

Violence/Accommodation Binary in Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition*

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Abstract

The present paper examines the divergent attitudes of black characters toward racism in Charles W. Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Traditions* (1901). Chesnutt wrote his novel to reflect his opinions on how African Americans should act to improve their situation. To situate the study within the historical and cultural context of *Marrow*, Black intellectuals' views, namely Washington and Du Bois, about the complicated problem of 'color' were explored. To analyze the contrasting views and actions of Chesnutt's black characters, the paper uses the lens of postcolonial theory. Although *Marrow* is not set within a colonial context, postcolonial theoretical frameworks can be used as models to re-read this novel because they deal with intersections of races, classes, cultures, and the oppressor/ oppressed relationship. The paper concludes that Chesnutt has entertained the possibility of a hybrid or third race— as referred to within postcolonial framework—that may succeed where both races (pure white and black) have failed.

Keywords: Bhabha, hybridity, mulatto, postcolonial theory, racism, The Marrow of Traditions, violence

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Introduction

Charles W. Chesnutt (1858-1932) wrote *The Marrow of Tradition* (1901) as a commentary on the race riots that took place in Wilmington, North Carolina in 1898. The novel expresses his opinions on how African Americans should act to improve their situation. He believed that American slavery reemerged after the reconstruction period in the same way slavery had been reincarnated in the New World. He thought that regardless of the great divide characterizing America during his times, the currents of progress will prevail in the end. Chesnutt, of course, had in mind what black intellectuals, namely Washington and Du Bois, proposed as solutions to the color problem. Still, it seems that he wanted to take those two different attitudes to a new level and produce them in a way that is readable by his white audience. His hopes for a new America found their expression in envisioning the advancement of a third race or a hybrid race that may succeed where the whites and blacks have failed. The present paper is not an attempt to explain the white society's racism—its origins or derivatives—rather it tries to explain the distinct divergent responses of black characters to it as depicted in *Marrow*. The purpose of the paper is to analyze the contrasting views and actions of Chesnutt's black characters through the lens of postcolonial theory.

Black Intellectuals' Approaches to the Effects of the Reconstruction Period

The legacy of Reconstruction is at the heart of Chesnutt's *Marrow*. Reconstruction was supposed to change the South, in particular, from a place of slavery and dehumanization into a paradise of freedom and equal rights. Foner (1990) states that "Reconstruction was not only a specific time period, but also the beginning of an extended historical time process: the adjustment of American society to the end of slavery" (p. xvi). The process of change, however, was not an easy task for political actors as well as for the population in general. Foner (1990) believes that the Emancipation Proclamation (1863) "transformed a war of armies into a conflict of societies" (p. 3). The problem of the blacks, which had persisted for two and a half centuries, could not be solved during the Reconstruction period and even after. Even though black participation in Southern public life had increased after 1867 and a significant number of Southern whites and the Northern Republicans were willing to link their political fates with that of the blacks, racism persisted and barred the integration of the country (Foner, 1990). Within the social and political strivings of the blacks, Chesnutt situates *Marrow*, and the 'tradition' which title refers to is "a tradition whose *marrow* is colonial racism" (Roe, 1999, p. 231).

Black intellectuals during Chesnutt's time envisioned two different attitudes as a solution to the 'problem' of the black individual in the American white society. Washington believed that by providing needed skills to society—laborers with vocational skills and elementary education—African Americans would play their part, leading to acceptance by white Americans. He thought that blacks would eventually gain full participation in society by acting as responsible, reliable American citizens. Also, he warned that any confrontation with the white society would only lead to disaster and greater disfranchisement of the blacks. But it seems that Washington's formula would result in second-class citizens, which Du Bois (2006) thought it was unacceptable. Conversely, Du Bois believed that blacks should pursue a more demanding tone of protest and ask for equal civil rights as lawful citizens of the country. He insisted on equality in everything, especially in the kind of education people of color should get. He asserted that intellectual elevation

would help produce the proper leadership elite among blacks. Washington's idea of the ideal black citizen as a helpful tool employed to further white dominance would create a citizen with a single limited vision of black cause. Du Bois's proposal (2006), conversely, would make a citizen who is well-aware of his role in his community, but he would suffer from what he calls "double consciousness" (p. 9) as a consequence of his increased sophistication.

Racism and the postcolonial Discourse in *Marrow*

Marrow is obviously not a postcolonial text because U.S. slavery is not equivalent to British colonialism and the post-slavery society that the novel depicts is not the same as the postcolonial worlds of India, Africa, or the Caribbean. Nevertheless, because postcolonial texts and theories deal with intersections of races, classes, cultures, and the oppressor/ oppressed relationship, postcolonial theoretical frameworks can be used as models to re-read *Marrow*. Sharpe (1995) suggests that the term "postcolonial" can be used with respect to literature of the U.S. to designate "the presence of racial minorities and Third World immigrants." Sharpe argues that "given its history of imported slave and contract labor, continental expansion, and overseas imperialism, an implication of American culture in the postcolonial study of empires is perhaps long overdue" (p. 181). Moreover, Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967) states that "colonial racism is no different from any other form of racism" (p. 65). Also, according to Barnard (2014), Chesnutt's works articulate two main points, and one of them is that "American slavery should be contextualized in the boarder and longer history of empire, traceable through New World colonialism back to ancient Rome" (p. 78). In the US, post-slavery racism produced distinctive black individuals who were eager to define their position in this dehumanizing environment. They are unique in their perceptions of themselves and the 'other', as represented by the oppressing whites. Du Bois's concept of "double consciousness" and Washington's model of black subordination and singleness of vision are different. Still, within postcolonial discourse, they seem to be two faces for the same coin—possible solutions in the oppressive reality of the South.

These two different attitudes find their echoes in later texts by postcolonial intellectuals like Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1963), and Bhabha's "Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse" (1984). It seems that Du Bois's "double consciousness", which explains the position of the black individual in white society, resembles the situation of the colonized imitation of the colonizer's culture. Instead of creating an equal, the product, in Bhabha's (1984) words, will be "a reformed, recognizable 'Other', as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (p. 126). While commenting on this notion, Huddart (2006) states that "[e]ssentially, colonial discourse wants the colonized to be extremely like the colonizer, but by no means identical" (p. 40). This notion of mimicry or imitation might be the core of the white philosophy in the South. The black characters in the novel are, in different ways, repetitions rather than representations of white society. The idea of mimicry explains why whites feel threatened by blacks with "white" professions or educations. Sandy, Mr. Delamere's butler, Jerry and Mammy Jane, who works for Major Carteret, Dr. Miller, the mulatto physician, and others are copies of the white culture, and they have been situated exactly where that culture wants them to be. When the 'Big three' of the novel make their list of those who should be expelled from the city, and Dr. Miller's name is reviewed, General Belmont remarks, "I shouldn't interfere with Miller.... He's a very good sort of a negro, does n't meddle with politics,

nor tread on anyone else's toes." (Chesnutt, 1969, pp. 251-2). The discourse which the three uses is colonial in the sense that the conversers perceive blacks as inferior imitations or as polite inferiors. Within this context, this paper argues that the different responses produced by the black community can be located in the imperial dimension of white America.

Bhabha's contribution to the idea of mimicry, which has been already described by Lacan, under the term "camouflage," gives a degree of agency to the colonized (Huddart, 2006, p. 11). He asserts that:

The menace of mimicry is its double vision which in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority. And it is a double vision that is a result of what I've described as the partial representation/ recognition of the colonial object. (Bhabha, 1984, p. 129)

Du Bois's robust analysis of the African American position in white society seems to reflect a notion similar to that of Bhabha's:

It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. (p. 9)

The division of the self seems to be relevant to Bhabha's concept of mimicry, which is a process the colonizer imposes on the colonized to create a copy of himself but not an equal. This process, like Du Bois's, creates duality and is characterized by ambivalence. It seems that Washington's argument about racial relations may, in a sense, relate to this same argument. He believed that in order for blacks to be accepted by the whites, they should not try to be equals, but rather to be laborers serving their dominators. In this respect, it seems that both Du Bois and Washington's views of racial relations do not compete as much as complement each other within the postcolonial framework. Therefore, blacks within this framework can either be 'inferior imitations' or 'polite inferiors.' But the essential questions that *Marrow* asks are what will happen if the colonized claims some agency and steps outside the earlier formula set by Bhabha? What shapes will that stepping outside take? Agency is a fundamental concept in postcolonial discourse as it refers to "the ability of post-colonial subjects to initiate action in engaging or resisting imperial power" (Ashcroft et al., 2013, p. 10). The novel presents, but does not endorse, two plausible distinct black agency; the enlightened imitation of the white as represented by the Millers or the savage militant exemplified by Josh Green.

The novel does not seem to endorse either model; the moderate intellectual Dr. Miller suffers significant loss, and the black militant Josh Green dies. Out of the bitter fruits of each model, Chesnutt seems to be ambivalent about the end of his novel. This ambivalence demonstrates itself in the other two alternative endings contemplated by him¹. The one which he adopted in the end is less bleak; nonetheless, its openness does not show an optimistic outlook for future racial relations in White America. Presenting Janet, Miller's wife, as the forgiving heartbroken mother adds more complexity to the racial relations of the book. However, there is only one thing that can be taken for granted: Chesnutt, in "*Marrow*, goes far beyond mere historical accuracy. His counter-history illuminates the ideology of colonial racism underlying the political plot" (Roe, 1999, p. 233). It seems that Chesnutt's disappointment, like Du Bois's, reflects the deep-seated ideology of colonial racism.

Violence or Accommodation

The tension between the whites and blacks reflects the kind of racial relations present in the *Marrow*. Both races struggle to assert their racial spaces in the South. Early in the novel, Dr. Miller has to leave the whites' coach on the train taking him to Wellington because he is a colored person. Captain McBane, on the other hand, comes to the "Colored" people's coach (space) to dispose of the smoke of his cigar (Chesnutt, 1969, p. 56). As a response to Miller's objections to his presence, McBane says, "I'll leave this car when I get good and ready, and that's won't be till I've finished my cigar" (Chesnutt, 1969, p. 58). This response suggests that the domination of the whites is not limited to their racially and socially well-defined spaces, but extends to occupy the colored's spaces as well. At another point of the novel, Captain McBane voices his contempt over the following scene: "I saw a spectacle of social equality and negro domination that made my blood boil with indignation, --a white and a black convict chained together, crossing the city in charge of a negro officer!" (p. 33). McBane, as a representative of the whites, voices the unwillingness of his race to share the same space with the blacks; hence the complexity of the situation heightens whenever any black individual tries to break those racial lines. Any attempt of this kind is perceived as a threat to social and cultural structures set by the oppressor/colonizer.

The Blacks' attempt to step outside their racial spaces might be seen as a kind of mimicry. The question of mimicry, however, reveals the ambivalence of both the colonized and the colonizer. Using Bhabah's words, the colonizer wants a subject that is "almost the same, but not quite." In chapter three of *Marrow*, the narrator describes Dr. Burns, the white physician, and Miller as similar to the fair eye, but starkly different to the American eye, "for the first was white and the second black, or more correctly speaking, brown" (Chesnutt, 1969, p. 49). The colonizer wants to stress the difference rather than the similarity because this difference keeps the colonized in his/her place as a copy or imitation. The resulting individual can be reformed and educated to a certain extent, but is not superior to the oppressor/colonizer.

The Millers, however, are not pure blacks, and not white either. They are a third race that had been categorized in the 1850 census as mulattoes. Postcolonial theoretical constructions, such as Bhabha's concept of hybridity, may offer a way to describe them. They occupy a middle ground that might provide the answer to the color line problem in Chesnutt's vision of racial relations. This new race, however, is not problem-free. Its individuals suffer from being an outsider to both

cultures. Mammy Jane views the Millers as a fake imitation that can never be real. The Millers own a hospital, a nursing school, a big mansion previously owned by Major Carteret's ancestors, and a beautiful buggy with horses—all signs of whiteness in a racist South. These possessions do not make them less black to the whites, but they do set them away from the black community. Mammy Jane, reflecting on Janet's situation, mentions:

Well, well! Fo'ty yeahs ago who'd 'a' ever expected ter see a nigger gal ridin' in her own buggy? My, my! But I don' know,—I don' know! It don' look right, an' it ain' gwin ter las'!—you can't make me b'lieve! (Chesnutt, 1969, p. 106)

Mammy Jane's words prove to be prophetic. The possessions that define the Millers' position in Wellington turn into ashes due to the race riots. According to traditionalists like Mammy Jane, her grandson, Jerry, and Sandy, the Millers are the opposite vision of how a black should be. Charles Hackenberry thinks that:

Dr. Miller represents Chesnutt's ideal man; Miller is obviously, according to Chesnutt at this stage of his thinking, the model on which members of the black race ought to pattern themselves if they are to ascend to rightful, equal position before the law and in society. (as cited in Wilson, 2004, p. 113)

He represents Washington's pacific response to white violence. For example, he preaches wisdom in his different encounters with Josh Green. He believes, like Washington, that any confrontation with the whites would only lead to a disaster. At one point in the novel, he explains to Green that "they'll [whites] only kill the colored people who resist them....Resistance only makes the matter worse" (Chesnutt, 1969, p. 295). Green, who is tormented by the trauma of the Ku Klux Klan, cannot see Miller's logic. Before losing his son, everything seems so distant for Miller; he is almost neutral in his feelings because the loss has not struck home yet.

But the question here is what makes Miller ascribe to Washington's philosophy in the novel? It seems that being a mulatto may partly explain his motivations. According to postcolonial discourse, the Millers, as a hybrid race, set themselves outside their black heritage, but also outside white society. The contradiction or irresolution is a natural outcome of the duality that inhabits the individual who resides on borderlines of two different races. Dr. Miller's intellectual elevation, which sets him aside from the stereotypical black image, may also explain his middle position, especially if Du Bois's "double consciousness" is taken into consideration. Furthermore, Miller's response to the assumed criminality of his race reflects the "in-betweenness," which is an essential concept in Bhabha's discourse, of his existence:

The whole thing is profoundly discouraging.... Try as we may to build up the race in the essentials of good citizenship and win the good opinion of the best people, some black scoundrel comes along, and by a single criminal act, committed in the twinkling of an eye, neutralizes the effect of a whole year's work. (Chesnutt, 1969, p. 190)

The space Miller occupies is precarious; he is committed to helping his people, but at the same time he seems to be emotionally alienated from them. George and Pressman (1987) believe that this represents the “contradiction in the novel between psychic rationality and emotionality, social compliance and obedience, cultural dependence and independence” (p. 1).

Miller's rationality, however, seems to fade in comparison to Josh Green's vitality. Green proposes a more aggressive attitude; he asserts that “We kin fight, ef we haf ter” (Chesnutt, 1969, p. 191), and “I'd ruther be a dead nigger any day dan a live dog!” (p. 284). Although Miller realizes that this would only lead to disaster, he cannot hide his admiration of Green's vitality and his passion for the cause. The narrator describes Miller's feelings while watching Green and his party marching to their inevitable death as follows:

Miller, while entirely convinced that he had acted wisely in declining to accompany them, was yet conscious of a distinct feeling of shame and envy that he, too, did not feel impelled to throw away his life in a hopeless struggle. (Chesnutt, 1969, p. 285)

Glimpses into Miller's psyche are rare in *Marrow*, and when they do occur, they are brief and disappear as fast as they emerge. While Miller stands firm in his repudiation of violence, he still admires Green's willingness to die for his cause. At another point in the novel, the narrator describes Miller asking himself an important question, which the reader is invited to contemplate as well, “would he be equally willing, he asked himself, to die for it (a cause)?” (Chesnutt, 1969, p. 113). Due to his upbringing, education, and his identity as a mulatto it seems that a valid answer to Miller's question is no; violence is out of the question under any circumstances. Zogas (2016) refers to Miller's moderate stance, “Miller's pragmatism recognizes the further loss of rights that may occur as a result of violence, and he puts his faith in the slow progress of the history rather than the violent confrontation of individuals” (p. 153). However, Miller again admires the vitality of black people in an early train scene. Miller, for a while, enjoys the company of those “noisy, loquacious, happy, dirty, and malodorous” black people, but after some time “these people were just as offensive to him as to the whites in the other end of the train” (Chesnutt, 1969, pp. 60–61). Miller, as a hybrid product, is torn between two contradicting drives which may spring “from a deep-seated division between his conformist “white” identity (rational, compliant, dependent) and his rebellious “black” identity (emotional, defiant, independent)” (George & Pressman, 1987, p. 1).

Unlike Miller, Green is racially well-identified. He is a black person who has been traumatized by white masters' (colonizers) oppression and the memory of his father being killed by the Ku Klux Klan. His mad mother “Silly Milly” (Chesnutt, 1969, p. 112), roaming the streets aimlessly, serves as a constant reminder of the ongoing tragedy of his race. Memories of oppression and the perceived injustice being done to his race lead Green to violent acts of resistance that postcolonial discourse call decolonization. Fanon's discussion of decolonization may be useful in explaining Green's attitude:

Decolonization never goes unnoticed, for it focuses on and fundamentally alters being, and transforms the spectator crushed to a nonessential state into a privileged actor, captured in a virtually grandiose fashion by the spotlight of History. It infuses a new

rhythm, specific to a new generation of men, with a new language and a new humanity. Decolonization is truly the creation of new men. But such a creation cannot be attributed to a supernatural power: The “thing” colonized becomes a man through the very process of liberation. (Fanon, 1963, p. 2)

The ‘new generation of men,’ which Fanon refers to in the passage, resembles in a way the new generation of the blacks, including Green and the young nurse. They do not see their dependency on the whites, but rather envision their separateness. Like Green, the young nurse views her relationship with the whites as a mere business; selling her time for their money, and “there was no question of love between them.” Like Green, she is in “the chip-on-the-shoulder stage” (Chesnutt, 1969, p. 42). The new generation admits that the whites and the blacks share the same world, but they can exist together as enemies destined to confront each other. Fanon adds the following to the explanation of the violence adopted by the colonized:

The colonized, who have made up their mind to make such an agenda into a driving force, have been prepared for violence from time immemorial. As soon as they are born it is obvious to them that their cramped world, riddled with taboos, can only be challenged by out and out violence. (p. 3)

Viewing Green through this light seems to explain why he cannot accept the forgetfulness and forgiveness which Miller proposes. Green believes that “fergitfulniss an’ fergivniss is mighty one-sided;” it is meant only for blacks and not the whites. He, therefore, does not want to hear about this, especially when “de w’ite folks gives ‘em somethin’ new ev’y now an’ den, ter practice on” (Chesnutt, 1969, p. 113). Unlike Miller, counter-violence seems to be the only viable solution to Green’s ongoing white repression.

Janet, Dr. Miller’s wife, is another mulatto whose life, like that of Green’s, has been traumatized by past memories. Her memories, however, are not of Ku Klux Klan’s terror and madness like those of Green. She has been tormented by her white half-sister’s rejection and abandonment. Her mother, Julia, has been driven out of her master/husband’s house after his death, and died in poverty, leaving her fair-skin daughter, Janet, to be looked after by the charities. Within the overall purpose of the paper, Janet is worth analyzing while looking at the different responses the black community shows towards the oppressor/colonizer’s repression. Janet’s full power and strength do not appear fully until the final climactic chapter of confrontation between the two sisters. Janet’s presence, however, hovers like a ghost tormenting Olivia’s life and causing her to stay in bed more than once in the course of the novel. Janet’s presence and her son’s blooming health seem to be a source of disturbance and fear to Olivia. She threatens to invade her space and robs her of her white superiority. It might be useful here to consider in colonial terms how Olivia’s white stability is shaken by her half-sister’s presence. Ashcroft et al. (2013) explain the kind of binary present in the colonial setting as follows:

Perhaps one of the most catastrophic binary systems perpetuated by imperialism is the invention of the concept of race. The reduction of complex physical and cultural differences within and between colonized societies into the simple distinction between

black/brown/yellow/ white is in fact a strategy to establish a binarism of white/ non-white which asserts a relation of dominance.... The danger of anti-colonial resistance comes when the binary opposition is simply reversed, so that 'black', for instance, or 'the colonized' become the dominant term. (pp. 26–7)

Janet now lives in the Mansion that previously belonged to Major Carteret's ancestors. Janet, with her buggy, horses, and the fine house, is the exact imitation of her half-sister. Besides, she resembles Olivia physically. The final scene of the novel describes them in this way: "[s]tanding thus face to face, each under the stress of the deepest emotions, the resemblance between them was even more striking than it had seemed to Miller when he had admitted Mrs. Carteret to the house" (Chesnutt, 1969, p. 326–7). Olivia could not acknowledge the existence of her half-sister because she holds on to her husband's supremacist agenda. Seeing Janet's advancement in the world and the resemblance she holds to her life and features, Olivia feels threatened by her presence. She represents the colonizer's ambivalence who desires the colonized to be a copy of him/her but not quite the same. Bhabha's concept of mimicry, "almost the same, but not quite" does not seem to apply to Janet because she is "quite" the same in Olivia's eyes. Mimicry then, using Bhabha's (1984) words again, "is at once resemblance and menace," (p. 127) and maybe that is why Olivia cannot accept Janet as a sister under normal circumstances.

Janet, on the other hand, has oriented her whole existence towards one desire; that is, to be accepted and acknowledged by her half-sister:

Janet had a tender heart, and could have loved this white sister, her sole living relative of whom she knew. All her life long she yearned for a kind word, a nod, a smile, the least thing that imagination might have twisted into a recognition of the tie between them. But it had never come. (Chesnutt, 1969, p. 65)

Early in the novel, Janet is not satisfied with her lot among black people. She wants to impose her presence over Olivia (the oppressor/colonizer) so that she can feel the wholeness of her identity. It seems as if she is, in Bhabha's (1984) words, a "partial presence" that needs the colonizer's endorsement or acknowledgment to be whole (p. 129). This dependency torments Janet in a way that her husband understands more than anyone else. In the final scene of the novel, Miller, therefore, makes his offer of help to the Carterets' son dependent upon his wife's approval.

During the 'race riots,' the Millers lose their only son, and the Carteret's son is seriously ill. Racial relations come to a tragic conclusion, but the mutual tragedy of the two families brings the two races into one last confrontation. Dr. Miller is the only doctor in town who may save the Carterets' sick child. Major Carteret, the white supremacist, seeks Miller's help, although he had previously prevented him from using his expertise to operate on the boy. Carteret "for a moment" seems to be free of "the veil of race prejudice" where he can see "things as they were, in their correct proportions and relations" (Chesnutt, 1969, p. 321). However, he is not hampered by a conviction of his wrong position as a white supremacist, but by the fact that there is no other doctor in town who is available to treat his son. Asking for help is, therefore, not an acknowledgment of equality on Carteret's part. Rather, it is a momentary submission necessitated by circumstances.

Thus, their encounter cannot be taken as a sign of hope that the white oppressors would change their attitude towards the oppressed (Wilson, 2004). Moreover, Miller, who has preached tolerance and rationality to Green, cannot bring himself to be neutral and offers what his job requires—saving people's lives. His reaction to white violence almost resembles that of Green here. Not helping a dying boy is almost like being an accomplice in his murder. Reflecting on the corpse of his dead son, Miller tells Major Carteret, "I cannot go with you. There is a just God in heaven!—as you have sown, so may you reap!" (p. 320). At this point, Miller, like Green, cannot forget or forgive, and the novel seems to reach a dead end. The oppressor/colonizer has shattered Miller's life, and there is no question of forgiveness anymore. But this position is further complicated by the appearance of Olivia.

It seems that Chesnutt chooses to push race relations to a different level. After exploring the rationality of the men and its outcome, the novel puts the women center stage to reflect on the same subject. The concluding scene between Janet and Olivia offers a final chance of reconciliation between the two races. Miller confirms his previous position to Olivia and refuses to help her son. He, however, decides to offer her a chance when he realizes the resemblance between Olivia and his wife and how it is marked by "the same wild grief" (Chesnutt, 1969, p. 321). The description of the two opposing characters is remarkable in that it reverses the order of things in terms of colonial discourse. The oppressor/colonizer is no longer in charge; the oppressed/colonized assumed the agency that Bhabha discusses. The novel vividly describes the encounter, "The sad-eyed Janet towered erect, with menacing aspect, like an avenging goddess. The other, whose pride had been her life, stood in the attitude of trembling suppliant" (Chesnutt, 1969, p. 326). Olivia and Janet represent the binary that has always been there in the South—white vs. black. Janet, the black, however, does not occupy the polite inferior position anymore. She can, for the first time, feel her independence; she no longer asks for her sister's acknowledgment. She is powerful not because she can save Olivia's son with a gesture to her husband, but because she can transcend her pain and emerge as a black woman independent of her white counterpart. Knadler (1996) describes the situation perfectly in the following lines:

White finally stands face to face with its black counterpart in a culminating moment of the novel's pattern of doubling, but not merely so that Olivia can confess her blood ties with her estranged sister. Rather, to assure her son's life, Olivia Carteret must recognize that the ideal type of womanhood, a type she in her ongoing enmity against her sister has failed to live out, is embodied in her "dark" Other. (p. 437)

In this scene, Janet seems to possess a whiteness that Olivia never had; she is morally unable to wrong those who have wronged her and her race. Her superiority is, then, moral, not physical or material. She asserts that she no longer cares for Olivia's "sisterly recognition." She, however, assures Olivia that "you may know that a woman may be foully wronged, and yet may have a heart to feel, even for one who has injured her, you may have your child's life" (Chesnutt, 1969, p. 329). Janet's final gesture of kindness has stimulated many responses from literary critics. The majority of opinions seem to interpret the ambiguous ending of the novel as carrying an optimistic note on race relations in America.

Knadler (1996) suggests that Janet points the readers towards a 'utopian' future of racial relations in America (p. 442). Najmi (1999) argues that Janet and Olivia's final twinning symbolizes "a guarded hope of racial harmony" (p. 12). Those critics who argue in favor of optimism think that motherhood and gender may explain this outcome. Wilson (2004), on the other hand, does not see Janet's final gesture as an optimistic reference to future race relations. Although he does not deny Janet's ability to show greater compassion than her white sister, he still cannot see any chance for their future reunion. He states:

The African American character shows her innate fineness, her true womanliness, and her sympathy by sending her husband to try to save the child's life, but interestingly, she does not forgive, thus foreclosing any reconciliation...

Even though the half-sisters live in the same town, they will remain separated—by the actions of the plotters of the coup, and by Janet's choice. (pp. 145–7)

Looking at these differing opinions from a postcolonial perspective, it appears that the sense of ambivalence of the oppressor/colonizer and oppressed/colonized will always come in the way of any reconciliation. The relationship between the two races will always be a relation of dependency rather than integration and acceptance.

The death of Josh Green, Mammy Jane, and the Millers' son suggest that neither Green's violence and complete independence nor Mammy Jane's total submission and dependence nor the Millers' accommodation attitude are the proper responses to the oppression of the oppressor/colonizer. Before the final chapter, the Millers' status as mulattoes could have been the solution to race relations. But after the death of the Millers' boy, the hope of any fusion between the races seems to be shattered; as Janet puts it to her sister, "they are bought too dear!" (Chesnutt, 1969, p. 329).

Conclusion

Chesnutt presents in *Marrow* a small piece of a nation that seems to be divided along racial lines in the wake of the reconstruction period in the United States. The black and white characters in the small town of Wellington are incapable of coming together on equal grounds. The divergent black character's responses to racism are the main focus of the paper. The paper has endeavored to explain the interaction between the whites and blacks and the resulting opposing responses of the blacks using the postcolonial theory. The final outcome of the novel indicates that neither violence nor the complete acceptance of the white's racist attitudes are plausible solutions. Therefore, Chesnutt presents the Millers as the future solution for the problem of color. The Millers are a hybrid or third race, as referred to within postcolonial framework, and therefore may succeed where both races (pure white and black) have failed. Chesnutt's imaginative fusion policy is the future of America. The hybridization of the nation seems to be what he preaches through *Marrow*. In presenting the Millers as free of hatred and capable, if not of forgiveness, at least of compassion, the novel seems to say that the mulatto family has the best of the two races. The hybrid breed, although characterized by ambivalent feelings, has the humanity and the refinement that the whites are incapable of expressing.

Note

1. Richard Yarborough detects two alternative endings for the novel in Chesnutt's notebook. The first shows Dr. Miller saving Major Carteret's son and is offered safety in return. Miller, however, refuses whites' protection and asks for the equal rights of his people. The second sketches the Millers leaving Wellington and traveling in a Jim Crow car (as cited in Wilson, 2004).

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