any threat to the custom of the clan is a threat to its racial integrity, leaving the same society vulnerable at every turn in a story of inevitable social change. *The Age of Innocence* recalls a society long-gone before the novel is even written, and even by the end of the novel’s timeline, the customs of this age are “prehistoric” to the next generation (213). Any racial security wrapped up in customs and traditions is necessarily lost on this next generation of Americans who are living out the racially apocalyptic warning that “If things go at this rate, our children will be marrying Beaufort’s bastards” (211): as the novel ends, Archer and May’s son Dallas is preparing to wed Fanny Beaufort—all transgressions of the distasteful and once-bankrupted Beaufort seemingly forgotten after he reestablishes his wealth, and with it, his position in New York society; the threat inherent in the ballooning ranks of the New York “Four Hundred” has been fully realized.

In *A Backward Glance*, Wharton describes *Age* as “a momentary escape in going back to my childish memories of a long-vanished America” (369). And the novel shows that this escape into memory is as fleeting as the racial stability America so scrupulously guarded. The sacrifice of Ellen on the altar of American whiteness only slightly defers the inevitable racial changes afoot in America; after all, the racial hyper-exclusivity that expatriates Ellen does not defend against Beaufort. What’s more, while May is able to secure her bloodline with Archer for one generation (in the removal of Ellen and in May and Archer’s subsequent children), the next generation is not racially stabilized: May and

Archer's grandchildren will be Beauforts as they are Archers. Yet, *The Age of Innocence* shows, while these racial barriers may be finally futile, they are no less destructive. If Ellen is the most obvious victim of such racial exclusivity since she cannot live up to the racial standards of American whiteness (and hence must be cast out because of the threat her difference poses to such standards), her "successful" counterpart May is no less affected by them. May's life and customs are dictated by these standards that she struggles to uphold (and, in the marriage of her child to Fanny Beaufort, ultimately fails to secure) and her own white identity is entirely dependent on her marrying the right (white) man and producing white children. What this hints at is that May's sex (as a potential reproducer) and gender (as understood in roles and virtues), as much as anything else, determine her racial status; a gendered complication to race that we can see clearly in Wharton's most famous heroine, Lily Bart, and in Chapter Two, I explore the way gender itself becomes a racial liability in *The House of Mirth* and how such intersections of sex, gender, and race conversely undermine the whiteness of the seemingly lily-white.

Chapter 2

Death of the White Heroine: The Racial Uncertainty of Lily Bart

[Lily] seemed a stranger to herself, or rather there were two selves in her, the one she had always known, and a new abhorrent being to which it found itself chained.

-Edith Wharton
The House of Mirth

Near the middle of *The House of Mirth* (1905), the peripheral Wellington Brys (who, like most of the characters in the novel, are desperately clinging to good society) decide to “attack society collectively” by throwing a fashionable party at Bellomont and that “*tableaux vivants* and expensive music were the two baits most likely to attract the desired prey” (103). *Tableaux vivants*, in which fashionable society posed as figures in sculptures or paintings, had “taken the country by storm” by the 1890s (Orlando, 62), and the Brys are depending upon the continued popularity of these performances to propel them into good social standing. Happily, the social climbers are gratified by all the right people attending their party to hear their expensive music and view the *tableaux*, in what has become one of the most famous scenes of the novel.

Just as the first curtain is drawn, the narrator breaks away from describing the scene represented (here, the nymphs of Botticelli’s *Spring*) and its admiring crowd to explain to the reader the relationship between the *tableau* and the viewer:

Tableaux vivants depend for their effect not only on the happy disposal of lights and the delusive interposition of layers of gauze, but on a corresponding adjustment of the mental vision. To unfurnished minds

they remain, in spite of every enhancement of art, only a superior kind of wax-works; but to the responsive fancy they may give magic glimpses of the boundary world between fact and imagination. (105)

What the *tableau vivant* demands from the viewer, the narrator suggests, is a certain way of seeing to make the illusion complete, a vision that sees past the woman representing the picture and can see, instead, the picture she represents. Further, the good *tableau* will help to take the viewer to that “boundary world” where the difference between fact and imagination is compromised, so that the viewer is not simply willfully suspending disbelief, but is seeing the very real interplay between fact and fiction.⁴⁷ The *tableaux* featured at the Brys’s party at Bellomont, the narrator assures us, “wanted none of the qualities which go to the producing of such illusions” (105). And the women who perform occupy a liminal space between fact and imagination and have been “cleverly fitted with characters suited to their type” to make the illusion all the more complete (105). The crowd is convinced, for instance, by Carry Fisher, with her “dark-skinned face” as a representative model for the Spaniard Goya; equally are they convinced by the “frailer Dutch type” Mrs. Van Alstyne as a “characteristic [Flemish] Vandyck [*sic*]” (105).⁴⁸ These women blend into the canvas the *tableaux* are meant to represent and the

⁴⁷ The language in this artistic explanation certainly has classist implications, as presumably the furnished mind will possess some indefinable quality, a certain refinement, which helps it see the art beyond the artwork. It also suggests that there is significant room for *misreading*. The viewer of the *tableaux* who only sees the performance (the “wax works”) misses what is really at stake for the narrator in such a performance, the borderlands between fact and imagination, where the *tableau* is more than a representation; it is itself real.

⁴⁸ In *Edith Wharton and the Visual Arts* (2007), Emily J. Orlando notes the fixed status of the women of Goya’s paintings (who are often pointing at the artist’s name inscribed at their feet): “While the Goya painting thus emphasizes the male artist’s authorship as well as the female subject’s status as ‘taken,’ Lily’s tableau draws attention to Lily as artist and broadcasts her status as ‘available’” (68). This status is troubling because for Lily it is “her *body* that is at stake here” (70), which, as I will later argue, is troubling because of its implications of prostitution. Orlando curiously fails to note the important racial overtones of this scene and the paintings the women are performing.

illusion of fact becoming fiction in these scenes is complete. The women blend so seamlessly into their scenes in part because they have been racially typecast. Carry Fisher can easily portray one of Goya's women because her facial features are described as Mediterranean. Mrs. Van Alstyne is a "Dutch type," and can easily portray one of Van Dyck's women. This clever fitting "with characters suited to their [highly racialized] type," is what makes these women so effective in the illusion of the *tableaux vivants*.

Unlike the other women whose ability to pass as raced portrait subjects helps reveal something intrinsic about the painting they are performing, Lily's performance is shocking because it does the opposite. In Lily's performance, in the boundary world between fact and imagination, the viewer is able to see past the picture Lily is representing to something intrinsically true about the woman herself. When Lily's *tableau* is revealed:

there could be no mistaking the predominance of personality—the unanimous "Oh!" of the spectators was a tribute not to the brushwork of Reynolds's "Mrs. Lloyd" but to the flesh and blood loveliness of Lily Bart [...] It was as though she had stepped, not out of, but into, Reynolds's canvas [...] The impulse to show herself in a splendid setting—she had thought for a moment of representing Tiepolo's Cleopatra—had yielded a truer instinct of trusting to her unassisted beauty, and she had purposely chosen a picture without distracting accessories of dress or surrounding. Her pale draperies, and the background of foliage against which she stood, served only to relieve the long dryad-like curves that swept upward from her poised foot to her lifted arm. (106)

What Lily's performance suggests is that she is as much represented by the picture as the picture is represented by her. Lily has refused to define herself in the more stylized, more markedly racial choice of Cleopatra, and chooses, instead, the unadorned Mrs. Lloyd, a painting which depicts a white Englishwoman in simple, "pale draperies" reaching toward a tree (where, in the painting, she is inscribing her husband's name) (106). Lily has chosen a subject with the hopes of showing that "her loveliness was no mere fixed quality" (103). The novel highlights Lily's pliability: we learn that Lily's early and immediate loss of fortune "had made Lily supple instead of hardening her" (31). And when her Aunt Julia Peniston takes her in after the death of her mother, Lily "showed a pliancy" for which Mrs. Peniston is grateful, but "which, to a more penetrating mind than her aunt's, might have been less reassuring" (31); this pliancy means Lily can adapt and recreate herself as she needs to—she is accommodating for her Aunt (who is far more strict than Lily), coy and attractive for potential husbands, and obliging to her higher-class friends. It is a pliancy that is expertly used as Lily enacts Mrs. Lloyd.

While the other women of the *tableaux* are well matched to their subjects, Lily's ability to become her subject, moreover, to make her subject become her, reminds the reader of the earliest impression of Lily as an artificial creation. In the opening passages of the novel, Lawrence Selden (a lawyer by profession and Lily's love-interest were he more wealthy) sees Lily at Grand Central Station where Selden has "a confused sense that she must have cost a great deal to make, that a great many dull and ugly people must, in some mysterious way, have been sacrificed to produce her [...] as though a fine glaze of beauty and fastidiousness had been applied to vulgar clay" (7). Selden's initial impression of Lily will prove to be deeply ironic by the end of the novel, when Lily, cast

from the graces of high society and now destitute, will herself be sewing spangles on hats for the rich and will be part of the great many people that sacrifice to produce beauty for the wealthy. But what's most striking in Selden's reading of Lily is his suspicion that she is merely "vulgar clay" that has been shaped to appear fine, and (as the *tableaux* scene earlier suggests) that the Lily both Selden and the readers sees is created. Despite his lingering question as to the nature of Lily Bart, Selden, like most people throughout the novel, is entranced by the "fine glaze" of Lily's beauty; it is perhaps the shine from this glaze that blinds Selden to his own suspicions of Lily's created-ness, which he frequently forgets, and encourages him to affix to her the certainty of identity that Lily is lacking.

This moment at Grand Central Station is one Kassanoff describes as a *tableau*-like scene of "racialized stasis" (46), where Wharton is "attempting to stage racial perfection by capturing an ideal image of the endangered Anglo-American" (46). Lily is, Kassanoff argues, Wharton's ideal Anglo-American, a race apart from those around her. Selden certainly seems to agree and he sees Lily walk, "past sallow-faced girls in preposterous hats, and flat-chested women struggling with paper bundles and palm leaf fans. Was it possible that she belonged to the same race? The dinginess, the crudity of this average section of womanhood made him feel how highly specialized she was" (6). If Selden here wonders if Lily belongs to the same human race as these other women, he also implicates Lily's racial status. This ambiguity of exactly what "race" means to Selden (Lily's sex or gender, nationality, class, phenotype) is a reflection of the broad ease with which Wharton understands the term throughout the novel.⁴⁹ Lily's "race" in

⁴⁹ Kassanoff rightly locates Wharton's understanding and use of race in its cultural moment where "This most disputed term could refer to anything from national origin, religious affiliation and aesthetic predilection, to geographic location, class membership and ancestral descent. In expressing her own concerns about America's future, Wharton drew feely on these protean possibilities" (4)

this scene is categorized by her general refinement in opposition to the coarseness of the dingy women around her. Yet her phenotype is also implicated in opposition to the “sallow-faced” women who mill about. So, too, is her general class standing as Selden realizes how much she “cost” to make. Even Lily’s sense of taste sets her apart as she presumably knows better than to wear preposterous hats. And, of course, Lily’s beauty itself is a racial marker. Selden understands Lily’s race as evidence that she is above the “average section” of womanhood, and the total effect of Lily is so convincing to Selden that he reconsiders his analogy of the “vulgar clay” and wonders “was it not possible that the material was fine, but the circumstance had fashioned it into a futile shape” (7). Selden’s inability to decide whether Lily is a vulgar clay made to look fine or fine material made to live among the vulgar is reminiscent of the fleeting and seemingly innocuous moment where Selden is unable to tell if Lily’s hair has been lightened when he admires the “crisp upward wave of her hair—was it ever so slightly brightened by art?” (7). This slight wavering in Selden’s assessment of Lily’s “natural” beauty is essentially the same question as his more philosophical musings about the nature of her identity as something vulgar fashioned to be fine, or something intrinsically fine. It is the crux of the question of Lily Bart throughout the novel: is Lily’s identity created, or is it innate—fixed or fashionable? This question is deeply connected to Lily’s racial status.

The Art of Race: Outlining Lily

Despite Selden’s lingering doubt, critics who have written about race identity in *The House of Mirth* have been in surprising agreement about the fixedness, and overwhelming whiteness, of Lily’s race (when Lily is considered as a raced character at

all). In “Edith Wharton and the Issue of Race” (1995), Elizabeth Ammons insists that Lily is “the whitest of white women” (70), an emblem of “Anglo-Saxon purity” who through her death only barely escapes “the shiny, Semitic invader” Simon Rosedale who would marry her (79). In “The Year of the Rose: Jewish Masculinity in *The House of Mirth*” (2005), Meredith Goldsmith offers a more complicated and compelling reading of Rosedale and points to the importance of understanding issues of race in conjunction with understandings of gender and identifies Rosedale as both a racial and gendered Other who exists outside both white and masculine norms. While Goldsmith overstates her charge that “the critical response to Wharton’s Jewish representations has remained only a little less offhanded than Jack Stepney’s remarks [that “we don’t *marry* Rosedale in our family”]” (375), it is true that Rosedale, when he is considered at all, is often simplified as an assumed reflection of Wharton’s anti-Semitic personal beliefs, and as an embodiment of his racial status. And while the connection between Wharton’s own anti-Semitism and her racist rendering of Rosedale is clear, Goldsmith is right in wanting to push beyond an oversimplified reading of Rosedale and consider, instead, more nuanced discussions about Rosedale’s racial position in the novel.

And yet nuance is what seems to be largely lacking in critical considerations of Lily’s race. Goldsmith, like Ammons, sees Lily only as a representative of the “Anglo-Saxon elite” who must be saved from the threat of Rosedale’s racial impurity (374). Hoeller argues that Lily is the most shining example of Wharton’s “trope of ultimate, irreducible difference” (14), a phrase she borrows from Henry Louis Gates Jr. to situate Lily as the fixed point against which we can understand Rosedale’s racial difference.

Kassanoff offers the most extensive consideration of Lily's racial position, which is worth considering here at greater length. She argues:

Lily's body becomes a supreme emblem of her race in all the turn-of-the-century senses of the term. As a figure for whiteness, class pedigree, western European origin and incipient nativism, Lily articulates a central set of early twentieth-century patrician anxieties: that the ill-bred, the foreign and the poor would overwhelm the native elite; that American culture would fall victim to the "vulgar" tastes of the masses; and that the country's oligarchy would fail to reproduce itself and commit "race suicide." (38)

Kassanoff's reading offers a tempting analysis of Lily's death in the novel as a necessary sacrifice on the altar of whiteness. In this reading, Lily's death maintains racial purity by avoiding racial corruption through union with the racial Other (Rosedale). The logic seems sound enough: if Lily is dead, she can't marry or reproduce with the Jew. What's more, Kassanoff's reminder that Lily might serve as a vessel of race suicide would certainly have been on the mind of Wharton's readers, as race suicide had become a "minor national phobia" by 1905 (Higham 146). Race suicide, the public was warned, was imminent as "whites were having fewer children while millions of eastern European immigrants arrived in the United States each year and bore larger families" (Kitch 40), and these warnings were "echoed by the 'scientific' arguments of eugenicists in newspapers and magazines and were justified in terms of the strength of country as a whole" (Kitch 40).

Though the gospel of race suicide had many powerful evangelists, there was perhaps none so visible and influential as Theodore Roosevelt. Roosevelt was deeply committed to warning the public of the imminent dangers of race suicide. Before the National Congress of Mothers in 1905, for instance, Roosevelt pleaded that women renew their “sense of duty” and produce and raise children “numerous enough so that the race shall increase and not decrease” (Roosevelt, “Welfare” 226). In *The Outlook* in 1911, he warned of “the rapid decline of the birth-rate which inevitably signalizes racial death” (“Race Decadence” 151). It was a “simple mathematical proposition” (Roosevelt, “Letter” 551): the “native” white families were being out-bred.⁵⁰ For Roosevelt, there was no higher patriotic duty than for white families to breed; he implored white families to have children and condemned those who did not:

If, through no fault of theirs, they [“native” American couples in wedlock] have no children they are entitled to our deepest sympathy. If they refuse to have children sufficient in number to mean that the race goes forward and not back, if they refuse to bring them up healthy in body and mind, then they are criminals. (“Letter” 551)⁵¹

⁵⁰ See: Miriam King and Steven Ruggles, “American Immigration, Fertility, and Race Suicide at the Turn of the Century” (1990). King and Ruggles note that at the turn of the century “immigrants were reproducing faster than native Americans” (348). Moreover, ‘new’ immigrants—those from southern and eastern Europe—had higher fertility rates than the ‘old’ immigrants from Ireland, Germany, and elsewhere in northern Europe” (354). The Anglo-Saxon population in America was, in fact, on the decline.

⁵¹ Complementary to Roosevelt’s insistence that the “right” people, being “native” American white people, breed so as to ensure the proliferation of the race, was his equally strong belief that the “wrong” people should not breed. In “Race Decadence” he argues, “Criminals should not have children. Shiftless and worthless people should not marry and have families” as they will not “add” to the race (164). Roosevelt sympathized with eugenicists in this and in “Twisted Eugenics” (first published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1913), he somewhat wistfully reflects: “I wish very much that the wrong people could be prevented entirely from breeding. Criminals should be sterilized, and feeble-minded persons forbidden to leave offspring behind them [... but the] emphasis should be laid on getting desirable people to breed” (172).

Thus it is not only Lily's potential alignment with the Jewish Rosedale that links her to the threat of race suicide, but her status as a single woman of a certain age. A major contributor to decreased fertility rates in the "native" American white population was the reality that people were waiting to get married until later, if at all (King and Ruggles 367). Moreover, as Priscilla Wald rightly notes in *Constituting Americans* (1995), the issue of race suicide was as much about changing gender roles as it was about racial changes in America's population:

"Race Suicide" evidently resulted from a challenge to the reproduction of established gender roles as well as to the reproduction of children. And the crisis facing the *literal* "American" (traditional white middle-class) family threatened the nation, the metaphoric "American family," with potential extinction [...] Carefully delineated gender roles mitigate "the peril which threatens [the Yankee's] home." (245-6)

In this sense, Lily Bart—unmarried, willful, and courted by a Jewish interloper—is a prime candidate for race suicide. Lily's very position as an unmarried woman shows the vulnerability of the Anglo-Saxon elite whom she supposedly represents, as their whiteness is constantly under attack from the possibility of marriage to the racial Other (and thus adding to the breeding of non-whites), or non-marriage to the white/right partner, or marriage too late in life (neither of the latter options adding to white children "sufficient in number," to borrow a phrase from Roosevelt). Hence, woman herself is the "peril" to the Anglo-Saxon white elite.

Yet, if Lily specifically is a symptom of race suicide, it is not in the varied ways that beleaguered Roosevelt; the problem for Lily is not that she is somehow too white

(and not reproducing), but that she is not white enough. Lily can never quite achieve the “right white” necessary to gain real access to the native elite. Contrary to Kassanoff’s claim that “Miss Bart is fundamentally—indeed, ontologically—inviolable” (53), a “timeless tableau of racial stasis” (57), Lily’s racial position is continually mutable (seen in her *tableau* performance and the danger of her potential union to Rosedale). Throughout the novel Lily is a racially compromised character, unable to pass through the threshold of whiteness. She can never quite pinpoint or exemplify the various and varying markers for whiteness. Yet Lily’s failure is not a saving grace for the white elite who finally exile her for racial purity’s sake, but its greatest defeat. After all, if Lily Bart is not white enough, who can be? Whiteness itself has become so paranoid and insular, so impossible to define or achieve, that it has revealed its own vulnerabilities—its porous, inconsistent nature—and left itself vulnerable to penetration from the ill-bred, foreign, and generally racially undesirable it sought to exclude in the first place.

Lily Bart becomes the focus of racial debate, the site upon which racial anxieties are played out, and she dies not a paragon of Anglo-Saxon womanhood, but a racially insecure heroine, unable to establish a legitimate whiteness for herself or the society that so desperately needs it. Lily’s very character undermines the certainty of race that critics and, at times, those like Selden attribute to her. And her role throughout the novel both as a paragon of whiteness and as a symbol of its impossibility points to the instability of whiteness itself. Like Selden, the reader will never really know if Lily’s hair is naturally bright or has been improved by art, the same way Lily’s race can never be fully pinned down because it, too, is an unanswerable question. The intersection of various aspects of Lily’s identity—most pressingly her race, class, gender, and sexuality—shows that far

from being something innate and fixed, Lily's identity is relentlessly mutable, and race itself is dangerously permeable. Like a good *tableaux*, Lily gives us magical glimpses of the boundary world between fact and imagination in race and gender construction and shows us the growing impossibility of staying—or being—white.

In her *tableau*, “Lily Bart offers herself, and is read by others, as a work of art” (Orlando 59). Yet, Lily's performance at Bellomont is more than a performance of Reynolds's painting; it reveals the complicated art of race production and representation. In Lily's reproduction of Mrs. Lloyd, we are again reminded of the created, pliable quality of Lily: “Lily was in her element on such occasions [...] her vivid plastic sense, hitherto nurtured on no higher food than dress-making and upholstery found eager expression in the disposal of draperies, the study of attitudes, the shifting of lights and shadows. Her dramatic instinct was roused [...]” (103). Her plasticity is so compelling to the artist Paul Morphet (who was called upon to organize the *tableaux* scenes) that he still remembers months later how he “had been immensely struck by Lily's plastic possibilities” (186). Lily's pliability—her ability to be made into, a plasticity that Selden senses early on in the novel—is disquieting in her portrayal of Mrs. Lloyd not because she is performing someone else (as the other women in the *tableaux* are), but precisely because she is performing herself, suggesting that the performance is her identity, and, more troubling, her identity is performance. The narrator's connection here with Lily's early dressmaking and upholstery only strengthens the sense of Lily as a performance, as both dressmaking and upholstery are interested in ornamentation and costume. Like a couch with a cover made to match the mode, or a dress made to fit the fashion, Lily's performances work to fit her into marriage and high society. That Lily must spend her

life “performing” certain roles to gain access to the upper class is easily seen in the plot of the novel as she attends necessary parties, entertains the tediously wealthy, and aligns herself with the morally offensive members therein.⁵²

What this early *tableaux* scene reveals about Lily’s performances throughout the text is that they are not only class or gender performances,⁵³ but racial performances as well. As she stands as Mrs. Lloyd, Lily enacts a highly racialized artistic scene, because, as Ammons notes, “what Reynolds’s *Mrs. Lloyd* stands for –nationalized Anglo-Saxon ‘natural’ dominance –Lily embodies” (79).⁵⁴ Yet if Lily embodies Anglo-Saxon identity in her performance of Mrs. Lloyd, the success of her performance points to the very pliability of Lily’s racial status. While Lily chooses to portray the English Mrs. Lloyd, she considers the Egyptian Cleopatra, a role, the emphasis on her “dramatic instinct” and pliable nature suggests, she could perform equally as well. The mere possibility of Lily playing Tiepolo’s Cleopatra is itself racially suspicious. The Italian rococo painter

⁵² In Cynthia Griffin Wolff’s *A Feast of Words: The Triumph of Edith Wharton* (1977), Wolff highlights Lily as an actor throughout the novel, in a “frantic quest for a ‘role’ to play” (422), and the *tableaux* scene as “a piece of explicit stagecraft—‘Lily Bart’ produced from behind the curtain” (430). Wolff’s use of quotations marks around “Lily Bart” highlights the Lily the audience is seeing as production, but she then argues, “both Selden and Miss Bart recognize” Lily’s act of production as production” (430). This seems unlikely as in his desire for this “Lily” to be the “real” Lily (who wouldn’t need to be in quotation marks) Selden doesn’t recognize Lily as production, but instead imposes his desire for Lily to be somehow pre-production, artless and “real,” something that Wolff herself agrees isn’t the Lily of the novel.

⁵³ See especially: Gary Totten’s “The Art and Architecture of the Self: Designing the ‘I’-Witness in Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth*” (2000), Grace Ann Hovet’s “Tableaux Vivants: Masculine Vision and Feminine Reflections in Novels by Warner, Alcott, Stowe, and Wharton” (1993), and Jennifer Shepherd’s “Fashioning an Aesthetics of Consumption in *The House of Mirth*” (2007). Of course, Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity is useful here, as Lily’s performance of Mrs. Lloyd highlights that her “natural” self may, too, be a performance—suggesting both her gender and race are not innate or intrinsic, but rather performative. See: Butler, *Gender Trouble* (1999).

⁵⁴ Ammons notes that Sir Joshua Reynolds “regarded English national virtues and universal human virtues as one and the same, a collapsed ethic neatly produced by and in turn reproducing Anglo-Saxon superiority” (79). In this sense, Lily’s portrayal of a Reynolds painting comes with just as much racial baggage as if she had chosen to portray the “exotic” Cleopatra. Reynolds was “the first critic of painting” (and painter himself) to propose the task of establishing a code of art that had as its primary task the nation as constituent, which, for Reynolds, was “to confirm the nationhood of the English” (Barrell 174). For Reynolds, as for many American nativists a century later and a continent apart, this definition of nationhood was understood as a racial definition.

Giovanni Battista Tiepolo (1696-1770) did a series of paintings and frescos depicting the story of Cleopatra, the most famous of which are the frescos in the Palazzo Labia, Venice (1746-47), and Wharton knew and “appreciated Tiepolo[‘s work]” (Orlando 8). And as Emily J. Orlando notes in *Edith Wharton and the Visual Arts* (2007), there is a strong connection between Lily and Cleopatra, “a woman who, like Lily, displays powerful charm and allure, and, significantly, takes her own life” (72). The connections between Lily and Cleopatra, including Lily’s potential ability to step into the role of Cleopatra, implicate Lily in Cleopatra’s racial Otherness. Though the Egyptian queen is fair-skinned in Tiepolo’s paintings, her “Oriental” setting and her dark-skinned African and Middle-Eastern servants (by whom she is surrounded) highlight her racial exoticism. Further, in all these paintings, Cleopatra is always in the presence of her famous lover Anthony, heightening her sexuality. In the famous *Banquet of Cleopatra* (1743) fresco from the Palazzo Labia, for example, Cleopatra sits near Anthony with her bared breasts as the focal point of her otherwise elaborate costume.⁵⁵ Her bare breasts, and even the pearl she dangles, mark Cleopatra as sexualized, even as a “high-class prostitute” (Hamer 72). Unlike the “Dutch-type” Mrs. Van Alstyne who blends seamlessly into a portrait of a Dutch woman, Lily, it is suggested, could just as easily blend into a portrait of the “Oriental,” sexualized Cleopatra as she could the Anglo, chaste Mrs. Lloyd.

By choosing Mrs. Lloyd, instead of performing the racial Other, Lily is more than “standing in” for an Anglo-Saxon dominance; she is performing whiteness. By embodying whiteness, she is undermining it by rendering it a performance, an artifice. Yet, Lily’s performance is so convincing that it moves Selden to mistake the performance

⁵⁵ This fresco banquet scene of Cleopatra, as well as the other banquet scene of the same name on canvas, shows Cleopatra about to dissolve her pearl in her wine, exercising her full power and status over money, something for which Lily strives.

for a revelation of Lily's authentic self: "he seemed to see before him the real Lily Bart" (106). Gerty Farish, Selden's philanthropic cousin, is also taken (or taken in) by the performance: "Wasn't she too beautiful, Lawrence? Don't you like her best in that simple dress? It makes her look like the real Lily—the Lily I know" [...] "'The Lily we know,' he corrected" (107). Here Selden sees Lily as "detached from all that cheapened and vulgarized [her life]" (107). Selden has hitherto disapproved of Lily's lifestyle, "despise[d Lily's] ambitions" to enter into the society for which she is currently posing as Mrs. Lloyd (57), and in this moment, he sees her as he would like to see her: stripped of the society around her and the social climbing it demands. And in her portrayal of Mrs. Lloyd, Lily is literally stripped of all ornamentation; in her "pale draperies" she dons neither the elaborate costume Cleopatra would have required, nor the elaborate costume that is her normal dress (gowns, gloves, hats, corsets). This lack of ornamentation, combined with Lily's "natural" beauty, moves Selden and Gerty to see what they want to believe is the "real" Lily Bart. But those things of which Lily is *not* stripped are equally important here: namely her race, class, gender, and sexuality. Gerty and Selden's vision of the "real" Lily is an impossible nostalgia for a pre-class, pre-race Lily, without the vulgarities involved in her desire to belong to the "right" class and race. But the narrator's emphasis on Lily's performative capability in this scene—her "artistic intelligence," her "dramatic instinct," her "plastic sense"—complicate reading her performance as a glimpse of the "real" Lily, or even that there can be a "real" Lily Bart.

The reactions to Lily's performance from others in the Bellomont crowd further highlight Lily's compromised racial position. Mr. Ned Van Alstyne, the "experienced connoisseur" of high society, immediately recognizes the sexual overtones of Lily's

performance and complains aloud, “Deuced bold thing to show herself in that get-up; but, gad, there isn’t a break in the lines anywhere, and I suppose she wanted us to know it!” (107). Later in the evening, he admires the beauty that such a display showed and brags, “Gad, what a show of good-looking women but not one of ‘em could touch that little cousin of mine [...] I never knew till tonight what an outline Lily has” (109). But Gus Trenor has the final word of the debate and encompasses the general consensus of the audience: “Damned bad taste, I call it” (109).⁵⁶ In this both literally and figuratively stripped down version of Lily, her sexuality has become all too obvious to her audience. Though portraying the devoted wife Mrs. Lloyd, the sexuality that would have been implicit in a portrayal of the famous lover Cleopatra still shines through Lily’s depiction of the otherwise sexless Mrs. Lloyd. Lily’s sexuality is an important factor in fully understanding her racial position in the novel. Kassanoff herself notes the importance of intersectionality in fully understanding the novel, and rightly reads *The House of Mirth* as a novel that “highlights the tensions inherit in this now familiar trinity of race, class and gender: while class and gender have conventionally structured Wharton criticism, race is the missing but historically crucial component complicating progressive interpretations of Wharton’s project” (38). While Kassanoff is certainly correct in her recognition of the importance of race in the novel and in much needed criticism, surprisingly, she excludes issues of sexuality as integral to fully understanding the character and the novel, only considering them as a peripheral aspect of gender, which, in light of the rumors of sexual impropriety that ultimately lead to Lily’s disinheritance and social ostracizing, is a

⁵⁶ The connection between “taste” and race was a question at the recent Edith Wharton Society “Edith Wharton and History” Conference (2008). See Maureen Montgomery’s forthcoming *Whiteness and Politeness: The Racialization of Civilization, 1880-1930*, which considers American manners, etiquette, and taste as a way of conceptualizing fraught national and racial identity.

glaring omission and suggests that the familiar trinity of identity factors apparent throughout Wharton's fiction should at least be a quartet.

The Painted Lady: Sex, Race, and Sexuality

Lily's sexuality is particularly poignant and problematic in the *tableau* where she stands as a work of art that would otherwise emphasize her purity. In *Angels of Art: Women and Art in American Society, 1876-1914* (1996), Baily Van Hook describes the American obsession with female (by which she means white female) purity in art, which "is apparent in all stages of nineteenth-century American art" (188). And certainly Lily's own artistic endeavor, her re-enactment of the British painting, is, or should be, representational of female purity—Mrs. Lloyd is, after all, etching out her husband's and her married name (Lloyd) in the tree. Yet, while Lily's performance should re-enact female fidelity, it instead inspires controversy around her sexuality.

Lily's cousin Jack Stepney identifies the problem later that week when he complains, "Really, you know, I'm no prude, but when it comes to a girl standing there as if she were up at auction—I thought seriously of speaking to cousin Julia" (124).⁵⁷ By displaying herself so publicly, Lily seems to have put herself up for public auction, making her, in essence, a high-class prostitute. In her self-display, she has compromised

⁵⁷ Lily's overt sexuality in her *tableau* cheapens the art form itself, and yet also reveals the inherent contradiction in the use of *tableaux vivants* in "refined" society. As, Robert C. Byrd reminds us in *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (1991), living pictures had been immensely popular throughout the nineteenth century (starting in the 1830s), and yet near the end of the century:

[the] living picture as an entertainment form had been split into two class-bound genres: sensational living pictures that promised working-class men a glimpse of the partially revealed female body [...] and the *tableaux vivants* of sentimental or patriotic subjects produced for middle-class audiences [...] which did not emphasize women as objects of sexual display. (94)

Lily's performance is meant to be the latter, of course, but the sexuality inherent in her performance grants her audience an uneasy class demotion by suggesting their sophisticated leisure is little more than a high-class peep-show.

her own sexuality and implicated herself as little more than a high-class call-girl. Maureen E. Montgomery locates this tension throughout Wharton's fiction in *Displaying Women: Spectacles of Leisure in Edith Wharton's New York* (1998). "The problem for society women," she explains, "was that the notion of a woman displaying herself was firmly associated with the world of prostitution" (120). Lily embodies this problem when she "prostitutes her body when she transforms herself into a work of art: she displays her beauty on the marriage market in hopes of procuring a husband. The double entendre of 'painted lady' is especially apt to Lily's case, for in her tableau vivant she at once transforms herself into a painting of a lady (living picture) and a sort of painted lady (prostitute)" (57). Lily's situation is, of course, a double bind for her and for other women who would procure social standing through the marriage market. She must be "marketable" as it is her only access to society, and in doing so she is essentially trying to auction herself to a marriageable mate. Yet the line between displaying oneself as maritally and sexually available is uncomfortably thin and it lands Lily in the "dirty sheets" of the *Town Talk* paper, a position that is again reminiscent of prostitution not only in its undertones of sexual impropriety (in "dirty sheets") but also as it highlights Lily as up for public consumption as news for a public audience (124).

It is thus that Gus Trenor thinks he can buy Lily like a prostitute. Trenor invests money for Lily and, she only later learns, her return was not from her own interest (as the investment was a bad one), but from Trenor's own pocket. When Trenor calls Lily to his house late at night under the guise of an invitation from his wife (who, unbeknownst to Lily, is out of town), his language is littered with both implicit and explicit gestures toward his "purchasing" of Lily's favor. He describes what he is "owed" for his

investment not in her money, but in her: “Hang it, the man who pays for the dinner is generally allowed to have a seat at table” (114). When she protests that she had only asked a business favor, he makes clear that the transaction was not idiomatic:

“Of course I know now what you wanted [money]—it wasn’t my beautiful eyes you were after—but I tell you what, Miss Lily, you’ve got to pay up for making me think so—”

“Pay up?” she faltered. “Do you mean I owe you money?” He laughed again. “Oh, I’m not asking for payment in kind. But there’s such a thing as fair play—and interest on one’s money—and hang me if I’ve had as much as a look from you—”. (116)

Trenor’s language of what he is “owed” and what he is demanding coupled with his physical aggression suggest an attempted sexual assault on Lily. Trenor blocks the door so that Lily cannot escape and Lily feels “the brutality of the thrust” of his words and “she felt suddenly weak and defenseless” (114). Lily “called out the primitive man [in Trenor]” (116). Just as Trenor believes Lily (and her services) can be bought and sold, he seems to also consider that they can just as easily be taken. Trenor’s brutality as “the primitive man” links sexually violent behavior not to the “civilized man” from whom the actions are actually coming, but to the “lesser” races of the “primitive man” (which is to say, non-white men) (D’Emilio and Freedman 86). Lily’s own racial display in the *tableau* has aroused something more “primitive” in Trenor, who seamlessly transitions from gentleman to brute questions his own racial stability.

Importantly, this scene where Trenor complains of not having “as much as a look” from Lily follows Lily’s *tableau* where everyone has spent so much time looking at her,

and where she has, many complain, given too much away. Of course Trenor wants more than just “a look” from her as he thinks more is owed to him. He has, after all, paid for it. When Lily again offers to pay back any money she owes him, Trenor finally, clearly articulates Lily’s role at best as kept woman, and at worst as a prostitute: “Ah [to pay me back]—you’ll borrow from Selden or Rosedale—and take your chances of fooling them as you’ve fooled me! Unless—unless you’ve settled your other scores already—and I’m the only one left out in the cold!” (116). His accusation that Lily has already pimped herself out to Selden and Rosedale in return for money by settling her debts of intimacy with them leaves no doubt to what he has expected in this transaction all along: she is to pay him back not with money, but in her own flesh. Here Trenor articulates the understanding of Lily’s own body as commodity—to be auctioned, bought, sold, and traded—and Lily realizes with horror that “this is the way men talked of her” (114). But it’s not only the men who understand Lily in these terms. Lily’s cousin Grace Stepney gossips with Lily’s Aunt and guardian Mrs. Peniston that there has been talk of “unpleasant things” about Lily’s relationship with Trenor and other men. Grace not-so-subtly hints to Mrs. Peniston that there could be no reason for Lily to be connected with Trenor, “unless—” she explains “with a low-toned emphasis [...] unless there are material advantages to be gained by making herself agreeable to him” (98-99). Here Grace Stepney confirms Trenor’s own assumption: Lily Bart has bartered herself for money. These accusations are not so far-fetched as they may seem. Lily has been living largely off the money of her aunt (in her allowance) and the favors of others (second-hand dresses and dinner invitations from friends). That Lily might take the next step in

such an arrangement and further barter herself is believable enough to Lily's Aunt for whom these accusations become the "knowledge" that disinherits Lily.

As opposed to Mrs. Peniston's moral outrage, Trenor's major complaint about what he understands as Lily's high-class prostitution is that he personally seems to be getting the short end of the stick. The scandal for Jack Stepney and the other Knickerbockers is that Lily's sexuality sets her decidedly apart from her assumed class, gender, and race status. Such sexuality is not proper for a white woman of a certain class and Lily's display of sexuality in the *tableaux* scene questions both her sexual and racial purity. After Lily's *tableau*, Ned Van Alstyne suggests that "When a girl's as good-looking as that she'd better marry" (124), and his insight recognizes a broader trap for white women whose sexuality is automatically suspect when not contained in the proper channels of marriage. Historian Carroll Smith-Rosenberg points to this precedent for white women in *Disorderly Conduct* (1985) where she notes that "Nineteenth-century American society provided but one socially respectable, nondeviant role for women—that of loving wife and mother" (213). This marital and maternal ideology of American womanhood—white womanhood particularly—devoid of sexuality, was reaffirmed in an 1873 U.S. Supreme Court opinion that confirmed: "The paramount destiny and mission of women are to fulfill the noble and benign offices of wife and mother. This is the law of the Creator" (Cott 365). This idea that women's sexuality had to be contained within the boundaries of marriage and motherhood suggests that the important role for a woman is not necessarily to be white herself, but to reproduce whiteness. As a wife and mother, white women were vehicles for the white race. As Cynthia Eagle Russett notes in *Sexual Science* (1989), "women bore, quite literally, the future of the race" (77).

The suggestion that Lily is “up at auction” is most troubling when Grace Stepney suggests who could possibly win such an auction. In response to Ned Van Alstyne’s suggestion that beautiful young women like Lily need to marry (and quickly), Grace laughs: “I understand Lily is about to assume [the obligations of marriage] in the shape of Mr. Rosedale” (124). The scandal of this suggestion is immediately obvious:

“Rosedale—good heavens?” exclaimed Van Alstyne, dropping his eyeglass. “Stepney, that’s your fault for foisting the brute on us.”

“Oh confound it, you know, we don’t *marry* Rosedale in our family,” Stepney languidly protested; but his wife [...] quelled him with the judicial reflection: “In Lily’s circumstance it’s a mistake to have too high a standard.” (125)

The scandal of Rosedale is his own racial impurity: he is the “fat and shiny” Jew (65), the “same little Jew who had been served up and rejected at the social board a dozen times” (16). The problem with Lily’s sexuality being up at auction—with her selling herself to the highest bidder—is that she could very well end up in the arms of the financially well-endowed Jew. And, as Grace suggests, Lily has compromised herself so much in her sexuality that this racially distasteful union may be her only option.

And of course Lily is further racially suspect exactly because her sexuality itself is racially suspect. In *The Sexual Education of Edith Wharton* (1992), Gloria C. Erlich argues, “Lily is stuck on the verge of sexual adulthood, unable to cross this threshold or to remain any longer on it” (57). Yet Lily’s sexuality is only unrealized in the actual act of sex; otherwise her sexuality (both in her sexual desirability and her presumed sexual activity) is clear enough to those around her. The assumption that her display of

sexuality, often coupled with unflattering or misinterpreted circumstances, indicates her sexual experience certainly seems unfair, even tragic, as when Selden sees her coming out of Gus Trenor's late at night. The reader knows she is fleeing sexual danger, but Selden sees it as anyone else in his society would: as incriminating evidence of her dangerous sexuality, as he presumes she is leaving the site of sexual impropriety. The consequences are severe: Selden abandons her at the time their union is most plausible, at the very moment when Lily has finally recognized "a promise of rescue in his love" (138). Instead, he flees to the West Indies, and Lily "understood now that he was never coming" (142). Certainly Erlich is correct in her emphatic assertion that, "*without having committed or desired adultery, Lily must pay the price of it*" (*emphasis in original* 60). Rosedale too makes such an assumption of Lily's sexual impropriety when he catches her leaving Selden's apartment building, aptly named "The Benedick," which Rosedale explains is "an old word for bachelor" (15). Rosedale would know: as further confirmation of his "Jewish" penchant for money and business, he owns the building. Lily's presence therein leads Rosedale to assume with Lily a "sudden intimacy [...]" which had the familiarity of a touch" when he catches her coming out of the bachelor building (13). As a consequence of her assumed sexual impropriety, Rosedale, like Trenor, claims the right to intimacy with Lily.⁵⁸

Sexuality and race was frequently linked in American racist ideology that coupled whiteness with "superior" sexual morality (namely, chastity and purity for white

⁵⁸ Though Rosedale—the most clearly-marked racial Other of the novel—is, ironically, not as "brutish" as Trenor, Rosedale's claim here of (unwanted) intimacy with Lily's prefigures Gus Trenor's own scene of forced intimacy. In both these scenes, both men have assumed Lily's sexual impropriety and claim certain privileges from Lily, both of intimacy and because of it.

women⁵⁹), while connecting the “non-whites” (at times blacks, Native Americans, Irish, non-Anglo-Saxons, etc.) with hyper-sexuality. John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman detail this connection in *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (1997) where they locate this ideology as reaching back to early colonization of America: “Ever since the seventeenth century, European migrants to America had merged racial and sexual ideology in order to differentiate themselves [from other ‘races’]. [...] Both scientific and popular thought supported the view that whites were civilized and rational, while members of other races were savage, irrational, and sensual” (86). This ideology of sexuality and race is one that handily separates out white from all others, simplifying racial stratification to white/not-white. Lily’s own sexuality associates her with the latter racial category, disassociating her from whiteness, and aligning her with the racial and sexual Other. This is dangerous for Lily not only because she loses her position within the white-upper-class society in which she is trying to secure marriage, but because it makes her sexually vulnerable. This type of sexual vulnerability was often the case for non-white women as a product of the same racist ideologies that have ostracized Lily:

The belief in white moral superiority surfaced in relation to all racial and ethnic groups—whether the Chinese in California who were considered a “depraved class,” or the Irish in eastern cities, who were portrayed as an animalistic race with a “love for vicious excitement.” Indians, Mexicans, and blacks elicited the most extensive commentaries [...] patterns differed, but in each region the belief that white sexual customs were more civilized, along with the assumption that Indian, Mexican, and black

⁵⁹ These “cardinal virtues” of white womanhood were essential to racial purity. See: Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860” (1966).

women were sexually available to white men, supported white supremacist attitudes and justified social control of other races. (87)

In a sense, when Trenor demands “attention” from Lily, he is asserting his white (sexual) privilege over her. Of course Lily’s status as suspect prostitute is highly racially charged, and Sander L. Gilman confirms in “Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature” (1985) that in the late nineteenth century, the perception of the prostitute, the “essential sexualized female” (240) “merged with the perception of the black” (248).⁶⁰ This social blurring with the racial Other only further compromises Lily’s own racial standing as the *tableaux* scene calls attention to her sexuality and displays her as though she were up at auction and, like a prostitute, available to buy.

The fallout from the *tableaux* scene suggests that Wharton is “mindful of the damage incurred by countless pairs of lustful eyes” (Orlando 199). Here, where Wharton offers up her heroine for extended gaze of the audience and the reader, Lily’s sexual and racial position is called into question. It seems that when we look too closely at Lily, her lily-whiteness is no longer certain. And herein this racial paradox of the lily-white Lily Bart lies an unresolved contradiction in *The House of Mirth*. It is never clear what, exactly, race is—what it looks like, how you recognize it, or how you protect it. Lily’s whiteness is to Selden and Gerty so seemingly intrinsic that Lily can easily embody the

⁶⁰ Perhaps the most famous example of this is the “Hottentot Venus,” Saartjie “Sarah” Baartman, a Khoi slave from the region of what is now South Africa who was exhibited around Europe in the early nineteenth century. The “Hottentot” was famous for her large buttox (due to steatopygia) as well as her elongated labia. As Gilman argues in *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sexuality, Race, and Madness* (2002), for the audience, Baartman “existed only as a collection of sexual parts” and was seen as the “epitome of this sexual lasciviousness” (122). The Hottentot Venus is the most visible example of the “late nineteenth-century perception of the prostitute merged with the black” (128). Like Lily in her *tableau*, Baartman’s display of herself (or rather, her master’s display of her), further sexualizes her. Even death did not end the sexualization of Baartman: her genitals were preserved and on display in a Parisian museum until 1974.

Anglo-Saxon-ness of Mrs. Lloyd with an exactness that convinces the viewers they are seeing the “real” Lily Bart. And yet, Lily’s racial purity is compromised by her sexuality—and more damagingly, her supposed sexuality—and her ability to be sullied by the mere possibility of marrying “outside her race” to a Jew, implying that racial status is not immutable, but instead, dangerously precarious (indeed, part of the threat is that Rosedale himself might possibly gain access to whiteness through marriage). Lily’s own racial uncertainty recalls Selden’s earlier question about the essence of Lily’s identity, and begs the broader, more ontological question: is one’s race born, or is it made?

Lily herself wonders if her very being is a product of nature or nurture, whether her traits are inherited and thus immutable, or simply learned and therefore changeable. After Lily has suffered her worst rejection from high society (when Bertha Dorset has publicly shamed her by spreading rumors of Lily’s sexual impropriety and then turned Lily off the Dorset yacht in the middle of the night on the Mediterranean), Lily has returned to New York to stay with Gerty. When Gerty tries to understand the details of the fiasco regarding Trenor, of which she is sure Lily is innocent, she asks Lily: “But what *is* your story, Lily? I don’t believe any one knows it yet” (176). Gerty is asking for confirmation of Lily’s innocence through specific details of the yacht and Bertha’s bad behavior, but Lily’s answer moves beyond the petty details of her life and specific social setback and enters instead into a broader public debate on the characteristics of race:

My story? –I don’t believe I know it myself. [...] From the beginning?
[...] Why, the beginning was in my cradle, I suppose—in the way I was brought up, and the things I was taught to care for. Or no—I won’t blame anybody for my faults: I’ll say it was in my blood, that I got it from some

wicked pleasure-loving ancestress, who reacted against the homely virtues
of New Amsterdam, and wanted to be back at the court of the Charleses!
(176)

Lily's uncertainty here between her traits being either something "in [the] blood" or something that she was "taught to care for" prefigures debates around race and gender identity in American anthropology, itself a fledgling field. That identity was potentially "in the blood" certainly reflects eugenic obsessions with racial heredity, and imminent Jim Crow laws that would begin to legislate that you could indeed determine someone's race through their "blood," and even one-drop of "non-white" blood racially sullied a person.⁶¹ Moreover, science throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries supported race and gender as "natural" categories, supported by research that found differences between whites and non-whites, and men and women (particularly white men and white women) inherent in physical traits. As Russett summarizes, "Race and gender, not infrequently linked, are two of the great themes of nineteenth-century science" (7). Scientists used measurements of white women's skulls to connect white women to more "inferior" races, and even to animals.⁶² It was, after all, white women's "resemblance to the savage" that made them inferior to white men (Russett 55). Yet, Lily's brief consideration that her "faults" may be a result of her environment, that they are not

⁶¹ The first "one-drop" legislation was legally adopted in 1910, only five years after *The House of Mirth* was published, and wasn't invalidated until the 1965 Supreme Court ruling in *Loving v. Virginia*. In *The Passing of the Great Race*, Grant encapsulates this type of race-thinking perfectly in his insistence that "The cross between a white man and an Indian is an Indian; the cross between a white man and a negro is a negro; the cross between a white man and a Hindu is a Hindu; and the cross between any of the three European races and a Jew is a Jew" (18).

⁶² Russett notes that in "the brief publications annals of the *Anthropological Review* (1863-1869), the analogy between blacks and women was several times explicitly drawn" (28). The measure of white women's skulls and brains aligned white women with the "savage" races. Scientists like Carl Vogt observed that "the female European skull resembles much more the Negro skull than that of the European man," and concluded, "We may be sure that, whenever we perceive an approach to the animal type, the female is nearer to it than the male" (55).

somehow naturally inherent in her, looks forward to the work of such American anthropologists as Franz Boas. Boas's 1908-1910 studies undertaken for the U.S. Immigration Commission challenged the assumption of racial fixity and contributed to the erosion what Russett calls the "Victorian Paradigm" in which scientists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries "spoke with remarkable uniformity about the nature of womanhood" and frequently linked white women to non-white races (155). The work of Boas and other anthropologists in the new century challenged the claims of "biological determinism" of sex and race, and opened the door for social scientists to "raise the claims of nurture over nature" (Russett 12, 172).

Lily's brief consideration that perhaps she can look to her environment to understand "her story" gestures toward such forward-thinking racial and gender constructionism. And the reader knows, too, from the small introduction to Lily's childhood that she *was* taught from her cradle to be that which she is. She "had been brought up with the faith that, whatever it cost, one must have a good cook, and be what Mrs. Bart called 'decently dressed'" (26). The alternative to enough Parisian dresses and fine dining is "living like a pig," and "Lily knew people who 'lived like pigs,' and their appearance and surroundings justified her mother's repugnance to that form of existence" (26). These people are the people who live "dingy" lives (26), and Lily is explicitly trained by her mother to expect the higher life, "the existence to which she felt herself entitled" (30). After all, "What was the use of living if one had to live like a pig?" (29).⁶³ The narrator suggests that Lily's less materialistic traits, too, are a product of her

⁶³ Lily's inability to see beyond a dichotomy of existence between a life of luxury or living like a pig means that any deviance from such luxury is unimaginable and helps answer the question for many readers as to why Lily simply can't marry Selden or even, when all other options seem lost, live with Gerty. Selden can't support Lily in a "decently dressed" life, and Gerty Farrish leads what can only be called a dingy life.

upbringing. Her father, as Mrs. Bart describes it, “wasted his evenings in what she vaguely described as ‘reading poetry’” (30), and “there was in Lily a vein of sentiment, perhaps transmitted from this source, which gave an idealizing touch to her most prosaic purposes” (30). Even Selden sees Lily as a product of her society. As she takes tea at his apartment, Selden reflects that Lily “was so evidently the victim of the civilization which had produced her, that the links of her bracelet seemed like manacles chaining her to her fate” (8). Lily must suffer her final fate, Selden suggests, because she has been fashioned toward that end. These recognitions that Lily’s “story” is connected to the environment that produced her are early whispers of new approaches in anthropology that would turn away from anthropological taxonomy that understood society, race, and gender as biologically determinate, and looked instead to the environment by which one was shaped. It is, as Lily herself puts it when thinking of her parents, a recognition of “the past out of which her present had grown” (25).

Yet, despite this momentary questioning, Lily reverts to understanding her story as something that is “in the blood,” realigning herself with nineteenth-century scientific discourses that connect her, by way of her sex, to “inferior races.” It is not entirely surprising that Lily finally understands herself in this biologically deterministic way, as the scientific and anthropological theories of race and gender that stressed biology-as-destiny still held much sway in discourses about race and nationhood, and “[t]aken to an extreme this attitude led to the eugenics movement of the 1910s and 1920s” (Russett 160). Lily’s resolution that her story is “in my blood,” as Kassanoff notes, “was a popular Spencerian notion of the day,” which stressed “ancestral memory” as responsible

for identity (37).⁶⁴ In claiming this hereditary explanation for her identity, Lily allies herself with the heritage of “pleasure-loving” ancestors and the court of the Charleses, the second of which was notoriously hedonist, and further links herself to compromising sexuality through her blood-lines. This sexuality is itself, of course, racially suspect, though perhaps no more suspect than it was to be a woman in the first place.

The Year of the Rose: Lily Bart as Racial Other

Lily’s decline and final ruin—inversely reflected in what Lily describes as Rosedale’s “social ascent” and inevitable success throughout the novel (16)—shows what a slippery slope identity really is. Both Lily and Rosedale are trying to secure a position in the social elite, but while Lily moves from a favored insider to an outcast, Rosedale moves from a position of ultimate outsider to a resignedly accepted insider. Moreover, Lily’s pairing with Rosedale, the consistent racial outsider in the novel, further highlights Lily’s own increasingly evident position as an outsider herself.

Much of the critical attention concerned with issues of race in *The House of Mirth* has focused on Wharton’s portrayal of Simon Rosedale, the clearly marked racial Other of the novel. Wharton makes use of many common anti-Semitic tropes, most of which highlight Rosedale’s vulgarity and separate him as a “race” apart. Rosedale “had

⁶⁴ English philosopher Herbert Spencer was perhaps best known for his coinage of “survival of the fittest,” from his widely-read *Principles of Biology* (1864). Spencer built on Darwin’s understanding of natural selection, and “helped popularise [sic] evolutionary ideas” (Elliot v). Yet, Kassanoff’s suggestion that Lily’s ancestral musings are “Spencerian” is imprecise. While Spencer, like Darwin, stressed ancestral inheritance, Spencer was Lamarckian in his understanding that one generation could pass on its characteristics immediately to the very next generation (Elliot 22), and Lily’s understanding that she could have inherited her “pleasure-loving” from her ancestors in Charles’ court is more a broad interpretation of Social Darwinianism than it is specifically Spencerian. Lily’s initial suggestion that her traits might be from how she was “brought up” (presumably by her mother) might be misinterpreted as an interpretation of Spencerian ideology as it suggests an inheritance of acquired characteristics from the immediately previous generation, except that Spencer stressed the theory of “use inheritance” that claimed “individual choice mattered greatly for which habits were developed and passed down” (Taylor 7). For Lily’s musings to be Spencerian, her ancestors would have had to consciously chosen and willed such traits to be passed down.

been pronounced [by society] ‘impossible’ [... he] was the same little Jew who had been served up and rejected by the social board a dozen times” (16). Lily, too, characterizes Rosedale by his coarseness and racial difference, and she reasserts that Rosedale “was impossible” (65). Rosedale’s impossibility is, of course, directly linked to him being that “same little Jew.”⁶⁵ The first time we meet Rosedale, he is specifically racially marked as “a plump rosy man of the blond Jewish type, with smart London clothes fitting him like upholstery, and small sidelong eyes which gave him the air of appraising people as if they were bric-a-brac” (13). Rosedale’s appraisal of people as bric-a-brac objects to be assessed and valued is highlighted as a critical aspect of his racial instincts that dehumanize those around him to mere currency, valued only as potentially profitable commodity. Rosedale has, the novel insists, a “natural” affinity for money and business with “his race’s accuracy in the appraisal of values” (15). Rosedale’s racial difference is clear to the society that has thus far kept him at bay, and Lily, too, has an “intuitive repugnance” to Rosedale (16)—one that the novel suggests is as natural as is Rosedale’s racial difference. Rosedale’s physical appearance is an outer sign of his racial difference: he has a general physical “repugnance” and he is described as a “small glossy-looking man” (13), “fat and shiny” (65). His physical unsavoriness is a conspicuously stark contrast to Lily’s insistent beauty, and is an important marker of his racial difference, one that should only make Lily whiter by comparison. After all, as Ammons asks, “How would we know just how white—how superwhite—Lily and Selden are without Rosedale to set off their sweatless pale perfection?” (80). Lily certainly wants to set herself apart from Rosedale and considers him a vile reminder of why she must succeed in her own

⁶⁵ See especially: Hoeller, “‘The Impossible Rosedale’: ‘Race’ and the Reading of Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth*” (1991); “The Perfect Jew and *The House of Mirth*: A Study in Point of View” (2000); and “‘Queer Myself for Good and All’”: *The House of Mirth* and the Fictions of Lily’s Whiteness” (2004).

quest to secure entrance into high society: “*Sim Rosedale!* The name, made more odious by its diminutive, obtruded itself on Lily’s thoughts like a leer. It stood for one of the many hated possibilities hovering on the edge of life. If she did not marry Percy Gryce, the day might come when she would have to be civil to such men as Rosedale” (46). Thanks to his financial success, Rosedale can expect to buy his way in to this society. As Trenor warns: “[Rosedale’s] going to be rich enough to buy us all out one of these days” (65). And Rosedale’s financial and social rise, the novel continually suggests, is thanks to “the instincts of his race” (96), which is, paradoxically, the very thing that makes him so “impossible” to the social, and racial, elite. Rosedale’s success poses a genuine threat to the purity of high society. He is a “brute” among the genteel (125), who are also, not coincidentally, the Gentiles. What can only be described as Rosedale’s cunning positioning of himself as a financial necessity to elite New York means that his success in the society, and the racial impurity he brings with him, is inevitable. As Trenor explains to Lily, “Well, all I can say is that the people who are clever enough to be civil to him now will make a mighty good thing of it. A few years from now he’ll be in it whether we want him or not” (65).

Despite the critical tendency to see Rosedale’s racial Otherness as a contrast to Lily’s whiteness, Rosedale’s and Lily’s very names invite the comparison of the two characters and suggest that their stories are intrinsically connected.⁶⁶ Lily, like Rosedale,

⁶⁶ One of Wharton’s working titles for *The House of Mirth*, “The Year of the Rose,” suggests that the novel is as much about the success of Rosedale as it is about the failure of Lily (Wolff 105). The emphasis on the rose in the title foreshadows Rosedale’s social success, but also the inability of the more delicate Lily/Lily to succeed. Another working title, *A Moment’s Ornament*, emphasizes the inevitability of Lily’s failure in her inability to make herself permanent instead of ephemeral. Certainly the racial exclusivity of high society is also fleeting: Rosedale’s success marks the failure of the patrician society that fails to exclude him. Rosedale’s “very acceptance deep into the folds of society becomes proof that society is in an irretrievable decline” (Goldman-Price 8).

is trying to secure her place in society, and while Rosedale's calculations to obtain entrance into high society seem to highlight the cold, capital-driven instinct of his "race," Lily's social-striving is described in strikingly similar terms; even her means are similar. Rosedale needs a good marriage to legitimize his money, and Lily needs money to be a legitimate player in the marriage market and high society. Rosedale carries with him "a general sense of having comported himself in a way to advance his cause," (90), which is, of course, entering into the society that does not wish to have him. Yet, Lily's cause, widely known as her "hunt for a rich husband" (38), means that she, too, must be as calculating as Rosedale. Selden recognizes that all of Lily's actions are "part of some carefully-elaborated plan" (7), and, in fact, Selden feels free with Lily because he knows he could "could never be a factor in her calculations" (7). Lily briefly recognizes the parallel between her and the Semitic invader after she has been caught by Rosedale exiting Selden's apartment in the Benedick. She knows Rosedale wishes to accompany her to the train station because being seen with Lily "would have been money in his pocket, he might himself have phrased it" (15), and she admits to herself that, "[s]he understood his motives, for her own course was guided by as nice calculations" (16).

It is Rosedale's vulgar business sense—a stereotypic Jewish obsession with money—that Trenor demeans as Rosedale's "shoppy manner" (65). It is, apparently, because of this manner that Rosedale sees Lily as a commodity. In Lily's *tableau*, the "real" Lily for Rosedale is not any promise of her transcendence, but her tangible commercial value. After Lily's *tableau*, Rosedale calculates Lily's value: "My God, Mrs. Fisher, if I could get Paul Morphet to paint her like that, the picture'd appreciate a hundred percent in ten years" (125). Like his desire to "show" Lily on his arm at the

train station as a type of capital gain, Rosedale assesses Lily's beauty in terms of its capital potential. That Rosedale can only see Lily's beauty as a potential monetary gain highlights his vulgar inability to see beauty as anything more than a commodity to be traded like the stocks he buys and sells on Wall Street. And yet Lily herself knows that her beauty is her currency. After the financial ruin of her parents and the death of her father, Lily's beauty becomes "the last asset in their fortunes" (29). Lily's mother sees Lily's beauty as an insurance policy to guard them against their financial fall. Though Mrs. Bart bemoans their loss of fortune, she is sure of the value of Lily's assets and insists to her daughter, "But you'll get it all back—you'll get it all back, with your face" (25). And Lily, too, understands her own beauty as "the raw material of conquest" to "fight [her] way out [of dinginess]" (31). When she lingers in front of her mirror at Bellomont, brushing her hair, "she was frightened by two little lines near her mouth, faint flaws in the smooth curve of the cheek" (25), because she knows her beauty is her best asset in her struggle to secure a husband and, with him, social and financial security. At the first sign of a fault in her perfect beauty, she recognizes the "injustice that petty cares [of financial insecurity] should leave a trace on the beauty which was her only defence [sic] against them" (25). For Lily, her best—her only—defense against her financial insecurity is a marriage she must secure using her beauty.

Lily is dependent on this understanding of her beauty-as-commodity to ensure a good marriage, which, despite the "vein of sentiment" she learned from her father, she knows is a necessary calculation to secure her standing in society. Like her understanding of her own beauty, Lily's unromantic understanding of marriage-as-commodity echoes Rosedale's own proposal of marriage to Lily as a business

proposition. Rosedale's business/marriage proposal comes to Lily in her greatest time of need: after Lily's Aunt Mrs. Peniston has flatly refused to help her pay back money lost in gambling and other such necessary expenses of entertaining the wealthy (she notably blames Lily's "foreign bringing-up" for her disgrace and predicament [137]), Lily is left with no option to which she can turn for her social and financial security, both of which are intimately linked. Rosedale recognizes this void, and seeks to fill it with the perfect solution: she needs the money; he needs a wife. Rosedale knows Lily doesn't love him, but he can give her the luxury and ease she does love, and in return, she would be for him the "wife to make all other women feel small" (139). Rosedale bypasses the romantic talk "that is expected under those circumstances" when a marriage has anything to do with love, and insists to Lily, "I'm just giving you a plain business statement of the consequences" (140). For Lily, as for Rosedale, marriage is not a matter of the heart; it is a matter of the pocketbook. Lily recognizes that Rosedale has a "utilitarian motive" for his wooing (189), just as she recognizes her own necessity of wooing and winning a rich, eligible bachelor—but not Rosedale. Lily needs, after all, a rich, eligible *white* bachelor.

In this proposal scene, Lily recognizes the complex interweaving of identity issues she must consider. By joining with Rosedale, she would be securing her class status as Rosedale certainly has the money and financial power to ensure a certain acceptance, albeit a begrudging one, into the society that is dependent on his wealth. Yet in such an alignment, Lily would be further compromising her racial status. And to be fully accepted in society, Lily knows she needs both the "right" class and race status, not just one or the other. Lily defers to the rest of her society and finds Rosedale "too grotesque" to be her partner in business or marriage (140), but even her measured

rejection of Rosedale further aligns her with him as she explains her role in marriage in similar business terms: “I have [...] worried about my bills. But I should be selfish and ungrateful if I made that a reason for accepting all you offer, with no better return to make than the desire to be free from my anxieties” (141). Lily’s return for Rosedale’s investment, she insists, would be unfair. While we might read Lily’s rejection of Rosedale as evidence of her growing morality throughout the novel, she also recognizes that this business deal would be bad for her as well. And in her rejection of this particular proposal, Lily reveals her alignment with Rosedale in her understanding of marriage as a business venture. While Lily is certainly looking for a polite way to reject Rosedale whom she herself has cast as the racial outsider, she recognizes that this partnership is the best deal for her (though it seems to be by the end of the novel when she belatedly and futilely accepts Rosedale’s proposal), and she is still confident in her powers to capture a good, which is to say white, husband.

Lily and Rosedale are raced not only in their detached calculations in the business of marriage, but also, somewhat paradoxically, in the “savage” urgency they both exhibit in their hunt for a mate. In Lily’s early (and self-sabotaged) attempts to win Percy Gryce as a husband, she “tranquilly stud[ied] her prey through downcast lashes while she organized a method of attack” (17). Her “prey” and “attack” are a far cry from the courtships she would have found in the “sentimental fiction” of which she is so fond (30), but closely link her to the brutish Rosedale. By the end of the novel when her situation and prospects have deteriorated, she reconsiders marriage to Rosedale, and realizes that he, like she, is a predator in this hunt for marriage; he would “be kind [to her] in his gross, unscrupulous, rapacious way, the way of the predatory creature with his mate”

(195). Wharton's language here is again reminiscent of nineteenth-century scientific scholars who linked "[white w]omen and the lesser races" to more "savage" peoples and practices (Russett 14).⁶⁷

The racial threat of Rosedale in *The House of Mirth* is clear: it is the threat of the racial outsider becoming an insider, and as Rosedale ingratiates himself more and more into high society, he makes real this threat of racial impurity. Critic Lori Harrison-Kahan argues that for turn-of-the-century America, the "Jew was a simultaneous threat to the whiteness of the nation and to the economic security of the aristocratic upper classes" (40). And Rosedale certainly embodies this dual threat as he has made his fortune much on the back of the Knickerbocker elite. When everyone else "felt poor" because of a "bad autumn in Wall Street" (95), Rosedale's fortune doubles, and his situation improves at the expense of the "victims of the crash" (96). Rosedale threatens to use this fortune amassed at their expense to buy his way into their society, adding racial insult to financial injury. Rosedale's money gives him access to high society, access that allows him to mingle among the upper class. His money means, as Trenor has warned, that Rosedale is "a chap it pays to be decent to" (74). Harrison-Kahan argues that "the Jew [Rosedale] achieves his parvenu status through class passing. In imitating the habits, dress, and behavior of those around him Rosedale hopes to stabilize his identity as white" (40), and

⁶⁷ To ensure white men's rule in the social (and political) hierarchy, "[w]omen and the lesser races served to buffer Victorian gentleman from a too-threatening intimacy with the brutes," and intimacy that had the potential to destabilize gender and racial differences (Russett 14). Wharton seems to be employing this type of racial logic especially in her portrayal of Rosedale as a "brute" against whom the elite measure their superiority. Moreover Harrison-Kahn argues that American national identity was being challenged by "the New Woman's assumption of masculinity" (47), and Lily threatens this identity throughout *The House of Mirth* as a type of New Woman (as does Gerty Farish, whom Harrison-Kahan identifies as the novel's "closest approximation to the historical New Woman" [35]). Harrison-Kahan also rightly notes that Rosedale's difference "draws attention to [Lily's] new status on the margins of society and reveals the instability of her sexual, racial, and class identities" (34). Notably, Harrison-Kahan is the only critic who has argued that Lily herself embodies a precarious racial position.

contends that Rosedale poses a “particular threat because Americanized Jewish immigrants could not be distinguished easily from other self-made men” (40). Yet, while Rosedale’s wealth and blonde, rosy features may not be conspicuous markers of his racial difference, Rosedale is still clearly marked as racially Other throughout the novel. Though blonde, he is sweaty and shiny, and he is further marked by his crudeness of speech, “racial characteristics” (like his shrewdness with money), and his general distastefulness.⁶⁸ If anything, Rosedale’s blonde features only point to the inadequacy of phenotype to identify racial difference, a racial reality that has deep implications for the fair-skinned Lily Bart as well.⁶⁹ Rosedale’s difference throughout the novel is apparent, and even when he more fully integrated into society, he remains “the same little Jew” (16). The real threat of Rosedale is not that he will somehow “pass” as white, but that being the racial Other, he still gets in anyway.

Yet, even while the threat of someone actually marrying a Rosedale (as Jack Stepney swears must be impossible) looms large throughout *The House of Mirth*, the most troubling racial threat in the novel is not the outside invader Rosedale, but the presumptive racial insider Lily. Rosedale may be a threatening stranger from without,

⁶⁸ Rosedale’s crude speech and bad grammar throughout the novel serve as way of distinguishing him from his surrounding white company. Language was an important distinction in the Jones household of Wharton’s youth. As she recalls in her autobiography *A Backward Glance*, the young Edith was never allowed to read popular children’s books because, as her mother explained in horror, the children in these books “spoke bad English *without the author’s knowing it*” (51). Wharton further explained the importance of proper English: “You could do what you like with language if you did it consciously, and for a given purpose—but if you went shuffling along, trailing it after you like a rag in the dust, tramping over it, as Henry James said, like the emigrant tramping over his kitchen oil-cloth—that was unpardonable, there deterioration and corruption lurked” (51). Like the emigrant who trips over his oil-cloth, Rosedale has committed the unpardonable sin of poor language.

⁶⁹ Even though, as Kassanoff notes, “Unlike today’s observers, who often narrowly construe race as an exclusive matter of skin color, Wharton’s generation applied the term liberally to a diverse array of possible identifications” (3), a surprising number of critics still linger on Lily’s skin color as a telling marker of her racial status, most notably Elizabeth Ammons in her prominent chapter on Wharton and race from *The Cambridge Companion to Edith Wharton* (80).

but Lily is more threatening because it becomes clear she is the stranger from within. Lily's sexuality, her inability to pin down her story, her proximity to Rosedale, and the racial instability inherent in being a woman, challenge an understanding of race as a fixed thing. As Lily's racial and consequently social positions fluctuate throughout the novel, it becomes clear that the real problem is not that the racial outsider may become an insider, but that the racial insider can so easily become a racial outsider.

Making an End

In a sense, Lily Bart is only a symptom of a greater problem, one that is festering in the ranks of American high society. The people who visit Bellomont, live in the great brownstones of New York, and eventually expel Lily from their ranks are the "old-time Americans" Wharton identifies in her 1927 essay "The Great American Novel" (181), the "Anglo-Saxons" that make up America's old stock (181). These are the people of Wharton's own "race," and *The House of Mirth* documents them in a society that Wharton herself knew very well. Yet, as Ammons notes in her preface to the novel, if Wharton was very much a "product of her time, place, class, and culture," she was also its "sharp critic and questioner" (viii). And Wharton's critical eye is leveled on that very same high society of "old-time Americans" who in *The House of Mirth* have so squandered their Anglo-Saxon heritage that they reject Lily Bart yet allow the likes of Rosedale to penetrate their borders. Indeed, society has become paradoxically so racially insular and yet permeable, that there is no place for Lily Bart by the end of the novel.

Lily's inability to find her place is exemplified in her time at Bellomont when Lily and Selden walk the grounds of the estate (shortly before Lily plays her part in the

tableau vivant). Selden waxes philosophical about a “republic of the spirit” where one might live “free from money, from poverty, from ease and anxiety, from all the material accidents” (55). Such a mythical place would offer Lily the freedom from all her material woes, and she would like to join Selden in this “republic” and, in the more immediate physical world, share a cigarette with him. But Lily can do neither because she is, she bemoans, “a *jeune fille à marier*” (56). Lily is keenly aware of her position as a marriageable young woman and the steps she needs to take to secure her own freedom from material woes by securing a marriage. Indeed, her current expedition to Bellomont is largely to attract the attention and secure the affection of Mr. Percy Gryce, the single, shy, and moneyed collector of Americana. Gryce’s collection of Americana is, of course, deeply suggestive. He collects Americana because it is extremely rare (11), and, not surprisingly, Lily will not be able to fit into such a collection. Despite Lily’s awareness of her precarious position as an unmarried woman seeking high society, she undermines the white allegiances necessary to give her that security (her angering of Bertha Dorset, for example) and can never quite follow through on her white alliances (in her self-sabotaged pursuit of Gryce, for example). As her botched pursuit of Percy Gryce suggests, Lily can never be exactly the right kind of American, and her death at the end of the novel reveals the consequences for the young, unmarried woman who cannot find her racial place.

In Lily Bart, Wharton draws a character excluded by the uneven strictures of her own race and a society corrupted by its own exclusivity. There is nothing left for Lily Bart at the end of the novel; cast from her own society and closed off from the standing of her race, she has no place in the patrician society so obsessed with racial purity. In

The Writing of Fiction (1925), Wharton deferred to Nietzsche in her estimation of how to make a good ending for a novel: “Nietzsche said that it took genius to ‘make an end’—that is, to give the touch of inevitableness to the conclusion of any work of art. In the art of fiction this is peculiarly true of the novel” (50). What makes *The House of Mirth* a good novel, then, is the inevitability of Lily Bart’s death. Lily must die because she cannot live among a people who will not have her and a race that will not claim her. Lily’s shifting racial status and final inability to be accepted in her own society show the permeability of the racially select, the instability of racial categories as a whole, and the self-defeating making of whiteness.

Lily’s death is more than just a tragedy of the individual who cannot find her place; it is the sign of a changing world. In *The Age of Innocence* and *The House of Mirth*, Wharton traces the instability of whiteness and the shifting standards of defining and understanding race, and points to the ways in which these standards undermine the racial security of the very people who are meant to protect while seemingly leaving American whiteness accessible to the invading racial Other. Yet, if it seems inevitable that whiteness as a racial standard is vulnerable where it was once venerable, it is not, necessarily, that it has somehow become possible to become white, rather that it has become impossible to be white. Rosedale, for example, does not cease being a racial Other though he seems to be able to access the benefits of the white society that would rather reject him; but Lily still falls to impossible racial and gendered standards of her society. The success of Rosedale or Beaufort points to a growing possibility that American identity need not be yoked to certain standards of whiteness. In *Chapter Three* the connection of whiteness to American identity in general is traced in the work of

immigrant author Anzia Yezierska. Yezierska recognizes the white standard of identity meant to exclude the racial Other (and charts the very real consequences of such exclusion). Yet Yezierska identifies opportunities for the immigrant outsider not to somehow become white, but to define American identity not fully dependent on whiteness. In such she reveals the contradictions inherent in discourses of nation that are dependent on whiteness and the need, particularly for the immigrant, to think beyond whiteness.

Chapter Three

All She Could Never Be: Anzia Yeziarska and the Task of Becoming American

We have been forced out of our national boundaries into racial units.

-Anzia Yeziarska
All I Could Never Be

Now, I even looked dressed up like the American-born. But inside of me I knew that I was not yet an American.

-Anzia Yeziarska
“Children of Loneliness”

After over two decades living abroad, Henry James returned to New York in 1904 to find his native city much changed. Since his previous visit, the metropolis had more than tripled in population, its increasingly cramped neighborhoods awash with the waves of immigrants daily arriving on America’s shores. The change in the country’s make-up and character had been so severe, James explained in *The American Scene* (1907), that the very “idea of the country itself underwent something of that profane overhauling through which it appears to suffer the indignity of change” (85). New York City was a microcosm for such change; by the opening of the new century the seed of the Old Dutch colony had fully blossomed into a multicultural center. It was transformed and unfamiliar; it was, James discovered, alien.

The cause and effects of such a profound alteration were evident to James throughout the city. On the electric car, you could see the rows “of faces, up and down, testifying, without exception, to alienism unmistakable, alienism undisguised and unashamed” (125), and in Central Park, you could hear their “cheerful hum of that babel

of tongues” (119). New York had become the “loud primary stage of alienism,” in which “the native” American, like James, found himself dispossessed—an alien in his own nation (86). It was a chilling realization for New York’s native son: “This sense of dispossession, to be brief about it, haunted me” (86).

There was perhaps no better example of what we might call this native alienation than in the “Jewish Quarter,” the most bustling example of what James dubbed “the Hebrew conquest of New York.” (132). The Jewish Quarter swarmed with immigrant otherness, and there was “no swarming like that of Israel when once Israel has got a start, and the scene here bristled, at every step, with the signs and sounds, immitigable, unmistakable, of a Jewry that had burst all bounds” (131). The Jewish Quarter was bursting at the seams not only with an actual overpopulation of people, but with an overabundance of immigrant Otherness. For James, being in the Jewish Quarter or any of New York’s numerous immigrant neighborhoods alienated him from his sense of national entitlement; for the “native” American like himself, James observed, “it is his American fate to share the sanctity of his American consciousness, the intimacy of his American patriotism, with the inconceivable alien” (85).⁷⁰

If James felt adrift in the “million or so of immigrants annually knocking at our official door” by 1904 (84), he may have been further alarmed, had he lived so long, by

⁷⁰ For James, his experience in the Jewish Quarter was particularly dehumanizing; it was like being “at the bottom of some vast sallow aquarium in which innumerable fish, of over-developed proboscis, were to bump together, for ever, amid heaped spoils of the sea” (131). But in “Affirming the Alien: The Pragmatist Pluralism of *The American Scene*” (1998), James Posnock offers a reading of *American Scene* in which James’s “snobbery” is complicated “with sympathy” for the alien Other (227). *The American Scene*, Posnock argues, “might be summed up as the effort to foster active democratic citizenship and the messy heterogeneity of what I call pragmatist pluralism” (229). Certainly James considers the “great ‘ethnic’ question” very carefully (James 121). The prominent immigrant population causes James to ponder “the cauldron of the ‘American character’” and ask, “What meaning, in the presence of such impressions, can continue to attach to such a term as the ‘American’ character?—what type as the result of such a prodigious amalgam, such as hotch-potch of racial ingredients, is to be conceived as shaping itself?” (121). Here James considers defining the “American character” not in spite of, but including the ethnic Other.

New York City in 1920, where roughly three-quarters of the 28 million immigrants who had come to America since 1880 were settled in the swelling city (Douglas 304).⁷¹ By 1920, only one million of the city's six million residents were white "native-born" Protestants (304). As eugenicist Madison Grant warned William Howard Taft, after a "walk down Fifth Avenue [... to as] far as Washington Square," one could clearly see that the "natives" were now an "endangered species" (qtd. Spiro 97).

James's increased feeling of dispossession in his own homeland is compounded by his sense that immigrants in America were feeling increasingly "at home" (125), that they were "more at home, at the end of their few weeks or months or their year or two, than they had ever been in their lives" (125). Immigrant populations had quickly made New York their home not necessarily by readily adapting to America, but by adapting America to them. New York's numerous overflowing neighborhoods felt like miniature representations of various foreign homelands now transported onto America soil.⁷² Like *The American Scene*, Jacob Riis's landmark *How the Other Half Lives* (1890) had earlier noted the growing alien makeup of New York where, reflected Riis, "One may find for the asking an Italian, a German, a French, African, Spanish, Bohemian, Russian, Scandinavian, Jewish, and Chinese colony [...]. The one thing you shall vainly ask for in the chief city of America is a distinctively American community" (16). Like James, Riis seemed particularly struck by "Jewtown" and the sheer number of immigrants he

⁷¹ James did return once more to New York in 1910 and he reported New York to be "a queer mixture of the awful and the amusing, the almost interesting and the utterly impossible" (qtd. Edel 451).

⁷² In *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (1972), Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb attribute these oases of immigrant culture not to "a preservation of what the immigrant had known in his native land" but rather as a "way to re-ignite some feeling of common custom and culture that had been disintegrating at home" (11). Certainly those immigrant communities fleeing cultural persecution may have found "in the strange alien cities of America" this opportunity to re-inscribe a cultural identity (11). As one "a Russian Jew" remarked in the 1920s: "In the desert of America [...] it is easier to remain Russian in the old ways than among the iron mills in the Urals" (11).

encountered there: “It is said that nowhere in the world are so many people crowded together on a square mile as here” (63). What’s more, Jewtown was overwhelmed not simply by the number of immigrants, but by their palpable racial Otherness. Everything about the Jewish immigrant seemed to mark him or her as alien: their “jargon [Yiddish] of the street, the signs of the sidewalk, the manner and dress of the people, their unmistakable physiognomy, betray their every step” (63). In his own travel narrative, *Impressions and Experiences* (1896), William Dean Howells, too, had noted the clear racial differences apparent particularly in the Jewish immigrants who were each, to Howells, “noble profiles of their race” (147).

Most social commentators were not as sympathetic to the plight of immigrants, particularly Jewish immigrants, as perhaps James, Riis, and Howells were, though many would certainly agree that Jews were racially different. In *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916), Madison Grant warned that Jews posed the greatest threat of any immigrant group to American racial purity. While Grant was vehement about his opposition to any immigrant not of the Anglo-Saxon or Nordic “race,” his “deadliest animus focused on the Jew, whom he saw all about him in New York” (Higham 156). For Grant, and many other nativists, Jewish immigrants posed an immediate and real threat to racial purity, “the foundation of every national and cultural value” (156). As David A. Gerber explains in *Anti-Semitism in American History*, deeply embedded anti-Semitism exacerbated already strong anti-immigrant nativist prejudices toward Jews, singling out Jews for the most vehement nativist attacks. The “ancient, aversive folklore” against Jews (like the “guilt” of the Jews in the crucifixion or the pervading Shylock stereotypes) had “led to centuries of persecution in the Old World” and had followed Jewish immigrants into the

New (5). This deeply embedded anti-Semitism, coupled with “the unusually rapid socioeconomic mobility they experienced in America” made Jews “unique among foreigners” as Gerber argues, and the “most prominent and the most vulnerable of all [immigrant] minorities discriminated against” (5).

White racial purity was particularly at risk with an influx of Jewish immigrants in America because, argued Grant, “the cross between any of the three European races and Jew is a Jew” (156). Grant was not alone in his hysteria: *The New York Times* was appalled by “unwashed, ignorant, unkempt, childish semi-savages” who were the “hatched-faced, sallow, rat-eyed, young men of the Russian Jewish colony” (qtd. Jacobson 184). When prominent anthropologist Franz Boas argued that biology did not, in fact, separate new immigrants from America’s “old stock,” Stoddard attacked Boas’s denial of racial differences between immigrants and Old-stock Americans as “the desperate attempt as a Jew to pass himself off as ‘white’” (Rogin 89). As early as 1894, the *Illustrated American* had warned of the threat of Jewish immigrants in America and decried that “the inroad of the hungry Semitic barbarian [in America] is a positive calamity” (Jacobson 184).⁷³

These particularly vehement attacks on the Jewish “race” reveal (though certainly inadvertently) the vulnerability of whiteness itself by highlighting the shifting determinants of racial difference in the early twentieth century, and consequently the precarious position of American whiteness as it needed to constantly shift to ensure its

⁷³ While animosity toward immigrants, Jewish immigrants in particular, was often focused on the racial “threat” such immigrants posed to white America, Sennett and Cobb note that the “immigrant influx” was also seen as a serious “threat to the jobs of established skilled workers” (11). The influx of unskilled labor abundant in new immigrant populations corresponded with an increasing replacement of skilled labor by machines, and thus immigrants were largely seen as a compounded threat to these (white American) skilled laborers. “And, not surprisingly, a deep hostility arose among the old Americans toward the newcomers” (12), which Sennett and Cobb attribute to this economic and labor competition.

own sanctity. Jews were considered racially divergent because of a variety of interchangeable, shifting, and sometimes competing factors, factors that would prove inconstant barriers of racial exclusion. As those like Howells noted, Jewish physiognomy was considered a notable racial trait, as was Jewish religious practice. Even the “Jew’s ‘ostentation’ and lack of ‘civility’ were themselves widely interpreted as racial traits” (Jacobson 164), an indication that someone one’s demeanor indicated racial difference. Yet, as Jacobson notes, by the late twentieth century in America, Jews (even while retaining markers of “racial difference” like religion or cultural difference) were considered white under the rubric of “Caucasian,” with any cultural and national differences now understood as ethnic differences, rather than racial.⁷⁴ What this “vicissitude of Jewish whiteness” reveals is not how Jewishness is inherently racially different from American whiteness (Jacobson 3), but how inconstant and ultimately vulnerable categories of American whiteness really are in their need and urgency to hyper-refine whiteness and establish racial difference in such populations as immigrant Jews.

It is perhaps because of the ultimate instability of American whiteness that nativist rhetoric of the early twentieth century so emphatically warned of the daily arriving immigrants, particularly Jewish immigrants, who were making themselves at

⁷⁴ In his chapter “Becoming Caucasian,” Jacobson deftly outlines the process by which what had been considered people of various races (Anglo-Saxons, Celts, Teutons, Slavs, etc.) came to be understood as one racial group: Caucasians. In the mid-1920s there was a “pattern of Caucasian unity” that began to grow, ultimately resulting in a changing understanding of race and whiteness by the mid-1960s (91-138). This transition was slower for the Jewish “race.” As an *Atlantic Monthly* article titled “The Jewish Problem,” warned in 1941 of Jews in Europe, the “Orientalized” Jew could never really shed his or her racial difference; Jews had become European “only in residence; by nature he did not become an Occidental; he could not possibly have done so” (187). But, by the end of the war Jews were largely considered white (now understood as “Caucasian”): “World War II and the revelations of the horrors of Nazi Germany were in fact part of what catapulted American Hebrews into the community of Caucasians in the mid-twentieth century” (187).

home and threatening the sanctity of America's racial identity. Yet if these markedly racially different immigrants were making themselves "at home" in these communities, they were certainly not living as other Americans lived. Like Riis who meticulously chronicled this division, Howells, too, was particularly aware of this division as he walked through the Jewish Quarter: "I said to myself that it was among such throngs that Christ walked, it was from such people that he chose his Disciples and his friends; but I looked in vain for him in Hester Street. Probably he was at the moment on Fifth Avenue" (147). Unlike that *other* "other half"—the white, "native" Americans living in white strongholds like Fifth Avenue—immigrants suffered indignities of dilapidated and unsafe housing, cruel and unjust work conditions, and the grasping hunger of being alien in America.⁷⁵ Howells was notably appalled by the living conditions he encountered in New York's immigrant neighborhoods, particularly those of "The Jewish East Side:" "I suppose there are and have been worse conditions of life, but if I stopped short of savage life I found it hard to imagine them. I did not exaggerate to myself the squalor that I saw," Howells assured, "and I do not exaggerate it to the reader" (143). Riis's eye in *How the Other Half Lives* was particularly fixed on the tenements of New York because of "one thing New York made sure at that early stage of the inquiry: the boundary line of the Other Half lies through the tenements" (5).

It's exactly here, as part of that non-white immigrant Other half, that we find author Anzia Yezierska, a Jewish immigrant from Russian Poland new to America's

⁷⁵ Riis's *How the Other Half Lived* detailed these living conditions of immigrants in the ghettos and Riis launched a nation-wide speaking tour to raise awareness of the often inhuman living conditions. Of course, not all immigrants to America suffered the same fate as those in places like the Jewish Quarter. Riis himself was a Danish immigrant and an "American success story, the immigrant who made it but who [...] recognized that most would not" (Diner xiv). Not coincidentally, Riis's Danish ethnicity allowed him to claim white, Nordic "racial" identity in America.

shores and living in the Jewish Quarter tenements of New York's Lower East Side in the early 1890's as a girl not yet ten.⁷⁶ When Henry James visited New York in 1904, Yeziarska was finishing a teaching degree in Domestic Science from the Teacher's College at Columbia University, and in 1920, when immigrants outnumbered the "native-born," Yeziarska published her first collection of short stories about immigrant life in America. Her fiction was promoted as "an insider's guide to 'how the other half lives'" (Ferraro 547). Her first book *Hungry Hearts* (1920) was so popular that it was turned into the first of her two Hollywood movies and launched her literary and cinematic fame for over a decade as a "rags to riches" immigrant success story. Yet while the popular and widely accepted mythology of Yeziarska's life would afford her a certain public image of an up-from-the-ghetto immigrant triumph, her fiction reveals an intense struggle with the possibility of achieving not simply American fame or financial success, but the impossible-to-reach standard of white American identity.

Throughout her fiction, Yeziarska's heroines strive to Americanize themselves, but closer and closer though they may come, they can never quite manage to fully achieve the elusive standards of Americanness. This seemingly impenetrable barrier between the immigrant heroine and recognition as an American is hinted at in the observations of those who chronicled the very slums in which Yeziarska lived and of which she writes: what makes the Jewish immigrant so alien, what distances her from the observing James, Riis, and Howells, and what finally prevents her from ever ceasing to

⁷⁶ Like much of her biography, Yeziarska's exact location or date of birth is uncertain. Yeziarska was born in a small town (perhaps Plotsk or Plinsk) in Russian Poland (Gelfant xi). Between 1880 and 1885, the speculated dates of Yeziarska's birth, Poland was still a de-facto annex of Russia (Poland would gain its independence in 1918), and during its time under Czarist Russia, Poland was considered "Russian Poland." While Jews had a history of marginalization in Russian Poland, the Czarist pogroms of 1881 began an intensely bloody persecution that lingered in continued violence and restrictive legal reforms. High numbers of Russian-Polish Jews fled, and many (like Yeziarska's family) immigrated to the United States. See: Milton Meltzer, *World of Our Fathers: The Jews of Eastern Europe* (1974), pp. 190-216.

be alien and becoming American is that she is not simply worlds apart from the Americans of Fifth Avenue, but that she is a race apart.

Yeziarska's writing shows a keen awareness of and preoccupation with her own racial position in America, which is to say her racial difference from Americans. Much of Yeziarska's writing shares nativist assumptions that "American" national identity was entangled with a specific standard of whiteness embodied in the Anglo-Saxon "race." In this sense, Yeziarska's fiction reinforces a racialized nationalism that maintains that to be American is to be white and to be white is to be Anglo-Saxon, which creates an impossible standard of American identity for the immigrant who can never, of course, achieve this whiteness. This division between the immigrant heroine and the "native-born" white American alienates her from the American people and customs and a legitimized American identity.

Yet while this chapter offers a contextualized reading of Yeziarska that highlights the ways in which such theories of whiteness are not only present throughout but are central to the development of Yeziarska's writing, it also points to the ways in which Yeziarska resists such nativist theories of racial (and national) exclusion. While Yeziarska recognizes the power of such racial discourses, she simultaneously undermines them by revealing the slippery nature of such inconstant, shifting definitions of American whiteness, and provides space for the immigrant to realize an American identity not by successfully adapting to these shifting standards of whiteness, but, much like James predicted, by adapting American identity to the immigrant.

The “Sweatshop Cinderella”

In the 1920s, “There wasn’t anybody who didn’t know Anzia Yeziarska” writes Alice Kessler-Harris in her 1975 introduction to *Bread Givers*; “Today, there is hardly anyone who does” (v). While in the thirty-five years hence things have somewhat improved for Yeziarska’s circulation, Anzia Yeziarska principally remains a momentary celebrity, one still largely unknown by today’s readers and largely understudied by today’s critics. At first glance, Yeziarska seems exactly the type of alien that James was talking about, making herself at home in America as a Jewish Russian-Polish immigrant in New York. She was celebrated as an immigrant success story and billed as the “Sweatshop Cinderella.”⁷⁷ Stories about her life emphasized the years of struggle in factories, her fight through night school, and her miraculous transformation into a successful writer. A 1922 *New York Tribune* article explained her broad appeal:

Probably as romantic a figure as contemporary American literature affords is that of Anzia Yeziarska, who landed at Ellis Island fifteen years ago as a frail, young Polish-Jew immigrant girl, and who now has won her way through dreary hours in a sweatshop and scullery to a place among the successful authors of the day. (“Anna Yeziarska”)

This version of Anzia Yeziarska’s story “was told so often that she became known as the ‘Sunday supplement heroine’” (Dearborn, “Anzia” 108). It was a story that emphasized the contrast between downtrodden immigrant life and remarkable American success.

⁷⁷ The story of Yeziarska’s fairy-tale success had important nationalistic implications. Yeziarska was the woman “who fulfilled the immigrant’s dream of America as a land of self-transformation in which ‘a nobody from nowhere’ could become a ‘somebody’” (Gelfant viii). Yeziarska, of course, comes from somewhere, but that she is understood as being a “nobody from nowhere” suggests that her identity is only relevant once it becomes Americanized. Notably, this is the same language Tom Buchanan uses in *The Great Gatsby* to mark Gatsby as a racial outsider.

Such a romantic vision on Yeziarska's life is further perpetuated in Yeziarska's biography (1988), written by her daughter, Louise Levitas Henriksen, which begins: "She was the heroine of a very American fairy tale" (1), and in criticism that understands Yeziarska as "the American dream come true" (Kessler-Harris v).

Yeziarska's tale of success—rising from the ashes of alien poverty to artistic achievement and then American stardom—is certainly reminiscent of a classic American mythology of endless possibility, yet it obscures Yeziarska's own alienation from this story and glosses over the realities of what her hard-won success actually wrought, and what type of identity it allowed her to claim. The fame of Yeziarska's meteoric rise from the ghetto as the "Sweatshop Cinderella" is undercut by the less-famous reality that this story of her seemingly seamless American success was largely invented. It wasn't that the public biography was an outright lie, as much as it was strategically incomplete. The popularized story of success focused only on Yeziarska's years of flourish, and largely ignored the author's very conscious and calculated efforts to achieve authorial success, economic freedom, and artistic recognition,⁷⁸ it omitted her time in and graduation from Columbia Teacher's College, her years as a teacher of domestic science, her two marriages, and her child; it certainly didn't account for Yeziarska's criticism of her cold Anglo-Saxon American audience or her inability to shake an immigrant Otherness that often alienated her from that audience.

As an American author, Yeziarska was certainly not alone in having a public persona that differed from her actual self. As Laura Wexler notes in "Looking at Yeziarska" (1994), such a persona was the "social 'mask' that American writers since

⁷⁸ Stories of Yeziarska often focused on her natural, raw talent, yet, as biographer Carol Schoen points out, "Yeziarska was not an illiterate immigrant who miraculously found words to describe her life; she was an educated, highly conscious artist who struggled to develop the tool of her trade" ("Anzia Yeziarska" 3).

Ralph Waldo Emerson have complained about” (156). Yet, what Yeziarska’s public “mask” specifically depended on was the seeming ease with which an immigrant might come to the American land of promise and “make it” as an American. It imagines seamless assimilation for the wayward alien who arrives in America a young, despondent foreign girl and becomes a happy, successful American. It is a myth not only of Yeziarska’s life, but also of America itself. In the autobiographical “How I Found America” (1920), Yeziarska mythologizes America as such a land of possibility in the words of the would-be emigrants of Russian Poland:

From lips to lips flowed the golden legend of the golden country:
“In America is a home for everybody. This land is your land.” [...] “Everybody is with everybody alike, in America. Christians and Jews are brothers together.” [...] “Everybody can do what he wants with his life in America.” [...]

Age-old visions sang themselves in me—songs of freedom of an oppressed people.

America! — America! (158-9)

Such is an America in which the alien would certainly be, as James described, “at home.” Yet, if America offered such promise to the immigrant, it also offered hardship, and Yeziarska was destined to exist “in a double world of oppression and opportunity in America” (Wexler 154). While Yeziarska might have claim to being part of what James saw as the alienizing of America, she could not so easily lay claim to an American identity even with all her literary and cinematic success. Her public persona betrays the contradiction for Yeziarska: what the public demanded was a story about an immigrant

girl who had made a success precisely by publishing about her immigrant experiences—she was an “American” success story by still remaining alien. Yeziarska “spoke from the ethnic, sexual, and regional margins of the early twentieth-century American culture” (Wexler 178), but needed to be palatable to a largely white, “native-born” American audience, and her story of easy adaptation to America betrays a “rags to riches romance that tacitly accepted the inevitability of acculturation and the rightful hegemony of White Anglo-Saxon Protestant culture” (Fishbein 137).

Yeziarska’s actual success was continually hampered by her inability to fulfill the promise and ease of her popular biography—one that paradoxically wanted her to remain alien while still adapting to American (understood as white/Anglo-Saxon) codes of behavior. She was considered crass and pushy in Hollywood, and her objections to the altered endings of her movies (both with added happy endings of the successful Americanization of the Jewish heroines)⁷⁹ were ignored. She constantly pestered her publisher about royalties, ads, and publicity, and her “raw manners” were a far cry from acceptable “WASP” standards (Henriksen 212). The popularity of her fiction waned as the decade wore on, and her 1927 *Arrogant Beggar*, which explicitly critiques white upper-class philanthropists, was, perhaps not surprisingly, poorly received by those same white upper-class readers.⁸⁰ By 1932 and the crash of the stock market, Yeziarska was fully out of fashion.

⁷⁹ The ending to *Salome of the Tenements*, for example, was drastically changed. In the novel, the Jewish Sonya and the Anglo-Saxon John Manning are finally too different to remain married. Sonya leaves John and remarries a Jewish immigrant. In the movie, this racial incompatibility is erased and Manning and Sonya end the movie happily together.

⁸⁰ Yeziarska’s readers would have read her work not only in her collected short stories and novels, but in various popular magazines like *Harper’s*, *The Nation*, *The New Republic*, *Good Housekeeping*, and *Metropolitan* (Henriksen 128). Yeziarska’s style itself may have contributed to her decline in popularity, as her strong, emotional style was decreasingly palatable to what Yeziarska saw as a more emotionally

In her introduction to *Arrogant Beggar*, Katherine Stubbs accounts for Yeziarska's fast decline in popularity and points to "a rising tide of conservatism, a wave of hostility to those ethnic groups that failed to conform to America's vision of itself as Anglo-Saxon" (xiii). Stubbs also notes the prevalence of eugenics and resurgence of the Klan in the mid-1920s as gauges for national tastes: "In this light, critics' growing impatience with Yeziarska's subject matter by the late 1920s begins to make more sense" (xiv). Yet in 2009, Yeziarska seems to still be generally out of fashion. Critical studies, when they consider Yeziarska at all, are apt to pair her with other immigrant authors, most often other Jewish immigrant authors such as Mary Antin, Rose Cohen, or Abraham Cahan, a critical tendency that, as critic Carol Batker suggests, may indicate "that Jewishness and Americanism are still being figured as antithetical" (81). A noticeable portion of the critical articles concerning Yeziarska appear in journals like *Studies in American Jewish Literature*, *Yiddish*, and *MELUS* (published by The Society for the Study of Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States), suggesting an understanding of Yeziarska as an immigrant author, Jewish author, or "ethnic" author in America, rather than an American author who is a Jewish immigrant. Yet Yeziarska's writing speaks to an underexplored broader American context that is relevant not just for the Jewish immigrant, but for understanding the shifting standard of American identity for all immigrants and "native-born" Americans. As Wexler argues, the "tale that Yeziarska told is a Jewish tale, though it is not only the tale of the Jews. It is also the story of every striver and every stranger to American soil who is faced with the demand for amnesia and assimilation" (160).

reserved white readership. As Ann Douglas describes her, Yeziarska was a "gifted if overwrought novelist and screenwriter" (540).

Given the continued emphasis on Yeziarska's "Other" status, it is not particularly surprising that critics who have written on Yeziarska have shown a heightened awareness of the role of the author's own ethnic position in her fiction. In "Anzia Yeziarska and the Making of an Ethnic Immigrant Self," for example, Mary V. Dearborn parallels the deliberate creation of ethnic heroines with Yeziarska's own self-conscious creation of her biography. Or, as Lori Jirousek argues in "Ethnics and Ethnographers: Zora Neale Hurston and Anzia Yeziarska" (2006), Yeziarska's own ethnic position influences her ability to be an effective ethnographer in her fiction. Additionally, it is the exception, rather than the rule, that a critic is not explicitly interested in issues of race and ethnicity in Yeziarska's work, though many seem to take for granted exactly if it is race or ethnicity that is at work. In Melanie Levinson's "'To Make Myself for a Person': 'Passing' Narratives and the Divided Self in the Work of Anzia Yeziarska" (1994), for example, Levinson begins the promising task of tracing the manifestations of the "Passing" narrative as it has traditionally been understood in an African American literary context within Yeziarska's fiction.⁸¹ While Levinson interestingly suggests that female characters are significantly troubled "by the ramifications of leaving their 'blackness' or 'Jewish-ness' behind them" (2), she never identifies the ethnic or racial stakes of her argument, nor even whether she is talking about race or ethnicity or both. Is Jewishness equivalent to blackness despite the slippage between definitions of ethnicity

⁸¹ For further parallels to the "Passing" narrative, see also: Steven J. Belluscio, *To Be Suddenly White: Literary Realism and Passing* (2006); and Adam Zachary Newton, "Incognito Ergo Sum: 'Ex' Marks the Spot in Cahan, Johnson, Larsen, and Yeziarska" (2003). Newton sees passing as "ethnic erasure and self-fashioning" that "divides the ethnic self at skin level" (140, 147), and points to Yeziarska's "Soap and Water" (1920), as an example where the immigrant's literal skin (here too dirty for Anglo-standards of cleanliness) precludes her "whiteness." Belluscio reads Yeziarska's *Bread Givers* as a narrative that shows the difficulty for the "ethnic white" immigrant woman to shed her Old World heritage. For Belluscio, "whiteness" is an available option for the Jewish immigrant, if only she could fully leave her "old" ethnic self behind. Both of these readings suggest that if only the immigrant could overcome a given hurdle (her dirtiness, or her Old World heritage), she could, in fact, achieve whiteness.

and race? Do early twentieth-century confusions of race and ethnicity help or hinder such a reading?

The consideration of “passing” raises a fundamental definitional complication when thinking about race in Yeziarska’s fiction. While investigations into “passing” raise important questions about the racial difference of the Jewish immigrant from the dominant white (which is to say Anglo-Saxon) American culture in which the immigrant must operate (or into which she must try to assimilate), the comparison of this racial insecurity with “passing” narratives by African American authors of the same time points to a troubling critical suggestion that oversimplifies racial difference by tacitly collapsing it into “non-whiteness.” What’s more, while the status of many immigrant groups was dependent on the terms of their assimilation, as Priscilla Wald points out in *Constituting Americans: Cultural Anxiety and Narrative Form* (1995), the option of assimilation for the immigrant “was scarcely ventured by white Americans with regard to black American culture at the turn of the century” (205).⁸² At the same time as assimilation programs are being promoted for certain immigrant groups into white American culture, American politicians are simultaneously dealing with “the Negro Problem” by legally justifying segregation.⁸³ What’s more, while neither the African American author nor Jewish immigrant author would have been considered white in their contemporary moment, the

⁸² Such barriers also certainly existed for “migrants and immigrants of color,” as James G. Gimpel notes is still true today in *Separate Destinations: Migration, Immigration, and the Politics of Places* (1999) as migrants and immigrants of color “face special obstacles to conformity and assimilation in a predominantly white” (21).

⁸³ As Wald notes of the landmark *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision in 1896, “*Plessy* legislated racial classification, legally articulating and perpetuating the permanent alien status” of blacks in America (205). Much like legal moves to limit immigration and then assimilate any remaining immigrants into a white American cultural hegemony, *Plessy* signaled “that American citizenship had been again redefined in accordance with ideas about the ‘new American race’” (205), a race defined by Anglo-Saxon standards of American whiteness that black Americans could never achieve.

terms of that non-whiteness—their racial identities in America—are not equal. Non-whiteness for the Jewish immigrant must be seen within its historical trajectory, and as Jacobson has rightly outlined, the fundamental question of Jewish racial identity in America “is not *are* they white, nor even how white are they, but how have they been both white and Other? What have been the historical terms of their probationary whiteness?” (176).

This racial and ethnic confusion that we see in an article like Levinson’s remains a lingering issue in much of Yeziarska criticism, and underlines the trouble of talking about immigrant identity or race in general in early twentieth-century America: categories of race, particularly whiteness, are slippery and constantly in flux. These identities expand and contract as is politically and personally convenient for dominant culture, oftentimes, as I have earlier noted, specifically in response to perceived immigrant threats, so that the Jewish immigrant in the earliest twentieth century can be “racially” different because of her religion, national origin, or ethnicity all at once or as separate identity factors.

Despite the critical attunement to the importance of issues of race and ethnicity (and notwithstanding the critical slippage between race and ethnicity) in Yeziarska’s fiction, there is surprisingly little consideration of whiteness specifically, an oversight that is particularly glaring when we consider that such flux over immigrant Jewish identity is largely because of the shifting definition of whiteness. One notable exception to this is Steven J. Belluscio’s *To Be Suddenly White: Literary Realism and Passing* (2006) in which Belluscio argues that “Non-Anglo-Saxon European immigrants found themselves in racially in-between subject positions from which they could escape only by

adopting the social, religious, economic, and intellectual mores of the better-established white dominant culture” (2).⁸⁴ Belluscio employs the term “ethnic white” (4) for this identity position, a usefully descriptive term despite its limitations, as it reminds us of the transient status of whiteness for many immigrants. It’s equally important to remember, however, that while “ethnic white” seems well-suited to understanding the identity of a Jewish immigrant (because we today understand Jewish identity to be an ethnic or religious identity and not a racial one), at the turn of the twentieth century the nuance between race, ethnicity, and religion was largely lacking and the immigrants of Yezierska’s fiction were not at all white by contemporary standards.

Despite promising critical inroads,⁸⁵ what remains insufficiently considered in Yezierska criticism is an exploration of the role of whiteness as it is constructed as a racial, national, and gender category. Yezierska was acutely aware of what she understood as her own racial position as a Jewish Russian-Polish immigrant in America and, I will argue, her fiction is particularly attuned to the national debates of nation, gender, and race. This study works to situate Yezierska’s own sense of her ethnic, racial, and gender identity and place her in the larger national debate about American whiteness, a debate that has significant ramifications for the immigrant woman in America. By

⁸⁴ In his chapter “‘As if I Were Dead’: Passing into Subjectivity in the Writings of Ets, Antin, Yezierska, and Barolini,” Belluscio explores the trope of passing in white ethnic women’s realist fiction. For Italian-American and Jewish-American women to “shed” their Old World attributes pass as white in the New World, argues Belluscio, is to “undergo a kind of cultural ‘death’ that is either undesirable or impossible” (177).

⁸⁵ Including criticism that has rightly shown a heightened awareness to the role of gender, particularly, among the intersectional issues facing the immigrant woman at the turn of the century. Critics like Thomas J. Ferraro in “‘Working Ourselves Up’ in America: Anzia Yezierska’s *Bread Givers*” (1990) and Cara-Lynn Ungar in “Discourses of Class and the New Jewish Woman in Anzia Yezierska’s *Arrogant Beggar*” (1999), for example, focus on the importance of class and gender intersections for immigrant women. What these critics reveal are the complications of Jewish identity and the way in which the immigrant woman’s class and gender, particularly, affected her status and possibilities.

placing Yeziarska in conversation with authors like Wharton and Fitzgerald (instead of specifically with other Jewish-American authors) I highlight the ways in which Yeziarska participates in a broader national literary discourse of American whiteness. Yeziarska reveals the way in which whiteness is a fundamental part of American identity, one that binds itself to a specific racial ideology and excludes the hopeful immigrant. Yet Yeziarska simultaneously insists that an American identity that seeks to protect itself from racial infiltration by yoking itself to whiteness ultimately fails itself.

I begin this exploration with an introduction to the ways in which Anglo-Saxon standards of American whiteness were transmitted (if not always made accessible) to immigrants through various programs of racial “uplift” and cultural assimilation and I trace the ways in which, particularly in her 1927 novel *Arrogant Beggar*, Yeziarska reveals how such programs re-inscribe a racial hierarchy of white, Anglo-Saxon American identity onto the immigrant Other. Yet despite the racial hierarchy inherent in such programs, *Arrogant Beggar* exposes the cracks in an exclusive American identity. Racially liminal figures dot the novel’s landscape and complicate the otherwise dichotomous hierarchy between white American and immigrant Other. Such characters point to the hypocrisy of such assimilation programs and trouble the foundational assumptions of race at work in the forced separation of immigrant Other and “native” American.

I then move to Yeziarska’s first novel *Salome of the Tenements* (1922), which offers Yeziarska’s most direct consideration of race, particularly nativist and eugenicist theories of Anglo-Saxon American whiteness. While *Arrogant Beggar* focuses on the charity house experience of immigrants and reveals the constructed racial barriers that

face immigrants in their attempt to be Americanized, it is *Salome of the Tenements* that offers the most sustained, critical look at the role of race as the standard of American identity. *Salome* directly addresses and attacks nativist assumptions of Anglo-Saxon superiority and the connection of this “racial” distinction to American national identity. While in many ways the Anglo-Saxon race is recognized in *Salome* to be the standard of American identity, easily compartmentalized understandings of race are simultaneously troubled throughout the novel and *Salome* reveals that the real racial threat to an exclusive white American identity lies not in the potential of the immigrant to be or become white, but in the immigrant’s growing ability to bypass whiteness altogether in the quest to become American.

Protecting the American Race: Anglo-Saxonizing the Immigrant

In “How I Found America,” the narrator insists, “I came to America to make from myself a person” (162), and this quest of personhood is represented in Yeziarska’s fiction as a constant negotiation of defining the immigrant self apart from an Old World identity but also against the strictures of an Anglo-Saxon white American ideal in the New World.⁸⁶

In Yeziarska’s most critically discussed novel *Bread Givers*, for example, heroine Sara Smolinsky struggles against the constraints of her Orthodox father’s house to gain freedom as a successful American (an identity defined by the “native-born” white Americans) only to find the promise of Americanness to be always out of reach for the

⁸⁶ That to make oneself a “person” in America would be tied to an understanding of American whiteness is not particularly surprising considering that citizenship in America had been designed for “free white persons” (by which was meant free, white, male persons) and that the legal racial restrictions in United States’ naturalization law were not removed until 1952. See: Ian F. Haney López, *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (1996), pp. 42-7.

poor, uneducated immigrant woman. Like the narrator of “How I found America,” Sara wants to “make [herself] for a person” (21), but realizes that the road to such personhood is hampered by her inability to shake her immigrant identity, and ends the novel by symbolically returning to her Jewish identity in marriage to another Jewish immigrant, and the caretaker for her Orthodox father who embodies the Old World and shuns the New World of America.⁸⁷ While Sara celebrates partial victories of success in America (she does, after all, become a teacher of immigrant children and financially stable enough to support her father), she cannot shake the legacy of the Old World, nor is she ever fully accepted in the New. Her paradox, as critics have noted, is that as an immigrant in white America, Sara can be at home in neither world.⁸⁸

What is initially so puzzling about *Bread Givers* is that Sara’s honest struggle to be Americanized (in her journey through college and effort to be accepted by her Anglo-Saxon peers in custom and appearance) is ultimately futile despite her effort and desire to be American and despite any broader societal push for immigrant assimilation. That America was a nation of one culture had been widely emphasized in national dialogues from Lothrop Stoddard who declared that “like-mindedness” was the root of America’s “true national life” (*Re-Forging* 256, 255) to Theodore Roosevelt who warned that immigrants, in particular, posed a threat to such national unity:

⁸⁷ Sara’s alienation from the Old World embodied in her father is a common immigrant narrative. As Sarah E. Chinn argues in *Inventing the Modern Adolescence: The Children of Immigrants in Turn-of-the-Century America* (2008), “the story of alienation between immigrants and their American-raised children was so familiar that it appeared almost everywhere in descriptions of urban immigrant life” (80). Yet Sara is never able to fully reject her father, and her struggle between the Old World and the New is part of the same immigrant narrative for the children of immigrants—particularly children born in the United States—who struggled between “their parents on the one hand, and [...] the United States on the other [...] a struggle] often thematized as the conflict between the ‘Old World’ and the ‘New World’” (78).

⁸⁸ See especially: Evelyn Avery’s chapter “Between Two Worlds: Anzia Yezierska, Longing for the New: Bound to the Old” in her *Modern Jewish Women Writers in America* (2007); and Martin Japtok, “Justifying Individualism: Anzia Yezierska’s *Bread Givers*” (1999).

where immigrants or the sons of immigrants, do not heartily and in good faith throw in their lot with us, but cling to the speech, the customs, the way of the Old World which they have left, they thereby harm both themselves and us. If they remain alien elements, unassimilated, and with interests separate from ours, they are mere obstructions to the current of our national life. (“True Americanism” 48)⁸⁹

Reformers like Frances Kellor argued that “Americanization education” was the answer to this problem and could form the “harmonious and homogenous nation Americans desired” (Carlson 107)—America as a “one-minded nation” (108).⁹⁰ On the one hand, such Americanization projects diverged from more eugenicist thinking that “denied that assimilation of the foreign-born was a biological possibility” by insisting that the immigrant could assimilate to American life and culture through education and social conditioning (Ziegler-McPherson 55). But, on the other hand, Americanization projects reinforced white American hegemony by insisting that immigrants adapt to standards of Anglo-Saxon cultural values and practices. For Yeziarska’s heroines, such programs of

⁸⁹ For Roosevelt, assimilation was both a “racial and a nationalistic concept” (T. Dyer 132). Roosevelt rejected the idea of “hyphenation” (that one could be ‘German-American’ or ‘Irish-American,’ etc.) and saw Americanization as a way to ensure national cultural and racial unity. Unlike some who argued immigrants from eastern or southern Europe were un-assimilable, Roosevelt saw that these immigrants could become “men precisely like ourselves” (135), even if it took a few generations. But for such identity groups as blacks, “Orientals” or Latin Americans, assimilation remained impossible. See: T. Dyer, *Roosevelt and the Idea of Race*, pp.129-137.

⁹⁰ In 1910 Frances Kellor created the Bureau of Industries and Immigration, which sought to resolve complaints brought by immigrants “against those who would exploit them,” investigate the living conditions of immigrants and lobby for improvements in them, and “publish and distribute information that would ‘facilitate assimilation’” (Ziegler-McPherson 23). As an advocate for immigrants, Kellor had “enormous faith [...] in] the transforming power of the social environment” and that Americanization would lead to “equality, efficiently, and most of all, citizenship” for the immigrant (23). As the Chief Investigator for the Bureau, Kellor lobbied for a bevy of immigrant protections and opportunities, and suggested that better education was the best defense for the immigrant; she proposed a “school of citizenship” be established (New York 139). See: New York Dept. of Labor, *Annual Report of the Bureau of Industries and Immigration* (1912), pp. 137-139.

assimilation represent a deeper betrayal of the immigrant who can never really achieve such standards, and, in many cases, aren't really meant to. In *Arrogant Beggar*, we see this paradox more clearly as heroine Adele Lindner, a Jewish immigrant from Russian-Poland, seeks the path to Americanization through the assimilation project of the charity working-girls home only to find a deep hypocrisy in the philanthropic upper-class whose extravagant lunches served on fine china contrast sharply with the classes they teach to immigrant women on how to make eggless, milkless, butterless cakes. The rich justify this inequity in their belief that it would be “utterly disastrous for them [immigrants] to get wrong notions of superiority” (62). Whether this would be more “disastrous” for the immigrants themselves, or rather for the white hegemony they might threaten to upend is unclear, yet the result is that assimilation is pushed on the immigrant, but a full American identity remains unattainable and the benefits of American identity are always out of reach.

Such a paradox of the Americanization yet continued racial segregation of immigrants in America was played out on a national stage in the debate of America's “melting-pot.”⁹¹ While nativists were insisting on the need for national unity (located in

⁹¹ In his *Letters from An American Farmer* (1782), French immigrant Michel Guillaume Jean de Crèvecoeur (naturalized in New York as John Hector St. John) was the first to describe America as a place where immigrants melted into culture, and that a mixture of all these immigrants formed the “American, this new man” (44). In the *American Scene*, James explained the diverse, alien New York as a “fusion, as of elements in solution in a vast hot pot” (116). In 1908, Israel Zangwill (an Englishman who ran an emigration society that helped Russian Jews immigrate to America) wrote the enthusiastic and popular play *The Melting-Pot*, which “attached a vivid symbol to the old assimilationist ideal of American nationality” (Higham 124). Those like Madison Grant bemoaned the Melting Pot analogy (and reality) of America and warned: “If the Melting Pot is allowed to boil without control [...] the type of Native American of Colonial descent will become as extinct as the Athenian in the age of Pericles, and the Viking of the days of Rollo” (228). Yet, despite the fears of Grant, instead of erasing Anglo-Saxon dominance, the “Melting Pot” ideology reinforced white supremacy by erasing racial and ethnic difference, after all, as James Posnock notes in *Color & Culture: Black Writers and the Making of the Modern Intellectual* (1998), in “the 1920s the melting pot and Jim Crow reigned, both in different ways erasing all racial or ethnic minglings” (31). Desmond King agrees in *Making Americans: Immigration, Race, and The Origins of the Diverse Democracy* (2000) that a “national Anglo-Saxon identity [was formalized] under the guise of a ‘melting-

an Anglo-Saxon white identity), more progressive reformers focused on the needs of immigrant communities, the possibilities for immigrant uplift, and the ways in which assimilation programs might provide for these needs.⁹² Among them were such influential figures as Jane Addams, founder of the U.S. Settlement House movement; Graham Stokes, millionaire socialist and philanthropist whose marriage to Jewish-American activist Rose Pastor is loosely fictionalized in *Salome of the Tenements*; and prominent philosopher and educational reformer John Dewey,⁹³ who shared an intense relationship with Yeziarska. Dewey, particularly, was “suspicious of the Americanizers’ agenda. ‘Nationalization’ was dangerously akin to homogenization, Dewey felt, and was predicated on values implicitly antithetical to democracy” (Dearborn, *Love* 86). Dewey

pot” (19). Some progressive reformers argued against the Melting Pot for this reason. In “Democracy Versus the Melting Pot” (1915), philosopher Horace Kallen argued that American life was culturally pluralistic and legitimized ethnic diversity. Kallen’s own sense of the dangers of ethnic erasure inherent in Melting Pot ideology may have been shaped by his own experiences as a Jewish immigrant from Germany, what Arthur A. Goren calls Kallen’s “Jewish concerns” in *The Politics and Public Culture of American Jews* (1999) (16).

⁹² In *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origins* (1964), Milton Myron Gordon outlines three different forms of assimilation in America: the Anglo-Conformity model, in which assimilation is geared toward Anglo-Saxon cultural identity; the melting-pot model, in which dominant groups and immigrants blend together; and cultural pluralism, a model of ethnic coexistence. Gordon argues that the type of assimilation most prevalent in America has historically been Anglo-conformity, which “received its fullest expression in the so-called Americanization movement, which gripped the nation like a fever during World War I” (98). Yet, despite this, there were “humanitarian” Americanizers like Addams or Dewey who focused on immigrant uplift rather than national unity, and who supported aspects of Americanization as the best opportunity for immigrant success (Carlson 78). The underlying philosophical difference between these reformers and other, eugenically-inclined assimilators (“Americanizers”) was that “Americanisers [sic] thought of Anglo-based American culture as complete, [whereas] the Liberal Progressives [like Dewey and Addams] pictured American culture as still-evolving [...] and] made room for the incorporation of the ‘best’ elements of more recent additions to American life” (Carson, “American” 40). Yet, “even the most ‘democratic’ settlers probably failed to hold or convey the institutional view that immigrant languages and social practices were something other than remnants to shed at the first opportunity” (Carson 40), and expected that their patience would pay off in the eventual disappearance of the culture of the immigrants” (Carlson 93).

⁹³ Dewey was in many ways the “father of the Progressive movement” (Dearborn, *Love* 3). He was one of the “most important American thinkers” of the Progressive Era (Pestritto and Atto 3), and his ideas on education, particularly, dramatically shaped national reform. Dewey saw education as “the fundamental method of social progress and reform” (Dewey 133).

had met Yeziarska at Columbia Teacher's College, and had encouraged her writing and development (Schoen, "New Light" 4); Yeziarska sought Dewey's advice and guidance in her training and writing, and had worked for Dewey in his study of the Catholic-Jewish political divisions the Polish-American immigrant community of Philadelphia. Yet their relationship was certainly more complicated than student-teacher, or immigrant-philanthropist. Yeziarska offered Dewey "the chance to practice what he had been preaching" in his inclusive rhetoric, and "declared [to him] that she had been excluded from her rightful place as a schoolteacher because she was a non-Anglo-Saxon, an immigrant [...but still] believed in the immigrant's dream of America: opportunity" and Dewey was in a position to help her attain it (Henriksen 86). To Dewey, "Yeziarska offered not only passion and a second chance at life but a personal introduction to the immigrant world that had commanded his interest for so long" (Dearborn, *Love* 117). Their emotionally charged, eventually amorous⁹⁴ relationship was rooted, Yeziarska contended, in racial difference:

We're drawn to each other by something even more compelling than the love of man for woman, and woman for man. It's that irresistible force as terrible as birth and death that sometimes flares up between Jew and Gentile It's because he and I are of ... different races that we can understand one another so profoundly. (qtd. Henriksen 111-12)

⁹⁴ Yeziarska and Dewey shared a "fierce and mutual attraction" (Dearborn, *Love* 131) and were deeply drawn to each both intellectually and through a "growing sexual attraction" (Henriksen 111). Dewey wrote poetry that revealed his emotional attachment: "There stirred within me/ The ghosts of many a love" (qtd. Dearborn, *Love* 113). Though Dewey was married, he became "deeply involved with Yeziarska" (118). The difficulties of their relationship are symptomatic of the racial complications (and failures) of immigrant assimilation, and the failure of their relationship "told a very real failure on the part of the native-born American in accepting the immigrant America" (134).

For Yeziarska, the difference between herself and Dewey was at its base racial. And Dewey, like other reformers, saw the solution for bridging these racial differences in the project of assimilation. Dewey imagined Americanization as a way to achieve “a genuine assimilation to one another—not to Anglo saxondom—[that] seems to be essential to America” (qtd. Eisele 71). Dewey’s idealized vision of Americanization imagined such assimilative projects as a means to help educate both races, the immigrant foreigner and the Anglo-Saxon American, and bring them together in mutual understanding while “doing away with barriers of caste, or class, or race” (qtd. Carlson 87).

But Yeziarska saw the reality of America and Americanization as a far cry from such lofty ideals. Such idealizations of racial harmony are satirized in Yeziarska’s *All I Could Never Be*, for instance, where the Dewey-like⁹⁵ educational philanthropist Henry Scott imagines a similar romanticized vision of Americanization: “Our whole history is one of assimilation. We began as Anglo-Saxons. And look at our country now! Jews, Italians, Poles—all the nations of the world are weaving themselves into the interracial symphony” (38). While this vision is preached at benefits and banquets to the well-meaning white elite, the immigrants will never see such an America achieved. Instead, the immigrant heroine Fanya sees America as it really is for the immigrant:

There rose before her the thwarted, inarticulate, starved lives she knew in the factory. Crowded blocks of Poles, Jews, Italians who had lost their own national heritage and had not gained a true American one. Islands of foreign-born who remained shut out of America, shut out from one another, behind the barrier of their racial differences. (38)

⁹⁵ Dewey was the “prototype of Anglo-Saxon coldness” for Yeziarska (Dearborn, *Love* 158-9), and various incarnations of Dewey appear throughout Yeziarska’s fiction.

America, the immigrant knew, would seek to strip away one's national and ethnic (i.e. racial) difference, without offering anything in return.⁹⁶

Yet, programs of racial uplift continually promised a path to Americanization through the magnanimity of various white benefactors, the “affluent do-gooders and social workers [who] lived in the settlement houses and tried to ‘uplift’ downtrodden slum dwellers” (Zipser 7).⁹⁷ The connection of American life and an underlying American race was clear in classes that were taught about “the nation’s Protestant heritage, Anglo-Saxon law, and middle class views of the rights and responsibilities of U.S. citizenship” (Carlson 81), and such programs were implicitly protecting a certain standard of white American identity; the immigrant had to be “Americanized so as to protect the ‘American way’” (Karier 88).⁹⁸ As a representative of the YMCA warned of un-assimilated immigrants: “unless we Americanize them they will foreignize us” (qtd.

⁹⁶ As Julian Levinson notes in *Exiles on Main Street: Jewish American Writers and American Literary Culture* (1008), Yeziarska was not alone in her criticism of assimilation projects or noting the cost that such projects wrought upon the immigrants within them. The poetry of Israel Jacob Schwartz, and novels like Abraham Cahan’s *The Rise of David Levinsky* (1917), and Sholem Asch’s *Keyn Amerike* (trans. *To America*; 1911) “tell a generational story, linking Americanization with cultural loss and anomie” (136). While programs offered the foreigner the “ultimate fulfillment of a resident of the United States—the opportunity for entry into the nation’s middle class” (Carlson 8), such an offer came at a heavy cultural price, as the immigrant in turn must give up “virtually all his [or her] unique qualities of religion, culture, thought, and appearance” (8-9). Yet, simultaneously, uplift programs did offer immigrant communities a variety of tools not available to them through other means including education for children and adults, literacy classes, and civics classes aimed at improving immigrant political engagement and status. See: Mina Carson, “American Settlement Houses: The First Half Century” (2001).

⁹⁷ In *Settlement Folk: Social Thought and the American Settlement Movement, 1885-1930* (1990), Mina Carson importantly notes that many settlement workers expressed certain “ambivalence toward the goals of ‘Americanization.’ The settlement workers were among the first to appreciate the Old World cultural survivals in the immigrant colonies” (103), yet still, even these well-meaning more democratic settlement workers “shared the chauvinism, if not the fears, of their fellow citizens toward the ‘new immigrants’ from southern and eastern Europe” (102).

⁹⁸ In order to preserve a specific “American” identity, immigrant populations had to be assimilated to American life and ways and stripped of their own cultural identities and uplift programs were central to the “transmutation by ‘the miracle of assimilation’ of Jews, Slavs, Poles, Frenchmen, Germans, Hindus, Scandinavians into beings similar in background, tradition, outlook, and spirit to the descendants of the British colonists, the Anglo-Saxon stock” (Kallen 72).

Carlson 112).⁹⁹ Programs were thus designed to “inculcate the poor and ethnically diverse immigrants into the values and traditions of the dominant group” (Wilentz xiv), which is to say, the Anglo-Saxon descendants who made up white America. In this sense, Americanization programs were a direct response to the perceived threat foreign immigrants like Yeziarska herself posed to “native-born” Americans as the definitive American race.

The palpable—and threatening—foreignness of the immigrant Other is played out in *Arrogant Beggar* as a bevy of racial stereotypes amongst the participants of the charity house: the immigrant factory girls from a variety of “unsavory” nations. And while the novel ultimately reveals such uplift programs as corrupt and hypocritical, the immigrant women reveal their coarseness and confirm various racial stereotypes that inform and drive these Americanization projects. While alone in their charity home together, the young immigrant women banter back and forth as Adele listens:

“That’s Angela Patruno” [... one immigrant girl notes]. “Works in a paint factory. Ain’t she a cute little wop?” [...]

[The pale-faced blonde next to her is] “a Pollak just outa Ellis Island.” [...]

“You kikes are always kicking.”

“And you wops—macaroni suckers”

⁹⁹ The fear of “foreignization” was also a cause for opposition to Americanization projects. Opponents of assimilation programs warned that reformers were “sentimentalists” (Carlson 104) and argued that some immigrants (namely southern and eastern Europeans) were too “ignorant and morally debased [and] “incapable of being Americanized” (Carlson 100).

“Dry up! Hollering and fighting like a League of Nations. Kikes, Wops, Micks, and Polacks. Only thing missing’s a Chink to make it perfect.” (22)

The immigrant women revert to racist stereotypes and epithets partly in jest, and yet their crude language here is only a symptom of their rudeness, both linguistic and cultural, and their behavior generally confirms the racist stereotypes prevalent in American culture.¹⁰⁰

In a sense, this is meant to contrast these other immigrants (here a Polish, Jewish, Italian, and Irish immigrant) to the immigrant Adele and demonstrate her superiority to these more vulgar immigrants—after all, Adele listens without joining in their coarse talk, and is later “selected” by their white benefactress to serve at the uplift gala where the white up-lifters will sit around and meditate on how benevolent their charity is. Indeed, Adele is even singled out by the dashing young son of the benefactress for his adoration, another indication that she has transcended the racial caste stereotypes that the charity house girls seem to have readily accepted. But by the end of the novel, Adele herself has accepted that as an immigrant, she “oughtn’t to be playing lady” (111), a role reserved for “native-born” American women, and needs to instead return to the immigrant community out of which she was being uplifted. While Ljiljana Coklin notes that such racial stereotyping casts the immigrant woman as the “noble savage” (137), it nonetheless reasserts nativist claims of inherent racial difference and immigrant debasement. Moreover, as Stubbs notes in her “Introduction” to the novel, while “opposing characterization of the cold-blooded, cultured Anglo-Saxon and the hot-blooded,

¹⁰⁰ Immigrants, Jewish immigrants particularly, were often characterized as being coarse and rude (Higham 47), and Yeziarska was keenly aware of the role which language, particularly, played in the immigrant’s assimilation. See: Delia Caparoso Konzett, “Administered Identities and Linguistic Assimilation: The Politics of Immigrant English in Anzia Yeziarska’s *Hungry Hearts*” (1997).

primitive ‘oriental’” served Yeziarka’s romantic plot (a scheme we see throughout Yeziarska’s fiction), such stereotyping also “dangerously reinforced tenets of eugenicist theory” (xx).¹⁰¹

For Adele, the assimilation program seeks not to induct the immigrant into the hallowed halls of white American life, but better adapt her to the role of meek and appreciative servant, thus assimilating her into a racially-determined class-fixedness. Adele is being trained to be a grateful servant, one who may even go on to help other immigrant women into such roles of grateful servitude. As one of the charity benefactresses explains to Adele: “It is my hope that this training in domestic science will enable you to become a leader among your people” (46); Adele then might better prepare other immigrant women to be able to “[f]ace the conditions in which they were born and to which they must adjust themselves” (62). For Adele, there is no uplift out of her conditions, only the training that sets the lives of the Anglo-Saxon wealthy as the coveted standard of living while keeping it safely from immigrant servants. For the immigrant in *Arrogant Beggar*, assimilation is not to become American, only to become the literal and figurative servants of such American racial ideology,¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Such racial stereotyping in Yeziarska’s fiction was not limited to its linking of the immigrant to the savage: easy examples of such stereotypes include the manipulative and controlling father Moses (“Reb”) Smolinsky of *Bread Givers* who with comical fervency adheres to Old World standards of behavior, or the money-lender “Honest Abe” from *Salome*, who “worse than Shylock” and whose “one passion was his cash box” (58, 59). Moreover, Yeziarska often “links Jews to acquisitive consumerist practices” and in so doing rearticulates “an old anti-Semitic stereotype” (Stubbs, “Reading Material” 163). Such racist stereotypes did not go unnoticed by contemporary readers. After the publication of Yeziarska’s *Bread Givers* (1925), for example, “a coterie of Jewish-American men [...] lambasted [the novel] as yet another up-from-the-ghetto tract, cartoonish in plot and characterization, assimilationist in drive, anti-Semitic in effect if not in intent” (Ferraro 548). Yet, while critics have often criticized Yeziarska’s use of stereotypes, Ron Ebest argues that Yeziarska often “exploits and transforms” stereotypes, though maintains that even though “by embracing the dominant culture’s stereotypes Yeziarska was embracing the dominant culture, whatever use she made of those stereotypes afterward” (121, 122).

¹⁰² Eugenicists like Stoddard argued that Western-European immigrants might “be absorbed into the nation’s blood” through “ultimate assimilation” and strengthen “the stability and continuity of our national

The racial ideology underlying Stoddard's push for immigrant assimilation and even the racial ideology of more well-meaning reformers for such Americanization reveal the deep-seeded anxiety of maintaining a standard of exclusive American whiteness as the bedrock of American identity. Such an ideology covertly demanded "immigrants conform to the Anglo-Saxon model of culture and society" (Feinberg 497), while at the same time maintaining this Anglo-Saxon Americanness far aloof from immigrants so that none could never actually achieve it, only desire to be it.¹⁰³ Yet, the promise of Americanization, of successfully embracing and being embraced by Anglo-Saxon culture and becoming white, remained a powerful one, particularly for the immigrant woman. And, Jane Addams noted, there was "perhaps no other immigrant so eager to become Americanized as the Jewish girl" (qtd. Heinze 94).¹⁰⁴ With "American identity" intrinsically "presented as an Anglo-Saxon ideal" (Dearborn, *Love* 39), this path to Americanization meant the constant striving for American whiteness.

life" because these immigrants "belong to some branch of the white racial group" (*Re-Forging* 257, 256). Yet, for other immigrant "races" (like Adele, the Russian-Polish Jew), the "ethnic differences are so great that 'assimilation' in the racial sense is impossible" (257). Among these, Jews, especially, were "thought to be unassimilable" (Dinnerstein 59); indeed, "Of all the newcomers to the United States in the Progressive era, the public found Jews the least acceptable" (68). For immigrants like these, Stoddard argued for "the very real advantages to be gained by a separate race-life" (*Re-Forging* 328), which is to say the ethnic segregation like we see in *Arrogant Beggar*.

¹⁰³ Yeziarska herself felt this impossibility in her experiences with uplift programs and her relationship with Dewey. Yeziarska's "passionate intensity" was too stark a contrast to Dewey's reserved, "dignified" demeanor (Schoen, *Anzia* 11). Such differences, Yeziarska argued, were based in their race: "Like all Anglo-Saxons, coldhearted and clearheaded, he was concerned with propriety" she was the racial opposite: passionate, "intense" and "aggressive" (Henricksen 102, 88). Their relationship came to an abrupt end when, as Yeziarska recounts it, she rebuffed his awkward sexual advance during a walk in the park one night, causing him to retreat into an even deeper emotional distance that would eventually end their relationship (fictionalized in *All I Could Never Be* [1932] and in *Red Ribbon on a White Horse* [1950]).

¹⁰⁴ In *Jewish Girls Coming of Age in America, 1860-1920* (2005), Melissa R. Klapper agrees that Jewish immigrant girls were particularly eager to "embrace many of the changes that would aid their desire to pull away from their families and tradition and move toward their peers and modernity" (56), but this didn't necessarily result in a complete rejection of their Jewish heritage, as many girls balanced their desire for Americanization with a refusal to fully "reject their Jewishness" (57).

Adele's drive to succeed in the charity house and become successfully Americanized is described as being "a fire inside of me" (42). The charity home uplift program is originally an "oasis" to her; she sees it as being a "lighthouse" to all immigrants so that they might find their way (43). Yet, despite Adele's drive, she soon realizes that she can never fully achieve American identity exactly because of her status as a Jewish girl, and being "Americanized" only further entrenches her racial difference from "native born" Americans. Adele explains to the son of the charity-house benefactress the difference between her immigrant world and his American world: "The whole world is made to order for you. You've never had to go through the dirt of fighting for your life. Your ancestors did the fighting for you" (112). The benefactress's son is interested in Adele as a sort of "slumming tour" (113); he is the vaguely well-intended white man, she the exotic Other. It is her racial difference that attracts him to Adele, but that also separates them, and Adele learns the lesson of countless non-white immigrants before her: it is "*whiteness*, not any kind of New World magnanimity, that opened the Golden Door" in America (*emphasis in original*, Jacobson 7).

Yet, if *Arrogant Beggar* goes to extremes to reveal the impossibility for immigrants of such racially exclusive definitions of American identity as they are re-inscribed through assimilation programs, it also reveals the cracks already inherent in such a system of racial hierarchy and exclusive white American identity (as defined by and reserved for Anglo-Saxons). The white do-gooders themselves add a surprising racial complication. As a reviewer for the *New York Herald Tribune* assumed when she criticized Yeziarska for her "amusing ignorance of gentile minds" (qtd. Stubbs, "Introduction" xxx), we might easily assume these benefactors are members of the

Anglo-Saxon (Christian) elite who normally ran such programs. Such a reading is understandable based on high-profile celebrities of uplift programs like Dewey, Addams, and Stokes, coupled with the focus of many uplift programs on Anglo-Saxon Protestant values. The benefactors of the charity home certainly see themselves as part of that same charitable legacy of uplift for the unfortunate downtrodden racial Other, as one is hailed as the “Abraham Lincoln of our day!” (83). And when Adele bursts out in a public speech at a charity ball: “I hate this Home [...] I hate ever damned bit of kindness you’ve ever done me [...] Hypocrites!” (86),¹⁰⁵ the lady’s faces are emphasized as being particularly “white” with their fear (88), and Adele’s outburst has solidified her as “savage” (88), a mark of her racial Otherness against the more civilized white company.

Yet, as Stubbs notes, the charity women’s last names introduce a creeping doubt into these upper-class women’s own racial status: several of the charity-givers’ last names—Hellman, Stone, Gordon, Gessenheim—may as easily be the names of German Jews as they are of Anglo-Saxon Christians (“Introduction” xxx). In contrast to the Germans who came before them, “the eastern Europeans [Jewish immigrants] were poorer upon arrival; more prone to concentrate in the immigrant slums of the major northern cities; more troubled by such social problems as poverty, desertion, and unemployment; and more likely to be pre-modern in their habits and traditional in

¹⁰⁵ Here, Adele in all her fury provides a violent immigrant contrast to what Lori Merish has called the vision of the “deserving poor,” romanticized versions of virtuous (though impoverished) women that rise in Antebellum literature as the “deserving objects of sympathy in the writings of reformers concerned with moderating what was perceived to be a growing gap between rich and poor” (50). Not only are the charity givers in *Arrogant Beggar* invested in maintaining distinctions of upper and lower class between themselves and those they seek to “uplift,” but it is the immigrant author writing her own story of the “deserving” poor, instead of being further commodified by the well-meaning benefactors who decided the worth of the downtrodden and appropriated their stories. Such a sentiment of the “deserving poor” is operating in Yeziarska’s *Salome of the Tenements*, for example, when the heroine Sonya comes into a meeting where “social workers” are debating how to discriminate between the “worthy poor” and “imposters” who are less deserving of charity (135). The “imposters” include immigrant women who are found with anything other than cornmeal, rice, and macaroni in their kitchens (135-6).

religion matters” (Gerber 24). Thus Adele’s distinction from the charity women may not be that of immigrant Other instead of white Anglo-Saxon American. Instead, what separates Adele from her philanthropic counterparts may be a convoluted set of differences between more-assimilated, less-religious, and more affluent Northern-European Jewish immigrant and less-assimilated, more-associated with religion, and poorer Eastern-European immigrant.¹⁰⁶

That the identity of these charity women is left ambiguous in the novel allows for lingering uncertainty in the requirements of Americanization, and in who dictates the standards of such Americanness (after all, the potentially German-Jewish higher-ups serve as the gatekeepers to assimilation in *Arrogant Beggar*). If these higher-up charity women are not Anglo-Saxon Gentiles (as nativists continually emphasized white Americans were), their identity presents a number of challenges to the dominance of American whiteness by reducing it to cultural custom: either racial difference is simply cultural difference and can thus be overcome; or, if race and culture are not equivocal, what separates the immigrant Other from the “native” American is not, in the end, actually race, but rather culture. If, then, national identity is founded on such “like-

¹⁰⁶ While Jews were generally determined to be “unassimilable aliens on racial grounds,” some nativists “distinguished between the Americanized, economically productive German and Sephardic Jews who generally had been in America for many decades and the impoverished Orthodox arrivals from the tribal ghettos of eastern Europe” (Singerman 119). Many German Jews were “assimilated and prosperous” in America, and some undertook to “Americanize, uplift and control an alien element [in the newly arrived eastern-European Jews] with which they were identified” (Goren 21). In some settlement houses, for example, German Jewish charity ladies were given the affairs of “Jewish-oriented activities instead of respecting the abilities of the quite different Eastern European Jewish immigrants to manage their own political and social affairs” (Carson, “American” 40). Yeziarska herself had taken night classes at the Educational Alliance settlement house that was supported by a variety of “‘uptown’ reformers, many of them German Jews” (Dearborn, *Love* 39); she dedicated her first book, *Hungry Hearts*, to Sarah Ollesheimer, trustee of the Clara de Hirsh charity settlement home and wife of a wealthy German-Jewish banker (43). Yet, if Yeziarska was grateful to a German-Jewish philanthropist in the particular, her fiction suggests a greater ambiguity with the role of these more-Americanized Jews. In her short story “My Own People” (1920), she attacks Jewish charity women who have refused aid to the narrator who was “caught” enjoying small luxuries (like wine and cake) given to her: “You call yourselves Americans? You dare call yourselves Jews? You bosses of the poor!” (150).

mindedness,” as Lothrop Stoddard argued it was, then what makes the immigrant such a threat to white America is not based on the “presumed racial peril” presented by immigrants, but rather their threat to “cultural homogeneity” (Singerman 119).

Adele’s own ending in the novel reinforces this need for cultural homogeneity when she returns to the Jewish ghetto and is brought back to a symbolic cultural life (and to full health) by the old Jewish woman Muhmenkeh. When Muhmenkeh dies, Adele opens a coffee house and creates a community center for her Jewish immigrant kin where they eat traditional Jewish food, Jewish artists display their paintings, and where she meets fellow immigrant Jean Rachmansky, a piano genius who plays music from the homeland (reminiscent of another musical Russian emigrant, Rachmaninoff). Adele and Jean end the novel married and waiting on the dock to receive Muhmenkeh’s granddaughter, the latest Jewish immigrant to join their family. Such an ending seems to suggest clear racial distinctions between these immigrant Others and the broader white American world they can never fully inhabit (their success, after all, is contingent on their remaining in the Jewish ghetto, serving traditional Eastern-European food, and depending on their fellow immigrant Jewish clientele). Yet, while Jean emphasizes the national connection they share (her coffee house brings him to memories of Poland [138]), and while he certainly is racially Othered by the charity benefactors for whom he has played (“You Slavs have such wonderful musical souls” [74]), his own status leaves a lingering racial doubt: while *Arrogant Beggar* continually emphasizes the Jewish identity of Adele, Muhmenkeh, Adele’s lower East-Side patrons, and the Jewish immigrants of the charity house and ghetto, Jean is conspicuously emphasized as being Polish-Russian, but not Jewish. In a novel that emphasizes the Jewish racial difference of so many of its

characters, Jean's own potential non-Jewish status—particularly when coupled with the possibility of assimilated German-Jewish philanthropists—leaves open the possible shifting of the standards of racial difference that defined and supposedly protected the American race.

Such racial slippage presents a bevy of questions, all of which offer potential challenges to prevailing nativist racial ideologies: What is it, after all, that makes the Jewish immigrant racially different from the American? If Adele and Jean are not bound together as Jewish immigrants, but rather as regionally connected, is Jean the same race as Adele? Are they Othered from an Anglo-Saxon white American standard simply because of their immigrant status rather than their racial status? And yet, if the charity women whose programs help uphold such a standard may in fact be German-Jewish immigrants, or the descendants thereof, is such a standard of whiteness already infiltrated by the immigrant Other? Is it, then, class status, rather than any racial difference, that separates these women from Adele, or has their Northern-European regional heritage somehow trumped their Jewishness? Are Jewish immigrants, then, racially different, or culturally different? The potential of racial questioning does not, of course, crumble the order of Anglo-Saxon dominance in early twentieth-century America, nor Adele's inability to achieve a standard of white American identity. But it does open a space in which we might begin to question the inconsistencies of nativist ideology and national racial standards as we see how lines are blurred between national origin, cultural customs, class status, and religious heritage to construct racial difference onto the immigrant. If, as John Higham argues in *Send These to Me: Jews and Other Immigrants in Urban America* (1975), the threat of immigration was at its base the potential to

“undermin[e] the unity of American culture” (47), then racial difference is reduced to “an impelling vehicle for thinking and talking about culture” (47). Such an understanding of American identity does not necessarily preclude the racial Other and undermines the validity of racial difference established in early twentieth-century America.

Pilgrims and Indians: *Salome of the Tenements* and Racial Difference

If *Arrogant Beggar* reveals the inconsistencies and vulnerabilities of an American identity dependant on Anglo-Saxon standards of whiteness, Yeziarska’s first novel *Salome of the Tenements* (1922) attacks this standard of American identity directly and undermines the tethering of racial status to national identity. *Salome* traces the life and struggles of Sonya Vrunsky, a young Russian-Jewish immigrant living in the tenements of Hester Street in the Jewish Ghetto of New York. Sonya idealizes, worships, and then marries the American millionaire-philanthropist, the genteel and Gentile Anglo-Saxon John Manning who lives “among the Ghetto people” as an “uplifter” (32). Manning and Sonya’s marriage comes to a quick end as Sonya realizes that as an immigrant, she will never be truly accepted by or acceptable to Manning or other “born higher-up” Americans (3), and Sonya returns to the ghetto, marries a fellow Russian-Jewish immigrant, and designs an instantly popular dress (called the “Sonya model”); she ends the novel happy and successful in America.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ How complete Sonya’s success is, or exactly what she has won, depends for many critics on how one reads Sonya’s role as a fashion designer at the end of the novel. While one might read Sonya as now able to “conceptualize her own beauty and enunciate her intellectual potential [...] in her own creation, despite a suppressive Americanizing climate” (Okonkwo 141), one could also argue that her “fabrications reinscribe the very hierarchies they initially appear to transgress” (Stubbs, “Reading” 170). What’s more, while she ends the novel assured that she and Jewish immigrant Jacky Hollins “belong together” (177), the success of their union is left to the assumption of the reader.

Yeziarska's portrayal of the cold, hypocritical Manning and his program of uplift certainly lends itself to Ann Douglas's assessment of the novel as an "impassioned protest against the soulless regimentation of the settlement house mentality" (540), yet *Salome* does much more than offer a sustained protest against such programs of racial uplift; the novel shows the impossibility of American whiteness as an ideal for non-white immigrants, as well as the limitations of such an identity for the whites it seeks to protect. The immigrant Other and Anglo-Saxon white American are embodied in the novel's two main characters—Sonya Vrunsky and John Manning—and in comparing the two Yeziarska attacks assumptions of Anglo-Saxon superiority. Yeziarska deconstructs Anglo-Saxon whiteness and questions its connection to American identity. Moreover, while the immigrant Other Sonya realizes she can never attain the standard of white Anglo-Saxon American identity (and, indeed, even the Anglo-Saxons in the novel can't), in this realization, she begins to carve for herself her own American identity outside of standards of whiteness. Thus, the real danger for American whiteness may not be that somehow it is accessible for the immigrant racial Other, but that it is increasingly irrelevant.

About three-quarters of the way through *Salome of the Tenements*, Sonya has married Manning and they are throwing a reception "to show the world that social chasms can be bridged with human love and democratic understanding," as Manning explains (120). They invite a flurry of what Sonya refers to as "higher-ups" as well as a few of Sonya's "Ghetto" friends. The inevitable failure of this reception is obvious from the start. Though Sonya is now the mistress of the house, she thinks of the manor as "Manning's aristocratic house on Madison Avenue" (117), a house from which she feels

entirely separate and of which she feels unworthy. She berates herself for not capitalizing on her “good luck” in this advantageous marriage: “Why can’t I take Manning’s house as a frame for me and make over my new world [...] Why am I still so lost in the air, a wild crazy from Hester Street?” (117). If Sonya remains mystified at the gap between Hester Street and Madison Avenue that prevents her from embracing her new life as Mrs. Manning, it’s less mysterious to the reader why Sonya remains uncomfortable. After all, Manning has fallen in love with Sonya exactly because of her difference. He is drawn to her fiery spirit and exotic ways, “it is because we come from opposite ends of civilization,” he insists, that they are drawn together (106). Yet, Sonya is right to worry that their mutual attraction will not be enough to bind them together: “Am I one of them?” she asks herself, “Has our love made us alike? Just because I am his wife, have I become his kind? Will his people accept me—and will I accept them?” (111). Sonya’s language of inclusion and exclusion outlines the novel’s central contention of racial identity: the American race is defined by white Anglo-Saxon “native” Americans, who stand apart from the immigrant Other as a different “kind.” The answers to Sonya’s questions will be clear by the end of the novel: Sonya is not one of them; their love has not made them alike; she has not become his kind (despite their marriage); and she certainly won’t be accepted by his people. Sonya’s disappointment in this marriage (which ultimately fails) is rooted in the racial difference that divides her from John Manning—racial difference on full display at their party.

At the party, Sonya nervously greets the cold, rude members of the “Four Hundred” who thrust barely-veiled insults at her as they indulge their “morbid curios[ity]” in seeing “how the Ghetto prodigy would conduct herself as Mrs. John

Manning” (121). The evening is, of course, a disaster. Sonya greets guests with unwelcome “Jewish fervor” (121), is embarrassingly affectionate to John in public, and is made increasingly awkward when a small group of Russian-Jewish immigrant women show up from Hester Street dressed in outlandish clothing, talking brashly and marveling loudly at Sonya’s new wealth.¹⁰⁸ The East-Side guests throw into further relief the differences between the immigrant women (Sonya included) and the native-born American higher-ups who view them through suspicious eyes. The difference is readily apparent to the high-society ladies who resent Sonya’s presence as Manning’s latest “melodramatic vaudeville of social equality” (127). As Sonya is returning to the party from a brief retreat upstairs, she overhears a group of these ladies gossiping about her:

“The East Side in full regalia... in the Manning drawing-room... what a picture.” [...]

“You remember the Newport monkey dinner that was given to a pet monkey? [...] Giving a dinner for a pet monkey is one thing and marrying one is quite another thing...” [...]

“They say,” broke in another voice, “Russian Jewesses are always fascinating to men. The reason, my dear, is because they have neither breeding, culture, nor tradition [...] They are mere creatures of sex” [...]

“But the East Side girl hasn’t the clothes [to imitate high-society and thus catch an upper-class man],” broke in the innocent voice of the debutante.

¹⁰⁸ The Ghetto women’s extravagant costuming reveals the failure of their clothing “to conceal [their] immigrant Otherness” (Okonkwo 133). Yet, even though “Sonya wears an American dress to repress her ethnicity and social class, the dress neither hides her Jewish immigrant origins nor insulates her from Manning and his high society’s spite” (136).

“She needs none, my dear... She gets the mans she wants... without them.” There was a laughing at the ambiguous phrase.

Sonya could hear no more. [...]

“Let the whole reception go hang! I’ll not go down again! Culture! Breeding!” (128)

The women at the party parrot common anti-Semitic nativist fears that “[t]he Jew [...] was not only mercenary and unscrupulous but also clamorously self-assertive—a tasteless barbarian rudely elbowing into genteel company” (Higham 27). Yet, these high-society American women do more than simply point to the racial undertones of their disdain for Sonya; they highlight the particular threat of the immigrant woman to their white American hegemony: the biggest threat Sonya poses to their high society is in her perceived “Russian-Jewish” sexuality, a theme to which their insults return multiple times. The title of the novel itself hints at Sonya’s seductive powers, at once sexualized and “orientalized” in the reference to Salome.¹⁰⁹ And Sonya embodies the double-threat of the sexualized immigrant woman: that she might seduce and, more horrifyingly, marry the Anglo-Saxon man, and that she will then reproduce (non-white babies).¹¹⁰ Sonya’s

¹⁰⁹ In “Between the Orient and the Ghetto: A Modern Immigrant Woman in Anzia Yeziarska’s *Salome of the Tenements*” (2006), Ljiljana Coklin argues that Yeziarska uses “Oriental imagery,” particularly the Salome myth, to “empower her heroine as well as to situate her within the larger context of modernity” (136, 137). But, as Coklin notes, this “orientalizing” of Sonya, particularly in connection with the connection to the “femme fatale” of Salome is a troubling strategy for empowerment since “the seductiveness of the Oriental imagery complicates Yeziarska’s effort, as the same imagery is used, as Edward Said has argued, to disempower, dissociate, and dismiss the other on the grounds of tits excessive and destabilizing, albeit charming and exoticized, difference” (141, 137).

¹¹⁰ Sonya poses the familiar racial threat of miscegenation. Her potential alignment with the Anglo-Saxon Manning represents the threat of what Ann Douglas has identified as the fear of “mongrelization” that was used “to describe (with horror) the imminent era of miscegenation” in the United State (5-6). Sonya’s rise to the top and her apparent penetration of Anglo-Saxon exclusivity reminiscent of the success and threat of a character like Joseph Bloekman from F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Beautiful and the Damned*, a novel published the same year as *Salome of the Tenements* (1922). In *The Beautiful and the Damned*, the “eugenic fear of miscegenation” is played out in the successful rise of Jewish immigrant Joseph Bloekman

marriage to Manning threatens the distinctions between “native-born” Americans and immigrant Other in the most terrifying way possible. After listening to the women slander her, Sonya returns to the party after being coerced by Manning, but she realizes she is alone as an immigrant among Americans, burdened with the realization that she will never really belong to Manning’s world (which is to say his white, Anglo-Saxon culture). Manning is benevolently “affectionate tolerant” of Sonya’s difference and he assures her that she will adapt to his society (131). However, their marriage quickly crumbles.

This “disastrous wedding reception” demonstrates “the failure of Sonya’s emulation of the elite classes” (Goldsmith, “Democracy” 173).¹¹¹ In one sense, Sonya’s attempts to “belong” to Manning’s society are rooted in a trust in the increased

who “rises to the top” and woos the “Nordic” Antony Patch’s girl (Neis 4-5). In *Salome*, Sonya threatens to rise to the top through her wooing.

¹¹¹ In “The Democracy of Beauty: Fashioning Ethnicity and Gender is the Fiction of Anzia Yeziarska” (1998) Goldsmith, like many critics, focuses on the prevalence of clothing throughout Yeziarska’s fiction and the role it plays in “fashioning” an American identity for the immigrant. This focus, while fruitful, often glosses over the racial implications of Sonya’s mobility and minimizes the way in which Sonya is attractive to Manning exactly because of her difference. See especially: Meredith Goldsmith, “Dressing, Passing, and Americanizing: Anzia Yeziarska’s Sartorial Fictions,” (1975); Katherine Stubbs “Reading Material: Contextualizing Clothing in the Work of Anzia Yeziarska,” (1998); Christopher N. Okonkwo, “Of Repression, Assertion, and the Speakerly Dress: Anzia Yeziarska’s *Salome of the Tenements*,” (2000); Nancy Von Rosk, ““Go, Make Yourself for a Person’: Urbanity and the Construction of an American Identity in the Novels of Abraham Cahan and Anzia Yeziarska,” (2001). Indeed, a noticeable percentage of the criticism on Yeziarska focuses on the role of clothing and fashion for the immigrant woman. This significant work on clothing in Yeziarska hints at what Bill Brown calls “thing theory” (see “Thing Theory” [2001]; see also: *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* [2003]). Yeziarska’s own “mania for clothes” is certainly prevalent throughout her fiction (Henriksen 23), and critics are right to recognize that “clothing played a pivotal role in the Americanization movement” (Okonkwo 131). As Chinn outlines in *Inventing the Modern Adolescence*, immigrant “adolescent workers [typically] chose to spend their money on amusement and fashion, both of which their parents imagined to be uniquely American” (85). Yet, if such seeming frivolities like fashion separated immigrant children from their “Old World” heritage, it did not necessarily buy them an American identity. As Chinn notes, “while the children of immigrants succeeded in distancing themselves from their parents [...] they were hardly paradigms of mainstream Americanness” (85-6). We can see exactly such a failure of acculturation-through-fashion in the example of Mashah from *Bread Givers* whose love for fashion and clothing alienates her from her family, but though she make momentarily look “like a Lady from Fifth Avenue” in her fashionable clothing instead of an immigrant from the ghetto (2), such fashion will prove to be meaningless as it fails to secure her any means of uplift from the immigrant ghetto.

commodification of identity that promised that certain products and fashion offered avenues of access into high society and American identity.¹¹² Sonya herself has gone to great lengths to dress the part of Manning's wife (attaining the money for fine garments at a steep price from a notorious pawnbroker), and the women at the party must admit that Sonya is "astonishingly well-dressed" (121). Yet, Sonya's "Jewish fervor" so apparent to her high-class white guests confirms that even if you can't determine someone's race by the way they look (a dangerous possibility that would leave the door open for racial uncertainty) at least you can determine their race by the way they act. The ability to be able to determine Sonya's race by her traits is important as her looks masked in high fashion might hide her "true" racial identity—a particular concern regarding Jewish immigrants.¹¹³ As an antidote to such potential racial uncertainty, Sonya's manner and mannerisms are confused, or perhaps confirmed, as racial traits so that the high-society women are able to safely racially categorize Sonya and voice their disdain for (and inherent racial superiority over) the nervous immigrant hostess.

¹¹² In "Making Faces: The Cosmetics Industry and the Cultural Construction of Gender, 1890-1930," Kathy Peiss notes that "Mass-market manufacturers stressed the makeover as a route to upward mobility, arguing that a woman's personal success relied on her appearance" (355). Clothing, make-up, and fineries were marketed to women as a way for them to improve their social position. Many of these products promised specific racial upward-mobility "linking whiteness with social success and refinement" (357). Bleach creams, for example, were sold "as a means of acquiring [...] whiteness [and meeting] the exacting standards of the elite and Anglo-Saxon superiority" (357). What's more, as Barbara Schreier notes in "Becoming American: Jewish Women Immigrants 1880-1920," "turn-of-the-century immigrants reported that American clothing and appearance were among the first symbols they adopted as a sign of cultural intermingling. Wearing fashionable clothing was second in importance only to learning English in their quest to becoming American" (26). Jewish women particularly "embraced the American lifestyle and American clothing with a level of devotion, purpose, and zeal unmatched by other immigrant groups" (27).

¹¹³ As *The North American Review* reminded readers in 1891, it might be difficult to tell a Jew's true race simply by looking, as "among cultured Jews the racial features are generally less strongly defined" (qtd. Jacobson 174). Yet, eugenicists claimed that Jewish racial difference was "discernable as a particular pattern of physical traits" (174). This reveals an inconsistency in racial categories while eugenicists who insisted that the "racial" difference of a Jew was obvious in physiognomy, at the same time warned of Jewish financial mobility that would allow Jews access to upper-class (white) culture and threatened to mask their Jewish racial difference. See: Jacobson, 171-99.

While the women in this scene are outlandishly rude (and the reader is certainly meant to sympathize with the devastated and disillusioned Sonya), in some sense, *Salome* seems to fundamentally agree with the underlying assessment of the snobbish white elites: the Russian-Jewish women of *Salome* are consistently more emotionally and romantically passionate and physically expressive than the cold, reserved Anglo-Saxon “native” American women. Moreover, the novel will continually insist that such characteristics are expressive of inherent racial difference and that one cannot reconcile the racial differences between the Anglo-Saxon American and the Russian-Jewish immigrant (the American women will never accept Sonya, and Sonya will never “fit” in their white society). It may seem surprising in a novel so sympathetic to the immigrant in America to see a confirmation of the same racial assumptions we see in eugenicist theories. Yet not recognizing these differences fares even worse for the immigrant. The philanthropic Manning doesn’t at first recognize such differences (and for a time blinds Sonya to them as well); even after their disastrous dinner party and reception, Manning is certain their marriage can work if only Sonya could just “adjust yourself to the form of society in which you have to live” (131), an echo of the assimilation projects which preached immigrant success through acculturation and Americanization. Sonya initially believes Manning, only to have her remaining illusions shattered when she tours his charity uplift projects to find teachers chastising immigrant women who question their lessons on making milkless, butterless, eggless “cake;” or social workers who are teaching other social workers to discern the “worthy poor” from the undeserving “imposters” (such imposters are found committing such crimes as cooking chicken or having eggs for breakfast).¹¹⁴ What Sonya discovers, of course, is the deep-rooted

¹¹⁴ For “deserving poor,” see note 105, p. 151.

hypocrisy of the uplift programs that Manning has championed as the opportunity to bring the races together, when the classes and structure of the program are rooted in racial division (American women controlling immigrant women).

Yet, Manning insists on an ideology of racial reconciliation because he believes their differences to be at root those of class, and that his uplift programs can help bring the “worthy poor” out of their poverty. As he explains to Sonya: “The elimination of all artificial class barriers is my religion” (120). Manning’s conflation of racial and class differences certainly points to the murky waters out of which inconstant and often competing definitions of race were drawn: sometimes a mixture, sometimes an alignment, sometimes a selection of any number of identity factors including class, ethnicity, national status, and religion. It is a confusion Yeziarska highlights as her heroines combine a mixture of class, ethnic heritage, national status, and religion to understand their own race (Sonya at various times bemoans her racial difference from Manning as being rooted in her being poor, and/or overly-emotional, and/or Eastern-European, and/or religiously divergent), and it is this racial identity that, despite the various and varying ways of defining and understanding it, ironically remains a type of constant. The novel emphasizes that the “plain, solid difference between those on top and those on the bottom” is the “immutable” reality of race (119); any illusions of racial understanding Sonya allows herself will only disappoint.

In “Mostly About Myself” (1923), Yeziarska calls these the “intense differences [...] between my race and the Anglo-Saxon race” (19-20), and in *Salome*, Yeziarska thrusts the immigrant Other together with the American native-born to throw into sharp contrast the racial differences between them, differences that reflect the innate racial

identity into which one is born. Manning, for example, is described as a “born higher-up” (3), a “born blueblood” (7), an “American-born higher-up” (30), and as one of the “born millionaires who comes down to the East Side to preach democracy” (30). Notably all these descriptions come from Sonya or other immigrants who understand both “higher-ups” (a class status) and “Americans” (a national status) in strictly inherited racial terms (i.e. one is born white; one does not become white). Indeed, for the immigrant speakers, Manning’s racial status explains his financial and national standing. Even when Manning is spoken about with scorn, his race is central to his identity, as when Sonya mocks Manning at the end of the novel as “the Anglo-Saxon gentleman, the saint, the philanthropist—the savior of humanity” (181).¹¹⁵

Manning’s Anglo-Saxon identity, exemplified in what the novel highlights as personal deficits (his coldness, distance, emotional limitation) are part of his predetermined racial identity, an inevitable racial heritage that dictates, both consciously and unconsciously, his life and actions. He explains to Sonya: “I am a puritan whose fathers were afraid to trust experience. We are bound by our possessions of propriety, knowledge and tradition” (37). His emotional failings are due to “the patrician race—the generations of self-control from which Manning sprang” (84). Manning comes to lament this racial heritage and idealize the more emotionally free Sonya, but “his dead ancestors, his rigid training, prevented him from being warm and spontaneous as he wanted to be” (35). Manning’s ancestral heritage, both as innate racial traits, and as a code of preserved

¹¹⁵ Sonya’s disgust with Manning is a reaction to the professed philanthropy of his white elite uplift programs for immigrants coupled with his paradoxical unwillingness and inability to understand immigrants on an emotional level. Such confusion points to Yeziarska’s own complicated relationship with what she described in *All I Could Never Be* as “the cold Anglo-Saxons” (74). In *All I Could Never Be*, for example, the Anglo-Saxon hero Henry Scott is described in familiarly cynical terms as: “A saint in his personal life—an Anglo-Saxon to the core in his championship of the underdog” (211). Like Manning, Scott is unable to reconcile the innate racial traits of the immigrant Other “underdog” with his own Anglo-Saxon coldness and distance, despite his good intentions.

and learned behavior, points to an understanding of race that is paradoxically inevitable and learned—something that is both inherent and performed—the simultaneous “culture” and “breeding” of the party guests from Sonya’s disastrous intermingling with the white American elite.

If Manning’s Anglo-Saxon heritage is seemingly more emotionally restrictive than Sonya’s passionate “Oriental” Otherness, Sonya’s own racial identity is no less inevitable. Her “intensity and earnestness” display “the naked soul of her race” (32). Sonya, the novel insists, is not American, but immigrant—not Anglo-Saxon, but racially Other. As Manning sums: “You’re different, more vital than our American women” (36). Sonya herself recognizes this divide: “American women! I couldn’t be like them if I stood on my head! [...] In their company, I feel like a wild savage in a dressed-up parlor of make-believes” (37). Compared to Sonya, American women, which is to say (as the novel explicitly does) “Anglo-Saxon” women (163), are “Self-condemned nuns” who “sterilize” the passion out of their hearts (163). Sonya scorns the gentility of white, American manners in favor of the rawness of her own. Despite Manning’s insistence that all races might live in the harmony of erased difference, at the end of the novel, Manning, too, reduces Sonya to her racial difference in describing her as: “my beautiful maddening Jewess!” (181).

These innate racial differences between Sonya and Manning are, the narrator explains, the reasons for their marital failure:

Sonya and Manning, tricked into matrimony, were the oriental and the Anglo-Saxon trying to find a common language. The over-emotional Ghetto struggling for its breath in the thin air of puritan restraint. An East

Side savage forced suddenly into the strait-jacket of American civilization. Sonya was like the dynamite bomb and Manning the walls of tradition constantly menaced by threatening explosions. (133)

The “trick” that led Sonya and Manning into this marriage is the false ideal that disparate races (as Sonya and Manning embody) can overcome their difference. Though Manning dreams that their relationship will be “the mingling of the races” and that their respective “oriental mystery and the Anglo-Saxon clarity that will pioneer a new race of men” (108), the dissolution of the marriage and the realignment of Sonya with her immigrant community (and a Jewish husband) at the end of the novel suggests that, contrary to the best intentions of the philanthropic up-lifters, such racial differences, as nativists had long forewarned, cannot be overcome.

Moreover, nativist strains seem to resurface throughout *Salome* in multiple implicit links of Sonya’s race (Jewish) and her national status (immigrant) with uncivilized barbarism. In contrast to American women, Sonya is, as she describes herself a “wild savage” (37). In contrast to the civilized American Manning, Sonya is an “East Side savage” (133). Manning himself is attracted to Sonya exactly because of her savagery: “The savage wildness of your mood fired my heart,” he confesses to her (176). Even Sonya thinks of herself and her race in these terms. When discussing her infatuation with Manning to another immigrant, she insists that Manning’s Anglo-Saxon identity is superior: “But all the same the Anglo-Saxons are a superior race to the crazy Russians. The higher life is built inch by inch on self-control. And they have it. They’re ages ahead of us. Compared to them we’re naked savages” (68). By the end of the novel her reverence for the Anglo-Saxon race will turn to scorn and then pity, but the savagery

of non-white immigrant race will largely remain. It is perhaps not as surprising then that contemporary reviewers would dismiss the novel, as one in the *New York Times* did, by accusing Sonya of being “an illiterate, hot-blooded little savage” (qtd. Henriksen 182).¹¹⁶

This disturbing connection of the non-white immigrant to racial savagery carries throughout Yeziarska’s fiction. In *Arrogant Beggar*, for example, Yeziarska reverts to racist tropes of Native Americans when Adele describes her hair as “standing out on the other side [of her head] like a wild Indian’s” (7), and describes the immigrant children waiting for their supper as having “turned into Indian chiefs dancing about the tribal pot” and as “yelping savages [as] they fought to lick up the precious drops of [spilt] soup” (103). Likewise, in the short story “Brothers” the lowly immigrant is living so that “[y]ou’d think he was living by wild Indians” (134). Even in slightly more subtle ways this connection to savagery plays throughout Yeziarska’s fiction, like the heartbroken heroine of the short story “Wings” who has a “savage desire for clothes” (16).

Yet just as it seems to reinforce certain nativist tropes, *Salome* destabilizes eugenicist insistences of racial difference in the novel by attacking the roots of Anglo-Saxon identity and questioning both its superiority and impermeability. Throughout the novel the narrator of *Salome* is certainly not without judgment about the Anglo-Saxon American culture for which the immigrant Other strives. Hypocritical, aloof, and unmoving, the Anglo-Saxon higher-ups of the novel live constrained and emotionally

¹¹⁶ The language of “savagery” was often used specifically to invoke links between certain immigrant groups and the “aboriginal savages” in America (Jacobson 54). The language of “savagery” used against various immigrants was not only strikingly similar to general “rhetoric regarding Indians,” but, particularly in the mid- to late-nineteenth century, reflected “accounts of the Indians in the West” against whom the United States was deeply embattled (55). Theodore W. Allen documents this alignment of the racial Other (immigrant populations and African Americans particularly) with the Native American (and thus with “savagery”) as early as eighteenth-century America. Such parallels offered a handy way to categorize racial Otherness by its “uncivilized ways” (Allen 31). See Allen: *The Invention of the White Race* (1994), pp. 31-47.

stunted lives.¹¹⁷ Manning reveals this deficiency near the end of the novel when Sonya reveals to him her deep secret (she has borrowed money from a notorious Jewish pawnbroker to finance her pursuit of Manning). Manning is disgusted and responds with a “puritan [...] frigid contempt” (152). He resists a divorce for appearance’s sake, and Sonya faces the prospect of a loveless marriage. Instead of being the savior of humanity, Manning is revealed as a “faking saint—bloodless higher-up” (152). He is a “dead lump of self-righteousness” and exposes Anglo-Saxon whiteness for being a re-enactment of racial requirements, but devoid of meaning and the basic feelings of living. Sonya, who once admired Manning, now sees him as lifeless, a sort of zombie of racial inevitability: “You never budged from the straight footsteps of your ancestors, because you’re as dead in your stony goodness as those in their graves” (152). The legacy of the Anglo-Saxon bloodline that ensures Manning’s racial status in America also condemns him to a passionless, inhuman existence. Back in the ghetto amongst her “own people” (158), Sonya explains why she finally leaves Manning: “The Anglo-Saxon coldness, it’s centuries of solid ice that all the suns of the sky can’t melt [... you can’t imagine the] bloodless inhumanity of it” (157). Such is the racial legacy of American identity, one that has protected itself so soundly it has begun to become irrelevant and is finally rejected by the immigrant Other it sought to exclude.

Simultaneously while *Salome* rejects the superiority of American whiteness (as it is tethered to Anglo-Saxon standards), it also begins to question the strict separations of

¹¹⁷ The stereotype of the Anglo-Saxon white America that runs throughout Yeziarska’s work. As Leslie Fishbein notes, “the Anglo-Saxon was a recurrent motif in Yeziarska’s work, a calm figure representing reason and civilization in contrast to the immigrant’s crude emotionalism, parochialism, and passion” (139). We see implicit criticism of such Anglo-Saxon Americanness in the “cold Anglo-Saxons” of *All I Could Never Be* (74), the aloof and hypocritical philanthropists of *Arrogant Beggars*, or the judgmental and allegorically named Miss Whiteside of the short story “Soap and Water” who rejects the immigrant would-be teacher for not being hygienic enough.

“savage” immigrant and “civilized” American. In this, it undermines the novel’s agreement with nativist theories that argued immigrant and Anglo-Saxon American were fundamentally different. The rhetorical slippage seen in *Salome* between the immigrant Other and a stereotyped Native American “savagery” adds a complication in the paradigm of white American and immigrant Other, forcing a more complicated vision of racial identity that questions who is “savage” in *Salome*, who is “native,” and who can lay claim to the mantle of American identity. While Yeziarska draws parallels between the new immigrant and stereotyped visions of the “savage,” she also insists that immigrants share a link to the “native born” American in the roots of America’s immigrant heritage (as “native-born” Americans are, themselves, the descendents of immigrants). Yeziarska directly connects the immigrant Other to the very roots of American identity in the short story “Mostly About Myself” (1923) and demands of the reader: “Were not the Pilgrim Fathers immigrants demanding a new world in which they could be free to live higher lives?” (27). This connection to the Pilgrims is significant since to be an American is to implicitly be connected to the Pilgrims. Yeziarska satirizes this connection between white Americans and their Pilgrim forefathers in “How I Found America” where the immigrant narrator questions the white woman next to her:

“Are you a born American?” I asked. There was none of that sure, all-right look of the Americans about her.

“Yes, indeed! My mother like so many mothers,” –and her eyebrows lifted humorously whimsical, — “claims we’re descendants of the Pilgrim fathers. And that one of our lineal ancestors came over in the Mayflower.” (179)

In this story, the welcoming “born American” both affirms her own American heritage while simultaneously offering such status to the new immigrant. In her look of humorous whimsy, she suggests that any “native-born” American’s connection to the Pilgrims is less genealogical than metaphorical; in this, the immigrant, too, can share that connection to the Pilgrims. After all, she assures the immigrant narrator, “Were n’t [sic] the Pilgrim fathers immigrants two hundred years ago?” (179). In suggesting a connection between the Pilgrims and modern immigrants, the barrier between the “native-born” (who claim the heritage of the Pilgrims) and the immigrants is challenged. Yeziarska pursues this deconstruction in “America and I” (1923) where she reverses the associations of savage/immigrant and “native-born”/American:

I began to read the American history. I found from the first pages that America started with a band of Courageous Pilgrims. They had left their native country as I had left mine. They had crossed an unknown ocean and landed in an unknown country, as I [had ...] I saw how the Pilgrim Fathers came to a rocky desert country, surrounded by Indian savages on all sides [...] They did not ask the Indians for sympathy, for understanding. They made no demands on anybody, but on their own indomitable spirit of persistence. (40)

Here Yeziarska compares the plight of America’s newest immigrants to that of its earliest. Like the Pilgrims, America’s newest immigrants must face a hostile reception by the native population. Notably in “America and I,” the “Indian savages” are metaphors not for the immigrant Other, but for the white Anglo-Saxon “native-borns.” In such a metaphor Yeziarska appeals to white Americans by comparing her struggle with

that of their American forebears suggesting that immigrants will share in the same American legacy. What this slippage suggests is that the immigrant “savage” might just as easily be understood as part of the same legacy as the white “native.”

The firm distinctions between immigrant and “native” in *Salome* are similarly (and surprisingly) troubled in the character of John Manning. Though Manning is defined throughout the novel as the paragon of the Anglo-Saxon race, the “greatest man in America” (6), he ends the novel in a deeply ambiguous racial position. As Sonya and Jaques Hollins (né Jaky Solomon, a fellow immigrant of the “Jewish race” [15] who has risen from the ghetto as a clothing designer) prepare to wed, they are at home in a loving embrace when John Manning rings at the door and interrupts their private moment. Manning has come to re-claim Sonya and is outraged to see her with another man. He is described as a “savage beast” in his fury (181):

With an inarticulate cry he seized her in his arms, savage passion in his eyes.

“You—you—you’re mine. Mine. You belong to me. You’re part of me. Mine. I want you. I can’t live without you. I dream of your lips—your eyes—your hair. I’m hungry for you. Oh, my beautiful maddening Jewess!”

Custom, tradition, every shred of convention, every vestige of civilization left him. He was primitive man starved into madness for the woman. His hungry hands [...] fluttered ravenously over her whole body. (181)

In this moment, what had been the sure and certain stability of Manning's racial identity is lost in his savage desire and devolution into the primitive. Reminiscent of the party scene in which the high-class Anglo women reduce Sonya to the threat of her sexuality, here it is Manning's sexuality that poses the threat (he succeeds in ripping half of Sonya's clothing off before she can extricate herself from his ravenous hands and lips).¹¹⁸

In this scene, Yeziarska points to the failure of American masculinity as the more reserved, "civilized" masculinity that has defined Manning not only fails to secure his marriage, but here falls victim to a more "primitive," "savage" masculinity. Yet, Sonya also rejects this masculinity. Ultimately, Manning cannot live up to the manly implications of his name, and he is finally rejected in favor of the more effeminate Jacky Solomon. As opposed to both the cold Anglo-Manning and his more violent "savage" self, Jacky is the "Jewish lover, who repeatedly appears as an artist/teacher in Yeziarska's writing [and] is soft-spoken and nonviolent" (Wexler 170). This figure, argues Wexler, offers Yeziarska's heroines a respite from the failure of the patriarchs from both the Old and New World: "Where the Old World patriarch hurls invectives, and the New World patriarch fails to empathize, the Jewish American lover quietly extends an intuitive embrace" (170). As a successful Jewish immigrant in America, Jacky offers Sonya a model of Americanization more empowering than the false uplift of the settlement program, and more attainable than Manning's lofty idealism of racial understanding.

In Manning's moment of masculine failure Sonya finds pity for Manning as she realizes that his passion has stripped him of his racial distinction: "her triumph over him

¹¹⁸ Here, Manning's sexual desire is itself a mark of savagery. Just as Sonya's presumed sexuality marks her as racially different at the party, national rhetoric lingering from the nineteenth century explicitly linked sexuality with non-White races: "Both scientific and popular thought supported the view that whites were civilized and rational, while members of other races were savage, irrational, and sensual" (D'Emilio and Freedman, 86).

died as it was born, for it was not the gentleman, nor the arrogant Anglo-Saxon who stood before her. It was a human being—suffering—wounded—despised and rejected in his hour of need” (182). The narrator, reiterating this point of human connection (beyond, above, or through racial difference), explains it again: “For one instant they were to each other not gentleman and East Side girl—not man and woman, but human being driven by bitter experience to one moment’s realization of life” (182). Manning’s passion and raw emotion have erased his emotional distance and with it, his racial distinction from Sonya.

Manning regains his composure and leaves the house, but this moment leads Sonya to realize that: “at the bottom we’re all alike, Anglo-Saxons or Jews, gentlemen or plain immigrant,” her thoughts went on. ‘When we’re hungry, we’re hungry—even a gentleman when starved long enough can become a savage East Sider’” (183).¹¹⁹ This racial philosophy of innate human sameness stands in contrast to the simultaneous race-thinking in the novel that suggests the reason Sonya’s marriage to Manning cannot work is because of their racial difference, and the reason Sonya is drawn to Jacky Solomon is because Sonya and Solomon are both Eastern-European Jewish immigrants (and subsequently both of the same “Jewish race” [17]). And the novel does seem to suggest this racial sameness is important because of that “like-mindedness” Stoddard highlights as central to determining and maintaining national character. In the chapter in *Salome* descriptively titled “Understanding,” Sonya and Solomon are happy and successful (unlike Sonya and Manning) because, Solomon explains to Sonya, “Together we work as

¹¹⁹ Critics have pointed to the role of hunger, as the “central metaphor of her [Yeziarska’s] generation (Golub 59), one that represents the promise of America, the striving of the immigrant, and desire of all kinds. See especially: Ellen Golub, “Eat Your Heart Out: The Fiction of Anzia Yeziarska” (1983) and Niever Pascual, “Starving for Hunger: The Fiction of Anzia Yeziarska” (2003).

one mind” (174). There is, the narrator explains, an unspoken, inherent “understanding” between them (179). And, Manning himself must finally admit that his marriage to his “maddening Jewess” failed because he “didn’t understand” (182).¹²⁰

Yet, if racial understanding seems to be lacking between the races so that union between the two is still impossible, the impenetrable walls of racial difference between the two races are certainly falling. Manning’s violent outburst suggests that all that has been separating the immigrant Other and the Anglo-Saxon white American is not some innate difference, but the circumstance and intensity of want. And Manning’s racial superiority over Sonya, the clear dividing line between the Anglo-Saxon white American and the immigrant Other, disappears in that moment. Yet, perhaps even more threatening than the disappearance of the racial distinction between white Anglo-Saxon American and immigrant Other is that the standard of American whiteness dependant on that distinction becomes irrelevant to Sonya who has found her own happiness and will build an American identity (as an instantly successful clothing designer) from within her own immigrant community.

Sonya has moved on from Manning, but his interaction with her has fundamentally changed him and compromised his racial heritage (so dependant on specific, predetermined codes of behavior). Even in their very first meetings her influence is so powerful that Manning wants to “thrust civilization aside, tear the garments that hid her beauty from him, put out his hands all over her naked breasts and crush her to him till she surrendered” (106). This early in their relationship he is able to

¹²⁰ This reinforcement of theories of racial affinity is echoed throughout Yezerksa’s fiction, as in her most popular *Bread Givers* where the Jewish-Russian-Polish immigrant Sara returns to the ghetto to marry Hugo Selig, another Polish-Russian immigrant (who has also returned to the ghetto). Hugo explains their attraction: “we are born friends [...] You and I, we are of one blood” (278)

repress this terrifying “relapse into the primitive” (106). But by the end of the novel, Sonya has made real the racially apocalyptic warning: “unless we Americanize them they will foreignize us” by foreignizing the paragon of Anglo-Saxon masculinity Manning. In this sense, both Manning and Sonya have compromised American whiteness. Sonya has shown how vulnerable it is to immigrant invasion, and how its very exclusivity makes it irrelevant to growing population of Americans who are re-defining what it means to be American. Manning, on the other hand, has seen the “real life” of the immigrant Other, and realized how empty his own Anglo-Saxon whiteness is, a whiteness that seems to have ultimately been a weak veneer over a more savage, more confused racial identity. The project of American whiteness is undermined not only by the immigrant who wanted to achieve it but has now cast it aside, but by the very Anglo-Saxons that defined it and cannot maintain it.

America Not Yet Finished

Sonya’s foreignizing effect on Manning is a microcosmic example of the effect Yeziarska predicts immigrants will have on America. Though the threat of Manning’s passion for Sonya still remains, the real threat is not that Sonya will form a lasting union with Manning—not that the racial other threatens the bloodlines of the Anglo-Saxon American and hence white America—but rather that the immigrant Other can undermine both the Anglo-Saxon and the terms of American identity. Unlike “native-born” white authors like Wharton or Fitzgerald who explore the ability to lose whiteness, Yeziarska as an “ethnic white” author emphasizes the impossibility of attaining whiteness in its purest form. It’s not that the promise of Americanization is fully false—if Sonya does not quite

make it out of the ghetto, she does improve her living conditions and learn to embrace her immigrant identity. Indeed, Yezierska highlights those things like education, passion, and drive that might transform living conditions, work opportunities, and possibilities for happiness and posterity for the immigrant in America.

In the end, Yezierska both assuages and confirms James's growing sense that America is becoming more alien. On the one hand, Yezierska never claims for her immigrants an "American" identity as it is defined by a certain standard of whiteness that is rooted deeply in an Anglo-Saxon racial heritage. Yet though Yezierska's heroines and the author herself may never be white enough to be fully "American," and thus they remain foreign in America and begin to re-define the make-up of America. The real threat of the immigrant is that she will abandon the false hope of becoming American as it is defined by and dependant on whiteness, and instead embrace her immigrant possibilities in America. Yezierska's heroines carve for themselves a place in the liminal space between immigrant and American, not allowing themselves to be totally ghettoized, but not ever becoming fully Americanized, either.

It is a new vision of America that reclaims America for the immigrant. In the aptly titled "America and I" (1923), Yezierska explains this vision: "I saw America—a big idea—a deathless hope—a world still in the making. I saw that it was the glory of America that it was not yet finished. And I, the last comer, had her share to give, small or great, to the making of America, like those Pilgrims who came in the *Mayflower*" (50). Such hopeful rhetoric imagines America as a work-in-progress, one in which the immigrant does not only belong, but actually helps build. Yet while *Salome* shares this vision of an America not-yet-finished, the full actualization of this America is left to the

reader to imagine. Though certain versions of whiteness may be rejected in the novel (particularly an American identity dependent on Anglo-Saxon racial ideology), the theory of a new American identity, one not dependent on impossible standards of whiteness, is never fully developed. There's a certain inevitability in the lingering ambiguity for the immigrant in America at the end of the novel. After all, while Sonya may reject Manning and the failings of his Anglo-Saxon identity, only two years after *Salome of the Tenements* was published, the Immigrant Quota Act became national law, re-affirming Anglo-Saxon whiteness as national identity and specifically limiting non-white immigrants. Yet, Sonya's final success depends on the old promise of America as a "home for everybody"—the promise on the lips of immigrants that sing "this land is your land." In this sense, the dream of America that Sonya has is not that much different than the dream that someone like Gatsby has: America as opportunity, America as self-definition. In *Chapter Four*, I explore the mounting pressure this dream puts on whiteness itself, because while Sonya builds her own America, *Salome* reminds us that if whiteness is something Sonya cannot fully gain, it is something that Manning can lose, and this fear of racial loss, I argue, lies at the root of *The Great Gatsby*.

Chapter Four

White Man's Burden: The Ebb and Flow of White Identity in *The Great Gatsby*

It began in Paris, that impression—fleeting, chiefly literary, unprofound—that the world was growing darker.

-F. Scott Fitzgerald
“Three Cities”

A year after F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* arrived to popular acclaim and launched the author onto the literary and social stage, he and Zelda, still newlyweds and expecting their first and only child, set off on their first trip abroad. It would be a defining experience for the young author. Their 1921 expedition began in London, and they journeyed to Oxford before crossing to the continent where they would visit Paris, Venice, Florence, and Rome. The Fitzgeralds had great success in England where they circulated among literary sets, ordered fine tailored clothing, and dined with the charming Lady Randolph Churchill and her son, Winston. Fitzgerald enjoyed England and was well impressed with Oxford in particular; for a time, he even considered living there. The young couple's stretch on the continent also left a lasting impression on Fitzgerald, though one decidedly less favorable. In July of the same year he wrote to his friend and literary critic, the American Edmund Wilson:

God damn the continent of Europe. It is of merely antiquarian interest. Rome is only a few years behind Tyre + Babylon. The Negroid streak creeps northward to defile the Nordic race. Already the Italians have the souls of blackamoors. Raise the bars of immigration and permit only Scandinavians, Teutons, Anglo Saxons and Celts to enter. France makes

me sick. It's [sic] silly pose as the thing the world has to save. I think its [sic] a shame that England and America didn't let Germany conquer Europe. It's the only thing that would have saved the fleet of tottering old wrecks.¹²¹ My reactions were all philistine, anti-socialist, provincial + racially snobbish. I believe at last in the white man's burden.¹²² We are as far above the modern frenchman as he is above the negro. (*Life in Letters* 46-47)

Though there's a certain playfulness in his tone (he admits, after all, to being philistine and snobbish), the underlying sentiment reveals Fitzgerald's sense that the European continent has come to represent a certain racial degradation, a threat to a racial whiteness embodied in the "Nordic race" (and for Fitzgerald, himself of Irish descent, the oftentimes sullied Celts are included in this racial make-up of allied white peoples). The white man's burden when faced with such a threat is to save a certain threatened whiteness, or simply to accept its inevitable blackening.

¹²¹ The three different, and twice incorrect, usages of its/it's appear in the original letter. This type of grammatical mistake is characteristic of Fitzgerald's writing. Bruccoli notes that Fitzgerald was "a bad speller" and that even Fitzgerald's published novels were often riddled with misspellings and misusages. In particular, the "sloppy text" of Fitzgerald's first novel, *This Side of Paradise* (1920), "established the image of Fitzgerald as a careless or illiterate writer" (*Epic Grandeur* 127). Though Bruccoli is quick to defend Fitzgerald by blaming copy editors for the errors in Fitzgerald's published novel, even noting somewhat pettily, "Fitzgerald was not unique among major authors in being an orthographic phenomenon. John Steinbeck is reported to have been a poor speller, and Hemingway's manuscripts look like the work of a child" (126), Fitzgerald's misspellings persisted in his drafts, letters, and published work throughout his life—including *The Great Gatsby*. Bruccoli partially concedes Fitzzzgerald's own role in these errors when he notes of Fitzgerald's last published novel, *Tender is the Night* (1934): "The published book has dozens of spelling errors as well as inconsistencies of chronology [...] The fault was the author's, [though] careful copy-editing by Scribners [sic] would have called the problem to his attention" (361).

¹²² The idea of the white man's burden was perhaps made most famous in the eponymous poem penned by Rudyard Kipling. Kipling's 1899 "White Man's Burden," often read as an extollation of imperialism, focused on the obligations of the white man to uplift the racial Other and had a particular resonance for an American audience (when originally published in *McClure's* it ran with the subtitle: "The United States and the Philippine Islands"). Yet the idea of the "white man's burden" was recast in specifically American racial terms not of expanding empire, but of a multi-racial America in Thomas Dixon's 1902 *The Leopard's Sopts: A Romance of the White Man's Burden—1865-1900*, the first in his Ku Klux Klan trilogy.

Yet, despite his strong impressions, it wouldn't be Oxford where Fitzgerald would eventually live; notwithstanding its shortcomings, on multiple occasions he and Zelda would come to live on the continent: on the French Riviera he would write *The Great Gatsby*; in Rome he would edit the proofs of the novel; and in Paris, in 1925, he would begin plotting what would become *Tender Is the Night*, the novel that would take him nine years and two continents to write and would be the last novel he would publish before his death in 1940.¹²³

The Fitzgeralds' sojourn abroad was a commonplace not only for a young couple of certain means, but also for a burgeoning literary man. Yet if Europe was at once a literary and cultural rite of passage for Fitzgerald, it was also a personal disappointment. Fitzgerald's experiences abroad were uneven at best, and, as his early observations suggest, he found it a racial mess. His caustic early impression of the continent foreshadows the uneasy relationship he would always have with Europe. Though he would live in Europe multiple times, he would never feel entirely comfortable or successful there, and while many other famous expatriate American authors would often come to see Western Europe as a refined reflection of their own vulgar American kin, Fitzgerald would arguably become increasingly provincial in his depictions of Americans and American concerns, and his connection with his native land would become stronger, not weaker, throughout his time abroad.¹²⁴ He and Zelda may have left America for

¹²³ Though *Tender is the Night* was the last novel he would publish, and he would continue re-working it until his death, Fitzgerald was also working on another novel, *The Love of the Last Tycoon*, when he died in 1940. The unfinished and compiled *The Last Tycoon* was published posthumously in 1993.

¹²⁴ See *Epic Grandeur*. Fitzgerald "remained a tourist" abroad and "never felt at home" in France or Europe (234). Moreover, Brucoli argues that in the writing Fitzgerald produced while living abroad, especially short stories like "The Swimmers," we see that "Fitzgerald's response to his expatriate experience was a reinforcement of his identification with America—not just patriotism, but a deep emotional sense of its history and hopes" (278).

Europe “less than one half of one per cent American,” as he described it in a short note for a Parisian bookstore magazine, but their time abroad made the “pernicious and sentimental sap [...] rise again within us” for their native land (“Three Cities,” 51).¹²⁵

Nonetheless, Fitzgerald’s feelings about Europe, particularly France, would vacillate violently throughout his life. It was not, after all, that France offered nothing positive for the American author during his sojourns. On the contrary, Paris in particular had its good qualities, not the least of which that it was full of interesting Americans. While living in Paris, Fitzgerald would famously befriend Ernest Hemingway, meet Gertrude Stein, and move around the expatriate literary colony on the Left Bank. In a 1927 interview, Fitzgerald conceded that, “The best of America drifts to Paris. The American in Paris is the best American. It is more fun for an intelligent person to live in an intelligent country” (“The Next Fifteen Years” 274). Europe, it seemed, and Paris in particular, was becoming America’s literary manifest destiny, and Fitzgerald was eager to be a part of it. Even years earlier, in 1924, his feelings for the continent were nothing but hopeful when he, Zelda, and their daughter Scottie arrived in the Riviera on their second trip abroad, only three years after that first disastrous trip. He wrote back to a friend in St. Paul that the Riviera was “the loveliest piece of earth I’ve seen [... Zelda and I are] both a little tight and very happily drunk if you can use that term for the less nervous, less violent reactions of this side [...] Well, I shall write a novel better than any novel ever written in America and become par excellence the best second-rater in the world” (192). That same year, while living in various hotels along the Riviera, he would become the means of his own prophecy and complete *The Great Gatsby*. Yet, despite the literary

¹²⁵ Originally printed in *Brentano’s Book Chat* in 1921.

community, the edifying culture, and even his own literary successes, Fitzgerald would still often resent France, where the problems of his drinking and quarrelsome marriage were habitually exacerbated, and his work ethic suffered whenever he fully embraced the *joie de vivre*. Fitzgerald was, of course, famous for his drinking, but it was in Europe that he became “an acknowledged alcoholic,” and a very public one at that (*Epic* 254). Fitzgerald himself saw his time in Europe as largely wasted. His *Ledger* entry for 1926 seems to reflect his broad feelings about his inability to actually work in Europe: the year was summarized as “Futile, shameful useless [...] Self disgust” (qtd. *Epic* 254).

Though Fitzgerald’s personal feelings about Europe would certainly dramatically wax and wane with time and drink, what’s striking about his initial impression—particularly his earliest sense of the racial danger in Europe—is how much the dialogue would actually remain fully present throughout Fitzgerald’s work. Fitzgerald would oftentimes combine a jocular tone with the serious matters of racial identity, in which his sometimes unsavory, but always meaningful remarks hint at a larger racial discourse that surfaces prominently in his fictional work. In his early, “racially snobbish” impression of Europe reveals a deep concern with racial categorization and the need to establish a stable racial hierarchy by which one can distinguish between the desirable and undesirable, and can chart the disastrous consequences of failing to keep out the menace of racial difference.

This chapter argues that Fitzgerald is fully engaged in these questions of racial categories, and that his personal observations and anxiety over the racial movement he sees in Europe are manifest in his fiction as they apply to American racial identity. After all, if the European “race” could be so darkened, America could not be far behind. In an

obscure 1921 note written for Brentano's Bookstore in Paris, Fitzgerald warns of just such a racial trajectory for America:

It began in Paris, that impression—fleeing, chiefly literary, unprofound [sic]—that the world was growing darker. We carefully reconstructed an old theory and, blonde both of us, cast supercilious Nordic glances at the play of dark children around us. [When we returned to Oxford from Italy...] something was wrong now—something that would never be right again. [...] In how many years would our descendants approach this ruin with supercilious eyes to buy postcards from men of a short, inferior race—a race that once were Englishmen. [...] Your time will come, New York, fifty years, sixty. Apollo's head is peering crazily, in new colors that our generation will never live to know, over the tip of the new century. (“Three Cities,” 52)¹²⁶

Again, Fitzgerald's potentially playful tone (here in the “supercilious Nordic glances”) is overshadowed in the larger concern at work in his words. The interview suggests that for the author, this growing “darkening” of Europe, and the ominous threat it poses to the American “race” is a national as well as literary concern. For Fitzgerald, the literary and the real are often intertwined, as his heavily autobiographical novels suggest, but even more, I argue, his novels offer a space for Fitzgerald to work through this “old theory” of racial difference, which he mainly does in *The Great Gatsby*. Fitzgerald's racial

¹²⁶ This short note was published in *Brentano's Book Chat*, a monthly literary pamphlet published by the Parisian bookstore that bore its name. Bruccoli notes in passing that Fitzgerald frequented Brentano's bookshop in Paris (*Epic Grandeur* 241), and the bookstore is still operating in Paris today. Fitzgerald's “Three Cities” is republished in *F. Scott Fitzgerald on Authorship* (eds. Bruccoli and Baughman, 1996), a volume of miscellaneous essays, reviews, and articles by Fitzgerald relating in some way to professionalism and writing. Despite its obscurity, it is still surprising that this note has not received any significant attention, particularly considering the burgeoning critical conversation surrounding Fitzgerald and issues of race and nation.

snobbery bears a striking resemblance to the current of nativism that flooded American shores.

Indeed, my interests in this chapter lie in the intersection of Fitzgerald's fiction and biography with a larger national and cultural biography that is deeply concerned with a seemingly darkening world. It is no coincidence that both Fitzgerald's solution and what he sees as the racial problem in Europe mirrors the anti-immigration, eugenicist tracts that littered the United States throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. American eugenicists similarly clamored that immigrants were taking over and darker races were blackening the soul of an otherwise white America. By 1924 when he writes *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald is certainly aware of nativist treatises like Madison Grant's *The Passing of the Great Race* (1916) and Lothrop Stoddard's *The Rising Tide of Color* (1920), which warned of the risk of racial diversity, the importance of shoring up immigration restrictions, and the pressing need to protect the white American race. Tom Buchanan champions these theories with a frantic sincerity while he screams about interracial marriage and casts side-long glances at Jay Gatsby. Yet, Tom is hardly the ideal of American masculinity, and it is with a mocking earnestness that these nativist discourses are aped in the mouth of *Gatsby's* brutish antagonist. Still, while Tom Buchanan's portrayal in *The Great Gatsby* suggests that Fitzgerald doesn't fully sign on to the hysterical tenor of the rants of Stoddard, Grant, or even the author's own "philistine" racial opinions of 1921 Europe, he never fully rejects their basic tenets, and the darkening of the European "race" becomes palpably manifest in the certainty of such a racial threat to American identity, an identity dependent on an increasingly difficult whiteness.

F. Scott Fitzgerald in Our Time

In “The Maturing of F. Scott Fitzgerald” (1997) Alan Margolies notes that “during the few past years, as our society has become even more conscious of the negative effects of ethnic stereotyping, there has been increased criticism of Fitzgerald’s depiction of African Americans and Jews in *The Great Gatsby*” (75). Margolies further suggests,

[a]n obvious response is not to excuse Fitzgerald but to suggest that the United States during the writer’s lifetime was racist and anti-Semitic in many respects, and, further, that Fitzgerald was not the only major writer of the time to employ ethnic stereotypes [...] In addition, one must note that his short stories appeared in some of the most popular magazines [which] did not seem to object to this ethnic stereotyping. (75)

Since, Margolies concedes, “these explanations do not seem to satisfy everyone,” he offers a “less obvious” addendum to better understand Fitzgerald’s perceived racism: “despite this stereotyping—and it was not restricted to African American and Jews—Fitzgerald felt differently about two vicious forms of racism that existed during his lifetime, Nordicism and lynching” (75-6). Margolies suggests that in reading racial stereotypes in Fitzgerald’s fiction, we should bear in mind that, particularly as “the country began to change [with increasing] awareness to what was happening in Nazi Germany” (90), Fitzgerald did not support extremist forms of racial exclusion or violence. While Margolies presents a convincing argument that Fitzgerald’s use of racial stereotypes sometimes ebb and flow with national fashion, something Milton Hindus calls the “modish” and “*fashionable anti-Semitism of the 1920’s*” (*emphasis in original*

510), I find the overall premise of Margolies's defense somewhat unsettling; his introduction in particular highlights what I see as a critical move to explain away Fitzgerald's racism instead of understanding it as an important, reoccurring theme in Fitzgerald's writing. Moreover, Margolies points to the fact that even when issues of race are considered in Fitzgerald, they have been focused on considerations of the racial Other (the depiction of African Americans and Jews in Fitzgerald), rather than considering issues of whiteness in Fitzgerald.

Discussion of race and ethnicity in Fitzgerald, though sparse, arises in the critical literature as early as 1947 in Hindus's "F. Scott Fitzgerald and Literary Anti-Semitism: a Footnote on the Mind of the 20's" in *Commentary*.¹²⁷ Hindus notes the increasing attention to Fitzgerald in American literary studies (in the 1940s) and to *The Great Gatsby* in particular, yet "[i]n all the praise of the book [...] something important had been omitted—that viewed in a certain light the novel reads very much like an anti-Semitic document" (508). Hindus argues that *Gatsby* is "nothing so simple as a piece of propaganda against the Jews [...] *But anti-Semitism is a component part of the novel*" (*emphasis in original* 510). Twenty years later, Robert Forrey published the short piece "Negroes in the Fiction of F. Scott Fitzgerald" in *Pylon* (1967) in which he notes that "[d]ark skinned individuals, when they do appear in Fitzgerald's fiction, are generally relegated to clownish and inferior roles" (293). Forrey also briefly nods to the role of whiteness in the construction of identity in Fitzgerald noting that "[t]o be at the top of society, in Fitzgerald's fiction, is axiomatically to be white and wealthy" (293). Both

¹²⁷ It seems important to note that the first article published dealing explicitly with Fitzgerald's use of anti-Semitism (or of any racial discussion surrounding Fitzgerald, for that matter) did not find an audience in a mainstream literary studies magazine, but rather in a magazine specifically interested in questions of Jewish identity in America.

these early articles recognize the troubled role of the racial Other in Fitzgerald's fiction and point to the need for more sustained studies of the role of race—including whiteness—in Fitzgerald. Yet until the mid-1990s, criticism is largely lacking in its recognition of race as central to Fitzgerald studies.¹²⁸ Fitzgerald's biographers fare little better in their serious consideration of issues of race in Fitzgerald. The exception is found only in a short note in Scott Donaldson's *Fool for Love* (1983) in which Donaldson mentions that "[d]uring the 1930s Fitzgerald came to regard Negroes as dignified beings whose stoic behavior gave him an example to follow," though Fitzgerald still relied on stereotypes in his stories where "blacks who could be safely categorized as servants [and he...] continued to describe Negroes in derogatory terms" (187).

In 1995, In *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism* (1995), Walter Benn Michaels places *Gatsby* in a broader literary and social context to understand the importance of issues of racial identity in American literature as they connect and conflict with constructions of Americanness in the early twentieth century. Since then, select critics have looked at the role of racial and ethnic identity in Fitzgerald and have thus been able to offer more complete readings of Fitzgerald's fiction. Some critics have noted the racial ambiguity of characters like Gatsby.¹²⁹ Others have pointed to the

¹²⁸ M. Gidley's "Notes on F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Passing of the Great Race" (1973) makes the important connection between Fitzgerald and Lothrop Stoddard who, he argues, Fitzgerald uses "both to satirize its racism [...] and to borrow ideas which underpin the structure and philosophy of history [of *Gatsby*] (172). In "The Souls of White Folks" (1988), Walter Benn Michaels further notes that "the Klan's style of racism makes several nonironic appearances in *Gatsby*" (193-4).

¹²⁹ See: Jeffery A. Clymer, "'Mr. Nobody from Nowhere': Rudolph Valentino, Jay Gatsby, and the End of the American Race" (1996) in which Clymer delineates Gatsby's similarities to popular 1920s cultural icon and celebrity Rudolph Valentino (a naturalized citizen from Italy) and the heightened dialogue of an "American race" that excludes such people as Gatsby and Valentino; John Rohrkemper, "Becoming White: Race and Ethnicity in *The Great Gatsby*" (2003), which highlights the importance of the 1924 Immigration Act as historical context for *Gatsby* and the supposed "self evidence" of whiteness that is troubled by racially ambiguous figures like Gatsby and even Daisy (25); and Charles Lewis, "Babbled Slander where

importance of race in understanding changing American identity in the post-war *Tender Is the Night*.¹³⁰ While most critics have overlooked issues of whiteness in Fitzgerald, in *F. Scott Fitzgerald's Racial Angles and the Business of Literary Greatness* (2007), Michael Nowlin argues that Fitzgerald himself had dueling cultural aspirations as a white (Southern aristocratic) artist and a black (Irish Immigrant) entertainer, which always threaten to collapse into one another. The racial anxieties played out in Fitzgerald's work, Nowlin argues, reflect Fitzgerald's attempts to create fiction out of "a rarefied, emphatically white masculine mode of failure [that disavows] a feminized, black and immigrant America" (14). Nowlin's identification of Fitzgerald as himself a racially troubled author (thanks in part to his Irish heritage) is provocative, though his suggestion that as "a parvenu who [...is trying to] gain admission into the club" Fitzgerald "is also someone who might know something of what it is like to be black in Jim Crow America" is less compelling (13). However, Nowlin's overall project points to the need to understand Fitzgerald as a writer fully engaged in questions of racial and ethnic identity and that issues of whiteness, particularly, are central to fully understanding Fitzgerald.¹³¹

Few critics have noted the importance of race and gender as intersecting categories in Fitzgerald's fiction. In *Eugenic Fantasies: Racial Ideology in the Literature*

the Paler Shades Dwell: Reading Race in *The Great Gatsby* and *Passing*" (2007) in which Charles argues Gatsby is essentially "passing" as white.

¹³⁰ See: Felipe Smith, "The Figure on the Bed: Difference and American Destiny in *Tender is the Night*" (1998) in which Smith argues that *Tender* portrays America's post-war loss of vitality as a white male phenomenon. See also, Milton R. Stern " *Tender is the Night* and American History" (2002).

¹³¹ Nowlin's 2007 book identifies the intersecting questions of identity that complicate past discussions of Fitzgerald's fiction in relation to race, class, and gender. However, Nowlin's linking of Fitzgerald with a "black" identity (the "entertainer") is less convincing as it collapses categories of identity that, while inter-related, are not equivocal and is unconvincing in claims of Fitzgerald's own identification as the racial Other. The "binary logic" that Nowlin employs between "pure white artist and compromised black entertainer" reductively argues that Fitzgerald's inability to fully penetrate a "pure white" artistic aestheticism thus classifies him as a black, and Nowlin collapses figurative and literal identities and confusing interlocking oppressions with equal oppressions (12, 13).

and Popular Culture of the 1920s (2002), for instance, Betsy L. Nies argues that issues of gender and of race in post-war America become increasingly intertwined as “[g]ender issues suddenly became racial issues as white males sought to retain complete social and economic control of white women through narratives of domestication and patriotism” (7). Nies argues that “[American a]nxieties about both new immigrants and white women coalesced in discourses of nation that figured the Nordic as its central icon” (7-8), and that many authors and artists, Fitzgerald included, turned to eugenicist logic to restore boundaries of concrete white male identity. In *Paternalism Incorporated: Fables of American Fatherhood* (2003), David Leverenz continues this line of questioning with an eye toward gender and race intersections in *Tender is the Night*, a novel concerned with Western culture’s decline fall and an elegy for the failed promise of paternalism, specifically white patriarchal Southern masculinity (185). With the loss of the white patriarchal South as a locale for moral value, the “civilized entitlements of the leisured white gentleman” (embodied in Dick Diver) are “yielding to aggressive women, homosexuals, and too many people of too many different colors” (186). Leverenz notes that “[w]hile the narrator poses as a good northern liberal in exposing Dick’s racism [in the novel], Fitzgerald’s narrative seems to endorse it” (197-8). This type of incongruity within Fitzgerald’s fiction, where incidents of crass racism are condemned in their moment but seemingly endorsed in the overall tenor of the novel, hints at Fitzgerald’s complicated relationship with racial identity in his life and fiction.

Certainly gender criticism has provided especially productive lines of inquiry into Fitzgerald’s work, particularly after the publication of Judith Fetterley’s landmark study *The Resisting Reader* (1978), which famously urges readers to reconsider canonical

American fiction “in light of how attitudes toward women shape their form and content” (xi), and encourages critical inquiry that resists standard, sexist presentations of women in literature (and, we must add, criticism). Notably, Fetterley uses Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* as a prime example of the need for such gender criticism. A newly engaged feminist critical dialogue emerged in Fitzgerald studies largely after *The Resisting Reader* and critics like Sarah Beebe Fryer in *Fitzgerald’s New Women: Harbingers of Change* (1988), began to note the importance of women’s changing social and political roles in Fitzgerald’s fiction. Some critics challenge conventional readings of Fitzgerald that insisted on women as victimizers, like Leland S. Person Jr.’s early “‘Herstory’ and Daisy Buchanan” (1978), Fetterley’s “Who Killed Dick Diver?: The Sexual Politics of *Tender Is the Night*” (1984), and Linda C. Pelzer’s “Beautiful Fools and Hulking Brutes: F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*” (2003). A very few began to explore the role of masculinity in Fitzgerald, most notably Michael Nowlin in “‘The World’s Rarest Work’: Modernism and Masculinity in Fitzgerald’s *Tender Is the Night*” (1998).¹³²

Yet while feminist critics opened important avenues of critical debate in terms of gender, they too, with few exceptions, did not fully undertake the intersecting question of race in Fitzgerald. To echo a complaint in Wharton criticism, it still seems as though many critics operate as though race—particularly whiteness—is not a category in

¹³² Fryer’s *Fitzgerald’s New Women* notes that “Fitzgerald lived and wrote in an era of momentous social change, particularly for upper middle-class American women” (1), and explores the impact of this gender-shifting in each of Fitzgerald’s novels. Person’s “Herstory” argues that Daisy is victimized throughout *Gatsby* and that she is “dehumanized” by her portrayal in the novel (257); in “Who Killed Dick Diver,” Fetterley argues that the gender trouble in *Tender* reflects Fitzgerald’s own troubled marriage with Zelda, and the fear that men are being de-masculinized by the feminization of modern society; in “Beautiful Fools” Pelzer argues that “women remain prisoners of patriarchy... commodities to be possessed and discarded” throughout *Gatsby* (127). Nowlin’s “The World’s Rarest Work” explores the anxiety in *Tender* when the understanding that men are supposed to be self-sufficient and women are supposed to be objects of desire breaks down for the characters and roles are reversed.

Fitzgerald's fiction. In *F. Scott Fitzgerald In His Own Time: A Miscellany* (1971), editors Matthew J. Bruccoli and Jackson R. Bryer shed some light on a possible reason for this absence by highlighting the imperative role criticism has played in the reputation of Fitzgerald: "F. Scott Fitzgerald, perhaps as much as any single American writer, can stand as a prime example of how this critical explosion has affected the reputation of an American literary figure" (vii).¹³³ It is perhaps for this reason that many critics have either chosen not to engage in discussions of race in Fitzgerald, or when they do, often seem to hedge in their evaluation. Perhaps because of the highly autobiographical nature of Fitzgerald's work, criticism regarding the author's fiction is often taken as a critique of the man himself, and a troubling amount of Fitzgerald criticism seems concerned with maintaining what the dedication to the *Cambridge Companion* calls a certain "reverence" for Fitzgerald both "as a man and artist."¹³⁴

This study seeks to understand the important role that race plays in Fitzgerald's fiction, and how race further complicates ongoing critical dialogues, particularly those interested in questions of gender and sex in American literature.¹³⁵ What's more, this chapter and the next are committed to rereading novels like *The Great Gatsby* and *Tender Is the Night* in light of these new dialogues. I am more interested in the way that a discussion of race in Fitzgerald, including a reconsideration of biography, helps to

¹³³ Here Bruccoli and Bryer are specifically speaking to the resurgence in Fitzgerald criticism in the late 1950s through the late 1960s.

¹³⁴ The dedication to the *Cambridge Companion* is "For Frances Kroll Ring [Fitzgerald's personal secretary in the last years of his life] / With affection, gratitude, and respect from everyone who reveres F. Scott Fitzgerald as a man and artist."

¹³⁵ In this my main concern with Margolies's argument is that it seems mainly interested in this debate as a way to defend Fitzgerald by contrasting the author's use of racial stereotype with extreme types of ethnic and racial prejudice or violence (like lynching). What Margolies's piece fails to do is to consider the broader discussion about racial identity throughout Fitzgerald's work of which these instances are a part.

demystify Fitzgerald as a writer, and less interested in attacking the author or mounting a character defense of the author (which is more often the case) that often shuts down critical conversations surrounding race in Fitzgerald. The latter trend in Fitzgerald criticism is especially unfortunate; Fitzgerald's racial inconsistencies in his writing and life offer us a richer understanding of the author and his work. Fitzgerald's attitudes about issues of race are complicated and often uneven. In saying this, I do not disagree with Bryan R. Washington who argues in *The Politics of Exile: Ideology in Henry James, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and James Baldwin* (1995) that readers may find overarching racial ideologies within Fitzgerald's fiction and non-fiction that are "ultimately discomfoting" and "disturbing" (66). We need to fully address Fitzgerald's inconsistent attitudes about race, including his racism, not only as we reveal the role of whiteness in Fitzgerald as central to his work, but to fully understand the author and his work. Fitzgerald is at times sympathetic, at times hostile to the racial Other. He writes of his own Irish heritage in tones both pathetic and proud, an inconsistency that is especially interesting as Fitzgerald oftentimes explicitly locates the Irish or Celtic "race" as part of a broader white American identity, which, of course, was by no means consistent with national cultural standards in the late-nineteenth or early-twentieth century. These inconsistencies in Fitzgerald's life and attitudes in fiction and biography toward race and racial difference have often been met with confusion and resistance in the criticism, if they are met at all, but these biographical realities should help open critical conversations rather than shut them down.

It is perhaps because the critical literature is so sparse that it still largely lacks a sense of how issues of race are interrelated to and interdependent with questions of gender and other intersecting identity issues. Further, what is still largely lacking is a

sustained focus on whiteness itself as a racial category that is troubled throughout Fitzgerald's fiction. This chapter offers a continued exploration of the role of race and ethnicity in Fitzgerald's writing with a focus on whiteness and insists that such categories cannot be understood outside of intersecting identity categories, particularly for Fitzgerald, those of gender, sexuality, and nation. Fitzgerald was, to paraphrase Brucoli and Bryer, a man of his time, and the national discourses concerning American identity and race during Fitzgerald's time raged with particular veracity throughout the country in politics, science, and news; as we see in Fitzgerald's biography and fiction, the author, too, was fully engaged in these discourses and was deeply concerned with the issue of race in American, particularly American whiteness.

The Rising Tide: The Racial Threat from Without

That Fitzgerald was directly aware of the currents of American racial debates is most obvious in *The Great Gatsby* where the echoes of such debates are easily recognizable in Tom Buchanan's warnings of the death of the white race and the subsequent crumbling of civilization. Tom Buchanan—the “great big hulking physical specimen” husband of Daisy (16)—is insistent that Daisy, Nick and Jordan understand the racial threat he is certain is encroaching upon them. It's the threat he's read about in “‘The Rise of the Coloured Empires’ by this man Goddard” (17), a fictional title familiar because of its unmistakable reminiscence of Lothrop Stoddard's 1920 *The Rising Tide of Color*. Throughout the novel, Tom combines the racist, alarmist ideologies of Stoddard and his predecessor Madison Grant (and I would not be the first to note a combination of Grant +

Stoddard = Goddard).¹³⁶ Grant and Stoddard's rhetorical appearances in the novel are stark in part because Tom seems to insist in bringing them into unrelated conversations in an often violent manner, but also because the novel itself, whose plot rotates around a lost love story and the unfulfilled dreams of a Midwesterner-come-East Egger, superficially seems uninterested in such questions. Yet, the background presence of such nativist and eugenic tracts marks a central current in *Gatsby*, one that spills over into much of Fitzgerald's fiction. I would argue Fitzgerald is fully engaged with a debate on race and nation that is very alive in the America in which he lives and about which he writes.

Though Stoddard's work does not make a direct appearance in the novel, the work of Lothrop Stoddard's father, John Lawson Stoddard, does: a volume of "Stoddard's Lectures" is found on Jay Gatsby's shelf. John Lawson Stoddard was well-known for his travel-lectures that detailed his extensive journeys ranging from Norway, to India, to Southern California (Gossett 390). While his son would go on to warn of the danger of the rise of "other" races, Stoddard's illustrated travelogues championed travel for "that broader education which only personal study of other races, civilizations and religions

¹³⁶ See: M. Gidley, "Notes of F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Passing of the Great Race" (1973). Goddard is also the name of a prominent American psychologist and eugenicist in the early twentieth century (Henry Herbert Goddard), most famous for his 1912 study, *The Kallikak Family: A Study in the Heredity of Feeble-Mindedness* (1912) in which he followed a family from a single descendant over multiple generations. Henry Goddard was instrumental in the first implementation of law requiring special education services for children in schools and for the use of intelligence testing in schools, hospitals, the military, and the legal system (Zenderland 2-4, 58). Margolies argues that this Goddard is "to whom Tom Buchanan in part is referring" (81), yet though Goddard's work related to the eugenics movement in his focus on mental capacity (particularly mental retardation) and in discouraging the "feeble-minded" to procreate, he stopped short of eugenicists' calls for forced sterilization (Zenderland 182-3), and though he did attempt to compare racial variation in mental capacity, including those of immigrants coming through Ellis Island, he never claimed a more racially-centered eugenicist anti-immigration or nativist rhetoric (Zenderland 264-5). Within ten years of the publication of *The Kallikak Family* (well before 1922) Goddard was negating his original claims that suggested any racial element in increased odds of mental retardation (Zenderland 7-9). Fitzgerald may very well have borrowed Goddard's actual name, perhaps even knowing the American psychologist who bore it, but the eugenic and racial theories that Tom reads in "this man Goddard's" book are unmistakably those of Lothrop Stoddard and his predecessor Madison Grant.

can bestow” (vol.1, 5). Stoddard’s lectures (published in ten volumes with five supplements from 1897 to 1898) were widely popular, and when a drunken party guest picks up the volume of “Stoddard’s Lectures” off of the shelves inside Gatsby’s mansion, he’s amazed to find the book is real: “This fella’s a regular Belasco. It’s a triumph. What thoroughness! What realism! Knew when to stop—didn’t cut the pages” (50). It is the presence of a volume of “Stoddard’s Lectures” that confirms to the unnamed guest that Gatsby knows what is fashionable and is adequately playing the part of the educated everyman, one who would know to have the lectures, but not cut the pages to read them. But while the presence of John Stoddard’s “Lectures” may help Gatsby enact a certain “realism” of identity, the presence of Lothrop Stoddard in its conservative racial ideology present throughout the book equally troubles Gatsby’s racial identity in this scene. The drunken guest hints at the performative nature of Gatsby’s identity by referencing David Belasco, a famous contemporary playwright and producer known for being an impressive impresario.¹³⁷ Though the drunken guest is awed by the “realism” of Gatsby, he can only be impressed because he sees it for what it is: a performance. The party guest knows what the reader is beginning to suspect: Gatsby is somehow an imitation, and the possibility that this imitation is at least in part a racial imitation comes into clearer focus as the racial discourse in the novel is heightened and the stakes of racial imitation are made clearer.

While Gatsby has presumably not read (Lothrop) Stoddard, it’s clear that by Tom’s reading of Goddard, Fitzgerald has. Tom’s speeches about race throughout the novel verge on plagiarism. Like Grant and Stoddard, he, too, has reorganized whiteness into its more discriminating categories and counts himself at the top among the “Nordic

¹³⁷ See: Craig Timberlake, *The Bishop of Broadway: The Life & Work of David Belasco* (1954).

race” (24). Tom insists that, “Civilization’s going to pieces [...] It’s up to us who are the dominant race to watch out or these other races will have control of things” (17). Daisy clarifies Tom’s—as well as Grant and Stoddard’s—mandate: “We’ve got to beat them down” (18). Tom becomes the spokesman for a nativist discourse made famous by Grant and Stoddard, and though Tom’s rants seemed mocked for their fervor, they reveal an undercurrent of racial anxiety that surfaces at various times throughout the novel in more subtle, and thus more meaningfully alarming, ways. In “Notes on F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Passing of the Great Race” (1973), Gidley observes that “Fitzgerald turned to Stoddard’s book *both* to satirize its racism (in that such beliefs are used to present Tom as boor, bully and chauvinist) *and* to borrow ideas which underpin the structure and philosophy of history of his novel” (172).

The Great Gatsby’s narrator Nick Carraway dismisses Tom in one of the more lyrical lines of the narrative, musing, “Something was making him nibble at the edge of stale ideas as if his sturdy physical egotism no longer nourished his peremptory heart” (25). Yet, the disruptive presence of the “other races” in the novel seems to confirm Tom’s fears and justify the fundamental truths buried in his buffoonish tirades. About one-third of the way through the novel, Gatsby and Nick drive down from East Egg and cross the Queensboro Bridge into Manhattan. As they are crossing, they pass a funeral hearse and carriages transporting the mourners who have the “tragic eyes and short upper lips of south-eastern Europe” (73). A few moments later, Nick narrates the scene:

A limousine passed us, driven by a white chauffeur, in which sat three modish Negroes, two bucks and a girl. I laughed aloud as the yolks of their eyeballs rolled toward us in haughty rivalry.

“Anything can happen now that we’ve slid over this bridge,” I thought; “anything at all....”

Even Gatsby could happen, without any particular wonder. (73)

The “modish Negroes” in the scene are such caricatures that it’s difficult to take them seriously. Nick almost seems to be describing the passengers as though they were cinematic representations of black caricatures, instead of actual people. The white yolks of their eyeballs as the most noticeable feature of the passengers brings to mind popular “blackface” performances where white performers, in mocking emphasis, blacken all the face but the eyes and mouth.¹³⁸ Yet, this scene is not in a movie or on stage, but in Nick’s real life, and despite the caricatured nature of the scene (or perhaps because of it), Nick is filled with a sense of wonder.

The wonder of the scene operates on multiple levels. In one sense, the passengers in the car embody Tom’s worst fear: non-whites who have seemingly successfully appropriated “whiteness” by appropriating its privilege. Yet while the scene at once shows the threat of the rising status of certain non-white races, it also undercuts such racial appropriation because while the three visibly black people inhabit a certain type of whiteness, they are not undermining the category of whiteness: racial difference remains clearly distinguishable through the windows of the rival limousine. Whiteness is easily separated from the various non-white identities in the scene, and the categories of identity remain untroubled. This is true, too, for the mourners from the funeral procession who can be handily categorized by their visible racial characteristics, characteristics that distinguish them as part of the influx of “undesirable” ethnic groups from southern

¹³⁸ See John Strausbaugh, *Black Like You: Blackface, Whiteface, Insult & Imitation in American Popular Culture* (2006).

Europe that Grant and Stoddard warned may be some sort of European, but certainly were not white.

This racially-coded moment in *Gatsby* tells us a lot about how we can understand and identify race as a category of identity and is reminiscent of the racialization in *This Side of Paradise* (1920) where protagonist Amory Blaine debates with his classmate Burne on what makes up “goodness” in a person. Burne insists:

“Now here’s something I do know—personal appearance has a lot to do with it.”

“Coloring?” Amory asked eagerly.

“Yes.”

“That’s what Tom and I figured,” Amory agreed. “We took the year-books for the last ten years and looked at the pictures of the Senior Council [...] Well, I suppose only about thirty-five per-cent of every class here are blonds, are really light—yet *two-thirds* of every Senior Council are light [...].”

“It’s true,” Burne agreed “The light-haired man *is* a higher type. I worked the thing out with Presidents of the United States once and found that over half of them were light-haired....”

“People unconsciously admit it,” said Amory. (122-3)

For Amory, as for Nick, you can tell a lot about a person by how they look and character traits themselves are racialized and classical Nordic characteristics reveal intelligence, success, and even “goodness” (122). Indeed, when Burne presses on to add that “the large mouth and broad chin and rather big nose undoubtedly make the superior face,”

Amory, who “was all for classical features” protests: “Burne, I think they’re the ugliest-looking crowd I ever came across” (123). By venturing outside of “classic” Nordic features, Burne shows his inability to pick out the right type of white and shows his own inferiority to Amory. Yet even Burne realizes what Amory and Nick, too, conclude: white is the higher type.

For Nick, the visible racial distinction of the funeral processors allows him to categorize them and assert his superiority with a wistful magnanimity toward the racial Other as he is “glad that the sight of Gatsby’s splendid car was included in their somber holiday” (73). This type of charitable feeling toward the downtrodden mourners from southeastern Europe is perhaps benign in its intention, but it also highlights their racial difference and the “alien” nature of the city, a city increasingly full of tragically featured immigrants in need of such charity. Such charitable feeling toward the less-fortunately raced is familiar, too, in *The Beautiful and the Damned* (1922) where protagonist Anthony Patch encounters more viscerally such immigrant need. Anthony is the grandson of the American patriarch Adam J. Patch, and can trace “his line over the sea to the crusaders” (4). This lineage is a stark contrast to the needy “aliens” of New York City to whom he goes to offer his good intentions:

The year after his graduation [the spirit of service] called him into the slums of New York to muck about with bewildered Italians as secretary to an “Alien Young Men’s Rescue Association.” He labored at it over a year before the monotony began to weary him. The aliens kept coming inexhaustible—Italians, Poles, Scandinavians, Czechs, Armenians—with the same wrongs, the same exceptionally ugly faces and very much the

same smells [...] Any amiable young man, his head ringing with the latest crusade, could accomplish as much as he could with the débris of Europe— (74-75)

Descended from crusaders though he may be, Anthony's charitable crusade is finally overtaken by his realization that he is swimming endlessly against the unending tide of immigrants; even Anthony Patch is no match for the sheer force of the limitless supply of aliens overtaking the city. His best intentions reveal much more than Anthony's "spirit" of service; they reveal the large gap between him and the alien muck he has gone to serve so charitably. Here again, the foreign populations are easily identifiable by their strange smells and alien, ugly faces. Their foreignness is, as Anthony himself will say of another foreigner in the novel, "desperately apparent" (209).

Nick, who has only just crossed the bridge into New York, will not "muck about" with the foreign faces of the city. Though he briefly wishes them well (enough), Nick's interactions with the foreign element make clear the sharp contrast between the two groups in his fantasy of dominance. The hearse and carriages of ethnic mourners offer nothing to rival the clear magnificence of Gatsby's car, or, for that matter, its driver. The humor Nick finds in this driving scene is that the passengers in the limousine, just as clearly different and inferior, seem to think they can. The "three modish Negroes, two bucks and a girl" in the limousine are clearly racially different, no matter how closely they can imitate the type of white privilege that marks Gatsby in this scene (his fancy car and conspicuous wealth). Their depiction highlights their physical difference and emphasizes that though their clothing or transportation may be stylish, their blackness is certainly not. The description, which animalizes the men and infantilizes the woman,

ensures that the reader, too, categorizes the black passengers in a different race altogether, perhaps not even quite fully part of the human race. The language that describes the black men in particular is clear in its demeaning intention. Such language bothered even contemporary readers of Fitzgerald, and one reader, noting the problematic trend, wrote to Fitzgerald in 1934 to complain, “Must all male Negroes in your books and stories be called ‘bucks’?” (Donaldson 187).

Yet, despite the descriptive language that intentionally sets them apart, the black passengers seem to believe they can rival the two white men in Gatsby’s car; it is just such a pretension that Tom Buchanan has forebodingly warned is the beginning of “the white race [being] utterly submerged” (17). Before long, the scene implies, wealth will allow the lesser races to fully simulate, and thus overtake, whiteness. That these three black passengers in particular have been able to make a success “despite” their clear racial difference validates one of the ominous signs of white apocalypse for Grant and Stoddard. The rising tide of color is not simply more racially inferior people coming into the United States, but the threat of their rise upward on the socio-economic ladder. The foreboding possibility of the success of such racial and economic climbing is manifest in the dauntingly successful and ubiquitous Jews in *The Beautiful and the Damned* when young Anthony Patch walks down a New York street and reads:

a dozen Jewish names on a line of stores; in the door of each stood a dark little man watching the passers from intent eyes – eyes gleaming with suspicion, with pride, with clarity, with cupidity, with comprehension. New York – he could not dissociate it now from the slow, upward creep of this people – the little stores, growing, expanding, consolidating [...] –

they slathered out on all sides. It was impressive – in perspective it was tremendous. (283)

This tremendous success of Jewish immigrants is characterized by their “upward creep” into white society. The language of dark men with gleaming eyes, creeping, and slathering in this passage is reminiscent of the horror films that were increasingly popular in America at the turn of the century and highlights the horror of the economic potential of such “dark little” men whose economic success has embedded them into the fabric of New York. While horror Films would have their heyday in America in the 1930s, they were gaining a foothold with American audiences as early as 1904 when nickel theaters abounded offering cheap entertainment at the cinema. The 1910s and early 20s saw various American adaptations of *Frankenstein*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, and other lesser-known monster tales (Worland 39-42). The parallel between the increasingly popular horror movies and the scene on the New York street seems apt here when we consider that horror films “realize[] our worst fears of victimization” by the terrifying other (Worland 11). On the New York streets that used to be familiar to Anthony, the horror has already been realized: the slathering Jewish businessmen have replaced the conspicuously absent white, “native” businessmen.

The foreboding tenor of this passage reminds the reader of the rising threat of this slow, upward creep of shadowy figures and foreign faces in once familiar places and smacks of Grants’ warning in *The Passing of the Great Race* that the “old stock is being crowded out” by foreigners and the “native American” (Americans of Anglo-Saxon or Nordic heritage) are “literally driven off the streets of New York City by the swarms of Polish Jews” (91). The persistent Jewish faces in *The Beautiful and the Damned* and the

haughty challenge of Negroes in *Gatsby* bring to the foreground the omnipresent background noise Nick and Jordan hear in New York, the “foreign clamor on the sidewalk” (143). It seems that by *Gatsby*, the time is, indeed, quickly coming for New York, and the “new colors” of people are already starting to supplant the American “race” with men of an inferior one.

Yet for Nick the suggestion of racial invasion, at least in terms of the Negroes in the competing car or the downtrodden south-eastern European immigrants in the carriages, is totally ridiculous, even laughable. The immigrant mourners are so inferior as to need the charity of Gatsby’s luxurious presence, and the Negroes in the car may propose total race upheaval—they enjoy wealth and style while their conspicuously white driver performs the part of their servant—yet they are rhetorically hardly even human. That they think themselves rivals of Gatsby, Nick, and the whiteness and wealth they represent in this moment is made ridiculous in their clear, visible inferiority. Nick’s rhetorical characterization of the immigrants and modish Negroes works against what Margolies largely inexplicably offers in “The Maturing of F. Scott Fitzgerald” as a “satirical” reading of this scene. In Margolies’s reading, the idea that “Gatsby’s expensive, garish car” “will take [the mourners] mind off death [is] meant to be funny” (87). Moreover, the “disturbing portrayal of the African Americans on the Queensboro Bridge” serves a purely “satirical function” for Margolies (87). Margolies opens his article by recounting this scene prefaced with “*Some* [readers] question the portrayal of the African Americans who pass Gatsby and Nick [on the bridge]” (*my emphasis* 75), and returns to the scene by describing Nick’s descriptions of the passengers “using what *some* may feel are ethnic stereotypes” (*my emphasis* 87). This introduction suggests that the

scene is racially troubling only because *some* people insist on seeing it as such, yet offers little in the way of evidence for his claim that the scene is “meant to be funny” (87). Margolies reads Nick’s description of the mourners in the “cheerful carriage” as an ironic cue for the rest of the scene, thus negating any (negative) ethnic stereotyping Nick relays to the reader. Some readers would find this logic unconvincing and might suggest that the mourners are in “more cheerful carriages” only by comparison to the hearse they are following (*Gatsby* 73). Any irony in Nick’s descriptions of the “short upper lips of south-eastern Europe” or the “haughty” “modish Negroes” seems, at best, imposed on the scene, which reverts to the same racial stereotypes we see throughout Fitzgerald’s fiction.¹³⁹

A more nuanced reading of Nick’s rhetorical position is offered by Charles Lewis in “Babbled Slander where the Paler Shades Dwell: Reading Race in *The Great Gatsby* and *Passing* (2007), where Lewis suggests that the scene can be read “in terms of Nick’s (and *Gatsby*’s) identification with—and his insistence on difference from—these black characters” (179). Here, for Lewis, the “conflated images of the parvenu and the passer” are represented in all those present on the bridge—the new immigrants, the upwardly mobile Negroes, the up-and-coming Nick, and, most of all, *Gatsby* himself (179). But what’s notable about this scene is precisely that Nick misses that important connection; while Nick seems savvy to the possible identity uplift of those who are distinguishably racially different in this scene (particularly the modish Negroes who mimic and thus undermine white privilege), he seems to miss the racial implications of this scene for

¹³⁹ Margolies suggests that in his later years and writing, Fitzgerald became more nuanced in his representations of racial and ethnic minorities (the most notable example is the complex Jewish hero Monre Stahr of *The Love of the Last Tycoon*). Yet simultaneously, Margolies admits that this attitude was “not consistent” for such portrayals of Jews or African Americans (86, 88), and racial and ethnic stereotypes persist in Fitzgerald’s writing until his death, many examples of which Margolies details in his article.

Gatsby, and even for whiteness itself as a category. If the modish Negroes can imitate whiteness, is Gatsby, too, an imitation? Just as the impossibility of presumed racial equality between whites and blacks can seem forebodingly possible as they slide from the civilization of East Egg into the chaos of the city, the impossibility of Gatsby, almost more an idea than an actual man, can also become possible. Notably, in other places in the novel, Nick seems fully aware of what Lewis would connect to the Queensboro Bridge scene as the parvenu nature of Gatsby. Nick is even awed by Gatsby's creation of himself; Gatsby, he finally decides, "sprang from his Platonic conception of himself" (104). Yet Nick seems to miss that the bridge scene implicates Gatsby in the list of racial outsiders and hints toward the fact that, as Walter Benn Michaels has suggested, Gatsby "isn't quite white" (*Our America*, 25).

Mr. Nobody From Nowhere: The Racial Threat Within

Tom Buchanan, brutish as he may be, intuits Gatsby's racial difference and immediately identifies the threat it poses to a standard of whiteness that he, and "scientists" like the fictional Goddard, are trying so hard to protect. When Tom finally realizes that Gatsby is re-courting Daisy, he rages:

"I suppose the latest thing is to sit back and let Mr. Nobody from Nowhere make love to your wife. Well if that's the idea you can count me out.... Nowadays people begin by sneering at family life and family institutions and next they'll throw everything overboard and have intermarriage between blacks and white."

Flushed with his impassioned gibberish he saw himself standing alone on the last barrier of civilization.

“We’re all white here,” murmured Jordan. (137)

Tom’s outrage at such an outsider—Mr. Nobody from Nowhere—is a confused combination of Gatsby’s clear outsider status in West Egg as New Money (money without a discernable class or family legacy) and the threat that Gatsby’s outsider status is more than just being from the “wrong” kind of money. Jordan’s insistence that everyone there—Tom, Daisy, Nick, Gatsby, and herself—are all white misses the nuance of racial difference that marks Gatsby throughout the novel and that leads Tom to collapse the threat Gatsby poses to the Buchanan’s marriage into one of miscegenation. Tom’s fear of miscegenation not only shows how Gatsby is collapsed with the racial Other—the “blacks” who are intermarrying with whites—but reveals the implied sexual threat throughout the novel of the racial Other, one highlighted in the sexualized “bucks” in the limousine. For Tom, the threat to his white household is the perceived threat the racial other poses to the white woman, a belief commonly held well into the twentieth century.¹⁴⁰ The sexualized bucks in the limousine coupled with Gatsby’s threat to Tom’s marriage in a potential “interracial” union reveals that the threat to Tom is what he perceives to be the threat to Daisy: the sullyng of her white womanhood. The American hysteria over the “purity” of white womanhood often found its incarnation in crazed lynch mobs who chased down black “offenders” (accused of anything from rape to

¹⁴⁰ As D’Emilio and Freedman explain, “[a]pologists for lynching raised the specter of rape, the brutal assault of white women by sexually crazed black men” (216). Social Darwinians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century added further credence to these stereotypes of black men’s threat to white women when they posited that black men raped white women out of more than mere lust, but to “raise his race to a little higher level” (Gossett 166). Some Social Darwinians further claimed that it was this same thinking, the “biological law of race preservation” that compelled whites to form lynch mobs and hang the “offender” (Gossett 166).

winking at a white woman) (Gossett 269-73). Men of “darker” races were cast as sexually lascivious and posed sexual threats to, as one man described them, the “God-like pure snowwhite angelic American Woman” (qtd. Hall 170). Stoddard himself recounted such threats to white women in his *Rising Tide of Color* when describing the “Black Man’s Land” where plots arose that would result in the “killing of the white men and the carrying off of the white women” (99). The need to protect white women was clear, and this attitude was prevalent throughout the early century into the 1930s, when, for example, South Carolina Senator Cole Blease (who would also serve as Governor) defended lynching in his reelection campaign crying “Whenever the Constitution comes between me and the virtue of the white women of the South, I say to hell with the Constitution!” (qtd. Hall 195). While Tom himself doesn’t propose this extreme type of violence, his fears of miscegenation are rooted in the same race logic that insists he protect his race by protecting his wife (from the assumed non-white sexual threat). Indeed, anti-miscegenation laws and “lynch laws” shared in common their effort to separate the races and prevent racial intermixing. As Ian F. Haney López explains in *White by Law: The Legal Construction of Race* (1996), “[a]ntimiscegenation laws, like lynch laws more generally, sought to maintain social dominance along specifically racial lines, and at the same time, sought to maintain racial lines through social domination” (117). Tom’s need to protect his own position and the status of his race is manifest in his confused accusation of Gatsby and his general fear of “intermarriage between blacks and whites.” Tom is himself like other American whites who “feared the specter of racial amalgamation, believing that it would debase whites to the status of other races” (D’Emilio and Freedman 86). For Tom, like Jordan, the nuance of Gatsby’s potential

racial identity is lost, but for Tom, that nuance is lost in the opposite direction. Instead of Gatsby's identity being collapsed into a general whiteness as Jordan sees it, for Tom, Gatsby's identity is collapsed into the racial Otherness that threatens the purity of the white race, and Tom's white home.

Part of the problem in fixing Gatsby's racial identity are his famously mysterious origins, and he's at times thought to be "a nephew or a cousin of Kaiser Wilhelm's" (37), "a German spy during the war" (48), or was he "a nephew to von Hindenburg and second cousin to the devil" (65). Gatsby offers an equally ambiguous and conspicuously racially suggestive answer to his past when he claims to have "lived like a young rajah in all the capitals of Europe" (70). Tom seems keen on this potential racial ambiguity as he addresses the potential threat of interracial marriage between Daisy and Gatsby. It's no wonder that Tom is suspicious; for the race theorist Stoddard, and subsequently for Tom, Gatsby's racial status is questionable at best.

Gatsby comes from everywhere and nowhere; his lineage, like his life, seems completely self-fashioned. This stands in contrast to Nick, who can trace his American roots back to the Civil War, and whose family "have been prominent, well-to-do people in the middle-western city for three generations" (7). While Nick's family line may situate him nationally, even his American pedigree must be held racial accountable. Nick introduces his family by saying "[t]he Carraways are something of a clan," and admits that though "we have a tradition that we're descended from the Dukes of Buccleuch," the family history really starts with the Civil War, with "my grandfather's brother who came here in fifty-one, sent a substitute to the Civil War and started the wholesale hardware business that my father carries on today" (7). That the Carraways feel compelled to

invent an Anglo heritage to undergird their American identity is telling for what it takes to legitimize a sufficiently white, American legacy. Gatsby himself apparently feels a similar need and Anglicizes his own name from “Gatz” to “Gatsby.” That Gatsby changes his name only highlights that he lacks a certain type of lineage necessary to legitimate the identity he wishes to embody. What’s more, Gatsby’s name change, John Rohrkemper argues in “Becoming White: Race and Ethnicity in *The Great Gatsby*” (2003), may signify something more; the name change “is not merely an attempt to acquire a more romantic sounding name, but an example of a common practice in American assimilation: name change to obscure ethnic origins” (Rohrkemper 28). Like thousands of immigrants have before him, Gatsby has changed his name to create for himself a more legitimate American identity. Gatsby keeps his origins intentionally obscure so that he can invent himself, but it is this very uncertainty that casts doubt on his national and racial background.¹⁴¹

Gatsby’s mysterious origins make him a potential racial threat to the white Buchanan family, and without a past, Gatsby’s present connections only further cast racial suspicion on him. His most damning relationship is his connection to Meyer Wolfshiem,¹⁴² the underworld business associate with a conspicuously Jewish-sounding name who is involved in organized crime, fixed the 1919 World Series, and wears cufflinks made of human teeth. Fitzgerald based Wolfshiem on a notorious Jewish

¹⁴¹ Rohrkemper’s conclusion about Gatsby’s identity echoes Michaels’s conclusion, when he notes that Gatsby’s “ethnically ambiguous” background suggests that Gatsby is “perhaps not quite white, not quite American” (29).

¹⁴² In the 1992 Scribner’s “Authoritative Text” edition of *The Great Gatsby*, edited by preeminent Fitzgerald scholar Matthew J. Bruccoli, Meyer Wolfshiem’s name is spelled “iem” instead of the more common printed spelling of “Wolfsheim” (“eim”), which has been the standard spelling of the Jewish gangster’s name in various other editions of the published text. For the purposes of this chapter, I use the spelling favored in this latest “authorized” text from which I am working, though why the change was made by the editor, or even if it was intentional, is unclear.

criminal, Arnie Rothstein, “New York’s famous gambling czar” who, himself, was accused of fixing the famous 1919 World Series (Mitgang 6, 7).

What’s more, Gatsby’s own parvenu spirit further casts him as racially suspect as “in an age of parvenus the Jew provided a symbol of the parvenu spirit” (Higham 27). Fitzgerald’s anti-Semitic description of Wolfshiem is perhaps the most widely discussed issue of race in Fitzgerald as it is the most widely acknowledged portrayal of racial or ethnic stereotyping in Fitzgerald. Such anti-Semitism was, indeed, as Hindus describes it, “modish anti-Semitism” (“Literary Anti-Semitism” 251), and was also, notably, consistent with the eugenicist tracts echoed throughout *Gatsby*. Of all the racial threats, Madison Grant’s “deadliest animus focused on the Jews” who were feared as the largest threat to racial purity and with it every national and cultural value (Highman 156).

With Gatsby’s fluctuating back-story and swarthy connections, it is little surprise that Gatsby is “persistently understood by [the Buchanans] as belonging to something more like a different race” (Michaels, *Our America* 7). Indeed, lacking a solid past, Gatsby’s own identity is itself potentially linked to a Jewish identity. In *Whiteness of a Different Color* (1998), for instance, Matthew Fry Jacobson makes a passing reference to Gatsby as “the Hebrew Jimmy Gatz” (97), and Michaels describes Gatsby as “Gatsby (né Gatz, with his Wolfshiem ‘gonnegtion’ [connection])” (25). That Tom insists Gatsby is “Mr. Nobody from Nowhere” is further reminiscent of anti-Semitic fears that the Jewish people posed a particular threat to America as a race because they could so easily assimilate themselves into culture, and they could do this because they, themselves, had no ties to a homeland—making them, like Gatsby, from “nowhere.”¹⁴³ If Tom

¹⁴³ Indeed Lothrop Stoddard’s father, John L. Stoddard, author of *Stoddard’s Lectures* (a copy of which is found on Gatsby’s shelf), was a proponent of a Jewish return to Israel. In his *Lectures* he wrote of the

recognized this connection, it would certainly fit with his fears of miscegenation; as Jacobson argues, “Negro and Jew [are seen] as equally divergent from normative whiteness” (66). To be Jewish is not to be black, but it is to be rhetorically racially blackened. And for Gatsby, existing outside a verifiable whiteness serves a similar purpose.¹⁴⁴

As such, Tom’s seemingly absurd comparison of a potential Daisy/Gatsby match to “intermarriage between blacks and whites” isn’t absurd in the least. For Tom, Gatsby’s unknowable racial identity poses a threat to his own conception of the American race, which is based in Grant and Stoddard’s understanding of whiteness as defined by a certain Anglo-Saxon, Nordic heritage. The problem with Gatsby for Tom is that Gatsby can’t be pinned down racially. The lack of concrete biography leaves enough gaps for Gatsby that he is able to construct a racial identity that threatens to be mistaken for white. Even when Nick (and the reader) learns that James Gatz came from a North Dakota farm, Gatsby’s ability to invent himself, to erase and then create a past, stands as the real threat—what’s important is not that Gatsby is actually black, or Jewish, or a Turkish Rajah, or a German spy, or an Oxford man, but that he *could* be any of those and still be nearly appropriating a type of whiteness embodied in the Buchanans. Though his discovered “roots” in North Dakota seem a curious choice for Gatsby’s regional identity—after all, such a birthplace severs him from any urban or commercial American identity—it emphasizes Gatsby’s ability to make his identity, rather than be born of it.

Jews: “You are a people without a country; there is a country without a people. Be united. Fulfil [sic] the dreams of your old poets and patriarchs. Go back, —go back to the land of Abraham” (vol. 2, 221).

¹⁴⁴ Clymer also suggests Gatsby’s similarities to the Italian-born American actor and pop-icon Rudolph Valentino known as the “Latin lover.” Gatsby, like Valentino, Clymer argues, presents a threat to a white American “race,” particularly as a sexual threat to “white”/American women. Though Clymer’s claim that Fitzgerald actively uses Valentino as a model for Gatsby is not particularly compelling, his underlying claim is apt: Gatsby’s unknowable racial identity poses a threat to Tom’s conception of the American race.

As such, Gatsby's story is less about the associations implicit in where he actually came from (North Dakota), and more about the mystery of where he *could* have come from (Turkey, Germany, Oxford, etc.). Gatsby's unknowable past, his mysterious origins, and his created self of the present prevent any secure fixation of his "real" ethnic or racial identity. It remains Tom's most damning question to Gatsby in their confrontation over Daisy: "Who are you anyhow?" (143).

Other readers have struggled alongside Tom in trying to fix upon Gatsby. The problem with Gatsby, as Fitzgerald's Scribner's editor Maxwell Perkins noted in his otherwise admiring assessment of the novel's manuscript, is that "Gatsby is somewhat vague. The reader's eyes can never quite focus upon him, his outlines are dim" (*Epic* 208). Perkins spends over half his lengthy letter suggesting ways Gatsby might be brought into better focus, given more exact details, provided a more concrete biography. The mystery of his identity is too great, the editor argues, despite the "general brilliant quality of the book" (209). Even Edith Wharton, in one of her only letters to Fitzgerald, echoed Perkins concerns about Gatsby's puzzling origins. Though she thanked him for sending his inscribed copy of *The Great Gatsby* to her, and praised the author for his depiction of the "perfect Jew" in Wolfshiem, she insisted that Gatsby must be made clearer: "My present quarrel with you is only this: that to make Gatsby really Great, you ought to have given us his early career (not from the cradle—but from his first visit to the yacht, if not before) instead of a short résumé of it. That would have *situated* him [...]" (*emphasis in original* Wharton, *Letters* 481-82). Left racially un-situated in the novel, Gatsby is essentially like the Negroes in the limousine: he may have fashioned the trappings of whiteness, but he cannot quite achieve it. Gatsby's racial ambiguity

highlights the main problem with Jordan's overly simplistic reading of race (and a problem of an increasingly stringent definition of race): they may all look white and act white, but that does not make them all white. Though Tom has warned throughout the novel about the consequences of the influx of "lesser" races, like the westward influx of eastern-European immigrants and the northern influx of southern blacks, it is not, in the end, the racial difference you can identify (the Slavs/Negroes on the bridge) that is the real racial threat to whiteness, but that which you can't (Gatsby).

Tom himself seems to have an inkling of this problem of racial categorization when he initially tries to convince Nick of the urgent need for white protection:

"The idea is that we're Nordics. I am and you are and you are and—"

After an infinitesimal hesitation he included Daisy with a slight nod and she winked at me again, "—and we've produced all the things that go to make civilization—oh, science and art and all that. Do you see?" (18).

Tom's infinitesimal hesitation when classifying Daisy's race answers his own question: one cannot see. Daisy is presumably as white as the rest of them, but Tom's hesitation in including her in his Nordic identity points to the problem of the racial category that has squeezed out Gatsby—the novel's hero—and can just as easily squeeze out Daisy, despite her "white girlhood" in Louisville (24). Tom's hesitance with regards to the question of Daisy's race is reminiscent of Selden's fleeting hesitance about Lily's hair color in *The House of Mirth*. Daisy, like Lily, ought to be the white flower of American womanhood her name suggests, yet, in a moment's glance, the authenticity of these women's racial identities is challenged. Tom's hesitance as he defines and defends the white race disrupts this certainty and suggests an uneasy relationship between whiteness

and womanhood for Daisy. Daisy's past is the fuzzy, rose-colored blur of dim memory. In the midst of a conversation she is supposed to be having with Nick about the "Nordic race" Daisy remembers herself and Jordan "[f]rom Louisville. Our white girlhood was passed together there. Our beautiful white—" before Tom interrupts her mid-sentence and Daisy's memories of her specifically white girlhood become intermingled with discussions about the Nordic race (24). Likewise, Jordan's memories of Daisy are white: Jordan remembers Daisy as "dressed in white and had a little white roadster" (78).

Yet Tom cannot fully bring himself to acknowledge Daisy as white. Perhaps Daisy Buchanan, Daisy *Fay* Buchanan, is actually Irish (Rohrkemper 24). If her maiden name suggests for Daisy a Celtic heritage, it would certainly complicate her white racial identity. American prejudices against Irish immigrants are well-documented, and much of the animus was based in the perception of the Irish as belonging to another "race" (Ignatiev 35).¹⁴⁵ This was perhaps no more obvious than in popular caricatures of Irish immigrants in newspaper cartoons where the Irish were "simianized" with features exaggerated to ape-like qualities to exaggerate the savagery and racial difference of the Irish.¹⁴⁶ As Jacobson explains, though the Irish may have come ashore in the United

¹⁴⁵ See especially Theodore W. Allen, *The Invention of the White Race* (Vol. 1) (1994), Noel Ignatiev, *How the Irish Became White* (1995), and Jacobson *Whiteness of a Difference Color* (1998). Allen offers a narrative of the construction of whiteness in Britain against the Celtic racial Other. The history of the Irish under British rule and then as immigrants in America is particularly useful for understanding "race" as "a sociogenic rather than a phylogenic category" (Allen 28). Ignatiev complicates Allen's construction of whiteness for the Irish by arguing that the Irish "entry into the white race" was a conscious, concerted effort made largely by Irish immigrants in America who sought distance from African-Americans with whom they were often lumped, so that they could claim the privileges of white superiority in America (3). While Jacobson hails Allen's study on "the relativity of race" and its consideration of whiteness in particular, he takes issue with Allen's narrative of the Irish down-trodden "Celts" in Britain to "privileged 'whites'" once they reached American shores (17). Like Ignatiev, Jacobson argues that the racial status of Irish in America is itself a complicated process of racialization in America (17).

¹⁴⁶ For example, cartoonist Thomas Nast, widely considered the father of American cartoons, frequently featured cartoons in the *New York Times* with Irish people, especially men, acting and looking like apes and gorillas (Jacobson 5, 53; R. Dyer 52-6).

States as “‘free white persons’ under the terms of the reigning naturalization law” (3-4), their “racial credentials were not equivalent to those of the Anglo-Saxon ‘old stock’ who laid propriety claim to the nation’s founding documents and hence to its stewardship” (4). Irish racial identity was so decidedly *not* white in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century, that they were slandered as “niggers turned inside out” and further connected to black American identity as African-Americans were themselves sometimes called “smoked Irish” (Ignatiev 41).

Fitzgerald himself seemed to have conflicted feelings about his own Irish heritage. In a 1933 letter to the admiring John O’Hara (who had written Fitzgerald a fan-letter), Fitzgerald described himself in self-deprecating terms:

I am half black Irish and half old American stock with the usual exaggerated ancestral pretensions. The black Irish half of the family had the money and looked down upon the Maryland side of the family who had, and really had, that certain series of reticences and obligations that go under the poor old shattered word “breeding” (modern form “inhibitions”). So being born in that atmosphere of crack, wisecrack and counterack I developed a two cylinder inferiority complex. So if I were elected King of Scotland tomorrow after graduating from Eton, Magdalene to the Guards with an embryonic history which tied me to the Plantagonets [sic], I would still be a parvenue [sic] [...]

I suppose this is just a confession of being a Gael though I have known many Irish who have not been afflicted by this intense social self-consciousness. (*Life in Letters* 233)

Somewhat ironically, it is the “black Irish” side of the family that looks down upon the Marylanders. To be “Black Irish” was to be Irish or of Irish descendants with dark brown or black hair, a common enough phenotypic phenomenon in Irish-American communities, yet was still deviant from “fairer” Irish norms. Being “Black Irish” is, itself, a potential reason for pause in Fitzgerald’s autobiographical sketch as common tales cited such dark features as springing from Spanish blood. A *Harper’s Weekly* illustration from the mid-nineteenth century explained racial differences in the Irish as being due to their “Iberian” ancestry. The Iberians, *Harper’s Weekly* explained,

are believed to have been originally an African Race [... that then] came to Ireland, and mixed with the native [Irish] of the South and the West, who themselves are supposed to have been of low type and descendants of savages of the Stone Age, who [...] thus made way, according to the laws of nature, for superior races. (qtd. R. Dyer 53)

Such undercurrents of racial complication help us see that despite the playful tone Fitzgerald uses, his letter reveals a deep unease with his identity. He seems simultaneously dismissive of, yet unable to fully break away from the notion of “breeding,” one that for Fitzgerald is troubled both by his Irish racial identity and inadequate class position. For Fitzgerald, a new imagined racial identity (in a Plantagenet lineage) could not erase his class self-consciousness just as a new class position (in having afforded and attended Eton) could not erase his racial self-consciousness.

In *Gatsby*, what the suggestion of Daisy’s potential racial difference, Irish or not in origin, shows is the way in which whiteness becomes a rarified category, particularly

through the racialization of those who might otherwise look the part, and the way in which such rarification of whiteness as a category makes it increasingly impossible to achieve. The example of the Irish, particularly, shows the logical leaps and incongruities in “white” Americanness as the Irish as an identity went through many racial categorizations, sometimes at the same time. The “Irish simians” for example “were ‘white’ according to naturalization law; they proclaimed themselves ‘Caucasians’ in various political organizations using that term; and they were derided as ‘Celts’ in the patrician lexicon of proud Anglo-Saxons” (Jacobson 5). Yet Daisy’s racial status is still questionable in the eyes of Tom. And if Tom hesitates to include even his wife Daisy, who is there left to be white? What’s more, though it’s possible that Tom recognizes Daisy as racially problematic because of her potentially Celtic heritage, his rhetoric against the threat of interracial marriage suggests it is not Daisy’s maiden name, but her maidenhood, that is the problem. Daisy’s very gender is a barrier and potential threat to whiteness as she can so easily tarnish her whiteness by aligning herself with Gatsby. Here again, the example of the Irish is telling as the threat of racial amalgamation was one of many racial threats Irish immigrants presented to “white” America and “in antebellum America it was speculated that if racial amalgamation was ever to take place it would be between those two groups [the Irish- and Afro-Americans]” (Ignatiev 2). This type of racial amalgamation was somewhat common between Irish immigrants and the “free Negroes” of the North. As Ignatiev points out, on arrival in America, “the Irish were thrown together with black people on jobs and in neighborhoods, with predictable results. The Census of 1850 was the first to include a class it called ‘mulattoes’” (40). In New York and Boston, especially, “the majority of ‘mixed’ matings involved Irish

women” (41). The logic can be dizzying: here the Irish, at once derided for not being “white” can somehow still threaten whiteness in intermarrying with “non-whites.” Thus, questionably white (in a suggested Irish background) or “legitimately” white (with an Anglo-Saxon or Nordic background), Daisy still threatens whiteness in her attraction to Gatsby.

The most palpably racial threat that Gatsby poses is that he can sully whiteness through marriage—or liaison—into the white race. The potential for the racially compromising appropriation of white women by the racial Other looms large in *Gatsby*. At the apartment Tom keeps for Myrtle Wilson in New York, a guest at their mock cocktail party reveals the horrors of her own history. She admits, “I almost married a little kyke [sic] who’d been after me for years. I knew he was below me. Everybody kept saying to me, ‘Lucille, that man’s way below you!’ But if I hadn’t met Chester he’d of got me sure” (38). Here Mrs. McKee is at the whim of the men around her (both as a potential victim of the racial Other and in her need to be rescued by the white male). In the end, Tom, like Chester, must fend off the racial threat that Daisy poses by securing her in marriage and in reproducing a child to inherit their white legacy. Tom is able to succeed in fending off threats to his own household in an actual and racially symbolic reclaiming of Daisy from Gatsby. By the novel’s close, Gatsby is dead, and Tom has hurried Daisy and their child off to safer territory.

Despite Gatsby’s fatal ending, Nick reassures the reader that Gatsby ends up “all right in the end” (6), and finally the novel seems to defend Gatsby and criticize a new American falsity that keeps the Buchanans on top and means death for the deserving outsider. The Buchanans live on while Gatsby has died and Nick leaves the East

disillusioned. Yet, Gatsby's death is in a sense the failure of racial ambiguity in this American moment, and it points to the quickening need for a clearer understanding of just what makes an American, or, more specifically, what makes an American white. Nick confirms that *The Great Gatsby* is as much a book about national identity as it is about anything else, and reflects on how Gatsby's dream was not much different than those of the first "Dutch sailor[s]" for whom their first glimpse of America was Long Island, "a fresh, green breast of the new world" (189). One of Fitzgerald's potential titles for the book, *Under the Red, White, and Blue*, suggests the same central theme of grappling with American identity. A few pages from the end of the novel, Nick recalls with fond nostalgia the Midwest from whence he and James Gatz came, and to which Nick will return. It is, "my middle-west [...] where dwellings are still called through decades by a family's name. I see now that this has been a story of the West, after all—Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerners, and perhaps we possessed some deficiency in common which made us subtly inadaptable to Eastern life" (184). In his closing soliloquy, it seems that Nick, like Gatsby, is collapsing multiple ideas and locations into the "the West." When Gatsby is telling Nick some of his back-story, parts of which Nick later confirms are definitely untrue, Gatsby claims to be "the son of some wealthy people in the middle-west—all dead now. I was brought up in America" (69), but when Nick inquires as to what part of the middle-west Gatsby's from, Gatsby's answer is simply "San Francisco" (70).¹⁴⁷ Gatsby's place of upbringing, like his very identity itself, is more an idea than a fixed reality. Likewise for Nick, the idea of the West is much more unifying than the exact reality of each person's point of origin (North

¹⁴⁷ Notably, when Tom is warning Nick about the rise of the "colored" races and the threat they pose to the white, "Nordic" races, Jordan suggests that if Tom thinks it's bad in the East, he "ought to live in California" (18), presumably where the racial threat is even worse.

Dakota, St. Paul, Louisville). For Nick, as for so many, New York was the port of entry into his new American life, but the promise of this “Eastern life,” the “orgastic” vision of what the American city could offer, is ultimately tarnished by the reality that the homes of the American East bear no lineage, can trace no family back generations past. The American East seems distorted and grotesque, and, in a sense, the failure of Gatsby or Nick in the East is the failure of America to move back in on itself, to turn the great Western Migration back East to re-colonize what is slowly being re-settled not by the likes of New York’s white, Dutch ancestors, but by the desperate of Southern and Eastern Europe and the ambitious of the black American South.

The final lesson of *Gatsby*, a lesson for America, is the same lesson Gatsby himself has earlier refused—one can’t relive the past. Gatsby, Nick realizes, wants Daisy to have never loved Tom, for the last three years of her marriage with Tom to be “obliterated” (116). Then, “they were to go back to Louisville and be married from her house—just as if it were five years ago” (116). But the problem of reliving a lost past is immediately obvious in Gatsby and Daisy’s meetings:

“And she doesn’t understand,” [Gatsby] said despairingly. “She used to be able to understand. We’d sit for hours—” [...]

“I wouldn’t ask too much of her,” I ventured. “You can’t repeat the past.”

“Can’t repeat the past?” he cried incredulously. “Why of course you can!”

He looked around him wildly, as if the past were lurking here in the shadow of his house, just out of reach of his hand.

“I’m going to fix everything just the way it was before [...]” (116)

Gatsby’s desire to return to Daisy’s “white girlhood” in Louisville, a time before her marriage to Tom, is, of course, impossible, and Gatsby will soon be killed for his trouble. Gatsby’s desire for a seemingly simpler time, a past where he understands and is understood, is not so far from Tom’s own desire for an America of the past (imagined though it may be), an America that he understands—an America still fresh with Dutch immigrants, an America with clear racial distinctions, a securely white America—an America before the tide. The novel itself, too, is constantly looking back, uncertain about a racial future it cannot quite seem to take seriously, but the danger of which nibbles at the edge of the story—always present, always lurking and threatening to wash over the shores, as America beats on, a boat against the current “borne back ceaselessly into the past” (189).

While *The Great Gatsby* might be said to search for a racial past so as to protect America’s racial future, the novel retains an uncertainty as to how seriously one should take the hyper-apocalyptic warnings of total white collapse or gender upheaval as they are prophesied by the overly-enthusiastic and morally bankrupt Tom Buchanan. Yet, by Fitzgerald’s next novel *Tender Is the Night*, Tom’s frantic warnings have become prophetic: the Anglo-Saxon white America that those like Grant and Stoddard would so scrupulously protect is no longer as easy to define or defend; racial categories have become increasingly unstable as have strict categories of gender, sexuality, and nation. In *Gatsby*, despite these threats of racial doom, Tom is able to reassert a certain white, masculine control over Daisy and the racially threatening Gatsby so as to secure his own white family and a stable white identity (by re-establishing his relationship with Daisy

and hastening Gatsby's death), but in *Tender*, there is a mounting threat to white masculinity, specifically, that strikes at the very heart of stable American identity for the characters, confusing their allegiances, weakening their solidarity, and making inevitable their imminent racial decline. Especially when we consider *Gatsby* in light of the racial loss in *Tender*, we can see that for Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* serves as the warning call, and *Tender Is the Night* as the lament for white masculinity, and thus American whiteness.

Chapter Five

The Dying Fall:

***Tender Is the Night* and the Decline of White Masculinity**

America hurts, because it has a powerful disintegrative influence upon the white psyche. It is full of grinning, unappeased aboriginal demons [...] and it persecutes the white men [...] until the white men give up their absolute whiteness. America is tense with latent violence and resistance.

-D.H. Lawrence

Studies in Classic American Literature

If they could get Dick Diver, none of us is safe.

-James Dickey

In conversation with Matthew J. Bruccoli

While traveling abroad in 1954, American author James Dickey visited Cap d'Antibes on the French Côte d'Azur, the French Riviera. Thirty years earlier, the Villa Americana at Cap d'Antibes had hosted Scott and Zelda Fitzgerald, who were there visiting their close friends and globetrotting companions Gerald and Sara Murphy. Dickey was sensitive to this authorial connection, and described his location on the Mediterranean as where "Gerald Murphy had his house with Scott Fitzgerald. [It was] the setting of the opening of *Tender Is the Night*, and we used to go swimming down on the beach that Gerald Murphy had made" (qtd. Hart 185). F. Scott Fitzgerald's time at the Murphy's Villa on the Côte d'Azur was as meaningful (perhaps more so) in the early 1920s to Scott as it would be decades later for James Dickey. As Dickey realized as he walked the same beach in the footsteps of Fitzgerald, much of *Tender Is the Night* was set on the French Riviera—around the Murphy's Villa particularly—and the novel depended heavily on the Fitzgerald's experiences with the Murphys for its inspiration. What's

more, Gerald Murphy was the model for the *Tender's* main character Dick Diver—or at least for Dick's more attractive traits.¹⁴⁸ Fitzgerald marked his “General Plan” for the novel to include the “Background [of Dick Diver] one in which the leisure class is at their truly most brilliant + glamorous such as the Murphys” (qtd. Brucoli, *Epic* 330). Like many of his qualities of charm, Dick's “external qualities” were also to be like “Gerald” (332). While much of the charm of Dick Diver can be traced to sketches of Gerald Murphy, Dick's faults are equally revealing in their parallel to Fitzgerald himself. After noting that in general Dick's qualities would mimic those of Gerald and others, Fitzgerald reminded himself: “He looks, though, like me. The faults—the weakness such as the social-climbing, the drinking, the desperate clinging to one woman, finally the neurosis, only come out gradually” (332).

Dick Diver's faults notwithstanding, James Dickey greatly admired *Tender Is the Night* and Fitzgerald in general. He felt a deep connection to Fitzgerald, and near the end of his life he wrote the poem “Entering Scott's Night” in which he welcomed the thought of joining Fitzgerald in death (Hart 742). This connection between Dickey and Fitzgerald was so compelling that Dickey's biographer even employs Fitzgerald in the closing pages of the biography to understand Dickey's life. Dickey's biographer compares Dickey's life to Gatsby's and reasserts that Dickey “identified with [both] Gatsby and Fitzgerald” (752). Dickey also knew Fitzgerald's most prominent biographer and literary scholar Matthew J. Brucoli. Brucoli served as another connection between Dickey and Fitzgerald as Brucoli was Dickey's literary executor and one of Dickey's “staunchest advocates” (Hart 413). Perhaps because of Dickey's feeling of deep connection to Fitzgerald, he was particularly unnerved by Dick Diver's ending in *Tender Is the Night*.

¹⁴⁸ See: Brucoli, *Epic*, pp. 200, 235-6, 239.

In a private conversation with Bruccoli, he warned: “If they could get Dick Diver, none of us is safe” (qtd. Bruccoli, *Epic* 370).

Dickey’s comment about Dick Diver is particularly interesting considering the author’s first novel, *Deliverance* (1970), in which four men venture into the wilderness where one is murdered, one sodomized, and the other two men murder the two mountain men who have victimized them. The novel highlights competing masculinities: the weak and effeminized Bobby who is sodomized is ultimately saved by the hyper-violent masculinized Lewis, and the aptly named narrator Ed Gentry who must transform from a more “civil” masculinity into a more brutishly violent masculinity in order to survive. One might very well read the violence in *Deliverance* as a response to a failed masculinity embodied in Dick Diver who ends the novel emasculated by the loss of his wife, national identity, and racial security.

In a sense, Dickey has put his finger on the pulse of Fitzgerald’s novel: *Tender Is the Night* is deeply anxious about questions of masculinity (Dickey’s “If they could get Dick Diver, none of us is safe,” is, not coincidentally, a fear shared between men [Dickey and Bruccoli]). One can certainly trace a fear of masculine loss throughout *Tender*, and yet, as Fitzgerald shows in his novel, American masculinity is an increasingly complicated identity; it is certainly as much about race as it is about gender (though, perhaps Dickey himself is aware of these identity intersections—after all, his conversation is of a fear shared between two *white* men). While Fitzgerald explores what he called the “old theory” of racial difference (that separated the blonde, Nordic whites

from the encroaching dark world)¹⁴⁹ in his previous novel *The Great Gatsby*, in *Tender Is the Night* Fitzgerald develops what we might call a “new theory” of racial anxiety, one that more fully recognizes the intersectional pressures of race, gender, sexuality, and nation. Indeed, *Tender Is the Night* is a novel primarily concerned with the quest and failure to maintain a certain standard of masculinity in the face of such pressures and the devastating consequences this failure has not only for the white men who try to embody it, but for America as a race itself. When Americanness is collapsed into whiteness, it, too, must ultimately fail in an increasingly diverse, multi-racial world. In the world of Dick Diver, masculinity is simultaneously intertwined with and a liability to Americanness and whiteness. This relationship is fatalistically cyclical as Dick’s masculine failure is a broader racial failure and such a weakening of racial categories is, in turn, a failure of American masculinity.

Fitzgerald’s American Race

Fitzgerald’s lingering sense that the world was growing darker has specific consequences for the American man. In *Gatsby*, for instance, we begin to see Fitzgerald’s own conflation of American nationality with an American race—more specifically, a white, American race. In this, the haughty Negroes and the immigrant mourners pose the same challenge to an exclusively white American identity as does any racial ambiguity in the seemingly white Gatsby or Daisy. It is Tom, ultimately, that keeps this threat at bay for his own family by reclaiming Daisy into American whiteness, and Tom’s style of hyper-masculine violence, though criticized for its brutishness, serves its purpose: his marriage

¹⁴⁹ See: Chapter 4, p. 188. We see this theory at work in *Gatsby* as much in the conspicuous racial Others of the Queensboro bridge and in Gatsby’s own racial ambiguity as we do in Tom’s spouting of eugenicist tracts.

and family are secure, and his white privilege remains unshaken. Tom has, at least temporarily, served as the barrier between his civilization and the potential invading force of Gatsby's racial ambiguity. And yet, in *Gatsby* this conflation of Americanness and whiteness, the construction of an American race, is already at risk, what with upwardly-mobile Negroes, the relentless influx of immigrants, and increasingly indistinguishable whiteness. This American race is in a race against time and tide. It is a race, *Tender Is the Night* shows, against the changes that have empowered women and emboldened non-whites at the expense of the (white) American man.

In this, *The Great Gatsby* foregrounds the American identity crisis at play in *Tender Is the Night*. Fitzgerald started drafts of *Tender* the same year *Gatsby* was published (1925), and though it would take nine years to reach an incarnation of the novel that Fitzgerald would finally send to print, many of the same race anxieties return, amplified. In *Tender*, Fitzgerald's sympathies seem realigned, his ambiguity about difference in American identity more fixed. The same racial threat about which Tom blusters in *Gatsby* is present throughout *Tender*, but it's no longer ridiculous. *Tender* also seems more acutely aware of the interconnectedness of race, gender, sexuality, and nation, and the interlocking pressures they apply to whiteness and masculinity. In *Tender*, the racial threat to American whiteness cannot be staved off by the type of violent masculinity exemplified in Tom Buchanan because this masculinity has been stripped from the American man. The racial threat about which Tom has so ominously prophesized has become more insidious exactly because it does not simply strike at the question of one's race, but also one's gender and one's nation. It is perhaps for this reason that *Tender* seems even more deeply invested in sorting through the complexity of

racial categorization and seeking a solid answer to the question too many people seem to take for granted in *The Great Gatsby*: who all exactly is white here?¹⁵⁰

Tender Is the Night is the story of Dick Diver, a young, brilliant psychologist, and the trajectory of his decline. The novel presents a confusing chronology, alternating unevenly between past and present, burying the introduction of the main character in the middle section, and relying on a series of embedded textual flashbacks to provide the back-story of Dick and his love interest Nicole. Told chronologically, the story outlines Dick's introduction to the fragile, recovering Nicole Warren in the Swiss sanitarium in which he works. Nicole, who seems unable to recognize or recover from the trauma of being raped by her father,¹⁵¹ falls in love with Dick. They get married, have two children, and travel around the Riviera and greater Western Europe (thanks to Nicole's wealth). While traveling, they meet the even younger Rosemary Hoyt, the budding American actress who also falls in love with Dick, and with whom Dick will eventually consummate an affair. Nicole continues to deteriorate, but Dick pours all his reserve into

¹⁵⁰ With the suggested threat of miscegenation in *Gatsby*, one might also ask the related question: who exactly is all-white here? The difference seems, and I would argue is, largely rhetorical. As any "non-white" blood would effectively preclude whiteness, then to be white is necessarily to be "all" "white."

¹⁵¹ In *Racial Angles*, Nowlin describes Nicole's rape by her father as the "licentious father's rape of a (seductive) daughter" (105). Nowlin's parenthetical inclusion of the seductive possibilities of Nicole points to various readings of the rape that have implied the culpability of the child/daughter Nicole in the incest committed by her father. These readings are certainly in line with the novel itself, which is explicitly hostile to women and implicitly blames Nicole for her own illness and incestuous rape. Franz Gregorovius, Dick's colleague at the Swiss clinic, explains to Dick that Nicole "felt complicity" in the incest and it was "from sheer self-protection [that] she developed the idea that she had no complicity—and from there it was an easy slide into a phantom world where all men [are] evil" (130-1). The "phantom world," Franz implies is that in which Nicole has no complicity in the incest. This reading is extremely troubling, and in "Who Killed Dick Diver? The Sexual Politics of *Tender Is the Night*" (1984), Judith Fetterley notes that "[t]hrough raped by her father" it is Nicole who bears the responsibility of recovery (124). Nicole must learn throughout *Tender* that "what happened to her has no political significance, no bearing on the relation between men and women" (124). Fetterley points to the novel's disturbing path for Nicole that means "she must reject the idea that she had no 'complicity' in her rape" (124). For a critical reading to avoid calling the incestuous rape "rape" is to be complicit with the novel's misogynistic blaming of women in general, and specifically in blaming rape victims for their own assaults.

Nicole, slowly bringing her back to mental and emotional health until, as evidence of his success, she leaves him for another man. Nicole is cured and Dick fades into obscurity.

Readings of the novel that focus on this inverse trajectory of Dick's disempowerment and Nicole's empowerment, coupled with the repugnant strength of Nicole's pushy sister Baby Warren, rightfully recognize the novel's preoccupation with the increasingly destabilized gender roles of American men and women.¹⁵² If, the novel seems to argue, women didn't simultaneously need rescuing like Nicole, while they at the same time were trying to appropriate men's roles like Baby, the American man Dick Diver would be able to navigate his own masculine role and everyone—men and women—would be the better for it. With the destabilization of these roles, the blame for Dick's masculine failure is all too easily laid at the feet of women.

Yet, it is not, as many critics have suggested, simply a battle of the sexes that finally unmans Dick Diver. Rather, the threat to American masculinity is crystallized simultaneously in the seemingly meteoric rise of the New Woman, powerful and independent, and the complementary loss of racial, sexual, and national control she comes to represent. The novel is equally preoccupied with the increasing destabilization of race as a category, and, most dangerously for American white masculinity, the

¹⁵² A reading like Leslie Fielder's in *Love and Death in the American Novel* (1966) is typical in its blame of Nicole for Dick's fall. For Fielder, Dick embodies "innocence and the American dream" (313), while Nicole "unman[s]" Dick and is the "evil-eyed" destroyer of Dick's masculinity (314). Many feminist readers have offered less complicit misogynistic readings of Nicole's role in Dick's decline (while still accounting for her role), and suggest more helpfully that Dick's decline embodies male anxiety in the face of increasing power of the American woman. See especially Fetterley and also Sarah Beebe Fryer, *Fitzgerald's New Women: Harbingers of Change* (1988). Fryer argues that Fitzgerald was "emphatically alert to the revolution" of social change, particularly for upper middle-class American women, going on around him (1). Though, Fryer argues, Fitzgerald's women are meant to reflect a historical gender-shift at once confused and confusing, Fryer admits that "Fitzgerald's marriage to Zelda may have decreased his sympathy for feminine conflicts" (47). See also Marcy A. McCay, "Fitzgerald's Women: Beyond Winter Dreams" (1982). McCay argues that Fitzgerald judges the women of his novels more severely than he does the men (312). Fitzgerald, McCay argues, wants us to see the men of the novels as victims to the women's increasing power and emptiness.

interconnected relationship between race and gender particularly. Like *The War* that serves as the constant backdrop of the novel, masculinity in *Tender Is the Night* is itself in a battle on multiple fronts and Dick Diver is the inevitable casualty. While Dick may begin his sojourn in Europe fully secure in the promise of his own privileged identity, he is unable to disentangle himself from the increasing race and gender complications that arise around him and that ultimately challenge, and undo, his own sense of self. In “The Figure on the Bed: Difference and American Destiny in *Tender Is the Night*” (1988), Felipe Smith has pointed to this interconnectedness and locates the novel’s “interconnecting concerns with nationality, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality” (189), and yet, there are conspicuously few readings of *Tender* that work within this framework. One way to understand the reluctance with reading *Tender* within such a framework is because the novel itself is wary of such connections that finally undo the protagonist Dick. What’s more, as David Leverenz notes in *Paternalism Incorporated* (2003), the novel champions Dick and relies heavily on auto-biography, creating a dilemma for the reader who sees Dick in a less sympathetic light:

One of the great problems with reading *Tender Is the Night* (1934) is that the narrator presents his hero with keening empathy, though Dick Diver invites satire at every turn. These tensions come partly from Fitzgerald’s autobiographical investments, which help to make the narration so strangely caressing and self-pitying. (185)

Tender, Leverenz argues, is a “tender elegy for the hollowed-out honor of a leisured white patrician” (200). Drawing attention to such a reading is inherently uncomfortable as we must try to understand why Fitzgerald’s novel mourns the loss of white, southern

patriarchal privilege at a time when America has experienced the injustice of Jim Crow, the terror of white supremacy in the Klan, and the violence of race riots in major urban centers. To read Fitzgerald in light of American history carries with it discomfort to the more ethically-attuned reader, as Bryan R. Washington concurs in his reading of *Tender* in *The Politics of Exile* (1995): “whether one chooses to examine Fitzgerald’s fictions or his private, ostensibly nonfictional discourse, there are consistent and ultimately discomfoting ideologies that as a marginalized reader I find disturbing” (66).

The major problem with the critical literature that forgoes the potentially uncomfortable critical discussion of such impolitic ideologies is that it offers an incomplete reading of the novel. Indeed, despite the dearth of critical attention to indicate such, *Tender Is the Night*, I will argue, is a novel supremely concerned with American racial identity, particularly with the increasingly difficult task of differentiating between races and the impossibility of maintaining a standard of white American masculinity dependent on race and gender categories that must clearly be defined and differentiated. It stands as Fitzgerald’s most direct engagement with the consequences of identity politics for the white American man and predicts his inevitable decline.

Getting Burnt: The Fragility of American Whiteness

Tender Is the Night opens “On the pleasant shore of the French Riviera” (3), where we are introduced to the many Americans tourists interspersed amongst other tourists and locals on the popular beach and who are enjoying all the luxuries of being Americans abroad. With its serene backdrop and relaxing vacationers, the opening scene invites us to imagine a lifestyle of relaxed privilege, where drinks are served to you while you bask

in the sun and watch the surf on foreign shores. Yet, underneath the still waters of this opening beach scene bubbles a deep anxiety that surfaces here between various American characters who become increasingly concerned with the American bodies on the shore, and more specifically, how you know which are American bodies and which aren't. What follows in the first two chapters is the introduction to a novel-long meditation on race, here distilled to the American tourists' preoccupation with skin color. In the scene on the beach, the narrator's hyper-sensitivity to the white bodies dotting the shoreline is concentrated on Rosemary Hoyt, who herself is immediately "conscious of the raw whiteness of her own body" (5). Indeed, everyone around her seems conscious of the whiteness of her body. Rosemary is introduced to four Americans, distinguishable from the locals as these Americans are "the untanned people" (7), and one of the four, Mrs. Abrams—who, as the novel quickly clarifies, "was not a Jewess, despite her name" (7)—comes to her fellow American Rosemary to "warn you about getting burned the first day... because *your* skin is important" (7). As an actress, Mrs. Abrams suggests, Rosemary's skin is an important commodity. Yet hours later on the beach when Dick meets Rosemary for the first time, he, identifying her as a fellow American but unaware that she is an actress, is also concerned with her skin color: "I was going to wake you before I left" he warns, "It's not good to get too burned right away" (11). What both of these American parties press upon Rosemary is the importance of keeping one's skin as white as possible; whiteness is a commodity in and of itself to be sought or maintained, particularly, though not exclusively, for Rosemary whose skin is part of her selling-point as an actress. The novel itself seems equally preoccupied with the color of people's skin, both literally as a marker for racial difference (as in keeping Rosemary as white-skinned

as possible), and figuratively (in keeping white people as “white” as possible). Skin seems to offer an easy way to understand and categorize people. After all, the beach is separated between “the dark people and the light people” (6-7). Rosemary immediately identifies the Americans as the group “with flesh as white as her own [...people who] were obviously less indigenous to the place” (6). For Rosemary, as for the novel, the question of one’s skin helps to answer the question of one’s race and nation. As such, white skin is a commodity not just for the actress, but for everyone as it is a marker of one’s racial and national, “indigenous” identity. In the opening scene, skin color differentiates the Americans from their European counterparts: the Americans look whiter. The white skin of the Americans here is an important marker of their effective tourism abroad; unlike ignorant tourists who get burned, or natives who have browned in the French sun, these tourists have traveled successfully by avoiding the harsh sun and subsequent sun-burn. There is an immediate irony in the focus on whiteness in the opening passage: though the American tourists separate themselves from the dark natives, and clearly understand their own whiteness as superior, they are inherently vulnerable here on the browning shores of Old Europe. They must remain ever vigilant to not “go native.” The inherent lesson to the white American tourist is that to travel abroad successfully, you need to limit your interactions with the foreign environment—an environment always threatening to darken you, or worse, burn you.

In this, the opening scene functions as more than an allegory of Otherness by suggesting a clean, simple way of understanding difference—of particular importance in a novel that highlights the increasing difficulty in discerning such differences. Dick explains to Rosemary that this beach is particularly good for Americans because: “The

theory is [...] that all the Northern places, like Deauville, were picked out by Russians and English who don't mind the cold, while half of us Americans come from tropical climates—that's why we're beginning to come here" (17-8). Yet Tommy Barban, a "young man of Latin aspect" (18), muddies the racial and national waters when he points to the roster at their shared hotel:

“Well, what nationality are these people?” he demanded, suddenly, and read with a slight French intonation, “Registered at the Hotel Palace at Vevey are Mr. Pandely Vlasco, Mme. Boneasee’—I don't exaggerate—‘Corinna Medonca, Mme. Pasche, Mme. Paragoris, Apostle Alexandre’ [...]” (18),

the list of ambiguous names goes on and Tommy is unable to discern people's national identities. The Americans, it would seem, are surrounded by hordes of the ethnically ambiguous. The ability to use skin as a marker serves as an antidote to such ambiguity by providing a way to understand diminishing difference. Race and nation are understood as connected categories in this matrix: the “indigenous” others have darker skin; the Americans, lighter. It is a way to understand who does not belong to the community of white Americans. In the 1929 draft of *Tender*, Abe North cautions the protagonist (here named Francis Melarky¹⁵³) against entangling himself with an innocent black man he has attacked: “I'm all through with niggers—no more niggers,” said Abe.

¹⁵³ See Brucoli, *The Composition of Tender Is the Night* (1963). Brucoli details the reconstruction of twelve major drafts of the novel, which changed protagonists at least twice. Fitzgerald produced over 3,500 pages of holograph manuscript, plus galley proof, page proof, and tearsheets, representing seventeen separate drafts and three distinct versions of the novel. The ridiculously named Frances Melarky was the original protagonist in Fitzgerald's earliest 1925 drafts of the novel, which was to be a sensational novel of American expatriate life on the French Riviera, and whose plot centered on matricide. A second version from 1929, called *The Kelley Version*, introduces the character of Rosemary (who would survive as Rosemary Hoyt in the final version). The *Dick Diver* version of the novel—the third and “final” version of the novel—was drafted in 1932 and was entitled *The Drunkard's Holiday*, then *Doctor Diver's Holiday*, and finally *Tender Is the Night*.

‘Once I had two [sic] many, more than you ever saw so I had to hide in my apartment and the maids were all furnished with a color chart so nobody could get in below a certain shade of tan’” (qtd, Smith 201). Abe’s “color chart” doesn’t make it in the final published version of *Tender Is the Night*, but the opening sequence of the novel suggests that the spirit of such a color chart does remain. Color differentiation is what immediately connects Rosemary to the American community abroad, and it is the tie that seems to bind them together. Beyond the beach, the novel remains as conscious of American whiteness as Rosemary is of her own “raw whiteness” in the opening scene. But unlike in the beach scene, whiteness throughout the novel becomes increasingly difficult to identify and maintain, and by the end of the novel, it is neither an adequate category for identifying Americans, nor does it seem to tie them together.

The problem of maintaining one’s race is a specifically gendered problem and has the most severe consequences for white American masculinity in *Tender Is the Night*, the figurehead of which is surely Dick Diver. That the problem for white American masculinity is that it is as raced as it is gendered is perhaps no more evident than in the “race riot” scene in Paris, where Dick and Nicole’s friend Abe North has gotten inextricably involved in an intra-racial fight that leaves one black man dead and intrusively abandoned in the young Rosemary’s hotel bed, and leaves Dick to clean up the mess. A superficial reading of the race riot scene, including the Peterson death, might suggest the disruptive presence of the Afro-Americans and Afro-Europeans in *Tender* is largely superfluous to the novel—after all, the interlude does little to propel the actual plot forward—yet the presence of these black characters serves a vital function in

understanding Dick's identity and the novel's underlying anxieties about white masculinity.

Fitzgerald uses what Toni Morrison identifies throughout American literature as the "Africanist" presence of the black Other to define Dick in his whiteness in contrast to the chaotic blackness around him. Whiteness is "contextualized" by appearing "in conjunction with representations of black or Africanist people who are dead [...] or under complete control" (33). It is thus that whiteness can "function as both antidote for and meditation on the shadow" of such blackness (33). As such, the dead Peterson is the ultimate example of what Morrison calls the "serviceability of the Africanist presence" (76). In *Tender*, the violent (and dead) black characters are the literal embodiment of such an Africanist presence, yet the real problem for Dick is not that black identity is used to define and offset white identity, but that the two identities can't be untangled. The superficial mess, the matter of the dead body, Dick can clean up with ease. But the deeper problem for Dick—the challenge that is presented by the racial and gender Other—is not so easily cleaned up, and what the scene reveals is not the clear distinction between black and white, but the ambiguity of Dick's own identity and the shifting terms on which he tries to stand. For Dick, the episode shows the failure of white detachment from foreign (including black American) problems and identity, the failure of white American exceptionalism, and the failure of white masculine control over his own fate.

The problem, the narrator explains, starts with Abe North, the Divers' American friend who is also touring Europe. Abe, a white, flailing, alcoholic musician has somehow

succeeded in the space of an hour in entangling himself with the personal lives, consciences, and emotions of one Afro-European and three Afro-Americans inhabiting the French Latin Quarter. The disentanglement was not even faintly in sight and the day had passed in an atmosphere of unfamiliar Negro faces bobbing up in unexpected places and around unexpected corners, and insistent Negro voices on the phone. (106)

Abe has entangled himself by enlisting one “Negro” as his witness, and then wrongfully accusing a “Negro [at] the bistro” of stealing his money, which subsequently leads to the arrest of a different, though apparently indistinguishable “Negro restaurateur” (106). Abe’s mingling with these black men has led to a paranoid surfacing of unavoidable blackness all over the city. They are popping up in bars, cafes, and finally, dead in Rosemary’s hotel bed. This uneasy ubiquity of the black characters is further marked by their seemingly interchangeability. The confusion of Abe’s criminal charge (blaming one, than arresting another black man—both unconnected to the crime) parallels the uncomfortable interchangeability of such characters for the novel itself: with the final exception of an identified dead Jules Peterson, it’s never quite clear which black characters are which, or from where, exactly, they come (both in terms of their national identities and their propensity to seem to come out of nowhere as they pop up around the city), suggesting that these black identities, like those of the necessarily black criminal, are collapsible. Even Jules Peterson’s identity is confused. When Abe calls Dick about Jules, he identifies Peterson as “a Negro from Copenhagen” (99), but when Abe introduces Peterson to Dick, Peterson is a “colored man” from Stockholm (105).¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ The spelling of Peterson’s name with the “-on” ending would suggest that he is intended to be from Sweden, despite the trouble the Americans have in keeping his nationality straight. John Hanson Mitchell’s

While Peterson's national identity seems to be questionable, his racial identity remains fixed. The most important aspect of his identity, like that of the criminals, is his blackness. The French police seem emblematically befuddled by blackness when they come to Nicole's room searching for the absent Abe North. "We have arrested a Negro," they explain to her "We are convinced we have at last arrested the correct Negro" (96). They have, of course, arrested the wrong "Negro," though the reader, too, is ultimately unable to sort through the nameless, faceless black characters who haunt the text with their movement in and out of jails, bars, and violent encounters. In the end, all we know is that one black man is dead, and that his murderer roams free about the city, identifiable only by his blackness.

That the only black people in the novel run about thieving and murdering each other, or ending up victims of intra-racial violence, makes it easy enough to see the faceless pan-Afro-national black men as representative of a more general fear of non-whiteness throughout the novel. But the problem for *Tender* seems to be less that black people are killing each other, and more that whiteness gets dragged into it, and finally dragged down by it. When the murdered Jules Peterson ends up in Rosemary's bed, Dick cleans up the situation with a figurative erasure of the black body. Dick drags the body into the hallway and makes it disappear by arranging for the hotel manager to remove the body thereby ensuring no possible connection can be made to Dick or any of his white friends in the unfortunate matter. Dick's persuasiveness is of course connected to his

Looking or Mr. Gilbert (2005) offers another possibility by suggesting that Peterson is an American expatriate. Peterson, Mitchell insists, "must have been based on [Robert Alexander] Gilbert" (214), an African-American from New England who landed in Paris after a failed attempt to make shoe-polish in Stockholm, Sweden in 1927. Gilbert was the assistant to white American William Brewster a nineteenth-century ornithologist and conservationist. While Gilbert did arrive in Paris from Sweden, having failed in the shoe-polish venture, like Peterson, there the similarities end, and it seems unlikely that Fitzgerald, who seemed largely unconcerned with black American expatriates in Paris (among them many well-known writers and artists), would have been familiar with Gilbert.

own position as a rich, white American tourist, and he leaves it to the hotel manager to be a maid in his own hotel, effectively cleaning up after Dick's race-problems. Dick masterfully convinces the hotel manager that his actions are done in "exquisite consideration for the hotel" and only asks in reply that the hotel "keep my name out of it. I don't want any French red tape just because I discovered the man" (111). Dick's real concern in this scene is less the red tape than it is the potential connection to blackness. Dick has made a point to try to forcefully separate himself from this situation before, when he insists to Nicole, "Look here, you musn't get upset over this—it's only some nigger scrap" (110). The implication here is that this situation is inherently raced, such violence inherently black and that it is unconnected from Dick's presumably more civilized whiteness.

Yet, despite what I am suggesting are Dick's attempts at separating himself and his white identity from this scene, the race-riot scenario has its roots in Fitzgerald's biography. In an entry in his *Ledger* in May of 1929 reads: "Nigger affair—Buck, Michell in prison. Dane." (qtd. Brucoli, *Epic* 278). Though the details from his *Ledger* are sparse, the connections are easily made. The "Nigger affair" becomes a "nigger scrap;" the "Dane" becomes the Swedish (or Danish) Jules Peterson; "Michell," presumably an acquaintance now in prison, is erased from the fictional account; and "Buck," Fitzgerald's generic moniker for black men, is easily interchanged with any of the interchangeable black and violent characters in the race riot. In his memoir, *That Summer in Paris: Memories of Tangled Friendships with Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and Some Others* (1963), author Morely Callaghan fills in some of the missing details of

Fitzgerald's *Ledger*, including Fitzgerald's own part in the ordeal. Callaghan visited Scott the night after the incident and describes the conversation:

Last night he had been in a night club, he said. His wallet had been stolen. He had accused a Negro, the wrong Negro, and the police had come; there had been a humiliating scene, then long hours of police interrogation as he tried to undo his false accusation yet prove his wallet had actually been stolen. The accused man and his friends had turned ugly. (163)

Despite Fitzgerald's own culpability in this episode, when this episode appears in Fitzgerald's ledger, it has been re-written to exonerate himself, and re-written in its fictional form in *Tender* to exonerate whiteness in general. Indeed, Fitzgerald's *Ledger* entry and the *Tender* re-writing of the incident work to extricate Fitzgerald from any dealings with black people in Paris, a trend that seems to carry over to much of Fitzgerald's time abroad.

Despite Paris's large and active African-American expatriate community of authors, poets, entertainers, and WWI U.S. veterans in the 1920s,¹⁵⁵ Fitzgerald makes little mention of any interactions with his black fellow Americans, an especially surprising omission considering the large number of prominent black authors in Paris in the 1920s and 1930s. It is, as Washington suggests, that Fitzgerald "either did not know or chose to ignore that Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, and Jessie Fauset were [his] neighbors" (65).¹⁵⁶ One notable exception is Fitzgerald's frequenting of a popular

¹⁵⁵ African-American musicians, authors, poets, and soldiers, particularly, flocked to Paris, as Stovall explains, as "the city offered them a life free from the debilitating limitations imposed by American racism" (26).

¹⁵⁶ See also: Michel Fabre, *Le Rive Noire: De Harlem à la Seine* (1985); and Petrine Archer-Straw, *Negrophilia: Avant-Garde Paris and Black Culture in the 1920s* (2000). Archer-Straw notes that many

Montmartre club, La Grand Duc, where popular African-American Bricktop (Ada Louise Smith) singer performed (Stovall 44). As Bricktop became a popular Parisian fixture, she opened her own club, “Bricktop’s,” also in the Montmartre neighborhood, “the undisputed center of black expatriate life in Paris” through the thirties (Stovall 47), and the same neighborhood in which Abe launches his “race riot.” Scott and Zelda became “favorite patrons” at the nightclub (Brucoli, *Epic* 234). According to Tyler Stovall in *Paris Noir: African Americans in the City of Light* (1996), Fitzgerald even professed, “my greatest claim to fame is that I discovered Bricktop before Cole Porter” (45). Bricktop makes a fictional appearance in Fitzgerald’s “Babylon Revisited” (1931), when the protagonist Charlie strolls toward Montmartre, where he passes “many Negroes [...and] a lighted door from which issued music, and [he] stopped with the sense of familiarity; it was Bricktop’s, where he had parted with so many hours and so much money” (620). Yet, though Bricktop would become a backdrop for Fitzgerald’s “Babylon Revisited,” and Montmartre would become the locale of *Tender*’s race riot, Fitzgerald’s personal interactions with any other black people, American expatriates or not, are fully lacking from his *Ledger* or stories. And, as Stovall notes, “F. Scott Fitzgerald’s love of Bricktop [...] did not hinder him from writing notoriously racist passages about blacks in one of the great novels of American expatriate life, *Tender Is the Night*” (80).

While Fitzgerald disassociates himself with the “Nigger affair” in the sparse details of his own *Ledger* (with no mention at all of his role as the accuser), and tries to disassociate Dick from association with such affairs in *Tender* (by making the failing Abe

white artists and authors sought out black culture and black artists in Paris as a way to challenge certain bourgeois values.

the accuser and describing the violence as explicitly between black men), the roots of the race-riot are clearly more complicated than being some intra-racial black-on-black violence. Such a raced incident in *Tender* has as much to do with white identity as it does with black identity.

The scene, though set in France, has strong ties not only to Fitzgerald's biography, but also to a national American biography. Even while living abroad, Fitzgerald would certainly have been aware of the race riots in America that happened in the years before he began writing *Tender*. The late teens of the early twentieth century were riddled with racial violence; there were so many and such violent race riots in the summer of 1919, for example, that it became known as the "Red Summer" for the amount of blood spilled in riots around the country. It was a summer that marked the "largest wave of race riots in American history" (Stovall 27). There were no fewer than 26 and as many as 56 separate, violent race riots during that summer, which, though marked by the intensity and frequency of inter-racial violence, was only a banner year in an increasingly consistent American phenomenon (Voogd 5). The race riots were well covered in national and global newspapers, and a *London Times* article in September of that year rightly placed race riots at the heart of the "race question" in America: "Another race riot, this time in Omaha, accentuates the fact that the United States is still far from finding a solution of what is when all is said and done the most difficult [...] of her social problems" (qtd. Voogd 124). Though 1919 marked the peak of race rioting in America, there were significant race riots in subsequent years like the major anti-black race riots in Ocoee, Florida (1920); Tulsa, Oklahoma (1921); and Rosewood, Florida (1923). In Tulsa at least 300 people (potentially countless more)—mainly blacks—were killed (Voogd

161), making it the worst race riot in United States history. The riot was so large and the consequences so far-reaching that the Oklahoma Commission to Study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921, a commission whose very establishment in 1997 suggests the weighty legacy of these riots, began work in finding mass and unmarked graves of potential victims and estimates that the number of deaths could be as high as 3,000 (Oklahoma 109-32). The inter-racial violence of the Red Summer of 1919, and subsequent race riots brought to the forefront of the global stage the continued tension for Americans between blacks and whites, a tension that resonates throughout *Tender*.¹⁵⁷ While these race riots would remain part of the American consciousness for years to come, what's interesting about Fitzgerald's race riot in *Tender* is the way in which the racial violence has been re-written. Historically, "race riots were events in which white mobs inflicted violence on a group of black people, or on a black community as a whole" (Voogd 13), but in *Tender*, though Abe North seems to have sparked a violent reaction by accusing the "wrong Negro" of stealing his wallet, the violence is entirely committed on black people by black people. The race riot in *Tender* embodies the common fears of a perceived threat from a black community, but plays them out without white violent participation, implicitly implying white innocence and victimization. Unlike the actual race riots in America, whites seem to be largely innocent bystanders to the black violence of *Tender*, left to sort through the carnage and try to reassert control over the situation. Like Fitzgerald's own

¹⁵⁷ The legacy of these race riots was far-reaching. In 1997 in Oklahoma, a Tulsa Race Riot Commission was created to study the riot and provide recommendations for restitution. Their report was delivered in 2001 and suggested direct financial reparations for survivors of the riot and their descendants. The Oklahoma state legislature fell far short of these recommendations when it passed the "1921 Tulsa Race Riot Reconciliation Act," which established a memorial, scholarship fund, and economic development in the largely black neighborhood of Greenwood (Schmidt A22).

re-working of his biographical “Nigger affair,” here the incidents of America’s biography are re-written in a way that seems to exonerate whiteness.

When the confused and upset Rosemary confronts Dick to ask “Do all the Americans in Paris just shoot at each other all the time?” Dick’s answer, “This seems to be the open season” is true enough, though somewhat disingenuous (111). Unlike the race riots in America where large white crowds mobbed blacks, the Americans shooting each other in *Tender* are black assaulters and black victims and direct white participation in race rioting violence has been erased. What’s more, the American identity of the assailants is secondary to their identity as black, both rhetorically as Afro-Americans and in their identification throughout the novel as seemingly nation-less black faces, suggesting that these men aren’t *really* American; they’re Afro-American, or black from America. Further, such violence is itself, Dick insists, intrinsically racial (“only some nigger scrap”). The racial nature of violence is all the more obvious when we juxtapose an earlier scene in which there has been a “gun duel” between the American would-be novelist Albert McKisko and the half-American half-French mercenary soldier Tommy Barban. It is a duel in which both miss and no one is hurt, suggesting that unlike the blacks in the novel, you wouldn’t find white people actually killing each other; they only play at it.

In Dick’s handling of the race riot scene and subsequent death of Jules Peterson, he seeks to separate himself from what he understands as a black situation. His disdain for such blackness encroaching on whiteness is seemingly easily remedied in Dick’s metaphorical erasure of the black body, a solution reminiscent of the erasure of black individualism in the novel. That blackness threatens to sully whiteness is signified in the

body of the dead black man in the bed of white Rosemary Hoyt in a hotel full of white tourists. Peterson's very blood becomes a source of tension for Dick when he realizes that Peterson's blood will seep through the bedclothes and stain the bed. Indeed, when Dick prevails upon Nicole to switch out the sheets, Peterson's blood is a permanent reminder of the black violence that killed him, yet also, importantly, connects blackness to another, earlier crime. The blood-stained sheets, evidence of Peterson's body and death, are here tied to Nicole's first sexual encounter (the incest with her father), even to Dick himself as Nicole collapses the trauma of seeing Peterson's blood, her rape, and her life with Dick together in her incoherent outburst that Dick cannot control:

Nicole knelt beside the tub swaying sidewise and sidewise. "It's you!" she cried, "—it's you come to intrude on the only privacy I have in the world—with your spread with red blood on it. I'll wear it for you—I'm not ashamed, though it was such a pity [...]"

"Control yourself!"

"—so I sat in the bathroom and they brought me a domino and said wear that. I did. What else could I do?"

"Control yourself, Nicole!"

"I never expected you to love me—but was too late—only don't come in the bathroom the only place I can go for privacy, dragging spreads with red blood on them and asking me to fix them."

"Control yourself. Get up— " (112)

The locus of Dick's lost control lies both in Nicole's outburst and Peterson's body and stages what Smith calls a "quintessentially American sex/race dilemma in Paris" (189).

For Smith the American ex-pats' time in Paris shows that American idealism, embodied in Dick Diver, has begun a "protracted and painful decline" (189). The Peterson murder particularly illustrates for Smith that the "'freest' of Americans" like Dick and Nicole who have fled their native shores, have only "accelerated their decline" (Smith 189). Yet Dick has far more to lose than Nicole as *Tender* defines this decline as a particularly white American masculine loss. Smith notes that "Fitzgerald's examples of his generation's violent demise portray American loss of vitality as a white male phenomenon" (195). American loss is a white male phenomenon because in *Tender*, I would further suggest, these identities are synonymous: a strong white masculinity makes a vital America.

Dick's impossible task throughout the novel is to re-assert a white American masculine control. In the Peterson episode, for example, Dick can get rid of the criminal evidence of any racial intermingling from the race riot, but the figurative white-out of the black body remains a fruitless gesture to whitewash the racial story at work throughout the novel; far from keeping himself "out of it" as he appeals to the hotel manager to do, the scene shows, instead, how deep Dick is into it. Whiteness, specifically American whiteness, is heavily implicated in the ordeal. Peterson has become involved, and consequently ends up dead, at the behest of the white American Abe North who believes himself the victim of inter-racial theft; earlier on, Abe knows he has put Peterson in danger, and admits, "it's entirely my fault" (105). Critics have been right to notice that the Divers' close and ill-fated friend Abe North comes with heavy allegorical baggage. As David Leverenz has suggested, "'Abe' [is named] for Abe Lincoln, and 'North' for the unfortunate winner of the civil war" (197). In earlier manuscripts, Fitzgerald

considered an equally heavy-handed allegorical name and Abe North was going to be Abe Grant,¹⁵⁸ recalling both the president and the general who led the charge to free the slaves who seem now, a generation later, reduced to nameless characters who commit theft, intra-racial violence, and murder. It is, after all, the one Afro-European (Peterson) who is named and who dies at the hands of the Afro-Americans whose nameless identities are those of thieves and murderers. Such a legacy for the North, the novel seems to suggest, may be entirely appropriate. Far from being the savior of the Union, General Grant, according to Dick, “just invented mass butchery” (57). Abe’s involvement with the current “race riot” he has launched in Montmartre is almost sloppy in its allegoric connection to America’s Civil War. Thus, after yet another “incorrect” Negro has been wrongly jailed, Abe (Lincoln, champion of the) North fights to free a black man from imprisonment whose name is, perhaps unsurprisingly, Mr. Freeman. Abe’s involvement with the black men in Europe, his efforts to free the black Freeman, paint him as a distorted caricature of his Civil War predecessors, a gross projection of the consequences of the Northern triumph and of a future where race-mixing is dangerous and even deadly. The scene points to the novel’s critique of the Northern failure to deliver its promise of a peaceful, multi-racial world. That Peterson himself comes to Abe and Dick for (white) protection, but is ultimately murdered while waiting for such, helps only to re-emphasize that critique.

The allegory is as troubling as it is heavy-handed. As Leverenz aptly sums, “It’s as if to say, this is what happens when you free the slaves; they kill each other and blacken your honor” (197). That we learn that Abe himself dies back in New York at a speakeasy only seems to confirm the seemingly obvious lesson that the mixture of black

¹⁵⁸ See: Brucoli, *The Composition of Tender Is the Night* (xix).

and white races is destructive, and that the legacy of Abraham Lincoln and the victory of the North is tainted not only for the blacks who can't seem to handle their freedom, but for the whites who must clean up after them and try to avoid entanglement with them.¹⁵⁹ The Civil War, as Milton Stern notes in "*Tender Is the Night* and American History" (2002), has left a tarnished American identity. Stern argues that the "corruption of the legacy of Lincoln in the legacy of the Grant administration is encompassed in the devolution from the great Abe of the North to an Abe North whose drunken ruin of his great promise is the debauched national heritage after the war" (106). But if Abe represents the failure of a post-Lincoln, multi-racial America, Dick represents the inability of white America to fully re-assert its dominance and ensure its success. For Stern, *Tender* chronicles post-war loss (99).¹⁶⁰ For Dick, I am suggesting, this loss stems not only from the national confusion following World War I, but has its roots in the racial confusion following the Civil War where *Tender* locates the initial loss of white masculine control. It is a loss embodied in an impossible standard of white masculinity that Dick tries, and ultimately fails, to maintain as it demands a separation from and dominance over populations that are now increasingly ubiquitous and powerful in a post-war world. In this sense, Dick is a nostalgic hangover of a bygone era in which one's

¹⁵⁹ Though the details of Abe's death (presumably a murder) are left ambiguous, his seeming propensity to start race-riots suggests how he meets his final ending. The racial intermingling associated with Abe points to what may very well be his fundamental problem, which is his own failure to maintain a certain white masculinity. Abe is debilitated by his drinking and emasculated by his wife. What's more, while his first name carries with it connections to President Lincoln, his full first name, Abraham, ties him to a potentially Jewish identity and when Rosemary first meets him, she describes his face as having "the high cheek-bones of an Indian" (9).

¹⁶⁰ Stern also highlights that part of the "complex interweaving of themes" in *Tender* is the "pattern of nationality and race that begins near the opening of the novel and that initiates the theme of America and Europe" (98). Thus, part of the "world in transition" with which Dick must learn to cope is the transition of secure racial and national identities (116).

race and gender identity was secure in one's national identity. It is a similar nostalgia to what Amory Blaine feels in *This Side of Paradise* (1920) when he imagines:

how much easier patriotism had been to a homogenous race, how much easier it would have been to fight as the Colonies fought, or as the Confederacy fought. And he did not sleep that night, but listened to the [immigrant] aliens [of New York] guffaw and snore while they filled the car with the heavy scent of latest America. (139)

Notably, Amory thinks fondly of the ease of patriotism for the Confederacy, not the Union. We might ascribe such nostalgia for the simpler Confederate past to Amory's growing liberal disillusionment, as critic Craig Monk suggests. Monk notes that, "Amory's personal development is hindered throughout *This Side of Paradise* by the reality behind his observation that American society is changing all around him, complicating any attempts to take his bearings within the volatile social milieu of the second decade of the twentieth century" (63). After all, as Scott Donaldson suggests, such disillusionment parallels Fitzgerald's own general disenchantment with the American political, and even social, scene until the 1930s ("Political," 314). And yet, such disillusionment with the present reveals a disturbing undertone when we consider that Amory's response to an unfulfilling present is to glamorize a gory past. For Amory, as for Dick, a homogenous American race as fought for by the Confederacy is implicitly a *white* homogenous American race, one increasingly difficult to maintain.

The "race riot" scene is a window into which we begin to see the failing of just such American whiteness. Despite taking place entirely on foreign shores with an international cast, this racial moment is for the narrator, and for Dick, a distinctly

American moment. Though Jules Peterson is presumably a Swedish National, the narrator can only understand him in an American context, and describes him as “a small respectable Negro, on the suave model that heels the Republican party in the border States” (106). That the narrator can only understand racial difference in an American context, despite being in Europe and despite the person in question being Swedish, begins to reveal some of the limitations of the novel’s definitions of racial difference, and the necessary problem of maintaining American whiteness dependant on easily identifiable and simplified, definable racial differences. What’s more, though Dick insists the whole incident is necessarily connected to blackness, the narrator presents an even more simplified understanding of race that collapses racial difference into whiteness and non-whiteness. This reduction is again obvious when Peterson is racially coded as being “in the position of the friendly Indian who had helped a white” because of his assistance to Abe North (106). The novel here seems to suggest some sympathy for Peterson, who, after all, was being a “friendly Indian” for the white Abe. Yet, the employment of the “Indian” here is hardly neutral. Where Native-American identity surfaces in Fitzgerald’s 1920 short story “Bernice Bobs Her Hair,” it is to suggest a way of setting Bernice apart and making her unpredictable, even potentially violent. Her “crazy Indian blood” makes her strange and is meant to explain away her odd behaviors (31), and she impulsively decides to dramatically cut her hair, which is compared to getting “scalped” (47). In the race riot scene of *Tender Is the Night*, the Indian connection highlights the savagery of the other Afro-Americans and Afro-Europeans (in the analogy, they are the un-friendly Indians); a friendly Indian, the episode suggests, is as rare as a peaceful Negro. What’s more, the analogy collapses identities of racial otherness together in peculiarly American

terms. The betrayed Indian/Negro was after Peterson, the friendly Indian/Negro, for his racial disloyalty. When Peterson ends up dead, Dick makes sense of the situation in similar, particularly American racial terms:

Certain points had become apparent to [Dick...]; first, that Abe's first hostile Indian had tracked the friendly Indian and discovered him in the corridor, and when the latter had taken desperate refuge in Rosemary's room, had hunted him down and slain him; second, that if the situation were allowed to develop naturally, no power on earth could keep the smear off Rosemary (110).

That Dick understands the situation as simultaneously an American "nigger scrap" and a distorted re-enactment of American Cowboys-and-Indians suggests that for Dick, racial difference is a category lacking nuance. For Dick, there is only whiteness and those who threaten to compromise whiteness, just as Peterson's dead body has literally smeared Rosemary's sheets with blood, and threatens to smear her reputation if it becomes public knowledge that she's had a black man in her bed (dead or not). That Dick sees himself as the protector of Rosemary's virtue and reputation, virtue he was more than ready to compromise in the same bed moments before the interruption, nods to Dick's need for strict, hierarchical definitions not only of race, but also of gender.

Despite his insistence otherwise, Dick's need to protect all his white friends indicates that he is painfully aware that it's all too easy to become entangled in what he'd rather dismiss as "nigger" business. The narrator's assessment that for Abe, "disentanglement was not even faintly in sight" is prophetic not only for Abe, but for Dick as well (106). For Abe, this entanglement seems to have compromised him fully,

and when Rosemary first sees the dead black body, she “had the preposterous idea that it was Abe North” (109), as though Abe’s entanglement with this black community has thrown his own racial identity into question. It is not simply the presence or invisibility of a black presence, but the encroaching non-whiteness that is represented in it, that is the broader threat to Dick. The real threat for Dick Diver is the breakdown of easily discernable categories of identity (here black and white) upon which his identity, and his dominance, as a white American man have relied. It is a loss of privilege that Leverenz describes as the “grandly civilized entitlements of the leisured white gentleman,” which are “yielding to aggressive women, homosexuals, and too many people of too many different colors” (186). This convergence of lost entitlements is no coincidence; it is the underlying suspicion of the novel that the loss of control of a certain type of white racial purity is directly connected to the loss of control over women.

Unmanning the Race: American Women and White Decline

Dick’s loss of racial control is hardly just that; instead, it is complicated by *Tender’s* sense of national and gendered loss, as well. Nicole’s rape by her own father points to such troubled intersections in the race-fraught means of control inherent in incest, or in Dick’s attempts to control Nicole first as her doctor and then her husband both at home and abroad. These intersections of race, nation, and gender particularly must be read together to fully understand Dick’s decline. Such an intersection is easily seen in the race riot scene—with its heavy allegorical American baggage—where Dick’s inability to control his wife or his aborted consummation with Rosemary is collapsed with the threatening presence of the black body from which he cannot fully dissociate himself.

These interlocking pressures upon Dick are seen again where they become manifest in Dick's own "scrap" in Rome. A drunk Dick fights with an Italian cab-driver over his fare, an argument that lands him in a fight with the Italian police. He is beaten and hauled to jail screaming racial epithets: "Are there any English? Are there any Americans? Are there any English? Are there any—oh, my God! You dirty Wops!" (228). Dick is so degraded that Nicole's sister Baby Warren must come to the rescue. In a flurry of speaking French and Italian, Baby saves Dick from his racial clash. Ironically, Baby's effectiveness at saving Dick is part of the indictment of her and American women in general against whom Fitzgerald himself famously ranted. In a 1922 interview, for example, Fitzgerald complained: "Our American women are leeches... They simply dominate the American man" (Marshall 27). A year later, when Zelda revealed in an interview that "[Scott] says that all women over thirty-five should be murdered," Fitzgerald clarified "I mean [the women who] demand continual slavery from their men" (Wilson 58). For Fitzgerald, women's power implies not only an upheaval of gender, but of race as well, as such women cast their (white) men into slavery. Fitzgerald goes on in the interview to criticize the women who "couldn't attract men; therefore she decided to fight them" (Wilson 56). Such women are found throughout *Tender*, like the American painter whose body lies ravished with a mysterious skin condition in Dick's Swiss institution. She admits to Dick that in her misery: "I'm sharing the fate of the women of my time who challenged men to battle" (184).

There is no better example of such a warrior woman than Baby Warren. Baby is flagrant and unlikable in her flaunting of non-feminine power. She, is described as a "tall restless virgin," and explained away as "a compendium of all the discontented women

who had loved Byron a hundred years before, yet, [...] there was something wooden and onanistic about her” (151-2). She had, the narrator notes, “certain spinsters’ characteristics—she was alien from touch” (172). The novel is fixed on Baby’s inability to secure herself in a traditional feminine role: though she is the older sister, she remains unmarried and sexually unfulfilled (as the novel refers to her in virginal, masturbatory, and spinster terms). A failure at expectable and acceptable femininity, Baby must exude a compensatory and unattractive masculinity. She is a stand-in for the “man” of her family as she guards and deals in Nicole’s “best-interest.” Her own position, particularly over the Warren family money, gives her emasculating power over Dick, a power that says: “We own you [Dick...] It is absurd to keep up the pretense of independence” (177).

Unlike the woman who lays both literally and figuratively prostrate in the institution, Baby makes no apologies for herself or for her challenge to traditional masculine roles. Instead, she wields her war to ensure Dick’s release from his Italian jail cell. Baby insists on seeing the American Consul, who is reluctant to intervene on Dick’s behalf. But his reluctance “proved of no avail: the American Woman, aroused, stood over him; the clean-sweeping irrational temper that had broken the moral back of a race and made a nursery out of a continent was too much for him... Baby had won” (232).¹⁶¹ What Baby has won is Dick’s freedom, but this win is coupled with a greater, gendered loss. As Baby Warren physically stands over the Consul to enforce her will and free Dick, the threat she symbolizes to America masculinity looms over an entire nation. The “American Woman” of which Baby is symbolic has “broken the moral back” of both the

¹⁶¹ That Baby’s emotional hysteria overpowers the men around her is only more evidence of her deviance. As Carroll Smith-Rosenberg outlines in *Disorderly Conduct*, “Hysteria could result from a secret and less forgivable form of sexuality [masturbation]” (206). Such sexual deviance is hinted at in Baby’s introduction as “onanistic” (masturbatory).

male and American race and has stripped the American man of his manhood, infantilizing the entire nation and making “a nursery out of a continent.” It is a powerful indictment of her own power and an ironic pun on Baby’s name. Baby’s ability to wield power here saves Dick, but is, in itself, a challenge to Dick’s masculinity. The hero is powerless and must be rescued here by a heroine, one as terrible as she is dominant. In this racial intermingling and Baby’s consequent rescue (with her own linguistic multi-nationalism), Dick must realize his defeat: his race and gender power have been compromised—he has been beaten up by an Italian and saved by a woman. The narrator, from Dick’s own point of view, understands this humiliation as one intrinsically racial and can do nothing about it but rage impotently against the “dirty Wops,” and this, he admits to himself, is not the behavior of a “mature Aryan” (233).¹⁶²

Dick’s decline throughout the novel, climaxing with his need to be rescued from the racial Other by the gendered Other, is coupled with his own increasingly ambiguous racial identity. On his way to the Italian courthouse, Dick is even mistaken by the crowd for an Italian, one, markedly, who is being tried for a familiar familial gendered crime: the rape and murder of a five-year-old girl. Yet, instead of rejecting this Italian identity, a “jovial” Dick stops in front of the crowd: “I want to make a speech... I want to explain to these people how I raped a five-year-old girl. Maybe I did—” (235). While being manhandled by Italian officers, only moments after Baby has emasculated him in her rescue, Dick’s attempted speech is his final attempt to assert any sexual power he can, even sexual power via rape of a

¹⁶² Earlier drafts of this scene reveal an important shift in Fitzgerald’s sense of Dick as a “mature Aryan,” or, in this case, a failed one. In the Melarky Papers (the version of the novel when Dick Diver is named Francis Melarky”), Francis, like Dick, is beaten up by the Italian police, but says, instead, his behavior is not that of a “Western man” (Brucoli, *Composition* 293). In a later draft, Fitzgerald replaces “man” with “Aryan” (293). And in the published draft, this becomes “mature Aryan” (233). As critic Felipe Smith argues, this transition from “Western man” to “mature Aryan” shows Fitzgerald highlighting a “historical turning point for in the future well-being of the ‘Aryan’ male” (197)

five-year-old girl. While he is being mistaken for the Italian offender, Dick's apparent (tasteless) joke that he *is* that Italian rapist ends in an uncertainty about his identity that links him to Nicole's father/rapist and confuses his racial identity further by conflating his loss of control over Nicole (whom he cannot sexually control as her father did, and who will consequently leave Dick for another man) with his loss of control over his own racial status as he is taken in by Italians and taken for an Italian.

Baby's intercession to save Dick in a flurry of foreign languages, and the novel's clear distaste for Baby points to the connection of the loss of racial control (here in being locked in an Italian jail and being mistaken for an Italian) and loss of control over women (in having to be rescued by his wife's domineering sister). American women like Baby, Nicole, and even Rosemary are eroding the power of American men, and are thus pivotal in America's racial decline (seen as dependant on white masculine control). Despite the attention I have paid to the racial Others in the novel, the most obvious challenge to white masculinity throughout much of Fitzgerald's work is often the women within the work. The general distrust of women pervades the novel not only in a character like Baby whom Dick clearly does not like, but also in the two women who receive Dick's attention, admiration, and even love: Nicole may be mentally ill, but her illness secures what she wants and needs; Rosemary Hoyt, the budding America actress and Dick's love interest, may be young and sexually inexperienced, but her "innocence" only contributes to Dick's continuing decline. The central, antagonizing role women play is re-played in the ample amount of critical literature that is interested in gender identity in the novel, particularly the rise of powerful women. Critics have long joined Dick in assailing the women of *Tender Is the Night* who are often understood as dangerous representations of America's "New Woman," a figure

Fitzgerald himself publicly decried. Nicole Diver receives the lion's share of direct blame for Dick's fall. Critics have supported readings of the novel with Dick as a "martyr" to Nicole's mental illness (White 55, Gray 8), an "innocent victim" (Coleman 237), even the sacrificial Christ (Qualls 192, McBride 28). Nicole is conversely a "villainous lovely heroine" (Wasserstrom 8), "a neurotic" (Gregory 5), and a "psychopath" (Colum 22, Gray 8); "slowly she sucks [Dick's] strength" from him (Light 18).¹⁶³ This last reading of Nicole is particularly monstrous, and James L. Tuttleton directly connects Nicole's increasing, grotesque strength to Dick's failure by casting her as the undead-queen of "female vampirism" (238). She "drains [Dick] of his vitality, his inexhaustible energy, his very self" (244). She is a "sinister destroyer who drains a man of his vital energies, leaving him spent and empty of a self" (244). It's important to note that these readings aren't necessarily misreadings of Nicole in *Tender Is the Night*, nor do they differ from readings of other women in this novel or even many of Fitzgerald's other novels and stories.¹⁶⁴ Indeed, works like *Tender* readily lend themselves to this type of misogynistic sympathy for heroes like Dick, especially when we recognize the easily traceable inverse decline of Dick Diver and the steady incline of female empowerment in the novel. Yet, few critics have considered the gendered implications of such readings or produced scholarship that challenges such readings. It is after all, as Leverenz suggests, with an "admiring misogyny" that Fitzgerald's

¹⁶³ Likewise, perhaps since *Tender Is the Night* is such a heavily autobiographical novel, criticism that considers Zelda and F. Scott in terms of the novel always faults Zelda for her part in Fitzgerald's 'fall.' In one explanation for Fitzgerald's famous alcoholism, for example one critic notes that the Fitzgeralds' happiness ended "when Zelda became a serious schizophrenic [sic] and Fitzgerald, pulled up short by this disaster, found himself an alcoholic" (*my emphasis*, Mizener 160). Here, Zelda is blamed for her mental illness, becoming the schizophrenic that drives the couple to their unhappy ends, while Fitzgerald seemingly happens upon a drinking problem (the cause of which, it is implied, is Zelda).

¹⁶⁴ Much of the criticism that is openly hostile toward the women of *Tender* peaks in the 1960s, though Tuttleton's vampire article was published in 1984. While criticism published after the 1970s (notably after rise of feminist criticism) is often less openly hostile, much of it is still complacent with misogynist readings of the novel, if not necessarily with the misogynist language directed toward the women of the novel.

narrative attacks women, blaming them for the sad fate of the good doctor (191). The critical problem with complying with such a reading of the novel is not only its implicit sexism, but that it offers only a superficial understanding of the complex relationship between race, gender, and nation in *Tender Is the Night*, and gives an incomplete understanding of what's really at stake for white American masculinity.

Critics like Fetterley have been calling for the re-evaluation of this type of criticism since the late 1970s. The problem of such misogynistic criticism is amplified in *Tender*, as Fetterley argues in "Who Killed Dick Diver?: The Sexual Politics of *Tender Is the Night*" (1984). The very act of reading the novel, Fetterley argues, "is to participate in the evocation of sympathy for Dick Diver, the victim of his culture, and to engage in the concomitant hostility toward that which has destroyed him" (114). Instead, if as readers and critics we refuse to demonize Nicole or the other distasteful women of the novel, even as the critics and novel itself suggest we do, and ask why the novel is so invested in such a depiction, we see that Nicole is only a symptom of a broader gender crisis at work in the novel, one that too readily faults women for the increasing lack of control enjoyed by white men. Indeed, Nicole is demonized precisely because she oftentimes rests outside the control of Dick, whose masculinity is dependent on such control, not only over gender categories and roles, but racial, sexual, and national ones as well.

The question of the "American Woman" looms large in the novel. While some women come to represent the breakdown of stabilized identity, others offer a glimpse of a type of American womanhood that has largely been replaced by its "New" and dangerous incarnation. Women like the "gold-star muzzers [mothers]" who have come to visit their

sons' graves in France help Dick construct a nostalgic vision of a bygone American era (100).¹⁶⁵ As Dick watches the procession of women from his café seat:

Over his wine Dick looked at them again; in their happy faces, the dignity that surrounded and pervaded the party, he perceived all the maturity of an older America. For a while the sobered women who had come to mourn for their dead, for something they could not repair, made the room beautiful. Momentarily, he sat again on his father's knee, riding with Moseby while the old loyalties and devotions fought on around him. Almost with an effort he turned back to his two women at the table and faced the whole new world in which he believed. (101)

Dick's nostalgia here is certainly in line with Stern's reading of the novel in which he calls *Tender* "a great American novel about history, a chronicle of post-war loss of the kinds of identities associated with stable societies, social altruism, and personal responsibility. The story of Dick Diver is a microcosm of that history" (99-100). The dignity of these women is in their connection to an America Dick believes to be overshadowed by the order of his "new world," their happy faces suggesting their commitment to their maternal (and patriotic) duty. In these women Dick sees a vision of the America lost after the Great War, a beautiful America where mothers tend their sons, boys can look up to their fathers, and one's loyalties and allegiances are clear. Yet, while Dick's nostalgia certainly indicates a general sense of American loss after World War I,

¹⁶⁵ "Gold-star" mothers refer to American mothers who have lost children in war; a gold star replaces the customary blue star of the military flag that is often hung in the window of a family to honor a deceased veteran. From 1930 through 1933, the U.S. government organized, funded, and conducted trips for over 6,500 mothers and widows of fallen soldiers from World War I. These women visited American cemeteries in Belgium, England, and France. See: John W. Graham. *The Gold Star Mother Pilgrimages of the 1930s* (2004).

particularly a gender-loss, it also betrays Dick's own loyalties and devotions. His memory of lost childhood innocence recalls John Singleton Mosby, a Confederate flash-fighter made famous for his voraciousness against the Union during the Civil War and his ambush raids against Union soldiers. John Singleton Mosby was the "single-most-hated Confederate in the North" (Ramage 5). He was known in the North as "the devil;" a murdering marauder and war assassin. In the South, Mosby was immortalized in folklore and legend, even in dime-novels and bed-time stories, and he "became a romantic hero of the Southern people" during and after the Civil War (Ramage 6). He was a symbol of the Confederacy's resistance, and Dick's romantic nostalgia for John Singleton Mosby aligns him with particularly Confederate sympathies. That Dick would romanticize these national memories is troubling in and of itself. In *The Illusions of a Nation: Myth and History in the Novels of F. Scott Fitzgerald* (1972), John F. Callahan is particularly disturbed by Dick's sense of the "Old loyalties and devotions":

These ideals mean one thing in the *legend* of chivalry and another in the *history* of America, particularly that of the South. Slavery and aristocracy; toil and leisure; white virgins worshipped, black women raped. In repetition of his personal fantasies and desires, Diver superimposes chivalric legend upon gruesome history. (*emphasis in original* 132-3)

For Dick, these memories lie untroubled by such scrutiny or historical reality, yet they reveal a certain gender and racial hierarchy upon which such an "America" relied, one in which the white American man enjoyed the full privilege of his identity, much at the expense of those around him. This loss, like the specter of the Civil War itself, is always present in the background of the novel, like the strains of "Dixie" playing in the novel's

closing pages: “Oh, way down South in the land of cotton/ Hotels bum and business rotten/ Look away—” (295). Fitzgerald’s humorously amended verse (“Hotels bum and business rotten”) suggests the failing of the traditional South glorified in the song’s popularized lyrics. The loss of this America Dick wistfully laments in his rose-colored memories of an America gone by, his memories living out the original first verse of “Dixie” where the singer wishes he were back South where “old times there are not forgotten.”

Like the Gold-Star mothers who represent to Dick a lost American identity, the other women of the novel are heavily burdened with national symbolism. The changes in American life and identity that Dick mourns are themselves embodied in the women of the novel. Nicole, Mary North, and Rosemary are made particularly symbolic as “representative of the enormous flux of American life” (53). Their backgrounds reveal the shifting standards of American identity:

Nicole was the granddaughter of a self-made American capitalists [...and] of a Count of the House of Lippe Weissenfeld. Mary North [...] a descendant of President Tyler. Rosemary was from the middle of the middle class [...] Their point of resemblance to each other and their difference from so many American women, lay in the fact that they were all happy to exist in a man’s world—they preserved their individuality through men and not by opposition to them. They would have all three made alternatively good courtesans or good wives not by accident of birth but through the greater accident of finding their man or not finding him. (53)

What their symbolic status reveals is the shifting racial grounds on which American identity tenuously stands. Rosemary's ascendancy from the middle class is compared with Nicole's Saxon lineage and Mary's Presidential pedigree. Rosemary is seemingly a woman without a racial history; she can neither provide bloodline or heritage. Yet, while she cannot account for this "accident of birth," her racial history seems less important than her perceived gender dependency on and acquiescence to the men around her. Rosemary is able to make up for her ambiguous racial past by her appropriate gender role. With Rosemary, Nicole and Mary seem to eschew the type of threat to American men that Baby Warren presents. Yet this passage is equally revealing in the status of women in the novel at large. That they would make equally good "courtesans or wives" betrays the novel's sense of how women are, or ought to be: at the pleasure of men. As Fryer notes in *Fitzgerald's New Women* (1988), the "patriarchal tradition" at work allows men to "view women as something less than fully human" (89). For Fryer, the novel allows Fitzgerald to "capture[] the nature of the impact conventional male chauvinism could have on a woman of his era" (71). Certainly readers can trace the effects of patriarchal privilege on a character like Nicole, who is a victim of her father and doctor-husband's attitudes and actions born from patriarchal tradition. Yet Fryer's argument offers an incomplete reading of the role of women in the novel. While the novel certainly reveals the effects of patriarchy on women, it seems less convinced by or concerned with the effects of such patriarchy as much as the pending failure of patriarchy, particularly in its ability to maintain the type of control it exerts over women. For while Nicole and Mary (with Rosemary) seem not to threaten men's position the same way in which a

strong woman like Baby Warren does, they actually offer the larger threat to patriarchal control, control that is implicitly and necessarily white patriarchal control.

It is perhaps because Nicole and Mary in particular are troubled with their symbolic burden of “American life” that they are such a threat to it. Unlike Baby Warren, who can be dismissed as “a trivial, selfish woman” (179), a woman who is defined in relation to men exactly in her “opposition to them,” Nicole and Mary are women who seem to be perfect complements to the American man: they are from long-standing American lines and their very identity (either as courtesans or wives) depends on the men around them. Yet while these women may represent the racial lineage of America’s past, they also represent the seeds of its racial destruction. Mary, the descendant of American presidents and wife of ill-fated Abe North, becomes the Contessa di Minghetti, wife of the ambiguously raced “Conte di Minghetti” whose name is given in quotation marks in the novel as it “was merely a papal-title” (258). The Count’s actual identity is questionable. He also has an “Asiatic title” and Dick disparagingly refers to him as “Buddha” (259). His riches come from his being the “ruler-owner of manganese deposits in southwestern Asia” (258). Yet, despite the Count’s Italian/Asian identity, Dick makes American sense of him by describing his skin color: “He was not quite light enough to travel in a Pullman south of Mason-Dixon” (258), which is to say, in America, the Conte di Minghetti would not be considered white.¹⁶⁶ Implicit in Dick’s Americanizing of the Conte di Minghetti is that in America,

¹⁶⁶ The Pullman was the sleeper car named after George Pullman, whose Pullman Company built extremely popular, upscale sleeper cars and rented out to railroads (Tye 3). The Pullman cars were explicitly for white customers only and the Pullman company hired black men, exclusively, to serve as “Pullman Porters” for these sleeper cars (Tye 2). A large reason Pullman insisted on hiring black men (and the darker skinned, the better) was to maintain the “social separation” between the black porter and the white guests (Tye 3). Pullman was certain that “trained as a race by years of personal service in various capacities,” black porters would be ideal to maintain this racial separation (Bates 17). For Dick, the Conte

if the former Mary North were to head south, her relationship would be considered miscegenation.

Dick's understanding of the Conte's not-whiteness means that as wife to a non-white husband and stepmother to his "very tan" children (259), Mary betrays her own white racial identity. Mary is opportunistic, to be sure. Dick considers her current situation with a light-hearted contempt: "Little Mary North knows what she wants [...] Abe educated her, and now she's married to a Buddha. If Europe ever goes Bolshevik she'll turn up the bride of Stalin" (259). Dick seems more troubled with Mary's own empowerment from man-to-man than in any particularly racial movement. Yet, of course, female sexual empowerment implicitly includes racial instability, and the novel's focus on her new husband's racial difference echoes early American concerns about white women who could become instruments of "race suicide" in their alignment with non-white men. Proponents of theories of American white race suicide worried not only that white women were not having enough children (particularly compared to non-white immigrant women who were having many children), but, even worse, that they could potentially have non-white children themselves. Miscegenation is, in this sense, the ultimate challenge to white patriarchy. It attacks white men both in gendered and raced terms. Thus, Mary's gender empowerment is inherently a threat to her race. As Priscilla Wald explains in *Constituting Americans*, Race Suicide "evidently resulted from a challenge to the reproduction of established gender roles as well as to the reproduction of children. And the crisis facing the *literal* 'American' (traditional white middle-class) family threatened the nation, the metaphoric 'American family,' with potential

di Minghetti's racial position aligns him not with the white passengers of the Pullman cars, but with their black servants.

extinction” (*emphasis in original* 245-6). President Theodore Roosevelt himself tied the threat of Race Suicide to women’s changing, increasingly empowered roles (T. Dyer, 150). Mary’s challenge to American whiteness is exactly the same as her challenge to American masculinity as by threatening one, she necessarily threatens the other—by asserting an uncharacteristic feminine empowerment (here in her opportunistic marriages), she has forgone a white racial identity. Dick’s resistance to accepting Mary’s new position and his belittling of her new husband (made more belittling when he mistakes the Conte’s sister for a servant, as Dick seems to have trouble telling non-whites apart) is hardly surprising since he, as the white, male American, stands to lose the most in such gender and racial upheaval.

That American women pose a substantial threat to this civilization, and the white male privilege implicit in it, is seen not only in the degeneration of Mary North née Tyler (and now Minghetti) from an alliance with American presidents to racially ambiguous miners, but in the degeneration of Dick’s own family, most particularly in Nicole. When Dick first met Nicole, she was “a Viking Madonna” (33) and “had been white-Saxon-blond” (67). When she was in the Swiss sanatorium under Dick’s medical care, she was “white and fresh and new in the September afternoon” (159). Yet, when the reader finally meets Nicole, her “hair had darkened” (67), and her skin is “ruddy, orange brown” (6), with her “brown back” offset against a white string of pearls (16). The racial ambiguity of Nicole, her own racial threat to Dick’s whiteness, is further emphasized in the name of their daughter “Topsy,” which implies a racially troubled identity at best. It seems strange that Fitzgerald would allude to the young slave girl from *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* who is described as “one of the blackest of her race” (Stowe 351), but no more so

than when Nicole herself babbles in a section of the novel written in Nicole's first-person, mimicking a disjointed diary entry that encompasses the first few years of the Diver marriage: "You tell me my baby is black—that's farcical, that's very cheap. We went to Africa merely to see Timgad, since my principal interest in life is archeology" (161). Archeology is not, of course, Nicole's principal interest in life. Yet while archeology does not resurface in the novel, the possibility of her baby actually being black does lurk in the shadows of the novel in the naming of their daughter.

The final blow to Dick's masculinity is one explicitly racial and gendered in losing Nicole to a man who is racially and ideologically impure: the half-French, half-American mercenary soldier Tommy Barban. Barban stands in barbaric contrast to his counterpart Dick, whom Nicole first met, after all, in his American uniform. It is, in fact, Tommy's very foreignness that attracts Nicole:

His handsome face was so dark as to have lost the pleasantness of deep tan, without attaining the blue beauty of Negroes—it was just worn leather. The foreignness of his depigmentation by unknown suns, his nourishment by strange soils, his tongue awkward with the curl of many dialects, his reaction attuned to odd alarms—these things fascinated and rested Nicole. (269)

It is this 'foreign' influence that helps Nicole abandon Dick. As Fryer argues, Tommy's influence helps her realize "that she is capable of, and indeed entitled to a certain amount of self-assertion" (91). Here, the multiple aspects of Dick's failing white masculinity collapse into one in the most tangible way: Nicole has become empowered beyond her previously attractive dependant femininity by a foreign mercenary, one whose racialized

features reduce him to a resemblance in race, face, and deed to “an earnest Satan” (294). Brown-skinned, foreign-born, and violent, Tommy Barban is “less civilized” than Dick (19), and the brute qualities of his “race” show through in that he “was moved by an irresistible racial tendency to chisel for an advantage” (310), an advantage he presses against Nicole to finally woo her away from Dick. As Leverenz notes, Nicole’s abandonment of Dick and new alignment with Barban has greater allegorical implications:

Nicole’s affair with her manly barbarian allegorizes the new United States, where the modern woman’s unregulated sexual desires can couple with mercenary conquest. Faced with such fragmented products of his degraded and degrading country, Dick’s capacity for chivalric leadership fades to a humiliated social spectacle. (191)

Dick’s marital failure reflects a broader national failure and Nicole succeeds where Dick must fail, in a world where power is not concentrated in a singular conception of white masculinity. The broader crisis at work in *Tender* is that this failure is not just of masculine or racial identity, but a subsequent loss of national identity. Shifting understandings of race and gender identity mean a complete re-evaluation of American identity, and the void left for characters like Dick Diver seems to offer few alternatives.

American women like Mary and Nicole become the wives of oriental and racially ambiguous foreigners and are further signs of American racial decline. Fitzgerald himself spoke of such “decline” of the “American race” in interviews in which he credited Oswald Spengler’s *Decline of the West* as his “bed-book” (Salpeter 275). *Decline of the West* was first published in German as *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* in

1918 and foretold of the waning and inevitable decline of Western culture, with the Western man as its tragic figure. Fitzgerald explained that “Spenglerism signals the death of this civilization” and agreed particularly that the American race wasn’t tough enough to withstand the rise of other cultures and races. Fitzgerald complained that “[t]here is now no mind of the race” (Salpeter 275). The Americans throughout the novel have, too, symbolically lost their identity. It is a preoccupation in more than one place in Fitzgerald’s fiction. In *Tender* the narrator describes “Europeanized Americans” as having “reached a position where they could scarcely have been said to belong to any nation at all, at least not to any great power though perhaps to a Balkan-like state composed of similar citizens” (287). It is identical to the description Fitzgerald uses in his 1931 short story “Hotel Child” where the narrator describes Americans who have been abroad too long in a verbatim description (with the single replacement of “hardly” for “scarcely,” 600). The preoccupation with the Europeanized-American would have been familiar to readers of Henry James’s “Daisy Miller” (1878) of course. Also familiar was a popular concern in American immigration debates, one focused on the American immigrant rather than the American emigrant. President Roosevelt warned “the man who does not become Americanized nevertheless fails to remain a European, and becomes nothing at all” (qtd. T. Dyer 7). In *Tender*, the warning is reversed, and the problem may very well be that there has been too much assimilation in America and, conversely, of Americans. While Dick has been abroad, American identity has shifted—his daydreams of “an older America” are compared to the harsh reality of the Americans that surround him: the black American men whose mobility, violence, and ubiquity confuse his own white racial purity, and the American women whose power and self-assertion confound

his sense of American masculinity. Dick himself hardly belongs to any nation at all because the America he left behind—the America of old loyalties—exists only in his nostalgic daydreams. It is the loss of his American identity—one dependant on strong white American patriarchs—that finally undoes Dick Diver. After he hears the news of his father’s death, Dick bids farewell not only to his own father, but to the America all lost fathers have come to represent: “Good-by, my father—good-by, all my fathers” (205).

The Final Dive

Fitzgerald’s depiction of the fate of Dick Diver in what he called Dick’s “dying fall,” is similar to the long, inevitable fall of the West that Spangler prophesied in his *Decline of the West*. Fitzgerald assured H. L. Mencken in 1934 that “the motif of the ‘dying fall’ in *Tender* was absolutely deliberate” (*Life in Letters* 256). The long trajectory of Dick’s decline does not so much end with a bang as it does with a whimper. In the last two pages of the novel, Dick is preparing to leave for America, and returns again to the Riviera beach on which the reader first met him in the opening pages of the novel—the beach Fitzgerald himself walked years before. It is the beach where Tommy complained of the difficulty of determining one’s national identity, where we first saw Nicole’s now browned body, and where Rosemary was warned against burning her skin. Dick looks out across the shore and imagines he is the last man on earth: “...Then he would not have to look at those two other figures, a man and a woman, black and white and metallic against the sky....” (313). Dick’s final vision, his final wish that he did not have to face a man and a woman, black and white together, is a sad

reminder for Dick of the America to which he will return and the world he now faces. Dick Diver has no real place in this world and thus will return to Buffalo and fade into obscurity.

By the time *Tender Is the Night* was published, Fitzgerald meant Dick's story and long, dying fall, to be the centerpiece of the often-changed novel, and Fitzgerald never felt at ease with the "final" product. Though *Tender* was serialized and published in 1934, the author never considered the novel finished. Over the course of nine years it took to write *Tender*, Fitzgerald worked intermittently on the novel and produced seventeen drafts and three distinctly different versions of the story (Brucoli, *Composition* xv). It wasn't until 1932 that Fitzgerald began drafting the version of *Tender* that would include Dick Diver (Brucoli, *Composition* xxiii). Yet even with Dick as the main character of the novel, after publication of the novel and until the author's death Fitzgerald lobbied unsuccessfully to have the novel reprinted in a "final" draft, which was to be more chronological and would more sharply focus the story arc on Dick. Though Brucoli insists that the "structure of the novel is not complicated and makes no heavy demands on the reader" (*Epic* 367), Fitzgerald himself deeply regretted the structural disjunctions, particularly as they obscured Dick Diver's central story. In a 1938 letter to his friend and publisher Maxwell Perkins, Fitzgerald wrote of *Tender*: "It's [sic] great fault is that the true beginning—the young psychiatrist in Switzerland—is tucked away in the middle of the book. If pages 151-212 were taken from their present place and put at the start the improvement in appeal would be enormous. In fact the mistake was noted and suggested by a dozen reviewers" (*Life in Letters* 372). The author's central concern for the novel, that it did not do enough for the "young psychiatrist in Switzerland," hints at a deeper connection for Fitzgerald to the material, Dick Diver

particularly. In the end, Fitzgerald, too, felt he had somehow betrayed Dick Diver, somehow lost something.

When *Tender* was published, Zelda Fitzgerald was in Craig House, a private psychiatric clinic in New York State, and she read it in serialized form. She wrote Scott multiple letters regarding *Tender* and expressed her admiration for the novel and her sense of the central tragedy of the novel: “It is tear-evoking to witness individual belief in individual volition succumbing to the purpose of a changing world” (*Correspondence* 341). She encouraged him in multiple letters to ignore the “silly reviews” that, she assured him, underestimated the novel (351): “And *don't* let them discourage you. It [*Tender*] is a swell evocation [sic] of an epoch and a very masterly presentation of tragedies sprung from the beliefs (or lack of them) of those times which bloomed from the seeds of despair planted by the war and of the circumstance dependent on the adjustment of philosophies—” (352). The “adjustment of philosophies” needed in the “changing world” are the ones Dick himself seems unable to make. Critic Milton Stern agrees with Zelda, and describes *Tender* as “about a world in transition, when established values crumble, when human society’s idea of goodness, stability, and moral purpose are lost in corruption [... it is a tale of] one good man ruined in that process of change and, in his way, representative of it, in all its sad and tremendous history” (116). What ultimately undoes Dick Diver is that in *Tender is the Night*, goodness, stability, and moral purpose are tied to white patriarchal American control—a control that cannot last and an identity that cannot hold.

Conclusion

Have I read *The Great Gatsby*? I am the
Great Gatsby!

-Sean “P. Diddy” Combs

In 2003, the Human Genome Project finished the full genetic sequencing of the chemical base pairs that make up the DNA of every human being. It was a scientific undertaking and revelation of biological knowledge that few, if any, could have imagined at the beginning of the twentieth century. Yet at least one revelation from this project would have been particularly relevant, and potentially deeply troubling, to those a century earlier: there is, the Human Genome Project suggested, no genetic basis for race.¹⁶⁷ As historian Nell Irvin Painter succinctly explains in her recent *The History of White People* (2010): “race is an idea; not a fact” (ix), most certainly not a biological fact. With this in mind, during an interview with Painter, the online magazine *Salon* asked the next logical question: “does the human genome project hail ‘the end of race’?” (Rogers). It’s a question reminiscent of that asked about “white America” after the election of Barack Obama. Does such new information, such a challenge to the status quo of our national understanding of race, identity, and power ultimately mean not only the breakdown of the dominance of one racial group, but of the very category of race itself? If the underlying anxieties of these questions are similar, so, too are the answers: for even if race may not be a genetic reality as leading science suggests, it is a persistent and enduring category of understanding, and though a non-white President is in office, whiteness still pervades the

¹⁶⁷ See: “Race in a Genetic World,” *Harvard Magazine* (2008). Human beings are 99.9% genetically identical and within that .1% of genetic variation, 85% of the difference occurs within geographical-distinct populations, suggesting that small amount of genetic variance between humans is heavily dependent on environment (63). What’s more there is no genetic test that can verify a person’s race or ethnicity (63).

American consciousness. As Painter explains, just because race may not be hard-wired into our DNA doesn't mean it's not hard-wired into our national consciousness: "Some people say race is in our national DNA so that we just can't get away from it. I don't know if we ever will" (Rogers).

Understanding, defining, and wielding "race" has been, as Painter points out, "our national sport," and there's no better example of this, or of the constructed nature of race, than the national obsession with whiteness. After all, what the Human Genome Project strongly suggests is that race, rather than being an immutable biological fact, is a socially constructed subjective category. Such information is, in many ways, simply a confirmation of what many had already suspected about whiteness. In his 1984 "On Being White...And Other Lies," for example, James Baldwin argues that whiteness is a "moral choice (for there are no white people)" (92). What's more, the created-ness of whiteness, Baldwin explains, has a particularly American legacy. After all, "[n]o one was white before he/she came to America. It took generations, and a vast amount of coercion, before this became a white country" (90). The insistence on America as a white country—as well as the constructed nature of that whiteness—is certainly easy to locate in the eugenicist and nativist movements of the early twentieth century that sought to rarify whiteness and yoke it to a national identity. Yet the legacy of America as a "white country" and the constructed-ness of that national whiteness is perhaps most evident not in the story of how whiteness was bifurcated, but in the reunification of whiteness that followed in its wake.

As I argue throughout this project, the restrictive definitions of whiteness in the early twentieth century—specifically in certain gender contexts—made it increasingly

difficult, even impossible, to actually be white. Perhaps exactly because of this impossibility of being white, and because of increasing shifts in gender roles and women's rights, by the 1930s this more exclusive whiteness was replaced with a broader, more inclusive vision of whiteness in America. Certainly the highly restrictive immigrant legislation of the 1920s had helped quell fears of an over-inclusive whiteness, but more pressingly, whiteness—understood as a hierarchy that definitionally limited the number of “whites” in America—was faced with a “new racial alchemy generated by African-American migration to the North and West” (Jacobson 8), one that threatened to overwhelm the now dwindled ranks of whites.¹⁶⁸ In response, Jacobson explains,

whiteness was reconsolidated: the late nineteenth century's probationary white groups were now remade and granted the scientific stamp of authenticity as the unitary Caucasian race—an 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. (8)¹⁶⁹

This new sense of race “obscured many of the ambiguities in turn-of-the-century racial classifications” and simplified and expanded whiteness (Guterl 155). Racial dialogues in America in the 1930s and 1940s became increasingly (re)focused on the politics of segregation and a black-white American racial dichotomy and “by the 1950s what was

¹⁶⁸ In *The Color of Race in American: 1900-1940* (2001), Matthew Pratt Guterl also credits this move to a unified whiteness to “the Great War, the Great Migration, the foreclosure of European immigrant, and the mergence of a national popular culture obsessed with ‘the Negro’” (155). The result, Guterl explains, is that many Americans “replaced their old-fashioned nativist distaste for European immigrants with a negrophobic concern about black folks strikingly reminiscent of the Jim Crow South” (155).

¹⁶⁹ Much of this racial reconsolidation can be traced in the courts, where increasingly whiteness was being understood as “Caucasian” (and legally defined) as referring to anyone was not black. A white person, the courts upheld, was a “person without negro blood” (Jacobson 234). Indeed, the term “white person” was not removed from American naturalization law until 1950 (244).

‘forgotten’ was that there had ever *been* distinct races [within whiteness] in the first place” (Jacobson 246). Race in America “ceased to concern the white races of Europe and came to refer exclusively to black-white relations,” and the multitude of white ethnicities, which in earlier decades would not have been considered white at all, were joined together in an inclusive new American whiteness under the more-encompassing umbrella of “Caucasian” (247). Thus non-whites who had so recently threatened American whiteness by too rapidly arriving to America’s shores became the means of shoring-up white American identity for the twentieth and twenty-first century against the threat of overwhelming blackness.

Yet despite the fluidity of white identity, the loss of rarified whiteness in America would seem to bring us back to the original question in the Introduction, one we can ask equally of the twentieth or twenty-first century: is this the end of white America? The literature of the early twentieth century does chart a failure of American whiteness as those like Lothrop Stoddard or Tom Buchanan saw it. Paradoxically too rigid while too mutable, too exclusive while too permeable, and too dependent on strict gender definitions during a time of shifting gender power, American identity understood as rarified whiteness defined by specific Anglo-Saxon heredity did come to an end. Yet that dominant culture in America (in our media, entertainment, and other various standards of normalcy) is still largely understood as white culture white itself indicates that “white America” is still very much alive. Even more telling: that American culture is largely assumed to be—though not often explicitly identified as—white points to the survival of a residual whiteness despite any setback caused by its failure in racial (or as we understand it today, ethnic) exclusivity. Despite any national fervor in the early twentieth

century that may have suggested whiteness needed guarding, whiteness has proven consistently resilient and pliable, reclaiming those as easily as it had previously excluded them, and shifting its boundaries to ensure its continued national supremacy.

Certainly Tom Buchanan wouldn't be happy with this—such whiteness would certainly include Gatsby, not to mention the Eastern-Europeans on the Queensboro Bridge—but Tom's consolation prize is continued white dominance in America, specifically white male dominance (because though Daisy's potential Irish identity may not remain an impediment to her whiteness, her gender would still be a racial—and political—liability in twenty-first century America¹⁷⁰). Besides, the further lesson from the literature of the early twentieth century shows that white America has always been in flux, shifting and struggling, raging battles against racial definitions and national corruptions, compromising itself in who it sacrifices and who it somehow still lets in, but all the while moving toward its ultimate survival. In this sense, there has never been a white America in the way that Tom Buchanan imagines it. Difficult to define and impossible to achieve, Tom's myth of limited and restrictive white identity is revealed throughout American literature to be just that: a myth. Instead of Tom's understanding of whiteness, American whiteness is continually re-imagined so that it can remain dominant, ubiquitous, and invisible—paradoxically impossible and omnipresent. As such, there is no end to whiteness, only ever-adapting evolutions so that the “end” of white America only means a transition into a new understanding of American whiteness. While Hua Hsu asks in “Will anyone mourn the end of white America?” (49), we might be better

¹⁷⁰ Much in the same way as Barack Obama's race was at the center of commentary regarding his candidacy, so, too, was Hilary Clinton's sex and gender at the center of commentary regarding her candidacy. And, much in the same way as white candidates were not the subject of debate as to the role of their race (made invisible in their whiteness), the sex and gender of male candidates was not the subject of political angst (it, too, made invisible in their maleness).

served to ask: would anyone actually notice? After all, the fear that “white America” is going to end (or, more alarmingly, has already ended) is built on a mythology of American whiteness that supposes whiteness has been a stable, static identity, instead of the shifting, amendable category of understanding American history and literature shows it to be.

In a 2001 interview, African-American hip-hop music mogul Sean “P. Diddy” Combs sought to situate himself for a British newspaper audience as the quintessentially American self-made man: “Have I read *The Great Gatsby*? I am the Great Gatsby!” (Eshun). While, like Gatsby, Combs is famous for his conspicuous wealth and extravagant parties, considering Gatsby’s ultimate fate, one would think Gatsby a dubious role model—particularly considering the racial implications of Gatsby’s failure. Perhaps, the article’s author Ekow Eshun suggests, Combs is undaunted by Gatsby’s unfortunate ending, because unlike Gatsby, Combs isn’t worried about his beginning:

Gatsby found it ultimately impossible to escape his humble origins, Combs has no such concerns. Far from hiding his roots he does the opposite, insisting upon, and even exaggerating, his connection to the streets of New York in order to offer himself as a brand name for black urban culture. Fitzgerald, the laureate of the jazz age, would have found it difficult to countenance that blackness could be a social asset. (Eshun)

Unlike Gatsby, a potentially dubious identity, one even specifically rooted in non-whiteness is, for Combs, an asset rather than a liability. In this sense, Combs’s claiming of Gatsby’s legacy only further illustrates the failure of exclusionary whiteness—as well as the complicated interplay of race, gender, and nation as Combs claims “Americanness”

by aligning himself with a certain version of male whiteness. After all, it could be argued that Sean Combs makes a better Gatsby than Gatsby himself is finally able to make. Yet, considering the “modish Negroes” of *Gatsby* or the murdering Afro-Americans and Afro-Europeans of *Tender Is the Night*, Eshun is right to note that Fitzgerald would have found it difficult, to say the least, to see blackness as anything but a liability. Yet at its most basic, any hesitation Fitzgerald has at seeing blackness as a social asset is alive today, echoed in the questions of pundits who worried over Obama’s race and wondered how the candidate’s blackness would play out in the national election that had only ever chosen a white man. Such anxiety over race (not coincidentally over race as understood as non-whiteness) suggests that a fundamental belief in America as a white nation—despite the ebb and flow of whiteness, despite the scientific evidence that race has no genetic basis—still dominates our national vision. Yet is this whiteness more secure or less secure at a time when Sean Combs can not only claim *Gatsby* as part of a national legacy not limited to whiteness, but actually claim to be Gatsby? Does such a claim show the failure of whiteness or merely its continued pervasiveness and invisibility? Moreover, could a woman make the same claim? Nearly a century after *Gatsby* was published, the only thing Combs’s Gatsby reference seems to do clearly is to reaffirm the role of literature, as Walter Benn Michaels describes it, in the “privileged position [...] as the carrier of cultural heritage” (*Our America* 141), and I would add, as central to our national understanding of racial identity. Otherwise, Sean “P. Diddy” Combs as Gatsby or not, white America remains a topic largely of questions; we would be well served to turn to our literature to seek the answers.

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