

Applying Strategies of the Snobographer: Charles W. Chesnutt's Use of Thackeray in Two "Blue Vein Society" Stories

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"To name our tradition is to rename each of its antecedents,
no matter how pale they might seem." – Henry Louis Gates, Jr.¹

ABSTRACT

No fiction writer wrote substantively about intra-racial snobs among African Americans before Charles W. Chesnutt. In his "Blue Vein Society" stories, this snobbery is acutely expressed through moneyed cultural edification in "The Wife of His Youth" as well as in blatantly racial terms in "A Matter of Principle." Long an admirer of *Vanity Fair*, Charles W. Chesnutt shared with the early Thackeray a keen interest in satirically exposing the hypocrisy of the haughty "higher" society. In this contribution, I attempt to demonstrate the impact of Thackeray's works on the strategies of Chesnutt's depictions of the African American snob.

KEYWORDS

Chesnutt, Thackeray, intertextual studies, snob, signifying, *Vanity Fair*, American short story

Introduction

In a number of acclaimed books on literary theory in the last two and a half decades, Henry Louis Gates has characterized the intertextual manner of African American rhetoric as "signifyin(g)," a figure he employs principally for the manner in which a motif, theme, or even the sound of a previous text is repeated and reversed or parodied (repeated to underscore irony) by an African American artist. In his most influential theoretical study, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Rhetoric* (1988), Gates quotes William Faux observing in 1819 the manner of the artistic expression of slaves: "Their verse was their own, and abounding either in praise or satire intended for kind and unkind masters"² and Gates describes elaborate games employed to mask meaning and play rhetorical "games" with the manners of the whites.

While Gates employs the term "signifyin(g)" as a metaphor for this formal revision of black texts, his study nevertheless leaves the door open for black authorial revision of white texts as well. For example, Gates refers to parody in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel* which "Signifies [...] in our sense of the term [...] upon Shakespeare" as well as numerous occasions of Paul Laurence Dunbar's revision of James Whitcomb Riley.³ A more recent study concerning one of the earliest African American novels, *The Bondswoman's Narrative*, employs Gatesian theory that propounds the (white) influence and the (black) parody of Charles Dickens by the African American enslaved author.⁴

1 Henry Louis Gates, *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Rhetoric* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), xxiii.

2 Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, 67.

3 Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, 107, 122-123.

4 Hollis Robbins, "Blackening Bleak House: Hannah Crafts' *The Bondswoman's Narrative*," in *In Search of Hannah Crafts: Critical Essays on The Bondswoman's Narrative* (New York: Basic Civitas, 2004), 84.

Signifying by black writers of “white” texts has also been prominently studied by other critics as well. The German scholar Klaus Schmidt interprets Richard Wright’s *Native Son* as signifying on the Old Testament, on John Donne’s *Devotions upon Emergent Occasions*, and finally Ralph Waldo Emerson’s essays.⁵ Russell Berman sees “Of the Coming of John,” one of the final sections of *The Souls of Black Folk*, as signifying on Richard Wagner’s opera *Lohengrin*.⁶ Gates himself sees elements of Emerson, Crane and Melville, as evidence of “double voicedness” in his Signifyin(g) on white texts in what is often described as an early example of an African American modernist novel, Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man*.⁷ Henry B. Wonham critiques Howell’s *An Imperative Duty* with Du Bois’s *The Souls of Black Folk* as “sites of dynamic cultural exchange” in a short study.⁸ Not surprisingly the literary impact goes both ways, as Fred V. Bernard convincingly demonstrates in “The Question of Race in *Moby Dick*” in which Bernard presents Melville’s novel in part as a response to the slave narrative and abolitionist writings of Frederick Douglass.⁹ As Werner Sollors points out,

*Literary pluralists of our time would like to construct a mosaic of ethnic stories that relies on the supposed permanence, individuality, and homogeneity of each ancestral tradition and has no space for the syncretistic nature of so much of American literary and cultural life. Ironically [...] literary pluralists share their dislike of mixings and “impurities” with the old nativists who, too, worked very hard at ignoring not only certain ethnic groups but also the polyethnic mixings in American culture.*¹⁰

Later we find a similar point made by Shelley Fisher Fishkin in her famous book entitled *Was Huck Black? Mark Twain and African-American Voices* (1993):

*We may no longer segregate trains, schools, water fountains, waiting rooms, Bibles for witnesses in courtrooms, parks, residences, textbooks [...] But segregation is alive and well among literary historians, who persist in affirming that white writers come from white literary ancestors, and black writers from black ones.*¹¹

To be sure, not all African American critics subscribe to Gates’ figure of signifyin(g). In the 1960s LeRoi Jones wrote in an essay entitled “The Myth of a ‘Negro Literature’ ” (first published in *The Saturday Review* in 1962) his notion of remarkable art in an unambiguous way:

High art, and by this I mean any art that would attempt to describe or characterize some portion of the profound meaningfulness of human life with any finality or truth, cannot be based on the superficialities of human existence. It must issue from real categories of human activity, truthful

5 Klaus Schmidt, “The Outsider’s Vision:” *Die Marginalitätsthematik in ausgewählten Prosatexten der afro-amerikanischen Erzähltradition* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang), 107-110.

6 Russell Berman, “Du Bois and Wagner: Race, Nation, and Culture between the United States and Germany,” *German Quarterly* 70.2 (1997): 123-135.

7 Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, 187.

8 Henry B. Wonham, “Writing Realism, Policing Consciousness: Howells and the Black Body,” *American Literature* 67 (December 1995): 701-724.

9 Fred V. Bernard, “The Question of Race in *Moby Dick*,” in *Massachusetts Review* 43:3 (2002): 384-404.

10 Werner Sollors, “A Critique of Pure Pluralism,” in *Reconstructing American Literary History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986): 274-275.

11 Shelley Fischer Fishkin, *Was Huck Black? Mark Twain and African-American Voices* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 142.

*accounts of human life, and not fancied accounts of the attainment of cultural privilege by some willingly preposterous apologists for one social 'order' or another.*¹²

In his assessment of African American literary achievements as a whole, Jean Toomer is the first writer to win praise from LeRoi Jones. After Toomer, only Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin win moderate praise, particularly as authors who

*have managed to bring off examples of writing that could succeed in passing themselves off as "serious" writing, in the sense that say, the work of Somerset Maugham is "serious" writing. That is, serious, if one has never read Herman Melville or James Joyce.*¹³

With regard to Charles Chesnutt, LeRoi Jones cites him as the example of "spectacular vapidness" in trying "to prove to America [...] that they were not who they were, *i.e.*, Negroes".¹⁴ He views writers of literature originating from the middle class, and when blacks enter or are members of the middle class, membership to that class pushes black identity out and away. This is not true with jazz music, which Jones has repeatedly characterized as the foremost contribution African Americans have made to the arts or to American culture. Charles Chesnutt's portraits of middle class characters as Jones describes them can only be identified in Chesnutt's second collection of stories, *The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line* (1899). As Jones disparagingly puts it,

*the embarrassing and inverted paternalism of Charles Chesnutt and his 'refined Afro-American' heroes are far cries from the richness and profundity of the blues. And it is impossible to mention the achievements of the Negro in any area of artistic endeavor with as much significance as in spirituals, blues and jazz.*¹⁵

Henry Louis Gates cites African American authors' reading of other black literature and, by imitating and playing with the patterns of African American rhetoric, Gates observes the magnitude in this African American artistic tendency to "signify." Jones, conversely, dismisses black writers generally as "middle class" and urges black writers (both of the 1960s and those of the future) to attempt exactly the opposite of signifying on previous texts:

*If there is ever a Negro literature, it must disengage itself from the weak heinous elements of the culture that spawned it [*i.e.*, of the middle class], and use its (African American) existence as evidence of a more profound America.*¹⁶

I suggest that Jones's prescription may be contrasted with Gates's theoretical observations of the African and African American rhetoric in that Jones insists on African American existence as the source of creative literary production rather than any signifying on previous texts since his overall view of black literature as bourgeois divorces the writer from black experience and identity.

12 LeRoi Jones, *Home: Social Essays* (New York, William Morrow, 1966), 109.

13 Jones, *Home: Social Essays*, 107.

14 Jones, *Home: Social Essays*, 106.

15 Jones, *Home: Social Essays*, 106-107.

16 Jones, *Home: Social Essays*, 115.

Ignoring the fact that a mere cursory examination of Chesnutt's most famous work of fiction, *The Conjure Woman* (1899) can hardly allow it to be regarded as "accounts of the attainment of cultural privilege," this paper will attempt to address both Gates's theory of signifying(g) and Jones's critique of Chesnutt's "fancied accounts of the attainment of cultural privilege" in what must have been Jones's principal target: Chesnutt's "Blue Vein Society" stories in *The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line* (1899). In doing so I assert that Chesnutt "signifies" on the literary work of William Makepeace Thackeray, one of his favorite novelists, and moreover show through Chesnutt's satirical portrait of the very "African American Vanity Fair," if you will, that Jones's contempt for the "fancied accounts of the attainment of cultural privilege" are indeed the butt of Chesnutt's pastiches, and in fact expresses a more scathing critique than Jones offers in his essay.

William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863) was born to a colonial administrator in Calcutta, Thackeray was half-brother to his father's illegitimate "mulatto" daughter with an Indian mistress. Sarah Redfield Blechynden (1804-1841) died impoverished and Thackeray, well aware of her rights to inheritance under the terms of their father's will, did not assist her financially.¹⁷ It has been widely speculated that Thackeray was himself the product of a distant miscegenation, a situation not so distant that family members were unaware of it but remote enough that it had become insignificant. Thackeray's daughter, Anne Thackeray Richie referred to Thackeray's paternal grandmother, Harriet Cowper, as "my brown [great] grandmother."¹⁸ With a black – though Indian rather than African – heritage, Gates's aforementioned quote is in need of reminding within this context: "To name our tradition is to rename each of its antecedents, no matter how pale they may seem."¹⁹ Showing little or no interest in the economic or sexual exploitation in colonial India or racist slavery in British colonial holdings in the Caribbean, in later life Thackeray actually became an apologist for Southern slavery. After the Civil War began in 1861, he would publicly defend the Confederacy in England.

Thackeray was well received in the North as well as the South. He was also deeply admired by Charles Chesnutt, who sought to become "a gentlemen" (defined in part as educated like a fine white man like the semi-autobiographical character John Walden in *The House behind the Cedars*) and therefore emulated, among other things, the reading habits of Southern whites. They in turn privileged Thackeray's fiction because of his satirical brilliance as well as his pro-Southern political views. Chesnutt was well read on all authors he knew to be popular among white readers in the South such as William Makepeace Thackeray, in particular *Vanity Fair* (1848).

Thackeray's Impact on Chesnutt

Charles Chesnutt showed a sustained interest in the works of Thackeray. In a journal entry dated March 26, 1881, the then 22-year-old teacher working humbly at a rural North Carolina colored school recorded his enthusiasm for Thackeray and how the success of *Vanity Fair* inspired his dream to make a living as a successful novelist:

I have just finished Thackeray's Vanity Fair, his first great novel. He had written much previous to its appearance, but with Vanity Fair he made himself a reputation.

17 D. J. Taylor, *Thackeray* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1999), 95-99, 173.

18 Gordon N. Ray, *Thackeray: The Uses of Ambiguity* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972), 54.

19 Gates, *The Signifying Monkey*, xxiii, italics added.

*Every time I read a good novel, I want to write one. It is the dream of my life – to be an author! It is not so much the monstrari digito, though that has something to do with my aspirations. It is not altogether the money. It is a mixture of motives. I want fame; I want money; I want to raise my children in a different rank of life from that I sprang from.*²⁰

Chesnutt assessed Thackeray's Henry Esmond and Becky Sharp as ranking among the immortal characters of literary fiction.²¹ In a speech delivered in 1916 entitled "The Negro in Literature," Chesnutt refers to "Miss Schwartz [sic], in *Vanity Fair*, the colored daughter of a sugar planter of the West Indies, whose swarthy complexion and crinkly hair are compensated by her millions and her amiable and generous disposition."²² Chesnutt felt that Miss Swartz was presented sympathetically, and derives his pastiche on Thackeray accordingly. Miss Swartz is Thackeray's exclusive literary portrait of a black person who was not enslaved or a servant, but Miss Swartz is also represented as a minstrel of sorts, as a ridiculous black-Jewish woman who exhibits extreme emotion (at her first appearance in *Vanity Fair* and later when she entertains phony noblewoman.

Stylistically, Chesnutt emulates Thackeray, especially in his so-called northern "Blue Vein Society" stories, and his letters appear to share much in style with Thackeray as well. McElrath and Leitz, editors of Chesnutt's first volume of letters, refer to Chesnutt possessing the epistolary style of Thackeray.²³ Moreover, Chesnutt wrote in his journal in 1877 that Thackeray inspired him to change the way he kept his journal from "the art of composition" to recording "my impressions of men and things, and such incidents or conversations which take place within my own knowledge, with a view to future use in literary work."²⁴

In many of his nondialect stories including the Blue Vein Society stories under consideration, Chesnutt focuses on the bourgeois, black urban life in the North, a representation which Harry Wonham characterizes as psychologically repressive of blackness and the past of a degraded experience of slavery.²⁵ Blue Veins are characterized not only by their use of Standard American English but even of a particular bourgeois language. One of the most famous and most frequently anthologized stories that Chesnutt wrote was "The Wife of His Youth," first published in the July 1898 issue of *The Atlantic* magazine. Modeled after the "Cleveland Social Circle" of upper class blacks to which Chesnutt belonged,²⁶ members of the exclusive "Blue Vein Society" adopted the very sort of color discrimination from which they themselves suffered.

The original Blue Veins were a little society of colored persons organized in a Northern city shortly after the war. Its purpose was to establish and maintain correct social standards among a people whose social condition presented almost unlimited room for improvement [...] members were light-

20 Charles W. Chesnutt, *The Journals of Charles W. Chesnutt*, ed. R. Broadhead (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 154.

21 Charles W. Chesnutt, *Charles W. Chesnutt: Essays and Speeches* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 551.

22 Chesnutt, *Essays and Speeches*, 432.

23 Charles W. Chesnutt, *To Be an Author: Letters of Charles W. Chesnutt 1889-1905*, ed. McElrath and Leitz (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), xiii.

24 Chesnutt, *The Journals*, 85.

25 Henry B. Wonham, *Charles W. Chesnutt. A Study of His Short Fiction* (New York: Twayne, 1998), 58.

26 Frances Keller, *An American Crusade: The Life of Charles Waddell Chesnutt* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press), 153.

colored [...] because such persons, as a rule, had had better opportunities to qualify themselves for membership.²⁷

In other words, restrictions on the basis of race were never acknowledged but nevertheless put into practice by many of the so-called “talented tenth.”²⁸ The “Blue Veins” are therefore hardly pure invention on Chesnutt’s part nor a matter of only signifyin(g) on the snobs in the fiction of Thackeray. To be sure, like Thackeray Chesnutt has a self-mocking way about the very society he aspired to in these short stories. He wrote in one letter that people who were the basis for the “Blue Vein” characters lived in Cleveland and that he himself had been a member of such an organization.²⁹

“A Matter of Principle”

“A Matter of Principle,” first written in 1897 but not published until Chesnutt’s second volume of short stories, *The Wife of His Youth and Other Stories of the Color Line* came out 1899. Although it appears later than “The Wife of His Youth” in this 1899 volume of short stories, the title story was written after “A Matter of Principle” in magazine publication by a full year. Therefore it should be treated chronologically, and, as I will argue below, regarded as a response to its predecessor (although all secondary literature I have examined up to now erroneously treat “The Wife of His Youth” as having been written first).

Cicero Clayton, a light-colored black man and a prominent leader in the Blue Vein Society of Groveland, insists both on the brotherhood of man while, as Chesnutt points out, at the same time, “Mr. Clayton’s social creed was that he himself was not a Negro” (CL, 151) since he had considerably more white ancestry than black. He believes in racial pride and encourages this way of thinking among his family members as well, and so he rarely associates with darker colored African Americans. Miss Alice Clayton, Cicero Clayton’s beloved daughter, is a haughty, nearly white young woman in search of an appropriate husband and “she frankly confessed her sorrow that she was not entirely” white (CL, 152). Both Alice and her family greatly limited her eliminated the majority of African Americans from her target choice due to both color and class. In Cleveland, Chesnutt encountered people like Cicero Clayton, and revealed his feelings about them in a speech in 1905: “I can scarcely restrain a smile when I hear a mulatto talking of race integrity, or a quadroon dwelling upon race pride. What they mean is a very fine thing, but it is not at all what they say.”³⁰

In a “phony” Washington, D.C. inaugural ball (since African Americans were not permitted to attend the real one at the White House) Alice dances with so many colored men and does not remember what one particular African American congressman looks like who subsequently expresses by letter an interest in marriage. This inaugural ball takes place in the 1870s for either President Ulysses S. Grant in the spring of 1873 or of President Rutherford B. Hayes in the spring of 1877, both Ohio-born Republican chief executives. (Hayes’ disputed presidential election resulted in the end of Reconstruction.) Hamilton M. Brown, a new South Carolina Republican Congressman of light

27 Charles W. Chesnutt, *Conjure Tales and Stories of the Color Line* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2000), 103, hereafter cited in text as CL.

28 W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Penguin, 1989), 87.

29 Charles W. Chesnutt, *An Exemplary Citizen: Letters of Charles W. Chesnutt 1906-1932* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 257-258.

30 Chesnutt, *Essays and Speeches*, 232.

pigmentation, visits Groveland after having become infatuated with Alice Clayton at the dance in Washington, DC. Yet because of the multitude of Alice's dancing partners at the ball the physical identity of this congressman is unclear, so Mr. Clayton hedges: "If this man is black, we don't want to encourage him. If he's the right sort, we'll invite him to the house" (CL, 157).

Solomon Sadler of the Blue Vein Society regularly offers information about all the blacks of significance in both Groveland, Ohio and Washington DC. Sadler concludes that Hamilton Brown was probably nearly white. Employing an unusual metonymy, Cicero Clayton says to Alice, "I guess he's all right [...] we must treat him white" (CL, 158) and decides to put on a huge reception party for him with invitations to all Blue Vein Society members: "We will show the darkeys of Groveland how to entertain a Congressman." The omniscient narrator then makes the following point:

It will be noted that in moments of abstraction or recitement Mr. Clayton sometimes relapsed into forms of speech not entirely consistent with his principles. But some allowance must be made for his atmosphere; he could no more escape from it than the leopard can change his spots, or the — . In deference to Mr. Clayton's feelings the quotation will be left incomplete. (CL, 158)

Completing the objectionable quotation, "...or the nigger his skin," is the racist American adaptation of the Old Testament saying that whites used in their common idiom. Evidently the "atmosphere" or adumbration as Chesnutt uses this phrase hints not only of the reminder of Cicero Clayton's ancestry ("Ethiopian"), but the feline reference in the Biblical phrase ("Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil"³¹) conveys his "spotted" (mixed black and white) pigmentation ("leopard") which is referencing his moral character just as much as his pigmentation.

Chesnutt thereby echoes the same paradigm of rejecting the racial Other as in *Vanity Fair* by George Osborne. In a shrewdly designed twist in the plot, while waiting to fetch the Congressman at the railroad station, Cicero Clayton sees "a stout and very black man" with a piece of luggage labeled "H.M. Brown, M.C." and saw that "the man in the waiting-room was palpably, aggressively black, with pronounced African features and woolly hair, without apparently a single drop of redeeming white blood" (CL, 161).

Like Miss Swartz, whose wealth formed the basis for the Osborne patriarch insisting that his son George marry the "mulatto" in an English society where money issues were paramount to assessing a proper marriage partner, Chesnutt transforms the issue into one of color when character Congressman Brown is maliciously snubbed because of his (imagined) dark pigmentation rather than wealth or status in society. Hence George Osborne's racist attitude is echoed by both Clayton African American parents: As Alice Clayton's mother puts it, "That nigger [...] can never set foot in this house [...] Why, she wouldn't marry him if he was President of the United States and plated with gold an inch thick. The very idea!" (CL, 164-165). The sexual tension of the objectionably dark man is understated in Chesnutt when compared with the "Hottentot Venus" phrase articulated by the younger Osborne in Thackeray's novel (of which more below). However, the rejection of blackness is compensated in both cases by expressions of outright racial hostility, and Chesnutt goes somewhat further than Thackeray by adding a feminine voice to express this utter hatred of blackness.

While George Osborne does nothing to hide his rancorous rejection of Miss Swartz before his own father, "Brotherhood Clayton" – as younger Blue Vein Society

31 Jeremiah 13:23, KJV.

members nicknamed Cicero Clayton – under no circumstances wants to be exposed before the public as a spiteful African American bigot, and undertakes numerous sly tricks to conceal his bigotry.

“We were fools for not finding out all about this man from someone who knew, before we invited him here. Sadler don’t know more than half he thinks he does, anyway. And we’ll have to do this thing thoroughly, or our motives will be misconstrued, and people will say we are prejudiced and all that, when it is only a matter of principle with us.” (CL, 165)

Feigning illness, Cicero Clayton arranges by letter an irrevocable subterfuge that “uninvites” the purportedly dark-skinned congressman. In Chesnutt’s most cynical stroke of the story, the feckless Cicero Clayton learns that the dark black man he mistook for the congressman was a certain “Bishop Jones” and that the congressman of light complexion had been momentarily separated from his luggage. After Cicero claims a contagious illness requiring a quarantine house, Congressman Brown stays at William Watkins and subsequently becomes engaged to Alice Clayton’s archrival, Lura Watkins. In a quintessential Thackerayan vein, Mr. Clayton concludes, “Such luck is enough to disgust a man with trying to do right and live up to his principles” (CL, 167), whereby the chauvinistic principle is never questioned and his bigotry remains unacknowledged. As one critic noted in 1939, this story is “[b]ased on the tragic absurdity of colorphobia, the story is a comedy of manners in the Molière sense.”³²

The phrase with which Chesnutt entitles this story signifies that one acts out of a higher moral basis or something more universal which one applies to particulars, even if the particulars beg exception. Contrasted with people of no principle, it asserts a higher moral tone. This Blue Vein Society story is juxtaposed with its moral antithesis entitled “The Wife of His Youth.” As noted above, many scholars critically treat “The Wife of His Youth” first since it appears first in the color line stories that Chesnutt published in 1899. However, the fact is that “The Wife of His Youth” followed “A Matter of Principle” in composition and in magazine publication by one year and so should be regarded as a response to its predecessor. My interpretation is that Chesnutt *signifies upon his own story* as well as on Thackeray’s famous novel, as I will try to demonstrate below.

“The Wife of His Youth”

A shared sequence in both “The Wife of his Youth” and *Vanity Fair* is the motif of triangular desire. Within Thackeray’s famous novel, the conflict concerns the mediator of desire, [Mr. John] “Old” Osborne, whose initial interest in his son marrying Amelia Sedley changes when her father goes bankrupt, and Osborne consequently insists that his son George marry in her stead Rhoda Swartz, an opulent woman in her younger twenties of a racially-mixed background (German-Jewish father and African mother) from Saint Kitts in the West Indies (an English slave colony). In Chesnutt’s story the triangle depicted is between Mr. Ryder’s desire for Mrs. Molly Dixon, a wealthy light complexioned widow, and his loyalty to ‘Liza Jane Taylor whom he married and, through illicit attempted enslavement and the confusion of war, lost track of for decades. Ryder contemplates the fact that he is not legally bound to his antebellum marriage with a slave woman. From a legal standpoint, his marriage to ‘Liza Jane is null and void, or as Ryder puts it directly to ‘Liza Jane, “your marriage doesn’t count” (CL, 110).

32 J. Saunders Redding, *To Make a Poet Black* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 71.

In both stories, misfortune brought about by external circumstances unrelated to the women's behavior threatened Amelia and 'Liza Jane with matrimonial rejection. Through no fault of her own, Amelia's financial ruin is a matter of her father, a stockbroker, and his business dealings with, among others, greedy Old Osborne. In the case of 'Liza Jane, her tragedy was the result of her slave master Bob Smith's greed. He attempted to illegally sell her husband, a free colored man, who at that time was known as Sam Taylor: "[Smith] knowed whar he could git a t'ousan' dollars for Sam an' no questions axed" (CL, 109).

The "other" women in the triangles in the fictional relationships depicted by Thackeray and Chesnutt are both "mulattoes." With Thackeray, Miss Rhoda Swartz (whose name translates as 'black' in German/Yiddish) is depicted as a highly unusual racial mixture of Jew and black in Victorian England, a character worthy of ridicule. George Osborne accentuates her "Otherness" since Miss Swartz possesses black hair "as curly as Sambo's. I dare say she wore a nose-ring when she went to court; and with a plume of feathers in her top-knot she would look a perfect Belle Sauvage."³³ ("Sambo" is the Osborne family's black servant.) Yet initially it is Miss Swartz's character that comes under attack by George Osborne, who describes her in plain words as an unpolished, unrefined woman, incapable of spelling or mastering the piano. On the other hand she was clearly fawned upon by George's two sisters Jane and Maria because of her pelf. After describing the vulgarly opportunistic interest of the Osborne sisters in the rich "mulatta" purely for her wealth, Thackeray snidely refers to Jane and Maria Osborne as "dear unsophisticated girls."³⁴ The Osborne girls are ridiculed for being "sophisticated," that is, socially ambitious, insincere, and materialistic women.

In characterizing Rhoda Swartz as unacceptable for marriage, George Osborne moves away from her flaws in education, cultivation and sense of fashion to the actual basis of his rejection; to her race. Near the end of chapter 21 in *Vanity Fair*, George Osborne vibrantly makes it clear to his father John "Old Osborne" that he will disregard paternal demands and marry Amelia Sedley instead. His father demands that he marry Miss Rhoda Swartz, a woman of great means in her younger twenties of a racial mixed background (German-Jewish father and African mother) from Saint Kitts in the West Indies instead of "fling[ing] away eight thousand a-year."³⁵ In a memorable confrontation in *Vanity Fair*, George Osborne responds to his father's final demand that he marry Miss Rhoda Schwarz:

*'Marry that mulatto woman?' George said, pulling up his shirtcollars. 'I don't like the colour sir. Ask the black that sweeps opposite Fleet Market, sir. I'm not going to marry a Hottentot Venus.'*³⁶

By eloping with Amelia Sedley, whose father's business failings downgraded her status in society substantially, George Osborne becomes disinherited. Like many Thackeray characters, George Osborne's heroic stance is expressed infelicitously, rendering him again, if not as a villainous character, then at the very least an unsympathetic one. (Shortly thereafter George Osborne veers firmly toward the villainous type when he expresses regret for his rash decision after being disinherited

33 William Makepeace Thackeray, *Vanity Fair: A Novel Without a Hero* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), 193.

34 Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 194.

35 Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 204.

36 Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 204.

and when he tries to get Mrs. Becky Crawley (née Sharp) to run away with him during his honeymoon at Brighton).

During his paternal confrontation, George Osborne points to his ultimate grounds for rejecting the mulatto woman: her race. George refers to a historical public figure named Sarah (Saartjie) Baartman, a South African slave living in London who was put on display for four years (1810-1814) for her exotic appearance. She was designated "The Hottentot Venus" by an Englishman, Dr. William Dunlap, who earned money by putting her on exhibition. First put on display in London, she was moved after four years to Paris after many protests against the "freak show," particularly by anti-slavery activists developing a popular movement in England. She was exhibited "to the public in a manner offensive to decency. She exhibits all the shape and frame of her body as if naked."³⁷ Sander Gilman notes that

*the iconography of the "Hottentot Venus" was a means of differentiating the black female from her white counterpart as a representative of a separate and distinct species [...] The double sign of the unapproachability of the black woman – her difference as a member of an inherently different race – and her pathological character became a signifier for the European.*³⁸

In Thackeray's plot, the white counterpart to the Caribbean-born mulatto woman George Osborne derogates as a Hottentot Venus is the lovely, kind but rather dull Amelia Sedley. While exhibiting no racial prejudices of her own, Amelia Sedley waits to be taken into the arms of her lover. Referencing the historical "Hottentot Venus," Sarah Baartman, serves the purpose for George Osborne's angry repudiation of Miss Swartz in the novel: to locate the racial Other as wholly unacceptable for inclusion into snobby English society. This exclusion, supplemented with evidence of Miss Swartz's ridiculous ways, is exclusively racial. In fact, the only person expressing an interest in marrying Miss Swartz is Old John Osborne, himself a widower: "'Gad, if Miss S. will have me, I'm her man. I ain't particular about a shade or so of tawny.' And the old gentleman gave his knowing grin and coarse laugh."³⁹ For Thackeray, Miss Swartz's wealth tests the most hypocritical members of Vanity Fair, as expressed in Old Osborne's "coarse laugh." Chesnut signifies on this very test, a test passed by Mr. Ryder in "The Wife of His Youth." Whereas the Hottentot Venus comment is fraught with symbolism of an outsider, or the ultimate Other, welcomed for her money earning ability by Thackeray's hypocrites, Ryder uses English poetry, Tennyson's "A Dream of Fair Women," to express the ultimate insider, Molly Dixon (for her white beauty, wealth and social status).

With regard to the love triangle in "The Wife of His Youth," Chesnut's other woman, Molly Dixon is a light-skinned mulatto who stands in stark contrast to the former slave, an older, dark black named 'Liza Jane, whose very name evokes an image of black servitude while Molly Dixon's name sounds solidly Scottish, the financially and culturally most dominating group of whites in the South. In the eyes of Mr. Ryder, everything about his inamorata is desirable: her name, light skin, opulence, education and cultivation. Mrs. Dixon in fact epitomizes a free white sylph who in every way that contrasts with the dark black woman, 'Liza Jane Taylor. She reminds the members of the

37 Paul Edwards Paul and James Walvin, *Black Personalities in the Era of the Slave Trade* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1983), 172.

38 Sander L. Gilman, "Black Sexuality and Modern Consciousness," in *Blacks and German Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 39.

39 Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 220.

Blue Vein Society of their former lives as chattel black slaves. As the Blue Veins were the first African Americans to assimilate, 'Liza Jane is in contrast the embodiment of the lowest members of their racial group from which they wish to disassociate themselves. Jacques Derrida coined the term "hauntology" to describe the spectral presence of the past, the ghostly return of the neither-dead-nor-alive generations that preceded us, to reflect on "this non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present."⁴⁰ 'Liza Jane is a spectral past not only for Ryder, but for all of the members of the Blue Vein society. Moreover, 'Liza Jane Taylor has supreme confidence that her husband would not marry another woman. In contrast, Amelia has become aware that George Osborne is being pushed to reject her because of her reduced circumstances. Both Amelia and 'Liza Jane await a decision of acknowledgement and loyalty. While Amelia is ultimately passive in faithfully waiting for George Osborne (who is pushed to marry her by the moralizing Captain William Dobbin as well as George's need to demonstrate independence from his domineering father and his racist rejection of the wealthy but otherwise undesirable mullato), 'Liza Jane shows her prowess by actively seeking out and ultimately finding her husband. She also confides in Mr. Ryder – whom she fails to recognize as her husband – that "[h]e wouldn't marry no yuther 'ooman 'tel he foun' out 'bout me. I knows it" (CL, 110).

In what may be considered Chesnutt's "signifyin(g)" on Thackeray's novel, when George Osborne learns he has been disinherited, he exclaims: "A beggar, by Jove, and all the consequences of my d—d sentimentality."⁴¹ In castigating his behavior, George Osborne reveals the hatred of his sentimental and honorable actions resulting in financial loss. In contrast, Chesnutt has Ryder place honor and sentiment above not only the sizable wealth Mrs. Dixon offers through her marriage, but her complexion, education, and respectability.

Ryder paradoxically hears his old wife express her everlasting confidence in him the evening before his engagement ball in which he meticulously plans to make his most glorious effect on the Blue Vein Society members. As the leader among the "Blue Veins," Mr. Ryder became "the custodian of its standards, and the preserver of its traditions." Having saved money through hard work and thrift at the railroad company, he owns a house on a respectable street and has two live-in servants. "His features were of a refined type, his hair was almost straight; he was always neatly dressed; his manners were inapproachable, and his morals above suspicion." Compared to other "Blue Veins," though, "he was not as white" (CL, 104), though this factor did not provide grounds to disqualify him from figuring so prominently that he became the society's president by the mid-1880s in "Groveland."

Henry Wonham criticizes "The Wife of His Youth" for "its unambiguous moral choice and heavy-handed satire of color prejudice among middle-class African Americans" and decries that this fiction "undeniably possesses the flavor of a Sunday School instructional tract."⁴² Nevertheless, the development of Ryder's character is more sublime. Earlier, Ryder had euphemistically deplored "a growing liberality in social manners" among some of Groveland's African Americans and

had several times been forced to meet in a social way persons whose complexions and callings in life were hardly up to the standard which he considered proper for the society to maintain. His ball would serve by its exclusiveness to counteract leveling tendencies (CL, 106).

40 Jacques Derrida, *Spectres of Marx* (London: Routledge, 2004), xviii.

41 Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*, 232.

42 Wonham, *Chesnutt. A Study of His Short Fiction*, 58.

Clearly Mr. Ryder was quite ridiculous in his pomposity and conceit. Chesnutt's Thackerayan use of irony in Mr. Ryder citing President Abraham Lincoln's *Second Inaugural Address* ("With malice towards none, with charity for all") combined with his view that marrying Molly Dixon, a wealthy, well-educated African American widow whiter than he to guarantee for his descendants a peculiarly Darwinian view towards "self-preservation" which, out of fear of the "extinction in the black [race] is the first law of nature" (CL, 106), reveals the little faith Ryder has in the white race's future charity, the very race in which he wishes to assimilate. The irony is lost on some critics though: Alice Walker points out that 'Liza Jane Taylor was "fortunately [...] too old to bear children" so that the issue of the "extinction" of the black race becomes null and void.⁴³

While Henry Wonham emphasizes the racial aspect of the interest Mr. Ryder had taken in the light-complexioned Molly Dixon, other aspects to Mrs. Dixon also make her more desirable: her wealth which Ryder would marry into, as she had been "left a considerable life insurance," her youth at about 24 years old ("he was old enough to have been her father" her education and "refined manners" (CL, 105). Besides her fair pigmentation, these are clearly quite a number of advantages in higher society as well.

Ryder was not only dignified in appearance but worked hard to acquire and cultivate good taste. In this way Chesnutt presents the hypocritical behavior typifying the Blue Veins as cultural snobs. Poetic romance is one of Ryder's means of segregating blacks in the color line. Among the many preparations for the announcement of his engagement, Mr. Ryder recited the poetry by Alfred, Lord Tennyson to himself just moments before encountering his wife he had forgotten about. A student of prosody, this elocutionist planned initially to propose to the pale, young African American woman, a widowed woman of wealth. The marriage proposal to Molly Dixon was to be accomplished only after subliminal reinforcement through "a little touch of romance" (CL, 105) by reciting Tennyson's fragment "Sir Lancelot and Queen Guinevere" (1842). 'Liza Jane Taylor tells of her long search for her husband and her romantic dream of finding him again, though she does not recognize him as Mr. Ryder. However, right after 'Liza Jane departs, Ryder "wrote ['Liza Jane's] address on the fly-leaf of the volume of Tennyson [...]" (CL, 111). Her slave narrative articulated in vernacular overcomes the venerated white discourse defining beauty and grace so that Ryder eventually abandons Tennyson, his favorite poet, as well as the fair Miss Dixon.

After dancing and supper at eleven o'clock, the Blue Vein Society toast-master called the ball to order to inform the society of man's dependency on woman and the rumor that Mr. Ryder, the host of the ball, "too is largely dependent upon the gentler sex for most that makes life worth living [...]" (CL, 112). But instead of Tennyson, Mr. Ryder relates "in the same soft dialect [as] the story told by his visitor of the afternoon" – a moralizing story and, as one scholar points out, an "embedded [slave] narrative."⁴⁴ This story relates 'Liza Jane's narrative of a woman's "fidelity and devotion." After narrating in the conditional an entrancing account which the audience may well have personally experienced but suppressed, Ryder asks his audience if an honorable free black man escaping enslavement should acknowledge, after two and a half decades, this loyal wife from the ante-bellum period. Ever the lover of English literature, Ryder recites the famous dictum by Polonius to his son Laertes (from act I, sc. iii in *Hamlet*) as he imagines giving advice to a friend:

43 Alice Walker, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1984), 300.

44 Charles Duncan, *The Absent Man: The Narrative Craft of Charles W. Chesnutt* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1998), 131-133.

*'This above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.'* (CL 114)

After reciting Polonius, Mr. Ryder appositely questions his Blue Vein Society audience: "What should he have done?" and requires of them the courage to hold on not only to a fundamental moral conviction which in the sharpest way contrasted to the unacknowledged but practiced rules of exclusivity of these socially upward-climbing members of the Blue Vein Society, but in a more profound way for the near-white African Americans to reflect on their past and acknowledge their own people, thereby accomplishing the mandate, "to thine own self be true" set forth in Shakespeare.

Unlike traditional patriarch decision-making, Ryder's cunning performance requires that the Blue Veins and specifically Molly Dixon decide whom he should marry. Ryder puts the question to Molly whether he should cast 'Liza Jane away and marry her, or be loyal. By doing so publicly, Ryder delegates his power, thereby forcing Molly's and the Blue Vein's hand, so to speak, so that they publicly acknowledge, welcome and even embrace 'Liza Jane into society. Ryder not only appears to passively submit to the authority of society, but introduces 'Liza Jane, whom he has accoutered for the occasion, to this exclusive society.

In his youth, Mr. Ryder's name had been Sam Taylor, a free-born mulatto who was almost sold as a slave illegally by his wife's owner in Missouri. His wife, a slave fully named 'Liza Jane Taylor, warned him of his illicit impending "sale" by her owner. Sam escaped, promising to rescue her after raising money to buying her freedom. However, as punishment for aiding young Sam's escape, his wife is sold down the river. Sam Taylor was unable to find her, changed his name to Ryder and moved to Ohio to work and climb to a high position in society. 'Liza Jane's devotion in seeking him out even after some twenty five years and her faith that he was still waiting for her update this story of utter matrimonial commitment.

In interpreting Mr. Ryder's decision to acknowledge his antebellum wife, Chesnutt has his protagonist apply a principle that not only constitutes a pastiche of Thackeray's George Osborne's cruel and malicious behavior toward Miss Swartz, but Mr. Ryder's behavior also is in alignment with Chesnutt's own moral view that in choosing 'Eliza Jane over Mrs. Molly Dixon, Mr. Ryder transcends his hypocritical notions about the color line. Hence this plot signifies through reversal on "A Matter of Principle" which Chesnutt had written a year earlier. Rather than judging people by means of color or station, Mr. Ryder chooses 'Eliza Jane because of her "humanity." To be sure, it is also not a matter of "black pride." As Chesnutt asseverates in a speech entitled "Race Prejudice: Its Causes and Cures" to the Boston Literary and Historical Association on June 25, 1905,

*But of what should we be proud? Of any inherent superiority? We deny it in others, proclaiming the equality of man. Of any great achievement? We are still in the infancy of achievement [...] our development should promote humanity instead of pride.*⁴⁵

Racial pride for Chesnutt was linked with the cause of racial prejudice. To be sure, 'Eliza Jane was an uncomfortable reminiscent for the Blue Vein Society not only because of her very black pigmentation, but also because of her humble station. Her

45 Chesnutt, *Essays and Speeches*, 232.

appearance constituted a reminder of the condition many of them used to live in (or had descended from). Chesnutt refers to blacks confronting their history of slavery in a letter to Frederick Moore, editor of *The New York Age*. In the letter, dated December 15, 1910, Chesnutt wrote:

*Replying to your letter under another cover, requesting my opinion concerning the proper method of celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the freedom of the Negro in 1913, I hope you will not think me indifferent in matters of the race, but in this town the Emancipation Proclamation is celebrated by the colored people every year, and I have sometimes thought that it might be well if they could forget that they were slaves, or at least give the whites a chance to forget it.*⁴⁶

Assimilating African Americans, such as members of Chesnutt's fictitious Blue Veins, tended not only to be indifferent towards celebrations of the historical event which formally ended the state of bondage they so eagerly sought to erase from their minds, but they sought to emulate the very problem Chesnutt refers to: they remember slavery as something *other* people – significantly darker – blacks, such as 'Eliza Jane, experienced.

Chesnutt's pastiche of Thackeray's marriage triangle in *Vanity Fair*, a novel Chesnutt indicated he admired particularly for the Miss Swartz character, employs Thackeray's destabilizing plot without a hero with a much sought-after man choosing the less "lucrative" bride primarily out of loyalty to a past relationship. While Chesnutt's hero Mr. Ryder is completely moral in his choice, Thackeray's "novel without a hero" depicts George not only as a loyal bridegroom to the love of his youth but also as a diabolical racist. Thackeray's Old Osborne and Chesnutt's Blue Vein Society are arbitrators of power pushing for the respective rejected women until it becomes unattainable, and both are thwarted. Chesnutt's story is morally perfectly rounded while, in the subplot of Thackeray's novel, the rejected woman, Miss Swartz, is castigated for her race, resulting in Old Osborne disinheriting his son. What makes both men, George Osborne and Mr. Ryder, decide in their triangle relationships: to marry their original beloved women and reject the opportunity to more easily marry into wealth was their own perceived moral imperative. Mediators remind them of their moral imperative: George has Captain William Dobbin while Ryder is reminded by Shakespeare.

In addition, George Osborne and Mr. Ryder, in their respective moral imperative, sympathize with women they have chosen because the cause of their respective ruin was the greed and immorality of men a generation or two older than they were. These wedded women ('Liza Jane and Amelia) were thrown out of their homes in their respective societies where the subjugation of women, while certainly of a different category and intensity, was the norm. After George Osborne dies in the Battle of Waterloo in *Vanity Fair*, both women share a fate in so far as they are forced to live a life in social and juridical limbo. Both women do eventually retrieve their love (Amelia weds Dobbin and Ryder re-marries 'Liza Jane).

Although Thackeray and Chesnutt depict fascinating male characters with substantial flaws, the men eventually marry women which sympathy and morality would direct them to choose. Still, Thackeray's George is a racist and repeatedly acts disloyally towards Amelia. Mr. Ryder, with his proclivity for a lighter-colored, younger and wealthier woman, hopes to become progenitor of an "American race," since he claims early in the story to other Blue Veins, "[o]ur fate lies between absorption by the

⁴⁶ Chesnutt, *An Exemplary Citizen: Letters*, 87.

white race and extinction in the black" (CL, 106). Before she arrived, Mr. Ryder did not consider his former wife who had sacrificed herself to save him from being sold illegally down the river. In both cases the moral principle is presented with complex male characters who, though flawed individuals, rather than being duplicitous, are directed to choose the morally proper woman for marriage.

In a section entitled "Snobs and Marriage" in *The Book of Snobs* (1848), Thackeray tellingly informs us of the grave consequences of "marrying below" one's station in society: instant repudiation from society and family:

*[...] marry poor, and society shall forsake thee; thy kinsmen shall avoid thee as a criminal; thy aunts and uncles shall turn up their eyes and bemoan the sad, sad manner in which Tom or Harry has thrown himself away.*⁴⁷

Chesnutt's hero undermines these societal expectations which he himself had helped to cultivate among the upper crust African American circles in the fictitious Ohio metropolis seeking to repress the experience of slavery. In the end, Ryder's actions figure prominently as both a moral for the members of society as well as a means of reconnecting them to the origins of the chattel slavery that Blue Vein Society members so eagerly sought to forget. Snobbery, for the characters Chesnutt produces for his pillaging in these stories, amounts to a kind of pseudosophistication. In "A Matter of Principle," the main character is what Thackeray termed "a hypocrite of hospitality."⁴⁸ In "The Wife of His Youth," Chesnutt upholds unsophisticated middle class virtues such as honesty, sincerity and simplicity – values that ordinarily middle class blacks might fail to uphold. Like middle class hypocrites, both the early Mr. Ryder and Cicero Clayton ameliorate their racism by claiming that they entertain no racial prejudices. Chesnutt signifies on his earlier story, "A Matter of Principle," by undoing middle class hypocrisy in the latter story.

Chesnutt was innovative in his fictional depiction of high society black Americans. As William Andrews puts it,

*Through such unprecedented works as "The Wife of His Youth" and "A Matter of Principle" in particular, Chesnutt demonstrated that he was ready to break the ice in the American fiction of manners. He would be the first to introduce, with a tonal ambiguity reminiscent of a Henry James or an Edith Wharton, the upper crust of Afro-American society to the upper crust of the white American reading public.*⁴⁹

Conclusion

As a young married man of 24, Chesnutt wrote indignantly of the racism he experienced in Fayetteville in his journal on March 7, 1882:

*I hear of colored men speak of their "white friends." I have no white friends. I could not degrade the sacred name of "Friendship" by associating it with any man who feels himself too good to sit at table with me, or to sleep at the same hotel.*⁵⁰

47 William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Book of Snobs* (Cologne: Könemann, 1999), 161.

48 Thackeray, *The Book of Snobs*, 38.

49 William L. Andrews, *The Literary Career of Charles W. Chesnutt* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1980), 104.

50 Chesnutt, *The Journals*, 172.

He wrote earlier in his journal of being removed to a second-class railroad car once he travelled further southwards, and of a local white man named McLaughlin he knew telling a black acquaintance that Chesnutt, despite his learning and other accomplishments, was just “a nigger, and nothing in the world can make him anything else but a nigger!”⁵¹ Chesnutt wrote sophisticated condemnation through his fiction of white racism against blacks, not only light-colored targets like himself. Simultaneously, the project examined thoroughly by Henry Louis Gates, Chesnutt took up notions exhibited in fiction by Thackeray though Chesnutt experienced racism personally and in many instances projected his unfortunate experiences into his fiction.⁵² To be sure, the author of these Blue Vein Society stories was well-versed in the literature satirizing snobs. He shared with Thackeray an analogous sociocritical project. Moreover, his triangular marriage episodes among the Blue Vein snobs bear an undeniable resemblance to the episode entitled “A Quarrel about an Heiress” in *Vanity Fair*, particularly with regard to the strategies of the snobs. Like Thackeray, Chesnutt satirizes African Americans who sought social advancement through imitation of the very people who exploited them. As William M. Ramsey cogently puts it, Chesnutt’s social criticism “launch[es] a broad, creditable, and incisive assault on American prejudice in any form.”⁵³ His biographer, Frances Keller, maintained that

*[h]is agenda required attacking color discrimination where it stood when he encountered it – in the hearts and minds of ordinary people. In youth he had conceived a project to realign the underpinnings of a caste society; he never changed this project.*⁵⁴

Rather than imitate middle class standards to the detriment of his craft as LeRoi Jones claims, Chesnutt condemns the very hypocrisy in his Blue Veins stories. Light-skinned blacks in Fayetteville, North Carolina before the Civil War were already a class apart and, as Chesnutt puts it, “looked down upon the slaves and thus constituted a class apart.”⁵⁵ As Keller points out, many blacks were weary of social equality among white people. One of Chesnutt’s contemporaries, a North Carolina black man of the post-bellum period, is quoted as saying that “social equality is humbug. We do not expect it, we do not want it. It does not exist among blacks themselves.”⁵⁶ Chesnutt attacked that condition as one of the dominating agitators, along with Du Bois, for complete social and legal equality for all Americans.

On numerous occasions, Thackeray writes as if the “institution of snobbery” were analogous to the “institution of slavery.” For example, at the end of a chapter in *The Book of Snobs* entitled “Snobs and Marriage,” Thackeray describes the “reckless marriage system” in England and the resulting matrimonial unhappiness. He concludes

51 Chesnutt, *The Journals*, 161.

52 For example Chesnutt experienced segregated trains and included the descriptions from his *Journals* into two separate novels. For a detailed examination of Chesnutt’s treatment of train segregation in his fiction, see my paper “‘Stan’ in wid de Angry-Saxon Race: Charles W. Chesnutt and the Railroad Motif,” in *America in Motion* (Olomouc: Palacký University Press, 2010), 65-79.

53 William M. Ramsey, “Family Matters in the Fiction of Charles W. Chesnutt,” *Southern Literary Journal* 33.2 (Spring 2001): 30-43.

54 Keller, *An American Crusade*, 141.

55 Keller, *An American Crusade*, 28.

56 Keller, *An American Crusade*, 42.

with the question, "Suicidal fool, art not thou, too, a Snob and a brother?"⁵⁷ – thereby playing off the famous slogan of the British Abolitionist Society: "Am I not a man and a brother?" Chesnutt echoes Thackeray by using similar thought-provoking notions in his fiction.

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57 Thackeray, *The Book of Snobs*, 177.

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